

CAPITALISM,  
HEGEMONY  
AND VIOLENCE  
IN THE AGE  
OF DRONES

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NORMAN POLLACK



Capitalism, Hegemony and Violence  
in the Age of Drones

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*In Remembrance: Gabriel Kolko, whose footsteps Norman has followed*

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PART I

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Theoretical Perspective:  
Global Hegemony

# Introduction: Moral-Political Philosophy, a Spectrum Shift Rightward

## I A UNIFIED POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CONFIGURATION

The epistemological foundation of a democratic society and government, thematically, is a modern variation of the mid-nineteenth–early twentieth-century concern about the fusion of psychology and history, structure and ideology, or, simply, mind and society. This can be seen as a dialogue between Marx and Freud, with Karl Mannheim hovering over the edges. The sociology of knowledge replaces the sociology of revolution as a means of understanding and transforming the contemporary order and what constitutes acceptable social change. My angle of vision which addresses these relationships is not to split the difference, but to strike out for the new. I adopt a moral-philosophical approach to delineate the genesis and practice of public policy in modern America.

In what follows, my emphasis is perhaps best seen in terms of the conflict between a democratic society founded on the rule of law (an idealization only partially realized in the American past), and its violation or contradiction through a long-term, linear pattern of near-absolutistic capitalist development. The latter lacks structural and cultural variegation. It thus makes possible and effects the interpenetration of business and government, capitalism and the State, to the consequent shrinkage of the ideological spectrum. The seeds are present for what I shall term “a pre-fascist configuration.”

Much of the writing will be viewed as controversial, particularly regarding capitalism, and more so because the analysis is grounded in the record

and experience of the Obama administration. Coming after the election and first months of the Trump presidency, which I see as the de-structuralizing of government itself, Obama, despite my criticisms, would appear tame by comparison, from the standpoint of policy, ideology, personnel, and the political culture being shaped in a fascist direction. I will have more to say about Trump in a later volume (if I live; I am presently in hospice home care), but the point here, simply, is that Obama, and his predecessors dating back to the aftermath of World War II, demonstrated continuities in political-structural development that paved the way for Trump's rise. With Obama centrally in mind, this becomes a critical analysis of liberalism as it has evolved in America to the present day.

As I proceed seriatim through the text, several points, by way of preview, stand out. In approach, I seek to reinterpret the nature of government (here, the State) and its relation to capitalism. An analysis of this relationship also entails, conversely, that of capitalism as the energizer of state power. There is a blending, or perhaps better, integration, of various disciplines/approaches, including a rich embroidery of sources embedded in the text. (On footnoting, surely we have reached a point, beyond mere novelty or experimentation, where form can be adapted to content and still possess scholarly merit.) The reader will recognize at once the usual suspects in political philosophy without the use of a conventional format citing chapter and verse, in sum, a rich universe of informal citations, as, for example, Melville's *Bartleby*, Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, or Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, to name but a few.

One general concern is the synchronization of polity and economy, in this case through a comparative analysis of America and Japan, from which I suggest the structural-ideological dimensions of fascism (as in, and borrowing from, Barrington Moore's chapter, "Asian Fascism," in his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, in the USA [not Moore's focus on this topic] and Japan in their respective historical developments). This led me—Moore, my esteemed teacher—to the intellectual atmosphere of Harvard and Yale (my first teaching assignment) in the 1950s–1960s. This was important for a delineation of political consciousness, which itself helps to expose structural-political abuse. What we have, then, in my attempt at sustained theorizing, is the evolving character of American capitalism. My time-frame is the months leading up to, and commencing, Obama's second term. This may surprise the reader, but Obama, as he/she shall see, I find pivotally significant in what I think of as the march to the abyss.

The interrelated universe of policy might be summarized as the materialization of consciousness, and the militarization of Exceptionalism, themes crisscrossing throughout the analysis. I confess that this is a pessimistic work, what I take to be the eclipse of democracy, as can be seen in the political-ideological investment America has in Obama's signature weapon, the armed drone for targeted assassination. This raises for me the relation between drone assassination and alienation, which prompted a close look at Marx's *Manuscripts*, and a description of the psychodynamics of the process. And from there, it appeared a natural step to society's absorption of its own systemic negativity (opposition, dissent, etc.), an extrapolation from Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, itself reliant on his interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic.

Power is a primary topic of my book, embodied in the structural-cultural dynamics of the interpenetration of business and government, capitalism and the State, but now with this addition to what Masao Maruyama, the Japanese political scientist, would call the co-partnership, the military factor, into a triadic arrangement of ruling groups. This also allows for the integration of domestic and foreign policy (here, a militarization of consciousness), which makes of power a near-absolute. And when power has been internalized, this assists in the social bonding of classes: the transmission of power from above, complicity and compliance from below. The analysis then takes up Marcuse's point (from Lord Acton) in *Eros*, that a society can be judged by its worst features, a paradigm of moral evaluation (symbolically and perhaps in actuality, for America, drone assassination; for Nazi Germany, the death camps).

Marx's rooting of alienation in the commodity structure of capitalism provides an explanation for the prevailing trait of desensitization, which makes the commission of war crimes or complicity in them understandable.

So much of American historical development can be apprehended through the analysis of capitalism itself, for example, the punitiveness of privatization, as in—residing in the latter—human separation, alienation, invidious comparison. The nation becomes a successful reproduction of its political-economic system, beginning from its structural foundations and cultural elaboration, all pointing to the maintenance of inequality and its internalization/introjection as its teleological purpose. Why else privatization? My emphasis on *purpose*, however, is not as a deterministic end or result, because structural foundations are themselves the product of human creation, and inequality here is part of the logic of construction and the reason for legitimating/sanctioning the structure.

Ownership is the basis for ethnocentrism (simply, the we–they dichotomy). Privatization gives a solipsistic character to property and ownership. Acquisitiveness (possessions) and acquisition (power) go together, and represent at bottom control. Privatization implies the use of force, for both an exercise in domination. From there I take up the anatomy of privatization and its relation, as a constituent element, to domestic and foreign policy. I discuss how the drone furthers these purposes. Finally, in this area, we see the relation between the privatization and the objectification of the individual. That includes the externalization of the self and the creation of human separation. Capitalism looms larger in the total analysis, the wider structural-institutional setting for the play of forces defining and supporting the condition of alienation (e.g., the denial of moral obligation, as in William Graham Sumner).

I discuss the reconceptualization of military power, a next step in the modernization of warfare. This entails a paradigm of decision-making on drone assassination, with attention to the role of John Brennan, as well as the greater relevance of paramilitary forces, without sacrifice to heavy military expenditures, main forces, naval power (as part of the overall strategy of global—read, China—confrontation), and nuclear modernization. (One can see, in the military aspect alone, the importance I attach to Obama, although there is much more, including the abrogation of civil liberties.) Counterterrorism has a special place in this context, not least as the fulcrum for damping down criticism and dissent affecting the fundamentals of capitalism. (One must not underestimate counterterrorism as the ideological gatekeeper of orthodoxy.)

I find that social systems cannot subsist on bifurcation. A unitary formation is critical for the locus of power arrangements, and essential to class structure, the centralization of authority, and ideological cohesion. There is a rightward shift of the political spectrum under Obama, as borne out by the way he is seen as too radical by many contemporaries (my idea of false consciousness). Castigation by the Right enables him to present policies on war, intervention, support for business, as somehow Centrist when in reality they are part of a rightward shift. Actual Centrist is viewed as an unacceptable tilt to the Left. This Centrist is as a poison seeping into the remotest pores of government and society. Obama emerges as an ideologue masking as a pragmatist. Even his ascription of paramilitary forces serves to evade, and gain practical exemption from, international law, codes of military conduct, and previously clear lines of demarcation.

I make reference to the “just war” doctrine, which seeks moral justification for immoral ends and is antidemocratic as interpreted by the White House. It is antithetical, in context, to a moral social system, its objectives being global hegemony, market fundamentalism, and hierarchical social ordering. As to claims to being a moral social system, we can see the mentality of body counts—an additive mindset, given the logic of permanent war. Not to be forgotten, there is the practice of indefinite detention under Obama, an absolute disregard for habeas corpus rights, as is also the case with rendition and military commissions (no Miranda rights). Throughout the narrative, drone warfare equals extrajudicial killings. It is as though America craves terrorism as a means of energizing its own global ambitions, and keeping its people receptive and on edge for what lay ahead.

## 2 THE WAY FORWARD

Beyond a moral-philosophical approach, I shall attempt to re-create the intellectual-scholarly atmosphere of a half-century ago, beyond the attention now given to the culture wars, and focus on ideology, social structure, and hierarchical modes of societal organization. A voice from the past? Not necessarily, for these areas remain vital, if largely covered over, for understanding the present and future. Actually, my thinking is classic Emersonian. I relate the particular to the general, the concrete to the abstract, which makes unnecessary dwelling on the empyrean heights or accepting current interpretations as gospel truth.

The individual is all, the remainder an escape via reification to the barrenness of ideology. Real persons create history, institutions, culture, nationhood, themes of conflict (notably, class), and reconciliation (also echoing class, translated into power, dominance, order). The human being, not metaphysical “realities” du jour, embodies the specificity of life as it is lived. Perhaps Jamesian (Henry more than William), I seek refuge in merging aesthetics and social protest as an inspirational point for the ever-present search for new forms, modes of expression, and the means of penetrating the petrified walls of ideological dogma. Whether as literature, social science, philosophy, or other fields of human endeavor, we have constructed an enclosing universe of discourse vividly seen in contemporary political life. The walls of circumscription in thought result in a certain hardening in America, an encrustation of human indifference.

The celebration of the life impulse need not be Sorelian (Georges Sorel), culminating in violence. It can also signify non-dominative social relations, mindful of beauty, nurturing a public morality and mentality conveying an implicit or explicit demand for equality. In institutional translation, this reflects a respect for the rule of law and equitable structural arrangements of power and influence. It appears, though, a vanishing dream, a bruiting about of emancipation as cover for increasing repression. It is not my purpose to shock or patronize the reader. I want to provoke thoughts about the adequacy of current shibboleths (ideological usages) of democracy, liberalism, and other concepts on offer, which obfuscate the delusional nature of Voltaire's political formula—to which, in exposing, he showed he knew better—of this being the best of all possible worlds.

It isn't. One need not descend to Spengler's level to recognize the importance of the role of dehumanization, desensitization, and depersonalization, all working in harmony, for shaping the present-day governing ethos: alienation, the product of our own making. For this reason, epistemology, the nature and grounds of knowledge as primarily rooted in social systems, is a useful starting point for inquiring into the vitality—inceptively democratic, or not—of political culture, class alignments, policymaking, and ideological themes. I focus on aspects of the Obama Administration. This is a finite time period, which, granted a modicum of historical distance, allows for the exploration of policymaking defining current practice and prospective trends. Rather than enumerate still further the book's contents (the annotative table of contents is helpful in this regard), I want the reader, in a spirit of self-discovery, to be awake to the possibility of turning surprising corners in what lies ahead. For now, I probe into a unified configuration of political-economic organization centered on American capitalism, past, current manifestations, and, still dimly, future direction.

The spirit is critical, as gathered from my chapter, "Education of a (Sometime) Radical," an autobiographical fragment. I want to assure the reader there are no tricks up my sleeve, much as had Peter Brook described his direction of *A Mid-Summer's Night Dream* in its London production. I am radical in politics, experimental in social analysis, all in all harmless, the badge of academic respectability generally bestowed on condition that one not personally mount the barricades or exhort others to that end. Declare one's sympathies in advance; the reader is entitled to no less.

Radicalism is a jealous mistress. One need not record disillusionment, as in Koestler's *The God That Failed*, and rather, keep one's wits about one, when radicalism today no longer appears worth honoring, as in placard-like thinking absent rigorous analysis, spiced with cultural politics. Vast numbers of the human race have been humbled, starved, confined to pig sties, as one enlists in co-optative, feel-good, touchy-feely diversions, creating safe outlets. Meanwhile, ruling groups entertain grand thoughts about capital accumulation, evasion of moral standards in business conduct, ultimately, displaying an ungovernable thirst for confrontation among the Great Powers, which is greeted by society at large with boredom, if noticed at all. (My original subtitle for this book was, "American Malaise.")

Malaise is a vagueness of despair accompanying the onset of illness. It accurately describes the nation today. The mood is stubbornly belligerent to hide from consciousness the illness, the growing senescence of American capitalism, which also corresponds to its declining place in international politics as new centers of power fully emerge. Militarization is the medicine of the weak, who yet possess the motivation to conquer; they make of hierarchy an obsession, overcompensation for keeping the vision alive. This is not new. The unification of the state and capitalism was already embarked on in Bismarckian Germany, as a world perception of the forthcoming, underlying challenge to be posed by socialism. It came shortly after to the USA in the form of Theodore Roosevelt (*our* Bismarck) and the formation, culminating years of agitation, of the interpenetration of government and business.

I shall write about what this pattern of modernization entails for the status of democracy in America. Interpenetration is a seminal factor in my working definition of the progression toward fascism here. It takes in politics, economics, ideology, culture, social relationships, and so on, in recognition of the integrated nature of a functioning social system, historically, its core of capitalistic institutions and values. While not discounting their possibility, one need not assume the concentration camp, extermination, knock-on-the-door fear. More likely, America would experience the more genial degradation which derives from what I shall term, "liberal fascism." This is not an oxymoron, but designates the popularization of Reaction. There is an ultimate willingness of complicity to ratify the policies of Leadership, and accept habituation to violence practiced on others. A compendium of societal traits is already glimpsed in 1950 when *The Authoritarian Personality* was published. The foregoing is addressed



during the Obama Administration, which provides concreteness for my construct. The reader should question both the writer and my interpretation, as opposed to an authoritarian submissiveness which today seems the case found in all ideological persuasions.

I am attracted to the *ordinary* historical moment (the more prosaic, the more revealing) in the developing narrative of the Obama administration. The content of public policy in America invites an explication of the role and place of this society in domestic and international politics. My reference to fascism is to the structural-ideological trend as present signs continue to mount and deepen. These signs make up or are symptomatic of the material informing that trend, my ideal being a modern chanticleer to awaken the reader.

I draw on the writings chiefly, though not always in agreement, of Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Max Weber, Masao Maruyama, Barrington Moore, Louis Hartz, C.B. Macpherson, Franz Neumann, Robert A. Brady, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Fritz Pappenheim. Behind them stands Emerson, who presents the tension between the particular and the general, their interaction fostering understanding about what is currently happening: the increasingly clear societal configuration in America of prefascism historically moving toward actualization.

### 3 THE DRIFT TOWARD FASCISM: LIBERALISM QUA ANTIRADICALISM

I am not Cassandra or Spengler, only one whose interests are social theory, political philosophy, and comparative history (aesthetics added for good measure). The seeming *mélange* affords a moral critique of capitalism. I take up, among other things, a comparative analysis of Japanese and American capitalist development for clues as to political-structural sources of fascism, patterns of social organization, that is, the interpenetration of government and business, and, a continuing motif, the American practice of armed drone targeted assassination. These and other topics form a coherent whole. The time period has reference to confrontation with Russia and China, market penetration, civil liberties, massive surveillance, the regulatory framework, and so on. The plan of attack, amplifying what has been said, will be discussed below.

I am concerned for the fate of the Republic. As the term suggests, I often drift into antiquarian linguistic mode because that reflects my age, my convictions, and the period no longer present to which I would like to

return. I have in mind not the eighteenth century, however, but the New Deal, a better America, because, being on the ropes, national pride was asserted in constructive leadership and the *actual* caring of, and for, a nearly impoverished citizenry and the majestic Land, physical-mental-literary, we then cherished.

I do not recognize America today. My emphasis on drone assassination underscores the point. In earlier moments of need for encouragement I would listen to Aaron Copeland's Third Symphony, the great antifascist opus in the American canon. My Left sympathies always had to do with antifascism, not pro-communism. Antifascism has been deep in my psyche since age 11, when I was bedridden for two years, brooding, becoming in the process a politically precocious youngster. By 16 Copland's Third was my steady companion, along with the voice of Paul Robeson, and music, baroque and contemporary, and the Bartok Second Piano Concerto (which dramatized for me the depth of fear and anguish sweeping over Europe when it was composed). These carried me along, notwithstanding my darkened mood.

The world was different then, and I think more honest and therefore better. We knew the faces of our enemies, from McCarthy types to Cold Warriors to segregationists to majordomos in industry, business, and banking. We witnessed the nakedness of repression. When I spoke of liberal fascism above, I was not striking out at liberalism as commonly, if erroneously, known, but one calling the historical bluff of liberalism itself, beginning at least in the eighteenth century: propertied, antiradical, in times of stress aligned with the Right, eminently capable of imperialism and conducting wars of aggression. In America, more than elsewhere, this indicated a *faux radicalism* by which to arrest progressive tendencies of equalitarianism. It used anticommunism as a truncheon to beat down opposition to modern corporatism and militarism.

Obama personifies liberalism in all its qualities of deception. (With Trump's ascendancy, my interpretation of Obama may seem out of place by comparison, exaggerated, overly harsh, but history has an integrity of its own, and I do not retreat from the criticisms which follow in this book.) This renders him indistinguishable from all whom and that which his admirers, in their false consciousness, love to condemn. The post-World War II cultural setting has not changed. A deep-seated neurotic fear of social change has become frozen in the American personality structure for more than a half-century, which accounts for the ethnocentric, xenophobic mindset, now affecting even social groups previously discriminated

against or marginalized. A veritable feast of proto-fascism is the resultant of that half-century-plus of retrogradation. I hold capitalism chiefly, but not exclusively, responsible for that, including the protective cover of patriotism accompanying it. Mono-causal analysis is a dangerous game to play with history; capitalism cannot be the whipping boy for everything.

America, 1945 and beyond, that I described, has not changed. My autobiographical fragment below in the text records years of protest against war and segregation, nothing esoteric, simply demonstrations, marches, speeches, with occasional moments of danger. Millennials will have missed a time of genuine engagement; what we consider radicalism today has evaporated or drifted away into cultural politics. A reason for writing this book is that I wish to recall a different perspective on contemporary society and social change. It is avowedly Old Left in spirit. It is one in which ruling groups are openly identified, the social structure is visibly hierarchical in its class relations, “exploitation” is not a forbidden term, presidential authority is critically studied, and foreign policy is scrutinized for its hegemonic ambitions and actions. One strives for the unified analysis of seemingly disparate policies and performances in order to find internal consistency in, and make sense of, the whole. I give equal weight to the moral and philosophical dimensions of the study of American power.

As one probes, one clarifies. The study is about American capitalist hegemony as it occurs in a self-constructed international moral vacuum. One interest here is the USA’s use of the armed drone for targeted assassination, which defines an Age of Terror. I view the drone, although a small part of the American arsenal, for its geopolitical significance and symbolic value: a miniaturization of the nation’s foreign-policy framework, flexible, intimidating, lethal, having strategic-psychological import in fulfilling US aspirations in the global economy and political order.

Complementing this posture and contributing to its support, within domestic society, are prominent themes, varied, yet single-directional in purpose and application. They include the normalization of ordinarily unthinkable practice (including the doctrine of permanent war), the absence of government transparency, the legal construction (expansion) of Executive authority, the public policy of the Obama administration (deregulation and the abridgment of civil liberties at home, global hegemonic measures and aspirations, with specific reference to the containment of China, abroad), and the president’s leadership traits and ideological parameters.

## 4 INTERNAL REVISIONS: A PERSONAL STATEMENT

Titles are elastic, subject to change through further contemplation and evidence. I started with “A Political Mind,” its subtitle, “Observations on the State of Freedom in America.” My purpose has been to explore moral philosophy in a particularized setting, during the Obama years (remaining flexible on dates as developments unfolded). Later, the title was revised to read, “The Fascistization of America,” its epithetical character unnecessarily off-putting. The present title and subtitle are self-explanatory; the writing elaborates their meaning. But since the others are important to me (and consistent with the present selection), I shall say a word about them.

I chose “A Political Mind” to indicate that the mind is many-chambered, a seat of conscious, unconscious, even subconscious dispositions. This is not of course to be taken literally, as to be physiologically grounded, corresponding to separate structures of the brain, but figuratively, in a literary sense (pertaining to learning and experience). A convenience of labeling is to suggest primary characteristics of the individual. I chose “A Political Mind” to differentiate the perspective from that of an economic, intellectual, or aesthetic mind, not that these are foreign to one’s interests or preclusive in nature, but by “political” I mean a capacious understanding of the term.

The reference is to activities concerning the maintenance and distribution of power, the range of public policies, their implications, ramifications, consequences, and, in America, the intersection of class, government, and the private/corporate sector. As well, the commonsense definition is included, having to do with politics, parties, the identification and generation of issues, and processes of authority and control. But political consciousness will do, in this case, mine, as I address the historical record largely confined to the above-described meaning of political. When young I discovered the analytical possibilities to be found in the concept of mind when I read W.J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South*, a brilliant work of systemic cultural penetration, poetic in its prose style.

My original subtitle, “Observations...,” is an homage to an earlier mode of scholarly discourse, that is, my attraction to political philosophy. I tread ever so lightly on the path laid out by eighteenth–nineteenth-century writers who grappled with questions on the nature of the State and its relation to political economy, which was itself a structural-cultural formation still emerging into modern form. Hence it possessed a clarity of elements now less discernible surrounded by ideological clutter and verbal legerdemain. This emphasis, adapted to modern historical reality, remains throughout the work as a continuing interest.

Here, I acknowledge the influence of Marx, specifically, his *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* to analyze the foundations of alienation and, especially relevant to drone assassination, the adoption of how one views and treats others through the mental lens of depersonalization. I also make specific reference to Tonnies, the German sociologist, Marcuse, Adorno and the *Authoritarian Personality* study, and reference to other scholars, as noted. Drone warfare and alienation are two sides of the same coin, the counterfeit of democracy and human autonomy.

The alternative subtitle, the more succinct, “The Fascistization of America,” framed a subtext that faithfully reflected the book’s content. Before abandoning it, let me explain its meaning by way of previewing the book. I take “fascistization” to mean primarily a societal *process*, the developing relationship between capitalism and the State, both of which I capitalize on occasion to indicate importance, emphasis in subject matter, but really, as might have Hobbes, the near-reification of forms which take on attributes of their own. I delight in smashing the walls of reification and uncovering human-centered decision-making.

Fascistization, as used here, has a definitional element that may be unfamiliar to the reader: the underpinning for the relationship between the State and capitalism in America is the *interpenetration of government and business*. This structural framework is generally designated as corporatism. Reflecting the current setting, it additionally signifies the military factor, which helps to drive the structural co-partnership and enforce the claims of America to global hegemonic status. Interpenetration represents a synthesis of political, economic, and military elites, and their corresponding sources of power, thoroughly integrated, when possible, into a unified societal formation. It is best understood through comparative analysis. The reader will note implied parallels among the USA, Germany, Italy, and Japan.

My interest in such comparisons is at the systemic level: how capitalism is organized with respect to the State, and not repression or aggression as such. I shall offer a brief comparative analysis of capitalist development in America and Japan, where structural similarities are less thought about than in the other cases. Further topics related to the discussion of government policy, drone assassination, and the Obama administration, include the psychodynamics of authoritarianism, and so on. This then is a work in history and theory, an orientation suggested to me 60 years ago, as a teaching fellow in Samuel Beer’s Gen. Ed. course of the same title, at Harvard, though covering very different subject matter, for example, the Puritan Revolution, the French Revolution, Nazism itself.

Titles and subtitles serve as a portal into one's writing, conveying the author's purpose. The gist of the whole is laid bare. When different themes are working themselves out through the writing, it is sometimes difficult for an author to choose the most appropriate one. Here I provide a sample of some derivable from the text not mentioned above, hence furnishing further clues to content: how the permanent-war doctrine plays into the rationale for, and policy-momentum fueling, the practice and significance of drone warfare; the relation between expansion of executive authority and the lack of government transparency; the rhythm of leadership—war, intervention, regime change; inseparableness of military power and capitalism; and the creation (to be explained) of non-evaluative values. I prefer a restricted time-frame and intensity of coverage to historical narrative. Instead of telling a story, we have the analytical probing of subject matter. The time-frame is meant to convey a thin slice by which to illustrate the whole.

I conceive this writing, in part, as a political journal, revealing a personal source of inspiration. Emerson thought of himself, in part, as a journalist, that is, the *keeper* of a journal, in which he was able to record contemporary observations, keeping an account of the times and, equally important, the formation of ideas as they occurred to him. The result was an asymmetric treasure trove of introspection. Terse entries become interspersed with more extensive ones. Together, we see the evolution of a focused, distilled intelligence, much of which finding its way into polished essays.

Thoreau, too, was a journalist, less self-proclaimed than Emerson, more public than private in character, certainly less practical in structure and dating. Nonetheless, he, like Emerson, valued the inner thought and feeling, cultivating a sensibility of acute awareness, and always mindful of eventually going public, perhaps more the essayist than journalist. The synthesis of the two writers' mindsets and social bearing, along with the profound genius of Melville, describes best the personal journey I have sought to take in the present writing. (My journal, tentatively titled "Leaves of Rebellion," to paraphrase Whitman, covering the Obama years and the early part of the Trump administration, is intended for separate publication.) My admiration for Melville is boundless. His novel *Pierre* and short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," haunt me to this day and feed into my early interest in alienation, even before I fully discovered Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

And to enclose myself more in the world of my American Trio, I emulate Thoreau's example of social activism as the extension of his personal philosophy. This means a lifetime of civil rights and antiwar agitation, with

Nature, the environment, gardening, my trusted companions. And with Melville, combining the immediate and the metaphysical, I have experienced and probed the world of alienation, the marginality afforded, sometimes painful, but always an advantage, in creating a foundation for social criticism and political involvement. Here, subject and autobiography intersect.

I cannot go back to nineteenth-century America for the security and reassurance that here and in Europe great minds were at work, free from the mental clutter of an intrusive, permeating modernity of technological wonderment and innovation. The latter remains lost on me, as though choking off the freedom to think about political and social philosophy through identifying key issues affecting humankind. With Thomas Wolfe I am forced to agree, you can't go home again, only the present, and of course the future. But let Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville stand, not as a miniature Greek chorus, but a healthy inspiration for speaking the unspeakable, addressing authority, piercing the defense mechanisms of an American personality bogged down in its stew of carnage, intervention, world-beating hegemony. It is not Thoreau's civil disobedience which comes to mind; instead I feel the excitement of the resounding *negation* of what is, in culture, politics, and institutions, which seems the appropriate response. In a word, *Bartleby*.

I do not mount pseudo-barricades. I prefer that one feel one's way to disciplined investigation, the prompting impulse for writing this book. It lacks scholarly paraphernalia (footnotes), to which I had been accustomed as an historian, even to using only primary sources in my books, and co-editing with Frank Freidel two extensive documentary histories. To that I added my own documentary collection, *The Populist Mind*. I worship evidence. But here I shall write in a different genre, that of the theoretical-analytical. Still, I try to identify sources and authors on which I draw, so as not to place the reader at a disadvantage.

Like most readers, I value the idea of *contemporaneity*, which creates a sense of freshness of thought and evidence. I want historical evidence to form an interactive whole with social theory. But in this case, it appeared necessary that the theory have pride of place, with a strict accounting of chronological entries, providing one an historical record which shows where the material is leading and whether or not one is on track in terms of further historical validation. The subsequent volume, now titled "Counterrevolution: Marching Against History," and previous to that, "Empirical Findings: A Contrarian Voice," is a somewhat massive

compilation of evidence which, because completed earlier, provided a context for suggesting the social theory found in the present volume.

Asymmetry interests me. It disrupts the lulling effect of evenness of expression (my love for contemporary music that is disciplined, as with Boulez and Carter), but also as the ideal vehicle for engaging a topic directly and as it occurs. I cannot pretend to emulate Emerson's aphoristic writings, sublime in their masterly succinctness, nor Thoreau's transparency of perception; I offer mundane political writings, radical in persuasion, as in my first book, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (Harvard), published, as of this writing, 55 years ago.

In the interim, like Thoreau, I have been counting centimeters of growth in the rose garden; also, in his spirit, I have walked picket lines and engaged in many-sided demonstrations, careful, in my teaching, to maintain non-doctrinaire instruction simultaneous with introducing students to the classics of social theory, aesthetics, political philosophy, and comparative history. What prompts me now to break my relative silence over several decades is the seriousness of the plight in which America finds itself. Ordinarily, I would count *only* scholarly writing as worth enumerating. Yet in recent years I have written some 400 articles for an international journal of fact and opinion, developing and refining ideas and subject matter which inform the present volume and recast to form the body of the subsequent one.

I speak of fascistization as a topic of deep concern and interest to me. Subject matter here has been identified through a lifetime of thinking, writing, and acting. Despite a seeming uneventful quality to the times, I have looked to the Obama presidency as significant of a qualitative transformation of American society. Obama is neither the chief architect nor, simply, a cipher, but his presidential record would not be intelligible without the political-structural-ideological sea change I see occurring in and to the American polity.

Elaborating the foregoing, exposing the record, and offering or implying a direction to be taken consistent with the democratization of the social order, I range freely over topics which interest me. The result represents an essay in political philosophy which, further development taking place because of unanticipated thoughts and findings, I have sought to broaden into an inquiry into *moral philosophy*.

I am not unique in this regard. As writers know, works have a life of their own; through internal processes of growth, what was once implicit purpose and content becomes explicit, purpose enlarged, content taking



seemingly odd turns. The purpose is a political-moral analysis; the content is from drone assassination, to the psychodynamics of fascistization, and the social-structural character of American capitalism. My intent is both personal and public. I need to express certain ideas (one early working title of the book being, “The Conscience of a Radical”), and, knowing I should want to see them in print, encourage a basic re-thinking of such key political concepts as “radical” and “liberal,” and, if there were sufficient interest, create the basis for a conversation on the nature and direction of America’s future.

The perspective is radical, yet quite reserved to avoid what I criticize in more radical writings than one cares to admit—thinking in placard-form, simplistic, cocky, all making for the mounting of fairy-tale barricades, above all, self-congratulatory. Examples from other positions on the political spectrum come to mind for writing and thinking bearing the same hallmarks, and sometimes worse. I am not in sympathy with radicalism in America today, in thrall to culture wars, race-chauvinism, and gender liberation. Rather, my focus is on class, not race or gender, even when race in particular—whether, in my case, for example, participation in the March on Washington, Mississippi Freedom Summer, and Selma—were uppermost in mind.

I seek to reinterpret race and gender in terms of class and power. Transgender bathrooms fail to excite me; what I take to be the trivialization of radicalism is, in the precarious position we find ourselves, out of place. As Arthur Miller put it, I believe, in *Death of a Salesman*, the woods are burning, the whole world is ablaze. People are suffering, wars are imminent in the process of intervention and regime change, and political consciousness is at a low point. The furor stimulated by political campaigns gives little serious thought to questions of power, wealth, status, or the actualization of living a meaningful life. I cannot prescribe for others what is meaningful, but I ask my countrymen/women to open their eyes to the possible dangers ahead. We must pierce the encrusted notion of American Exceptionalism, resist succumbing to the patriotism of false consciousness, and stand firm for civil liberties and the transparency of government. Lenin, Trotsky, and Marx are not necessary. Franklin Delano Roosevelt will do very nicely.

My remarks on radicals’ posturing should not be construed as antiradical sentiment. I *am* out of step with many present-day activists and radicals because I conceive problems with a view to their fundamental (i.e., systemic) character. This refers to social systems, political economies

(especially capitalism), and achieving democratization in public policy. The mindset returns one to an earlier generation of radicalism, addressed to imperialism, war, markets, the distribution of wealth and power, class supremacy, poverty, and exploitation. Each of these is *systemic* in character, not the trivialization of radicalism I noted, as in name changes of buildings, and so on. The autobiographical fragment (see in the text) indicates the genesis of my radicalism. I want to clarify my intent. Nothing is gained from pulling one's punches, or for that matter telegraphing them.

I am not sympathetic to the type of radicalism, increasingly prominent, which, in the name of rejecting elitism, damns academic training and writing as presumably selling out the masses. My writing is complex; I have made it so to force the reader to *think*. (I suspect Henry James had the same idea in mind, to make the reader ponder text and create a tension between writer and reader as a means of strengthening one's mental discipline, applicable to both alike.)

In a way, the author represents the reader, providing grounds and incentive for careful scrutiny of text. No one benefits from pabulum-like thinking and reasoning. Radicals frequently expect to be spoon-fed, as so often they spoon-feed others. For them, complexity is bad form (i.e., elitism!), and taking them on for evincing a certain mindlessness, brings down the house. If this book proves too demanding, lay it down. I am out of spoons and reject spoon-feeding on principle.

## 5 IDEAS/SPECTRUM-SHRINKAGE, SOURCES, ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I adopt a critical view of American capitalism, the Obama administration, and the course of US foreign policy in the time-frame covered. My training in and teaching of history, social theory, and political philosophy imparts to the writing more than a journalistic flavor. Based on C. B. Macpherson's *Possessive Individualism*, on which, more below, I see liberalism in relational terms. It is antiradical, yet opposed to pre-modern social formations and values, and thus appears to occupy a Centrist position. In world historical terms, it ideologically navigates between traditional autocracy and revolutionary socialism, or more commonly, between Right and Left, tilting more in favor of the Right. Pressed for a mid-point, I'd call it democratic-oriented counterrevolution.

We have, then, the Centrist affirmation of *property* which, historically, rejects and escapes from the feudal past but at the same time leads the way toward monopoly capitalism in the present and future. Yet Centrism, on the American political-ideological spectrum, because having more in common with the Right than the Left, leans rightward—beyond its property-orientation—as a result of the essentially moribund nature of the Left. The resulting shift of the total spectrum to the Right, given the inefficacious Left, gives to the Center, almost by default, the appearance to the American ear of occupying a Left position.

The Left in America has come to occupy the Center in Europe because of its dedication to the property right, a condition not always the case up through the New Deal period, and especially the late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries of industrial violence (which casts doubt on the fashionable Consensus Thesis of the 1950s). Today, though, there is validity to the thesis; the 70-odd years and more since the end of World War II has shaped an ideological structure of closure and, with selective applications of repression, has all but destroyed a Left political consciousness as more than empty rhetoric. Liberalism has filled the void, or rather naturally absorbed what had once been radical energies, philosophical and political. The spectrum, having become overly narrowed, rules out fundamental dissent and protest. If Centrism is the best on offer, which seems now the case, the equation of capitalism and democracy will remain permanently intact, an internal historical-ideological propagandistic coup which, as self-fulfilling prophesy, etches a capitalistic political economy in stone.

Capitalism has devoured democracy, or it has promoted the superimposition of restraints of order on it. Increasingly, it is difficult for Americans to distinguish a Left-of-liberalism position because liberalism has been coded to mean Left, which is furthest from the truth. Nothing is to be gained, from the standpoint of enlivening discussion and analysis, from spectrum-shrinkage. A Left cannot be generated out of whole cloth, but for the sake of intellectual honesty it would be nice to be enabled—even hypothetically—to envision and safeguard a meaningful, expansive Left-Right political continuum. Otherwise, capitalism continues monolithically apace, subject to the promised rigidity and fragility that that condition implies. America is trapped in its own ideological insularity; a reading of Mill's *On Liberty*, to counter spectrum-shrinkage, is highly recommended.

In the present study one will find the clustering of seemingly diverse issues on which policymakers act or have under advisement. I emphasize *diverse* here because, also in the structure and behavior of the human

personality, policies, ideas, actions tend to cluster; specifically, in this case, there is a consistency of approach providing the political-ideological connective however much the issues appear to differ. As is well known, on personality traits, Theodor Adorno et al., in *The Authoritarian Personality*, found that they hang together in a unified psychoanalytically oriented syndrome. I suggest that issues do the same, following the pattern of a unified policy-oriented syndrome.

This internal consistency or interrelatedness also holds for behavior traits, thematic content, and the direction of policy. Much has been written since, mostly in subtle refutation of the Adorno study, as a way of circumventing professional discussion, and reflecting popular denial, of the possible fascist structural and cultural proclivities of American society. Yet I have been as much influenced by that volume and its technical approach to the relation between psychology and ideology as I have to its empirical findings. When in the text I emphasize the significance of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, it is very much with the nation's historical experience in mind, including the assumptions and actions of current policymakers.

Thus, on the interrelatedness of policy, priority, judgment, direction, all provide cohesion to and affect the entire range of specific actions. When Obama makes drone assassination a signature weapon's choice, policy determination, and symbolic representation of his administration, one can expect other things, outside the realm of foreign policy, to follow. Consistent with drone assassination one finds a broad-based reactive formation: sponsorship of massive surveillance over the public; a policy of environmental degradation consistent with natural resources' extraction and industrial pollution; and not least, contempt for government transparency and civil liberties (prosecution of whistleblowers).

The reactive underside of liberalism is placed on display. Typified by one of the major political parties, marginally different from the other, this signifies incremental degrees of difference, *if at all*, on militarism and favoritism shown the business system, the present-day validation of consensus operating. Political differences are exaggerated for the electorate's consumption, while the more basic similitude on structure and ideology remains intact.

Adorno and his Berkeley colleagues studied (using the f-scale) what I term a prefascist societal configuration, which, in 1950, fit well in the analysis of racism and the contemporary voicing of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Despite the Cold War, the configuration, however, lacked an institutionalized militarism—even then with the onset of the Korean War,

a regional expression of the larger political-ideological conflict. American capitalism had not yet fully carried out the transition from political economy, destructive enough, to capitalist polity, which reached into the daily lives of Americans. The latter phase, inclusive in scope, began with a campaign of anticommunism, which served to stifle dissent, rally support for war and intervention, and shift the political-ideological spectrum further rightward. This was an ideal structural-ideological-historical matrix for the prefascist configuration and its further progression under conditions of government-business interpenetration (to be discussed).

I say this, not to suggest a conspiracy theory, but as resulting from a postwar antiradical climate having telling effect on legislation. This is accompanied by persecution and prosecution of radicals in a witch-hunting setting of hysteria, typified by, though not confined to, McCarthyism. For one living through those times, as did I, a high school student denounced in class for my support of Henry Wallace, this was pervasive hard-reality, nothing conspiratorial about it, transparent as the Florida sun in which I grew up. The post-World War II setting proved formative for the years to follow of suppression, formal and informal, which proceeded through successive waves of conformity to achieve what today, in Adorno's classification, stated so many years earlier, is authoritarian submissiveness, to all intents historically and structurally carrying the prefascist configuration closer to consummation.

In my reference to a prefascist configuration, as in all else, it is important that I not implicate teachers and friends over the years in agreeing with me. The more conservative among them (I have greater respect for that, in its classic Burkean form, than for present-day garden variety liberalism) encouraged me to grow in my own way, and foremost, to believe that intellectual dialogue was to be valued in its own right. A vital conservatism is essential to sharpening the contours, insights, and wit, of modern radicalism. Having been burned at times by an inflexible radicalism which, like the authoritarianism of the Right, reacts badly to criticism, I deplore the loyalty test always present when disagreement arises, met by the steady refrain, "don't criticize, show solidarity." Much of radical discourse today is of the feel-good, non-challenging kind, aimed at the faithful, a fearfulness mimicking the Right in ideological closure.

Teachers and friends, many now deceased, who guided me in my intellectual development, include Frank Freidel, Barrington Moore, Louis Hartz, Manning Dauer, William G. Carleton, Gordon Levin, Gabriel Kolko, Fritz Pappenheim, Stan Vittoz, and a wonderful group of students

from Harvard, Yale, Wayne State, and Michigan State. I was also privileged to work with men and women in such diverse locations as Mississippi, Selma, Boston Common, Harvard Square, and downtown Detroit, in social protest, from lunch-counter demonstrations, to picket lines, to anti-war rallies. Most important, as a source of life, encouragement, and love, is my family, Nancy, whom I met on the steps of the Fogg Museum at Harvard (as I write, we have already observed our 60th wedding anniversary), our son Peter, gifted percussionist, his wife, Sallie, extraordinary pianist, and our grandchildren.

With so many over the years in effect watching my back, I can face the music of the ideological spheres, Left and Right, neither of which appears to be taking on the broad challenges raised by contemporary capitalism. I deplore ideological orthodoxy whatever its location; I mention radicals for criticism—who are by no means alone in this regard—because I hold them to a higher standard, beyond wisdom or knowledge, and rather, openness, self-questioning, a welcoming of complexity. As for wisdom and knowledge, they count heavily whatever their source. I am drawn to what I believe was a more vital intellectual atmosphere in the past. Because the mind was under assault by the forces of order and bigotry, every fresh thought, as Sartre would hold, was a victory, one in which to take delight and cherish. America now is in process of self-evisceration, emptying the mental treasures from the past in a churlish mode of destructiveness because their existence is a rebuke to how far the mindlessness of society has progressed.

My writing is a pale shadow of that of scholars and teachers I admire most. I wish for their presence today, their instruction and wise counsel, but for that I have memories and could readily enlarge my list of acknowledgments. And then there are the world-beaters, Marx and Freud (must one still be fearful about referencing Marx?), the composers, painters, conductors, instrumentalists, sports heroes, and, not to be overlooked, my special regard, knowing fully the inadequacy of his policies, for Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). In soulful terms, my generation would be the New Deal, the writers, poets, actors/actresses, even the public officials, Ickes, Tugwell, Wallace (whom I was fortunate to meet), the guys who were in Works Progress Administration (WPA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Public Works Administration (PWA), and true working stiffs in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). I can only touch them with my fingertips, but that will have to do.

This is now a different and, I think, diminished period, whether in politics, literature, painting, music, or the general conviction and demeanor of the ordinary citizen. Privatization has swept aside moral scruples. Hegemony

and hubris ravage the national soul. I am not, in my mind's eye, an Old Testament prophet given to lamentations, nor a possessed radical determined on revolutionary change, merely an observer and sometime activist feeling my way cautiously in a world crumbling underfoot. The signs are not propitious for the onward progress of humanity. We shall see, all in good time.

# Advancing Monopoly Capitalism: A Totalitarian Mental Landscape

## 1 SYSTEMIC AUTHORITARIANISM: ON SOCIETAL DEFENSE MECHANISMS

America is in a state of political-structural decay. This is not to echo Spengler's lament, which reflects the mood of cultural despair; rather, it is an idea worth pursuing despite the customary invocation of historical, structural, and psychological defense mechanisms which come into play when a declining Power enters self-protective mode. By at least the 1970s, America exhibited a downward trajectory in its historical development, the product of a global counterrevolutionary posture at the heart, and integral to the logic, of the USA's involvement in the Cold War.

Yet such a trajectory does not signify a loss of power; quite the opposite, it fuels the desire, and national policy, for more intensive structural elaboration, in this case, systemic militarization, of capitalism and culture alike. In fact, the US role in international politics was predictable from 1945 onward, when, as the ascendant singular military and economic force, emerging from a ravaged world order, America actively sought the consolidation of its banking, industrial, and commercial sectors.

This was, and still is, a political economy of advancing monopoly capitalism. The projection of Exceptionalism provided a mandate for the unilateral reshaping of the global system to its own advantage. National security provided a rallying cry and ideological leverage for what remained basically a global geopolitical strategy centered on political influence,



market expansion, and the containment of Left social forces. In addition, and complementary, to the internal dynamics of structural-ideological development, must be factored in the main outlines of the Cold War, the confrontation with Russia and China, with the reintegration of Europe addressing the first, and the absorption of Japan, the second, goal. This was undoubtedly a busy time for American policymakers, a period following World War II, which in the context of disruption, upheaval, and crisis, saw America seeking global leadership on behalf of an international capitalist system within which it could advance superior claims to moral and material hegemony.

Dynamic forces of change had been unleashed in the war's aftermath. National liberation and anticolonial struggles, for starters, were changing the foundations of world politics. Too, the Powers were making up for lost time, seeking financial recovery and a favorable position in the world economy; their commercial-industrial market penetration led to intra-capitalist rivalries and wider international tensions. In addition, early prefiguring the Cold War, there was political mistrust between structural-ideological adversaries.

Thus, one is not surprised, particularly after the death of FDR and the breaking down of the wartime alliance, fragile in any case, that the core aspiration driving US foreign policy would be anticommunism, and that its domestic complementation would be a rightward shift of the political spectrum. This was, following upon the New Deal, a seemingly irreversible course, true to this day of bipartisan unity affecting fundamental issues of capitalism and world power. A gradually closing regimentation of views accepted the permanence of an hierarchical societal framework of class, wealth, and power, all clothed in patriotic ardor.

Two immediate phases, for purposes of discussion, can be distinguished. The earlier growing pains of imperialism abroad, business superiority and labor's subordination at home, occurred roughly from the Open Door in world markets (accompanied by an unrelieved suppression of working people, the Great Railroad Strikes to Haymarket, Homestead, and then Pullman) through the New Deal. The latter, although relatively protective of labor in the Wagner Act, nonetheless continued Hoover's trade-association organization and policy culminating in the National Recovery Administration.

In this period, there had perhaps been signs of innocence and vacillation in striking out on the world stage and disciplining society at home. Yet, this is contradicted by the geopolitical theories of Mahan, the

Battleship Navy of Theodore Roosevelt, and the hegemonic implications of Wilson's internationalism. But in contrast to the aftermath of World War II, America was neither prepared nor able to effect unilateral global leadership in the context of a still viable framework of power politics.

By the late 1940s, the second phase, a process of hardening, took place. An ossification of commitment and purpose raised Imperialism (now deserving capitalization) to a consuming definition of the nation. This would be in conformance with capitalist expectations favoring expansion, militarism, and the people's subscription to foreign policy and their own deferential behavior. Innocence and vacillation had all but completely vanished as the Cold War mindset took over. Russia then China became the evil cynosure in all eyes, followed by Third World efforts at self-determination and de-colonialism, marking the new epoch (say 1950). Now, well over a half-century later, little has changed in American policy and perspective, only grown progressively more hardened, matching an ideological rigidity in both. The very absence of substantive change in outlook and purpose is ample testimony to a hardening of arteries, impending decline, in a word, with which I started, *decay*.

Defense mechanisms, (a) historical, (b) structural, and (c) psychological, have prevented Americans from examining ourselves in introspective depth. This helps to account for what the world already knows, though one does not admit. There has occurred the narrowing of political consciousness to a somewhat arid rendering of what amounts to as a petrifying capitalism, that is, an absolute, an end in itself. With this attitude and widespread belief-system, any crack in the defensive mental walls is magnified out of all proportion as a total threat and to be responded to accordingly. This totalitarian organization of the mental landscape, a psychological totalitarianism recognizable at the time by clinicians as a form of authoritarianism, signifies a hardened reactive formation challenged when defensive walls are in danger of being breached.

Self-created walls, equally the work of individual and nation alike, mutually interacting to protect the mental/emotional core of structure and values, have characterized the dominant mode of personality-integration cumulatively building in America since the advent of the Cold War. This recognizable trait is the *projection* of one's hostility onto others: Russia, at first, constructed in American minds as the unmitigated evil bent on world aggression, which, in reality, had become embedded in our own aspirational planning and actual execution. Here, projection became a convenient displacement of aggression absolving the self—the nation—of responsibility

for committing pre-emptive aggressive acts as well as entertaining dark thoughts, still in the late 1940s, of war, intervention, regime change, whenever global currents of ideology, export markets, and the rise of Left governments were perceived as going against US interests.

A Garrison-State mentality, with its corollary fear and anxiety accounting for its structure and politics, soon prevailed. It arose naturally to America when it saw itself thwarted, under duress, a hoped-for ascendance within the international system of politics and economics impeded. The reasons were several, but two stand out: America's efforts were hindered through its own overextension into the world arena, as other nations were still shaking off the effects of the Second World War; relatedly, the world system was now becoming vastly more complicated with, by 1949, a decentralization of power taking place. The Soviet Union had begun its initial recovery and China now fully emerged, under Mao. In both cases, a change in international relations created political-ideological rivals of America.

To supplement these cohesive, independent centers of power on the world scene, the European Union provided a parallel development; unified trading blocs and their military counterparts now checkered the political-military landscape. The EU, as the economic child born of a US-directed overall military policy focused on Russian containment, became integrally related to NATO. Add to America's concerns an awakening Third World on three continents: Latin America, Asia, and Africa. From the US perspective, the international system portended an unaccustomed overcrowding of potential rivals (including those converted into adversaries). Negative possibilities abounded, autonomous states and their political economies capable and willing to come out from under American influence, pursuing their own interests and bidding for the recognition of and attention from what was fast breaking down into rival power blocs. The USA, then, was no longer the global architect of its own supremacy.

Nevertheless, its head-start in 1945–47 was an invitation to absolutism and rapaciousness. If we turn first to (a) historical defense mechanisms, one must start with the nation's seventeenth-century founding as an extension of Europe, yet, as a supposedly *New World* (indigenous people were not considered). This convenient fiction of immaculate conception offered for settlement an epistemological tableau of wonderment, the origins of what becomes its ideological guiding star, Exceptionalism, a table rasa of Innocence, Moral Rightness, a self-evident context of Nascent Capitalism, freed from Old World mercantilism and feudalism.

### 1.1 *A Self-announced Political Economy: Historical Sources of Ideological Closure*

Not only the New World that was of virgin birth, without blemish, preserved free from original sin by Divine grace. By extension, capitalism came to share these virtues, capitalism, over time, thought pure, unalloyed, perhaps even founded on self-evident reason. (Certainly by the early nineteenth century, setting and political economy, in the popular imagination, had become perfectly matched.) This, given obvious European influences, merely caricatured historical reality, but it would do, suiting the purposes of the primarily English colonial design, in which the fiction of independence was still safely under the control of the metropolitan. The ground rules, ripening economic conditions, and opportunities on a global basis, were sufficiently new, however, to extricate the salience of capitalism out of mercantilism. The importance of the commodity, whether applied to raw-materials production and exportation, or inhering in the conception of the slave in the system of plantation slavery, was fully recognized. (Shortly, it would come to characterize the industrial laborer as well.) The result is, the political economy (capitalism) was seen as politically-structurally self-announced and self-justified.

As Louis Hartz, in *The Liberal Tradition in America*, summarized, capitalism in America was born mature. It did not have to make itself so. His reference is to its purist societal formation in which feudalism had been left behind in a Europe still placing restraints on its unencumbered development. One does not have to agree with Hartz's formulation of essential separation to see its tremendous descriptive value *in situ* (how colonists perceived or, better still, fabricated reality to accomplish their own ends). And, for analytical purposes, its advantage is in searching out the disposition to rigidity, fear of challenge, ethnocentrism, an interiorized repression, which derives from a purist structural formation susceptible to conjuring up its own enemies. Hartz would have rejected this conclusion, writing more in a celebratory mode, but his brilliance, particularly in suggesting capitalism's monolithic quality and pervading influence in America, as well as being a beloved teacher, draws me back from historical criticism of the thesis.

In America, capitalism defines a solipsistic polity comprehensively occupying the nation's ideological universe. Parenthetically, like other modal political economies, capitalism as a system can take on variegated forms, features, even class alignments and cultural emphases, depending on historical development, timing, location, a prior configuration of struggle

(or its absence), and so on. America, in comparative terms (I credit Hartz with the insight), has endeavored to remain outside of history, ascribing to capitalism an absolutism as though nurtured in a vacuum, with the cumulative force to insure its structural-ideological integrity, that is, freedom from alteration that might introduce unwanted democratization of wealth and power. It is as though capitalism in America has had an ever-renewed dynamism, paradoxically, to achieve a permanent status quo. For a century, militarism and military strength constituted the requisite preventative agents of social change. Exceptionalism stands on an ideological pedestal of unrelieved sameness, consequential change headed off or subsumed by an encroaching, quietly terrifying conformity.

Related to commodity production and anteceding it in political-philosophical importance is the Property Right, the sine qua non condition of capitalism, which C.B. Macpherson, in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, draws on to define the individual. The property right represents a psychological penetration so deep as, radiating from the center of the conception of identity, it acts to color the meaning of institutions, culture, national purpose. The property right, too, is interiorized. It becomes a constituent part of what it means to be an American. America is capitalistic from head to toe: The individual *owns* himself/herself, not is himself/herself. The act of ownership starts from self-conception. (Even more primordial, property is a natural right enjoying the protection of government.)

This elemental conception, integrating the self and property as a timeless unit of moral value, affects, beyond the foundations of law, the character and quality of social relations. Political-ideological recognition is accorded to self-ownership as identity-shaping, the corollaries of which pertain to property qua possession and the exclusion of others, as well as an unrestricted right. All of the foregoing point to the silent erection of walls around the individual, so that a structural-cultural-economic paradigm of human separation concludes the epistemological cum psychological chain of reasoning. Solitary encounters trump solitary relationships. Fragmented social bonds, what I later refer to as depersonalization, make the impersonal regard for others as commodities possible.

The human being is rendered the ultimate commodity under capitalism. From this one can see immediately the erection of personal defensive walls, not only to underscore possessiveness as the defining relation to the self, but also to render meaningless, under capitalism, genuine respect for the rights of others, as more than instruments or vehicles to serve one's own ends. It is also to ascribe to the political economy—to which one

owes one's identity—a reified status in which it, like the individual, is not subject to question. Human dignity rides with the security of property; conversely, working people who are without property, and slaves, in an enforced status of being the property of others, have no standing in society, morally, legally, every which way, thus heightening the contrast with those who hold property and possess themselves.

One can well imagine Thomas Hobbes turning in his grave, his world of seventeenth-century dissociation and competitive antagonism a mild tea party, although rendered with vast premonitory insight, compared with today's self-withdrawal into vituperative meanness and undue sensitivity to the societal-cultural differences between propertied and non-propertied humanity, internationally and domestically. Much of this is one-sided, moving from the top down in the social structure and class system. Hobbes, a worthy protagonist of Locke, sought a corrective to inequalities in wealth, power, and status, not only for the good of the realm, but as conformable to sovereign power unchallenged in preserving the social welfare freed from conflict and selfishness. Locke is America's patron saint, legitimating capital accumulation an end in itself, capitalism by that token a supremely moral system.

Hartz transported Locke whole to America, providing one an analytical springboard for viewing capitalism without clothes, so to speak. In its purist societal delineation, it constitutes a moral order. Yet, freed from personal and human obligation (even familial as the pervasive reality), the property right constitutes a moral void: therefore, a moral framework, an amoral core. There is a demand for State protection, simultaneous with the abandonment of individuals to the workings of the system. Property, sacred, humans, not so. Enjoying natural/legal rights' status, capitalism now blossoms forth as market fundamentalism, which, compounding the process of reification (the abstraction taking material form), is again pertinent to the construction of defensive walls—for the individual, but also for promoting the individual's attachment to the social order. Capitalism becomes a direct expression of patriotic fervor, as the only social order worthy of being defended.

### *1.2 Hierarchy, Stability, Force: Structural Sources of Ideological Closure*

From historical defense mechanisms, one turns to (b) structural defense mechanisms, the inner skeletal framework of societal formations which provide them cohesion in facing external (real and imagined) threats.

This can be seen as a monolithic, unitary building process. Class, status, power, perhaps through historical trial-and-error, act in defining the contours of structure, but more likely, the real or potential exercise of coercive force, rooted in these relationships, leaves nothing to chance. Structure is an accretive process, legitimated force becoming translated into the command of agencies (government, military, etc.) having authority to exercise it. Modern states are the sum of their ruling/ascendant parts; they do not arise in an absence of mind. The same can be said for their structures, which have the specialized function of the stabilization of the social order and the consequent elimination or stifling of whatever is thought (primarily by ruling groups) a menace to that order.

The hierarchical form (mirroring, or caused by, the particular stage of capitalism) that structure takes in America is derived from the characteristics of capitalism itself: from a compliant State to the unequal distribution of wealth and power. Status is less consequential because it is seen as merely honorific, and in any case matter-of-factly attached to the other two with or without fanfare. Added reinforcement to societal hierarchy comes primarily from ideological themes and echoes sanctioning the litany of business, wealth, militarism, themselves all hierarchical in structure and arrangement of rankings. The shibboleth of democracy notwithstanding, America is composed of pigeon holes, *class* too unseemly a word, negating and canceling out the will to authentic humaneness toward and respect for others. Consider later the implications of the foregoing for drone assassination, the vaporization of human beings.

Ruling groups, public and private (an often meaningless distinction at the top of the hierarchy), are skilled in enlisting popular support via myriad forms of social-control mechanisms. One notes a pattern, carrot-and-stick in nature, that is Pavlovian, as in exalting patriotic fervor through publicizing military successes, or stirring fear from reminders of massive surveillance. A second pattern, borrowed from McCarthyism, drums home anticommunism (confrontation with Russia and China) which then slides into and becomes mixed with counterterrorism, the revivification of the *Enemy* on the doorstep calling for the need of the National Security State, prosecution of whistleblowers, rejection of transparency in government, a tarring of dissident opinion under *liberal* influence.

(The reader will note that I have less to say about the nation's preoccupation with terrorism, this because my attention lies with antecedent sources of geopolitical concern *and* in the long wash I view counterterrorism as replicating habits and themes of anticommunism, thus a half-century and

more of hegemonic practice acting to disturb and distort the international order. Whatever emphasis I underplay or omit concerning terrorism, may nonetheless be implicitly restored as an extension from previous historical disruptions to global power arrangements. This is emphatically not to exonerate jihadism, or place exclusive blame on the USA for the current situation, but merely to establish a framework which analyzes American capitalist ideology and behavior.)

Thus, an underlying theme of the book is the spectrum-shift rightward in ideology, politics, and economics. The emphasis on monolithic order corresponds with, serves the needs of, and is imperative to, an historical process that precludes the generation of alternative patterns of modernization. History stops with capitalism; further, it stops with alterations of class relations of power that might tip the balance to working people (a possible vulgarization of the end-of-history thesis?), and must not be permitted to evolve into socialism. What is called for is capitalist development as an historical process of unrelieved sameness, a one-dimensional, linear one, in which a splendiferous vortex of perfection reigns.

Structure accompanies, emulates, works through, and is the product of history. It is not the instantaneous product of ruling groups sitting around the table and declaring it so. It is therefore not a reification of itself, a materialization of its identity without benefit of human intercession. Humans endow it with qualities, material, transcendent, whatever best justifies their power and rule. They ascribe to it a living presence in order to implement and militarize the authority and force stored—through the apparatus of government—and residing in it. The legal system confirms the prerogatives of command resulting from the organization of class and power. Indeed, the interior of structure *is* class power, refined or not through ideology and culture.

Viewed as a social formation, it necessarily requires the ascription of internal consistency (it cannot *value* such consistency itself), lest it become fragmented, repressive, unresponsive to the needs of its people, all of which can and does readily happen. The quest for unity and uniformity—a focal point of both ruling groups and government, generally in alignment, for purposes of maintaining Order—is to reject dissonance in all its forms. (Cognitive-dissonance theory, after more than a half-century, may still have something to offer.) Hence, emphasis is placed on the maintenance of defense mechanisms, wherein structural and psychological forms (indeed, all three, history too) are mutually interacting and reinforcing. A framework of social control is translated from structure to individual through the



mediation of ideology. In this case, the content and principles of capitalism are intended to enclose and protect its structure from harm. Structure itself is perceived and formally and informally disseminated through the selfsame mechanisms of social control, from media, to literature, to political rhetoric, to, most effective, everyday cultural values and observances.

### 1.3 *Penchant for Dichotomization: Psychological Sources of Ideological Closure*

For America, social change, notwithstanding hymns of progress, is the enemy at the gates, an unwelcome interruption in stabilizing class relations and their political-cultural reinforcement. Structure is most successful in the achievement of stabilization and the cultural permeation of Order when it promotes conditions favoring ethnocentrism and xenophobia, which themselves are intimately associated with (c) psychological defense mechanisms. This is to suggest that capitalism is not per se an integrative societal formation (Marx's ideas on *contradiction* possibly derive from this recognition). Property has a preclusive cast, aimed at individual possession and class differentiation, both specifically weakening social bonds, an ethos of inclusion, and the wholeness, as opposed to fragmentation, of the individual.

Ethnocentrism is the logical expression of invidious distinction, in this case predicated on ownership, property, and wealth. Its effect is rampant ideological dichotomization predicated on the psychologically notorious we-they distinction, a consequent drawing together of an in-group at the expense of all others. Politically, the we-they distinction extends to that of superior-inferior, a perhaps more harmful dichotomy, which, in capitalism, bestows prestige and moral rightness on the rich, and the prescriptive conduct of deference (authoritarian submissiveness) on the poor. Psychological defense mechanisms verily abound in the underlying rejection of social change, conversely, in the efforts at achieving capitalist stabilization. (We think of ethnocentrism as primarily if not exclusively directed to the *external* enemy, the "they" qua foreigners, members of a different race, etc., always with an imputation of a superior-inferior relationship. But ethnocentrism also has its domestic counterpart, as the enemy within—radical, dissident—and more particularly applied to the poor, where a superior-inferior relationship also prevails.)

The Berkeley group, led by Theodor Adorno, created a firestorm for an American audience (in Europe the theoretical framework was well-known, but lacked the empirical findings and scale-construction) when their

volume, *The Authoritarian Personality*, appeared in 1950. It indicated a clear predisposition to fascistic values in America, celebratory of conformity, punitive toward disagreement and dissent, fearful not only of the Stranger but also even of subtlety and nuance, whatever undermines feelings of certitude, and, not least, the penchant for dichotomization of practically everything in life.

Here xenophobia, fear of the stranger, strongly complements, and is similar to, ethnocentrism in the formation of the fascist mindset. Its psychodynamics, as in drawing close, cements an in-group, which seeks the protection of a Leader. In the Nazi rallies, ego-loss is accomplished through a solidification of the mass, then redirected, displaced, and projected onto the Leader. The atmosphere (what now, little man?), with drums rolling and spotlights punctuating the dark, creates an alarming parallel to the process of habituation in the demands for conformity and loyalty nearer to hand and warned against in the study.

The social process of psychodynamics illustrated here does not occur in a vacuum, hence *social*. It is not the product of marginalized groups, but is at the center of government policy, drone warfare—to which I will return in detail—merely the signal for deeper impulses toward death and destruction wrought by the alleged superior, the Exceptional Nation. The personality structure was a virtual grab-all of Manichaeanism, the reification of dualism, a we-they dichotomy, which leads to the repression and persecution of others, abject respect for power, and a desire for submission to a strong leader (in Nazism, the Leadership principle). When history operates to close alternative pathways to development, when structure provides the authority and mechanisms for ensuring that this process occurs (euphemistically, continuities of institutions, culture, values), we then turn to psychology for the internalization of the resulting defensive walls.

## 2    ENSHRINEMENT OF THE STATUS QUO: POLITY SYNCHRONIZATION

At some abstract level, we can say that America's unrelieved sameness of development, its non-dialectical pattern of historical development, represents the ultimate refutation of a Marxian dialectical schema in history. Whether or not America has therefore "won" in the cosmic battle of ideological triumphalism, Marx the principal adversary in modern times, still awaits historical determination. But what can be said for now is that, even absent Marx altogether, the historical-structural pathway set by America,

*before* modern socialism had even been conceived (except perhaps in a somewhat arbitrary reading of Hobbes), is that America has from its founding been hostile to the principle of ideological variegation, and still more, its reflection in multiple expressions of political economy.

Historically, it could essentially ignore or bypass European feudalism, and largely cannibalize mercantilism, to attain capitalism in more-or-less pure modal form, an absolutism of capitalism even before it had achieved the recognizable dimensions of a world system. Projecting ahead, one is not surprised to find that the USA has claimed a guardianship of capitalism in international politics. America equates its own political economy with that of the universal generic species. As I shall repeat or imply several times over, the identicalness of America with capitalism is a national political-ideological formula of long duration, a systemic priority which required a good deal of internal repression (beyond the psychological variety) to achieve.

### 2.1 *Brutalization of Adversarial Forces: Radicalism and Dissent*

Consensus, such as it is, derives not from God or Nature (as the doctrine of Exceptionalism connotes or hopes to summon), but from repression on several levels, particularly in the formative industrial phase, where it was essential permanently to neutralize the militancy of the working class. American capitalism, in vernacular terms, had to knock the stuffing out of labor, a step toward the reduction and elimination of class consciousness, if capitalism was to assume the form it has. I take that to be a *prior* phase of brutalization, similar on a structural level to Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation in delineating the course of capitalist development. For the USA, in that earlier industrial phase, the domestication of, through direct assault on, the labor movement, beginning in the late nineteenth century, found its counterpart, though more legal and political, in the assault on militant agricultural movements challenging monetary policy and the power of the railroads. In addition to undue political influence, and a motivating force in shaping the structure and conditions of interpenetration, railroads were a leading sector of the economy having more importance for capital accumulation and systemic growth than one supposes.

This flattening-out process directed to radicalism and dissent, neither of which finds hospitable ground to flourish, occurs as well on the psychological level, as a militarized capitalism-nationalism, through a foreign policy of war, expansion, and market penetration, is already evident

also in the late nineteenth century. It gave identity and satisfaction; in twentieth-century fascism, the arch-formula, divert the gaze of the masses, had been implied still earlier here, as in the Spanish-American War. At the turn of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt was a pivotal figure, a correlation of business conservatism and military expansionism, dressed in the putative liberalism of pure energy, action, power. This, including his interest in eugenics, was a dangerous forewarning of subsequent fascism in the corporatist wrapping of the cult of violence.

The twin assault on the American mind, a further carrot-and-stick proposition, their relative weight varying as circumstances dictated (usually more stick than carrot in personality-formation dynamics), helps to explain what in mid-twentieth-century American historiography had been advanced as the Consensus Thesis. Sidestepped, to speak politely, of the consensus-formulators, what had been discounted, in achieving consensus (exaggerated to begin with) was its obverse side, *repression*, often in naked form. In the forced-celebratory mood of the Cold War, it was both easy and politic to ignore the bloody underpinnings to an achievement of structural-ideological moderation, calmness, acquiescence. (The celebratory mood itself was a sign of uncertainty and fear, with punitive stirrings boiling up in witch hunts, loyalty oaths, and university purges of dissident faculty.)

In the 1950s, I did battle in those mock-wars of the academe, now far over the time-horizon for anyone to care, as the post-New Deal pattern of consensus settled in, a prime casualty of the Cold War itself. To suggest that scholarship is immune to the pressures and blandishments of a reigning political-ideological culture of conformity and patriotism (i.e., consensus) is nonsense. The period has left its indelible mark on how we think, as a nation, about America and its history.

Enshrinement of the status quo is inscribed in the political culture, economic mode, and value system, themselves integrated to the point of near-absolute synchronization, in America. This leaves little room for the breadth and perhaps depth of political-philosophical thought, analysis, criticism, even by radicals, suffocated by an accommodational atmosphere of consent to policymaking at the top. Adorno and colleagues discuss authoritarian submission, which is unusually apt two-thirds of a century later, where war-making, nuclear modernization, climate change, and environmental destruction, bounce off walls of boredom and indifference, detachment from reality itself becoming the new and governing reality: the reality of unreality, the unreality of reality. This is the raw stuff of which history is made—at least in modern times.

## 2.2 *Alienation: Commodity Structure and Human Separation*

This detachment constitutes a mass invitation to wealth concentration (for the few), the psychological fragmentation of the individual, and the enhancement of class differences, all proceeding as I write. American society is materially (said advisedly) wounded, ordinarily raising the question of whether it is industrialism or capitalism that is responsible for alienation. Yet, for present purposes, this matters less than the fact of alienation as separation from the self and all that it implies for the root-separation between humans and as exemplified in their culture, institutions, and proclivities toward aggression.

I favor capitalism as the explanation for the source of alienation, having been influenced by Fritz Pappenheim's *Alienation of Modern Man*. Pappenheim, in turn, relies on Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which fixes on the commodity as the denial of use value and promotion of exchange value, the latter defining human relationships and sociocultural values in general. Commodity structure is an epistemological fact. It is not a mere economic description by itself or of social relations; it inscribes mental patterns into the materialization of consciousness and concretization of personal transactions between individuals in their ordinary roles. Here the grounds of knowledge follow the principal *forms* in the organization of societal preservation and maintenance.

Marx does not penetrate deeply enough into the structural sources of psychology, specifically as manifested in learning and understanding. He perhaps goes further than anyone in his time, making the commodity the critical unit in shaping behavior and values under capitalism, as an or *the* antecedent factor in defining motivation toward others and the entire objective world. His emphasis on exchange, derivable from the nature and purpose of the commodity, analyzes the essential precondition for the objectification of the individual—in sociology the hidden substratum of depersonalization which, in psychology, would be the equivalent in importance of Freud's analysis of the unconscious: seminal breakthroughs which in the latter case results in a flourishing science of humankind and therapeutic framework, and the former, a dead end, because even sociologists blanch when it comes to a critical analysis of capitalism.

It is hard to say what element might still be lacking in Marx's discussion, for he is careful to root commodity structure in a functioning political economy which is itself the product of historical development, rather than postulate universal principles of knowledge-acquisition resulting in an epistemic jumble. Mannheim's mind-society relationship

in *Ideology and Utopia* lacks the structural specificity Marx provides, in part underestimating what Marx does not, how the commodity structure necessitates exchange value, and exchange value necessitates the instrumental view one takes of another—all others, the Hobbesian jungle in interpersonal relations. Whether I've misrepresented the situation, commodity giving rise to exchange, or exchange giving rise to commodity, perhaps is less consequential than their correlation, which places both within the boundaries of capitalism. Further on, I shall explore Marx's *Manuscripts* and, more briefly, Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* in an explanation of the genesis of alienation. What is clear, though, is that emphasis on exchange value, the core element of the commodity, depreciates the intrinsic valuing of human worth. From there to drone assassination is a giant but still manageable analytical step.

John Locke, perhaps unwittingly, has given America a capitalist paradise. In time, this has produced the individual as a microcosm of the system, an introjection of all that comes before, history, structure, psychology, practically rendering the person identical with capitalism now in human form. On a systemic level, pursuing the idea of identicalness, it would be permissible to speak here of the intended anthropomorphizing of capitalism, attributing to it human form or personality, appositely, the intended capitalization (to convert into capital) of the individual, attributing to the human person a corporative mindset and miniaturized world of capitalism within the self, that is, the reproduction of capitalism, internalized, on a small scale. Putting the two together, if I may paraphrase Emerson, capitalism is a large individual, the individual, a small capitalism, that *closely* are system and person interlocked. The human person trades his/her identity for a self-reified organization of the personality structure based on the profit motive, self-interest, exchange values—a *dehumanized* human. The foregoing is what I mean by polity synchronization.

We are perhaps a step closer to understanding the psychodynamics of depersonalization, that which makes drone assassination possible and then *probable*. But that seems to matter less, for the moment, than pursuing the nature of the system, capitalism, that would fuse itself with militarism making drone assassination a living option in maintaining global hegemony. If the individual incorporates capitalism within the self, capitalism likewise incorporates the individual within its identity—only that may be too mild; for, substitute “introjection” and “internalization” for “incorporation” to gain a sense of how deeply entrenched in the personality of one, in the persona (my Jungian adaptation to an inanimate form) of the other, this mutually interactive process runs.

It would be nice to be able to suggest, of the interaction, the humanization of capitalism as the principal result of, and the individual thereby not harmed by, the process. But what we find is that capitalism fends off modification and social criticism through its pretend-human qualities. Meanwhile, the individual accepts as the only reality life itself as being hierarchically arranged, deference shown those higher in the broadly conceived command structure, however disguised the condition, and loyalty as the highest virtue, easily converted from firm to nation to war and intervention. The humanization of structure produces, not equality, but domination; what is human has been distorted into class relations of power.

Endowing capitalism with human attributes, an inversion of reification, becomes a barrier to criticism and protest. It is also a barrier to the historical development of alternative modes of economic activity—socialism, in particular. Here the instinctive, perhaps even innate, trait of antiradicalism at the ideological core of capitalism becomes vital. Capitalism transmogrifies the individual into a commodity—we are back to epistemology, a systemic universal in miniature, the human personality a faithful projection of all that exchange value entails and implies—in which the human being and articles of commerce are merged into one, the corporality of the spirit of accumulation, besting others, relating to others with a fraction of one's being. In a word, *alienation*.

Capitalism does that to people, the mentality of give-and-take, trade, substitution. We sell ourselves; we relate to others for what we prize that we are able to extract from them; we reduce fellow humans into commodities, so as not to be blinded by the act of besting them in the transactions of life. Life itself becomes a transaction and subject to transactional analysis. Hobbes, before Marx (from whom he, Marx, may have gotten the idea), understood and wrote about a world made up, all, of buyers and sellers, Leviathan hypothesized to correct rather than regularize the context and situation.

Even then, in seventeenth-century England, when the outlines of capitalism were becoming clear, the polity—Hobbes recognized—with or without a declaration of natural rights, was, in the new historical dispensation, losing the qualities and philosophical underpinnings of *commonwealth*. A system regulating human affairs had institutionally created the buy-sell relation which was potentially dehumanizing. Human beings, at least as I interpret Hobbes, were entitled to more than having instrumental value, to the consequent loss of dignity and, instead, inhabitan-  
 cy in a

state of perpetual war. Adam Smith also drew the same conclusions, at a later time, about human separation and dissociation, though he gave positive meaning to the condition and failed to credit Hobbes' insights.

### 2.3 *Identicalness: Individual and Society, a Monolith*

I believe Emerson would have agreed with my formulation, its implicit leads from the thought of systemic-individual identicalness. The drop, a small ocean, the ocean, a large drop, might work as a metaphysical vision in positing the unity of material and spiritual factors, humanity and nature, a pantheistic embrace of all that which is contained in the universe (and somehow, beyond). But an Age of Individualism had replaced the Emersonian vision of humankind. The roots of individuality lie deeper than human instrumentalism, or Pavlovian salivation at the thought of making a fast buck. Neither identicalness nor inseparability, as construed and practiced in modern times by advanced capitalism, would have passed muster as other than an evisceration of the soul. Metaphysical wonderment and, still less, Emerson's directness of thought, feeling, and experience are the last things wanted today.

For in that case, present-day civilization regards them as coercive and distractive, an avenue to, and code for, social pacification. One does not have to be a pre-Marxian agitator, Emerson and Thoreau certainly were not, to appreciate the sense-dulling and spiritual-deadening nature of capitalism when, as was appearing to be the case in nineteenth-century America, habituation became directed to that end. Identicalness and inseparability represented a denial of the autonomous individual, who instead has been subsumed within a state formation and political economy devoid of moral values and repulsed by non-capitalistic behavior and aspirations, perceived as mortal threats to social order. Rather, state and economy are merged as one; their synthetic quality combines so as to form a whole, which, relating to individual and social behavior, is predicated on force.

Thus, socialization via habituation equals pacification, self- and collectively applied. To accept a consensual framework of identicalness is to be intimidated into the silence of consent and obedience. (Emerson would not have remotely approved of the foregoing, seeing in what amounts to as the psychodynamics of accommodation the betrayal of human potentiality. *There*, he and Thoreau would have met on common personal and philosophical ground.) The identicalness of person and system, a nexus of



*reciprocal* introjection, mutual engulfment of one the other, was practically an inescapable condition of life, from which ethnocentrism and xenophobia directly followed.

This monolithic psychological mold of State and individual contained internal walls, respectively in each, of separation, so that, applicable to both, yet not applying to each other, they provided a matrix for ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Like Emerson's ocean/drop analogy, each, State and individual, reinforced the other, shaping structural-psychological continuities in alienation. The differentiation of self and outsider, Nation and Enemy, compounded their respective contributions to depersonalization always latent in, and ready to emerge from, ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Together, individual and State huddled beyond the safe walls of identity fused in common purpose; outside, there lurked the stranger, upon whom one could project all one's hatreds, phobias, and frustrations.

The road to fascism begins in a trumpet blast. It announces for individual and State alike, themselves locked into reciprocal identification, the internal walls of separation, which can be reduced to the transcendently resounding term, Exceptionalism. The question that American political philosophy has narrowly put to itself is: Who can argue with self-evidence as the basis and style of political-legal understanding and valuation? Self-evidence is before Americans at every turn, whether referring to business, finance, or mundane matters of state, such as the domestic regulatory apparatus, or foreign-policy initiatives requiring assassination, special forces, saturation bombing, and cyber-warfare. The response is one of certitude. It reflects the attitudinal structure of Exceptionalism and the psychodynamics of ethnocentrism: Americans as prideful, complacent, compliant, in thinking about the potential for, and promise of, global dominance in all arenas, economic, military, and political, clustering as chiefly ideological, the legitimizing agent of national purpose.

If Hartz is correct, that capitalism in America was born mature, and did not have to make itself so, the formulation suggests an accelerated aging process, maturity-at-birth, which opens out to what one expects from such a characterization (interpretation mine). Namely, the condition is one of senescence, a peculiar state in which ascendance occurs in the context of systemic decline. Military, financial, and market power, cumulative in nature, remain trending upward; meanwhile, society encounters, or is chiefly responsible for, a generalized decay of institutions and values, which takes the form of harshness, brutality, closure affecting boundaries of dissent and political change.

Assumptions of order are particularly evident in domestic class arrangements and the ground rules for the expansion of foreign trade and investment. Military and ideological factors, which primarily make up decision-making for present purposes, serve to energize the course of American capitalism. They embody the paradigm of ascendance-in-decline, not as Marxian contradiction, but as consistent, expected behavior, to satisfy capitalist imperatives of survival and growth. From this, one takes away the impression that growth is not inevitable; policies and actions to support it, considered necessitous, can often prove self-defeating.

America has constructed for itself a systemic-ideological vacuum, the historical development of an absolutistic capitalism freed from the structural-cultural impact of Europe, whether as stages of feudalism, mercantilism, or later, syndicalism. This process, winnowing down the historical chaff and leaving in its place the precious kernel of purist capitalism, was achieved through removing encumbrances of every description from its path which might blur or derogate from its central features as it began its modernization. Ultimately plantation slavery, though fulfilling many of the conditions of an earlier form of capitalism—production for a market, the slave as commodity—had to go as structurally untenable from the standpoint of free labor in a free market, and the mobility of capital. Regional differentiation had to be spelled and worked out. The pacification of labor was seen as crucial, as was a foreign policy of market expansion.

The unitary character of nation-building, capitalism its foundation and centerpiece, could not be taken for granted; it had to be culturally, institutionally, militarily sought in order to effect the modern industrial state. Capitalism in America was an experiment in self-actualization. Even though, or particularly because, this is achieved through human intervention, it cannot afford to fall behind History, lest it retain atavistic elements, as in the disposition to war, the need for affirming hegemony at every turn, the stifling of discussion and dissent at home, and, a clear atavism (recurrence to an earlier stage) unworthy of a democratic nation, drone assassination. International law has other (and better) standards in mind.

## Hierarchical Structuring of the Social Order: Ideological Implications

### I A NEW EPOCH IN WORLD HISTORY?: ON PROPERTY AND PATRIOTISM

In America, one finds a straight-line (non-dialectical) projection of unwavering dedication to property and the property right. The linear historical pattern takes in seemingly ideological departures, yet contains within itself the essential momentum: From Winthrop (though he still retained some communitarian ideas), to Calhoun (hardly a disciple of still-emerging bourgeois capitalism), to Lincoln (in a sense, presiding over or announcing the beginnings of the modern phase), to Wilson (internationalism as the assertion of *national* moral/material self-interest), to Obama (counter-revolution in the name of liberalism). Locke would have gleefully approved, as would disciples of modern corporatism, beneficiaries of the integral hierarchical structure embedded in capitalism in its later developmental phase.

And from the post-Civil War period onward, there is generally harshness toward dissent, the support of foreign expansion, and war to keep the system moving at favorable rates of profit. Most important, in what would come to define the nation's structure, ideology, and politics, all under the self-acknowledged heading of liberalism, is the interpenetration of business and government, the close alignment between capitalism and the State, a virtual partnership of common interests and interacting elites. Since 1945, protected under the Cold War umbrella, the military-component has been included as part of an integrated ruling group and

protector-underwriter of capitalist expansion and success. Wealth accumulation now wore a uniform; meanwhile, government saw its mission as facilitating long-term trends in the concentration and consolidation of industry, finance, and commerce.

### 1.1 *Structural Convergence: The Military as Midwife*

Midway in the historical process, from the Civil War to World War I, global imperialism was becoming, for America, thinkable and acted upon (the earlier Monroe-Doctrine period was still premature and/or impractical): the Open Door policy, Theodore Roosevelt's Battleship Navy, and Wilson's internationalism sculpted out a world order suitable to realizing the mutual subsuming (each including the other) of capitalism and America. Because each swallowed whole the other, this left dissident forces scrambling at the margins. From the 1920s to the present, we see psychology incorporated into structure and structure into history; the coterminous arrangement, capitalism and the State, further evolves to include the military, a subset of the State, yet, practically speaking, equally a part of capitalism, both as its militarization and advanced guard for performing multiple functions (still formally under the aegis of the State), from safeguarding market penetration to prompting regime change in areas where investment channels were not forthcoming or secure.

The capitalism-military relation is not gained at the expense of the State, itself the ultimate protector of capitalist development, but rather as enrichment of the interpenetration process. One might speculate, indeed, that the military becomes the midwife—one who or which assists in bringing about  $x$ , wide-ranging from making imperialism viable to strengthening, Keynesian-fashion, the domestic economy and avoiding economic stagnation—between the other two, capitalism and the State, when earlier twentieth-century corporatism no longer suffices to promote their singular and joint interests. When the horizons and/or imperatives of both expand, as happened with the conclusion of World War II, the military becomes a propelling agent for further conquest in its myriad forms.

This takes America, beyond corporatism, and even the militarization of capitalism to a new starting place, somewhat novel, because, with the more advanced stage of capitalism, the prosecution of permanent war is being considered more seriously by American policymakers. We see a more uninhibited unilateralism, less solicitous about reorganizing the global structure than working within the existing system of international politics

to gain unmitigated, preclusive objectives. Wendell Willkie's *One World* of 1940 is in the ash heap. Now financialization fuses with militarization in defining contemporary capitalism, in the process displacing manufacturing while commerce and investment become leading concerns and the combination of air power and special forces is increasingly relied on to displace conventional forces. Diplomacy, not to be outdone, magnifies coerciveness rather than peace.

A new epoch in world history? To the extent that America is succeeding, or attempting to, in its hegemonic goals and aspirations, which now must factor in a renewed Cold War, directed to China as well as Russia, and to Third World restiveness (I tend to downgrade Islamic terrorism in significance on a broader geopolitical scale), the answer is, "Yes." The building process may have taken centuries to refine. Yet, for the moment, after such swift progress in the twentieth century, America can currently, if not rest on its laurels, have at least subjected its people to willing submission through massive surveillance and reminders of military power and supposed national greatness.

To bring about what may prove a qualitative change or transformation, importance attaches to structural convergences, which require, in form, and achieved through historical assistance and consistency, the establishment of an hierarchical societal framework. This framework is key to the coordination of elites, inscribing gradations of power into the social structure as a means of curtailing and containing popular energies of dissent should they—increasingly unlikely—ever arise. Hierarchy provides ruling groups a reasonably clear identity and cohesion, which gives them, as now in America, acknowledged legitimacy in politics, economics, ideology, and culture. In turn, the structural-ideological arrangement confers power to be transferred downward, without loss of control, and applied through the levels of social stratification. This creates a polity of class and status meant to hold firm in outline as a pecking order of domination.

What is good for the nation, is good for the world: this is the operant principle of hierarchy incorporated into social structure as a system of power transmission and having application from center to circumference. The USA is to be the source and chief beneficiary of the configuration of forces. That is the ideal, whether or not successfully executed in fact. In this context, the military takes on a higher degree of precedence, in the available tools of Empire, than thought necessary when simply addressing domestic concerns. (On the latter, I have in mind the use of federal troops and state militias in strikebreaking activities, especially in the period 1877–1919.)

Yet, the world pattern as culminating its national counterpart is neither broken nor irrelevant as America referenced. It is transposed to domestic society, another example of interrelatedness, given the totalitarian implications of (social) harmony and (structural) consistency. We see this in a militarized police, federal and state units of investigation and punishment, a simulated climate of patriotism (no longer viewed as contrived), and a thousand-and-one behavioral clues to being good citizens. The military metaphor holds in exploring the culture-molding process: soldiers-in-industry, which Robert A. Brady discusses in *Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*, finds its equivalent in a more informal but nonetheless apt description as soldiers-in-nation, a populace in lockstep, reinforced through the standardization of political culture *and* popular culture. Each has appropriate safety valves, proving harmless, in order to avoid perceptions and thoughts of regimentation.

The structural psychodynamics, if we can speak of them thusly, of inculcating loyalty to the firm replicates the structural psychodynamics of inculcating loyalty to the nation. The firm becomes a microcosm of the nation. This is another case of syncretism run wild, as though a unitary identity has to be consistently hammered out, lest there be deviations cropping up in the polity having political implications. The adverse treatment of one, no matter which, is taken as evidence of un-Americanism, disloyalty to the nation, a denial of patriotism. That close have capitalism and the State been joined. Each basks in the prestige of the other; together they form an indissoluble bond directed against the agitator and the non-submissive at home, the “communist” abroad, a deliberate melding of the two as a unified menace to the good order of free institutions (America/capitalism).

It is this further point of a combined or synthesized historical-structural identity (conveniently, post-1945 onward) that one finds a higher stage of capitalism, an inseparableness of business and government, capitalism and the State, tantamount to the privatization of patriotism itself. The patriotic-laden infusion of the myriad legal-political-cultural supports for private property is at best a tautologous statement. Property and patriotism are reciprocally understood and defined in the American mindset. Here ideology and psychology fuse in the modern creation of the stalwart American, male or female, distinguished by a war-prone disposition, narrowly construed individualism, close-mindedness to societal transformation, an updated Cro-Magnon creating vast wastelands in his/her quest for surplus value at the top of the social scale.

For our prototypic individual, alienation comes naturally, whether or not commodity structure has been inscribed in one's psyche; for, as role-theory might disclose, what becomes the determinative locus of the individual's place in the social structure is wealth in all its glorious manifestations. A cross section of that structure would reveal the following (social stratification under the capitalist dispensation): an obedient servant of wealth and power at the bottom; in the middle, willing accomplices in the transfer of wealth and power upward, while ensuring a buffer zone to keep the bottom in its place—what one means by hierarchy; at the top, to which all systemic energy flows, a composite ruling group, the elites from numerous substructures (military, political, banking, etc.) in informal agreement and alliance. To enhance class separation (without appearing to do so, classlessness being a supreme ideological gimmick in addressing radicalism), the flow occurs in both directions, orders transmitted down, wealth transmitted up, the structural ladder.

### 1.2 *Systemic Extrication: Historical Recapitulation of Capitalist Stages*

Structure has been incorporated into the historical process, reflecting, among other things, prevailing class distribution and philosophic currents. We see the extrication of capitalism in undeviating thrust from the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries to arrive on the shores of twenty-first-century America encapsulating prior feudalism and mercantilism channeled into modern-day liberalism. To speak of purist capitalism does not mean abandonment of feudalism and mercantilism (both integral to its formative historical development), but only that capitalism adopts a *selective* borrowing from each in order to establish the basis for modern liberalism: the property right, of course, but also the formal hierarchical structuring (feudalism) and the importance of the State itself and with respect to emphasis on foreign markets (mercantilism).

The recapitulation of historical stages helps to explain the comprehensive character of capitalism, wherein disparate elements, for example free trade and monopolism, are reconciled. Liberalism renders capitalism acceptable, without significant modification of its essential parts. Liberalism becomes a corrective on State power, a *filter* through which the latter must pass, so that the State is judged by its performance: favored in its assistance to capitalism, deplored should it prove an obstruction, inconvenience, or adversary. The State primarily serving the working class is a nonstarter,

liberalism standing, a Praetorian guard, astride the structural battlement, its co-optative influence enough to sway the masses into inaction if not also gratitude.

Here Locke is the great Transitional Figure, distilling prior historical formations into the new liberalism without sacrifice to the property right as a natural right. Capitalism is dedicated to serving the property right in all essential ways, including the shaping and conditioning of the individual's personality structure to accommodate its needs: socialist man in a capitalist polity would never do. Transformations in culture and society are prompted by, and must keep up with, capitalist development, as a political as well as economic phenomenon. The historical journey from the seventeenth through the twenty-first centuries is all about the reconciliation between polity and economy, pivoted on the institutionalization of the property right permeating the far-flung boundaries of the social order.

This higher standard, clothed originally in natural-rights doctrine, becomes taken for granted by government and public alike, now somewhat secularized. The State via the Law now replaces Nature as its protector. Because government cannot quite do enough in meeting its moral obligation (inherited from natural-rights doctrine) to serve the property right, much less either renounce or surmount it, it is left intact presumably for time immemorial. Oddly, Locke, centuries ahead of his time, makes perfect historical-ideological sense, particularly in that his life and writings coincide with the forces of production and legal treatment of ownership. He trumps Hobbes in the present academic setting. The latter's communitarian/commonwealth potential raises the stakes on capitalism's ultimate security and stabilization, as categorically unacceptable, because of the Sovereign's theoretical power over property, the State preceding the property right in importance.

Locke represents an emphasis on the primordial moral status of property shorn of all other considerations, even in his own system of political philosophy. This enables one to realize that to be liberal is hardly to be progressive, much less radical. One, then, cannot passively accept the accuracy of the modern usage of liberalism—left of Centrism on the political scale—which to me is a dubious reading because skipping lightly over the property right. That right was, is, and will remain its bedrock. I prefer to go back to Locke, not as an "originalist," as in present-day conservative Constitutional and legal theory, but because Locke had a comprehensive grasp of its meaning, significance, and the conditions of its acceptance.



Government figures prominently in the understanding of liberalism, but government transmogrified from service to the public and the performance of social-welfare functions, to, instead, custodian of the capitalist system. The greater the latter's problems, the more the former must step up and enlarge its responsibilities to avert declining rates of profit, recession, depression, stagnation, and breakdown. Keynesian economics superbly brings liberalism up to date, welfare capitalism stripped of illusions about either welfare or capitalism, presenting the former as a life-saver for the sustainability of the latter.

## 2 THE REGULATORY SYSTEM: MYTH OF POPULAR CONTROL

Lockean capitalism need not, and does not, champion *laissez-faire*, itself proving dysfunctional by 1900 at home and on the world stage. Government is crucial to capitalist stabilization and expansion. Purist capitalism, in that light, does not abjure government, but actively cultivates it, liberalism the bridge for associating capitalism with government regulation. In slight contrast, conservatism plays a different role *vis-à-vis* capitalism. It is equally sympathetic, but focused, as a protective device or measure, on repression, rather than on the larger systemic advantages of regulation, as in curbing internecine competition as a basis for stability and the growth of monopolization.

Accordingly, liberalism possesses advantages of sophistication in the modern means of penetration and accumulation over conservatism. What is seldom remarked on or possibly realized, so deep has the consciousness of property penetrated into, and defined, the political-ideological mindset, is that regulation is primarily or exclusively *self*-regulation of and by the various units that come within its purview. The absolutist character of property consciousness hides from the unobservant (not mindful of business support for and control over the process), uninitiated (not privy to and unable to take advantage of the benefits of corporate growth and stabilization), true believers (knee-jerk opposition to whatever *seems* a threat to property), the planned conservative nature of the regulatory system as the stimulus to wealth concentration, structural hierarchy, and monopolism.

The State provides a protective shield for capitalist development. Corporations, banks, the monetary system, pharmaceuticals, automotive, practically every sector where accumulation is pronounced, all seek a

competition-free business environment so that growth (monopolization) can take place, and access gained to foreign markets. Firms alone cannot achieve this; even at home, private armies are more expensive and less efficient than state militias and the national guard, for purposes of restoring industrial peace. The Pinkerton, quelling labor disturbances in the late nineteenth century, is a relic of the past, destined with other private agencies to performing ancillary functions. Capitalism and the State march arm-in-arm into the sunset, but the sunset is prelude to the darkened night: antigovernment conservatism may weaken capitalism, or liberalism, with a green light to monopoly capitalism; this may generate problems of war-proneness and underconsumption, either way tugging at the social safety net with the same result.

Order is fundamental to the safe patterning of capitalist development, the respective pieces falling into harmonious place. Recklessness, if preventable, is an object of concern, to be kept under control and moderated, as is being attempted in the current phase of financialization. When not preventable, as in hegemonic aspirations left pending or unfulfilled, or specific confrontational postures (e.g., directed against Russia and China), a latent demiurge awakened to action, reticence appears nowhere to be found. Restraints on capitalism are only what it permits; otherwise, unrestraint, often unmindful of the consequences, enters with the clear perception of advantage—correct or not.

Regulation, then, is self-promotion, having little regard to the public interest. Capitalism may require a degree of public supervision for its own well-being, health standards, in particular, or safeguarding institutions and practices already favoring business, finance, and trade, from the criminalization of pertinent activities. Intra-capitalist chicanery, whether manipulation of the stock-market or foreign-exchange rates, banking defalcations, fraud, or even hostile takeover bids, is harmful to the normalization of systemic operations. Internecine competition is still more harmful because done under the rules of the game, and *must* be moderated and reduced in favor of stability. Ultimately government has capitalism's back, conservation of prime concern in the unlikely event, in America, of direct political challenge, making government the watchdog doubly indispensable to capitalism.

At all points, regulation complements systemic needs and ideological premises—and is so written and administered by those proven favorably inclined. There is nothing underhanded about the regulatory process; it is the logical expression of a political economy facing internal problems and

difficulties only authoritative intervention can resolve. Marxists theorize about the capitalist state; America experiences it directly. The revolving-door principle is helpful in that regard, as is the broader circulation of elites. There is nothing confiscatory about government regulation in America; nor does one find the legal or moral compulsion to serve the public interest (itself a product of prior transvaluation to yield its opposite) on the horizon.

Regulation is an extension of the business system. Its apparatus consists, then, in a congeries of vested interests, as Veblen would say. It is presided over, and given legitimation, by a government solemnized to maintain Order, predefined to signify, within the American context, the regularization of consolidative trends in the business system, mediation of conflicting interests on the economic-sectorial level (finance clearly now in the ascendance), and the rendering of assistance, broadly construed to include a vigorous policy with respect to foreign markets and investments, to those—from individuals to multinationals—in need or performing badly.

Veblen would have delighted in bank bailouts as confirmation of capitalism's internal structure of self-protection, a matter he deplored for the power it conferred on corporations to abuse the rational standards and procedures of production. However, because of his dating, he is less aware of the interpenetration of business and government than of the raw power of capitalism. Still, he remains perhaps more astute than any for his time in the delineation of the structure of modern enterprise; but on the role of government, which gives the total formation the positive reputation of liberalism, he came too early to the analysis, or was deceived by electoral politics and the putative role of reformers.

### 3 INSECURE FOUNDATIONS: CHARISMATIC CORE OF RATIONAL SOCIETY

This raises the question of the rise and presence of fascism in America, not as an epithet to be irresponsibly bandied around, but as a strict historical stage of capitalist development, drawing on twentieth-century precedent for clues, and factoring in both expansion and the military element, along with a declining political consciousness on the part of the mass of people. Fascism precedes the rise of Hitler in formal sociological analysis, even before the term itself is used. In Max Weber's systemic/structural typology of the three major social systems—traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic—in his *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, he regards

the traditional as largely stable and unlikely to spread the contagion of war, chaos, and disruption, externally or internally. The rational-legal, on the other hand, bears the legitimation of modernity, and hence, the presumption of rationality and also stability. (Weber's is the first detailed description and understanding of bureaucratic structure, seen as a well-oiled mechanism suited to longevity.)

### 3.1 *The Bureaucratic Form: Structural Routinization of Life and Work*

Actually, although perhaps not his intent to convey, Weber's analysis contains a sterility of organizational rigidity and affect that produces structural-ideological breakdown, or, implicitly, societal collapse, when carried far enough, as was already appearing to be the case in Weimar Germany and America. This is sobering. The West's vaunted achievement in social organization (the Chinese, centuries earlier, may have gotten there first, but under very different historical-structural circumstances) rested on shaky foundations.

To this point, Weber may have outdone Spengler in the genre of catastrophic thinking, although he is far more circumspect (and, given its pessimistic implications, inattentive to their effect on his analysis). The problem lies with the structure and nature of the bureaucratic form. As with so much else in social theory, it stands out with greater clarity in earlier sociological writings, free from the crowded atmosphere of intellectual clutter of the present—I have in mind Robert K. Merton's superb essays in *Social Theory and Social Structure*. (I use the term "bureaucratism.") The form can be generalized from the structure of modern business organization, and so on, to the larger society, religion, family, in effect, the totality of human social relations in every organized endeavor or setting, but its application to the State and the large-scale corporation is more effective.

Already one feels (beginning in the 1920s) the suffocation of interconnected, stipulated rules defining the individual's role. The danger is not hierarchy (which is already present in the framework, its steel skeleton anchoring and upholding the edifice), but circumscription. Each role is carefully set in place, as so many pigeon holes, hence, the *routinization* of segmented tasks, as though, Kafkaesque, boredom, numbness, desensitization, have been inscribed in the very workings of the form. The overly circumscribed (to constrict the range or activity, to define carefully) *role* implies an exaggerated closure thwarting the growth of the human personality. This is a danger

signal of structural repression, even without its more familiar political guise, ready to explode under prevailing circumstances.

Fascism (my above remark on drums rolling) had already recognized the explosive character of *ennui*, and post-1950 America was showing signs, if not of recognition, then at least of the condition itself. For Weber and Merton, if they cared to admit it, as I told Talcott Parsons, in my directed readings with him on *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, at the heart of rationality is irrationality, bureaucracy being inherently unstable. This seemed plain to one not unusually gifted. The predominant mode of social organization in modern life is ready to erupt, a disgorging or vomitus of societal fragmentation, which would have to await reintegration on the terms prescribed by a ruling elite promising to restore wholeness and solidarity. What happened in Weimar Germany could also, as Sinclair Lewis once warned, happen here.

At the core of the bureaucratic framework is the emptiness of affect. Its form is partly achieved through a bludgeoning of the individual's self-identity. C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* describes attitudes and work routine potentially dispositional to proto-fascism in this sector. But there is also the sheer boredom of the role performed. Boredom and violence make for an interesting coupling. The eruption marks the release of defense mechanisms which had kept at bay stored resentments, frustrations, fears, some, systemically created, some culturally ideologically prey to the selfsame bureaucratic grinding down of the person to an anomic state. This is played on and manipulated, the release, as expected from what has been thwarted, an ugliness bar none (akin to a lynching—or normalized, drone assassination and saturated bombing raids).

### 3.2 *The Weimar Syndrome: A Premonitory Sign*

Bureaucratism is an incitement to malaise, and finally violence. Here we see the underside, currently becoming actualized, of rational-legal society. The social process helps to describe an Hitlerian atmosphere, perhaps premature for application to twenty-first-century America, but certainly *not* far enough off-base to be discarded altogether. Social discontent in Weimar had no, or rather sought no, constructive outlet, and in America, protest is either unfocused or to no avail. Both historical settings indicate capitalism turning inward on itself.

When one thinks of the cultural achievements in Weimar, from architecture and painting to literature, indicative of substantial vitality, and *yet*

the ruthless outcome and horrific transition, despite the internal vitality, one fears still more for America, which is politically culturally in a lethargic state by comparison. It is unprepared to oppose, circumvent, or overcome fascistic currents evident in all areas of note: public policy, military intervention, economic-political expansion, and an inner decay of the body politic shown in the degradative effects of the political campaigns. Lack of preparation may be code for incipient inclination already in that direction, as noted in later discussion of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and authoritarianism well-grooved into the American psyche.

The signs are plain. For America, keep the structural and psychological dynamics of Weimar in mind, though of course no direct historical or other correspondence is intended between them, except that they occur at pivotal moments in the respective patterns of capitalist development. The foundation of each is organized around a base of economic concentration, disparities in wealth distribution, and thinking and operating in a crisis mode. For one, this is the trying aftermath of World War I, and for the other, a prolonged case of political-ideological hysteria, in which the fear of communism, as part of the Cold War, is transposed or projected onto the fear of terrorism, a possibly just dessert for global interventions and regime change in Arab-Muslim countries, as well as political interference in the Middle East, whether in support of Israel or the security of US oil interests.

Capitalism is central to Weimar and America. The structural dynamics focused in each on trade association activities, the growing incidence of monopolization, the incorporation of labor into an industrial synthesis which subordinated workers while sublimating their radical energies into appeals for national unity. The psychological dynamics took a parallel course, equally effective, indeed, in overall synchronization with structural realities.

### 3.3 *Capitalism's Inward Turning: Submergence of Class Identity*

My concern here is America, so that for Weimar, keep the USA in mind. Working people are losing their class identity as capitalism seeks to divert and channel their political consciousness into identification with the Nation and its upper groups. Plebeian fears—partly understandable in that based on the realities of power relations in modern industrialism—of growing anonymity in an impersonal world of technology and large-scale production, is a corollary of capitalism's turning inward on itself, as almost

a way of containing subversive energies destructive of the system. This inward turning is a difficult concept to handle, as though Marxian contradiction were understood and anticipated in order, systemically, for capitalism—as Marcuse suggests—to absorb its own negativity, without success, much like a dog chasing its flea-bitten tail.

At this point, in present-day America, similarly in 1930s Weimar, structure and people alike become receptive—responding to prevailing discontent and/or frustration—to any solution centered on and personified by the strong Leader. It is the Leader (pure *charisma* in Weber’s classic meaning at the core of a rational society unraveling and in process of self-destruction) who, through easing the burden of independent thinking, invites submission to a Higher Order. The submergence of identity into the Whole follows.

Politics and society are surrounded by, enveloped in, the mystification of organicism (societal organizational characteristics analogous to that of a living organism), in which the organic social-cultural relation between the classes typifies, and is important to, having the systematic coordination of all of the parts, Authority/people, State/capitalism, business/labor, industry/agriculture—systemic overkill (literally) when and where there is little room to breathe, think, dissent, protest. The theme of classlessness is hammered out incessantly, capitalism the beneficiary, along with the State, in both Germany and America. The ideological distance between the two is not terribly great. In America, the State is partially hidden from view; in Germany, capitalism is partially hidden from view. In both, despite differences in relative emphasis, the partnership between capitalism and the State remains intact.

Chaplin’s *Modern Times* unerringly indicates the shape of the capitalist world circa early 1930s then, and in anticipation of the capitalist world now. A clear manifestation, perhaps thought a unifying factor over time, is mechanization, yet the defining factor is ownership. Capitalism has not changed its spots. With the advent of modern industry, despite disparate factors of historical experience and national culture, which made for differences within capitalism as a *world* system, capitalism has now witnessed a structural convergence of features so that it has truly become an international system, its problems not dissimilar from one national context to another.

Whether business cycle fluctuations, unemployment, periods of stagnation, misallocation of resources, not to say foreign policy and its search for materials and markets, capitalism, yet bearing Weimar in mind, had a

universality which in recent years appears to have left dissimilarities behind altogether. It still exemplifies an historical chain of causation, a reminder of one from the past, the evolution from capitalism to fascism, as actually occurred in the West. This process can be ascribed, certainly as a first approximation, to historical-structural factors *integral* to capitalism itself. The common thread is present, it being the only formation extant in Italy, Germany, and as I shall come to, Japan, in the general period I think formative for the modern era. Comparative history is a significant tool for the understanding of a particular historical context. In my mind's eye, I shall be looking over at multiple examples, including the three just mentioned, my interpretation of America largely unstated.

#### 4 IDEOLOGICAL PROXIMITIES(?): DISPOSITION OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

I am unhappy with single-factor explanations, for the analytical culprit might be industrialism *or* a generic totalitarianism, across, and no respecter of, ideological lines, based on development per se, the power mobilized for war, and internal suppression. Barrington Moore wrestled with the problem in *Political Power and Social Theory*, in this case focusing on totalitarian elements in preindustrial societies. The implication, whether or not he intended, is that totalitarianism has had a long history and thus cannot implicate capitalism as more than one of several or many historical contexts for its rise and effectuality. Granted. (He, too, was a beloved teacher from whom I learned much, and with whom I do not wish to quarrel.) But my interest is the specificity of fascistization, not generic totalitarianism; the latter is historically applicable to all systems of repression through time, what, in another connection, Moore termed legitimated violence.

##### *4.1 Volition: Social-Structural Institutional Configuration (Capitalism)*

Fascism: Germany, Italy, and Japan had militarized an industrial-capitalist base (less so Italy), cartel-like in organization and function, in which socialism had been or was being removed from the historical-structural agenda. These three case studies do not *prove* the connection between capitalism and fascism. Nevertheless, studying structural proclivities in



that direction before the fact, notably the co-partnership between capitalism and the State, and within the former, state-assisted consolidative trends, and within the latter, an intensified hierarchical structure and implied dedication to the Leader and Nation, themselves seen as inseparable, one finds a sequential development, linked to capitalism, in each case which culminates in the genuine article. (Readers unfamiliar with the aptness of the designation of fascism to Japan should consult Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.)

By contrast, although socialism cannot be sprinkled with holy water by any serious scholar or observer, I raise the question about its relation to, or its ideological proximity with, fascism. The two do not mix, despite the Nazis' opportunist use of National Socialism (about as accurate as Americans' use of People's capitalism). To be clear, socialism, too, is often bureaucratic, as in its non- and post-revolutionary phase; in its revolutionary phase, however, a Left-charisma, very different from the structural form described by Weber, has created a foundation and framework which may or may not have non-repressive, liberating consequences for the social system. The difference, I think, between capitalism and socialism in this vital respect is one of volition (the power of choosing or determining).

Capitalism has denied itself this power, by virtue of its class alignments, imperatives for growth, and concrete historical experience. It is what it set out to be. This is not to say, its course is determined, capitalist development following a deterministic pattern, a self-contained system, with fixed boundaries hurtling into space (the future), on autopilot, powerless to alter course, its structure frozen in place. Rather, from at least the late medieval–early modern period, its historical experience as, not only a political economy, but a social system, has been one of refining the political-economic-social institutions, beginning with trade, the land, and banking, that would elaborate and institutionalize the property right; subsequently, it would do the same for a labor market, or specifically, the class-relation founded on wage labor, both in the city and in the countryside.

Mobility replaced a fixed attachment, employer replaced master, free laborer replaced serf; whether as weaver or farm tenant, the work regime was gradually codified through contract, now founded on a money economy rather than tradition and custom. As with so much about historical causation, one is never certain about the correct ordering. Conceivably, the disciplining of a labor force, as in Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation in *Das Capital*, preceded and paved the way for the refinement of basic capitalist institutions.

Here the matter of volition enters. The striking point is that a *choice* was offered; it historically summarized the institutional configuration thus far adopted, made consistent with that configuration, and continually reproduced. It was added to, key parts steadily modified and modernized, for example, trade and finance, urbanization, and public authority to ensure order. The State took on specialized functions adapted to proliferating requirements for economic and social change. All of the foregoing pointed to, neither by magic nor inevitability, the coalescence and cohesion of capitalism.

Volition: there were multiple choices, not just theoretically but historically on offer: anti- or permanently non- or pre-bourgeois capitalism, as in mercantilism resting on a semi-feudal base; the protracted time of stagnation, possibly favoring existing ruling groups in town and country; or socialism, still inchoate, elemental, but ideationally, still on the boards. Gerrard Winstanley could have replaced John Locke, *A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England* could have replaced *A Second Treatise of Government*, but in fact did not. Capitalism had the historical option to be other than itself, volition, and of course *did not*.

#### 4.2 *Internal Consistency of Political Typologies: Capitalism and Socialism*

This may seem like kindergarten. Those sensitive to words will know that “kindergarten” is code for something noble and complex, as in Louis Sullivan’s marvelous early work on modern architecture, *Kindergarten Chats*. But, for us, political economies do not voluntarily commit suicide, particularly when they have history and structure in the wind at their back. Capitalism vanquished a radicalized peasantry to become what it was, is, and will be—no turning back. If anything, further systemic tightening has been the order of the day. America best exemplifies the determination to hold on: change, within boundaries; change, within constant assumptions that produced, and reproduced, ad infinitum, a privatized, hierarchical Leviathan; in sum, counterrevolution of today within the supposed revolution of yesterday.

Capitalism is not an abstraction, a reification of historians’ making, a slogan to keep the world bi-polarized on tenterhooks. Rather, specific social groups, working with, sometimes creating, generally benefiting from, rising productive forces, had and have a choice to make, and down through the centuries have, as I said, made—and are still making—that

choice. Elasticity beats determinism, except when volition is pressed into service voluntarily to reject elasticity. By now, structural rigidification has become a settled historical pattern, determinism nowhere in sight because ruling groups, with the significant addition of a military-complement, are used to having their way.

Hence, capitalism does not have, by virtue of its institutional make-up, or rather, has chosen to give up, the structural-ideological-cultural option to be non-authoritarian and liberating. Its formation is predicated on wealth, class, hierarchy, capital accumulation, suppression of labor discontent, and, perhaps derivatively, alienation, and false consciousness. The foregoing stem from, on the epistemological level, commodity structure, on the ideological level, privatization, and on the structural level, economic concentration and massive corporate organization. These in turn are accompanied by sufficient military power to challenge for global supremacy in world markets and a strong voice in shaping the contours of international politics and trade.

Socialism reveals a very different pattern of historical development. Having invariably experienced resistance in its formation and growth, it has an adversarial thrust, a survival-instinct, that carries the *potential* for acting as a progressive social force. I emphasize potential, because through time, potential often becomes dissipated, loses energy, settles in, so that socialism becomes a caricature of itself—even an enemy of itself. This does not have to happen, and volition, I would argue, is more of a live option than can be found in capitalism—an option, not to become capitalist (presently the case with Russia and China), but to become more radicalized and pursue socialism into a new, more creative, non-bureaucratic, non-elitist form. Size may have something to do with radicalization, the greater ability and conditions to sustain the spirit and texture of socialism in lesser space, outside the center of the storm of power politics, threatened by world counterrevolutionary forces. Generally, size also bears on *community*, its values and purposes, as witness Rousseau's writings.

For our purposes, the issue of comparison, socialism is not prey to the specific epistemological, ideological, and structural characteristics that could eventuate in fascism. It is not necessarily the chaste expression of benevolence, virginal freshness, and beauty, emanating from the societal womb of immaculate conception (rivaling that out of which capitalism also supposedly came). Societies, their political economies, and their values, are human creations and do not descend from heaven.

Socialism, too, has its problems: commodity structure in capitalism, statist pretensions, and overreach in socialism. The latter, however, in practice, is not intrinsic to the form. Capitalism, with or without the presence or potential of autocratic leadership, nonetheless cannot simply turn off or shut down specificities of structure and political culture leading to inequalities and discriminations from which ethnocentrism and xenophobia arise. Enlightened capitalism, with respect to human fellowship, is an oxymoron; the system would deliquesce if it sought to base itself on goodness.

While my focus is on capitalism, the problems it produces, those growing out of *its* structure (socialism already having its own abundant critics), the topic of historical relationships cannot be so easily dismissed. The evolution from capitalism to fascism is not replicated by a similar evolution from socialism to fascism. Privatization for one, state ownership for the other, can both lead to abuses, particularly as centralization sets in as a pattern of control. The historical, structural, and cultural linkages are dissimilar if not missing for each modality.

Each system has different internal capacities for, and perhaps the likelihood of achieving, democratization. State power, under the rubric of social property, can be dismantled; the same cannot be said for the combined power of capitalism and the state, under the rubric of private property. Privatization may be ascendant today, and the wave of the future, but it is not subject to the structural-social forces of democratization. Its core meanings of possessiveness, class differences and privileges, a presumed natural right of entitlement, the adventurism mounted on its behalf, including war, intervention, regime change, all dramatically negate democratization. If it were otherwise, there would be a structural transformation to socialism or a mixed economy hardly acceptable to the current mode of capitalism, or at least political-social currents striving for that outcome.

Liberalism would not be the structural-ideological halfway point, mediating between types of political economy. When privatization faces democratization, liberalism would be in the former camp. Authoritarianism, where and when it occurs, will not be the same for *all* social systems; socialism, unlike capitalism, can conceivably offer, that is, generate from within, correctives to its own deficiencies. Whether or not it actually does, will depend on the internal consistency of the political typology, rare but still possible, if capitalist pressures and encirclement in the real world afford sufficient breathing space.

By internal consistency of the political typology I mean a thoroughgoing matching of profession and practice. This would require a fundamental equalitarianism in structure, culture, ideology, a non-repressive State, solidary bonds of mutual respect which serve to eradicate not only poverty and class difference, but also alienation. (As I write, I feel forlorn given the realities through much of the socialist world, professions of humaneness, pacifism, civility, paid lip service to, more than honored.)

Intuitively, American policymakers, who serve in the vanguard presiding over and defining the interests of the West, sense a weakness in socialism providing opportunity—John Foster Dulles-like in inspiration—for rolling it back. This is an especially confusing geopolitical posture for the USA in its own declining status within continued ascendance. Yet for that reason, decline, a structural-ideological *panic* coming with that perception, if not quite crossing the threshold of consciousness, makes completely understandable confrontation, escalation, modernization of weaponry, a new-found emphasis on the military. Both ideological camps appear in disarray, socialists turning capitalist, capitalists, turning inward, clambering for the Order and Stability promised by fascism.

Reason is not exclusively on the side of the (capitalist) angels. In sociological terms, and, as I read him, Hobbes, it is on the side of equitableness. In contradistinction to that, capitalism subsumes equity (justice according to law or right) within hierarchy, nullifying even a pretense to fairness, impartiality, and the well-being of all. Hierarchy and democracy do not mix; the same cannot be said for socialism. When it is repressive, it contradicts its essential values of equality, the abjuring of force to discipline working people, and so on, but when capitalism is that way, it affirms its essential values, inequality, a labor force subordinated to capital, and more, finding no parallel in socialism, a foreign policy of market penetration and global military hegemony.

Socialism reflecting and/or in pursuit of the latter becomes to that degree a gross departure from, and falsification of, socialism. Hierarchy is the real deal-breaker in the formation of democratic society, that which structures domination into the social system; any pretense that it is necessary for sound administrative practice is an apology for repression. To the extent that socialism has not destroyed its influence, as by working toward decentralized decision-making, denigrates its very being. Competence, there should be; a mentality of being for sale to the highest bidder, absolutely not.

# Interpenetration: Business-Government Co-partnership

## 1 BUREAUCRACY: A MORAL VOID

Here one returns to Weber, who comes close to a central explanation of modern times. At the heart of the rational-legal (which it would be correct to equate with America, bureaucracy itself a guiding structural hand in organizing and assigning values, so that his anticipation of the present is quite brilliant) is the charismatic, eruptive, volatile, of no use on its own, but thriving on societal breakdown. It actually hastens societal breakdown by preparing the way for the parallel breaking-down of the individual's personality structure through churning the waters of irrationality and despair as the individual is being made over into a cipher. Yet because the traditional order has its own economic, structural, and, perhaps above all, its psychological mechanisms of support, comfort, and, in the etiquette of social relationships, obligation (of course, not always observed, and subject to abuse), this leaves the rational-legal mode fully exposed, vulnerable, trapped in its deliberately designed ambience of desiccation, from which moral judgment and moral consciousness cannot take root.

### *1.1 Systemic Neutrality: Social-Structural Potential*

Kafka was right. It is hard to imagine a moral voice emanating from bureaucracy, whose formalization of structure evolved with the declaration of being value-neutral in decision-making. (Value-neutrality is a fiction.) It seldom reached that ambition, neutral here a cover for furthering the

purposes of organization and sponsorship. Efficiency, for some, is a noble thought. Within the context of social science, however, its value lies in expediting social control, addressing, for purpose of collapsing, the interior space of mind for thinking, reasoning, critical judgments, lest wider societal goals come into view and are made transparent.

Bureaucracy per se need not be anti-humane, despite its easily caricatured form. Like technology, which Pappenheim maintained was a neutral force (neutrality signifying a force capable of achieving *ends*, good or ill, depending on how it is used), bureaucracy, too, could set forth goals for achievement which either advance or destroy human potentiality. But when bureaucracy caricatures itself as bureaucratization, which is generally the case, all discussion stops, all hope lost, as specialization of function, segmentation of roles, hierarchical structure, adherence to fixed rules, formal routine, and so on become of uppermost importance. Then, moral emptiness prevails. Pappenheim's point: societal context is determinative on how bureaucracy functions.

Bureaucracy is Bartleby in his little box, facing out on the blankness of Wall Street. Bureaucracy is national-security advisers in their Situation Room recommending to Obama the next assassination targets. But bureaucracy is also a life-giving Doctors Without Borders determining the allocation of scarce resources for saving lives and implementing the goal in practice. Thus, neutrality need not be value-neutral, and rather is dependent on the motivating will of the directive agency. Stultification need not logically follow; a vitalized bureaucracy can do wonders for humankind once situated in a historical-political context dedicated to freedom-serving ends. That, regrettably, is seldom the case. (Societal context is everything, its inner structure and form secondary and conformable to purposes being set forth.)

Weber is not speaking of generic bureaucracy, but that which he has observed and studied, that is, capitalism. Merton, similarly. Socialism, as we know, has also its own bureaucracies—in collective mentality probably as dulled to nuance and free thought as its US counterpart. But here the societal objectives remain overriding, dullards or not, in their pigeon holes. Socialism's qualitative difference from capitalism, with respect to everything germane to this study, comes down—beyond volition, but related to it—to the historical-structural factors which condition and promote desensitization toward human worth.

We are accustomed to thinking of Russia and China as alone defining socialism. It is no coincidence that both have exhibited significant infusions of capitalism and have rudimentary (imperfectly developed) class systems.

Perhaps socialism looks good on paper, but will never live up to the expectations I have set for it in this comparative sketch of social systems. Yet, the salience of the comparison is that capitalism in its inner workings depends for its survival and sustainability on profit, surplus value, alienation, international confrontation (even, in the form of trade rivalries, with other capitalist powers), and systemic chauvinism (i.e., Exceptionalism). Socialism does not go this far on any of the variables mentioned, nor are they essential to its identity and functioning.

The fear one has in this regard is the globalization of social systems *per se*. This would mean the vanishing of ideological differences, supported through the uniformitarian pressures on life-situations and political cultures. Although this may seem a solution to war and conflict (which it is *not*), it defines the future exclusively in capitalistic terms. A psychology of alienation is sure to follow, everything else, from hierarchy to invidious comparison, the same.

### 1.2 *Marx and Weber: Systemic Integration, Toward Fascism*

But remaining with capitalism in the present, one finds a pervasive sterility characteristic of bureaucratism wherever one looks. It activates the charismatic, which thrives on a setting of anomie, into an agency of social change lying in wait, so to speak, because modernization, and more specifically, advanced capitalism, is at the bottom of a vast sea of commodification and alienation. The structural-epistemological foundation has overlaid on it a heavy burden of routinization-bureaucratization already deriving from the rational-legal mode. This adds further cumulative weight to the human being's dehumanization. The foregoing suggests the need for a synthesis of Marx (see discussion below) and Weber, thought by most analysts to be difficult of accomplishment if not wrong-headed or impossible.

Fascism need not be Nazism *per se*; Italian corporatism is perhaps a closer model (or the pre-Nazi political-structural developments in Weimar Germany) for historical understanding of the American case. My emphasis is on fascism *as* interpenetration: the State and capitalism, each at a higher point in their respective developments, bureaucratism for one, monopolism, the other. (Thus combined, there is the added attraction of presenting a united front to socialism, radicalism, and labor.) Government and business, each is wedded symbiotically to the other through common policies—regulation, taxation, markets, collective bargaining, and so



on—and the internal circulation of personnel, the revolving-door principle. Too, the ideological-cultural expression of militarism is subtly stated in the form of hierarchy and deference. Formally, it represents the combined thrust of State- and capitalist-interests in global hegemonic influences affecting capitalist market penetration, opposition to social revolution, and now, more recently, containment of terrorist activities in some measure brought about by US activities in the Middle East and Asia. This brief profile is no more than what we have already seen, where the term “fascism” need not, and did *not*, appear. Fittingly, however, the structural-cultural-ideological stage has been set for its proper introduction into the discussion.

Interpenetration is not harmless. It signifies the collapse of the public and private spheres of structure, polity, society, into one. It is a comprehensive principle and practice of re-structuring social organization to reflect the unity of capitalism and the State. This represents, therefore, a wholly inauthentic representation of the separable public interest, now melded instead into a capitalist framework under the protection and aegis of government.

Fascism may well have an independent statist function, invaluable for propagandistic purposes in creating a Leadership Principle (Il Duce) which induces and correlates with the authoritarian submission of the people. This also gives militarism and war-making activities (intervention, regime change, generalized confrontational stances, etc.) an authoritative meaning and coloration. But while not window-dressing, the statist dimension of fascism does not stand up without the systemic integration of capitalism into the fascist framework.

Government-business Interpenetration is one step removed from its next and currently reigning form, the militarization of capitalism. Through expansionism and war-making powers, it carries the interpenetrated structure further toward the actualization of fascism. Gas ovens lie in the past, no longer essential in the modern age to fascism. Mass accommodation to self-restraint and cultural-ideological collective-pacification is possible through an admixture of repression (massive surveillance, viewing conquest, bombings, naval power, drones, as object lessons, weaponry also an implied threat of force that could be turned inward, etc.) and consumerism (keeping the public focused on a material treadmill of ascent and aspiration). Physical extermination has given way to more sophisticated wiles of authoritarianism.

## 2 CONCEPT OF LIBERAL FASCISM: THE REGULATORY PROCESS (CORPORATISM)

Fascism need not cause an uproar. Sinclair Lewis, as noted, announced its coming. But it is here, and under the gentler name of *corporatism*, interpenetration is so locked-into the structural core of the polity that it is now taken for granted and ignored. Similarly ignored, even perhaps admired as part of the social process of political-structural habituation, is the preponderance of military activities and spending. This is at the expense of the social safety net, medical, health, education, and infrastructure needs, and so on. Ignored, too, is the skewed nature of income distribution (unprecedented wealth concentration), and the popularization of aggressiveness drawing sustenance from the gun culture and foreign-policy interventions (themselves conceivably mutually inspiring one the other).

### 2.1 *Liberalism: Statist-Oriented Conservatism*

The structuralization of fascism is translated into everyday life and policy-making. It speaks to the normalization of a seemingly repression-free yet repressive society, the militarization of capitalism, and a state-formation which is simultaneously servant, executant, and administrator of power, thereby legitimating the course and content of capitalist development. Corporatism, then, is more than a brand-name at the shopping mall. It is a system of power embracing public (government) and private (capitalism) spheres, a less objectionable term than fascism, though indistinguishable from it in modern application.

The modernization of fascism, corporatism, is, given the centrality of interpenetration, the basis for contemporary liberalism, which prompts me to designate the current societal formation, *liberal* fascism. It is meant to signify how deeply capitalism is dependent on government for providing a self-promotional regulatory framework, and also, military assistance for achieving the financial and commercial architecture leading to global economic hegemony. I say liberal, because of a culturally misinterpreted perception of the ideological significance of government. In America, one uses *laissez-faire* as a double standard, notably, to oppose the regulation of the economy and to elaborate a doctrine of individualism which sanctions unrestrained actions and conduct. Finer points require to be filled in.

But for now, emotional rhetoric notwithstanding, liberalism is statist-oriented conservatism, wherein government is the activator/stimulator/protector of capitalism. The liberal identifier is addressed to individual rights, as sotto voce the negation or denial of *social* rights and collective obligation (at one, therefore, with antiradicalism) is pressed forward. The apparent conflict between individualism and government activism is quickly resolved when one asks the purpose of the latter, for both stand foursquare for property (recall, interpenetration), what simplistic views of government (and the class-state) are at pains to deny.

Liberalism invokes laissez-faire deceptively. In popular usage, it absorbs the reputation of individualism (as though itself presumptively radical) to hide the state-component in capitalist development toward which it works. By “hide” I do not mean a conspiratorial act; everything is out in the open—but few are there to study the consequences, either of individualism or liberalism. Cherished symbols repel scrutiny, or are given the benefit of the doubt. The State, as a political symbol, conveys the erroneous impression that regulation is independent from business, and that it actually regulates in the public interest. Coincidentally, the “public interest” receives little sanction in the American cosmos of ideas and values.

We have then a situation of robbing Peter to pay Paul, a propagandistic sleight-of-hand that ensures a business civilization at the center of the polity, in which Paul is capitalism, and Peter, the people. Placing liberalism as though somehow on the same ideological continuum with radicalism and/or socialism, allowed for at least a century to have grown up nearly undetected, speaks volumes about the misuse of the term and underscores not the ignorance so much as the contemptuous disregard, even or especially under capitalism, for the spirit and substance of commonweal. Fascism in America, in whatever gestational stage, makes headway knowing this ingrained bias against the people, shared by the people themselves.

## 2.2 *Systemic Cohesion: Government, Nurturer of Capitalism*

The upper ranks of capital appreciate the role of government in its stabilizing function with respect to internal economic activity (tantamount to the encouragement of monopolism, and warding off, should they ever occur, challenges to the System posed by labor, radicalism, or other dissident forces, social, environmental, etc.). Its expansionist function of

promoting and facilitating capitalist development through military, diplomatic, and financial means is equally important, the two functional areas inseparable and mutually enhancing. To the latter, one would also add intervention, regime change, foreign-aid programs, and, more sharply, military practices including war itself. Government, while protecting capitalism, provides it the basis for greater systemic cohesion and added muscle in conducting a rounded, comprehensive foreign policy. The resulting coalescence of parallel structures of power, their combination clearly enlarging the magnitude of power by several units on a logarithmic scale (political-structural-social integration, pointing upward), and separating it (power) from popular control, obviously leaves little room for democracy and democratic governance.

In that light, *laissez-faire* is fool's gold (pyrite) to blind capitalist-doubters that *all* government intervention is ipso facto radical, or at any rate, progressive. In most cases it is not, and rather, government is the nurturer and protector of capitalism, as well as overseer of economic growth through a wide range of policies, from fiscal and monetary, to subsidies, defense spending, and setting the tone for Order, Patriotism, and passive acceptance of whatever Authority directs. As for a candid admission of governmental favoritism to business, that is a selective message only the privileged can hear. And as for enhancing capitalism's prominence and security in international politics and markets, *that* dimension of government involvement would require volume upon volume to record. My point, simply: government is not the enemy of capitalism; liberalism's attempt to ride in on its ideological coattails as a radical/progressive/reform force is a distortion of the ultimate search for and movement toward the democratization of America.

### 3 FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONAL POWER: A UNITARY COMPLEX OF FORCES

Theodore Roosevelt had it right, from the standpoint of corporatism in its nascent form in America. He sought to graft the powers of the State onto a monopolistic structural base of capitalism. As noted, causation in the realm of inseparableness is a difficult matter. Reverse the statement, and I believe it would still hold: monopolism is here an indirect product of State power, capitalism therefore grafted onto the governmental structural base. One need not choose between explanations, the interconnections being

tightly woven to achieve a common purpose: capitalism and State merge at the center of power, division of labor the determinant of their respective spheres of activity and interest.

### 3.1 *TR, Prioritizing Values: Capitalism Foremost*

Yet, despite his enamoring of the Battleship Navy and militarism as vehicle for expanding US world leadership, my sense is that Roosevelt favored the first, state power resting on a consolidated economic base, rather than the reverse, in prioritizing national values: capitalism foremost, all else deriving strength from that source. We see his tribute to monopolism in his First Annual Message, and then, his collaboration with the House of Morgan in advancing the work of the Bureau of Corporations, the major step in systematizing interpenetration. Then too, his overt and pronounced antiradicalism, as when early on he boasted that his men (aka, the Rough Riders) would like nothing better than to take a shot at the Haymarket rioters—“and my men shoot straight”—follows the same lines of according primacy to capitalism.

Roosevelt helped create a patriotic populace for enthusiastic backup. (Nor was an hierarchical Progressivism shy about foreign expansion.) The Rough Riders were a militarized version of the American public. All of these elements were under the *leadership* of the president, giving an unmistakable sign of TR’s sought-for State–capitalist paradigm of national security, capitalist stability, and international power. As in choice passages from his *Winning of the West*, one sees his instinctive racism—how the Whites will conquer all before them—and in his support for the “scientific” work at Cold Springs Harbor, his passion for eugenics, he is a poster person for authoritarianism. Still, my point on the prevalence of false consciousness in America, Roosevelt is affectionately set down as a trustbuster and endearing figure mumbling “By jove.”

If national power strengthened capitalism, capitalism strengthened national power. It supplied the impetus for overseas markets and provided the material underpinnings for a strong military and world-class status in international politics. Through interpenetration the foundations of the State, the State itself had achieved, for that reason, a more sophisticated level and would never be the same. Besides government and business, inserted into the State’s foundations, integrated with these would be the *military* presence, which, it was recognized, was necessary for maximizing the growth and power of the other two.

### 3.2 *Prussianized America: A Political Economy of Naval Power*

Roosevelt, as though at first on two runaway horses, then harnessed into manageable tandem, superbly straddled both worlds of capitalism and the State. In his case, my capitalization of the State, more than other contexts, is to indicate the Prussian-flavor and influence he imparts to the government/business/military arrangement of forces in *his* America. This turns out from that time on, *pace* textbook-history, not substantially different from that of Wilson and then skipping ahead to the post-World War II period. But skipping ahead is unnecessary; with the partial exception of the New Deal, corporatism had an undeviating historical course, 1920s trade association activities filling the gap between the Federal Reserve System and the National Recovery Administration, governmental regulation supplemented by private organization, as with the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce. The Blue Eagle perched on the entablature of the National City Bank.

To put a finer point on matters, Roosevelt was not original with respect to the practical origins of interpenetration. His originality lay in appreciating the role of capitalism in strengthening the powers of the State, so that it was not merely expansionist or militaristic solely for its own sake. (This is why I refer to, as a practical as well as ideological formula, the militarization of capitalism.) Power per se, notwithstanding the combinative role of the State and capitalism, required the State chiefly for its implementation. Capitalism does not amass military forces for international missions (although it does, in addition to state militias and federal troops, hire private armies at home). In crediting the State, as for him the primal instrument of force in assuring America's world position of supremacy, I think Roosevelt's first concern was to lay the monopoly-capitalist foundations of national power, placed beyond doubt, and only then—setting the causal sequence right—introduce the State-factor as to be considered in its own right (and perhaps even taking precedence over capitalism). But the State absent its capitalist base would be a toothless tiger.

The State and capitalism: each underpinned the structural dynamics of the other's growth. TR was somewhat egocentric, but he had not lost touch with the realities of power. Capitalism, however competitive in international waters, could not proceed unassisted; if one could speak of a political economy of naval power, then that would come close to his vision of performance in world markets. But world markets were not somehow

out there, to be conquered; their conquest, almost self-evidently, depended on a *domestic* infrastructure of industry and banking. For its time, he exemplified advanced capitalist thinking, practically taking him to the early 1950s in levels of understanding; only later would financial over industrial power be a determining factor in America's articulation of a global power position.

The State, c'est Roosevelt, fits only up to a point. He steered between Mahan and Morgan, deriving national strength from the power represented by each (and Morgan, though a financial titan, had an industrial portfolio as well). Roosevelt sought to create a structurally intimate—initially a financially integrated business and banking system in expansive mode—relationship between capitalism and the military, largely because he saw foreign markets and international power politics as decisive to capitalism at home. He appreciated the power of capitalism as a necessity in the total configuration of national greatness, but, like in the case of militarism, he did not worship capitalism.

To his credit, in that one respect, he stood above the fray, the better perhaps to coordinate the respective contributions of capitalism and the State. And with that perspective, the stimulus he provided for monopoly (via both the Bureau and his foreign policy of expansion) was not because he stood in awe of business leaders, but because he viewed monopolism as providing the solidness for all else: economic and military dominance on a global basis. The fact that he could comprehend and lead toward the public-private-military synthesis made it unnecessary for him to disentangle or prioritize the different elements. It is Roosevelt's fusion of traditional imperialism and modern capitalism that distinguishes his position. His successors generally tilted to one side or the other, though the secondary element is never discarded.

#### 4 THE LIBERAL STATE: ECONOMIC-MILITARY RATIONALIZATION OF CAPITALISM

Yet, he was not original. Founded in 1887, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) heralded government regulation via stabilizing the railroad sector, which provided a straight line to the present in the growth of corporatism. This had nothing to do with bringing the railroads to their iron knees, executives of the time, like Morgan and Cassatt, proving cooperative and appreciative. (Gabriel Kolko's *Railroads & Regulation* removes any doubts about the fact of interpenetration in the founding, promotion,

and effect of the ICC, its anticompetitive thrust in favoring industrial consolidation and positive consequences in general for the American business system.) As noted, Roosevelt and *his* Bureau, Wilson's Federal Reserve System and Federal Trade Commission, each dedicated to the economic rationalization of its respective sphere of competence, furnished the impetus for, especially Hoover's, trade association activities and policies, so that by 1920, the Liberal State has achieved preliminary form.

#### 4.1 *The Indispensable State: Normalization of Capitalist Functions*

Then, with FDR and the New Deal, because of honest efforts to end unemployment and bring about recovery, reform aspects trump corporatism, and antifascist planning culminating in war against the Axis Powers trumps straight-out imperialism. FDR and the New Deal are not thereby out of the woods. The National Recovery Administration hastened and abetted monopolization; in foreign policy, Bretton Woods decisively signaled a foreign economic policy devoted to postwar financial and market expansion. But, in comparison with previous domestic policy, especially, I would, if not remove this period from the historical progression, to be resumed with Truman onward, instead credit its humane dimensions of governance.

The New Deal, led forcefully by FDR, enlarged the public sector, which provided jobs for the unemployed, and, to conserve and build upon the aesthetic and creative talents of the American people, tried through every conceivable, experimental venue or format to kindle the nation's spirit. There was a true joy of *national aspiration, feeling, and fellowship*—from writing guidebooks to writing poetry, from composing music to painting folk masterpieces, a joy America perhaps will not witness again, when despite, or because of, extreme hardship and suffering, the people were together in a process of individual self-discovery and collective pride. The people discovered themselves and the Land.

This was a detour, warts and all, in American history, a time of accomplishment in being human. Yet, even then, fascism was a world historical fact, one we must come to grips with, because it was not buried by World War II, or, if buried, later exhumed and somehow becoming restored to life—a disinterment devoutly to be regretted. Interpenetration (business and government, capitalism and the State) looms increasingly large in a structural explanation of fascism. Thus, narrowly statist, or



narrowly capitalistic, one does not have fascism. In modern times, it is difficult to conceive of the State without its ideological foundation and its specific political economy, whether socialist, communist, or capitalist. Similarly, for capitalism, absent the State, and it appears to be in a political free-floating universe.

Without the State to implement policies affecting virtually every aspect of capitalism, even on its domestic side, from regulating the monetary and banking systems in support of a favorable business climate and acceptable rate of employment, and furnishing the stimulus, through public spending and taxation policies, to economic growth, to exercising police powers on behalf of public safety (and prevention of disorder), capitalism would be an anarchic mess as well as deep in the throes of stagnation and depression. In the world outside, without the State, imperialism to all practical purposes would cease, and with that there would be a spiraling downward in foreign trade, foreign investment, the opening of markets for US surplus production, intercession in the real world of intra-capitalist rivalries, securing stable sources of raw materials, and the list goes on.

The normalization of capitalist functions depends on military power. Indeed, left out of the above list was Great Powers' confrontation, at stake, as America sees it, unilateral domination (perhaps "regulation" is less offensive) of global patterns affecting market penetration, trade, investment, and, as a result, because subject to conflict and valued as goals, national security. It had early been made clear that the dependence on projecting American power overseas marks the critical difference in the performance of capitalism. This does not begin to touch on the mainstay of government support of capitalism in foreign affairs: the military/diplomatic protection of the System as a whole, flexing muscle whenever American interests are or appear to be threatened or challenged.

Although domestic considerations must be looked after in determining the success or failure of capitalist performance, foreign markets and foreign policy in general appear to mark the critical difference in that performance. Perhaps this is where Marx's emphasis on underconsumption enters the picture. American capitalism has refused or failed to build up the home market, lest a general well-being lessens labor's discipline, moderates class differences, or risks the fall in profit rates, because of potential overproduction and lowered prices. Scarcity at home, dumping abroad, seemingly an economic caricature, may have had a point, and was certainly emphasized in the 1920s. Otherwise, the drive for foreign markets, to prevent the expansion and well-being of the domestic market and society,

would have made little sense. Similarly, this would be applicable to investment, possibly, like markets, more profitable overseas. (Dumping, in that light, may have been an exaggeration.) Yet, both for ideological and economic reasons, profit maximization and control over working people, business recognized the risks inherent in a full-employment policy, a higher wage-structure, *and* overheating of the economy if the focus were primarily at home.

Shibboleths of free trade, or simply, harmonious international relations, are best understood as conditioned for the maintenance of success on the threat of using force which, even concealed or held in abeyance, is never far from sight. Capitalism is powerless to act on its own whether in enforcing its prerogatives on the global stage or gaining entrance to foreign markets closed for a variety of reasons. What has been required, in promoting and reinforcing the carrying out of US international business policies and aims, *none* of which is within the power and province of capitalism to effect alone, is government agency. That includes war, intervention, regime change, paramilitary operations, drone killings, the skillful allocation of military assistance as a key component of foreign aid; all have contributed to the continued growth and profitability of American capitalism, whether directly or indirectly. To be a world player, for example in such areas as outsourcing, trade negotiations, participation in the global oil market, and this does not begin to mention other problems to be faced in the framework of international politics, reveals the dependence of capitalism on the State.

As before, one might reverse the formulation to read, the dependence of the State on capitalism. For the State would have little reason for existence, in America, absent capitalism. Instead, without other ideological support and/or orientation, it would resemble an empty hulk: all bureaucracy, nothing to administer; all military, marching parade dress back and forth on the drilling field; all politicians, displaying empty pockets, subsidies, gratuities, contributions, not forthcoming. But the more important reason for the dependence is that the State *per se* is lifeless, pointless, of no account, unless, again capitalism, and by implication, America, it can represent the interests of society's upper groups, be they business, finance, industry, and now, military, a composite elite formation which provides the State purpose and direction.

Barrington Moore describes the essence of Junker autocracy as the marriage of iron and rye. We can, in the American circumstances, speak of the marriage of capitalism and the State, the military as bridesmaid,

organist, part of the congregation, everything but the minister, specially reserved for the president. In contrast, under socialism the State, rather than capitalism, would be indispensable to the economic function. This is not said with the glorification of the State in mind. The possibility of abuses in foreign policy and the integrity of political leadership are there as well. We are back to *volition* and a satisfaction of structural preconditions for viability and definition. Other ideologies have their own needs; my concern here is capitalism, although neither socialism nor communism—each capable of having its own form of authoritarianism—historically possessed the societal-structural dynamics which eventuated in fascism. I know the formulation is problematic for many, who identify communism and fascism as a single entity. Authoritarianism *may* embrace both, but I do not find fascism a live option in, or already present in, Russia and China.

#### 4.2 *Zaibatsu Phenomenon: Structure of Hierarchical Economics*

Here it would be well to state analytical priorities specific to fascism. The militarization of capitalism is not identical with, and does not necessarily outrank in importance, the interpenetration of government and business. Simply, capitalism cannot itself be militarized until first it is sufficiently strengthened. That was the course throughout the 1920s in Germany, before Hitler came to power. A fertile political culture for Nazism was already, if still independently, in progress. Thus, under fascism, capitalism has to await becoming a prime candidate for militarization until systemically mature; otherwise, neither the economic foundation nor the preconditions for manipulating the *folk* will have been put in place for mounting an aggressive campaign for expansion abroad and social control at home. National purpose is already embedded in the overall design. The rise of Hitler coincides with an appropriate capitalist base in advance in the making, Nazism refining and adding to the structure and, through “front” organizations, cementing workers’ loyalties to the consolidated structure of industrial monopolism, trade bodies, cartels.

First interpenetration (government and business), then the sky’s the limit (militarization of capitalism), the State, perhaps likened to Mother Earth, the enfolding Power which cranks the wheels of fascistization. History is less tidy than I make out, a perfect sequential ordering from interpenetration to militarization being highly unlikely. Conversely, militarization, as the

impetus for bringing business and government into tighter structural-ideological alignment, might be true. (All of this is relevant to the American experience, post-1945 to the present.) I would conclude, of the Capitalism–State relation, one cannot do without the other; neither is entirely self-actualizing, but more than complementary, what one finds is an *organic* whole. At this point, for comparative purposes in elucidating similarities about the historical preconditions of fascism, one must refer back to Japan.

Its organizational framework has been and remains a structural co-partnership, its political-cultural base, hierarchy and militarism, and its economy, a high degree of concentration in banking and industry. All of this brings Japan closer to the American model than the case of Germany and Italy of a previous generation. One exception, in contradistinction to America, is the total absence of liberal fascism, given their respective differences in historical patterning. Even then, feudalism and capitalism have in common the hierarchical principle and a disproportionate emphasis on the military. Still to this day, the *zaibatsu* represents a stage of monopoly capital, but I prefer feudal industrial base or *industrial feudalism*. For Japan, co-partnership, by possessing essentially the same functional categories (capitalism and the State), though perhaps notched one step closer, as does interpenetration in America, can be taken as indicating the course for the structural-ideological direction in which America *is heading*. Our *zaibatsu* phenomenon, when all is said, reveals a higher degree of wealth concentration in industry and banking (correcting for domestic and off-shore activity in both cases) than Japan's, and thus, a more consolidated structure of hierarchical economics as well.

Even better than industrial feudalism, I prefer, for America, the designation Modern Feudalism, hardly a shocker, for W.J. Ghent said as much about the organization and reality of America's economy a century ago—like a snowball, a trend which cumulatively grows stronger and more pronounced. Feudal imagery is apt, as a telling rejoinder to claims of internal democratization and a consequent regulatory pattern in the public interest. To look closer at the paradigmatic fusion of capitalism and the State in both societies (for our purpose, I've said enough about the American case here, and will discuss at greater length that of Japan, interpolating comments on the USA as we go), one's point of departure is the comparative perspective on fascistization as a structural-ideological process. Japan antedates American practice, if at all, by little more than a decade.

Here Maruyama Masao is extremely helpful. His *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japan*, like Moore's *Social Origins* (his chapter, "Japan: Asian Fascism"), does not imply comparison with or make reference to America; yet, the analytical possibilities are intriguing, despite differences in institutional context, psychodynamics of societal habituation, and the ideological treatment of the source of power. Throughout the respective formations, however, three common elements are shared by each: State, capitalism, and military. And for good measure, add: hierarchy. While this does not make Japan and America identical, it gives incentive for searching out functional, institutional, and political-cultural *equivalents* which further elucidates the potential for fascism in the American setting.

On reflection, I speculate that the drift toward fascism may result in a process of structural-ideological homogenization. The two nations are not there yet, that is, the commonality of experience, values, symbols, but a foundation is being accreted (to grow or become attached through gradual build-up), not of course literally via political attachment, but signaling, for a start, the militarization of hierarchy resting on a monopolistic base—advanced/mature capitalism verily the wave of the future.

## Comparative Probing of Fascism: Japan and America

### 1 PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION AND MODERN CAPITALISM: CLEARING A PATH

One first confronts the historical importance of feudalism in the shaping of social formations of modernity. The issue is whether a feudal past, its presence *or* absence, proves decisive in the subsequent development of political structure and ideology. Japan is a no-brainer. There is widespread agreement on the continuity from feudalism to modern industrial society. The only disagreement is over how structurally entrenched feudalism has remained in the social system enclosing industrialism within its foundations. Modernity, the fig leaf covering liberalism, has largely had its way unmolested, to the point that the historical elimination of a peasantry has been the *sine qua non*, in social analysis, of capitalist democracy.

#### *1.1 Pre-modernism: Historical Transference of Feudalism*

That is Moore's main point, the historical traversal of modernity to the present, and whether or not a specifically bourgeois phase has been present in the interim between pre-modern and modern formations. Otherwise, feudalism is carried over whole to the new setting, ensuring the hierarchical structuring both of industry and the class system. In Japan's case, the peasantry, in manner, ideology, and ethos, if not in number, has remained, accompanied by a comparatively weak bourgeoisie. As for ethos, we equally

see the cultural transmission of militarism from the feudal base—again the weakness of the bourgeoisie like a sieve permitting the unimpeded flow of militarism through today.

For Japan, perhaps more so than Germany (there is no Japanese Thomas Mann to write *Buddenbrooks*), this weakness is telling on social-class formation. Historically, the bourgeois has been an initial carrier of democracy (e.g., England), even if the influence ultimately hardens and peters out. By comparison, America had been predominantly bourgeois, on the land as well, but, as with all things monolithic, atrophy historically sets in, and the process loses its democratic character. (Not coincidentally, much of the literature on fascism focuses on a frustrated middle class, a harbinger of fascism.) Never mind the brutality of the process when this occurs, a clearing-the-deck of pre-modern phenomena as necessary, justified, indeed, inevitable, in anticipation of a progressive future, that is, capitalist development.

The doctrine was applied to the enclosure movement in seventeenth-century England (Marx's classic example of "primitive accumulation"), and next, sotto voce, the French Revolution, as though, in both, modernity is carried on the wings of genocide. It has done service too, in perhaps slightly less harsh terms, through much of American history. In the ghettoization and/or removal of Native Americans, one finds a generic, metaphorical peasantry, along with blacks and the white poor, all peasants from the standpoint of an advancing capitalism needing the ideology and free space for shaping a class structure and disciplining a labor force.

### *1.2 Linear Capitalist Development: Absence of Structural Variegation*

Capitalism is not kind to those it finds dispensable. Hartz is correct about the absence of feudalism in America (its remnants, as in the patroon system in New York State, and the institution of plantation slavery, offer partial qualification to his generalization), but what that historically entailed was a linear growth of capitalism lacking the variegation with which a democratic structure is associated. As in France, destroying feudalism becomes a springboard to at least a partial achievement of democracy. America had no clash to speak of, and Japan, nothing to clash about, the friction inhering in the dismantling of an Old Order missing for both. The feudalization of America seems odd-sounding (and literally untrue), yet

descriptively accurate when one takes into account (which Hartz by a different route seems to have done, in saying that capitalism in America was born mature) how close-structured US development has been, its ideological parameters drawing inward, its economic formation more consolidated and concentrated, its foreign policy, more narrowly hegemonic and resistant to social change.

I am struck by how capitalism, even when, as in America, has had its own way and sway, thereby not confronting historical-structural obstacles as in Europe, that is, feudalism, has nonetheless acted as though such obstacles were there to be removed. In other words, the USA also, historically, had, as in Marx's analysis of seventeenth-century enclosures, its period of primitive accumulation (what I once termed its *brutalization* phase), only for the USA it was the later nineteenth century. And the American version of the peasantry to be confronted and figuratively to be neutralized and/or cleared out, in addition to the above remarks on primitive accumulation (Native Americans, etc.), was the American worker, treated with an unparalleled brutality befitting the rawness of US capitalism itself. The pathway was clear for the unobstructed course of capitalism—agricultural, industrial—through the mechanism of legitimated violence and an increasing segment of the military factor to support, renew, and find market-advantage for the system in its advanced, mature stage.

### 1.3 *Brutalization: Enforcing Submission to Authority*

How else think of the period 1877 through 1894, when strikes, lockouts, and bloody battles ensued in such areas as railroads, steel, mining, manufacturing, and people were being thrown off the land or reduced to farm tenancy and sharecropping as anything but upper social groups' efforts at domesticating a labor force? The strikebreaker had become the prototypic American worker. This was the deck-clearing operation designed to ensure a compliant, assenting mass base in which class consciousness was to be extirpated—in short, the brutalization process—in favor of a patriotic/war-prone consensus. Only, a favorable attitude toward war was now beside the point; the goal was forcing submission to Authority, whether government or plant management. It did not, of course, fully work, as witness later organizing drives, sit-down strikes, a sporadic, yet awakened, militancy. But the ideological dye was cast: America was to be free from



and *of* radicalism, which, in the New Deal, still very much surfaced in the less repressive era. In the postwar period, McCarthyism created the basis and atmosphere for Taft-Hartley and other measures to come, sanitizing, with courageous exceptions, the labor movement and work environment.

Thus the steel and auto workers became the Native Americans of their time, as ideological-functional equivalences go. And blacks, especially in the postwar years, lynching a frequent occurrence, having already been ghettoized and forcibly strait-jacketed through segregation, merely were reduced to the same plane of inferior status, power, and wealth, thus confirming the primitive accumulation process which has still not run its course. In America, capitalism takes on revolutionary significance, not as the fundamental changing of the social order, effected through force and violence against an ancien regime. It *is* the ancien regime fulfilling itself in a state of industrial-financial-military permanence, a freezing of history in what it has hoped is the apical stage of its power. In fact, capitalist revolution in America is the inversion of revolution, inside-out revolution to consolidate its domestic and international hegemony. The *reverse* revolution for all to stand in awe of is especially declared for those intended to see and fully appreciate its significance, the mass base, which awaits the Nation (as in Japan, Nation having a special meaning for the graduated pacing which eventuates in fascism).

## 2 THE NATION, A MORAL ENTITY: JAPANESE EMPEROR-WORSHIP

In Japan, the peasantry is retained in concept, demolished in practice, recalled in political mythology as honorific and heroic, essential to the philosophic code of social stratification, disposable in meeting the exigencies of structural-military modernization: the warrior in button-down collar. The evidence is clear. A hierarchical structural-cultural emphasis characterizes Japan perhaps like no other advanced-capitalist industrial nation to this day (the resistance to the argument, as noted, being that industrialism creates democratization *and* modernity per se). Feudalism sufficiently equates to hierarchy historically that for descriptive purposes—although Japan has carried this further—to find societies hierarchically arranged, especially with both a well-defined class system and a propensity to militarism and war, the term, as in “Modern Feudalism,” is meaningful and useful. Japan, by whatever terminology, would not have it otherwise.

## 2.1 *Nation and Economy: Joined in Reciprocal Service*

What I have sketched, when applied to America, may be more accurately categorized as, not fascism, essentials, for example, hierarchy, interpenetration, military power and spirit, notwithstanding, but a *prefascist configuration*, internal structure and foreign policy already in agreement with my definition, but perhaps lacking further systemic tightening and social awareness on the part of leadership and public alike. Disposition, I believe, is present, but that is not the same as awareness; fascism, if and when it comes full throttle, may still obviate the need for the more sinister aspects of Nazism, and emerge gradually if not altogether painlessly.

There is a lag in the political culture on fascism and its relevance, desirability, or application to America. The term is still studiously avoided, but attitude and *praxis* are moving steadily forward, fascism still as ethnocentrism, xenophobia, a hostile attitude toward the poor and government-welfare functions, and in foreign policy, a full-scale interventionist mode aligned with the operational doctrine of permanent war. Expansionism per se, as with Germany and Japan, is embedded in the very mindset of such a doctrine. Labels can be scare-words; better that one emphasizes attributes. Although gas chambers are not to be facilely equated with interpenetration, systemic connections may take one there. It is not that the State-capitalism paradigm brooks no opposition, but that, in combination, it yields the worst features in both; power supplements alienation yielding the resultant, desensitization. The gas chamber is a more extreme form of drone assassination, both being on the same continuum of suppressed hatred and inflicting pain.

Japan and America, dancing to the rhythm of Ravel's "La Valse," a churning, tempestuous rite, makes of political structure a harbinger of the future (a future of fascism already realized, or partially realized, in both nations). In Japan, because of its extreme feudalization, liberalism has meaning for the society as individual rights (there has been a dissenting strand dating far back, however miniscule); in America, without feudalism, liberalism can be what it actually *is*—the guardian-articulator of the Property Right, making it Centrist or right of Center. (Actually, Liberal, a party designation, fulfills, on war and peace, business regulation, societal absorption of dissent, much the same underlying behavior and practice found in its American counterpart.)

In Japan, the concept of "people's rights" is absorbed into/swallowed up by nationalism, itself a specific construction of the State (well beyond Western ideas of nationalism, or possibly even the Reich, as in Germany)

which rests on a feudal base going right up to the Emperor (Leader). Nationalism is the soft covering for State, which is accepted as a *moral* entity, thus investing the State with higher status over capitalism. In America, it is capitalism over the state, or helps to define its content, contrasted with capitalism in Japan, where the “national polity,” obviously not hostile to capitalism, nevertheless endows the meaning of the state with absolute value. To dwell on the difference, however, in the respective statuses accorded capitalism is to miss their point of intersection, different historical-structural routes to a synthetic core, capitalism/State an integrated whole. In one, capitalism is joined to the service of the nation (Japan), in the other, the nation, joined to the service of capitalism (America). Both conditions are satisfied by Noma Saiji, reflected in the Japanese slogan, “The Road to Success and Prosperity,” in which, the positions reversed between capitalism and the State, the outcome is the same: the unity of structures, interpenetration.

## *2.2 Concept of National Polity: Moral Legitimation of Structure*

Let’s call this Emperor-worship, regardless of transformative changes in emperors since the war, because social structure is still predicated on infinite gradations of status measured by the distance to the top. This makes private affairs unusually *public*, because they can only be morally legitimated when they are identified with national affairs, and not alone. Capitalism is not thereby de-legitimated; rather, it may actually be enhanced. It is a derivative of feudalism (industrial base notwithstanding, and cherished as providing hierarchical structure) and Nation, aka, State. Here we are being drawn into the fascist ideological vortex.

The Nation (national polity) is all encompassing. It has, as Maruyama emphasizes, spiritual authority and political power, and therefore its own moral code of right and wrong. Comparing American capitalism on the same dimension, one finds that it has spiritual authority, and leaves political power to the State, not a spoiler, though, because the latter remains informally under the control of ruling groups, and private in all but name. For one, moral standards cannot supersede the Nation (Japan), and the other, moral standards cannot supersede capitalism (America).

These two versions of the relative ranking of capitalism are seemingly opposite, yet together constitute a closed system in which power *and* moral right shifts from, is ascribable to, one or the other, in which case,

however the allocation, the closed-partnership remains intact. It is also equally expansionist under either auspices, and, in whichever name, opposes dissenting forces. Expansion appears inherent in the capitalism/State matrix. This goes beyond obvious reasons, deflection of people's awareness (the Nazi formula, divert the gaze of the masses) or disposal of surplus production (the Marxist explanation of imperialism), although still important to the analysis. Rather, expansion is also a deeply felt response to the fear, largely hidden, of *stasis* as integral to capitalist development.

### 3 A CONSTANT TREADMILL: THE EXPANSIONIST DEMIURGE

Corporate-political-military power circles refuse to face the internal difficulties of capitalism, whether business-cycle fluctuations, stagnation, falling tendencies in the rate of profit, monopolistic effects on stifling competition, underconsumption, an inequitable distribution of wealth, and more. In these circles, and the media, no one wants to admit to systemic failure (tantamount to disloyalty to the Nation) or generate concerns that become self-fulfilling. It is as though a condition of self-inflicted blindsiding was mandatory to maintaining business confidence. Ideological correctness requires that capitalism be handled with kid-gloves. Structure is its foundation, ideology its façade onto the world (for keeping up appearances and fending off criticism).

#### 3.1 *War: A Defining Condition, Nationhood and Capitalism*

Instead of addressing these and other underlying concerns, capitalism's historical path since at least the late nineteenth century has been one of externalization: externalize all issues, problems, fears; propel outward; avoid, stave off, contraction. Capitalism, especially, worried about gluts in inventory, meeting profit expectations, and so on, appears driven, on a constant treadmill to exceed the past, keep up with the present, and create higher value in the future, all of which concerns are less apparent or important in meeting the requirements of socialist production. Possibly not being so driven accounts for a certain lethargy in socialist production, but the trade-off, when socialism reconciles its profession and practice, is a sharp reduction in alienation and depersonalization, if any of either yet

remains, and greater material benefits. More to the point here, there is the matter of externalization (already characterizing mercantilism) in which the outward thrust is less a surrogate, than a precondition, for war, with intervention, forcible market penetration, and the like, steps in that direction.

To continue the aforementioned comparison: The Nation encapsulates its own virtue; capitalism does the same. The moral center in each is that it could do no wrong (the US drone assassination, in service to the nation, where nation is code for, because inseparable from, capitalism). This suggests the parallel rationale for an expansionist foreign policy (no stranger to either), treated as a moral obligation to share the respective good tidings, hierarchical order, democracy: Japan, the “just cause,” America, Exceptionalism, together having in common a peculiar affinity to war. The tacit equation of nation and military, and by extension, capitalism and war, in America, cuts deeper than what I have been calling the militarization of capitalism. It is as though war becomes a defining condition of both nationhood and capitalism, normalized to the extent of becoming an unstated assumption giving it ready cogency in the discussion of public policy and popular acceptance.

### *3.2 Self-evidence: Acceptance of Moral/Mental Absolutes*

In Japan, “just cause” is tied to the organicism of hierarchical structure, starting from ages-old service to the Emperor, and proceeding down the structural chain (class seems somehow inadequate or ill-fitting), deference to those above, dominance over those below, encasement of the whole in the unity of moral values and power, devotion and loyalty focused on the top, the Sovereign Nation the source of both. America, perhaps because of its focus on capitalism, has let Exceptionalism carry the burden of ideological explanation for the source of morality and power. Systematic analysis is not needed because of the mental satisfaction deriving from a belief in self-evidence, self-evident truths sufficient for attesting to the virtues of capitalism. In any case, justificatory reasoning appears more conspicuous and necessary in the USA than in Japan. The spread of democracy has been expressed by Woodrow Wilson down through the present, and implied earlier, perhaps dating back to Winthrop’s “city on a hill.” Self-evidence is a canard (a fabrication) conveniently believed—the Statue of Liberty blindfolded—to silence all questioning by proponents and critics alike, capitalism ascending the heights of the Absolute.

The unity characterizing Japan's structure and thought resides in the Nation, and in America, in capitalism. In the latter, the interesting point is not the source but the fact of the unity, something capitalism depends on in legitimating a sense of national purpose. In both cases, unity translates into outward action (for example wartime Japan, imperialist America, the marriage of morality and power in each nation a goad to expansion) and to giving Authority the benefit of the doubt, as well as unquestioned loyalty. The Japanese slogan, providing a further goad to action, applicable to America as well, "total mobilization of the people's spirit," defines, for the USA, the underlying premise for massive surveillance and a guiding principle both for the political system and the mass media.

Maruyama is a veritable philosophical-historical goldmine, allowing one to think through and expand the analysis further. To paraphrase the title of his lead essay, "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Capitalism," rather than "Ultra-Nationalism," one has the principal variables, for him, Nation and capitalism, for me, State and capitalism, at hand in studying how organic structures have common points of reference. Almost necessarily, they are antidemocratic because of the top-down transmission of authority and values and the expected reciprocal flow, deference cascading upward. The common hierarchical element of structure creates the basis for the equation, national polity = capitalist polity. Each is assigned the source of authority and values in its respective bailiwick.

There is a curious primordial quality at the epistemological level, in this case social knowledge, where expectations are formed about command and obedience without regard to the specificity of societal formation. Despite the differences, there is an underlying, striking similarity; the tendency toward absolutism in each case requires strong Authority to complete the societal process. Neither Japan nor the USA is quite receptive to the democratization of wealth or power.

Whether the State or capitalism makes the more direct connection to fascism is difficult to say, because they are so tied together. In Japan, the State is an initiatory force. In America, this falls to capitalism, although, as an intervening step, the individual, rather than capitalism or the State, begins the movement forward in that direction. But that step, individual rights, is deceptive; they are first filtered through capitalism to be given effect. In neither case, then, is individual conscience or consciousness free to operate unrestrained by external forces, so that source per se as determinative of individual rights is canceled out, leaving a moral void in each case.

#### 4 ABDICATION OF THE MORAL SENSE: TRANSFERENCE TO A HIGHER POWER

This leaves the individual helpless before, or susceptible to, what- or whomever promises deliverance in the form of an ersatz (described as real) human autonomy. Here externalization takes on additional meaning, that which is projected from an alienated existence and state of mind when intrinsic gratification and meaning can no longer hold. Fascism promises the world in exchange for the externalized individual soul, an incremental step beyond the normalization of political-cultural repression, what the State and capitalism have done in Japan and America—externalization referring here to abdicating the moral sense, transferring it to an outside body free to act in the individual's name while performing acts of self-aggrandizement and cruelty.

##### 4.1 *Ultimate Values: The Individual's Proximity to Power*

Ordinarily this sounds like the psychodynamics of transference to a Leader, a primary act, no further intervention needed, straightforward in its attachment, as in the Nazi nighttime rallies. But it could also describe the psychodynamics of transference to capitalism, one or two steps removed from primality, given the system's impersonal character. This would require, for the needed attachment, the full weight of patriotic thundering, an invitation to share in hegemonic aspirations and conquests, and the hint of reserved force to engender fear.

Class, though denied, relegated to murk, or otherwise disposed of—again in both contexts—is actually significant to an understanding of the psychodynamics leading up to, and preparing the way for, fascism. Both Japan and America have supposed hierarchy in the construction of their political frameworks. In both, that is, one finds the notion of hierarchical application to the law, so that for each the proximate distance of the individual to the source of power and moral goodness determines one's worth to society (and presumably the rewards conferred thereby).

For Japan, the ultimate value is the Emperor, for America, Emperor = America, or specifically, Emperor = capitalism, yet with a statist dimension of power to confirm the totality of state and political economy. This emendation to the last-named is grounded in the reality of capitalist operations and systemic needs. It is what makes business-government interpenetration so important, to provide a monolith for social control, a

structure adequate to supplying the needs for moral values and political power, and a synthesis to unify both business and government if society is to hold together. Their separable identities and spheres of activity are preserved, the better to maximize the power of each. I hear echoes of late-Weimar as I write.

Here liberalism is the structural-ideological midwife or unifying agency representing both the State and capitalism. It signifies an underpinning of commonality between them favoring all the usual suspects, expansion, the property right, rule of law, and so on, yet none in contradiction to, and rather, seeking to strengthen—each interpreted through the lens of the property right—capitalism itself. In this political-structural core, militarism would not be out of place, particularly because the core, like its surrounding body (capitalism), purports to be moral, thus giving the use of moral force moral justification. And force emanating from either source, whether capitalism or the State, whether America or Japan, is already predefined as moral. This is the beauty of Moore's concept of legitimated violence, a concerted exposure of State-approved and often-conducted force.

#### 4.2 *Vertical Social Structure: Splintering Class Consciousness*

The analysis is directed to America, but key elements, if not the totality, would apply equally to Japan. As I proceed, the interchangeability of State and capitalism appears closer in meaning, whichever nation one chooses, so that pride in the State is transferred to, or translates into, pride in capitalism, and vice versa. As a result, the psychodynamics of structural legitimation become hardened and periodically reinforced as ideology. I had mentioned Italy and Germany as points of reference for America, but by now I think Japan, subject to more detailed analysis below, is more congruent in structure, ideology, and values with America than the others, and, still placing emphasis on Japan, illumines through comparison features of American structure and ideology less often noticed.

When Maruyama draws a distinction between vertical and horizontal lines in social structure, horizontal, essentially democratically organized, vertical, precisely the hierarchical organization of class, power, and force, it is easy to see how Japan, where the individual identifies with the top (or with the system), falls into the former category. Verticality in social stratification means that at each class-level the individual is always looking upward, and demonstrating contempt for those below, a structural framework which results, by design and/or historical experience, in the fragmentation of class consciousness.



Class becomes its own negation through the arts of repression, when identity rests on one's upward-downward societal perspective of others. The tighter the intra-class feeling, provided that, *as a class*, individuals still focus at the top for the source of Nationhood and their own worth, the less class matters as a viable vehicle for protest. Not only do we find that class consciousness splinters in the context of Emperor-worship, but also conditions are propitious for the rise of false consciousness, which is the result of accepting the appeals of hierarchical arrangements in the first place.

### 4.3 *Invisibility of Class: A Covenantal Inclusiveness*

In all of this, America is not far behind, indeed, possibly ahead, because class could not even be mentioned for social control purposes. The verticality of political-structural-ideological design, or simply convergence, has raised classlessness to a moral height invariably to be equated with Americanism. There are scores of dedications in the USA, as though stepping stones to Heaven, or patriotism broadly construed, as, for example, sports teams, firm/company, Nation, its dimensions of war, expansion, capitalism, anything but class. This is a vertical epistemology, corresponding to the individual's place in the social system, in which the grounds of knowledge are malleable and bend to the prevailing structure of power. The process of mental screening determining reason and cogency is what keeps America safe, sound, ignorant of socialism, and code for capitalism.

The dedication to the whole system, as though it were reified and stood—above one—for the covenantal framework to which all Americans aspired, and to which they sought to conform, may help to explain the prominence of ethnocentrism and racism in contemporary life. Covenantal inclusiveness, though specifically contradicted by both ethnocentrism and racism, is for that reason maintained in Constitution-worship and Fourth of July celebrations, as reminder of the power of the in-group to *exclude* others from the full rights and powers of citizenship, a savoring by upper groups of the fruits of political sadism and repression. Two-edged promises are ideal vehicles for social control.

## 5 STRUCTURAL CONVERGENCE: CAPITALISM—STATE ORGANICISM

The in-group, a personification of capitalism in terms of its ruling stratum, possesses moral rectitude, superior to, and defensive against, those who do not share in the Nation's values. Massed in self-protection through the

institutional inseparableness of State and capitalism, the in-group, basking in the moral prestige of those above (if they are not already clearly part of that group), extends its influence lower down the social order, receiving further confirmation of Exceptionalism through rigid adherence to the capacious moral code of capitalist values. The assurance of deference, civility, and compliance of lower social groups confirms the superiority of those above, validates the efficacy and moral dimensions of Exceptionalism, and renews the domineering bent of those in the higher reaches of the social structure.

### 5.1 *Certitude, Immutability, Timelessness: Structural Dynamism, a Static Framework*

For Japan and America alike, there is a constancy of inner historical-structural compulsion; the transmission of force from feudalism to modern Japan resonates with the American pattern of transmission of capitalism, spiraling historically upward. In both cases a seeming of one-dimensional certitude, the convergence of force and capitalism, to ensure the dialectic, such as it is, stops here. From several directions comes the idea of the immutability of capitalism and the State, their convergence then also testifying to the integration of structure and function enshrined in a halo of timelessness. A more suitable historical-ideological context for a doctrine of self-evident truths, whether in Japan or America, would be hard to find.

As Maruyama points out, the Imperial Constitution of 1889 stated that it “transmitted the immutable law according to which the land has been governed.” The more capitalism changes, the more it remains the same, because, for both societies, a political-structural dynamism is confined within a static framework, in which history remains frozen in the decisive areas of ideology, politics, and culture. This is the ideal breeding ground for the structural process of fascistization. (Indeed, it is more than structural, as the immediately preceding areas make clear; fascistization is *societal* in scope, totalitarian in meaning, and functionally complete when it embraces the State for purposes of domination and repression.) National polity and Exceptionalism, reigning concepts underpinned by the rivets of heavy industry (less true today of the USA, now in its finance-capital phase) and the spirit of hierarchical validation, signify perhaps the ultimate convergence, the structural *core of morality* by which Nation, Individual, and Law are placed outside the rule of law, scruples of international conduct, and the constraints of a philosophy of moral obligation.

Fascistization, as the term implies, is a process, not a coup, nor a revolution. Given its structural-cultural insinuation into traditional political structure, particularly in the case of Japan, upper capitalist groups, aligned with the military, engaged in what proved a *gradualist* transformation, more ideological than structural. The Old Order was left essentially intact, equally if not more hierarchical in shape, now with greater energizing ideas and justifications for expansion. Germany and Italy suggest different historical experiences, the developmental paradigm of fascism thus not being invariable, with coup and/or revolution an inexact but more useful description than for Japan.

In all three national cases, capitalism—as a unifying historical force—is obviously significant, as is the fear, more often than not artificially stimulated, of “bolshevization” coupled with right-wing antilabor violence. (If one can speak of a negative dialectic, what would the Right have done, without a real or projected Left to scare society out of its wits? A straight-out Rightest putsch would have none of the legitimation customarily reserved under capitalism for putting down the Left.) For Germany and Italy, a legitimation of political thuggery, more so than in Japan, provided transformative energies for a political takeover. Paradoxically, on ideology, Japan seemed more imbued than its European counterparts with the spirit and structure of feudalism, though for all three nations fitting capitalism even, or especially, as it modernized into an hierarchical framework, the military component decisively signified the fascist form.

### 5.2 *Etiquette of Class Relations: Master/Follower, Firm/Worker*

Maruyama distinguishes three phases 1919–45 in Japanese fascism, the preparatory period, period of maturity, and consummation period, for present purposes the first of these being the most fruitful for delineating the generic specie, fascism, clarified, unadorned, with possible implications for America as well (not, as I noted, his intent). Groups, such as the “Society to Carry Out Heaven’s Way on Earth,” or here, with its manifesto, deeply imbued with feudalism, the “Great Japan Political Justice Corps,” state, in praise of hierarchy: “The master is like the parent; the follower is like the child. The comradeship of followers is like the brothers in a family. The orders of the master must be obeyed through thick and thin. The brothers are to assist each other in mutual affection and must not forget the rules of courtesy.” The rules of courtesy forbade labor strikes, much less revolutionary violence.

With suitable changes to what may appear (in translation) quaintness to the American ear, the passage could be duplicated readily in Sutton, et al., *The American Business Creed* as commonplace corporate rhetoric outlining the etiquette of class relations. The only corrections from the preceding quote being: *firm* rather than *master*, *worker* or *employee* rather than *follower*, although *master* and *follower* readily substitute by implication for the other terms; too, comradeship does not extend to labor unions nor brothers to their members; *orders* are *orders*, whichever of the two political cultures one chooses. In the USA, scientific management and industrial relations transmitted the required behavior traits and mindset from above; in Japan, these were absorbed into the everyday understanding of history and culture.

### 5.3 *Phases of Fascistization: From Movement to Structure*

Both Japan and America had a head-start in antiradicalism immediately following World War I, a period of brutalization making possible, and paving the way for, subsequent gradualism in the movement toward fascism. The USA perhaps did not have the clarified ideological position as did Japan (e.g., Kitta Ikkii, in its formative context of fascist ideology), but did have, to an equal extent, the suppression of radicals, notably the International Workers of the World (IWW). It was only during the New Deal that we see a partial interlude, a blanketing down of extremism, Coughlin, Smith, and so on, in America's formative period during the interwar years. But with FDR's death, fascistic currents emerged full blown, again the usual pattern, namely, explosion, to future gradualism (McCarthyism successfully absorbed and internalized, boundaries, political and ideological, thereby circumscribed, the alteration then taken for granted). After World War II, in America, anticommunism, originating in stored-up antiradicalism, gradually filters into and shapes the shift of the political-ideological spectrum rightward.

An analogous process is at work in Japan, with fragmentary movements, a proliferation of patriotic societies—seemingly enough to fill a small telephone directory—becoming unified through the active support of the military. This linkage to the military is an important element in translating upper-group and plebeian sources of fascism into a cohesive mainstream force in Japan. In America, this linkage is weaker. The status and role of the US military in the interwar period is still an unanswered question, though suppression of the Bonus Marchers under Gen. MacArthur, and

supervisory activities of the US Army in the Civilian Conservation Corps, point to some, but not widespread, influence. On the level of rhetoric, Japan, in the second phase, evidences Left-wing pronouncements galore, but their disappearance in the third suggests the incipience of fascism even when using Left rhetoric. In America, Left rhetoric is standard even though not acted on. The USA is a Liberal society (Hartz), with everything transvalued to fit a context of capitalism and property rights.

In the post-Manchuria period, right-wing parties flourish, some even from labor unions (a mobilization from below, but not in such volume and strength as occurs in Germany and Italy) even having National Socialist in their titles, so that fascism from above, mobilization partially accomplished from below, makes for a solidified movement. Maruyama draws the distinction between fascist movement and total structure of Japanese fascism, his emphasis, on the first, mine, on the second. This also indicates the distinction between the early and later phases, and between an emphasis on ideology, and on state structure.

Despite Maruyama's focus on continuity as critical to Japan's historical-structural development, capitalism sinks in importance, or is sidetracked, in the analysis far more than is warranted, and not offset by cultural-ideological factors as other than contributory and consonant with the historical and structural. Fascism is not all thought, that is, ideological superstructure, for it has foundations, that is, capitalism, and their interaction, essential to understanding, requires both, with an eye to their reciprocal influence. Ideology may be a powerful instrument (for whatever purpose intended), but it has to be rooted in an appropriate context to elicit action. Words don't necessarily kill, nor do ideas; persons kill, governments kill, nations kill. Fascism is not now, nor was it ever, an impersonal force, which is why one looks to systemic frameworks and structures of power for location and understanding.

With attention primarily to social movement and ideology, Maruyama treats state structure as somewhat of an intrusion in Japan's history, which, coming forward in time, gradually takes power and has greater impact on politics and culture. For purposes of discussion, I have used state structure interchangeably with capitalism in our comparative analysis, although of course state structure covers a wide variety of social systems having diverse historical, economic, and ideological characteristics—the point here being, on a functional level the interchangeability holds for Japan and America. Even then, the State is discriminably different from capitalism—because of

historical tradition and political culture—*provided* State and capitalism, in our study, are recognized to be in modern times interpenetrated structures with mutually supportive ideological and cultural themes.

## 6 IDEOLOGY, TRADITION, CONFORMITY: ABSENCE OF VARIEGATION

The USA is different, perhaps only slightly, both state structure and capitalism being mainstream, so that historical development becomes a steady movement in the consolidation, adaptation between them unnecessary, because already achieved, of political culture, ideology, capitalism. Contrary to expectations, Japan's uniformity of growth is less stark, though still extreme, than that of America's. (Liberal absolutism, whether or not Locke is the sole accredited source, is not an unreasonable thesis, when the full weight of property and the property right on structure and consciousness is taken into account.) None of the structural development toward fascism, whether in Japan or America, unlike Germany and Italy, is dependent on capture of the state structure by marginalized groups coming into being and/or operating outside of authoritative circles. For America, unified Center-Right ruling groups preside simultaneously over monopoly capital, foreign-policy hegemonic goals, and domestic order, enjoying the complicity (or indifference) of the citizenry in these pursuits.

When one looks closely at Japan's fascist ideology (again courtesy Maruyama, extrapolations my own), we are informally on the epistemological level, here, the fundamental unit of social meaning which underpins the State: the *family*-system, or State in miniature, in which the Nation (also reflected in the spirit of nationalism) is the aggregation of families, and together, one big Family—the "State as a united body," Tsuda's paean to village life (a purposeful effort at retrogradation to glorify presumed rural values of the preyed upon, maligned *folk*). Nazism used the theme even more savagely, as a mainstay of anti-Semitism and somehow (a feat of great imagination) in defense of Big Industry. Hence a second theme of Japanese fascism is, relatedly, agrarianism, ordinarily or logically in conflict with an ideology favoring the absolute State and a strong industrial base—but not so here. What Maruyama sees as both views "mingled in confusing eclecticism" is not confusing if agrarianism serves, as it did in Japan, to intensify acceptance of the traditional order.

### 6.1 *A One-Dimensional Nation: Encasement in Structural Order*

One cannot overstate the cancerous use of a politicized agrarianism to designate Tradition as the embodiment of a folk community of Reaction. This denies at the outset any progressive-liberating tendencies in the rise of industry, usually accompanied, as in eighteenth-century England, by the commercialization of agriculture, perhaps the most important historical advance of modern times. The issuance is still capitalism, but capitalism following a different path from that encased in a structural process of feudalism and a cultural process of traditionalism. In theory, Hartz was correct in his expectation that America, absent European feudalism, would be a democratic nation. Yet by stating that capitalism in America was born mature, he unwittingly short-circuited the historical process through skipping over the significance of conflict, or the lack thereof, in the formation of democracy. Capitalism without historical-structural-cultural variegation yields a one-dimensional Nation, not unlike that claimed by Germany for the Folk, or Japan for the Family.

Tradition is the pernicious encasement of monochromatic societal development, the effective erasing and/or denial of progressive social forces and outcomes, especially when self-evidence is claimed in justification, not only of its content (a revolutionary heritage, which America never had, or deserved in reputation to have had, conceivably could exercise a radical influence when brought into modern times), but also, more important, its *process*: encasement qua stifling of a democratizing force when industry is free to liberate and expand productive forces. None of the foregoing has exhibited historical viability, precisely because industry has been harnessed to the petrifying ends of stabilization and increased power of ruling groups. Nor has socialism thus far fully emancipated productive forces so that they might reach their potential, whether in China or Russia. Tradition negates variegation, which itself has not been traditionalized in America, its impetus lacking because having no historical-substantive actuality to impart. The result is a disheartening sameness of mental landscape (a principal reason for my arriving at the conclusion, a prefascist configuration characterizing the American present).

## 6.2 *Traditionalizing Capitalism/Industrialism: Militaryism, the Folk*

This is fascism awaiting the world's embrace: the traditional order, a framework for capitalist industrial society. Workers are soldiers-in-industry (an idea explicit to Japan and Germany); they are loyal and do not strike. Tradition, almost subliminal and instinctive in the conveying of meaning, carries the structural message of stabilization, hierarchy tracing to a distant past, and organic, non-class, social organization, a grand recipe for elites' dominance of the social order.

Traditionalize industrialism and, besides enabling, preserving, and enforcing the status quo, one goes a step further, unleashing the military factor as necessary to national self-preservation. The more national heritage is dressed in a distant past (Germany, Italy, Japan, and, less so, America), the more easily the ennoblement of the folk, the virtues of hierarchical ordering of structure, the glorification of Order. America, in light of its comparatively recent origins, has it both ways: mythologizing similar themes adapted to liberal rhetoric, claims of modernity and its putative association with democracy (while industry has been consolidated, wealth concentrated, and foreign policy activated to perhaps unprecedented heights).

If for present-day capitalism in America, if not Japan, the industrial/manufacturing base declines, as now happens, emphasis is being placed on preserving the strength of the national entity via a strong military. (Trade and finance cannot give the assurance that weaponry, intervention, or war can—a feeling finding ample precedent in tradition.) The village-principle may suggest a vein of anti-city, anti-industry, and anti-central authority sentiment, all to the good from a fascist worldview, a propagandistic effort at misdirection to avoid scrutiny of the power-relations between industrialists, generals, and the Nazi party. But the village qua lifeblood of the Nation serves even better in its ideological clarity, particularly the synthesis of the two, by circuitously bringing back the military into view: in Japan, strong village, strong military; large cities are soft, corrupt. The confusion sowed (Tokyo hardly a hamlet; village youth, the ideal conscripts in point of fact) appears contradiction-free when the totality of the political culture is invoked.

Fascism is an essay in cleanliness, the reason being, I suspect, anality in personality structure (or analogous psychosocial development in which fixation plays a part), as in the meticulous way of wreaking havoc, a



seeming bursting out from repression which releases destructive urges. The individual, despite the crowded rallies and the military symbolism, is self-enclosed, purposely by preference, but also structurally, the easier thereby to control and manipulate. Nazism's effectiveness in culture-molding owes to the effective isolation of the individual, this, combined with the amassing of terrifying power, in symbol and fact, juxtaposed to the isolated person. There is no such thing as going one-on-one with the State; the individual is reduced to an empty vessel within which hateful ideology is poured and constraints imposed on daily life. Xenophobia, fear of the stranger, and ethnocentrism, the we–they dichotomy, both conspicuous features of the fascist mindset, bring structure and alienation together in the harmony of racial (the superior folk) fellowship.

## 7 FOLKISH CAPITALISM: THE INDUSTRIAL BASE ETHERIALIZED

This offers an alternative set of psychodynamics from that in Marx's analysis of the significance of commodity production. It is as though a plea for homogeneity, no *they*, no *stranger*, just we, *we* are all *we*. I am not paraphrasing Gertrude Stein here; this is merely another theme specific to Japan in the interwar years (whether borrowed from, or taught to, Germany, where one finds a similar rationale for the expansion of power), the desire to free Asian countries from European imperialism/colonialism, the idea being homogeneity in Asia: Greater Asia Principle. (I can almost hear the tanks crossing the border into Poland in September 1939.) Homogeneity doesn't answer fully, however, for Japanese motivation, and rather homogeneity in the service of dominance, as the record in World War II and constant altercations during the interwar years show. Homogeneity at home, in any case, spells trouble for democratic social organization, with the scapegoat waiting at the edges, and appeals to solidarity a convenient means of suffocating political and social dissent.

### 7.1 *Accommodation: Homogeneity and Plebeian Fascism*

In light of the 1937–40 period in Japan, the crushing of labor and radical organizations, and rise of still more patriotic societies, one might say that if there had not been a New Deal in America, the USA could have *been* Japan. That thought is particularly fresh today. Fascism is not all top-heavy

Industrial Junkerdom with accompanying brass. It is also plebeian, for different reasons, in different historical circumstances, a frustrated working class giving vent to its pent-up aggression. So much depends on context. In America, the New Deal created sufficient ideological appeal, policy advancements, and structural inclusion, that working people had valid reason for identification with the purposes enlivening political society and the benefits deriving from welfare and unemployment policies. In America, however, as I write, the working class has verged into plebeian fascism with a vengeance, a reservoir of racism among white workers, along with pro-war vituperation, and a decline in authentic militancy in favor of the recent opioid culture of nihilism. The reason for this extreme case of demoralization and indifference is the lack, unlike the New Deal period, of a supporting culture of class, protest, and radicalism.

A key factor in the incipience of fascism in America is, alternatively, the betrayal of the working class's own dreams of freedom, languishment instead in self-pity, and capitalism's success in fostering a spirit of accommodation based on the denial of class, protest, and radicalism. One does not expect the middle classes to be the spearhead for, and custodian of, democratization. *That* role historically and objectively has been and presumably is to be fulfilled by the working class. This is less likely today than ever in the nation's history; before the New Deal, the experience of struggle created the spirit and honed the commitment and agitational skills that richly endowed the history of industrial violence. Working people, of course, lost, but they forged a class, which today is no longer present. America could have validated its democratic credentials in such a victory; instead, plebeian fascism is a real prospect (when the right demagogue comes along).

As it is, America's politicization of the anticommunism issue after the war left it second to none in ferocity concerning the commitment to order, the same intuitive and heartfelt belief as with Japan in homogeneity as the solution to many problems, a glorification of the in-group that had both racial and economic significance. This makes more understandable the contemporary acceptance of the Cold War mindset—all of which has been so successful as to be with us in our structural and psychological DNA, so to speak, at this very moment. Russia and China have replaced World War II Germany and Japan, only, if possible, seen as a greater long-term threat (the Axis we could defeat, present-day adversaries, a looming question mark). This brings me back to fascism and homogeneity.

## 7.2 *Antiradicalism: Manipulating a Sense of Danger*

America prides itself on its evenness, no revolution or coup in modern industrial times, or even attempts in these directions; one might turn that around, however, for it suggests weakness of those below, no militant labor or radical organizations. One does not have to endorse coups or revolutions to realize that *national polity* (an essential principle in Japanese political theory), its unified, non-class features making possible fascism from above, is common to both Japan and America. The clear structural-ideological channel downward, where no resistance has been offered, explains how a fascistic direction, gradual, its direction from above, is possible. The Cold War was an ideal context (encountering Bolsheviks) for the means of strengthening monopoly capital. This was no longer a matter of divert-the-gaze of the masses, but the full-scale mobilization of society in wiping clear the democratic slate—in both Japan and America, anticommunism the means of achieving popular unification and the further structuralization of advanced capitalism.

National polity fits America as well as it does Japan. The fact of there being few communists in, and not a threat to, either society, and yet, in both, an overreaction, perhaps deliberate, speaks to the opportunist character of the political moment. Antiradicalism is the vehicle not only for monopolization, but also for drawing inward, tightening the in-group's identity in both and, for Japan specifically, the analogous family-principle. Everything points to creating an hierarchical framework based on the Leadership Principle (with America itself its corporeal embodiment). Again in both nations, ersatz radicalism became the whipping boy, the message, conform, supplemented by an invitation to being absorbed. McCarthy was an apt figure ("I have in my hand") for the age, Kitta and lesser known nationalists his counterpart in Japan. The exploitation of fears was critical to steering both countries rightward.

Maruyama succinctly puts the matter: "There was a powerful inclination to regard as dangerous all trends towards political and ideological diversity that might interfere with the homogeneity of the community (the 'spirit of harmony'). This tendency becomes strong in direct proportion to the acceleration of a sense that the structure is in danger." One wants to add, create the sense of danger *first* to ensure the spirit of harmony follows. For that spirit ensures feelings of classlessness (for those below) and complicity in national policy and business aggrandizement (for the same strata of society). The description applies equally to the USA:

amplify the danger to ensure the homogeneity. And hence, one finds fascist attacks “on marginal ideologies in concrete situations.” One lesson to be learned from the Japanese experience for the historical direction America is taking, is: capitalism without revolution in its life cycle, even a bourgeois revolution, which the American Revolution was *not*, too much, as with slavery, left intact, historically paves the way for fascism. In sum, capitalism without revolution is fascism. To reduce American history to one sentence, Locke is no Robespierre.

Not merely did the American Revolution leave slavery intact, but it also by definition left capitalism intact. This may seem strange at first sight, because of course it left capitalism intact. But if so, then it was hardly a revolution. The point is, America reproduced itself as capitalistic at every moment of national development, the abolition of slavery clearing the historical boards of one remaining drawback—the fiction being, a bourgeois revolution, yet, led by the railroad sector, a straight-line projection over several decades to monopoly capital and destruction of all fictions, bourgeois or democracy itself. Self-reproducing capitalism affords little to no opportunity for alternative historical paths, except fascism, not because of an intrinsically linear pattern from capitalism to fascism, but because intermediary obstacles to that outcome (e.g., socialism, or possibly, Third Way welfare-oriented capitalism) have been discarded, ruled off the structural agenda, and so on. Here a vital labor movement, within capitalism, might be a useful check, so, too, the decentralization of economic power, and, not least, the rejection of a determination to achieve world hegemony via military power—*none of these obstacles*, much less all together, were or are emplaced or presented consistently as living options in the nation’s history and/or political development.

## 8 NON-TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE: THE OLD ORDER RENEWED

Absolutism of America (Exceptionalism), joined to monopoly capital, where each reinforces the other, is similar to Japan, where absolutism has a different referent (Emperor, Nation, National Polity), with the same result: a linear historical track, non-transformative social change. Japan did not have a bourgeois revolution; instead, its straight-line historical-ideological projection was encapsulated within pre-modernism as the basis for industrial society. The USA *was* the bourgeois revolution, but from the

outset this defined the Old Order as well as the New, a continuity, rather than variegated development, an historical constant, as one continuing Old Order. Because it was not transformative, the American Revolution, only confirmatory, gave out to a projection of unrelieved sameness, implying there was no need for revolution, or that separation provided a weak impetus for change. If American capitalism was born mature (Hartz), it was thus already Lockean, a springboard to further consolidation and modernization.

Modernization had been sundered from democratization. The same held true for Japan. The transformation of American history (*pace* Beard's interpretation of the Civil War) was never that; additive, not qualitative. I speak of Modern Feudalism, even when feudalism *per se* was not present. We are fleshing out hierarchy and homogeneity, or better, the superimposition of hierarchy on homogeneity (or perhaps the reverse), a more than adequate working definition of fascism in skeletal form. To that must be added the de-politicization of the masses, thence their reintegration into the Nation, the folk, or simply, an Exceptionalist America. And unlike the British parliamentary system, there would be the raising of the Leader above the political parties, a secular deification as it were. Emperor, President, it doesn't matter, neither office of course is *simon-pure*, above the fray, yet the fiction must be preserved, to legitimate the system of political economy and symbolize a unified Nation embarked on a permanent state of war. This fits America to a "t"; whether Japan completes the same journey, time will tell.

# Liberal Dimensions of Structural Uniformity: Capitalism and National Power

## I SANITIZATION OF VIOLENCE: AN INDIFFERENT PUBLIC

American gradualism was once considered a redeeming feature for identifying, exposing, and combating extremism. It has become a form of extremism when major political-structural-ideological currents are allowed to pass unexamined or unnoticed. Presently, this is reflected more in subterranean actions and values than as a concrete, specific threat. The militarization of capitalism, as a component of fascism, however decisive to twentieth-century world history, fails to excite interest, yet confirms one's fears, because it represents decades in the normalization of policies devoted simultaneously to capitalist and military expansion. The former draws a blank stare, the latter, patriotic fervor.

### *1.1 Liberalism/Conservatism: A Shared Political-Structural Continuum*

A fusion of identities results in a single, harmonious entity. In this case it is seemingly liberal because of simplistic views of government regulation, and because in America the prefascist configuration of beliefs, values, and actions had already been etched in stone. The synonymy between democracy and capitalism is an accomplished fact, as is becoming true of militarism and capitalism. The former I take to be now more important (for analytical purposes) because it provides a justification for negating regulation and for promoting the centralization of wealth and power. This is

thought somehow safe or inconsequential because democracy provides its stamp of approval and would not have it otherwise. Also, there is the cultural emphasis on the benefits of leadership, order, and participation (in the empty exercise of power). As for the synonymy between militarism and capitalism, that is an historical work in progress, my emphasis on armed drone assassination a prophetic guide to America's future.

Self-regulation, by definition, is non-adversarial. It is only the tip of the structural iceberg. A volcano is more like it—given the overall propensity for war, militarism, and large-scale defense expenditures, always ready to erupt in perceived threats to America's national interest, capitalism chiefly at issue. Eroding the iceberg or seething beneath the volcanic mass is a capitalism beset with difficulties and an America showing unmistakable signs of decay, again, an inseparableness anticipating further steps in the concretization of liberal fascism. Capitalist difficulties and societal decay appear reciprocally exacerbating in fomenting extremism.

Emblematic of liberalism in America, modernity on display, and high-tech weaponry, is drone assassination, the human factor (including boots on the ground) supposedly eliminated. Liberal, too, because spotless (save for the blood splat) is sanitized killing at one with depersonalization of the victim, desensitization toward the deed. Finally, liberal, as well, because the public approves or is indifferent, but generally not critical. A culture of violence is channeled into acceptance of the topsy-turvy world that created it. In that world we find among other signs a foreign policy of intervention and regime change, a domestic policy of regulation that does not regulate, a working class sullen, habituated to fatalism and compliance with presidential authority wherever it might lead, and a radicalism enmeshed in cultural wars rather than class wars.

Why liberal, therefore? Because this does not take into account the other side of the ledger, or rather, *does*—a conservatism stripped of its traditional philosophical concerns and embroiled in all manner of fears and loathing, including an obsessive regard for national security. Even assassination and waterboarding look good by comparison, as measured against a strident, bellicose yearning for abandonment of all restraint in international politics. The form it takes could unleash savagery, first, in counterterrorism, and then, saturation bombing, and then, paramilitary (including CIA) operations of regime change.

On this slippery slope, liberals and conservatives are on the same continuum. The latter are slightly further down the track, the former, magnifying the slight difference for ideological purposes, support, rather than resist, the

main drift of policy. The extreme reactionary character of American public opinion so obfuscates the character of the political-ideological spectrum that, almost by default, current public policy inherits the term “liberal,” actually correctly used, but in America, to be equated (incorrectly) with radicalism. This gives heft and substance to the designation “liberal fascism,” as the normalization of interpenetration and the attractiveness of war, intervention, the whole kit and caboodle of counterrevolution.

### 1.2 *Harmonious Framework: Synchronization of Capitalist Development*

To be liberal is to speak well of humanity, meanwhile cutting its throat, domestically, through regulation (as favoring dominant interests sector by sector, the full weight of government behind the consolidation-monopolistic process for supervision and enforcement), and through war (a prime stimulus toward monopoly capital and the system’s externalization projected onto the world scene). The resulting harmonious working relationship of regulation and war strengthens the internal structure of capitalism via interpenetration between business and government, and, that as precondition, it strengthens monopoly capital via world trade and involvement, maximizing the power and influence of US capitalism in international politics and economics. This two-pronged stage of modern American capitalist development serves to extol the virtues of harmony (presumed good in its own right) between business and government and policies facilitating cooperation between the two (cooperation another token of the good).

Meanwhile, capitalism becomes the inner mechanism of national power. In Japan and America (emphasis here on the latter), the military factor provides the leverage for the expansion and enlargement of foreign markets, ideological influence, and the promotion of military and trade alliances, one invariably making way for the other. All else under structure flows from the capitalism–State relationship; in this unified power arrangement, structure develops class, more particularly, a ruling class, as necessary to chart, supervise, and maintain the course of capitalist development, both at home and abroad, and their synchronization. Otherwise, presumably lies chaos, worse still, socialism. There is an ideological coalescence on antiradicalism, which gives a sense of inevitableness to this particular construction of capitalist development. Moore, in *Social Origins*, learning from Maruyama, termed this “modernization from above.”



For America, though, a caution must be entered. It would seem premature to speak of a ruling class as such. The capacity for acting in a unified way appears weakened by the continued rise of new sources of wealth (e.g., the rapidly rising technology sector), and because the American reading and practice of globalization creates competing pressures within the national economy (e.g., the search for overseas profits—corporate inversion—in seeking favorable tax costs, industrial sites for lowered wages, outsourcing in general). Still, this multidirectional flow of energies redounds back to the solid core of the system; hence, the opportunity offers for strengthening the class structure, whether or not yet assuming ruling-class proportions. The overseas dimension of national capitalist development *is* a logical structural progression of capitalism, having antecedece in the Open Door policy for the USA, but also, in general systemic terms, tracing back to mercantilism, colonialism, and imperialism. As a purely domestic manifestation, American capitalism long ago would have proven a flop, which is to say, capitalism in America is as much capitalist as it is American, circumstances determining when one or the other element takes precedence, although when possible a combinative structure is infinitely preferred.

## 2 AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL FILTER: STRUCTURALLY MEDIATED CONTENT

Our contemporary period, broadly conceived, begins from the aftermath of World War II. It is one in which American capitalism is prideful of its global ascendancy. Yet, if one could speak of systemic introspection (figuratively, and not to be guilty of reification), it also is secretly fearful, manifesting the determination (one possible psychological interpretation of the Cold War) *not* willingly to go under, or be the architect of its own demise. Globalization, at least as business and government leaders see it, represents the affirmation of American leadership in the world. To others, it may best resemble an act of desperation, to prevent slippage into the intermediate ranks of the world's economic powers. Whatever one's views, present difficulties signal intra-capitalist tensions and rivalries *within* the American economy. Yet in bold outline, the tensions and rivalries somewhat, if not completely, vanish at a higher level of abstraction, where the conservation of capitalism is involved or at stake. We therefore see structure becoming code for its own militarization in recent years, as though this was indispensable for economic growth and, ideologically, feeding an addiction for war and correlative activities as vital to the national psyche.

## 2.1 *Culture-Molding: Habituation to Particular Societal Roles*

The suspicion arises; America perhaps is unable to subsist without resort to war (and certainly the preparation for war). This can be seen in the imbalance between domestic and foreign policy, especially in that over-weighting the military budget all but nullifies a vital social safety net. (It is not out of the question that this is the reason for such large-scale allocations and expenditures for defense—not national security, but starve the beast of welfarism. Instead of, better dead than red, or red than dead, the military pipeline ensures that one be neither dead *nor* red.) Even though domestic and foreign policies and priorities are systemically inter-related, foreign is proving increasingly decisive—the tail wagging the dog—to foster growth, cushion business profitability, and ward off stagnation at home (these, of course, in addition to saving the world from communism, socialism, and terrorism). Absent the military factor, capitalism would look very different in America, and America look very different to itself. It would result in taking a plunge in world power-rankings and possibly lead to frustration and disillusionment, the raw stuff of a developing fascist sensibility and accelerating the process of fascistization in order to make up for lost time. Paradoxically, imperialism might delay rather than advance this historical-structural process.

Fascistization does not place the psychodynamics of authoritarian submission in a deterministic mold. The age-old analytic concern, the relation between mind and society, offers still no iron-clad conclusion, either about the nature of the interaction, or the relative emphasis to be put on each factor. What is apparent, though, is the culture-molding effect of social structure. The individual is not so much lost in an intricate epistemological maze, as subject to specific policies, to which he/she may actually have assented, as in habituation to assuming a particular role in society, heavily influenced by class, culture, and ideology.

These last are not impersonal forces divorced from humankind, but directly its creation, except that a filtering mechanism is and remains present. The substance of class, culture, and ideology cannot escape history itself in the form of structure and political economy. These, too, are not the product of divine intervention or posited as, a priori, present prior to and independent from individuals whose lives contribute to their shaping and substance. Reification is the enemy of epistemological awareness and understanding, whether one speaks of politics or poetry, bank notes or musical notes. The human factor is the *center* of motivation, acting, learning; self-embodied structure is mysticism even Wagner would not touch.

## 2.2 *Refraction: Capitalist Medium of Epistemological Passage*

When we turn now to the third set of defense mechanisms, the psychological, it appears not independently *causal* so much as having been locked into the overall posture of America qua a capitalist-refracted moral system. By locked-into, one means inseparable from the conditions which give it—psychological factors, in this case—meaning and content, that is, capitalism, having a specificity of time, location, class structure, whatever influences are at work in the shaping of consciousness. Refraction is not necessarily distortion; here, it refers to (beyond the moral system, the totality of the social system) *passing through*, of substantive meaning and content, the medium of capitalism, as drawn from institutions, political economy, knowledge, values, and so on. Capitalism, the medium of epistemological passage, imparts to whatever is contained in the social system a particularity of definition capitalistic in nature and association.

Thus mindset and social structure are mutually interactive; socialist valuations do not emanate from a capitalist political-ideological setting. Not that they could not, for the individual's will has resisted oppression from time immemorial, but that all the pressures society can muster to habituate the individual to an acceptance of established roles, values, procedures, and defeat whatever is thought subversive or antithetical to its stability and security, are put in place and made historically operable. Society is not an Hobbesian Ogre or Giant lumbering through the political landscape, but individuals organized in power-relations, given ideological legitimation, structurally expressed in an hierarchical class-framework, disproportionately weighted to those at the top. The point being, social structures have an epistemological filter by which to monitor the raw materials of knowledge and understanding, determining, if at all possible, what can be safely passed through, bolstering order and existing power.

Perhaps better than filter, epistemological cheesecloth will do; for, stoppage only encourages rebellion. So long as the relevant sources provide capitalistic meaning and implication, mission accomplished. Systemic refraction preserves political-economic-ideological content; passing through signifies transmission of structurally mediated content to the individual. Structure does not produce mindset, nor does mindset, acting in a vacuum, produce structure. Simply, influences are present in both directions and at all times.

My concern is a societal conditioning of the human being, to be understood and *resisted*. Structure-mediation-understanding-consciousness, if

in epistemological flow, still there is never a one-to-one correspondence. In our case, capitalism is a vast epistemological fountain, structure and individual splashing around together, a water fight ensuing over the shaping and constraining of thought, behavior, and responses to be made to historical circumstances as they arise and perhaps linger and become determinative in peoples' lives. One nevertheless holds one's breath, attempts at suasion growing more intense, persistent, and far-reaching with time. Once it was thought epistemology had touched the foundations of knowledge; now, perhaps cynically, one looks for antecedent factors, culture itself possibly hiding from view systemic factors related to *whole* societal formations, each, capitalism, socialism, and so on, determinative in shaping both the conditions and content of learning.

### 3 PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF AUTHORITARIANISM: ALIENATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

At the very least we see a bastardized pragmatism, less Jamesian (William, not Henry), than programmed for one's personal advantage and advancement. It is measured by how well the individual conforms to the ideological premises of the social order (capitalism in this instance). Instead of measuring practical consequences against belief, the utility of capitalism itself is of first priority, *its* well-being and prosperity of foremost concern. This is capitalistic Nirvana, except that it has already been normalized, a closure to end all closures, wherein capitalism is the final referent to all that transpires.

#### *3.1 Self-pacification: Absence of Meaningful Choice*

The individual's flattened affect is a dominant societal characteristic, with desensitization a correlative trait. This is fostered by consumerism and the still more important separation of individuals, one from another, into a persistent state of anomie. Yet one demands further explanation, flattened affect itself a psychological response to a social order not providing meaningful choices. This has led to a condition of collective self-pacification having an inwardly subdual effect on the desire for social change. Habituation to such an outcome leads to the devolution of life-impulses, moving from paralysis to a sea of emptiness. One's choice is thus reduced

between anomie and alienation, lack of purpose, on one hand, indifference, isolation, fragmentation of the self, on the other. Advanced capitalism provides the picture of frenetic societal energies going nowhere, compounding a sense of aimlessness and further fragmenting the self and interpersonal relations.

War, and the always-preparation for war, produces a perpetual state of fear and insecurity. It is masked by feelings of superiority, protestations of greatness, and an all-too-obvious self-righteousness. Psychology harnessed to structure and culture provides a massive wall around the individual, the better to initiate through the class system (human action and behavior, not a reification of the system) an indoctrination into society's basic expectations, aspirations, and rules of conduct. The individual stands rather naked in the process, a volatile mix of anxiety fueling hostility directed both inward and outward in which belligerence seeks completion in war and conquest.

How much the inward-directed anxiety provides the build-up for aggression taking the form of war, I cannot say; what is apparent, though, is the instability of the psychological economy when society neither contributes, nor is responsive, to structural impulses for life-giving features of human development. In that case, anomie, alienation, hostility, all would remain and probably intensify. Rather, if conditions of liberation were sought and obtained, they, like air escaping an open balloon, would be expelled into a thin cloud, both the individual and society alike having a better chance at restoration to a non-alienated wholeness.

### *3.2 Human Objectification and Aggression: Marx and Freud*

In the individual's psychological economy, division reigns supreme. Ethnocentrism and xenophobia vie for primary influence in defining one's identity; since they both tap the same reservoir of discontent and frustration, they are essentially similar and work in tandem. In one, there is the insistence on the superiority of one's group, America itself, and the derivation of strength from that allegiance. In the other, there is the internalization of an habituated we-they dichotomy expressed as the fear of the stranger, and generally, a phobic reaction to whatever is different. The close relation of these mental states, each prohibitive of introspection, and hence ideally accompanying a generalized aggression, provides the primordial context of what is most psychologically distinctive about character formation in capitalism: alienation.

Marx more than Freud is our guide here, and their fusion, as in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, yields a sparkling analytic framework. There is no better starting place for the discussion of alienation than Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The mental structure of commodity relations, far more than his emphasis on revolution in the *Communist Manifesto*, constitutes a principal indictment of and challenge to capitalism. This is necessarily to be integrated with Freud's analysis of repression, the dynamics of transference, and reaction formations to shield against self- and societal-liberation, together, the icing on the analytic cake. Fromm's *Escape From Freedom* says quite well, in non-technical terms, the problem here, the fear of liberation from repression which I, but not the author, lay at the door of capitalism, a system of class-emasculatation which represents the prevention of basic social change.

Alienation is everywhere present, a dichotomization of the self which involves separation in the failed search for authenticity. In myriad settings of interpersonal dealings, one's egoism comes to the fore, reducing others to impersonal objects, indeed, the objectification of persons and things, fending off human contact. This strident assertion of ego (made respectable in Adam Smith's elaboration of self-interest) paradoxically reveals its opposite, ego-loss, in the societal conditioning which makes assertiveness necessary in the first place. An historical-structural equipoise, wherein the ego is subject to neither stridency nor loss is clearly difficult to come by, pressures toward human objectification the outward manifestation of unresolved psychological tensions stemming from capitalism's encouragement of a compensatory inflation of character.

### 3.3 *Dynamics of Human Separation: Societal Context*

Capitalism represents the deformation of the individual. One cannot be oneself, and rather one becomes the system miniaturized. Self-knowledge is filtered through a sieve screening out negative or subversive intellectual and cultural matter otherwise potentially having a liberating effect from commodity structure, objectified social relations, and solipsistic identity. If liberation were possible, commodification, objectification, solipsism, all could then be supplanted with a vision of human autonomy predicated on character formation whose point of origin is an alternative social-political system. In such a system, the individual would be accorded integral respect irrespective of status and ideological claims. Conversely, the instrumental use of others (and possession of objects) is internalized to designate self-worth.

More than is better; ownership becomes, next to godliness, the highest attribute of humankind. "What's in it for me?" the prototypic alienated person asks, revealing rock-bottom separation which illustrates a searing fissure of social bonds. Rather than a declaration of greed (far down in importance to the workings of alienation), we see a broken, perhaps unrepairable, ego-formation, an incapableness for feeling or expressing love. The individual becomes isolated from humanity (including his/her own). To the extent that alienation characterizes American life, isolation predominates. Sherwood Anderson poignantly described this isolation from the self and others. None is immune from it: the rise of a societal context which breeds a forced, inflated sense of self, indifference to others, and, seen in policy and the national temperament, stored-up aggression ready to explode.

Invidious comparison, Veblen's conclusion on the preceding dynamics of human separation, allows one to see the near-infinite gradations in all areas of capitalist life. Alienation breeds a gnawing resentment in the individual, vengefulness part of life's equipment in capitalism when one feels deprived of identity, legitimation, distinction, and consolation. Fritz Pappenheim's book *The Alienation of Modern Man* is a modern classic that combines the work of Marx and Ferdinand Tonnies into an inquiry that explores how the commodity under capitalism divorces use value from exchange value, favoring or permitting only the latter to hold. The result is to convert human relations into exchange relations. Leonard Kreiger's *German Idea of Freedom* also treats alienation starting from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

In the frontispiece for Pappenheim's book we find the Goya etching of the alienated man stealing the gold from a corpse's teeth while averting his gaze to his action, the shutter going through his divided self. In microcosm, as Goya intended his work, we have a scathing commentary on human separation and lack of fulfillment. The image suggests more, the separation rooted in the *self*, alienation, beyond lack of elemental human contact with others, becoming, for that reason a form of structural schizophrenia, individual self-division as the mental state arising from capitalism. The instrumental life in view, one has a compelling reminder of the defensive barriers that are erected to self- and social knowledge, an ideal breeding ground for the pacification of the individual as the desired essential condition of capitalism and the State.

PART II

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Praxis: Customary Practice  
or Conduct



## Framework of Corporatism: Contrasts in Leadership (FDR vs. Obama)

[October 8, 2012, nearly one month before the election, Obama, opposed by Mitt Romney, is completing a presidential term which, claiming the mantra of liberalism (by my emphasis on its antiradical dimension, inadvertently true), continues the work of his predecessor, George W. Bush. He adds to foreign policy the escalation of drone assassinations, further intervention and efforts at regime change, and so on. To domestic policy, he provides support, still further back, for the financial and banking sectors along Clinton-Rubin lines, and corresponding regulatory and trade policies of a pro-business nature. Obama demonstrates relative lack of leadership on the environment, gun control, climate change, labor organization, employment, and even racial justice.

Writing still early in the discovery process of Barack Obama (for election to a second term did not change either his record or political creation of a liberal image), I did not give him, as did many, a free pass, but saw through the ideological hype and found him to be profoundly reactionary, as measured by an aggressive, interventionist foreign policy, surrounded by advisors bent on re-setting the Cold War, now more completely embracing China in its scope, and doing little, on the domestic front, to correct for the grossly inequitable distribution of wealth. Nevertheless, he is on his way to sweeping to another electoral victory. This entry was in response to *The New York Times'* coverage of the Obama–Romney presidential debate the preceding evening.]

## I OBAMA'S FAILURE: ERECTION OF WALLS, PERSONAL AND STRUCTURAL

*The Times'* coverage of Obama's performance in the first debate, which supporters and opponents alike have characterized as ill-prepared or lackluster, and which he in his Denver speech and his staff sought to excuse as the surprising persona of Romney, misses a central point. Focusing on Obama's personality traits, I find the debate revelatory: Obama cannot take criticism; he surrounds himself with staff designed to bolster a weak ego-structure; his vigorous nodding in the debate indicated not so much sulking as it did a deflation, a drawing inward; he is not used to going man-on-man with another, as was the case with Romney. If I am correct, several questions arise. Why the closing down within himself, his intolerance toward personal criticism, his thin-skin-ness—all in contrast to Romney's evident comfort in feeling at one with himself, directness, looking Obama in the eye?

I mentioned weak ego-structure, which takes on greater significance by the way Obama has thrown the cloak of the state secrets doctrine around his government and employed the Espionage Act against whistleblowers. Transparency in government is at a new low. Defensive walls, personal and structural, have been erected, and on the former, which concerns us here, explanation has to lie in family circumstances and Obama's clear difficulties in relating to authority. More than any president, Republican or Democrat, perhaps throughout American history, Obama gravitates to men of power and, equally significant, thrives on becoming immersed in the trappings of power. Harding, Hoover, Reagan, Bush II, have all enjoyed closeness with business leaders, yet none via ambiguous psychological attachments. Obama has not been so fortunate. And what passes for bipartisanship in the political realm and accommodation in the economic is the steady need for reassurance, of being praised and even liked. Romney had a more supportive upbringing.

These traits do not necessarily have a one-to-one correspondence with ideology. Human personality is not politically coded; those with solidary family ties may become social Darwinists, those poorly resolving intra-familial ties may be highly compassionate. But in Obama's case it is imperative that, absent David Axelrod's manipulations and Ben Rhodes' crafting of liberal rhetoric, we see the man removed from the artificial pedestal on which he has been placed in order to evaluate his record dispassionately. This is hardly a plea for Romney's election, but it is to say that because to

his base Obama can do no wrong, his policies, as on banking regulation and job creation, stand in need of exposure. They may have discrepancies equal to or greater than those charged to his opponent. At least in Romney, you get what you see—and one is then free to make a determination.

## 2 AMERICA ON THE CUSP OF FASCISM: PROBING THE UNTHINKABLE

[October 12, 2012, several days later, uncertain about whether or not to keep a journal, I am concerned that even if the entries are sporadic, better than being forced they should be spontaneous. This decision frees me up, after the first try, to explore a broader range of topics, as now. Here, still in the 2012 campaign, I draw the distinction between plebeian and corporatist fascism, represented inchoately, respectively, by Romney and Obama. The latter I take to be more dangerous, because associated with the structural engineering and energizing of modern power; this fosters precisely the interpenetration of business and government favorable to State-sponsored and -protected privatization and its hierarchically derived class system. That Romney's pro-business/antilabor beliefs and record are well known, while Obama's on quite the same lines are disguised or hidden from view, makes the latter a more serious threat to democratic government because more difficult to expose and combat.]

I use "fascism" not as a cliché, but as an historical-structural formation principally rooted in the mature stage of capitalism. In this formation, business-government interpenetration (what the Japanese political scientist Maruyama Masao called the "close-embrace" system) has created hierarchical social classes of wide differences in wealth and power, the militarization of social values and geopolitical strategy, and a faux ideology of classlessness to instill loyalty for the social order among working people. In fact, each of these factors is already present to a high degree in America—superbly disguised however by the rhetoric of liberalism, as in Obama's presidency.

### 2.1 *Bipartisan Policy: Replication of Opponents' Central Elements*

This said, my provocative hypothesis (only slightly tongue-in-cheek) is that in the coming election Romney is preferable to Obama. Why? In broad terms, we see varying degrees of sophistication in the mad dash

across the finish line (i.e., fascism proper, midway between nascent and full blown), with Romney and Republicans representing plebeian fascism, and Obama and Democrats a sophisticated corporatist form.

Everything charged against Romney may be true, from Social Darwinist beliefs and gut-militarism to cultural intolerance and xenophobia, and perhaps even more so for the party as a whole, though that is a moot point—an overt negation, on all grounds, of what we mean by democracy. (Not that America has honored or achieved that state of political-economic development through most of its history!) To pursue the candidacy of Romney involves one in a societal nightmare of unrestrained wealth and the perks that go with it: from horribly skewed taxation policy to categorical setbacks to unions, wage rates, and an antilabor climate, and severe cuts in the social safety net. All this is known, predictable, transparent—part of my argument for viewing Romney as preferable to Obama. Clearly, Trotsky in popularized form is in the back of my mind.

By contrast, Obama is unassailable. He enjoys the protective cloak of the state secrets doctrine (which, also as the National Security State, he invokes constantly), the liberal glossing on all policy matters, thanks to the extremely able spinmeisters Axelrod and Rhodes, and an adoring, submissive, uncritical base, in deep denial and for whatever reasons unwilling to examine the administration's record. That record confirms the long-term political, economic, and moral bankruptcy of the Democratic Party. Its differentiating character, setting it apart from the Republicans, lies in the magnitude of skilled evasion and/or deception surrounding policies which themselves replicate the central elements in those of their opponents. Republicans sincerely criticize Obama because they are too ignorant to recognize, in their rush to antigovernment rhetoric, that he takes the same position as they, smoothed out to please a base at best composed of pretend-radicalism and, equally, to ward off criticism from those who desperately want to believe his earlier promises. This comes down to political theater at its cruelest, or rather, Theatre of the Absurd, Ionesco, a better world beyond our reach, or Beckett and Genet—or to suit my taste, Brecht.

## 2.2 *Executive Agenda: Bread-and-Circuses Ritualization, Monopoly Capital*

The list of actual betrayal is long and covers his public policy almost without exception. For example, on health care, Obama savaged the single-payer system, thus preparing the way for the same on the public

option; meanwhile, he silenced and/or de-legitimated dissident voices, at the same time as exempting health insurers from antitrust prosecution and favoring Big Pharma. On civil liberties, a good litmus test of democratic governance, his Department of Justice argued against granting habeas corpus rights to detainees, invoked the Espionage Act against whistleblowers, and carried surveillance beyond that of previous administrations. His use of the National Security Agency to unprecedented lengths, one of the culprits practicing eavesdropping, is noteworthy, while renditions and “black holes” continue, and even agencies like FDA spy on their employees.

Then there is militarism, from which foreign policy, including trade policy, cannot be excluded. The drone aptly symbolizes, and is emerging as, Obama’s weapon of choice. Its function is terrorization pure and simple, starting with assassination, often in circumstances of inflicting collateral damage (i.e., death of civilian populations). It reeks destruction from the skies and fits well into the military paradigm of sustained confrontation: naval power displayed from the South China Sea to the Mediterranean; the modernization of nuclear weapons under the fiction of arms control, a whole new generation in the pipeline (exempt from potential budgetary sequestration); a military budget itself second to none, in what appears to be viewed as a permanent state of war. Then too there are the omissions, which, by their absence, speak volumes about the purposes and policies of his administration. Job creation and foreclosures have not been addressed. Climate change has wholly disappeared from the Executive agenda, even contraindicated by policies involving pollution and environmental risk. Gun control is nonexistent, poverty, never mentioned, and business and banking regulation merely the compounding of phoniness. The presidential record is not unexpected, given Obama’s belief in deregulation and his recruitment into government of the Clinton-Rubin crowd of free marketers.

How much more or worse damage can Romney and the Republicans inflict? They might protest about same-sex marriage and contraception, while Obama, in his Pacific-first geopolitical vision and concrete strategy, wants to encircle China, and press for an economic agenda promoting further corporate-wealth concentration. One deplores both sets of emphases, but surely geopolitical trump cultural issues when it comes to the foundations of the polity. If Republicans come across as Taliban on cultural issues, Democrats almost surreptitiously advance the financialization of the total economy, with such consequent distortions introduced as a loss of manufacturing, increasing wealth concentration, and capitalism’s Achilles heel, underconsumption.

Why Romney? Because his transparency as the Neanderthal candidate may just bring people into the streets, while under Obama passivity and false consciousness seem almost irreversible. I intend to stay home. The lesser-of-two-evils argument is morally obtuse, and dangerous, the first, because it means complicity with policies ultimately destructive, the second, because it induces an undeserved self-righteousness which next time around would yield further compromise. If the people are gulled and lulled into an acceptance of mock-democracy, whether by Goldman Sachs or, say, the waterboarding-apologist John Brennan, it is Obama who in the last analysis presides over the bread-and-circuses ritualization of a triumphant monopoly-capital formation.

### 3 OBAMA'S DIALECTIC OF BETRAYAL: COMPARISON WITH FDR AND THE NEW DEAL

[October 16, 2012, a gradual entrance into journal-making, the format falling into place, with the pursuit of clear lines of criticism over Obama's policies becoming ascertainable and more evident. This entry is a paean to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal. As a child my own two-year condition of being bedridden (I was 11 and in bed the day FDR died, and I remember it vividly) gave me a sense of special empathy with the president and his long battle with polio, Warm Springs, massages, and simulating walking through the use of heavy braces. He was a symbol to me of struggling America, then wartime, but before, the New Deal. Although I did not become radical till shortly later, as a precocious youngster, my political crush on FDR never left me, and many years later provided me a comparative standard by which to measure Obama, quickly apparent a rank opportunist. My FDR/New Deal studies continued in graduate school at Stanford and Harvard under Frank Freidel, FDR's brilliant and thorough biographer, with whom I subsequently co-edited two documentary collections of American history.

The present entry concerns the implications of leadership, in FDR's case, the dialectic between individual and movement to advance human rights, and, in Obama's case, a dialectic of betrayal, negating the moral bond and vulgarizing the ongoing struggle for societal betterment. In its historical drift downward, America appears unable to affirm itself and its people—except through wealth concentration and war (hardly the stuff of moral affirmation). The present entry, drawing on the preliminary definition of fascism in the one before, is pivotal to everything that

follows, in which fascism, qua structural framework, sets the limits to social change, enclosing boundaries at best yielding a commonwealth of business accelerated by Clinton and the Democrats, brought further along by Obama.]

During the Great Depression, America was a different nation. We were drawn together as a people, even or especially in extreme hardship. Class was a salient term, one to build on, not an object of ridicule subject to obfuscation. We accepted responsibility for one another, solidified in a view of social obligation centered on government as the people's instrument for achieving the public interest. We were not stampeded and frightened away, either by a cultural atmosphere of heightened individualism or organized campaigns by corporations and right-wing ideologues for privatization and trickle-down economics. The refrain, "Brother, can you spare a dime?," in the early days of gathering conviction and will, emphasized the first word—brother. Had I been of age (I was born in 1933—and did not think of myself as a radical until 14–15, with the Cold War and the campaign of Henry Wallace in 1948), I would have been proud to be an American during the New Deal, where public values, public institutions, and public works—as the means for job creation and to address underconsumption—came to the foreground.

### 3.1 *A Positive Dialectic: FDR and Societal Reconstruction*

Leadership matters. Through his speeches, his fireside chats, his example in fighting polio (he would never again walk unaided, heavy braces, leaning on his son's arm, giving the illusion of walking), his warmth, unflappable demeanor, and, yes, charm, Franklin Roosevelt established a bond with his supporters which mutually strengthened both. A positive dialectic: the interplay of political nourishment strengthened the resolve for each leading the other forward. FDR, a conservative at heart, but conservative in ways not understood today, could venture far afield from conventional economics; partly in response, partly nudging him still further, his supporters, a large majority of the American people, could and did lift their own horizons. Perhaps for the first time in American history, they and he could grasp the full meaning, without apology, of *entitlement* as a basic human right.

This dialectic, or interplay, fortifying the conviction, dignity, and resolve of both, was based on the foundation of societal reconstruction: tangible achievement in what today we call infrastructure, but even more, in the

realm of the human spirit, not as an ethereal concept, because food on the table also mattered. To be sure, the outer limits of the New Deal remained capitalistic (i.e., to save capitalism), and there should be no illusion about NRA (National Recovery Administration), which, under Hugh Johnson, promoted the concentration of industry. Nonetheless, the other side of the ledger, much of which was quasi-socialist in nature, or when not, still affirming the primacy of human over property rights, was a veritable alphabet soup of ingenuity and creativity in the service of the social welfare. Pragmatism, not as later usage would have it, to forestall basic change, provided a mindset and analytical framework for uncovering needs and offering solutions to them. If the potential for fundamental change generated by conditions in the Depression was never truly actualized, that, too, was the intention of the New Deal, more than remedial, less than revolutionary.

### 3.2 *Institutional Creation of Social Bonds: New Deal Welfare Programs*

WPA, PWA, CCC, these three alone suffice to constitute, if not a silent revolution, then a Great Reformation, when measured against three centuries of American political culture. Poets' workshops, leaf-raking, federal theater projects, bring tears to my eyes because of the nourishment they gave to those who participated and those whom they reached. America was affirming itself and its people. Odets: "Awake and Sing." There was of course more: the Wagner Act, Social Security, banking and securities legislation, conservation, agricultural policy, the birth of a social capitalism only partially realized, perhaps an oxymoron in the world to follow, yet previously unknown in America.

This was not Roosevelt's doing alone, as though creating a new society from whole cloth. It depended as much if not more on a people responding to the opportunity he provided for self-organization (as in the Wagner Act) and pressuring him leftward because they were mobilizing for concerted action after decades of repression or indifference. FDR's leadership was measured, never demagogic, if anything, a restraining force on change made necessary because of the expectations he raised and the social bond he created with the people legitimating movement toward reform. Government and people were becoming one, not like Germany or Japan, where their identity was being lost in an atmosphere of patriotism, but through the more modest atmosphere of compassion and *specific* programs to give meaning to relief and social betterment. FDR removed the



cobwebs from the people's eyes; the dialectic was consummated in their own assertion of rights for a decent competence, presented to receptive ears. When the "economic royalists" of the period made known their hatred of him, he responded, "and I welcome their hate."

### 3.3 *Fascistization, American Style: A Compliant Mass Base*

The song, "Long ago and far away," from the memorable film of the early 1940s, is a refrain which today would distance events from the New Deal and going back still further that, in political-structural-ideological time, were really *not* that far back, as measured in the steadily rightward shift of America itself. Continuities of development, most, I judge, negative, are important to recall in understanding where America is at present. The New Deal is just over the horizon, yet its warmth of human endeavor is all but banished from memory. One chief casualty of this development was the Democratic Party, which at each step became an accomplice in what I am terming the fascistization of the society at large, including the body politic. America is not fascist, yet, but as both a structural and a social process the trend line seems to me clear.

Fascism does not require the concentration camp, persecution, or torture, although their threat and potential remain present always, ready to be invoked while remaining discretely under the surface. Rather, fascism can be apprehended through a number of indices: for example, extreme wealth concentration; business-government co-partnership, as a structural interpenetration of powerful institutions that promotes monopoly capital, restricts union organization and labor militancy, and creates a strong State predicated on military power and trade supremacy; also encouragement of a compliant, complacent mass base, deferential to power and wealth, tied in ideological knots through both false consciousness and intimidation, intellectually broken through media, propaganda, and signals from above.

Enter then the Obama administration, a mirror image of FDR and the New Deal *in reverse*. One expects reactionary ideology and politics from Nixon, Reagan, Bush I, and Bush II, but surely not from the Democrats, first Clinton, and now, more spectacularly, Obama. Clinton does not concern us here, possibly the most overrated Democrat ever. He has repositioned the American economy—more systematically than his Republican predecessors—on the axis of deregulation, so thoroughly as to cripple any possibility of effective regulation of business and banking in the public interest and, with destroying Glass-Steagall, to pave the way for the financial debacle of 2007.

### 3.4 *Free-Market Ideology: Clinton–Obama, Straight Line Projection*

Clinton has given market fundamentalism a folksy vibe; the administration, from Robert Rubin down, provided corporate America a bountiful feast and shifted the direction of the economic system to finance, widening its reach, at manufacturing's expense, to international channels and in the concoction of exotic, highly profitable, investment vehicles. Here the dialectic between leader and followers turns decidedly negative. With each movement and maneuver away from the people, the people applauded more; Clinton basked in their adulation, nerving him to still greater efforts on behalf of the business community, from trade pacts to personal tributes.

One cannot understand Obama without Clinton—as, not merely background, but a straight line projection: Obama took over much of the Clinton team and all of the free-market ideology focused specifically as the starting point on deregulation. This was not known to Obama's base, his fervent supporters in the 2008 campaign, of whom, despite concerns, I was one, having participated in the civil rights struggle in the late 1950s and through the 1960s, now elated at the election of a black president who talked the language of social justice. With the appointments of Geithner and Summers, however, I was quickly disabused. As the rhetoric soared, the policies plummeted. Few saw this happening as it occurred, and his base remains in a state of profound denial, false consciousness given an exponential boost that neither Marx nor Marcuse could perhaps imagine.

### 3.5 *Obama's Garrison State: Absorptive Liberalism, Potential War*

The honor role of perfidiousness covers a wide swath: the Nobel Prize for Peace for waging war; the New START treaty on nuclear weapons reduction for actually ordering a new round of weapons development under the euphemism of modernization; a teaching appointment and background in constitutional law, for perhaps the greatest setback to civil liberties since the Palmer Raids; massive surveillance, facilitated by advanced technology, as in the National Security Administration usage; reliance on the state secrets doctrine to hide potential war crimes and place government completely out of reach as the National Security State; denial of the right of habeas corpus to detainees; relatedly, the despicable doctrine of indefinite detention; employment of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers,

thereby stifling dissent and criticism where and when they are most needed; and, under civil liberties, I would include the drone attacks, in which the targets for assassination (personally authorized by Obama) are hardly given the right of counsel, a fair trial, or even proper identification. How his base can condone the drone, making them complicit in its use, speaks volumes about the moral bankruptcy of modern liberalism.

Cornel West's remark that Obama is the "black mascot of Wall Street," understates the problem. He is something worse—not a symbolic figure to bring the Street good luck, but a heart-and-soul activist, one we once called "a true believer," who consciously tailors policies to the interests of upper economic groups. This is achieved frequently through omission, the absence of genuine banking regulation, as well as commission, as in favoritism to the oil companies, nuclear power industry, defense contractors, already an unmistakable record of assistance to key sectors sufficient to validate capitalism as so top heavy that the tipping point to fascism is within reach or has been reached.

This active strengthening of capitalism has its clear military and international-economic components. We have become a Garrison State. Obama's foreign policy would make Dean Acheson, National Security Democrat *par excellence*, green with envy. Obama is the next in a long line of Democrats anxious to burnish anticommunist credentials, under whatever name the current enemy may be labeled, a party mistakenly thinking itself, and viewed by others, as to the Left and for that reason wanting to prove to the world its super-patriotism, manifested largely in military prowess and huge defense budgets. Naval power, in the Mediterranean and the South China Sea, the support of dictators (Honduras), and opposition to popular governments (Venezuela), the latter in seeking to remain dominant in Latin America, are examples of a counterrevolutionary global posture; most important, though, Obama is positioning foreign policy, his Pacific-first strategy, with respect to the encirclement and containment of China.

To all of the foregoing, his base is silent, or possibly worse, indifferent. In contrast to the New Deal, there is very little opposition presently in the street, even though the provocation then was less. The Flint Sit-down strike of 1937 might as well have been at the time of the Roman Empire. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), despite its good intentions, has not taken on Obama and the Department of Justice (DOJ). The Occupy Movement has not confronted Obama directly and by name. In other words, the negative dialectic is alive and well, each Obama betrayal met by like passivity in the base, thus giving him reason to think he can continue a policy of absorptive liberalism and potential war, to the advantage of haute capital in America. At the moment, he may be right.

#### 4 THE MORAL CASE FOR SILENCE: ON ALIENATION, COMPLICITY, MARKET IDOLATRY

[October 25, 2012, we are still in Obama's first term, yet the handwriting of corporatism is already on the wall, lascivious graffiti, from the standpoint of peace, social justice, human rights, a substantive regulatory regime for unleashing rather than curbing wealth-and-power consolidation and concentration within the financial and industrial structure of American capitalism. Accelerated political-structural changes mark steps toward the fascistization of America, whether carried on under Democratic or Republican auspices. Here, we enter a rhythm; the tilting toward fascism becomes readily discernible in small as well as large ways, the latter a gradual transmogrification of the polity in the form of the sophisticated corporatism of mature capitalism. With Obama's anticipated victory comes also the victory of privatization as the demolition of socially responsive government. Alienation awaits, silence as passivity rather than as moral outrage.]

Herman Melville's story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," written 160-odd years ago, is more relevant now than ever. Bartleby faces out to a blank wall—the subtitle is, "A Story of Wall Street"—his highest assertion of self being, "I prefer not to." Melville, perhaps America's greatest writer, was making an important statement: meaningful choice has been circumscribed, even by the mid-nineteenth century, in American society. Not only was the heroic turned against itself, but a pervasive condition of alienation defined the individual's inner life and relations to others. One encountered reality through basic compromises of the ideal vision of a democratic polity, so that engagement became complicity in the renewal of one's alienation. Engagement meant accommodation, confinement within walls, perhaps symbolic of capitalism; for why else the powerful imagery of the chosen site? (Bartleby could have been looking out at the Bowery, East River, or Harlem, summoning different images and implications.) The spirit of the Chase had been vanquished, as in *Pierre*, in an empty universe, one without meaning—where transcendence is destruction—and the societal core, a vast theological chasm of Nothingness. This, Melville resolutely opposed; implicitly, he sought liberation, for himself and society.

So, too, did Sherwood Anderson 70 years later. (Today the *New York Times* focuses on Elyria, Ohio, his birthplace and the locale for *Winesburg*, which remains essentially unchanged.) Anderson also captures the

loneliness and sadness of American life, which finds the individual enclosed within walls, so that one's highest affirmation becomes to say "No" to the materialism that trades in false values and destroys the human soul. From Melville to Anderson to the present, America remains in the same condition, only now alienation has penetrated so deeply into the American psyche that it is no longer recognized as alienation, merely, malaise attending modern life. This too, in a roundabout way, explains drone assassination, a personality structure ground down, not even possessing Bartleby's inner strength to say, I prefer not to, and instead accept complicity in a life devoid of self-knowledge and the cooperative social bonds which alone confers dignity on human beings.

#### 4.1 *Sophisticated Conservatism: Transmogrification of Government and Society*

Making the moral case for silence as imperative in the coming election may seem difficult. Liberals and many but not all progressives regard the choice to be crystal-clear: Romney, the Republican Party, and the Tea Partiers in its midst, represent retrograde social forces affecting all sectors of American life. The indictment is merited. Romney seeks a return to the Dark Ages of American capitalism. Both regulation and the social safety net would be severely impaired, and individual privacy would be invaded by a heightened puritanical zeal. Hester Prynne would lurk in every shadow, spied on, spat upon, and ferreted out. In foreign policy, bluntness would rule the waves. One suspects that the Pentagon would be given a blank check to wage perpetual war founded on the belief that America, a pristine land of freedom, is surrounded by enemies, domestic and foreign. From the liberals' standpoint, what could possibly be worse?

I submit, perhaps Barack Obama could be worse. It is not that he fails to transcend the Dark Ages of American capitalism and its rapacious behaviors. In fact, he has, yet in ways that speak to a sophisticated corporatism which already has created societal foundations detrimental to America's root democratic professions of freedom and human rights. These, instead, have been relegated to the mythology of Exceptionalism. Obama, more than his predecessors, is a quintessential spokesperson for mature capitalism, in which government, as custodian of the public interest, is under assault from the forces of privatization, now gathering as a tidal wave which he is blithely surfing. The leader of government presides over its transformation into an annex of Wall Street. This is a

transmogrification, both of government and society, knit together in callous disregard for economic and ethical constraints on greed, extremes in the distribution of wealth, and the widespread privation created by a political economy of market idolatry and financial chicanery.

#### 4.2 *Depersonalized Human Relations: A Massiveness of Anonymity*

Alienation had been classically described as the pain and anguish experienced through feelings of estrangement from one's society. Yet, at least the pain was felt, and therefore could be contested even when the source was unclear. One was not reduced to apathy or passivity. In that meaning, alienation was akin to the recognition (although somewhat blurred) of exploitation, in which case the idea of resistance had not been removed from consciousness.

Today under mature capitalism social structure and cultural institutions are directed to the obliteration of political consciousness, unless of course it calls for—negating its own potential powers and spirit of negation—acceptance of the existing order. Resistance to the actuality of hunger, homelessness, unemployment, home foreclosures, inequality of income and wealth, vast military outlays, all of which speak volumes about the decay of a democratic order, is less than conditions warrant and is almost nonexistent. This is alienation in its modern phase: exploitation is very much present; its recognition is at a low ebb. Obama dances over a spiritual void: the inertia of once progressive social forces, whether labor unions, civil liberties and civil rights groups, or the mobilization of the poor, as in councils of the unemployed at the advent of the Great Depression.

This form of alienation is the more insidious because it inheres in the individual's mass-formation, leading to the depersonalization of human relations in the social order as described by Kafka. At some point, society as a whole *descends* into the massiveness of anonymity, the proverbial black hole, only now replete with skyscrapers, superhighways, and so on, road signs bearing no direction, war clouds forever blocking the sun. Alienation has yielded a monochromatic world of linear-projected capitalism. Depersonalization is one notable characteristic of the modern form of alienation; another is its politicization, which translates into an hierarchical structure of power creating the division between upper and lower social

groups, dominance above, acquiescence below, the latter here referring to working people en masse (fully three-fourths of society) and dissidents of all stripes who still have their wits about them.

## 5 THE REPOSITIONING OF AMERICAN POWER: A REFURBISHED COLD WAR

The behavior of upper groups, base and cruel, is not groundless or irrational. To have millions out of work, many of whom are no longer defined as included in the labor force because of long-term unemployment, others, barely holding on, facing demoralization, ill health, disintegration of family ties, and youth, without prospects, becoming a lost generation, all of these represent a potential tinder box for, if not social revolt, then almost equally to be feared, destabilization of the market society and economy. The poor can only be hidden, ignored, or forgotten up to a point, when the phrase “middle class” as an inclusive social diagram loses its accuracy and celebratory aura. For mature capitalism to achieve optimal functionality, that is, the generation of sustained profits to a small, increasingly cohesive elite, or ruling group, requires strong—or at least presenting the illusion of strength—co-optative leadership capable of absorbing the negative energies it produces.

### 5.1 *Shifting Proportions: Industry and Finance*

In this regard, Obama is the ideal personification of mature capitalism. He is not a front man, cipher, or puppet; instead, he identifies fully with the social order, its hierarchical structure, its social purposes. He needed no urgings from others to betray practically every campaign promise he made in 2008. Today, he is hardly the alternative to Romney, his record reducing him to the same plane as his opponent. For ruling groups, his advantage lies in his facility for dressing retrograde policies in liberal rhetoric and keeping intact an electoral base in the depths of false consciousness. In denial, they cannot see how their interests, including that of the black community, have been violated. Broadly, he and Romney are committed to the Washington Consensus, its faith in market efficiency, rationality, and justness(?), which provides the ideological cornerstone for deregulation of the economy and subordination of government to, while servicing the needs of, business.

Even here, one can debate who has the better argument. Romney emphasizes a stronger manufacturing base, Obama—signaling the new—looking toward the financialization of the total economy. Yet neither position detracts from further wealth concentration and an hierarchical system of power. By deeming finance modern, the wave of the future in economic growth, Obama in practice devalues manufacturing as perhaps pre-modern (a distinction fueled by his rhetorical liberalism). The shift in proportions—the relative weightings assigned industry and finance—of the economic foundation, especially in the context of globalization, industrialization becoming widespread, *intentionally* offers a structural vehicle for greater if riskier profitability through the financial sector. A New American Exceptionalism is informally declared, banking as the ascendant force in achieving national and global prosperity. The hitch is that this has led to some of the shadiest practices in the history of American capitalism: predatory lending, credit default swaps, derivatives trading, exotic instruments having utmost ingenuity, all carrying the message, risk analysis be damned, full speed ahead to enormous profits.

[Disclosure: the reader not interested particularly in the fidelity of chronology will no doubt become impatient with a discussion of the 2012 campaign. I, too, in preparing the manuscript, sometimes have that feeling. Yet I stick to the plan in order to identify issues as they arise, specifically, early indications of Obama's merging of advanced capitalism with a paradigm of American-sponsored globalization effected through a strong military presence in international politics. Thus, for me, 2012 is not dated, but instructive, as is all of the material, evidence of multifaceted government policy, through my closing date, early January 2016. (Of course, different personages, yet striking parallels exist to the 2016 campaign and election.)]

As a result, the global financial community was deeply shaken. This was a disaster in the making for some time. It was most acutely felt not by bankers and fund managers but those whose equity was destroyed in the housing debacle and the poor and the unemployed who faced reductions in social services and benefits. Social misery, though, did not run parallel with enlightenment. Obama's supporters forget or do not wish to be reminded that among his first appointments were Geithner and Summers, representing a straight line projection—and for that reason were chosen—from Clinton administration stalwarts of deregulation.



## 5.2 *The Future Awaits: Deregulation, Globalization, National Might*

The essence of Clintonian economics, under Robert Rubin's tutelage, deregulation, primarily through the repeal of Glass-Steagall, laid the basis for the financial crisis of 2007 and threatens still worse. Dependence on financialization has prompted, under Obama, a bolder program of imperialism, intervention and regime change perhaps compensatory mechanisms to balance the structural *imbalance*, as in more foreign investment, outsourcing, sequestration of raw materials (here, seizure), and the militarization of whatever manufacturing infrastructure remains. This becomes an economic regression dressed as post-industrial society.

The absence of effective financial regulation, true to this day, is evident from the feckless operations of the SEC. This is one dimension of the candidates' basic agreement on policy, essential deregulation disguised as its opposite in banking and finance. Others include such diverse areas (yet forming a unitary perspective of conservatism, if not reaction) as gun control, climate change, oil drilling, the inclusion of coal mining in the energy mix, and despite nuances, immigration policy, and, although Romney is mum on the subject, their common disregard for civil liberties, justified as necessary by the threat of terrorism. On the last-named, it would be difficult for Romney to exceed or match Obama's record in erecting the state secrets doctrine as a first principle of governance. It has led to the National Security State, which features the use of the Espionage Act to discourage whistleblowers, widespread surveillance, the practice of rendition, assault on habeas corpus rights, and approval of indefinite detention.

Yet, Obama appears untouchable; his genius for manipulating the American public, or rather, his base, including the many in distress, is critical to his leadership role in advancing American financial and business interests. The base, resting in adulatory mode, refuses to recognize potential long-term trends that have now been set in motion. Foremost is perhaps the march toward war, which, whether or not consummated, sets up the need for greater defense spending, public habituation to counterterrorism as the widening opportunity for the political-economic-ideological globalization of American capitalism, and a specificity of intervention and regime change having unmistakable geostrategic advantages. Here drone assassination nicely dovetails with paramilitary operations. Trends can also be discerned in, for example, further deregulation or that which proves inefficacious (as witness FDA and Interior Department policies), privatization, and the weakening of the social safety net. In symbolic

terms, the drone may well define the Obama presidency. One does not know whether Romney would closet himself with his advisors and personally authorize targeted assassination. Hopefully not, given that this represents the antithesis of due process and rule of law—a leap into moral vacuity that he would find difficult to match or surpass.

Finally, in foreign policy, Obama, Republican distortions of the record notwithstanding, has been anything but a dove (aka, weak, soft, red), and instead, a robust commander-in-chief who surrounds himself with an aggressive national security team asserting a geopolitical agenda entirely establishment-oriented, one consistent with the main outlines of previous administrations. Obama stands tall on matters of defense, security, and the use of force. He has enlarged the mission of the CIA to include operations, even assigning it responsibilities in drone warfare and securing suitable bases to that end. He enjoys cordial relations with the intelligence community, especially commissioning the National Security Agency (NSA) to conduct massive domestic surveillance. He has become awakened to the imperial possibilities of naval power, deploying forces, as per his Pacific-first strategy, to apply pressures on China, presently unspecified, open-ended, but aimed at its containment and isolation, political, economic, and so on. He has, through assistance to the nuclear power industry, moved forward a new generation of nuclear weapons, modernization equated with lethality. He has assisted paramilitary groups in Columbia in conducting death-squad operations against labor organizers and peasants whose land stands in the way of mineral companies.

Among the foregoing, if one had to choose, what stands out is the “repositioning” of American interest and military forces. Russia has not been thereby neglected, and is still useful in whipping the European Community into line (with implications for stabilizing the Middle East). The Cold War is being refurbished, however, with a new enemy in thrall—China. Obama’s Pacific-first strategy has the added advantage, beyond China’s encirclement, of strengthening alliance systems for that purpose, which then spills over into reportedly urging Japan to rearm and embark on the development of nuclear weapons. Nor has positioning for favorable trade-and-investment outlets globally been neglected.

### 5.3 *Affirmation: An Authentic Alternative Vision*

Let’s recur to the Bartleby-model, negation of present reality the means of affirming a future reality (of societal democratization) or, finally realizing the futility of struggle, withdrawing, succumbing, paralysis, death curled

up in the fetal position. But why even consider failure? Why defeatism? That is precisely the goal of existing institutions. If the situation is not quite that bad, then a culture of trivialness, submission to Authority, which—as Melville would have wanted—*must be resisted*. As I believe Bartleby would hold, affirming silence becomes necessary when, as in the coming election, but also, the wider historical path being pursued, one regards as morally debasing not only a lesser-of-two-evils argument but what stands behind it: willing complicity in the political and cultural mechanisms used to promote exploitation and inequality, societal conditions rooted in hierarchical relations of power having direct economic consequences for every member of society.

Inequality is a cancer. Its spread depends on false consciousness, its treatment and cure on self-knowledge and resistance to policies and practices in the name of, but intended to deceive, the people and deprive them of their rights. My hope is slight that just to say “No” would strike a responsive chord, make for a collective response, become socially popular. The sky may not fall in, but false consciousness would be if not sloughed off at least seriously weakened. And, in turn, the structure of power, in its brutality affecting human dignity, would be exposed for all to see—and ultimately oppose. The chance to project an authentic alternative vision, one no longer beholden to wealth accumulation and its correlates, social misery and division, is worth taking. These are not propitious times for democracy; first must come an awareness of that in order to rekindle the hope in its realization.

## 6 THE CONVICTION GAP: NOTATION ON PERFIDIOUS LEADERSHIP

[December 21, 2012, during the interregnum the nation awaits—what? In the full throes of false consciousness, contrived mechanisms—a liberal manipulation of the electorate via an amiable disposition (once victory is achieved) and false promises—provide for the political-psychological dynamics of mass acquiescence, as meanwhile Obama’s agenda has been left intact, from deregulation and militarism (especially a modernization of the nuclear arsenal) to the Pacific-first strategy and increasing attention to China in a new or reawakened Cold War. The people sleep in holiday cheer.]  
“I don’t think I’ve been on vacation.”

No, Obama, you have been too busy servicing corporate wealth and major banking interests—as well as keeping the USA embroiled in war, intervention, and your signature, armed drones for targeted assassination.

How can we expect you to feel sorrow for the deaths of children at home, when you personally through your authorization inflict death on children abroad?

The world has your number, if America doesn't. There will be no substantial and substantive gun control in your tenure. By echoing Republican themes of mental health, you will sidetrack direct attacks on the issue of gun control.

Shed no more crocodile tears, and please don't be irritated, as a *New York Times* article points out, when your four years of inaction are brought up. If you can't take criticism, and enough has been written to know that you cannot, it's time to stop the fakery and begin to lead America in a small "d" democratic direction. You claim having been busy. True, all on the wrong side of issues concerning peace and justice.

Perhaps if you take up gun control, I mean, not give off pious platitudes, but get down to business, then maybe that would give you a taste for why you were elected, and perhaps then you will also address climate change, oil drilling, civil liberties, job creation, mortgage foreclosures, and a host of things from which you have run away. Get real, scrap the teleprompter, Axelrod, and Rhodes, and say something that shows conviction.

## Political Reflections: Education of a (Sometime) Radical

### I AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP: FDR, HENRY WALLACE, ADLAI STEVENSON

[January 3, 2013. In a work purportedly of social theory, is there a legitimate place for the author's private life experiences? Here, with the reader's indulgence, is an experiment. At the intersection of history and theory, a brief interlude: an autobiographical fragment, not to insert the writer's presence, but to record experiences which reveal the setting for events, hence, a light thrown on the workings of contemporary society as background for the discussion already in progress. Let me be Ellison's Invisible Man (or assign me the letter "P" as though out of Kafka), but I have stories to tell that point up principal themes, such as the anatomy of the American prefascist configuration, which bear on the lineal and monochromatic pattern of ideology and society in the earlier period of the Cold War.]

It is the new year; like Kurt Weill's "September Song," it casts an introspective spell on one's thoughts, saddened at the near-universality of human degradation, a dash of piquancy, for stirring things up, anger summoned from below the surface when the futility of the present course becomes intelligible and evident—hence, relating autobiography to social protest and the world beyond. In calling up memories, I feel a certain pride, or rather, having had the luck, to be present with individuals whom I admire for their courage and/or to participate in what proved meaningful experiences. Life was then worth living, despite my inconspicuous role, when one could be proud of America, or to be exact, proud of Americans

who stood in dissent against their country's repressive policies and actions. The antidote to alienation is solidarity over causes worth fighting for, and knowing that countless other unnamed individuals feel the same way. That becomes clear in detailing social protest, as well, this song of praise to FDR, Adlai Stevenson, and Henry Wallace.

My political education began approximately in 1945, when I started to become aware of politics and economics (only later walking picket lines, delivering speeches, engaging in endless debate, and marching in demonstrations). Why 1945? Already then, one had in microcosm the tensions, fears, crosscurrents of hatred which would characterize the next two-thirds of a century, and I, an impressionable youngster, bedridden, the first of two years, one in full body cast and the second still confined to bed, now age 12, with long stretches alone, ample time to think, and mysteriously—actually not—to become radicalized.

Although my parents were not political I had developed, easy for the time, a deep admiration for Franklin Roosevelt, intuitively reaching out to all that the New Deal represented, and more particularly, identifying with FDR's own tribulations, his experience with poliomyelitis. (I was more fortunate, a spinal ailment.) When at 13 I began the arduous process of learning to walk again, it seemed to me natural to *identify* with all underdogs, the poor, Negroes (at the time, a word of honor, as used with *pride* by my hero, Paul Robeson, and by my later hero, Dr. King, as in his famous March on Washington address, which I attended), migrant workers, janitors, and the occasional homeless I would meet.

This process of identification was not unlike my feelings about FDR, who I later learned never again walked unaided, instead leaning on the arm of one of his sons and, in excruciating pain, giving the illusion of walking. My feeling for and about FDR only deepened when I learned that at his death (which, listening helplessly to the radio beside my bed, I vividly remember), despite the blackout still in effect on Long Island Sound, the lights burned brightly on the estates that night at parties celebrating his passing. I still cherish his words, roughly paraphrased, about how the economic royalists passionately hated him, his reply being, "And I welcome their hatred." Nine years later, I embarked on graduate studies with my mentor, Frank Freidel, still the finest scholar of FDR, first at Stanford, then at Harvard.

Emotionally, politically, I could never forgive the rich their ignorance and folly—at least, certain rich, for I was frankly conflicted in that I admired FDR's own patrician spirit because it contributed to a certain

selflessness, which meant simply, he was not on the take, his ambition could be channeled into public service, there were no revolving doors. This was admittedly rare; put crudely, there were an exceptional few who could skip over or around the rat race and find within themselves the wherewithal to achieve greatness or distinction, or better yet, *be* themselves, from which it could be possible to discover latent energies translating into exemplary conduct and values, much like adherence to a personal code of honor.

In politics, I trust such a man. Once in California, while at Stanford, I followed Adlai Stevenson in the 1956 Democratic primary for three days of grueling campaigning, saw him near exhaustion, and on the final day, standing on the railroad tracks trailed by a few reporters and supporters, he gave sublime expression to a social vision free from the usual cant of politicians. That stuck, for I have seldom since found anyone in politics, in either party, including most emphatically, John F. Kennedy, who possessed the genuineness to take the reins of leadership. Wealth was no guarantee of goodness, nor certainly was high office (as Lord Acton readily predicted).

Henry Agard Wallace was another exception, whom, as a 15-year-old, I worked hard to elect in 1948, as the Progressive Party's presidential candidate. A dozen years later, having already done research at Hyde Park, and having found that he was an early riser, I sought him out at the Harvard Guest House one Sunday morning at 6 a.m., after his address the night before at the Ford Hall Forum. There he was, as usual prepared for visitors, black suit, shock of graying hair, sitting on the sofa in the visitors lounge, and after an intense conversation, we had a heaping pancake breakfast, by which time I realized he was quite like no other, having an extraordinarily capacious mind, already evident from his Forum presentation on the relations between Russia and China.

This was 1960, and he was far ahead of the intellectual curve. I mentioned my interest in writing his biography, and he invited Nancy and me to his home in South Salem, New York, formerly the John G. Winant estate, which he had converted into a working farm to continue with his hybridization experiments (as I recall, strawberries)—assisted by a farmhand, PhD, Minnesota. Though we agreed on the biography (he ran up and down the stairs with batches destined for the Columbia Oral History Project, because I challenged him on the 1935–36 purge in the Dept. of Agriculture, of which he was Secretary) I realized to my shame later, and even on the spot, that given his strong scientific spine, for example, the first one in America to offer, at Iowa State, courses in mathematical statistics,

I was over my head and could not do justice to his multifaceted life and career. I dropped out, fearing lack of adequate preparation. This was to my sorrow because of the intrinsic value of such a study, but now for another reason as well.

I place little stock in becoming involved in the vogueish alternative history, but the question, what if FDR had not replaced Wallace with Harry Truman, is nonetheless intriguing. For, still as vice-president, he would have ascended to the presidency in 1945 upon Roosevelt's death and could possibly have made a difference in the history of the Cold War, either mitigating its severity or, by seeking a reduction in tensions and pressing for greater mutual trade (as he in fact did as Secretary of Commerce, in his brave Madison Square Garden Speech, which got him canned) he could have brought the conflict, with its attendant harsh anti-communism, to an end. Instead, he became one of its victims, though obviously quite moderate himself, as befitting the son and grandson of the editors of the leading Midwestern farm paper, *Wallace's Farmer*. "What ifs" don't interest me; my regret is that I lacked the intellectual and moral stamina, at that time, to see the task through; he was a great man—again one I could admire and trust.

My criticism of wealth is at best superficial, not least because, from an analytical standpoint, *structure* is far more fruitful as a starting point than is personality to a systematic inquiry. Clarification of purpose is essential to alerting oneself and others to possible biases and one's train of thought, and to introduce further observations pertinent to the education of a (sometime) radical. From the above, it should be apparent I do not think being radical is license for intolerance or narrowness, nor do I consider radicalism an absolutist "project," virtue incarnate, the solution to societal difficulties, the end all and be all which defines, or should, human strivings.

In these examples, FDR, Adlai Stevenson, and Henry Wallace, the first two decidedly conservative, and the third, a transcendent thinker (international peace, attacks on domestic privation) who yet does not abandon capitalism, we have gradations on the use and power of government to achieve the social welfare of the individual, a common core of humanism unifying their various differences on policy and execution. They would rectify social ills, implement just distributive policies (e.g., progressive taxation, public job creation, dedicated regulatory agencies and cabinet departments), and create a political-ideological climate sympathetic to labor, the creation of a social safety net (as an entitlement rather than an



illegitimate charge on society), and, as summarized in Roosevelt's Four Freedoms address, the nation's commitment to basic guarantees of the individual's security and well-being.

Stating the inner voice of conscience defining the formulation and implementation of public policy, as I believe would apply to all three men, suggests how far the USA has degenerated over the last half-century in meeting the obligations which attach to a democratic polity. Just distributive policies are viewed as unprincipled coddling and handouts to the undeserving, progressive taxation, confiscatory, and the social safety net, a drag on the economy, and put to better use via military spending. This is a New Age of Barbarism when it comes to the common weal. It also suggests how far the Obama administration, despite acting under so-called liberal auspices, has clashed with every one of these—given past efforts at their achievement—reasonable expectations and goals. Obama's starting point might as well have been on Uranus or Neptune, so great the disconnect from the New Deal experience, the values of freedom and social decency of the civil rights movement, the struggles and spirit of the labor movement, so much of beauty and meaning cut off by current government and society contemptuous of the democratic strides made in the past.

Conservative-inclined persons can do radical things when convinced of their need, and not themselves handcuffed by ideologies of patriotism or business trumping humanity. FDR had the National Recovery Administration under Hugh Johnson, which conserved and aggregated capitalism via trade associations and the concentration of business (i.e., monopolization under government auspices). This corporatist framework ran counter to recovery and equitable wealth distribution. Yet, if one constructed a pie chart for the New Deal, business recovery might be awarded a 20% slice, to be weighed against a giant leap forward taken by FDR and the New Deal.

We see the latter in the social safety net and the regulatory apparatus, as well as the massive improvement in infrastructure, the principle of *public* employment, relief, and the repair of the national estate. Less tangible, but hardly unimportant, is FDR's attack on the Supreme Court for obstructing New Deal welfare legislation, thereby breaking the log jam on policies to that end and leading to appointments sympathetic to upholding regulatory and distributive standards. Here, and I only scratch the surface on the New Deal programs and FDR's ability to elevate the dignity and sense of purpose of the people, I'd award the effort an 80% slice of the pie.

If today, given the dismantling of regulation in key areas (e.g., banking), and its ineffectuality (e.g., SEC, FDA, Interior), plus the intended cutting open, after much snipping away, of the social safety net, and the massive allocation of social wealth to defense, I would reverse the New Deal configuration: today, 80% pro-business, 20% social welfare. This last is critical, because the armed drone for targeted assassination cannot be abstracted from a governmental and societal context demonstrably wedded to a hardened ideological posture ill-tuned to human needs and national priorities. This last would cover everything from public health to rutted highways and collapsing bridges, from inadequate educational opportunities to decaying inner cities, from a culture of militarism to paralysis in the face of gun violence.

The New Deal was not Nirvana, but given the Great Depression, it did not shirk its responsibility to the common weal, and, in proportion to available resources compared with that of today, it did remarkably well with what it had. Ask, if it were possible, the young men in CCC, the unemployed in WPA, the programs large and small which conserved the people's health, spirits, and skills, the homes saved from foreclosure, and one would find an historical context morally and politically well above today's indifference to human life.

One looks back and then forward to the present, combined with the technological means of execution, and the armed drone seems particularly fitting for our times. It is ideal for pursuing America's self-interest defined by its hierarchical structure of power. Not by chance, the drone is Obama's signature weapons system, for its own sake, for the close collaboration it facilitates between the CIA and elite military units, and for the bases and airstrips worldwide it requires as essential to its operations. This provides the pretext or rationale for establishing hegemony in critical regions as part of long-term geopolitical strategies pursuant to global political-economic stabilization on lines favorable to US trade-and-investment expansion. It also helps to address the fear driving the program and making assassination acceptable, warding off or postponing national decline.

I won't attempt here a comparison between Adlai Stevenson and Henry Wallace, except to say that political integrity, which both possessed in abundance, trumps radicalism as a working formulation. This is not because radicalism is somehow suspect, but because integrity creates elasticity in policymaking and hones in on people's needs, whether the national ethos or the US Congress holds otherwise. When I think of Wallace I recall his manifesto, a milk bottle on every doorstep, and when I think of

Stevenson, I recall hard work and austerity (the campaign pin, feet on the desk, a hole in his sole) and, like FDR and Wallace, above suspicion of personal enrichment or self-aggrandizement.

As for self-aggrandizement, dissident and/or disillusioned observers are coming to see Obama, his abandonment by his father a salient fact of his personal history, in pursuit of recognition for its own sake, unmindful of specific public policy demands except those which favor wealth and the wealthy and powerful with whom he identifies. With the drone campaign in mind, I see in him a moral void, but also a *policy* void, from the standpoint of advancing societal welfare. He and his kitchen cabinet (e.g., Geithner, Brennan) would be ill-suited to join the company of the other three. More on this, especially the moral void, later.

Obama is very much involved in policy. He is no one's puppet or fool. But the crux of his policy framework—synthesizing deregulation and militarism, with, as an offshoot or source of further propulsion the Pacific-first strategy for the containment and isolation of China—has little to do with the democratization of American society and, although done repeatedly in its name, little, with counterterrorism, the latter becoming indistinguishable from counterrevolution abroad and the silencing of dissent and open palm to business expansion at home.

## 2 AN AFFIRMATION OF SOCIAL PROTEST: JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

I noted that radicalism is not license for intolerance or narrowness. To advance societal welfare does not require cosmetics—the red flag; May Day parades, dances, and picnics; spellbinding rhetoric; or even formulaic pronouncements from Marx, Lenin, Trotsky—as enjoyable or comforting as some or all of these are. Rather, what is required is a foundational discipline, non-elitist in origin and intent, that derives its strength from uncompromising moral-ethical standards inscribed in the collective mindset. I do not mean by that, totalitarian mind-control, but, perhaps in my untutored reading of Rousseau many years ago, the general will as interpreted to mean the assent of the body politic, because commending itself qua principle as conforming to the realizable condition of *equality*.

Departures from this structural-ideological-political core principle would be disallowed through the administration and rule of law. It would find legitimation through the cultural-institutional promotion and safeguarding of a comprehensive doctrine of human rights. This avoids the pitfalls of

narrowness, where some single variable, say, the means of production, provides the criterion (here, through state ownership and the consequent elimination of private property) for definitional success and the automatic achievement of individual and social welfare. It isn't always that easy. Abolition of private property, alone, without further institutional change, including the thorough democratization of the bureaucratic and military power bases, may represent swapping one form of tyranny for another. There must be equality in the resulting mix, as a dominating influence.

What, then, of intolerance, the other element radicalism does not license and should eschew? Here, in its somewhat habitual dogmatism about the sources of belief and action (we leave ideology aside as a sitting duck when it comes to rigid mental traits, although not always, depending on the content and values espoused), we come to the conundrum of religion, because of its potential for either repression or emancipation in the human assertion of and struggle for freedom. Radicalism tends to be preclusive, even snide here, in its disparagement of theological-based religion, compared with human-centered, secular belief systems. FDR—I think honestly, not opportunistically—regarded religion as the counterweight to conservatism, instead, containing self-evident precepts which justified the New Deal program even at its most advanced.

I refer, first, to his youth, under the tutelage of Rev. Endicott Peabody at Groton, who had the ritual each night, in the library, of shaking hands with each student upon going up to bed, this as part of a whole regimen teaching fair play, mutual respect, a personal code of honor. With this background, then, when pressed by reporters later as president about the socialist and radical nature of the New Deal programs, Roosevelt buoyantly replied, disagreeing with the implied charge that they were subversive or worse still, saying simply, “These were Groton ideals.”

I shall always remember this statement, as an antidote to smug dismissals of potential non-radical sources of democratic change, structural and otherwise. Groton was not in Young Franklin's day, or any time since, about to usher in the proletariat revolution. So what? I had participated in enough civil rights demonstrations in the South in the 1960s to come to know, respect, even revere, the clergy who would be present to bear witness and, in the thick of things, help—like everyone else—in any way they could. Religion does not have to be the opiate of the people, whether or not private property is left intact. For example, those of my generation will fondly recall Dorothy Day and the *Catholic Worker*, and historians, the Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth–early twentieth century.

As for civil rights demonstrations, I was exposed quite early (without, in this case, help of clergy), through staging one of my own. June 1951, several weeks after high school graduation, I entered the University of Florida, and, meeting a young black student who was in library science at Morehouse, and who was from Gainesville, I brought him into the Library through the front door, checked out Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma*, handed it to him at the circulation desk, and invited him, after he had had the opportunity to read it, to come up to my dorm room so that we might discuss it. This was at a time of unbridgeable segregation.

That night I was almost lynched by drunken Kappa Alpha fraternity members—KA, with its daily call to colors, the primal Confederate bastion of its day. They constantly threw themselves against the door of my room, trying to break it down, and for good measure heaved boiling water over the open transom from a large wastebasket in the hall bathroom, gradually filling the room with water. Thank you, FDR: the door, a legacy of New Deal construction, fortunately held. In the utter desolation of the scene, total emptiness in the street and surroundings because this was all-university rush night, I was rescued when my roommate, his father a major crime figure widely known, returned early, sized up the situation, quietly warned them with a deft hand at the hip that he would get the boys after them if they did not immediately disperse, and they finally left.

Florida was a learning experience. Walking through the *front* door of the Library with my friend, in the South of enforced racial segregation, was a small gesture which would ordinarily have consequences of an untoward kind, except that the University of Florida was, in the early 1950s, an oasis rich in learning, good will, talent, and, in the cracks, genuine radicalism. Manning Dauer and William G. Carleton, highly respected political scientists, stared down a committee of the state legislature in witch-hunt mode. It called for cleansing the book shelves of suspected communist writings for Carleton's C-1 American Institutions course occupying the ground floor reading room of the Library. He and Dauer replied, journeying to Tallahassee, by reading aloud a whole list of inflammatory quotations, the committee's anger meanwhile mounting to the boiling point, when Dauer or Carleton (I forget which) said, "Gentlemen, every one of these quotations was taken from the Bible." McCarthyism was miasmatic, intensified by racial segregation; I was fortunate to have such teachers. (Somehow, Obama's prosecution of whistleblowers under the Espionage Act flashes by.)

Thus, one more invasion of the university had been defeated, although still in my freshman year, a beloved teacher of Ancient History, who had been a member of the Teacher's College Union at Harvard in 1939, and from a prominent Republican family in Pennsylvania, was summarily fired simply because he had been called before the House Un-American Activities Committee for his membership in the union. No citation was issued. The Committee members were impressed by his conservative demeanor. The encounter was friendly. But to be called was enough. Returning on the train, John Reynolds stopped at the Jacksonville station the next morning to pick up a paper, only to find his photograph on the front page under the headline "UF Professor Fired." Yes, we circulated petitions in his favor—to no avail. Still earlier in Florida, my support of Wallace in 1948, and more so, Claude Pepper in 1950, caused some murmurs and pushing and shoving, the point being, one could experience the growing pains of political and social awareness—and take the measure of American society—from a relatively early age. Whether that becomes a journey of self-discovery lasting through one's lifetime, is of course the difficult challenge. The large point: this was America, forever more interiorized, where we are, through the individual's self-pacification, today.

The Stanford years, 1954–55, a distinguished university, rivaling Harvard, for example, in mathematics and physics, because of the richness of the feast, had almost too much on offer, which meant spreading myself too thin and pressing radicalism into a, if not genteel, then less hard-edged, form.

I soon came to realize, because of that testing space, that my radicalism was of the one-note kind up until then. Perhaps this was nothing to be ashamed of, because the cause was just, yet my radicalism was insufficiently deep and wide to be systemic. Beyond the seeming attractions of an Eisenhower spirit of noblesse and calm in the air, and Palo Alto sunniness, I found that the initial stimulus turning me toward radicalism had been an opposition to racial segregation in the South. Once removed from that societal context, I needed to gain my bearings and achieve specificity of understanding so as to be able to approach exploitation, human degradation, the mushroom cloud, nuclear testing, issues of power and stratification, and so on, in terms of a more *generic* radicalism, still well beyond my reach and experience. It is not too much to say that, in the mid-1950s, America evidenced an ideological range and depth which has still not lost its thematic—hegemonic, anticommunist—cogency for the present generation.

So much about Stanford had to do with the pure delight in learning, not being as homogenized as one might believe, and had among faculty a becoming openness so that freedom of inquiry was encouraged. This may not have been a propitious setting for meaningful action, but I did start an NAACP college chapter there (the usual response for conservative institutions, graffiti—as I remember—was about blue suede shoes), which led to a friendship with Franklin Williams, NAACP western regional director. On weekends we visited chapters in Fresno, Stockton, and elsewhere. (Frank later served as ambassador to Ghana under Kennedy, and then as president of the Barnes Foundation.) His mission on these trips, a sign of the times, was to root out suspected communist influence in the local chapters. I also shook hands with W.E.B. DuBois at a San Francisco meeting of the Independent Progressive Party; regrettably, I did not follow up on our meeting, and only years later did I benefit from my brief discussion with Dr. DuBois when I assigned his writings to my students.

Next I went from Quad to Yard, Stanford to Harvard, to continue my work with Prof. Freidel, a step having integral meaning to me in the journey of self-discovery. Harvard compressed into five years several jumps in my political consciousness, not worth delineating except to say that despite the national calm, picketing had become a part-time occupation.

Friday afternoons we gathered on Boston Common, opposite the State House, forming a circle around Gaby Kolko who stood on a soap box in the center, the issues being nuclear testing and the plan to move state government across town to Framingham (during a nuclear attack—although getting there on a clear day in less than an hour was possible). Police photographers recorded our faces as we passed, no doubt sent on to higher authority. Promptly at 5:30 p.m. workers disgorged from the MTA to jostle us, grab our signs—the expected response, as when hard hats beat up peace workers in New York during the Vietnam War. (For a radical, to be slugged by a worker was an eye-opener.) And Saturday mornings we picketed Woolworths, in the Square, to protest segregated lunch counters in the South, Linus Pauling on occasion joining us.

In Cambridge, one's education in radicalism came not only from within but also from outside of, and perhaps owing little at times to, Harvard. I was blessed to work with Freidel and Hartz, and to read Max Weber with Talcott Parsons, each one invaluable in enabling me to lay down building blocks without which my radicalism, identity, and aspirations could not find adequate lodgment. And as a teaching fellow and tutor I was engaged directly in the discussion and analysis of political philosophy. But radicalism as an

intellectual process, just as in social protest, proceeds from the ground up. Harvard had no such intention (in abetting subversion), but in providing lifetime equipment for self-development it was nonpareil. It also acted as a magnet, at least in 1956–61, for gathering in one place the displaced intellectuals from the war, the avowed Marxists who made their home there while (for some) working in New York, and the independent scholars attracted to Widener and pursuing writing that they conceived in decades—including the perennial graduate students who could mark, say, 18G, for 18th-year graduate student, on their book requests. This was a heady brew, a lifeblood for pushing forward seminal ideas for ourselves and to those to come.

I joined an informal Marxist study group which met weekly at the office of the American Friends Service Committee, a Cambridge landmark for open discussion, Paul Sweezy and Dirk Struick regular attendees, along with Fritz Pappenheim, author of *The Alienation of Modern Man*, to whom I owe much in apprehending the structural foundations of capitalism. He and his wife Yvonne were among our closest friends. From an older generation, Fritz fled Nazi Germany almost too late, spending the war interned in a Spanish prison camp, until Paul Tillich somehow intervened to get him out. It is he who introduced me to the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

I am not a Marxist, mindful in saying that, that I do not wish to be misconstrued as fearful, an opportunist, careerist, politic, or just for purposes of self-protection. Rather, I am not intellectually bright enough to be one. Yet particularly his earlier philosophical writings on alienation and commodity structure, which before Harvard I knew only in passing, have made an indelible impression on me. They illuminated the underside of what had come to interest me, already in Obama's first term, as a societal manifestation of the emergent fascistic structural-ideological framework in America: the policy of drone assassination (its von Braunian antecedents did not escape me) which he did not initiate, but greatly expanded. This was a deliberate choice made in full knowledge of the moral consequences.

For what we see is alienation taken to its chilling extreme, its logical end, as the desensitization of the individual (and of the whole society) to killing, the impersonal murder of men, women, children, in this case, from 8000 miles away, without blinking—a society whose emblem should be the *blood spat*, for the vaporization of human beings, rather than the stars and stripes. Pappenheim made seriousness of purpose and disciplined study not only mandatory for the life of the mind, but a social obligation if one is to fulfill one's purpose in living. I cannot say it any



clearer. I hold radicals to a higher standard, a double standard applied to them, if you will, because moral insanity, war, death squads, “collateral damage,” are no laughing matter, nor is the impersonal, bloodless way they have been ordered and/or executed. When radicals devote their energies to cultural issues, or fail to locate any and all issues in a wider context, we can sense their self-loathing and feelings of powerlessness, rather than make a good-faith effort at social change via the democratization of class, wealth, and power.

With Freidel, my other principal mentor was Barrington Moore, who brought together in his person much that I have said thus far. He is/is not Harvard, perhaps the best of both. A senior research fellow at the Russian Research Center, he gave among the most significant courses, regardless of field, in the University, paraphrased by the title of one of his books, *Political Power and Social Theory*. Indifferent to radicalism, Socratic in method and temperament, he addressed the major questions and finest minds, a disciplined venture into political philosophy as sociology, so that Marx and Marcuse would share space with Gaetano Mosca and others. He took nothing for granted. By exploring the relation between industrialism and totalitarianism, Moore, summoning vast stores of historical knowledge (a classics major at Williams), was led to examine totalitarianism in *preindustrial* societies as well. He possessed a mental clarity equal to confronting the most difficult issues in sociological analysis, for example, the historical development of the three principal structural-cultural variants of the modern world: capitalism, fascism, and communism. His book *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, containing this analysis, ranks with that of the most accomplished scholars of the twentieth century. Its provenance is world history to serve as a guide for the dissection of social systems, their rise and fall, their internal mechanisms of repression and, often less likely, liberation, the role of the peasantry in making or retarding revolution, and the relation of political economies to the formation of class structures.

To be indifferent to radicalism is perhaps the best way to reveal its salience and value, for I would maintain that historical development and social systems provide a critical perspective, whether one’s concern is democracy, freedom, totalitarianism, or simply the normalization of repression and privilege. Radicals have much to learn from Moore (as do all scholars of humankind), so that one does not wear radicalism on one’s sleeve as the substitute for hard thinking and viable conceptualization. Moore, like Freidel, also offers a lesson in character, which today, because of America’s state sponsorship of cruelty and terror (again my wakened

sense of injustice because of drone assassination) has renewed my appreciation of the significance of character, as a revelatory scholarly mode.

Both individuals have ground their analyses in a personal asceticism making for, more than objectivity, a certain serenity to call the shots without fear or favor, leaping over radicals' self-consciousness to speak unafraid of the structure of wealth and power. Opportunism is built-into the shaping of an academic career; not here though. Freidel driving cross-country in his old Plymouth to dig in to manuscripts and papers at Hyde Park, Moore coming to teach a Harvard class riding in on his one-speed bike, wearing a heavy woolen lumberjack outer garment, and the brilliant results, a multivolume biography of FDR, comparative political-structural paradigms of modernization, in *Social Origins*, inspirations to behold!

Plainness counts for something, as does humility, Freidel, crew-cut (about to take up his appointment as Harmsworth Professor at Oxford, before Harvard), Moore, ambling gait, silver steel-rimmed round glasses, Plymouth Suburban: I dwell on these inconsequential matters to make a point. The implied subversiveness of asceticism in America (if sufficiently widespread, perhaps able to modify or topple the monolith of capitalism) is indicative—Freidel and Moore instinctively valuing utmost simplicity—of providing a living refutation of the national temper, ostentatious and aggressive, of the role of wealth as a factor in policymaking and geopolitical strategy. Instead, wealth qua organized advanced capitalism shows the lamentable ignorance and shortsightedness of America's upper stratum. Today, a hodgepodge of one-generation ascent through illicit banking, hedge funds, and gambling (whether as derivatives or the real thing, Las Vegas casinos), the *nouveau riche* have become a New Colossus of Reaction. But Old or New, the disposition of wealth in general is to oppose or obstruct democratic processes. *That* brings us back to where we left off, a political culture of vested rights and antiradicalism, to which those I have taken up provide a notable exception.

Moore possessed great wealth; Freidel did not. Both possessed humility and embodied the same deflation of an excessive capitalist mindset. FDR also fits the pattern: rock-solid psychological security, and, like Moore, the extremely rare person, free from pressures, social, financial, familial, to rise above greed, self-indulgence, conspicuous display, hostility toward the working class, and cruelty to others as established prerogative of status and station. Personal traits converted into political, and opposed to authoritarian ones, count for something. Why, though, my emphasis? Perhaps it is my FDR-fixation, but really, a reaching back to an older America, by no means idyllic

in actuality, yet possessing the clarity by which to know right from wrong, even when the wrong predominates, for at least then one can fight back.

Briefly to conclude on Moore, asceticism has its foibles here, although not fatally injurious, because always hidden from view, in this case, “Vespera,” a magnificent sloop, built in the Netherlands, brought over, and sailing out of Northeast Harbor ME, the Rockefellers as guests just before my wife and I arrived on board, and Betty and Barry reading to each other in Greek at bedtime. I present this portrait, not to exonerate a miniscule segment of great wealth, or to probe others’ private lives, but, as a tool of comparative analysis, to plumb inner character, the raw stuff of human decency, applicable to all, rich and poor, literate or not, alike, as a way of determining some rough correlates of personal integrity.

From everything I see, Obama is no Martin Luther King, no FDR, Stevenson, or Henry Wallace, no Barrington Moore, just the overambitious, prickly, secretive, deceitful, self-indulgent, soft (in the sense of wanting luxury and the trappings of power), and, beneath the contrived rhetoric, itself empty and incapable of expressing emotion (think FDR’s “Fireside Chats”), a profoundly disturbing—to the world—nihilism, capable of, and on a daily basis authorizing, *impersonal murder*. Would Dr. King have to do with political assassination, himself the victim of it? Would FDR incinerate children? Would Adlai Stevenson huddle with his national-security team and flip baseball cards to finger the next victim? Would Henry Wallace make his chief adviser a person who endorsed waterboarding and other forms of extreme torture? Would Barrington Moore, Fritz Pappenheim, Louis Hartz, or Frank Freidel deliberately lie about civilian casualties, construct a system (maybe Herman Kahn would, or some at the RAND Corporation) in which “pilots” sitting comfortably 8000 miles away would zap persons frequently identity unknown and whether or not in a family setting, or for good measure, go after *second strikes* targeting the funerals of the victims or the first responders who have gone to their rescue? The White House should be draped in black.

### 3 SOCIAL PROTEST IN A HOSTILE CLIMATE: THE MANY FACES OF REPRESSION

I left Gabriel Kolko standing on a soap box on Boston Common. For those unfamiliar with his writings, let me record my indebtedness—hence his influence on my thinking—for his unparalleled contribution to radical scholarship, particularly in the areas of income distribution, the interpenetration

of business and government, and an expansionist, market-driven, counter-revolutionary foreign policy as the impetus to war and intervention. Taken together, a body of work extending over more than 50 years, Kolko has achieved a unified analysis of the American political economy like practically none other; with unflinching insight he has identified and probed the structural dynamics of US capitalism in their exposed and revealing nerve centers: business concentration, the reinforcement of inequitable shares of wealth and power, government protection of, and assistance to, the corporate system, and the militarization of foreign policy, as vital to establishing unilateral dominance of the global economy. In this respect, if he had stopped writing in, say, 1970, he would already have diagrammed the main contours in all essentials of subsequent development: a revelatory treatment of what is often hidden from historians, the antidemocratic dimensions of US structure, power, and conduct.

In my first teaching post, Yale, 1961–65, the intellectual scene dramatically shifts, insofar as experiencing a freedom to think and act along radical lines. Yale was not Harvard, and rather, a living hell for radical faculty. In all fairness, though, this character was largely confined to the history department, itself carrying disproportionate weight in the Yale community, as the repository for such Old Blue values as anti-Semitism and the valuing of social background over intelligence, ability, and achievement. Fortunately, the graduate schools, particularly the law and medical faculties, remained uncontaminated and maintained very high standards. History set a tone for and within itself, an oasis of reaction and haughtiness. Democratic recruitment was ignored, preferably for social pedigree, in turn coded for dress, appearance, correct religious standing, and prestigious secondary, college, and graduate school education. How I was hired remains a mystery, probably my critique of Richard Hofstadter's *Age of Reform*, although with a Harvard PhD, and a book accepted by Harvard Press, and still to be offered only an instructorship, should have alerted me to troubled seas in future.

George W. Pierson, as we walked back ahead of the others from lunch, observed, in condescension, "I see from your curriculum vitae that you attended the University of Florida. How quaint, we've never had anyone from there before." I let the remark and his patronizing tone pass. Upon arrival, it was clear that, despite coat and tie, my Sears workshirt and Jack Purcells, which went unremarked at Harvard for five years, did me in from the start. Pierson once stopped me in Sterling Library and sniffed me up and down as if I were unclean. There were other incidents.

Fortunately, my students (I gave the junior honors seminar, and directed most of their senior theses) were, regardless of background, from legacy entrants who enjoyed preferential treatment, to those also from wealthy backgrounds, to the bursary students on assistance (a distinct minority), all hard-working, open-minded, bright, unspoiled, deeply sincere, and therefore a pleasure to teach. Ideology was never at issue; it stopped at the classroom door. Spirited discussion gloriously blazed in the spirit of mutual respect and trust. Restrictions on thought harm proponents and critics alike. Senior theses, likewise. Provided I kept my distance from the department, I had no complaints; the problem was, I was always under a cloud of suspicion. John M. Blum charged that I was a Marxist; after reading the copy I presented to him of my book *The Populist Response to Industrial America*, he solemnly intoned, “Marxism is not in my pantheon of ideas.”

Fine, except that Hartz was one of the readers of the dissertation (the other, Freidel), and himself a noted conservative political theorist for his application of Locke to America, who, at our conference in his office, gleefully paced up and down, saying he would have modified his ideas in light of my evidence on the seriousness and extent of Populist protest. Hartz lived for pure intellection; Freidel, the professional of all professionals, seen on every page of his FDR biography, also knew my respect for evidence, as in our collaboration later on two extensive documentary histories of the USA. Besides, there is a whole chapter in *Populist Response* showing the hostility of contemporary Marxists (DeLeon and the Socialist Labor Party) to the Populists. Blum read with unseeing eyes, guided by a prejudgment perhaps attributable to his own identification with *Theodore* Roosevelt and their shared contempt for social protest. I noted above that Roosevelt once lamented he and his Rough Riders couldn’t take a shot at those Haymarket rioters! Blum probably lamented he couldn’t take a shot at those who wrote about them.

I did not refrain from controversy, whether at Yale or in meetings of historians, where I learned also that, like other professions, historians look out for their own. Criticism is not wanted. I introduced Herbert Aptheker at the Law School, in an impassioned plea for freedom of discussion—generally denied to him because of his Communist affiliation, despite the fact that his work was prosaic, conventional, and moderate to a fault. And I also was the commentator for a session of the Organization of American Historians, in which the paper, by John Higham, an otherwise good historian, was abysmal. It was a presumed exploration of “cultural history”

(Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., would have turned in his grave) arguing that the strains of industrialism in the late nineteenth century (no further historical specificity) were manifested in birdwatching, bicycle clubs, stream of consciousness in Frank Lloyd Wright's designs, and so on. There was not a word about depression, unemployment, strikes, lockouts, declining living standards, and other "strains" integral to what most agree was an Age of Industrial Violence, from, say, the Great Railroad Strikes of 1877 to Homestead and Pullman, 1892, 1894.

I dissected the paper amid growing tension in the room, the ballroom of the Cleveland Statler. Higham sat back, his St. Francis expression in place. The next commentator, Robert K. Murray, who wrote about the Red Scare, himself now took a hand at red-baiting, then raising his fist, proclaimed, "This was a great paper," to which the audience was standing and cheering. The scene was indescribable, which ended on, for me, a dramatic note. Pierson rushed to the front of the platform, face contorted in hatred, and shook his fist at me, until Edmund Morgan escorted him away. The next day, on the plane back, according to Howard Quint, an historian of American socialism, who was present, Pierson went up and down the aisle, apologizing to all that I was at Yale. For an assistant professor who was to come up for tenure, the machinery was grinding away.

I present the foregoing details to illustrate what should be painfully apparent, that America, comparable to the stage of primitive accumulation of capitalism, whether England or America, as pertaining to physical repression of laboring people, had, 1950–65, *its* period of intellectual primitive accumulation, which preceded and set the stage for an evolving Consensus ever since. The narrowing boundaries which defined political discourse had their direct counterpart in the academic world, which is not surprising given the highly integrative nature of American culture.

The lesson was sinking in. I had by now burned my bridges behind me. In Spring 1965 I drove an interracial group of Divinity School students to Selma, following the suppression at the Pettus Bridge. I could not be directly faulted for missing class since I was on a Morse Fellowship and hence released from teaching, except that *any* sign of activism violated the gentleman's code of bored neutrality, conjuring the notion of trouble-maker, whether the cause was justified or not. Again, more might be said, but let's move on.

My field of concentration at the time was American Populism, a social movement of protest in the 1890s of quite unprecedented scope in America. As part of the Consensus Thesis, beyond smears of alleged

anti-Semitism, was the need to demolish Populism because its existence was not only admission that the American past had significant poverty, periods of depression, and the people's awakening to the abuses of corporations, railroads, market fixers, and so on, responsible for social misery, even though long ago, but also, if not admission, then drawing unwelcome attention to the present, growing out of the celebration of US hegemony in the world and unrestrained capitalism at home. In sum, the past must be perceived as untarnished, to mythologize the present as well.

#### 4 THOUGHTS ON RADICALISM: THE AESTHETIC MODE

Radicalism can be a jealous mistress. It frequently (like conservatism) demands conformity to certain texts, interests, activities—a need to prove one's credentials. This is stultifying, worse, forced, and doesn't lead to deepening compassion or the widening of mental horizons. When I introduced our Saint Bernard puppy to Sweezy and the Marxist study group as Karl Marx, a name Nancy and I lovingly and whimsically gave him, no one would talk to me for a week or two. Why must rigidity and radicalism often go together? Thus from Florida through Yale, less so after, I was truly a sometime radical, less the poseur than aesthete, for long periods seeing aesthetics, primarily music and painting, as somehow liberating, if not revolutionary, forces in the battle against false consciousness and in activating a disciplined quest for higher social standards. This was, at best, a backdoor attack on capitalism—probably as inefficacious as political theater (Odets to the barricades). But it also fashioned my alertness, as in standing before a Cezanne for a half-hour, penetrating its mysteries and techniques until I was satisfied.

Aesthetics, in its probing, and also, though not necessarily avant-garde character, can summon or contribute to precisely the mental discipline capable of a more radical mode of penetration as well, that given to piercing the screen of the socially—and politically—useful fabrications which protect and surround ruling-class ideology. Pierre Boulez and Elliott Carter may not, whether in their compositions or, supposing they are even interested, in their political life, have given thought to radicalism; yet the very complexity of their musical writing, a distillation of mental effort so remarkable, cannot but be abrasive to the contemporary structure of social thought, and for those who *are* radically inclined, provide inspiration not to succumb to dominant patterns of thought and their intimate

association, as vehicles, with the values legitimating an essentially uncritical acceptance of wealth and power.

The USA becomes ever more closed, diversity of ideas and opinions a somewhat cruel hoax, alternative paths to the future ever more uniform in scope and content, focused on the consolidation of the political economy and the infusion of military power in market expansion. In this context, the aesthetic dimension of human creativity takes on, or rather should, because my view here is utopian when the aesthetic mode meets force and repression, as it surely does, head-on—significance as a moral-mental awakened social force. Whether or not this will ever happen, the epistemological leap from aesthetics to politics to democracy, I feel compelled to speak out.

The gradual shrinkage in range of the ideological spectrum and growing agreement on basic policy—for example, war, deregulation, privatization—between the political parties leads one to turn in near-desperation for relief and/or remedies to shatter the opaque, oppressive mindset of authoritarianism enveloping the social order. What I am terming the aesthetic mode is not, ideally, the instrument of mass mobilization or political-structural transcendence. Core radical involvement via social protest is far closer to the mark. Yet, because we as a society are losing our critical faculties and succumbing to an ideological regimen of bread-and-circuses (a universe of perpetual Super Bowl commercials as itself reality), force usually—though less so now—remaining discretely in the background, one is compelled, even more still, to speak out.

Radicalism is about more than private property and social change. It is about an appreciation of human possibilities. It must include the dimension of aesthetics, not only to fight off fatalism or nihilism, but to affirm creativity. Whether it be architecture and city planning (as art rather than mainly as science), toward a beautiful yet practical environment (in which the pros and cons of everything from ornamentation to sewage removal can be raised and discussed), or string quartets, harpsichord sonatas, the choral works of Britten or Berlioz, aesthetics can be explosive in the mental framework. It can be directed toward thinking or imagining on a different wave length, away from clutter and salesmanship, and toward alternative visions of the social order.

In this context, given the dismal nature of US politics, my candidate for American mind-activator would be Elliott Carter. Nearly 50 years ago, fresh from our Guggenheim year in London, where among our priceless experiences, we attended the concerts of the English Chamber Orchestra,



we returned to East Lansing (this gets us ahead of the story, but let me complete the thought) missing in the USA the likes of Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies. When the E.C.O., on tour, came to East Lansing, we held a reception for them in our home. Emanuel Hurwitz, the leader, and I sat on the floor arguing the point about the lack of distinction among modern American composers, whereupon he made an impassioned defense of Carter, which definitely held my attention. I stood corrected. But I stick to my larger point, important, I think, then, more so today: society's need to confront culturally and, indeed, every which way, ideologically, politically, and so on, its own central values and institutions, themselves frequently code for repression and/or the conservation of privilege.

There is a need to venture toward the *unassimilable*—becoming near-impossible in a culture, political and other, where everything is brought to the surface, sloganized, reduced to simplistic terms—which capitalism cannot co-opt or falsify in meaning, so as to absorb the negativity of fundamental protest. Otherwise, authentic transformation, away from alienation and commodity production (the emphasis on exchange value over use value) cannot ever be realized.

I am not making a muted plea, to avoid prosecution, for outright advocating for revolution, a revolution which, given the existing state of civilization and society, would turn, no doubt, into eruptive fascism and a caricature of democracy. But simply, I caution, be aware of what is happening, the warped mind of society, and ever more resort to force, manipulation, and deception. Carter's music will not batter down the walls of capitalism, hardly his intent. But an America more sensitive to discrimination and nuance, and not a pushover for broad-gauged deceptions of every kind, such as the hucksterism of patriotism (as in flyovers at bowl games, to emphasize the military's awe-inspiring might while, for the loyal and devoted, a cuddly, intimate friend), *perhaps*, just perhaps, might be less likely to obliterate small children from 8000 miles away *or* select leaders who personally authorize such actions.

This may seem irrelevant to a condemnation of armed drones for targeted assassination, but when faced with cruelty, evil, and zombiism, much of it contained in the bureaucratic personality and mindset, a counterforce of sunlight, reason, appreciation of nature, *man/woman creating*, must be part of material efforts at societal reconstruction. Otherwise, one oppressive context has been swapped for another, the old values and ways still predominating, to the detriment of human freedom. Aesthetics can lead to a clean break, what I would term the epistemological break to distinguish

it from claims of social transformation as served up by Obama's mock turtle soup. It must be parallel with or ahead of the concretization of mass striving as itself directed to the reshaping of political economy, institutions, culture: the integration of thought and action, absent the mediation of politics and ideology discouraging such striving. For how else prior to, or concomitant with, social protest can the break with the established order occur?

When I think back to Yale, I also preserve, beyond the usual (pleasures of teaching, the odd confrontation here and there), memories of cameo events. I borrowed an ill-fitting tuxedo from one of the boys to attend the Yale Daily News banquet (the center of the universe in the College, and therefore glared at by history attendees resentful that I was invited), or, the same tux, when Nancy and I chaperoned a dance, with the Count Basie orchestra, we sitting on the bandstand by his left hand for much of the evening. Life was not all bad. Even the antiwar and civil rights demonstrations had a non-radical component which protesters are sometimes loath to admit.

One might risk life and limb, as in Mississippi, but less because of intrinsic regard for the cause than because of a compulsion to bear witness, be part of something larger, even put one's body on the line. In sum, this is to embark perhaps for personal gratification on an ego trip best left home or guarded against, if protest is to have meaning, so that one can recover one's wits and not *use* others and their suffering for one's own ends. That would be almost as bad as getting one's kicks by targeting funerals and first responders; in both cases, fellow human beings are reduced to ciphers.

There was always the danger that protest might become a way of life offering its own gratification, and with it, almost necessarily, not just a tincture of arrogance and self-righteousness. Tenure was farther away than Mars; it was therefore time to get serious. I shall never be Odets nor Brecht for that matter. To be Jewish and from *Bridgeport* (we moved when I was six)—the word literally spat out by would-be patricians and their imitators—was a double whammy. Blum, succeeding Pierson as chair, called me in while I had the Morse, an unheard of summons while on research leave—and said I might stay several more years, even have a graduate seminar, but I knew it was time to leave. Tenure is important when one is starting a family and more so when the factor of radicalism looms large in the possible denial of an appointment, much less the achievement of security.

## 5 AN EXILIC PHASE: THE SEETHING CAULDRON

I left quietly. Why give the powers that be, satisfaction that if I encouraged student demonstrations on my behalf, that would be taken as confirmation of their indictment that I was irresponsible and sought to politicize the learning process? Better to wash one's hands off the whole business, and, rather than play the usual games—networking in search of a prestigious position—take whatever comes, as the opportunity for further teaching, intellectual growth, and continued social protest. No complaints; unlike many, much worse off, I landed on my feet. I mention the personal really as archetypal of the developing ideological/intellectual atmosphere. The trek to what one feared was nowhere (I turned out to be wrong) was made by others besides myself.

In 1965, Detroit was a seething cauldron, especially after Palo Alto, Cambridge, and New Haven. I don't know how I got the Wayne State job, I had not, to my knowledge, interviewed for it or otherwise been in communication, and I assume that Mother Yale took the initiative in making arrangements for its cast-offs. C. Vann Woodward, whom I respected and with whom I had a good working relationship, said reassuringly, "Norman, you're going to love Wayne State, you're going to love the museums and restaurants, and you're really going to love Chicago." He didn't even know where it was! Staughton Lynd, a most decent person, a Quaker, who went to Hanoi personally to declare peace with the North Vietnam government (political theater at its symbolic finest), a highly esteemed teacher, and the son of Robert and Helen Lynd, knowing our plans, notified Detroit peace groups of our arrival. The next day, I addressed a mammoth peace rally in Grand Circus Park. (Staughton was himself fired shortly after we left.)

What a new ball game: Black Trotskyites (poseurs, blow-hards, with far greater dramatic ability than Olivier playing *Hamlet*); Detroit's Tactical Mobile Unit (cruising in their blue-and-white Plymouths, four burley men per car, probably 270 lbs. average weight, not counting hardware and ax handles); the CIA-sponsored group of young fascists, Breakthrough, who crowded to the front of the rallies, raising a din so loud as to drown out the speakers; and yes, the *history* chairman, a powerhouse, former longshoreman, who cowed the department into submission, and, in the spirit of Eric Hoffer—as I recall him—a specialist in civil liberties (like pedophiles who go to the elementary schools, Willie Sutton, to the banks, Alfred H. Kelley went to civil liberties for undisguised purposes).

At one point, when a diminutive young woman led a demonstration to the president's office in Mackenzie Hall, Kelley stood foursquare at the door and, blocking the way, then stepped forward and with a roundhouse right to the jaw knocked her flat. That is not Yale's way, but from my limited sampling I've come to regard history, as practiced, more as a pathology than a discipline of learning. Detroit did not have the visibility that New York and Berkeley had on the national protest front, but it was a veritable maelstrom centered on the Wayne campus, with all of the principals gathered in battle array.

Four episodes, in no particular order, illustrate the scene. To recount them here is not to fatten my autobiographical profile, but to illustrate the raw substance of America's entering into what I term a prefascist configuration. First, the day following the murder of Dr. King a memorial was held at Lower DeRoy, a smallish auditorium, in which the Black student leaders spoke. I was horrified, for I had seen him several times in the week before the Selma to Montgomery March, and was greatly moved by his eulogy for the Rev. Jim Reeb, a Boston Unitarian minister, who was murdered on the streets of Selma the preceding Monday. Brown's Church was unadorned, with a steep surrounding balcony, the entire group attending now standing, swaying back and forth, arms locked, singing "We Shall Overcome." Much of the week we maintained a vigil outside the church until the early hours of the morning, facing a double line of local and state police cars—all perfectly safe, and symbolic—some 18 rows deep.

Why horrified? Because speaker after speaker who got up *cursed* Dr. King. This was not grief or anguish crying out, but rank opportunism, the fashionable black militancy making an early appearance: We're glad you're dead. You held us back. Your nonviolence is doing us more harm than good. (A faithful paraphrase) The moral stature of the man—nothing; the wider, more radical scope of protest, embodied in the Poor People's Campaign (an immediate circumstance of his death)—nothing; the courage and fortitude that kept him going—nothing.

## 6 TARNISHED LIBERALISM: CONSTRAINTS ON RADICALISM AND RACE

I was waking up fast. This display of raw anger against Dr. King, disrespect for his work, his ideas, what he represented in the struggle for democratic rights regardless of race and skewed toward the bottom stratum of working people, the braggadocio of those who only talked the talk, all this was

becoming too much for me. Was this a small sample, or were Blacks peeling off in a direction seemingly more militant, but perhaps actually a kind of black chauvinism, which disregarded *class* and used injured pride now blown up as a negotiating tool for mere recognition and complacent self-indulgence?

That may seem a harsh indictment coming from a radical. I am not making oblique reference to affirmative action, and instead, the more profound negation of political consciousness, emblemized in the person and music of Paul Robeson, where race pride, essential as a first step of identity, becomes subsumed in the fight for the social welfare of *all* people acting and building together. Some in the DeRoy “mourning” group would ride black chauvinism, in predominantly black Detroit, to prominence and high office, as meanwhile their adoring constituents were sinking further into poverty. (This, of course, is similar to black constituents’ adoration of Obama.)

In an earlier, more focused age, race-opportunism may have served as a consolatory function for Blacks (a throwback to Father Divine), but black radicals eschewed this characterization as demeaning and shortsighted. They were in it for keeps, the emancipation of the poor on class lines. In contrast, race pride meant race solidarity, a closing of ranks around black leadership, however good or poor (which didn’t seem to matter) the record was. With Dr. King’s death, there have been few black leaders who have proven to be radical, that is, in these circumstances, class-oriented, outspoken in criticism of American foreign policy, and taking on issues that are deemed unrelated to race.

Actually, nothing is, because Blacks as a whole were and remain disproportionately represented as the exploited and dispossessed. Climate change, banking regulation, massive defense spending, and so on, are examples of such issues, all of which, their leaders maintain, have no bearing not only on race identity and pride but also civil rights (as narrowly construed). The world I knew before 1965 is not the world I know after—although, in Detroit, not for want of trying, where I tried to form an antiwar-civil rights coalition. That would have been a *natural* for radicals in the past, but as I learned, radicalism, as I understand it, and black nationalism or chauvinism, as I witnessed it, did not mix.

I am not the one to talk (or analyze), because I as much as anyone committed the liberal error on race—one I shrugged off by the early 1970s, but not fully before, despite jarring moments in the decade following Dr. King’s death. That is, I gave a free pass to anyone who was black simply

because he/she was black. Since that time I have wanted to see an open declaration of the neutralization of race in the American psyche, black and white alike. We like to think “race neutral” is widely inscribed and practically always professed, whether in law, the economy, politics, or general living. It may be, and to some extent even honored, but somehow at the expense of black progressiveness, really a bargain with the devil in the sense that acceptance comes at the cost of surrendering an authentic thirst for democracy.

That authentic thirst comes from the history of the race life, of slavery, segregation, beatings, discrimination, poverty, disfranchisement, all the punishment a racial-and-class-structured white world of capitalism could devise and mete out at stages in its development and consequent stabilization. Repression does not automatically lead to militancy on behalf of freedom. Repression can also be the internalization of the captor’s mindset and values, reinforced by the systemic framework which makes the repression possible, thereby reducing the captive to acquiescence and helplessness.

This is why the next step is important. There can be no shortcuts; racial consciousness is a vital preparatory stage, but the process cannot stop there. My mind goes back to Paul Robeson, in which race pride is converted into class pride. The former is indispensable to marking the transition to a liberated human identity, *from race to class*, as prerequisite for then knocking down the walls of racial division, and making possible both a realization of that identity and the structural democratization of the social order.

Here is where my bias kicks in. I hold Blacks up to a higher standard because I *want* them, along with industrial workers (and radicalism in general), to be the vanguard of social change, the agent for democratizing the structure of society. Condescending, yes, because in that light they cannot simply be themselves—good and bad, as varied as there are individuals. Not-condescending also, though, because both groups historically have a stake in realizing freedom. Given their life experiences and treatment they have ample reason (and ample qualifications) to accept that role even though it is thankless and others in society who benefit from the status quo don’t deserve, while they oppose and resist, the resulting improvements. My romantic attachment to the lower classes (now defined out of existence by the spurious label of “middle class” to hide very real gradation—differences of income, status, and power) is a poor substitute for confronting a reality in which workers and Blacks have presently gone

to seed, dormant, immersed in false consciousness, for one, respectability, the other, racial solidarity, for both, given their respective conditions, accommodation to hierarchy at home, hegemony abroad, to the ultimate detriment of each.

Assuming my attitude toward Blacks and working people in general was based, as I'm sure many radicals in flashes of self-effacement would admit, on an ideological-mythological craving for revolutionary transcendence of existing society via human perfection, no slips or blemishes allowed, it is time to grow up, and restore pitiless frankness to its proper place. One must therefore disabuse oneself of wish-fulfillment and the assigning of potential radical significance to groups neither equal to the task nor committed to fulfilling it. The challenge is to achieve a societal framework in which they *will* be equal to the task—pursuit of democratization—and keen on fulfilling it. No further free passes should be given to those who have not earned them. (Gender, too, increasingly fulfills the prevalent condition of a false consciousness of identity, as when someday a female candidate for the presidency receives widespread support from women despite her record on economic issues and foreign policy detrimental to the poor and working people in general.)

What does this have to do with the price of wheat in Shanghai? Nothing. What does it have to do with armed drones for targeted assassination? Everything. If Obama were *white*, he would be repudiated by a large part of American society, including blacks who, out of a mistaken show of racial solidarity in supporting him, are cutting their own throats. Liberals dare not oppose him, because he is black and because *they* have gradually lost their way for at least four decades. I expect nothing from liberals, drone assassination being merely one area receiving their support, along with the whole of the national-security framework and, domestically, financialization of the political economy and corporatism in the form of business-government interpenetration. In this way, he proves himself a liberal. Obama is white, in a black skin.

This Obama-liberalism consanguineous relation, he, the perfect illustration of its moral as well as political and economic bankruptcy of ideas and practice, has significance for the current state of American society. For Democrats, in particular, a degeneration of social conviction stems probably from their unwillingness to stand up to McCarthyism in the 1950s, even earlier, their subscription to the Cold War agenda with few or no reservations. Anxious to demonstrate their patriotic/anticommunist convictions and credentials, the Democratic Party had, well before

Kennedy, still under Truman, in war's aftermath, accepted membership in a Cold War bipartisan framework that implicitly had already endorsed a permanent-war mindset.

Kennedy merely brought together disparate strands of policy—confrontation, intervention, regime change—regularized through a now-established military/defense-oriented economy and brought to a focus with the Vietnam War. That much is Obama's inheritance, for him, a proud inheritance. Equally so, what follows: The Clinton administration provided the platform of internal financial hegemony and deregulation which underpins Obama's own corporatist framework, including trade agreements and evisceration of America's industrial base.

Certainly by 2000 the handwriting is on the wall; emphasis on deregulation as the key to economic growth meant that the death knell had sounded on the New Deal at the hands of both major parties. We see a long-term shifting of the political spectrum rightward, so that Democrats today in any meaningful sense are right-of-center, while Republicans are skirting the line of plebeian fascism. In foreign policy, for both, an unrestrained push is occurring for global stabilization through unilateral superpower status, to be achieved through a global system of military bases, increased naval power, and the armed drone. Obama is truly a child of the recent past; all that is lacking in his portfolio is a Cuban Missile Crisis, although with his eyes to the Pacific, that too could complete the picture.

Obama, then, embodies a liberalism that now for 60-plus years has become associated with business consolidation and the militarization of capitalism and society alike. But he is also its Lord High Executioner, with respect to the quashing of dissidents, the erection of the National Security State, the advancement of mass-surveillance, pressing forward trends, perhaps amounting to a qualitative change, long in the making. When one reads about his approval of, and *eagerness* to sign, pending legislation to expand the government's powers of surveillance, assisted by Senator Feinstein's position on the Intelligence Committee, one realizes how mild, innocent, and out-of-date Orwell's *1984* actually is—probably already by the time of the title.

Now American society, and its role in the world, just on this dimension, invites the designation "liberal totalitarianism," Big Brother through guile rather than the naked bayonet. The relevance of the discussion lies in Obama's personification of a total structural-cultural-ideological context which, among other things, makes the armed drone possible, *thinkable*, and highly desirable, without which it could be neither strategically nor



morally acceptable. The same can be said for waterboarding, rendition, military commissions, the existence of Guantanamo, all of which have become part of a new norm, the equation of torture with America itself.

This has emerged largely through the decline of traditional restraining forces on the unrestricted use of power. Obama has performed a neat political hat trick—a “threefer” if you will. With his left hand, he silenced the black community (who have acted out of racial loyalty) and labor unions (who have been loath to question the Democratic Party, and their own place of presumed security and advantage within it). With his right hand, he appeased, protected, assisted, strengthened, and coddled what has become the unified structure of wealth and power (which includes the upper groups of banking and finance, as well as the military and intelligence communities). And with both hands, he has, as the snake-oil salesman par excellence, supported by the superb public-relations machinery in the White House, sold the American public a bill of goods suitably coated with liberal gloss.

It synthesized the financialization and militarization of the American economy into a political framework geared to the execution of more ambitious foreign policy goals (e.g., the Pacific-first strategy). At home it reinforced the principles and practices of market fundamentalism. In this light, drone warfare didn’t require much selling. The extreme secrecy surrounding its operations perfectly meshes with a public, uncritically identifying with counterterrorism as the new kid or cause on the block, knowing instinctively to shut its eyes to the many excesses committed in its name.

The drone, as part of a larger systemic discussion, proves ideally suited to the glamor of high-tech warfare which supposedly sanitizes killing. The victims appear not as fellow humans but factitious objects in a giant video game. Desensitization is a cornerstone of national policy; it becomes the foundation for making drone warfare and assassination operable.

Here Obama steps forward as essentially a counterrevolutionary figure to all of the social protest occurring in earlier decades. His race serves as a crutch for those who heretofore supported radical causes and now want for whatever reason *out*, and for those in the circles of power (once, in franker times, referred to as ruling groups), his race provides them a singular advantage: he could serve as a front man who, because black, side-tracked all critical discussion, subdued all opposition, from left-leaning—such as are still present—quarters. In Obama’s hands, the armed drone *is* America, which alone has the power to turn the tables on its foes, thought

to be legion in number, by making counterterrorism itself an instrument of terror. In the new dispensation, anything goes.

Let me return to Detroit and the Wayne campus with its turbulence. One antiwar rally held on the steps of a classroom building was so tense, with Breakthrough snarling in our face, the campus police—despite my calls for ensuring free speech on university grounds—standing idly by, that a black fellow who had seen it all, ex-Marine, fresh from Mississippi and voter registration, and doing community organizing in East Detroit, had become so unnerved that, to stop his body from shaking I had to grab him from behind to steady him. Facing the giant flag pole, he raised his arm, pointing, and said, “That’s your flag baby, not mine!” That statement made the next morning’s headline in the *Free Press*.

Another incident: students picketing military recruitment at the placement office were met by Tactile Mobile officers with ax handles, who bloodied them and drove them off. They scattered, then regrouped, and marched to the same classroom steps. (They were mostly just kids, as I observed, inexperienced, bookish, my heart going out to them.) I looked down on the scene from the eighth floor of Mackenzie Hall, the bodies sprawled out, colleagues at nearby windows actually jeering, at which point I literally saw red, walked down the eight flights, crossed the street, took the bullhorn, spoke, then walked with it to the Tactile Mobile Unit car parked on the street, and went nearly berserk, taunting them to hit me as they did these students. Nothing happened.

One final scene: Spring ’68, Eugene McCarthy’s daughter, Anne, campaigning for her father during the primary season, visited the campus, accompanied by Dustin Hoffman and other friends. Her speech would be outdoors, standing behind the ropes of what looked to be a makeshift boxing ring. Now, instead of Breakthrough, black militants sought to prevent her from speaking. Standing off to the side, I realized how ugly things were getting and stepped into the ring. I thought, wrongly, they would listen to my demand that she be heard, so first—given the mumbo-jumbo they were shouting about imperialism—I proceeded with a radical critique of McCarthy’s foreign policy (which partly quieted them), and turned the mike over to Anne, who gave a heartfelt speech. As I stepped to the rear of the ring, I saw that Hoffman was shaking (protest was becoming an occupational hazard) and once again, smothering him to my chest, I felt called upon to hold tight, provide steadiness, and see the party safely out.

I came to Michigan State in 1968, inhospitable to a fault with respect to radicalism and stimulation in general—not the proverbial “cow college,”

but a highly sophisticated institution for purposes of making war and servicing corporate needs. Those of us around at the time will remember the *Ramparts* cover of Madame Nu dressed as a Michigan State cheerleader, beanie and all. MSU, under John Hannah, also had a distinguished role in making agriculture a weapon in the Cold War. I prefer not to comment on my three decades there as professor of history, except to say that, again, I was blessed with very fine students. They, after all, not faculty, not administrators, make the life of the mind sacred and precious.

## Master of Counterrevolution: Obama—Character and Policies

### 1 PSYCHODYNAMICS OF TRANSFERENCE: OBAMA AND THE POPULACE

[January 6, 2013. This entry concerns pathological dissimulation as the psychoanalytic frame for policymaking, exhibited in ways already seen, for example, armed drone assassination as the president's personal signature, but also, on a grander scale, the betrayal of trust defining the hoped-for expectations of the American people in his 2008 election. The policies of the first term hardly bespeak progressiveness, not to say radicalism, and, in foreign policy, matching business-banking concentration at home, an aggressiveness is directed to market expansion, international financial and monetary leadership, and an increase in military power signaling global military hegemony.]

One cannot forgive Obama his repudiation of democratic values, not only championing drone-targeted assassination (wholly morally repugnant), but also, the nation's first black president, *not* standing up for social justice. One finds in him a policy void, where genuine regulatory and social-welfare measures are involved. What is becoming clearer is that he also has a *personal* void, an all-embracing emptiness, filled by self-aggrandizement. It is tempting to refer to him simply as O., to indicate a Kafka-like characterization, but I will stick with Obama to avoid confusion. Still he is, for me, O., which designates, not a cipher, but one clever, cunning, best described as a pathological dissimulator.

### 1.1 *Breakdown of Personality: Divesting Individuals of Autonomy*

Supporters—there are, on the putative Left, relatively few critics—refer to his calm, indeed, a preternatural calm, which they see as salutary, an unflappability accounting for intelligent, reasoned, necessary compromise in the face of wholly irrational, unprovoked hostility on the part of Republicans. Moderation becomes the best of all possible political worlds. It is difficult to argue against that view, in terms of the realities of Obama's career in politics. His supporters projected onto him what they wanted to find (a superb exemplification of false consciousness), beginning with the 2008 campaign and possibly earlier, accounting for his remarkable ascent, and cumulatively building through today and, one suspects, into the future.

One sees a psychodynamic process of *transference* from his supporters of their guilt, fantasies, and hopes, perhaps, about restoring or sanitizing liberalism to its alleged former glory and progressiveness. Obama becomes all (good) things to those who in their own lives crave this identification. In their eyes, backed by massive defenses, he can do no wrong. I'm not one for psychological flapdoodle, especially the throwing around of technical psychiatric terminology; but there is something here.

The transference is not self-explanatory; it resides in the structural-cultural reality of societal pressures to enforce a false consciousness in the political realm. The populace qua electorate is considered an easy target for manipulation. From the standpoint of capitalism, the breakdown of the individual's critical awareness is as vital to the system as is selling high-profit goods and services, often shoddy or phony, through mass advertising, and in fact a narcotized populace is prerequisite to that end. Projection/transference is a high art of political rhetoric to keep the overall capitalist system going.

### 1.2 *Countertransference (Obama): Abuse of the People's Trust*

Capitalism that is based on astute, sharply aware individuals who are resistant to fraudulent or, especially, patriotic claims, is a non sequitur. Rather, it is as though transference were systemic and highly correlated with alienation, the psychodynamics of divesting the individual of autonomous direction. Psychology individualizes too much of its subject matter. While essential to an understanding of the dynamics of psychopathology and therapeutic solutions, it neglects the *social* dimension of the formation of

personality structure. The relation between mind and society should be a foremost consideration of the discipline, yet is not, I suspect, because that would bring critical scrutiny to bear on the foundations of society, that is, capitalism itself.

Societal intelligence, self-possession, a capacity for authentic empathic feeling toward others, none is wanted in (and by) capitalism. Hence, the politicization of transference: this is the case in the way political rhetoric manipulates the inner needs and feelings of the individual, serving to create a modal personality structure congruent with the maintenance of the status quo. The condition is predicated on uncritical submission to an hierarchical structure (reflecting the gross maldistribution of wealth and power) *and* the dependence on a strong leadership framework.

Obama is in perfect pitch, made-to-order, for what I am terming a systemic integration of the financialization and militarization of American capitalism, which he has busily carried out. Yet, what is hardly noticed, transference engenders *countertransference* (here a displacement in social-psychiatric terms) in which Obama's response to those who have transferred onto him their wishes, dreams, and so on, is to turn the tables on them reciprocally acknowledging the people's (those who elected him) *trust* in him only to abuse that trust. He creates the illusion of a caring person worthy of that attachment, and sustains it for purposes of his own advancement and/or gratification.

## 2 PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF RIGIDNESS: OBAMA'S PRETERNATURAL CALM

Obama does not play by the psychoanalytic rules, transference as projection being strictly a one-way street. Of course, my usage is not standard, in which countertransference is intra-individual, but I think the social dimension is important as indicating an extreme egoistic core hedged about by high defensive walls. By that token, there is *no* countertransference of any sort that might qualify his inner rigidity and certitude. Obama is a master of counter-this and counter-that, as in his clear stand on counterrevolution and counter-policies in every direction, business and financial regulation, climate change, gun control, genuine progressive taxation, but not countertransference as allowing him to reciprocate the feelings projected onto him, that is, affect of any kind to break the surface on behalf of those who have looked up to him. It is as though he is taking revenge on the

people for his own shortcomings and inner doubts. A flatness of affect goes to the heart of Obama's psychopathology. In the absence of counter-transference, we have instead, perhaps, were there such a state, reverse-projection, in which he projects onto the people his own hostility toward them, mistrusting them, secretly despising them for not catching on to the deceptions practiced in their name.

### 2.1 *Pathological Hustler: Hiding Deep-Seated Resentments*

When is calm not calm, but something quite different? My reference is to a reaction formation (in the non-technical sense), in which I mean a sealed chamber in which nothing can penetrate which is not suitable to Obama's own advancement and which precludes on his part any response of warmth toward others. This is particularized in destructive emotions toward those who would expose his emptiness, stand in the path of his advancement, or, as perceived by him, all who might be withdrawing their affection. This accounts for his well-known prickly disposition toward radicalism or the Left in general, whether critics on pipe lines, oil drilling, environmental and climate-change issues, war, intervention, drones, an infinitely extensible list, those who, however rarely, do not ascribe his lack of progressiveness to Republican intransigence and are therefore prime targets for his hostility.

Obama's destructive feelings are well disguised. They have to be, or he would not have gotten far in politics, except among those who instinctively ferreted out his aggressiveness and saw that as proof positive of the vigorous foreign policy they were seeking. The *calm* that we, the body politic, admire in him is, I suggest, a disguise, not from himself, but carefully constructed, in which he is largely in control, in order to hide deep-seated resentments, psychoanalytic in origin, but whose etiology is less interesting to me, or important to the nation and world, than his actual record. Obama is not only a pathological dissimulator, but also a pathological hustler (e.g., "self-advertisement" for himself a la Norman Mailer). Abandonment may very well run through his life, setting up probably the only fascinating psychopathological profile, except for Woodrow Wilson (not even Nixon qualifies) among American presidents, signaling reason to be concerned for possible aggression as translated beyond personal encounters.

Here I record my disagreement with Justin Frank's *Obama on the Couch*. It is not because I'd rather see Obama, not on the couch, but standing before the International Criminal Court (ICC), where I believe he belongs. Rather, it is because Dr. Frank starts on the wrong foot.

He claims the value of “applied psychoanalysis,” really an oxymoron, when psychoanalysis is, or should be, above all *medical* at its foundation and require direct observation through patient contact. To build a case from Obama’s autobiographical works is to miss the obvious: the hustler qua writer, in which his books are contrived rather than revelatory, or rather, revelatory in their being contrived.

## 2.2 *Disdainful of Others: The Taste for Power*

There is little to trust of that possesses authenticity. Obama doesn’t protest against wars; he makes them. The extreme lengths to which he goes to ensure secrecy in government (at this writing, he just moved against a former CIA agent Kiriakou, who faces a prison term for revealing classified information to the news media), points up Obama’s obsession with *preventing* transparency. Whether decision-making in general or, specifically, the drone-warfare program and the civilian casualties it has caused, he leaves the impression that he has, and believes he has, something to hide.

Secrecy takes on the magnitude of a personality disorder. He appears to be hiding from his own fraudulence, not just as a careerist, but as a human being. He recognizes himself only as the fictional being he has created for himself. Calm is not calm, just as “cool” is not cool. The urge to power, as a means to compensate for real and imagined childhood and subsequent loss, is matched by the *taste* for power. This is now seen through his predilection for surrounding himself in photographs with top military brass and—Nixon and Bush II would be envious—the closeness with which he has ingratiated himself with the CIA and Joint Special Ops Command (JSOC). It is as though, through bestowing paramilitary functions on the former and giving special recognition to the latter, and even assigning them joint missions, he has established the makings of a private or personal army, *his* palace guard.

Calm, thus, is quite deceptive. The numerous compromises with Republicans, the saw about his negotiating with himself before negotiating with them, may be pure blarney in *both* senses: as skillful flattery of the wealthy and powerful, whether private or military, with whom he wants to identify, wants their approval, and ultimately seeks to join; and outright humbug. The policies, including global hegemony and market fundamentalism, which, rather than being viewed as a compromise, are what he actually favors. So also does he favor a social world which is distanced from real or threatened privation, resenting not being accepted in the charmed



circles of wealth and power. Here his many resentments show, despite his best efforts at control, as revealed in frequent temper tantrums and a bristling over the slightest indication of being crossed, for example, his recent dismissal of Gen. McChrystal for remarks in *Rolling Stone* which were hardly insubordinate.

Obama's disdain for those he deems below him, or for whom he has no love or compassion within himself to give, or people around him, insufficiently sycophantic, whom he fears may see through him and neither recognize his special qualities of intellect nor credit his earned right to self-importance, is quite evident and cold-blooded. Carefully screened, the individuals are few and far between that get inside the door. Like Larry Summers, they fall by the wayside in the unlikely case of a contest of wills. Empty, on-the-make, secretly envious, despite his own unparalleled power, of those who inhabit a seemingly nether (or is it, higher?) world of wealth and privilege outside his previous, and perhaps still present, ken, Obama is poised—notwithstanding being a bundle of tensions, or else because of them—to, in his own mind, stride forth as the Colossus of Rhodes, and just as brittle, to make his mark previously denied him.

### 3 THE BLACK YEARNING FOR DEMOCRACY: OBAMA EMASCULATING ACTIVISM

With this background, it is not surprising that one could fault Obama for *not* standing up for social justice as America's first black president. But not I, the actual record of his first term says as much, and not the possible psychological gobbledygook (on my part and those of others). Obama is his own worst indicter. His record is open to all who care to see, yet practically all Democrats lack the courage to do so. How could anyone not trapped in or narcotized by false political consciousness expect him to be otherwise than wholly unsympathetic to the demands of social justice, when in fact policies do exist in clustered form, so that on every conceivable measure ranging from the abrogation of civil liberties (including heightened surveillance) to the global presence of US military activity and drone warfare, he has led America *away* from not only social justice but structural-ideological emphases on social decency and equity in all realms of American life?

The same direction can be seen in international affairs; he acts to buttress the nation's effort to maintain a unilateral posture of achieving world political stabilization in support of a dominant economic position in securing trade and investment opportunities. In this light, social justice

ranks at the bottom of the heap, except in cosmetic form to reinforce docility at home and prestige abroad, and in *that* form guaranteed to ensure nothing fundamental has changed. To recur to my comment, I question—out of conviction and experience—Obama’s commitment to social justice; keeping in mind he is the first black president, let’s start with the first, conviction.

### 3.1 *Unified Authoritarian Context: Institutional Foundations*

As one with deep radical sympathies I have always felt that inequality, whether racial discrimination, anti-Semitism, authoritarian premises toward subjugation of whomever for whatever reason is viewed as different, and therefore, somehow inferior, provides the entering wedge for constructing a fascist ideology and social order. Antidemocratic practices and beliefs, however variegated their target and content, are at bottom integrated into a unified perspective or world view. Evil ways are not compartmented; brutality has a single face.

As I noted earlier, more than 60 years ago, T.W. Adorno et al., in *The Authoritarian Personality* had already mapped the fascist mindset as psychologically organized into a unified personality syndrome. This means, for example, that a stand taken in support of racist ideology and practice will be associated with, or find its complement in support of war, hierarchical social stratification and the worship of power, and, in general, contempt for what is perceived as softness or weakness. In today’s world, the use of high-tech instrumentalities of death, specifically the armed drone for targeted assassination, to be used—in the name of homeland security (in reality, global economic, political, ideological, cultural hegemony)—against those declared the Enemy of the State, proves an excellent actual and symbolic representation of the fear, intolerance, and ruthless striking out which characterized the postwar climate in an earlier generation of anticommunism.

I shall argue that counterterrorism and anticommunism are two sides of the same authoritarian coin. As I write, it was only weeks ago that Michigan passed a “right-to-work” law, and in our habitual way of narrow-gauge focusing, we see this as simply an antiunion drive pushed forward for its own sake. True, except that, *in context*, even in this one state, it is but the entering wedge for an entire agenda that includes tax relief for business, permissive gun laws—essentially none at all, closing down abortion clinics, and the list goes on. In other words, consequential action cannot in

practice, should not in analysis, be allowed to stand alone. Its very existence speaks to a whole foundation of institutions and configuration of policies that have allowed or encouraged it to take hold.

More, it speaks to a further and fuller cluster of actions and consequences which are integral both to the broader range of policy and to the action itself. Hence, when an American citizen is literally evaporated through a drone strike in a distant, foreign land, a country not at war with the USA, we know that beyond the individual life destroyed, there is also the destruction of the rule of law, the rights of citizenship, the Constitution, and the moral principles and conscience of the nation. Due process and counterterrorism as currently manifested are polar opposites. Drone assassination unlocks a number of mysteries.

### 3.2 *Race Betrayal: Obama and King, a Comparison*

So much for conviction. Suffice it to say, I remember vividly society-wide hysterical witch-hunts of the late 1940s through the 1960s (“hysterical,” but at a deeper level, highly contrived, as a skillful method for rolling back and/or wiping out the societal gains of the New Deal), and, after 1970, the successful implanting of a truncated ideological spectrum, so that much of the Left-portion was wiped out, lost to memory, and the then Center-Right, for the last 40 years, has become the new Left, tepid, moderate, frightened of anything authentically progressive.

As for experience, then, I am not a white liberal who lets Obama’s race, in the name of political correctness, or for that matter, liberalism, shield him from, and stand in the way of, criticisms. I am not intimidated by skin color, his or anyone’s, because I have been in the thick of the civil rights struggles during two crucial decades. None of this is as relevant as the fact that Blacks I have known, actively worked with, or admired at close range, were so much more giants, men of courage and decency, visionary, incorruptible, and therefore light years in stature above Barack Obama.

Obama has never earned his stripes, as did Bob Moses, James Foreman, James Farmer, SNCC workers, and (I write with tears) Dr. King. I can still see his eyes as we passed within inches in a narrow alley on a dark, rain-soaked afternoon, in Montgomery, Alabama. (I recounted the incident above, but it is worth repeating.) I, trying to reassure him with my look that I intended no harm as he and his staff squeezed through, not identifying me and fearing the worst, this with Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) youngsters lying bloody on the ground outside the

courthouse. The obvious point being Dr. King at the end of his life led the Poor People's Campaign while Obama in the prime of *his* life, with more power than anyone on earth to command, led battalions of the wealthy to greater heights, and in place of nonviolence, offered to the world militarization of everything of consequence he touches.

Hence the right to criticize comes naturally. Obama must be stripped of his color and looked at for what he is, one who *betrayed* every promise, real or implied, that got him elected in 2008, and who has pushed the Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse as a concerted effort ever since: Privatization, Militarization, and Financialization, an encompassing triad which has resulted in the widest set of differentials in wealth and power in US history. Compare Dr. King, trying to raise up the desperately impoverished, with Obama, his retinue of Geithner, Brennan, Axelrod, and Rhodes, in which the White House and Wall Street are mutually supportive adjuncts complete, at least metaphorically, with connecting tunnels.

### 3.3 *Administration Colleagues: Deaf to Humanity*

I mention Bob Moses, James Foreman, James Farmer, and, of course, as they would have been the first to admit, countless young people, black and white, who also risked their lives behind them, trying to make the American Dream an everyday reality, in order to make the comparison with three blacks close to Obama, Eric Holder, Valerie Jarrett, and Susan Rice. One can hardly criticize blacks for acquiring wealth, still less, aspiring to positions of respect and distinction; my animus toward capitalism must not lead to the acceptance of racially differentiated reward systems.

The point is, even with an acceptance of capitalism, one still questions, which side are you on? Obama's black colleagues, without exception, have, like their white counterparts, failed to address the objective needs of the *poor*, black as well as white. They have profited handsomely through corporate representations, investments, or other means, applauded war, supported dictators, and in Holder's case, used his powers to deny habeas corpus rights to detainees. In the preceding, they are faulted, not for being black, but for being, like Obama himself, stone deaf to humanity and social justice.

Is that a racist statement of the situation? No, the reason I point out their identity as blacks—matching that of Moses, Foreman, and Farmer—is to point out what Obama has done, that is, turned the black yearning for democracy and justice *on its head*. He has let the killers of the dream rise to

the top and the dreamers and later descendants fall to the bottom. Obama has emasculated black activism. It is not racial profiling to argue that Blacks did stand for something brave and noble. To ignore, spit on, trample what Dr. King stood for, and gave his life for, objectively the case here, two things are sufficient to give the lie to Obama: peace and justice. For now, the opposite on both counts reigns.

Dr. King transcended race and color, while at the same time using their specificity as an indictment of America's domestic *and* global policies: Montgomery and Hanoi had become spiritually united in his mind, the victims of a generalized societal aggression. Blacks were a special case of a people, not just persons of color, degraded and dehumanized by the workings of political economy, militarism, and ideological nationalism. His sense of the universality of peace and justice flatly contradicted Obama's particularization of the same, to be confined, as already evident, to America's hegemonic claims in the world, and the groups and individuals supporting, and planning to benefit from, these claims. In the court of world moral opinion, as between their respective records on peace and justice, Obama can plead *nolo contendere* but to no avail—drone assassination alone being sufficient Exhibit "A," forgetting a legally justifiable run through the entire alphabet, to put him away.

#### 4 EICHMANN ON THE POTOMAC: NORMALITY OF MONSTROUS DEEDS

Liberals can hide behind the fig leaf of Republican obstructionism as an excuse for Obama's wretched record on all things pertinent to a genuinely democratic life. And with Obama, there is the Democratic Party lying supinely at his feet. (If one speaks of polar opposites, democracy and Democrats will also do.) The immorality and illegality of drone warfare, like so many other issues, cannot be construed in isolation. What applies to psychodynamics, the interrelatedness of personality traits, applies equally to the interrelatedness of policies and actions. The field is wide open for analysis. Each area is interrelated with the others.

Wherever one looks in the prevailing societal context, all comprise a geopolitical strategy and requisite enforcement which checks democratic impulses from approaching the line, let alone crossing it, to a more equitable and equalitarian domestic order. That order, if achieved and successfully defended, would be capable of mounting a *rational* response to climate change, environmental spoliation, natural-resources extraction

and allocation, and sustainable energy. Likewise, foreign policy, to be a rational response, would have to address, given its present formulation and execution via the hierarchical ordering of class and political culture, the hegemonic quest for categorical unilateralism for supervising world trade, investment, monetary, *and* military patterns of control.

#### 4.1 *Interrelated Policy Trends: Autocracy or Democracy?*

In both cases, rationality would take account of the clustering effect of policies and thereby better evaluate their impact on a democratic social order, recognizing that interrelatedness can work in either direction, furthering liberation *or* repression. In the negative case, as here, it would lead to fostering the inclusive range of interrelatedness, a context of ideological creep, in which policy emanates from the core of a society which institutionalizes the power of its ruling groups. This is why the notion of a “core” wherein occurs the distillation of power relations is crucial to democracy or autocracy: it shapes a political-ideological configuration depending on class relationships, the definition of prescribed *order*, and the will to implement and enforce, or not, principles of equity and equality.

Paralysis in that regard thus tends to work, under existing power arrangements, in one direction only: a prevention of equity and societal reconstruction. Here interrelatedness functions on behalf of autocracy. Where it does not, interrelatedness can be dissected, its deleterious consequences checked, and a contrived structural determinism opposed in its tracks. Yet, because power generally resides on one side, a democratic social order has difficulty shifting the clustering of policies in a positive, mutually reinforcing direction. But interrelatedness *per se* cannot be escaped, whether going on the right foot or the left foot, and hence, a wide-open inquiry, as a minimum, would also take in—still stemming from drone warfare—banking and financial regulation, fiscal policy, taxation, and the wholly rent social safety net.

If every one of the aforementioned factors—climate change, environmental spoliation, natural-resources extraction and allocation, sustainable energy, an hegemonic quest in many areas of foreign policy, all systemic in character—had been rectified to serve a democratic people and the democratization of power and society, drone warfare would be unthinkable and recognized for what it represents, the armed excrescence of a diseased societal mentality. But why stop? Other policies and actions congruent with targeted assassination would include astronomical military

appropriations, a failed or consciously inadequate program of job creation (in which privatization, as the mindset, has created an obstacle to, e.g., New Deal public works projects), and similarly, inadequate or failed programs on gun control, oil drilling, mortgage-foreclosure relief, and the sham of effective regulation.

In addition, we'd see the vast lacunae of deregulation: corporate power allowed to expand simultaneous with robbing the public blind; class-oriented austerity measures designed to widen further, and permanently enmesh the divisions between, wealth and poverty; civil liberties violation on an increasing scale, from massive surveillance to uses of the Espionage Act directed against whistleblowers; and with the corresponding build-up of the National Security State and a sympathetic judicial climate, the absolutist disregard for transparency in government. One finds Obama's finger in the pie in all and sundry such policies, a unified clustering so that drones are hardly noticed, or else treated matter-of-factly.

(Parenthetically, does Obama, as community organizer, offset or cast doubt on the above analysis? Saul Alinsky would have been aghast at Obama's record on job creation, mortgage foreclosure, antipoverty programs. Instead, one sees a broad process of social misery in which widespread deprivation and human suffering for many was matched by obscene profits for major banks, the financial industry, including hedge funds, and those who were in position to benefit from high unemployment and the consequent depression in wage levels and weakening of unions. The Chamber of Commerce, and Republicans in general, should have applauded rather than opposed Obama, for doing their work better than they, without possessing the liberal rhetoric, could have done, or perhaps ever do, for themselves.)

#### *4.2 Policy Schematics: Business-Government-Military Integration*

Defense and foreign policies are hardly more appealing, or conducive to international comity. The armed drone, its mission of targeted assassination, is especially in violation of international law, but other policies and programs have proven equally destructive and aggressive though on a larger canvas. Notably, Obama has continued the global structuring of US military force. This includes a world posture of bases, the enlargement, greater mobility, and combative potential of naval power, and intervention in its various guises (along with rendition and proxy-torturing by our "friends and allies").

Then there is his own specialty, aside from drones, the now famous repositioning of military “assets,” a Pacific-first strategy, including the *pivot* from Europe to Asia. Here the emphasis is on the strong US presence in South Asia, the shoring up of military alliances in the region, and the enlargement of naval power, all designed for achieving the encirclement, containment, and isolation of China. This may go down in the history books as Obama’s singular contribution to American foreign policy, not least in enlarging the breadth of the Cold War to include Russia and China as principal adversaries of the USA and ensure a mental climate of permanent war. By that token, Afghanistan is not a sideshow but, like Eastern Europe, a well-placed foot in the regional door.

In addition, one must note Obama’s other foreign-policy interests, for example, the increased role assigned paramilitary and Special Ops forces, along with the expansion of CIA activities, in the “war on terror.” The list in both foreign and domestic policy is almost infinitely extensible, suggesting how far liberalism has lost any claim to moving toward, or even engaging with, radicalism, except to destroy or co-opt it. I have accorded the armed drone real and symbolic value for exposing Obama’s presidency for what I think it is: ruthless, plutocratic (i.e., “government of and *by* the wealthy,”), opportunistic, self-justifying, and deliberately opaque. The last-named in part is to hide real and potential war crimes, as well as collusive arrangements with banking and finance.

Drone assassination cannot be justified, except to a media-sodden, war-happy populace in which false consciousness trumps critical awareness, and self-indulgence trumps a modest, dignified mode of living, mindful of others, the environment, and the need for a peaceful world. As for the drone program, one recognizes the lies and subterfuges which hide the nature of government policy and the perfidy of political leadership because, in both, one sees contempt for the public interest and, ultimately, the denial a *public* dimension exists, one liberating the collective capacities of the people to inscribe justice and societal well-being in their lives. Any of the issues mentioned, not just the armed drone, can serve as a means to penetrating the thick walls of secrecy hiding and protecting what Veblen aptly called the Vested Interests.

At some point, I began thinking of Obama, for purposes of a book title, as Eichmann on the Potomac, but that may be premature until the evidence of the second term is in. Already, however, there is a sufficient record for purposes of analyzing the work of the administration. Looking ahead one wants to take the measure of Brennan, his counterterrorism



czar, and other appointments, and more important, take the measure of the damage done America, which implicates all of us, myself included, for permitting our leadership to commit monstrous acts in our name. In a word, we are all Eichmann, in sensibility if not action, until the ideology of war, privatization, and self-absorption in the conquest of wealth and each other is overthrown.

I have coined a new acronym for the occasion, “moca,” which signifies, miasma of corporatist aggrandizement, and by “corporatist” I mean business-government interpenetration moving in the direction of systemic integration, with a third element necessarily to be added, a society of business-government-military systemic integration. Call this the cusp of fascism. The innards of such a system may well represent late-stage or mature capitalism, but I hesitate to apply a label because the latest historical variety of fascism may well wear a liberal gloss—that is, liberal fascism, fascism without the concentration camp, although replete with other repressive features, from the incarceration rate for Blacks in the American prison system to the massive surveillance of the population as a whole. Obama’s flair for interpenetrated structures, unifying capitalism and the State, along with measures of social regimentation, does not augur well for the future.

## 5 A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ... BARACK OBAMA: MULTIPLE POLICY FRONTS

[January 9, 2013, the title, an obvious paraphrase of Solzhenitsyn’s Ivan Denisovich, is to say, as an experiment in conceptualization, that the analysis has been confined or frozen to a single day, a somewhat routine one, in which one sees, through my three Comments written to *The New York Times*, three distinct and important areas of Obama’s policies and actions. They represent—to me—the wider configuration and consequences of his presidency, past and prospective. All three areas—regulation, cyberwarfare, military/strategic policy and planning refer to what I am calling the idea of liberal fascism.

The point now, with Obama’s reelection, is not a continuation of destructive policies, foreign and domestic, but their intensification. Marxists might refer to this as a qualitative change, crossing the line from traditional liberal regard for foreign intervention and empty if not also sympathetic business regulation to a full-court corporatist press with military underpinnings to give it legs: that is, a preliminary statement of liberal

fascism. Based on objective criteria of societal welfare, I consider him a failure. What follows draws extensively from the Comments, along with several interpolations which set them into context.]

### 5.1 *Commanding a Military State: Imperatives of Capitalist Growth*

Obama's Second Term commences shortly. One can expect the further passage from continuity with his predecessors to an intensification of policy trends promoting a more dangerous escalation of American global power. First, one finds the makeover of US capitalism. Its financialization marks the transformation from a domestic industrial base to the displacement of that base through globalization onto the world scene, a move impossible to achieve without the direct military and financial assistance of government. This illustrates the systemic nature of the interpenetration of business and government, in which capitalist development was dependent on uniting the two parallel structures of power in effecting the change.

At an earlier stage, market expansion was a more informal affair. Neither multinationals nor outsourcing (both, before 1950, still in their rudimentary form) offered the need for full-scale military-government protection. No longer; the migration of the American manufacturing base abroad is a serious business, the totality of activity spelling the critical difference in the maintenance or decline of the political economy. Obama is not the architect of the transformation; it is doubtful he has technical command over, even the basic understanding, of long-term structural processes. But he commands a military state, one he guides in the spirit of capitalist imperatives of growth—and *that* is sufficient for blundering through a series of rivalrous operations which confirm America's determination to remain foremost in international politics and economics.

### 5.2 *Underpinnings of Policy: Financialization-Militarization of Political Economy*

One need not be Hilferding, or other Marxian theoretician, in formulating moves on the chessboard of imperialism to know, instinctively, the need to search for cheaper labor costs, more "friendly" environmental standards, and, with investment on the ground, closer commercial and military ties with the penetrated countries, if capitalism is to succeed and

be profitable. These go almost without saying, as would bringing American industry closer to its source of raw materials. The difference now is the creation of a relative production-vacuum in America, making it possible for high finance to fill the void, wherein giving rise to derivatives trading and a whole catalog of investment schemes.

Relatedly, inseparable from financialization is the increased militarization of American capitalism, an economic good in its own right. The defense sector already makes a significant difference between prosperity and stagnation, the USA in collapse-mode without it. It also is the necessary and vital means of giving protection to US-defined and -sponsored globalization itself, failure in this regard turning stagnation into a runaway locomotive.

Second, Obama continues a *two-pronged* foreign policy already in place; now it takes on further significance because it meshes more closely with economic policy and a wider US international role giving meaning and urgency to globalization. The Pacific-first strategy stretches US political-ideological-commercial-military influence throughout Asia, embracing Japan, India, and extending to Australia and providing a back door to the Middle East. Though boldly proclaiming American hegemonic purpose over vast stretches of market-penetration, the strategy more probably has been inspired by its military purpose of containing China (a more ambitious replay of post-World War II American strategy vis-à-vis Russia).

America's eye on the Pacific goes back at least to the 1890s and the Open Door, then provided an explicit imperialist stamp with TR's Battleship Navy. Under Obama, one sees the top-heavy military implementation of strategy, from clear articulation of the "pivot" from Europe to Asia of US interests to the movement of carrier battle groups into regional waters. Encouragement of Japanese rearmament appears quietly, again China the target (secondarily, North Korea), to be going on.

The second prong of Obama's foreign policy is the heightened use of paramilitary forces, notably, CIA and JSOC, coupled with armed drones for targeted assassination, that is, counterterrorism qua counterrevolution, and vice versa, so inextricably tied are these in Third World regions as part of a geopolitical strategy to plant a global footprint on the world system. Yet, focusing on his contribution here should not blind us to the remainder of his strategy: the ongoing hostilities toward Russia, an Israel-centered Middle East policy, the political, economic, and military ties with the European Community, and a reliance on NATO for exercising pressure on the East; these and other policy initiatives continue unabated.

The footprint is intended for ensuring US-led political stabilization of the world trading system on terms favorable to American interests. The domestic correlates to Obama's foreign policy can be restated as the domestic retreat in all pertinent areas—for example, deregulation of the corporate and banking structure, depredation of the environment and consequent failure to respond to climate change, diminution of the scope and resources of the social safety net, and a widening of extremes of wealth and poverty. All of these pave the way to the evolving structure and character of American capitalism.

### 5.3 *Unrestrained Capital Accumulation: Intensification of Priorities*

Obama here is not the Einstein of American statecraft, but rather an ordinary fellow, blessed with sufficient intelligence and guile to function in a well-oiled framework of national priorities. Their direction has been largely set by historical development, policy continuities, and leadership chosen through a political process whose narrow structural-ideological boundaries reflect a highly stratified class system of concentrated wealth and power. Obama is the servitor in residence of this system. He is not captive by it, so much as he is in agreement with its purposes, a predilection for operating within military-implemented monopoly capitalism. (If he were any different, we would have seen shock waves by now, not the advent of a second term.)

The foregoing picture is clear. This is a societal context in which the disparities of power have their foundation in the ideological and systemic features sanctioning unrestrained capital accumulation, in turn promoted and protected by the State. Wherever one looks, job creation, mortgage foreclosures, health insurance, all the obvious points of contact between a democratic government and its citizenry, the Obama administration, placed on a scale from 1 to 10, is somewhere between 3 and 4, as measured by the potential of a society given its wealth and resources. The list is long and one only scratches the surface.

When one reviews Obama's program in the context of militarism, which breeds a spirit of acquiescence, and absorbs the funds for societal reconstruction, and then views each element in turn (whether drone warfare or the social safety net), the intensification-element stands out. The descriptive phrase "more of the same" hardly does justice to what is now happening. Now safely reelected, Obama will be emboldened to execute a

course of market fundamentalism at home in all its gross inequalities, for example, a regressive tax base and subsidies to favored sectors and corporations, among government's pro-business functions under his leadership. In the interrelated fields of defense and foreign policy, one finds a new gusto in embracing technology to achieve lethality and conquer markets.

Who would have known, from the 2008 campaign, with its *faux* radicalism, that he would somersault from left to right and always land on his feet? And that he would wind up in a position on the political-ideological spectrum today called moderate or centrist only because the spectrum itself has tilted far rightward, and lopped off the left? Republicans make him look good by comparison. Yet, objective criteria of societal welfare, such as economic democratization, the willingness to confront squarely long-term problems of climate change and natural-resources planning, and a foreign policy accommodative to the aspirations and needs of others, make him look, in each case, a dismal failure if not worse.

#### 5.4 *Regulation, Cyberwarfare, Intervention: A Conservative Policy Disposition*

On January 9, moments away from the Inaugural, an ordinary day by most standards, three items appeared in *The New York Times* which grabbed my attention, prompting me to write Comments to the paper, hoping, unrealistically, I might stimulate discussion of issues through an alternative framework from that which is generally offered. In establishing the context and discussing the material from the Comments, I have chosen to signify three moments in the Obama administration's policymaking, that is, areas of considerable or potential importance which point to a possibly darker future than what has come thus far.

The first, *The Times* at its best, is an editorial which recognizes a problem and meets it between one-half and two-thirds of the way. It stays clear, as usual, of demanding that Obama be held accountable for what is here a clear case of anti- or non-regulation (euphemistically, "self-regulation"), rather than pose a clear counter-standard, an independent government authority backed by law *and* criminal penalties, to oversee and prevent abuses in the financial industry's mortgage and foreclosure practices. The editorial, "Another Slap on the Wrist," criticizes the "illegal foreclosure practices" of the banks and the regulators' delay in stepping in to pronounce the self-review process inadequate.

It writes: “If it’s timely review they [regulators] wanted, they would not have instituted the deeply flawed review process in the first place, nor would they have let the sham reviews drag on for more than a year. Worse, the settlement amount is inadequate.” The remedy? Still no word about the responsibility of the Obama administration, merely an “independent monitor” for overseeing “antiforeclosure aid” and asking the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which Obama savaged from the start, to draw up rules. [*NYT*, 1/9/13]

This is an excellent description of the problem, yet inadequate in conceptualization and remedial action. Self-regulation has been essentially the American Way since Theodore Roosevelt’s Bureau of Corporations (1903). It is a wholly misleading mode of regulation if by that term is meant a framework of law and constituted authority, as it should, whose purpose is to enforce principles of control in the public interest, not that of the industry or other body presumably to be controlled. Self-regulation is a sweetheart arrangement legitimated and winked at (for its abuses). *NYT* correctly calls it “a wrist slap,” by a compliant government working not for the people but rather for throwing a shield of protection around that which is to be regulated to ensure its continued questionable behavior.

Self-regulation historically represents therefore the interpenetration of government and business (including the financial sector); this is just a scholarly and/or polite way of saying, deregulation per se, so that independent control is neither wanted nor achieved. It is a hoax, and *The Times* here must put the ball more squarely in the Obama administration’s corner for its generalized lack of regulatory commitment. Even the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), which the public should pin its hopes on, was weakened from Day One when Obama marginalized Elizabeth Warren, its creator, from assuming the directorship, just as it marginalized, also early, Paul Volcker from banking reform. Obama does not want effective regulation.

The second, an article by reporters Perloth and Hardy, describes recent cyberwarfare attacks on US online banking sites, more serious than previously thought because, “instead of exploiting individual computers, the attackers engineered networks of computers in data centers,” revealing greater sophistication and maximizing the impact of the interruptions. It is believed, but not established, that the attacks originated from Iran—for which Obama’s national security staff is understandably angered and alarmed, not, of course, conceding the obvious, that John Brennan started the cyberwarfare round by *first* initiating an attack on the computers of

the Iranian nuclear research facility. This is the same Brennan famous for “enhanced interrogation,” the president’s most trusted adviser on counterterrorism, geopolitical strategy, and founder, patron saint, and ideologue for the armed drone for targeted assassination, and nominee for head of CIA.

None of this reflects well on Obama. His approval of an escalation of cyberwarfare tactics incorporates them into a broader strategy which rests upon the reliance of paramilitary forces and armed drones, ostensibly in advancing the “war on terror,” but actually a geopolitical outreach to have a greater Middle East presence and, globally, warn and/or counter real and imagined adversaries. The importance Obama attaches to the advice of Brennan makes the latter positively Svengalian. [NYT, 1/9/13]

Brennan occupies a special place in Obama’s first term, as in a Harry Hopkins-relation to FDR, if this set of personages were not so obviously mismatched. Brennan will never be Hopkins, nor Obama, FDR. An ubiquitous Brennan, with his cyberwarfare against Iran’s nuclear site, helps us to understand how criminal activity generates blowback. Nominated to the CIA directorship (while probably still having Obama’s ear), he is one who has consistently lied about civilian casualties resulting from drone assassinations.

Since drone technology is not rocket-science, how soon will the USA find other nations using armed drones against America when the next intervention rolls around? Only psychopaths hit below the belt when weapons development is already so sophisticated. If America is taught a lesson, so that when it finally stops (because the price is too high), then the world can catch its breath, and diplomatic trump military solutions. With Brennan in place, Obama reveals the destructiveness at the base of his character and thinking.

In the third piece, David Sanger, the paper’s authoritative voice of political analysis, sets the appropriate tone for *The Times*’ place in both the newsgathering world and, more immediately important, the White House Press Corps. This group of elite reporters vies with each other for access to high level officialdom, and, in turn, are skillfully played off against each other, thereby ensuring there would be a selective process of partiality based on the favorable treatment shown the administration. This does not question the integrity of reporters, so much as it reveals the subtlety of the manipulation and their dependence on a loaded system if they are to gather the news.

I suspect Sanger is a step above the fray, given the White House's desire to cultivate *The Times* as an influential opinion-molder; yet, granting his entire convictions in the matter, his thinking resonates to a remarkable degree with official policy, as can be seen in his introductory comment that, “[W]ith the selection of a new national security team,” Kerry at State, Hagel at Defense, Brennan at the CIA, this is a group “deeply suspicious of the wisdom of American military interventions around the world.”

As a child, we called that a “snow job,” according to Webster's, “an intensive effort at persuasion or deception,” and whether or not the phrase is still used today, what we have here is expected yet objectionable, a willing suspension of critical insight or the dereliction of duty. Correctly, Sanger casts “intervention” in plural form, but as for the renunciation of military interventions, that remains to be seen. A streamlining may occur, which brings Robert McNamara's more-bang-for-the buck Vietnam War military thinking back in vogue, and the changing guise of interventions may occur, for what else is armed drone, cyberwarfare, and continued establishment of military bases to conduct these and paramilitary operations but *intervention*? This is one leopard that does not change its spots. America without intervention would not only strip diplomatic history textbooks of most of their pages, but make the nation unrecognizable to itself and others. Thus, Sanger helps to usher in a new era of *groupthink*, in which moderation prevails, intervention fails the test of cost-benefit analysis, and a serene cloud settles over 1400 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Gone, he writes, is the old team of hawks, and now Brennan, “who helped devise the ‘light footprint’ [the presently fashionable phrase for the supposed turn to moderation] strategy of limiting American interventions, whenever possible, to drones, cyberattacks and Special Operations forces,” steps forward as the *eminence grise* of what I would term the new dispensation. This is a somewhat horrifying thought, in which Brennan is said to enjoy, according to *The Times*' reports, the ear of the president more than other advisers, his famous “playbook” in hand, together with Obama modernizing the whole schema of US global ascendance to register swifter, more efficient, more terrifying force on any who stand in the way. For Sanger, inexplicably, “drones, cyberattacks and Special Operations forces” are the salutary wave of the future—perhaps what I had in mind without quite realizing when I called attention in previous references to liberal fascism. We are to be congratulated because Doctor Strangelove has not been given a Cabinet post, and the USA has not thus far threatened a Nuclear Holocaust if we don't have our way.



Sanger continues the preceding quotation, “All [Kerry, Hagel, Brennan] are advocates of those low-cost, low-American-casualty tools [i.e., drones, etc.], and all have sounded dismissive of attempts to send thousands of troops to *rewire* [my italics, a new entrant in Pentagon jargonize] foreign nations as wasteful and ill-conceived.” Intervention is not abandoned after all, and instead the USA now merely rewires foreign nations, that is, interferes with, rearranges, and/or controls their internal affairs to suit ourselves, but of course at cheaper cost. This moderation may then be described as liberalism-on-the-cheap; the moderation and the liberalism, however, are subject to qualification along what I believe to be fascist lines. The hierarchical class structure, including business consolidation, government-business interpenetration, and, increasingly, their systemic integration with militarization as the unifying glue of the social order, has not been changed, and, under Obama, rather, intensified.

Finally, Sanger, the inveterate insider, deserves credit for an insight which contradicts all reference to moderation. Namely, that the new team, marking the supposedly major internal shift in national security policy will, with these appointees, contribute to a decision-making process which will be White-House-centered: “[The three] are likely to accommodate themselves, in ways their predecessors often did not, to a White House that has insisted on running national security policy from the West Wing.” I think he knows whereof he speaks, and he here makes clear what observers have failed to notice through all of the alleged compromises with Republicans. Not only is there Obama’s gradual centralization of power in the Executive branch, particularly when it comes to national security, but also Obama’s sense that, rather than compromises on a whole range of issues, he sought the adoption of conservative policies.

These include an inadequate policy of job creation, the abrogation of civil liberties, the weakness of the regulatory system, and the emphasis on military power. There have been some supporters who view these positions undoubtedly as compromises, because they had been originally hoodwinked by the promises of 2008; yet, especially in the black community, Obama can do no wrong, and for the large majority, as witness after four years so little disaffection among his political base, one finds the latter taking comfort in their state of deep denial. The base reasons, accordingly, that he favored progressive measures from the outset and, not through expedience but prudence, he went through the (much publicized) painful process of negotiating with himself to do the right thing for the nation

[NYT, 1/9/13]. This is not Hamlet; surface agony is not sufficient to dispel doubts about inauthenticity. Forthright wrestling with oneself is commendable in a leader—there is no evidence of that here.

Obama went through the motions so as to disguise his conservative policy disposition. This was a shrewd assessment given the uncritical political consciousness characterizing the base and the country at large. It is better to be thought a compromiser, with fawning attention to his supposed reasonableness and desire to unite the red and blue states, than to be thought a con artist, self-promoter, careerist, or narcissistic, psychologically fragile, dissimulating figure of—despite an urge to power, and relatedly, payback to his inner demons—somewhat undistinguished character.

### 5.5 *Enlargement of Executive Authority: A “Light Footprint” Strategy?*

Sanger called attention, then, to what many observers missed. They characterize Obama as weak, better, fragile, unprepared for or ill-suited to the hurly-burly of political negotiation, and hence, in his character, disposed to reconciliations of all sorts. Instead, one finds the opposite possibility. Beginning with the centralization of power, and thus enlargement of Executive authority, Obama has freed himself to adopt a policy course of his own choosing, tilted heavily to military aggrandizement embodied in the reliance on drone warfare, and the way he has repelled efforts at government transparency. But psychology is less important than actuality.

Sanger, and with him, the foreign-policy establishment, cannot be allowed to announce the “light footprint” policy/strategy when reality blatantly contradicts it. Just taking the size of the military budget, the “pivot” from Europe to Asia (without neglecting Russia or the Middle East), especially the naval build-up to implement the Pacific-first strategy, even US activities in Afghanistan, and the initial moves for a unified American-led trade zone whose military implications are obvious—isolation and containment of China—and one has a prescription for heavy-handed hegemony. The light footprint is the stomping down of a massive elephant. Obama’s foreign policy *is* aggressive viewed in the context of great-power geopolitical strategy. But beyond the “in general,” Sanger neglects the “in particular,” for one, John Brennan. I am not persuaded the armed drone for targeted assassination leaves or creates a light footprint.

Brennan, as Obama's chief adviser (which will not change when he goes to CIA) is, I believe, a war criminal. The record is clear: despite his consistent denial of civilian casualties, including children, the program is a moral affront to the rule of law and democratic governance. The Stanford-NYU report, "Living Under Drones," is one of several authoritative findings, which include reference to second strikes on funerals and first responders.

Brennan's cyberwarfare, which, as in today's *Times*, shows the USA playing with fire—that is, blowback—is frosting on the cake of his fascistic tactics. (First in mind is his defense of waterboarding.) Why Sanger views CIA-Special Ops paramilitary operations, as in torture at black sites, or assassinations connected with regime change, as marking a light footprint, needs an explanation. Obama's team, new or old, will continue Tuesday night off the Situation Room hit-list merriment in murderous glee.

Today, drone assassination and cyberwarfare, tomorrow, what next? The year is not off to an auspicious start. *The Times*, customarily taken as a fair reflection of enlightened public opinion, appears remiss in its obligation (all the news that's fit to print, or, speak truth to power) to its readers, society, and, given its reach, the world. Obama escapes serious criticism from the paper and the demand he be held accountable for policies in every direction injurious to the achievement and maintenance of a democratic system of government. I have taken a single day, geared to the reporting of the preceding day's events—not Pearl Harbor, not Hiroshima, not the Kennedy or King assassinations, but an ordinary day—covered by *The Times* fairly straightforwardly, yet showing Obama, however far from its intentions, up to his neck in wrongdoing.

### 5.6 *Falsification of Trust: A Failure of Accountability*

This is not about personal corruption but policymaking which, either by commission or omission, is the falsification of the trust a presumably democratic nation places in its leadership. We start with banking regulation, or the lack thereof, and the broken homes and broken bodies resulting from mortgage practices still largely extant. This is mere surface for the absolute failure of the nation's regulatory framework, apparatus, and compromised independent execution. This should be laid at the president's door for *not* demanding enforcement of the mandates and principles of his executive departments and agencies, nor formulating and implementing the necessary ground-rules to achieve the public welfare.

Which is worse, SEC or FDA in doing the people's business—a toss-up? We then turn to cyberwarfare, which represents an illicit messing-around, sabotage on a grand scale, with or in other peoples' affairs, and prompting a mindset in which anything goes: Why not, by the same logic, and mindset, from the president down, which finds it appealing, *assassination*? The wish is father to the act, as in the use and whole purpose of the armed drone. Obama, illustrating the centralization of power in the White House, or Executive Power in general, is personally responsible for cyberwarfare, a major decision, in light of its retributive consequences, whether or not he signs a specific order. In the third case, the posture of the USA in its foreign relations is at stake. The "lighter footprint" has changed nothing fundamental about the historical pattern of expansion, the articulation of doctrines and their translation into practice which favor unilateralism in ordering the global system of monetary, trade, and investment activities, and the resort to military implementation of America's hegemonic aspirations.

Obama, like most previous presidents, takes hegemony and unilateralism as articles of faith—*that* is how we confer the honor of statesmen on our leaders. But is it what many of us, or the members of the Nobel Committee for the Peace Prize, expected? Here, we see a warrior verging on, if not already qualifying for, the status of war criminal, in which the full record of drone strikes amply testifies. *The Times* in its investigative reporting has contributed admirably to that record, but its editorial page and now Sanger have failed to catch up.

Apparently, Obama has little to worry about. He is not Herbert Hoover, hiding behind the curtain in the White House, watching, as the Army forcibly ejected the Bonus Marchers from the Anacostia flats. He is his affable self, successfully—on most occasions—masking his tensions, as he meanwhile turns the screws on the American people and anyone else within reach, knowing he will never be held accountable for his failed presidency, never be found out.

So much dirt is swept under the rug, it is hard to decide what takes precedence, concrete measures in domestic and foreign policy interconnecting monopolism and militarism, corporatism and intervention, or other conservative dualities unifying public policy, *or* the actual betrayal of the public trust, enabling the former a clear field, full speed ahead? Philosophically, liberalism is from its inception the historical guardian of the specifically capitalist property right. Unlike feudalism (which specified rights and obligations), the methodology of liberalism negates moral

obligation *per se*; rather than spell out and act on *reciprocal* relations between lord and serf, oppressive as that was or might be, now the capitalist is lord and master, the worker, in terms of bargaining rights, security, and identity, little more than a serf.

Nascent capitalism, and this continues to the present, lacks a moral center. Reciprocity has been replaced by the wage-relation, so that an important line—the social bond of obligation—has been crossed. I believe that even Locke and Adam Smith would not countenance this transformation in its subsequent sterile form. Natural rights could go only so far, the same for the Invisible Hand. For where Locke and Smith would disagree with later accepted ideology concerns the process of accumulation, capital gained via control over the state apparatus. Capitalism not developing internally under its own steam would signify systemic closure, favoritism, in a pinch, the militarization of society, economy, and culture, in response to international capitalist rivalry.

Nothing under modern capitalism must be left to chance; this generation praises Locke and Smith, yet proceeds to equip capitalism with artificial crutches, rather than let it stand unassisted on its own two feet. Centralization of power, whether in Executive hands, that of business itself, or more probable, a synthesis of the two, is viewed as denoting modernity, the further advancement of capitalism to a new stage, indeed, a variation of corporatism not seen before, in which mechanisms of consensus ensured permanent stabilization. But whatever the pattern of historical development from which this point of departure occurs, democratic structure and institutions would be the first to suffer. Trust would be, as it already is becoming, a commodity, shorn of, even when paying lip service to, moral obligation. Leadership is bereft of qualities enlivening and safeguarding a just polity. The specter of normless rule as the operant principle of government is being previewed in these pages.

## Butchers of the Beltway: Anatomy of “Legitimated Violence”

[January 15, 2013. Nietzsche would be ecstatic (in his popularized form, which has little to do with, e.g., *The Genealogy of Morals*) over the ascent of the blond brute in an American society ground down by conformity and mediocrity, except for the fact that the liberation he called for, of multidimensional human development, had little to do with Americans discussed here, or for that matter, America as now constituted. The blond brute was neither a Nazi storm trooper nor a US militia member and gun freak, but an individual in possession of himself/herself, non-alienated, free to experience life on its own terms, neuroses and psychoses dissipated or simply absent with the adoption of an affirmative stand toward others and toward living. The Nietzschean corrective to alienation, and more properly, anomie, would be to replenish the emptiness of soul with self-love magnified into striving for the fullness of human potentiality. This would not go over in America, especially in the present day.

If drone assassination symbolizes and confirms American foreign policy, the gun, and the disposition to violence it creates, symbolizes and confirms American domestic policy. The two are interrelated, as are the respective policy domains; in both cases a gnawing sense of fear erodes societal- and self-identity, making recourse to aggression the means of restoring balance. For the individual, the gun obviates the need for proving one's worth, just as the drone does for the aggressor nation.

Introspection of whatever kind is ruled out, lest it bring home to nation and individual alike knowledge that might question the purpose

and direction of goals. Violence, even its readiness for use, or its potential, firms up confidence on the national and individual levels, conveying a sense of moral rightness in the exercise of, or capacity for, strength. Without it, a presumed wasteland of equality would reign. The gun is the source of individuation, more sacred in its political-legal standing than freedom itself. Or so, many Americans believe, as code for the defense of a failing social system.]

## 1 TRANSMOGRIFICATION OF INDIVIDUALISM: GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

One would be tempted to blame the National Rifle Association (NRA) for the impasse over the control of gun violence. Its obstructionism and its application of political muscle in the Congress count for something, but there is a psychological perversion operating when the issue of “gun rights” shares an equal place in the American Decalogue with property rights, on both counts a somewhat tawdry interpretation of the Constitution. To explain how the NRA exercises such political-ideological powers—as though having America in its crosshairs—would have to take into account the individual’s loss of autonomy. This leaves an empty husk of property-obsessiveness calling for the separation of persons in battle gear facing each other as strangers, in sum, the prototypic mindset and behavior of capitalism.

### *1.1 Predisposition to Violence: Absence of Societal Democratization*

The implication for our purposes is there is a tendency to violence at the heart of capitalism because the pursuit of self-interest requires defensive/aggressive modes of conduct to actualize one’s security and holdings. On the national level, the same process, really, ethnocentrism, the we–they dichotomy (belief in one’s in-group superiority), and xenophobia, fear of the stranger, holds firm, but now instead of actualizing security, the mantle of aspiration is spread further to cover hegemony. In either case—national hegemonic goals, personal self-interest—the promotion of *force* is present or in readiness.

Why, though, should the nation—and its political leadership—be enthralled by claims of protection for gun ownership under the Second Amendment? No one applauded the efforts of civil liberties groups, much less showed interest in, or helped to defend on constitutional grounds,

victims of McCarthyism, when the *Fifth* Amendment was torn to shreds before our eyes. It depends on whose ox is gored. The Left, nary a murmur is heard in protest, the Right, it has been not unlike letting loose the bulls of Pamplona. The NRA's success is a tribute to the politicization of ideology in America, the evident double standard affecting Left and Right, guns serving as a guide to Constitutional interpretation along many lines, including privacy rights and the making of war (as a proneness to the legitimation of violence itself).

When one measures the frequency and extent of gun violence, the NRA can only be viewed as an enabler. Its own self-protective measures and popularization of gun culture become in America shorthand for deep-seated Reaction. In its role of helping to rent the social fabric, it sanctions instruments of violence per se, analogous—harsh as this may sound—to al-Qaeda with an American accent, capable of striking sheer terror into the body politic. It is immaterial who pulls the trigger, when the climate of promiscuous death is celebrated through rock-hard resistance to the social control of weaponry. Much of antigovernment sentiment in America, feeding into multiple attacks on the welfare functions of the State and the range and depth of its regulatory framework (hence, as noted, a spearhead for generalized Reaction), has nothing to do with government—these are not homegrown Edmund Burkes—and everything to do with gun control.

I use the al-Qaeda analogy because presently the Gun Culture is far more perverse of the nation's foundations than all the work of terrorists combined. The NRA here is symptomatic rather than causal. It is less a Fifth Column in America's midst than an association bordering on a quasi-religion, articulating the psychological fruits of the permanent-war doctrine and practice. A truly democratized America, one having a foreign policy without a global system of military bases, a record of habitual intervention and counterrevolution to ensure the political stabilization of the world's trade-and-investment activities compatible with US interests, would have less incentive and motivation to cultivate a disposition to violence. The same can be said of domestic society, if genuine respect for the individual in a context of greater economic and social equality were to prevail.

I separate the phenomenon of gun violence, which has structural-ideological roots in US twentieth-century international behavior and domestic consequences of wealth concentration on class structure, from the lackadaisical, backcountry ethos of hunting as described in W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*. Yet even then one senses a predisposition to violence



stemming from more than the Blue Mountain's haze, as in the heritage of slavery, maintenance of segregation, the exercise of social control over blacks. Violence is everywhere, in the DNA, historically, of America, even when appearing in supposedly more innocent guises. Backcountry violence is sporadic and personal. The frightening kind is institutionalized both in the social structure and value system. The dream of dominance is in the very air we breathe. The violence comes from all sides, not least from disgruntlement and resentment over perceived lack of reward and recognition at *every* level of society.

### 1.2 *Self-justifying Individualism/Nationhood: The Hobbesian Perversion*

Materialism is the incubator, in capitalism, for a framework of esteem made up of infinite gradations, individuals therefore ever mindful of ascending the ladder of success and respect. Failure to do so creates tensions, self and social; this returns us to Hobbes and the state of war, one against another, each against all. There is little room for individual kindness and social love. From political economy, where the condition of depersonalization, alienation, and a resulting competitive dissociation is a formative context for human behavior, one sees their transference—already coinciding with the historical growth of ethnocentrism and xenophobia habituating society to feelings of personal wariness and mistrust—to the wider culture. This makes for the ripeness of violence. Its presence is not surprising, given the system of rewards and incentives married to the valuation of the person's worth.

And if one accepts the idea of the conterminous identity of capitalism and America, it is not a large analytical leap to exploring the capitalistic foundations of violence itself. The rawness of capitalism in the protection of its principles is a seemingly frontier-like trait transposed into modern society, conveniently invoked from the Turner Thesis onward to render violence harmless, even democratic. This places capitalism and America alike in a state of utmost denial. Violence cannot shake its reputation of being the great equalizer, not as understood in political philosophy as the condition of equality, but as bringing all humans down to the same level through the ability to kill one another.

This is the Hobbesian perversion (because Hobbes, too, like Nietzsche, cannot be held responsible for the distortions to his works) of political-structural democratization of the polity. Guns require a toehold in the

social order, and gun culture tips that order to the Right as the self-justifying individualism of power and gain, each for himself/herself vis-à-vis everyone else. This structural-psychological paradigm is altered in one respect which actually confirms its correctness: the camaraderie of the violence-prone, having in common deploring democracy in favor of rule by the strongest, wealthiest, or militarily most advanced. This becomes an ideal fit for advancing protofascistic premises of hierarchy and the contempt for weakness. The gun in America is full-scale authoritarianism writ small. Neither Hobbes nor Nietzsche would be satisfied with the result.

Too, America's international role of counterrevolution and related posture of unilateral hegemony invites blowback, specifically, terrorism as currently faced. America would not have attracted Muslim and Arab opposition and hostility to the same degree, if at all, were it non-imperialist and fully democratic. As it is, America is a sitting duck for global agitation from any quarter, it being hard to generate hostility and opposition when the target has impeccable credentials of democracy and freedom. Even aspiring caliphates would hesitate over the legitimacy of such an attack.

Add to that the US intimidatory world presence, which warns all nations, as integral to Cold War international politics, first, Russia, now, China, not to mount ideological-cultural claims which challenge or are viewed as antithetical to the structure and values of American-defined and -sanctioned capitalism. Given its unilateralism, the complexity of alliance systems, the centrality of oil affecting the other two, would America still have been a target on the world stage if it had pursued a more accommodative historical course? Violence breeds violence. The USA, decades ago, entered the world of blowback, retribution (on earth, not in heaven), or simply comeuppance, for its gargantuan appetites and the treatment of non-industrialized nations.

### *1.3 Political Culture of Sadomasochism: A Negation of Justice*

Why then even mention the NRA? Despite a purported membership of 2.5 million, they are a mere surface indicator of a social phenomenon in American political culture which points to underlying authoritarian traits and rigidly maintained defense mechanisms preventing introspection and self-criticism. The American Way becomes code for the hierarchical structuring and militarization of American capitalism. The result is a worship of power and, though sanitized and channeled, for example, into the world of sport, a cult of violence.

Unrestrained capitalism has made a hodgepodge of human values, rule of law, respect for the poor, the disadvantaged, those rendered powerless, so that “democracy” is transvalued into extreme individualism, the renunciation of social obligation, and that which we now place on a pedestal—gun rights. Strip the Emperor of his clothes, and we find the prototypical neofascist clinging desperately to an identity which masks, even from the individual, an inner nihilism. Did Newtown, Connecticut, shake such a person up? Did it penetrate the thick walls of Obama’s psyche—crocodile tears in locus, while murdering far more children than gun violence could ever account for, in his signature campaign of armed drones for targeted assassination?

My generation can remember the Butcher of Buchenwald, although, thank goodness, I was never in a death camp. But now one fears—for America’s sake and its future—the Butcher(s) of the Beltway. The Holocaust is not comparable *yet* to what in the near-term one can expect from the rightward shift of the political-ideological spectrum. It exceeds on any moral scale the profound Evil and bestiality that political imagination in our time can conjure up. Projections of either structural tendencies or trends in political leadership simply do not measure up to the fate of the Jewish people under Hitler. But as concerns about maintaining the social peace mount, and while inequalities of wealth and power continue to widen and intensify, there is reason to be deeply worried.

One’s concern, rather, is that Obama and Brennan not be permitted to become *our* butchers; their geopolitical vision of a drone-saturated methodology of undisputed hegemony intact, can work greater harm in international politics than we’ve seen since JFK. I choose Kennedy here to be provocative, because I want altogether fresh thinking about his nuclear diplomacy, counterrevolutionary efforts in Latin America and the Third World generally, as creating a precedent for Obama, and the ability of both to clothe conservative doctrines and policies in liberal glitter.

This drone business has already crossed the line to a sadomasochism so unworthy and unspeakable in the upper reaches of government. However much hidden from view by Obama’s self-declared imperatives of the National Security State, it should have aroused the wrath of a now narcotized, spineless American public willing, indeed anxious, to turn a blind eye to a successive record of atrocities in the name of fighting terrorism. We cannot face the commission of criminal acts done also in the name of promoting freedom.

If, in America, there were sufficient will to stand upright for the achievement of a society founded on principles of peace and justice, not as *words* but structurally inscribed and demonstrably realized in the culture, values, and condition of the people, the NRA would be seen as an excrescence of the wider political culture, and its goals and tactics puerile, easily countered. Yet that flies in the face of a corporatist framework. If this achievement of peace and justice had been realized, and the NRA, as a small example, been relegated to the dustbin of history, corporatism would have had to renounce its most cherished attributes. It would no longer be corporatism. Instead, we have combined political-structural-ideological traits of hierarchy, toughness (toward those viewed as weaker), and, now perhaps more than ever, militarism, to reinforce patterns of social discipline and the mentality of *looking upward* for guidance in public policy, economic growth (trickle-down wealth creation), all decisions affecting foreign policy and the determination of war and peace.

#### 1.4 *Political Murder (Collateral Damage): Paraphernalia of Death*

In a society dedicated to peace and justice, teachers in Texas would not be undergoing instruction in the use of firearms, guns would not be brought into the national parks, and children in Pakistan would not be evaporated because a president, poring over *hit lists*, makes a determination, then transmitted to a “pilot” in an air-conditioned sanctuary 8000 miles from the target, who presses the lever, and the child, possibly in the same car (often of targets not identified) or walking on the street, becomes “a blood spat.” When public policy becomes the excrement both of Constitutional principles and democratic practices in real time, one gains a sense of the enormity of the betrayal of public trust on the part of government. Every child’s vaporization through presidential policies is a nail in the coffin of American freedom.

Obama’s nomination of John Brennan as CIA director gravely insults moral decency (whether or not the public raises an eyebrow). It speaks volumes about Obama’s moral vacuity, which each day becomes more evident. America has had four years of politicized ravagement: social policy, withered; environmental spoliation, unchecked; civil liberties, drowned in the unctuous blather of the state secrets doctrine (i.e., the use of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers); unionization, rolled back; surveillance, magnified, and so on. Brennan, who should be a prospective

candidate for investigation of war crimes, is acknowledged to be Obama's closest adviser. And Obama himself? On Terror Tuesdays he sits down with his national-security advisers, baseball-card-like hit lists in hand, ready to play God, juices no doubt working, as one who holds whole areas of the world in a state of terror, lest an Unmanned Ariel Vehicle (UAV) descends from the sky on a mission of human obliteration.

No US president to my knowledge has ever played such a *direct* role in authorizing the death of others. This seems a personal thing with him, and his colleague Brennan still does not admit the existence of civilian casualties. Why need he? He has the weight and prestige of the government behind him. He also has Obama's cunning redefinition of the combatant, all males of military age broadly conceived—the beautiful and the damned alike; and if wives and children get in the way, then presumably they are fellow travelers or otherwise deserving their fate. The evidence is overwhelming. If the “collateral damage” which comes from the designated strikes isn't enough, there are also the *second* strikes directed at funerals and first responders, premeditated murder being the nicest way one can put it.

## 2 COMPENSATORY THEMES: AMBIENCE SURROUNDING GUN VIOLENCE

The foregoing provides a context for the analysis of gun violence, and the reason the NRA enjoys the success that it does. Americans, beginning with the president—for we are looking at a framework in which political-cultural cues are transmitted from the *top* downward through both major parties—appear inured, desensitized, indeed, habituated, to violence. Gun violence is legitimated, allowed to go unchecked, because of the widely-subscribed value placed on equating social restraint on individual conduct with impermissible checks on the freedom of action. Whether my gun buttresses feelings of manhood and sexual prowess in me, is a testimony to my liberty as a free American. It provides a fictive equality which takes me beyond narrow class boundaries, or—the rationalizations are as unlimited as a fertile and furtive mind can concoct.

However, the important point is that the gun obsession is rooted in a dense ideological atmosphere saturated with compensatory themes and values in which the individual, denied a meaningful personhood, desperately seeks to fill the void, the emptiness, with the electrical charge he or she no longer feels. Instead of love sweeping the country, as the popular

song of the 1930s went, now guns are sweeping the country. In fact, guns, whether used, held in secret, or displayed in public areas, are a cultural indicator of the prevalence and extent of alienation, the emptiness Melville once wrote about in “Bartleby,” or Thomas Wolfe, in *Look Homeward Angel*, or Sherwood Anderson, in *Winesburg, Ohio*, now, through war, consumerism, and so on, multiplied many times over.

### 2.1 *Downward Vector of Authority: Enabling a Gun Culture*

Guns are the antidote to numbness, the surrogate for acts of heroism. Take away my gun, I become a nonperson, prey to nightmarish creatures of the deep, left without protection. Sadomasochism above is met by paranoia below. They intermix, leaving a diluted form of each spread with varying proportions throughout the social order. The obsession with guns becomes thinkable *and* tolerable because it fills a need, apparently unique to America, as evidenced by its comparative absence in other advanced industrial countries. Armed teachers—packing on your next trip to the mall or the supermarket—making the worship of guns a National Gun Holiday (mark your calendars, 1/19/13), all of these are signs of a societal decadence to which, if further confirmation were needed, we are oblivious.

The downward vector, whether of power, repression, or other salient category defining the flow and direction of authority and class relations—Barrington Moore’s twin concepts from *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, “legitimated violence,” and “modernization from above”—well describes what is involved. Starting from the top down, responsibility for the plight of gun violence, gun culture, gun obsession, lies with Obama: A nation which promotes the use of force and executes, by presidential order, its application in ways that violate international law, sets a bad example at home. How can Obama push for effective gun control when he facilitates the promiscuous use of weaponry, all the time increasing in lethality, as with the next generation of nuclear bombs reputed to be in the pipeline, and for now, super-carriers to confront China?

Because Obama’s position is poor on war, intervention, regime change, paramilitary operations, and armaments, there is neither a moral nor political basis for advocating for effective gun control. He is favorably disposed to all things military (which sets up an incipient mental conflict of interest), but more, he consciously *disfavors* regulatory controls as such, as is the case with fundamental reforms of every description, from the regulation of

the financial and business systems to rearguard holding actions with respect to climate change. His procrastination is not merely temperamental; it is ideologically driven. This can be seen by an article in *The New York Times* (1/11/13), by Michael Shear and Peter Baker, entitled “Tough Path Seen by Obama on Ban of Assault Weapons,” so devastating as to call forth protests from the White House and an article in the *Washington Post* largely defending the Administration.

Obama strikes a pose of pretend-vacillation, almost invariably starting by anticipating defeat. He then proposes halfway, ineffectual measures pleasing to those who are made subject to the regulations—and probably corresponding with his own conservative stance. This is called “pragmatism” or “realism,” but looks, rather, as his being devoid of conviction and always anxious to court popularity, the conservatism representing opportunism more than specific choices in public policy. Foreign policy seems another matter (the centralization of decision-making in the White House), but on gun control, a feigned modesty, essentially, pleading with Congress, to allow the Administration some cosmetics (i.e., cover) at home—*not*, the banning of assault weapons, but, background checks.

## 2.2 *Guns, a Moral Cancer: Sanctioning Aggressiveness*

The reporters write in careful, neutral language: “the White House has calculated that a ban on military-style assault weapons will be exceedingly difficult to pass through Congress and is focusing on other measures *it deems more politically achievable*” (Italics, mine). Specifically, this means gun checks “and the need for more research on gun violence.” And when Biden let slip “limits on the purchase of high-capacity magazines,” in his own extended public remarks, “he made no mention of curbing the production and sale of assault weapons.” Still, with apprehension about being pinned down by anything specific, the reporters state, “A spokesman for Mr. Obama said later in the afternoon that the vice-president’s remarks merely reflect a desire for a broad approach to gun violence.” To be sure, the broader the approach, the less the depth or specificity—and the less likely of anything efficacious being done.

One hears of gun rights, seldom or never, *people* rights? The dichotomization of US political culture appears to be coming down to *that*, a political culture of force and deceit that is eroding the nation’s inner nature, assuming there has not been a breakdown of values for some time. Guns, like cigarettes, hasten carcinogenesis, a cancer, moral, rather than physical,

that ravages the body politic, and in time also physical, as the deaths from gun violence mount up. Foreign policy sanctions aggression as national security; gun rights sanction aggression as domestic security.

The two are mutually reinforcing, one feeding on the other, the common base being an aggressiveness itself, whether or not carried out. Globalization, among other things, provides a magic carpet: the gunholder at home may never venture far, but his/her thoughts go out to American service members at the farthest corners of the world, doing the nation’s business (the double entendre intended) of safeguarding the national interest (primarily capitalism as a system), while the fighting men and women abroad, by experience and conviction, see the gun-rights people at home exemplifying the freedom for which they themselves are fighting.

The unity of social bonding marks the militarization of consciousness, foreign and domestic policy integrated, making of power an absolute. It was not always thus. If present trends continue, rather than worry about fiscal cliffs, America can start worrying about the fascist precipice. When I observe, “America in the Cross-Hairs,” my real reference is not to the NRA, but to ourselves. By allowing the Butcher(s) of the Beltway to define the tone of national life, backed by actions which disgrace the moral standards openly professed and underwrite any meaningful democratic society, we proceed to shoot ourselves, no longer in the leg but through the heart.

Authoritarian submission is not only to leaders, it can also be to nation, ideology, and capitalism, each in turn cast as self-evident patriotism, and together, acquiescence in the fundamentals of hierarchy and hegemony. By militarization of consciousness I mean an internalization of precepts and principles enforcing the social bonding of classes. Upper groups in time coalesce into a ruling class, and even short of that, a *command* system of structure, economy, and culture: authority from above, complicity and compliance from below.

### 3 EXECUTIVE USURPATION: MILITARIZATION OF THE *MILITARY*

[January 22, 2013. My steady outpouring of Comments to *The New York Times* for several years was prompted by the desire to present a sustained critique of the lead-up to Obama’s First Term. It already appeared obvious this early, with the announcement of his appointments, that he would betray the promises he made in the 2008 campaign. I will not return to



them, and rather concentrate on the three weeks before his new term. Yet the record became so apparent, as on health care, that I was alerted to expect the worst.

Obama did not disappoint. Even from the start, he, Janus-faced, looked upward, serving and servicing a political economy of unrestricted wealth (as in the absence of authentic banking and financial regulation) while he simultaneously looked down (as in working to weaken the social safety net, turn a blind eye to mortgage foreclosures, and do little in the way of job creation). Ordinarily, to be Janus-faced means looking to right and left, but since Obama fails meaningfully to address the Left and positions identified with it, I have him merely looking upward and downward. The posture is habitual to him.

Initially, I ascribed this negation of promised change to a failure of will or nerve. I did not at the outset realize that his compromises and opportunistic use of Republican obstruction signified accommodation to, and soon, wholehearted acceptance of, what we were led to believe he strongly opposed. Rather, he seemingly needed a crutch for self-pity and implied the promise of doing better when the spirit of bipartisanship took hold.]

### 3.1 *Next-Generation Weaponry: A Redefined Cold War*

Crediting Obama with compromise is a fraud, as though for the sake of successful passage of reform/radical legislation. He wants the substantive results. These include a range of conservative policies: from market fundamentalism, to intensified wealth inequality; environmental degradation, to extreme claims of government secrecy (lack of transparency) and the abrogation of civil liberties; the infusion of militarism into popular culture, to the much-despised armed drones for targeted assassination—and the list goes on. It is compounded, becoming uglier by the day.

Our president personally authorizes assassination, *vaporizing* human beings from control stations 8000 miles away. His trusted adviser John Brennan is at his ear, a new nomination inaugurating the Second Term which deserves widespread substantive criticism. Astoundingly, Obama has been in the process of pushing for, not only the militarization of capitalism, but also the militarization of the *military*, a neat trick that even Bush II had not attempted. This can be seen, most obviously, in the huge military budget, with new, more sophisticated (i.e., lethal) weaponry in the pipeline, such as—under the rubric from New Start of “modernization”—the next generation of nuclear weapons. This can be viewed as a base line for three specific areas of interest.

Notably, there is the Pacific-first strategy, a somewhat original Obama emphasis which builds on late nineteenth-century expansion via the Open Door to Asia, transformed into more specific military, as opposed to trade, conduct and policy via TR's Battleship Navy. Now an updated policy framework marks the continuity with the past, only more ambitious in content and scope. (The Trans-Pacific Partnership, still in its infancy, is one of the offshoots.) He does not neglect the original Cold War in attempting its transcendence to what is, because of the new focus of attention, a more dangerous and problematic stage. Russia is still, in Washington's eyes, Russia, or better, an unrepentant Soviet Union, which, under Putin, is deemed expansive and up to its old tricks.

But new or old Cold War including Russia, there is a qualitative shift of interest to Asia, backed by the rise of naval forces (super-carrier battle groups) to the Pacific. The pivot from Europe to the Far East is a significant move in geopolitical planning and strategy, the point of which is the isolation and containment of China. No longer is Russia the exclusive object of concern; accompanying the pivot is, besides the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the buttressing of a security pact, negotiating bilateral alliances, and joint military maneuvers. This serves to inaugurate a new or redefined Cold War; under Obama, China replaces Russia as the designated enemy.

A second area of interest concerns the armed drone for assassination, a weapons' choice calculated to be an instrument of terror which changes the complexion of warfare. Rather than engaging in war and intervention, boots on the ground, the possible though unlikely risking of dissent and social protest at home, the drone fulfills the dream of sanitized killing from a distance, clean, antiseptic, presumably no remorse of the "pilot," a methodology of killing combining modernity and nihilism, an unbeatable combination against non-state forces. Except for one thing: its function is not exclusively to engage in fighting terrorism, its nominal purpose, but rather, in the name of counterterrorism, the drone assists in implementing the military penetration of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and, held in reserve, other regions to be added on demand. Intimidation, more than body counts, is pertinent here. Operationally, as in hitting funerals and suspected neighborhoods, the promiscuous murder of innocents conveys a message: ruthlessness and collateral damage, together, are the *modus operandi* of America, no holds barred, as though drones were emblematic, along with rendition and torture, of America's *total* response to terrorism—and what might lay beyond, national liberation struggles, and so on.

The drone has become an all-purpose weapon. It creates the pretext for its launching facilities—bases worldwide, barracks, protective measures, garrisons, a foot in the door through which to influence local affairs, imperialism-by-stealth. Global implications are legion, directed to enlarging and multiplying US spheres of influence—what decades before required the landing of Marines, as in the Western Hemisphere. Now, the scope of activity is practically limitless, counterterrorism the basis for hegemonic growth, and the drone fitting exactly the needs, symbolic and actual, for its enlargement.

The ancestral home of the drone, it should be recalled, is the Nazi use of rocket warfare reigning down destruction on Britain in World War II. This was a policy choice which, beyond a similar form of technology, expressed the goals of creating havoc, destroying morale, and giving the illusion of unlimited power, not to say (also terrifying) presumed scientific superiority. Totalitarianism breeds its own psychological framework of *force*. The employment of armed drone assassination does not figure well with the belief in and practice of democracy. The historical line from Hitler to von Braun (*our* Nazi) to Obama may seem harsh, outlandish, of course defamatory, but the existence and use of the drone argues otherwise. It is a hated, inhumane instrument of terror that only one who shares in, or even countenances, its use, deserves inclusion in a moral indictment.

A third area of interest to be noted (there are of course more) is the way implementing drone assassination carries beyond targeted killing to a posture of global intimidation. One cannot claim to fathom the minds of policymakers, given the atmosphere of secretiveness in which they work, but I suspect the drone's purpose, at the very least, is to start with its role in counterterrorism, which, itself, activated, becomes a surrogate for and/or is directly transformed into counterrevolution. Who, given the political-cultural lag deriving from the Cold War, is the greatest menace, the jihadist or the revolutionary? Fortunately, in America the answer can go begging, once the two are collapsed into one. By dramatizing the first, counterterrorism, the drone, keeping the public's attention on it, can transfer the emotional content on to the second, hence a generalized or globalized antiradicalism (the gist of counterrevolution) in which radicalism and social revolution are seen as historically far more menacing to capitalism than anything present terrorism can possibly mount.

### 3.2 *Hegemonic Solidification: The Drone in Wider Context*

Relatedly, America is striking at what it sees as a surrounding world of hostility; it has sought desperately to remain the exclusive superpower, guiding and benefiting from globalization, in a world of multipolar centers of power. To that purpose, the drone—as symbol and fact—is joined by the entire array of US political-military resources. The ball now rolling, one finds the expansion of CIA functions, beyond its charter, and moving from intelligence to paramilitary operations. It is aligned with the Joint Special Ops Command, nominally in pursuing its avowedly chief task, counterterrorism, but actually striving for a still greater international role in stabilizing world markets, currencies, natural-resource extraction (the a, b, c’s of imperialism), as hegemonic solidification of military-financial-commercial supremacy.

Placing reliance on drones, the CIA, and Special Ops, Obama emerges as the quintessential sophisticated liberal, having sidestepped the minefield of vast armies in hand-to-hand combat. His close relations with the special forces and intelligence communities, building mutual trust and loyalties for increasingly high-risk assignments, have the effect of combining adventurism and the expansion of Executive power. In addition, one senses he is on an inflated ego trip or the creation—in spirit—of a personal army. This is not a lovely picture. The Inauguration is coming in a matter of hours.

## 4 NOTATIONS ON CURRENT AFFAIRS: ADMINISTRATION POLICY

My Comments for *The Times* presented here cover a range of policies (surprising in what should be a calm before the festivities) addressed to news articles, editorials, and columnists or political analysts (Krugman, Sanger): tax policy, the fiscal cliff, Chicago crime, the firing of a CIA member, rising health-insurance costs, economic recovery, Afghan withdrawal and the gun culture. At all times, Obama occupies center stage or is not far from my mind. All of the entries are relatively brief, to be viewed as notations of a political-historical narrative.

### 4.1 *Obama Tax Compromise, Favoring the Wealthy, January 1, 2013*

The Times has provided a good analytic breakdown of the tax compromise particularly by bringing out: (a) the \$450,000-level for actuation of an increase (the related article gives the exact sum, from 35% to 39.6%,

which is hardly a decent increase); and (b) the phony victories—if we can even call them that—concerning the estate and capital gains taxes. (I might add that the phrase “middle class,” with its upper limit of \$250,000, is a travesty, not only on defining social class, but an insult to and source of false consciousness for working people earning far less.)

Yet what is still needed is a systematic critique (or if that word is too strong when applied to Obama, then report or exposure will do), of how much he and his administration favored the wealthy. It’s our own fault. We are still falling for the liberal gloss Obama applies to, not conservative, but outright reactionary policies, taxation being merely the topic du jour. Even on the “fiscal cliff,” I’m glad you mentioned the phrase “public investment,” but I hope you expand on that in future. Obama has two guiding economic principles: deregulation and privatization—a direct contribution of the much-vaunted Clinton Administration, which gave us not only Robert Rubin, but also the axing of Glass-Steagall. Obama and fellow Democrats would qualify for FDR’s “economic royalists,” no better—whatever Obama’s supporters might say—than the Republicans.

#### 4.2 *Fiscal Cliff: From New Deal to Raw Deal, Uncaring (Bipartisan) Political Swampland, January 2, 2013*

What a way to start 2013. Both major parties can be credited with a dismal performance, the Republicans for cruelly and inhumanely calling for “cuts” as a way of savaging the social safety net, the Democrats for selling out on traditional New-Deal principles, such as genuine progressiveness in the income tax structure. Peter Baker was incorrect yesterday in speaking of the “Left” within the Democratic Party. There is no Left there or, with the exception of a few lone voices, anywhere in the major parties. It was nice to see Obama, golf clubs in tow, ready to resume his vacation, as meanwhile the American people have entered a new stage, from the New Deal to the Raw Deal, where wealth, deregulation, privatization, armed drones for targeted assassination, all—together, for in reality they are inseparable, or singly—trump social decency, respect for the needs of the less fortunate among us, good old-fashioned fairness. 2013 will witness, because of an uncaring political swampland inhabited by both parties, the beginning of decline, decline not least in its moral foundations, fast being eroded by the performance we see with respect to the fiscal situation. This mock-battle (neither side caring a farthing for the poor, the unemployed, the foreclosed,

those without adequate medical care) is symptomatic of an inner condition of dry rot: more gun massacres, more homeless; welcome to 2013!

#### 4.3 *Blowback: Moral Bankruptcy of National Leadership—The Killing Fields of Chicago, January 3, 2013*

Blowback. Granted, Blacks in Chicago are tearing each other apart; the mutual destructiveness speaks volumes about a nation incapable of or unwilling to provide jobs, the mentality of privatization and market fundamentalism making impossible and unthinkable the public works programs of the New Deal, where the youth and unemployed can develop pride for having made meaningful contributions to society. Blowback here refers to a collapsing of opportunity for the poor and minorities.

But blowback also refers to the moral bankruptcy of national leadership. *The Times* reports shooting at funerals in Chicago. What about Obama’s signature strikes by armed drones for targeted assassination? The Stanford-NYU report “Living Under Drones,” and the work of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, have verified Obama’s policy of attacking funerals as well as first responders in Pakistan and elsewhere. With examples like that, why be surprised at the killing fields in Chicago? It’s time for political leaders to drop their cowardice about gun control at home and show, abroad, a US presence of genuine peace. Where is Dr. King when we most need him? America is, deservedly, because of its shortsighted greed at home, and aggression overseas, falling apart, and the black youngster in your photo is paying the price of fear and being robbed of a decent education and life. America has to straighten out, before violence on the South Side abates.

#### 4.4 *Reply to Critic of Previous Comment, Barbarous Campaign of Drone Warfare, January 3, 2013*

Thanks [name of writer withheld], I agree that, at first sight, the analogy or comparison may seem an analytic stretch, but think about it; (a) privatization prevents government programs of social reconstruction which could provide meaningful work and a sense of group solidarity to troubled and rootless youth; and (b) Obama hardly sets a good example for tranquility at home with his barbarous campaign of drone warfare—the first president actively engaged in hands-on assassination. His speech at Newtown surely

was insincere, given that by his direct order, 162 children have already been killed by his drones. As a nation we are failing on both levels: domestic solutions to critical problems, and abroad, violations of law, due process, and much more.

#### 4.5 *Obama and Abridgement of Civil Liberties: CIA Firing— Secrecy, and Suppression of War Crimes, January 5, 2013*

Mr. Kiriakou's case exemplifies the dangers of the National Security State as intensified under the Obama presidency. Only recently have criticisms been acknowledged to be warranted, so completely has Obama been given a free pass and his supporters still refuse to admit how far civil liberties have been abridged and/or violated during his rule. Example: He has invoked the Espionage Act at least six times against whistleblowers, more than all previous presidents combined. The obsession with secrecy is nearing paranoid proportions, as witness that surrounding the armed drone program for targeted assassination.

Shane Scott's reporting, always informative, adds a further twist: When he writes, "one of an unprecedented string of six prosecutions under President Obama for leaking information to the news media," he is giving the nation a wake-up call to how intent Obama is to maintain an iron curtain around policymaking. Why the extreme secrecy? Common sense suggests one wants secrecy because there is something to hide. The Obama people are walking a fine line, knowing that they are on the edge of, if not over their heads in, war crimes. This present prosecution is ill-advised and gratuitous, indicating that things are spinning out of control. Even your adjoining piece on former Gen. MacChrystal indicates overreach. Obama goes for the jugular against anyone who crosses him. MacChrystal, like Kiriakou, is the victim of a paranoid president.

#### 4.6 *Rise in Insurance Costs: Obama's Record of Non-achievement, January 6, 2013*

Of course, the rise in insurance rates! If "one of the biggest objectives of the Obama administration's health care law was to stem the rapid rise on insurance costs for consumers," he would have fought for the single-payer system, even if only as an opening gambit, and then pushed for the public option. Instead, he did neither. One is tired of hearing about Republican intransigence to explain away the Obama record of non-achievement.

His base in its deep denial, and in its stonewalling of all criticisms, exhibits classic symptoms of transference—projecting on to him all their fantasies and hopes. It is time to grow up.

I say “of course,” about insurance premiums, because if you go back to the early White House Health Summit, the picture is clear. All dissident voices were kept out; it was a love feast for health insurers (promised exemption from antitrust prosecution) and Big Pharma. Meanwhile, Physicians for Social Responsibility started picketing the White House in scrubs—a major embarrassment to the regime, and so two were admitted, on condition that they remain silent. Hence, one must widen one’s critical perspective: health insurance? Bank regulation? Climate change? Indeed, the defense industry? Whether or not *The Times* chooses to print criticisms of Obama, he is an imposter who betrayed every promise from the 2008 campaign and in 2012 had little to offer but unctuous platitudes, including on gun control and now signing the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

#### 4.7 *Economic Recovery: Privatization—A Closed Economy* (Krugman), January 7, 2013

Prof. Krugman unintentionally reveals the bankruptcy (of ideas) of modern capitalism when he writes, “my spending is your income; your spending is my income.” Two things are immediately wrong with the formulation; (a) it is too confining, as though an hermetically-sealed economy—a zero-sum game—in which economic activity must work within those confines, and (b) spending per se tells us nothing, for what must be asked is: what kind of spending, and on what? A society avoiding depression through conspicuous consumption and the production of ersatz goods, is not one I’d choose to live in, nor would it, or perhaps could it, ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and the obviation of social tensions.

I think the cross Prof. Krugman must bear—which he seems gladly to do—is privatization, which itself poisons the atmosphere, as in the USA, against government expenditures (the very solution for recovery he, correctly, recommends), but, tying them (“while the private sector regains its balance”) as he does to narrow-gauged solutions, will get us nowhere.

America suffers because of its ideological rigidity. Seemingly long ago, there was FDR and the New Deal; there was direct government employment; there was direct government spending on the improvement of infrastructure, reforestation, and not least, the conservation of human skills, through, for example, WPA and CCC. What Krugman recommends is paltry in comparison.



#### 4.8 *Afghan Withdrawal: Unilateral Dominance in Shaping Global Stabilization* (ed.), January 7, 2013

*The Times* deftly sidesteps the elephant in the room, the big question: Why are we there in the first place? A wholly needless war which leaves its indelible mark: US intervention has no rational basis, except within the framework of geopolitical strategy, itself flawed because predicated—still to this day—on unilateral dominance in shaping global stabilization for purposes of advantageous trade-and-investment opportunities. A lot of people, on both sides of this tragic, misguided conflict have died—for what?

Militarism has become a US knee-jerk assertion to practically everything, a good in itself regardless of the havoc wrought, including the distortion of the American economy leading to the savaging of the social safety net. It is time to leave, and to cut our psychological losses. Like Vietnam, the USA has lost the Afghan war, however much it is politically and ideologically necessary to disguise and invert that truth. Instead of playing the numbers game, whether 3000, or 9000, or 60,000, hardly matters—the moral flooring here is plain zero.

### 5 OBAMA AS DANIEL BOONE: CULTIVATING A GUN CULTURE

[January 28, 2013. The January 26 edition of the *New York Times* has three items relevant to the issue of gun control, an editorial pleading for the restoration of funds for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for the study of gun violence, its argument being that this is really a public health problem; an article by Peter Baker, “Gun Control Advocates Need to Listen to Gun Owners,” Obama’s making of obeisance to the gunnies, their lobbies, the manufacturers, all who support the bastardization of the Constitution in this vital respect; and a second article, by Mike McIntire, on “Selling a New Generation on Guns,” which describes gun manufacturers targeting (pun intended) children, not simply to build a future pro-gun constituency but actually have them become *active* gunnies, starting them off with magazines like “Junior Shooter,” then getting them into gun “sports,” as a step to full gun-embracement. I’m reminded as a child of the tobacco companies during World War II boasting about sending cartons of cigarettes to the troops in the hospitals—a start, as with guns, to an addiction to harmful substances, bullets rather than cigarettes. (The Obama qua Daniel Boone reference is my take, from the Baker piece, on Obama’s praise of the wilderness experience, where men are men, and guns, well, guns.)]

I believe we are closing in on fascism when Obama can display tears over Newtown, and at the *same time* personally authorize targeted assassinations which, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, have killed, a tabulation not that recent, 162 children, well more than all children killed in gun rampages during his presidency and for some time before. How can we expect gun control at home when we indifferently slaughter men, women, and children in Pakistan and Somalia?

Why fascism? In part, because we, as a nation, are so indifferent to human life, except that of our own, and even then selectively applied. Why fascism? In part, because our indifference extends to the land, the atmosphere, the vast accumulations of wealth vacuumed-in under our noses, the contempt for Third World nations, the alacrity in building up a war machine, and, as with Obama and his close associate Brennan, constructing a foreign policy of permanent war—as though we need and must have an “enemy” to relieve our own boredom and, more basic, unify us as a country.

The lines of continuity between anticommunism and counterterrorism are clear, founded on the love of hating, as a prerequisite of glorifying our own nationhood—and giving a much-needed support to American capitalism. If America requires scapegoats, why not go one step further, to the genuine article, the terrorist in our midst. This might include Goldman and AIG executives, Sheldon Adelson and the purveyors, hiding under the casino tables, of political garbage via non-accountable secret organizations (I say that, not as a devotee of conspiracy theory, but from today’s *Times*), and those in the administration and Congress advocating for war, intervention, and regime change.

## American/Israeli War Crimes: National Policies Engendering Fear

[February 5, 2013. Murder, she said; No, not the popular song, not Brecht's Arturo Ui (rhymes with phooey), not Chicago's South Side gangland variety, but the real stuff of modern times: cold-blooded, methodical, depraved, the peculiar mix of militarism-ideology-practical realism. In a word, we see now the psychopathology of power, whose profile only the modal serial killer would ideally fit—the overkill mentality and practice, to prove one's superiority, muscularity (as opposed to national "softness"), powers of intimidation against the weaker, contempt for humankind, and therefore, deep-down, contempt for human life, including one's own.

I mean *official* violence as practiced by nations, leaving the opposition either vaporized (US armed drones for political assassination) or buried deep under rubble (Israeli military attacks in Gaza). The result is a national policy of terror revealing the use of disproportionate force, women, children, sometimes infants under one-year-old, in the crosshairs. Impunity is combined with immunity. America and Israel are joined at the hip of international war crimes; counterrevolution results in standardized behavior.

All this in less than a week: *The New York Times* had an article on the new US drone-opening in North Africa and Roger Cohen's column, reflecting on Amos Oz's criticisms of Israel, both of which prompted my brief Comments to the paper. Thinking about their interrelatedness, and then, coupled, with an op-ed piece by George Bisharat, a Hastings Law School professor, on why the Palestinians should find a way to take Israel

before the International Criminal Court for possible war-crimes prosecution, I found, in these three items, the basis for working out the interrelations troubling me, the stark phenomenon of war crimes as such.

This is the result, a brief look at drone warfare, and principal attention to the Israeli attack on Gaza in early 2009. Little has changed in the intervening time, the commission of more war crimes by the two—a veritable crime syndicate that Ui, Capone, Lepke, or, in my home town, Miami Beach, the S. and G., could only envy—except that they didn’t have the organized resources of the State behind them, drones, F-16s, batteries of artillery, and the profound indifference to killing in promiscuous fashion. For the former, crime was a business; our political crime boys seem made of sterner stuff, the desire to maim and kill, for the glory of—I wonder if they know themselves.]

## I COUNTERTERRORISM AS ITSELF TERRORISM: DELIBERATE, MALICIOUS, CRUEL

### 1.1 *Institutionalizing Permanent War: Dulling the Public Conscience*

On January 29, 2013 the *New York Times* had an article about the US introduction of drones into North Africa. Comments were favorable: zap terrorists; cost/benefit analysis (cheaper than massing ground troops); antiseptic—everything but moral outrage and/or recognition that drone warfare is part of the Obama–Brennan geopolitical strategy. That strategy includes creating global bases using drone airstrips to stake out a presence in key areas, otherwise known as “hot spots.” This establishes the pretext and incentive justifying the concept and practice of, and commitment to, the condition of permanent war. Permanent war, institutionalized, can then become the primordial doctrine binding future administrations, through elaborate rationales, secret legal memos authorizing conduct (including the killing of American citizens), and, as a corollary, keeping the program under the tightest wraps, a disconnection with the American public, who yet fully approve. Further, the continuance and implementation of drone warfare is ensured through continually adding to the names on the “hit lists.” Dirty, yet accurate, words, for example, “assassination,” like government itself, both falling under the cloak of a morbid hostility toward transparency, are prevented from sinking into the public consciousness.

Since Vietnam, it has become increasingly difficult to reach the public conscience, which is weak and overloaded with patriotic guff. Pressures are mounted to strengthen and enforce conformity, a society unifying through a siege mentality, so that beyond conscience, even consciousness is affected, becoming largely closed down to what is being done in the name of the American people. Perpetrators of this geopolitical strategy no doubt fear they have something to hide, that is, self-evident war crimes; only their high office, America's global military predominance, and the political-financial intimidation of "friends and allies," have saved them from being taken before the International Criminal Court (ICC). The foregoing list is hardly exhaustive. Three further aspects of the geopolitical context for drone warfare should be noted.

### *1.2 Framework of Atrocities: Multipurpose Reach of Drones*

First, drone warfare has utility as a means for keeping alive the societal tensions necessary for a full-scale counterterrorism campaign. This campaign has a tendency, perhaps integral to the planning stage or formative thinking about drones, to spill over into the abrogation of civil liberties at home. One sees, not coincidentally, the rise of surveillance into a national pastime (incipient McCarthyism), xenophobic responses to immigration—I hesitate to use the word "reform"—and further pressures to destroy transparency in government and in the military's own record. (We have to rely on the Bureau of Investigative Journalism to inform us of the number of children murdered in drone attacks.) This extension could have been achieved without the presence of drones, and had already been in the works, but their presence neatly cemented a unified configuration of the legitimacy of force and erosion of civil liberties.

Second, drone warfare serves to integrate the CIA and Joint Special Ops Command (JSOC) in still more secretive activities. Under Obama, these have made the reliance on paramilitary forces, along with his signature drones, a one-two combative punch presumably against adversaries, who, themselves, have a way of becoming redefined by official Washington and the media in more extended form. The phrase "associated forces" is coming more and more into play, which allows for including, possibly in the near-future, social-revolutionary forces resisting US political-military-commercial-investment penetration. The vagueness of the phrase, and the thought behind it, is also ideal for the inclusion of collateral damage, so

that women, children, chickens and cows, all alike, can be considered terrorists, and hence legitimate targets.

Third, drone warfare thereby predicates the vision of global hegemony for the USA. This was not axiomatic, but had to be connected and filled out in practice. To have the drone operational, ready for its mission of assassination, the program was greatly facilitated by the ring of military bases (at last count, exceeding 900) around the world. Also, these drone airstrips, as alluded to in the *Times* article, complement, in Africa, the vast installation in Djibouti, with counterterrorism thus somewhat of a pretext when policymakers have something else in mind. The drone is the new cop on the block for maintaining influence, and a finger locally, in every region, for purposes not even Brennan and Obama have fully worked out.

One could continue this recitation of what are sordid, shameful, illegal, and profoundly immoral practices—for the record is clear, despite Obama’s passion for obfuscation and his side doors to escape responsibility and accountability. For example, under the sonorous phrase “collateral damage,” civilians of every kind and station in life are murdered in cold blood. Press accounts and recent writings, such as Medea Benjamin’s work on drone warfare, based on first-person observation and/or testimony, are abundant. Particularly valuable, sufficiently documented to convince the ICC to put them behind bars for life (if ever the opportunity should arise, which most certainly it will not), is the study conducted by law school faculty, the Stanford-NYU report, “Living Under Drones.” Here the war crimes themselves, the psychological torment exercised on the people through the constant buzzing, then the attack without warning, leaving blood splats where human beings once stood, become, not a euphemism for, but the concrete evidence and reality of, atrocities.

## 2 ISRAEL, GAZA’S DESTRUCTION, HUMAN SUFFERING: GLORIFICATION OF FORCE

Also on January 29, 2013 the *Times* published Roger Cohen’s column on post-election Israel, focusing on the social commentary of Amos Oz, a self-identified “dove” on Israeli policies toward the Palestinians and critic of domestic politics affecting inequalities of wealth, preferential treatment shown the Orthodox, and so on. Both men merit respect, Cohen for his even-handed treatment of the country, Oz for his general sympathies and ascetic life in the desert. Perhaps it was the drone article that, after reading

Cohen, got me to think about the interrelatedness of the two pieces and the substance behind them. As my Comment to the *Times* indicates, my admiration for Oz is conditional, for he, in what remains of an Israeli Left, cannot make a break with the record of the society and government.

Oz points out the absolutism of his countrymen, yet drifts into a reverie of relativism which fails to liberate categorically the Palestinians from thralldom to their Israeli jailers. Having written criticisms of Israeli militarism, its policy of assassination, and penchant for supporting dictators, I was prepared to move on. In today's *Times* (January 30, 2013), however, Bisharat's op-ed piece, "Why Palestine Should Take Israel to Court in The Hague," appeared. This forced me to consider the interrelatedness between US drones and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

### 2.1 *A Propensity for Overkill: Providing Juridical Cover*

The two articles specify the common element of war crimes. They reveal much about the two societies. For Israel one sees the jadedness toward human aspiration and love of family, as if a Palestinian child or a Pakistani child possesses less moral worth than an American or Israeli child, and similarly, parents who cannot feel the grief at their loss, as opposed to the fully human, naturally standing closer to God. This suggests an entrenched arrogance, the propensity for overkill, whatever the situation confronted, and the preternatural delight in torture (or at least refusal to denounce it), in dealing with putative adversaries (many of whom are ordinary people). As before, the list could be continued. Now with Bisharat (and the important links he supplies to the Israeli merciless attack on Gaza), and material I recently gathered from the *Times* and the *Washington Post*, both of which supporters of Israel will dismiss as biased, as they do the UN, the basis for a moral indictment grows. Coming from a fellow Jew, such criticism will be dismissed as the rantings of a self-hating Jew. Criticism encounters a stone wall.

Bisharat first addresses the transmogrification of international law by Israel's military lawyers. We might call this damage control, were it not more serious. When the Palestinians first sought to join the I.C.C., and then, to receive the UN's conferral of non-member status on them, Israel raised fierce opposition. Why? He writes: "Israel's frantic opposition to the elevation of Palestine's status at the United Nations was motivated precisely by the fear that it would soon lead to I.C.C. jurisdiction over Palestinian claims of war crimes. Israeli leaders are unnerved for good

reason. The I.C.C. could prosecute major international crimes committed on Palestinian soil anytime after the court's founding on July 1, 2002."

In response to the threat, we see the deliberate reshaping of the law: Since 2000, "the Israel Defense Forces, guided by its military lawyers, have attempted to remake the laws of war by consciously violating them and then creating new legal concepts to provide juridical cover for their misdeeds." In other words, habituate the law to the existence of atrocities, which in America's case means that targeted assassination, repeated often enough, seems permissible, indeed clever and wise, as pressure is steadily applied to the laws of war. Thus, "collateral damage" is seen as unintentional, regrettable, but hardly prosecutable, and in the current atmosphere of complicity and desensitization, never a war crime. Remaking the laws of war so as to establish exonerative precedents which grant exemption for commission of what had been traditionally viewed as war crimes is unconscionable and cynical, not to say Orwellian. In America's case, because of the active role it plays in world affairs, even that step of legal gymnastics and subterfuge is skipped.

## 2.2 *Reshaping the Laws of War: Progression Through Violation*

Obama is hardly a novice at the game of stretching the law to suit the convenience of national security. To ensure the distortion in counting civilian casualties, which would bring the number down to zero, as Brennan claimed, Obama redefined the meaning of "combatant" status to be any male of military age throughout the area which the USA declared a combat zone. This noticeably led to a higher incidence of sadism, because it allowed for "second strikes" on funerals—the assumption that anyone attending must be a terrorist—and first responders, those who went to the aid of the wounded and dying, themselves also presumed certain to be terrorists because of their rescue attempts. America's leaders play hardball, as in using—by report—the proverbial baseball cards to designate who would be next on the kill list. But funerals and first responders—verified by accredited witnesses—seems overly much, and not a murmur from the public.

Bisharat provides two specific examples of Israeli war crimes. First, in 2002, "an Israeli F-16 dropped a one-ton bomb on an apartment building in a densely populated Gaza neighborhood, killing a Hamas military leader, Salah Shelhadeh, and 14 others, including his wife and seven children under the age of 15." And second, in 2009, "Israeli artillery killed



more than 20 members of the Samouni family, who had sought shelter in a structure in the Zeitoun district of Gaza City at the bidding of Israeli soldiers.” How does war guilt vanish into the thin air of Israeli legal trumpery, the corruption of the laws of war?

Daniel Reisner, former head of the Israeli military’s international law division, quoted by Bisharat, explains: “International law progresses through violations. We invented the targeted assassination thesis and we had to push it. At first there were protrusions [i.e., something sticking out, noticeable, causing waves] that made it hard to insert easily into the legal molds. Eight years later it is in the center of the *bounds of legitimacy*” (Italics, mine). We remind ourselves, he is talking about assassination, boasting about the legitimization of war crimes. The frank admission shows contempt for the rule of law, a cynicism which appears ingrained in the Israeli war machine—as in the way atrocities and cases of mistreatment are routinely dismissed or accorded a pro forma hearing, then dismissed. Reisner and Brennan become interchangeable cogs in that machine. For Obama, who needs Clausewitz when he has these two?

### 2.3 *Laser-Guided Bombs: Evidence of Genocidal Intent*

I take leave from Bisharat to examine his examples of Israeli war crimes more closely. On the first, the *Times* reporter John Kifner, on July 24, 2002, describing the “three-mile [funeral] procession today through Gaza City’s bleak streets,” filled in the scene, the F-16, “one-ton laser-guided bomb ... densely packed neighborhood ... just a few minutes after midnight” and the resulting deaths, “among them nine children.” He adds, “An area about half the size of a city block was leveled, and several buildings were damaged. Shifa Hospital said more than 140 people had been injured, 15 of them seriously.”

The funeral procession “drew 100,00 or more marchers,” one detail sharply etched in my mind: “A man held aloft the tiny body of the youngest victim, 2-month-old Dina Mattar, wrapped in a Palestinian flag, her small face visible. She was killed along with her mother and four siblings when upper-story rooms in their building collapsed.” The Israeli response? PM Sharon, “in a formal written statement issued by his office early in the day, described the airstrike as ‘*one of our major successes.*’” (Italics, mine) Not good enough; callousness to human suffering, a categorical pushing back, this time didn’t work, as “worldwide condemnation began pouring

in,” from the European Union, and even George Bush, so “Israeli officials scrambled to put the best face on their actions.”

The responses are instructive. General Harel, the army’s chief of operations: “We launched a precision attack. ... Only this house was hit, the house collapsed and this mastermind terrorist died. Unfortunately, along with him died several civilians, apparently innocent, and we are very sorry for it.” The building’s fault, not the laser-guided bomb—and were the others really innocent? Israelis never apologize—without conditions or sarcasm. At the same briefing, a “senior military official” (his and others’ remarks were not for attribution) states, “This was the only house that collapsed. It’s not clear to us right now where the other casualties were. There was no intention of killing people in the area. We did not estimate that houses in the area would be seriously damaged or collapse. Our assessment was that the damage to them would be minor.” The statement was similarly exonerative to that offered by US officials in the drone killing of al-Awlaki’s son, Abdulrahman (like his father, an American citizen), set down in the report as an unfortunate “bystander”—16-years-old, although the government tried to make him over 21, to satisfy Obama’s combatant-definition, until his family produced a copy of his birth certificate showing his age and that he was born in Denver.

As for General Harel and the unnamed “senior military official,” Kifner’s reporting demonstrates their straight-out lying about the extent of damage: “But in Gaza City there was a large flat area in the middle of a street of densely packed apartment houses. Neighbors said there had been three buildings on the spot, one of three stories, and two of two stories.” He continues: “All that remained were chunks of cinder block, several stumps of what had been pillars, pulverized lumps of concrete with twisted snarls of what had been iron reinforcement bars poking out of them, remnants of plumbing pipes and scraps of clothing.” Kifner ends this heart-breaking account, “A half-dozen buildings in an arc around the hole were badly damaged, chunks of their sides ripped off and floors partly destroyed.” Scraps of clothing, chunks of cinder block—Israelis have brought Gethsemane to Gaza City, not the agony of Jesus but the death of a whole people entitled, like all people, to live in freedom and without fear, and without laser-guided bombs suddenly raining down on them—while the whole world sits on its hands.

### 2.4 *Saturation Bombing: Under the Rubble*

The second example of Israeli war crimes to which Bisharat referred, in which 20 members of one family were killed in an artillery attack, was reported by Sabrina Tavernise and Taghreed El-Khodary, again in the *Times* (January 18, 2009). The article's title says it all, "Shocked and Grieving Gazans Find Bodies Under the Rubble of Homes." Israelis had not learned anything from the previous attack, if anything becoming still more ferocious, the article making clear, a degree of inhumanity rare even by their own standards. Above the article there is a photograph of a grave site, people solemnly gathered around, with the following legend underneath: "In Gaza City on Sunday, relatives buried the bodies of members of the Samouni family who were killed in attacks by Israel. More than 20 bodies of family members were recovered Sunday."

The writers grimly begin: "It was a day of digging and bitter discovery. Houses had lost walls, and the dead, after three weeks of war, had lost their faces. Families identified them by their clothes." This reminds one of saturation-bombing or carpet-bombing, the insidious itch to destroy, and more, to terrorize civilian populations. They write: "As the people of Gaza emerged from hiding [similar to the drone attacks in Pakistan, as described in the Stanford-NYU report] on Sunday, they confronted, for the first time, the full, sometimes breathtaking extent of the destruction around them wrought by the Israeli military. Bombs had pulverized the Parliament and cabinet buildings, the Ministry of Justice, the main university and the police station, paralyzing Gaza's central nervous system and leaving residents in a state of shock."

One way to obviate the need for a two-state solution is to destroy the government buildings—more to the point, humiliate the people, destroy their confidence in themselves, in the form of a scorched-earth policy of the mind. Yet the people were not, at least for some, humbled into submission. "Some places in Gaza City," the reporters note, "were bustling and matter-of-fact. Work crews in bright orange vests repaired water and power lines. Shops reopened. People lined up at bank machines."

But that proved the exception. What follows is difficult to read (much less, from which to quote), for the ancestors of the Holocaust have created a micro-holocaust of their own, against, like their forebears, a defenseless people. The reporters continue: "But other areas ached with loss. In Twam to the north, thousands dragged belongings away from ruined houses; they were dazed refugees in their own city. In Zeitoun, families

clawed at rubble and concrete, trying to dislodge the bodies of relatives who had died weeks before. The death toll kept climbing: 95 bodies were taken from the rubble.”

### 2.5 *Inflicting Pain, Rotting Flesh: The Air Assault*

Zeitoun had been home to the massacred family: “More than 20 of them were from the Samouni family, whose younger members were digging with shovels and hands for relatives stuck in rooms inside. Faris Samouni, 59, sat alone, watching them. He had lost his wife, daughter-in-law, grandson and nephew, and he was heartbroken.” I deliberately do not italicize; the words themselves shout out to us—and this from the staid *Times*—of murder, treachery, refugees, rubble, digging with hands and shovels, the dead trapped inside the ruins. And Mr. Samouni: “‘Twenty-one are down there,’ he said, starting to cry. ‘One is my wife. Her name is Rizka.’”

I wish I could confront every Israeli with this account. As a Jew I can think of Rizka as my mother, and the mother of all children everywhere at every time. But for Israelis, such is the emotional outburst of another self-hating Jew. What do you expect, they would say, the world is against us, even disloyal Jews are turning away. Why doesn’t American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) pressure them into pride and compliance with Jewish solidarity? And the recitation of evil goes on, so reminiscent of William L. Shirer’s book on the Third Reich—the attempt to identify corpses, trinkets, the stench—except now the situation has been reversed, the perpetrators being Jews, with a fighter jet flying over to remind the people of Israeli power, intimidate them, overawe them, all at the time of their profoundest misery.

To the point, the writers state: “The dead were badly decomposed, and families searched for familiar personal details that would identify them. One woman’s corpse was identified by her gold bracelets. Another by her earrings. And a third by the nightgown she wore. The smell of rotting flesh was suffocating, and as they got closer, the diggers donned masks.” Rizka and the fighter jet, simultaneous, as though recapitulating in an instant of time, the history of oppression, the strong over the weak: “At 10:55 a.m., the body of Rizka Samouni emerged as an Israeli fighter jet roared in the sky.

Other corpses followed. Houda, 18. Faris, 14. Hamdi, 21. The smallest corpse that emerged, from a different family, was that of a 4-year-old.” Rizka’s brother, Subhi, 55, said, “‘They killed the elders, the children, the

women, the animals, the chickens .... It's a nightmare. I never thought I would lose all of them.'" The chickens, too; calling up images of a Czarist pogrom in my mother's village as a child, 20 kilometers west of Minsk. Israelis to this day have not learned that human misery knows no separate identities, but is universal in its pain, and those who inflict the pain, under whatever flag, or whatever color uniform and insignia, are pariahs in the sight of whomever or whatever source one wishes to invoke.

There was a brief flurry, bureaucracy in the war machine (twisting the knife into the now-refugees): "Around noon, a worker from the Red Crescent ran up to the diggers. The Israelis had called, telling the people to leave, he said. The families began to run, again. 'We have to go!' a woman shouted. 'But where can we go? Where do we go?' An Israeli military spokesman said the order had been issued because the Red Crescent had not coordinated its movement in advance." Eichmann would have understood. The lesson driven home, of gaining prior approval, the order was lifted, "permission was granted and the diggers returned to exhume the remaining bodies."

Jet fighters, donkey carts—correcting for time, place, and technology, Twam might have been Rotterdam or some other city bombed out in the World War II, as their account suggests to me: "One of the areas worst hit was Twam, a neighborhood north of Gaza City, which by Friday afternoon had turned into a disorganized mass move. Donkey carts lurched over torn-up roads, spilling pillows and bedding into the dirt. People dragged bed frames and mattresses out of bombed-out houses. Small boys carried bookshelves. Curtains tied in giant sacks held clothes. Decorative cloth flowers fluttered from a half-closed trunk." In the words of one newly-created refugee, Riad Abbas Khalawa: "'It's madness .... Now our home is gone. There's no place for us to sit together as a family.'"

## 2.6 *Collective Punishment: "Even Our Dead Have No Land"*

Stunned, in search of an explanation for Israeli actions, there was a recognition that Hamas, the presumed object of the operation, was unscathed, that many themselves were not even supporters, and rather, that this was an attack on the people, to get them to leave Gaza. As one, gathered in the crowd around Khalawa, shouted: "'It's a war against us as a people .... What happened to Hamas? Nothing!'" A crime against a people—genocide—seems to me accurate, with Hamas a convenient target or pretext

for ridding the territory of Palestinians. The aftermath was one of somber reflection, the weight hanging heavily on people's shoulders.

One example: "Beker Rahim, a 26-year-old who works for a water distributor, was walking with a cradle on his head, and a blue plastic jug of homegrown olives in his right hand. He had to move a corpse on Sunday morning from near his house, placing it respectfully at the gates of the mosque. As he walked to his house, he saw it had been mostly destroyed and was unlivable."

Another: "'It was my dream and now it was erased,' said Hadija Saker, 55, who ticked off the evidence, as she saw it, of Israel's unjust actions. She said Hamas lacked influence in the area. A teacher at a United Nations school lived on one side. A journalist on the other. Most painful, she said, were her lemon trees, which she had nurtured for years and now lay crushed under the sandy soil crisscrossed with the marks of tank tracks." To those who drive tanks, it is perhaps inconceivable that Palestinians dream, and care about, their lemon trees.

Callousness of the conquering heroes: "Anger was compounded when people concluded that Israeli soldiers appeared to have been using their houses. The Sakers found wrappers for chocolate cranberry power bars and corn puffs with Hebrew writing. In another, a child found a tiny Torah." (I won't even comment on the implied desecration involved here.) Others pointed out they were Fatah supporters, but that Hamas' rocket fire did not justify Israel's disproportionate, that is, overkill, response. Ziad Dardasawi, 40, a wood importer, and Fatah supporter, said of that response: "'Let's say someone from Hamas fired a rocket—is it necessary to punish the whole neighborhood for that?' he said, standing in a stairway of his uncle's house, where furniture had been smashed, and all the windows broken.

He drew on an analogy he thought would strike a chord: 'In the U.S., when someone shoots someone, is his entire family punished?'" He might as easily have mentioned, in light of the practice of collective punishment, a reference closer to the Jewish experience in Nazi-dominated Europe. Also, Dardasawi does put his finger on the phenomenon of blowback, the resistance to—indeed, retaliation for—the carnage wrought (similar to what is happening in response to Obama's drone campaign of targeted assassination, in which, for each individual killed, especially through "collateral damage," as is very much the case in Gaza as well, there are multiple others to take his/her place): "The Israeli actions made the situation more intractable, he said. 'How can I convince my neighbors now for the option

of peace? I can't.' He added: 'Israel is breeding extremists. The feeling you get is that they just want you to leave Gaza.'"

Finally, nightfall, the enormity of the personal tragedy further sinking in: "It was almost dark and the Samounis were finally burying their dead. It took time to find a car big enough to carry them all. A man had to stand in the back to keep them from falling out. At the cemetery, a battery-powered neon light cast an eerie glow over men digging the graves. There was a moment of panic when Hamas militants launched a rocket not far away, but then nothing happened." When one sees vividly the logistics of death, preventing bodies from falling out of an overloaded car of the dead, the battery-powered neon light, and now, the grave site itself overloaded, what, really, is there left to be said? The reporters, once more: "A final obstacle: There was not enough room to bury all the bodies. The family opened up an old grave to accommodate them. A cousin, Khamis el-Sayess, observed bitterly, 'Even our dead have no land.'" The meaning of the Occupation: "Even our dead have no land."

The last word must go to youth, and to hope. "But for Yasser Smama," they conclude, "a teenager who was also part of the crowd, there was almost a resigned hope. 'Today is not the end,' he said. 'Today we bury our dead, and we pick ourselves up.' Then he pointed to the sky [just as perhaps in Shirer's account of an execution at a mass grave dug by the concentration camp inmates, the grandfather cradling the child and pointing upward to the sky, as the Nazi machine gunner, a cigarette dangling from his lips, was about to fire], and said, 'We have to be strong because they might hit us again tomorrow.'"

### 3 IN MEMORIAM: DINA MATTAR, ABDULRAHMAN AL-AWLAKI, RIZKA SAMOUNI

For additional insight into the Israeli attack, I turn first to *Times* correspondent Ethan Bronner, whose provocatively (and correctly) titled article, "Israel Reminds Foes That It Has Teeth," (December 29, 2008), was published three weeks before, after the second day of the onslaught. Bronner is well connected with the military, and reveals its operant mindset: Strike hard, act with disproportionate force, intimidate, as if—between the lines—one sees, on the part of the Israeli military, pride in the exercise of violence (hardly Bronner's intent to bring out). Perhaps a further twist

is that spilling blood becomes the elixir of life, renewed youth, muscularity, manhood.

The springboard for Gaza, after the first invasion of 2002, was the Lebanon War of 2006, which the Israeli military saw as an inconclusive victory because insufficient force was applied—the distorted invocation of a “Never Again” moment when, from here on out, we vow that we will not make the same mistake of going easy on our enemies. There actually was the extremely heavy use of force, and then, the seeding of the frontier with a massive dose of cluster bombs.

That apparently was not enough. Hezbollah was not crushed. Other nations will think we’re getting (or going) soft. We’ll show the world through attacking Gaza with the force all will come to respect—hence the title for Bronner’s piece. All of that destruction, death, human suffering, for what? To underwrite an ego-trip, give Israelis a shot in the arm of confidence, confirm them in their belief as being *ubermensch*, over Dina’s dead body, just as, for Americans, over Abdulrahman’s dead body, one 2-months old, the other, 16 years.

### 3.1 *Virtues of Power: Stirring Fear, Obsession with Weakness*

Bronner begins (this precedes the foregoing account by three weeks, plenty of time to withdraw, close the spigot of violence, look in the mirror and question one’s motives—but no, the damage only got worse): “Israel’s military operation in Gaza is aimed primarily at forcing Hamas to end its rocket barrages and military buildup. But it has another goal as well: to expunge the ghost of its flawed 2006 war against Hezbollah in Lebanon and *re-establish* Israeli deterrence.” (Italics, mine) Things had just begun, but already there is an overpowering use of force: “On the second day of the offensive, which has already killed hundreds and is devastating Hamas’s resources, Israeli commanders on Sunday were lining up tanks and troops at the border.” But this was alright, since renewed occupation was not part of the plan: “But they were also insisting that they did not intend to reoccupy the coastal strip of 1.5 million Palestinians or to overthrow the Hamas government there.” One would have hoped that such military force directed against such a densely populated center would have pulled them back upright. It did not, as though a largely defenseless people whet the Israelis’ appetite for violence.

Bronner proves invaluable. He internalizes uncritically the Israeli military thought processes and values, and, good reporter that he is, faithfully



records them for us, especially for this particular flash point of conflict. The reason overthrowing Hamas isn't worth the candle is because something worse might replace it; instead, a more hardnosed peace treaty with Hamas is needed. Still teasing out the basic motivation for the attack, he continues: "Such a concrete goal, however, should not obscure the fact that Israel has a larger concern—it worries that its enemies are less afraid of it than they once were, or should be. Israeli leaders are calculating that *a display of power* in Gaza could fix that" (Italics, mine). Killing these people isn't enough; one also shows disrespect by not even caring who they are, simply a prop for conducting what purports to be foreign policy via the sheer use of force.

Bronner emphasizes the magic elixir of force, that is, how energy counters doubt: "In the cabinet room today there was an energy, a feeling that after so long of showing restraint we had finally acted," said Mark Regev, spokesman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, speaking of the weekly government meeting that he attended." (This is not unlike Obama's Terror Tuesday weekly meeting with Brennan and others, casting off restraint, finally acting, with hit lists for designated murder.) Regev's assessment was seconded by "a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University," Mark Heller, who said that "that energy reflected the deep feeling among average Israelis that the country had to regain its deterrent capacity."

From the military and government, to the think-tanks, to the man in the street, one finds a concurrence on the virtues of power, strength, and force. Rizka Samouni doesn't stand a chance. Heller is a superlative guide into the Israeli mind: "There has been a nagging sense of uncertainty in the last couple of years of whether anyone is really afraid of Israel anymore," he said. "The concern is that in the past—perhaps a mythical past—people didn't mess with Israel because they were afraid of the consequences. Now the region is filled with provocative rhetoric about Israel the paper tiger. This operation is an attempt to re-establish the perception that if you provoke or attack you are going to pay a *disproportionate* price" (Italics, mine).

Negative perception is an invitation to victimhood—there can be no doubt permitted as to the power of the conqueror. Heller's statement typifies what one hears among defense intellectuals in the USA and Israel, themselves, together, a tightly wound group displaying a psychopathology whenever the domination-subordination relationship is being raised. His remark about "a mythical past," which comes down to a golden age of

stirring fear in the hearts of others, is mated with its opposite, the obsession with weakness, as in the remark about being considered a “paper tiger.”

To be considered weak is too horrible or unsettling to contemplate. This in turn calls for the resolution, a supreme manifestation of bullying to allay all fears and resolve all doubts. A “disproportionate price” must be exacted or inflicted on all comers who threaten this fragile self-image of doubt, aggression, ego-loss, our collective ubermensch in search of conquest of those still weaker. The banner has “overkill” inscribed on it, lest the victim fight back, resist, or even penetrate the façade of emptiness, in full heroic dress. There is something pathetic about the doctrine and practice of exacting a “disproportionate price” at every occasion, as though doubting one’s own internal strength and moral core, in this case perfectly understandable.

### 3.2 *Decimate the Opposition: Not Sufficiently Decisive*

Bronner, recalling Lebanon, discusses how Israelis learned the lesson there about finishing the job: “Israel began that war vowing to decimate Hezbollah without fully realizing the extent of its military infrastructure, underground bunkers and rocket arsenals. And while many in Lebanon and overseas considered Israel’s military activities to be excessive, in Israel the opposite conclusion was reached—that it had been too restrained, too careful about distinguishing between Hezbollah and the state of Lebanon.” Again, we have a perversion of the justified Holocaust lament, Never Again, now transposed to fit Israeli military campaigns.

The statement, probably accurate in reflecting the prevalent mood, could be seen as calling for an open season on the civilian population, for “distinguishing between Hezbollah and the state of Lebanon” had interfered with the wholesale destruction—the unforgivable reticence which thwarted its actions, as in “decimate”—of both, the latter included because it allowed Hezbollah to exist in its midst. Like Obama’s second-strike credo, 100% allegiance has to be assured. Those attending the funerals of victims are probably terrorists themselves or fellow travelers. The same for first responders. If, as also happened, five men are involved in changing a tire, one of whom is a suspect, all five are dispatched or their ranks decimated.

Bronner might have quit while he seemed ahead, but again, as a good reporter, he continues: Our favorite, “a senior military officer” (hence not

for attribution), said of Lebanon, “We were not decisive enough, and that will not happen again.” And on the war of the moment, the officer boasted: “I have flown over Gaza thousands of times and we know how to hit something within two meters.” This is not only false, as witness the breadth and depth of destruction, unless of course our “senior military officer” intended the widespread destruction, but is exactly what US officials, starting from Obama and Brennan, have been saying about drone strikes, its surgical precision. Because of these thousands of flights, one would have expected more careful target selection (especially given the putative accuracy), instead of the indiscriminate slaughter which took place—unless that was the purpose, the accuracy being put to good use, in the first place. This raises the question of the politicization of collateral damage, decimation a *conscious* act.

There is a barbaric pride in the reconnaissance operation, for what it led to (still discounting or denying outright civilian casualties): “The current operation started only after preparation and intelligence work, military commanders said, leading to a true surprise attack on Saturday and the instant deaths of scores of Hamas men. The Israeli military had mapped out Hamas bases, training camps and missile storehouses and systematically hit them simultaneously in an Israeli version of ‘shock and awe,’ the sudden delivery of overwhelming force.”

The affectless cunning, a collective war-criminal mindset, is present yet not detected as such in Israeli society: boasting about “a true surprise attack” (Rizka Samouni, along with many others, was struck without warning shortly after midnight); boasting further about “shock and awe”; about “the sudden delivery of overwhelming force” (both elements of the attack are important), along with one’s query about whether Rizka Samouni was killed in this or that training camp or missile storehouse, or rather, in her bed, in an apartment house in a densely packed quarter, together speak to the psychopathology of willed destruction.

### 3.3 *Stealth Attacks: Disproportionate Force*

This is unworthy of claims to represent a democratic government or ethos. Ehud Barak, whom we associate with Camp David and peace, now in charge of the Gaza campaign, followed the advice of Ron Ben-Yishai, “a veteran military correspondent,” on the lessons of Lebanon: Don’t rush in, instead, choose carefully the “moment and circumstances,” which, to Ben-Yishai’s satisfaction, Barak did (the aforementioned surprise attack).

As Bronner explains, Barack acted, “not only behind the scenes but through a subtle public disinformation campaign. On Friday night, after having decided to launch the operation, he appeared on a satirical television program. An attack seemed at least several days away and Hamas, which had been holding its breath, relaxed. The next day, the Jewish Sabbath, and the first day of the Arab workweek, Israel struck.” The Sabbath? Not its desecration? And if not, why not? Israelis love their games, stealth attacks employing overwhelming force being one of them.

Still nine days before the Tavernise–El-Khodary article, Craig Whitlock and Reyham Abdel Kareem, writing in the *Washington Post* (January 9, 2009), present a damning indictment of Israeli conduct in the war against Gaza. The degree of brutality, difficult to fathom, is indicated by the article’s title, “100 Survivors Rescued in Gaza From Ruins Blocked by Israelis,” and the subtitle (all of which is confirmed), “Relief Agencies Fear More Are Trapped, Days After Neighborhood Was Shelled.” It is past denial. Israelis hold the lives of Palestinians cheap. This of course is what the doctrine and application of disproportionate force is all about, not simply killing the same individual several times over, but killing more individuals, whether to prove a point, teach an object lesson, or drive home the idea that one Israeli is worth tens, hundreds, thousands, of the Other.

Otherwise, how confirm one’s own superior status, legitimate the means for keeping it from being challenged, and silence any moral inhibitions about one’s conduct that may have somehow crept in (in this case perhaps from the Torah itself)? We are venturing here on the well-worn ground of the psychodynamics of authoritarianism. The classic xenophobic distinction between superior and inferior is insulated through defense mechanisms rigidly maintained to hide the inhumane and absurd qualities of the claimants, an Israeli population tied in knots, including the stretching of religious doctrine to suit current policy, largely of its own making.

In this case, Israeli soldiers prevented rescuers from saving victims buried in the rubble, a standoff that meant certain, agonizing death for those, still calling for help from beneath tons of concrete, who might have survived. Whether doing what Israel did here—not the act of some willful individuals, but official military policy—is more, or less, morally reprehensible than Obama and Brennan’s targeting of funerals and first responders, also official policy of the USA, I leave for theologians to debate.

The article begins:

Emergency workers said they rescued 100 more trapped survivors Thursday and found between 40 and 50 corpses in a devastated residential block south

of Gaza City that the Israeli military had kept off-limits to the International Committee of the Red Cross for four days. Relief agencies said they feared more people remained in the rubble of several shattered houses in the Zaytoun neighborhood [where the Samouni family resided, as we saw, losing 20 members]. Red Cross officials said they began receiving distress calls from people in the houses late Saturday but that they were blocked by the Israeli military from reaching the area until Wednesday. “There are still people under demolished houses—we are sure of it,” said Khaled Abuzaid, an ambulance driver for the Red Cross who treated survivors at the site Wednesday and Thursday. “But without water or electricity, we are sure they will die.”

### 3.4 *Premeditated Killing, Bottomless Cruelty: Round-Ups, Shelling*

One perhaps cannot expect Israeli soldiers to throw in and help, even with bare hands, with the rescue, still less, lay down their weapons and resign in disgust. But obstructing the rescue of dying human beings, or being so cold to the dead beneath their boots (which sitting shiva in the case of their own family deaths might have somehow reached through protective-defensive layers to soften them to appreciation of the grief of others, or even plain respect for the dead as such), is beyond reach. Attending a Jewish Studies meeting in my university, I raised examples—drawn from the work of Benny Morris, the Israeli historian—in which Israeli soldiers raped and looted in the Occupation, to which the faculty panelist simply said, to end all discussion, “Well, soldiers will be soldiers.” I have not returned since.

Whitlock and Kareem provide further testimony from Abuzaid (with slightly different spellings from the above account, which should not confuse the reader): “In an interview at al-Quds Hospital, a Red Cross medical center in Gaza, Abuzaid said rescue workers found 16 bodies Wednesday in a large room of a house in Zaytoun: seven women, six children and three men, all members of the al-Samuni family. Most had sustained trauma injuries from shelling, but many had gunshot wounds as well, he said. Four children, weak but alive, were found lying under blankets, *nestled next to their dead mothers*” (Italics, mine).

There was, finally, a small window opened for rescue operations—with strings attached: “Abuzaid said he was part of a crew of 10 paramedics and other rescue workers who reached Zaytoun on Wednesday afternoon, during a three-hour break in combat operations in Gaza during which relief

agencies were allowed to deliver supplies and medical care to stricken Gazans. He said Israeli soldiers told the crew of Red Cross and Palestinian Red Crescent workers in advance that they were forbidden to take cameras, radios, or cellphones to the site. It is standard practice for crews to carry such equipment on rescue missions.”

The depth of psychological denial and character debasement of the self, enveloped in a cocoon of self-righteousness, seen here, and in Alice Rothchild’s book, *Broken Promises, Broken Dreams* (2007), of Israeli soldiers at the many checkpoints set up between Israel and the Occupied Territories, indicates a bottomless emptiness and cruelty on their part, whether in closing off areas, as now, where atrocities have been committed, or in the stock-in-trade arrogance of humiliating Palestinians at every turn. No cameras allowed.

What follows suggests why Israel has shown contempt for the UN, which probably extends to the Red Cross; they’re both onto its act, the war crimes committed with impunity—the resistance to Palestinian membership, as George Bisharat made clear, done for that very reason, fear of exposure before the International Criminal Court. The reporters’ enumeration continues:

The Red Cross has accused the Israeli military of repeatedly refusing to grant permission for ambulances to go to Zaytoun, even though soldiers were stationed outside the damaged houses and were aware people were wounded inside. In a statement issued early Thursday, the agency called the episode “unacceptable” and said the Israeli military had “failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded.” The Israeli military said it was investigating but declined to respond to specific allegations by the Red Cross .... The United Nations also pressed Israel to investigate the Red Cross allegations. John Holmes, chief of U.N. humanitarian aid programs, called the Zaytoun deaths “a particularly outrageous incident.” “What they found was absolutely horrifying,” he said at a news conference in New York. B’Tselem, the Israeli human rights group [courageously speaking out in the otherwise deafening silence], said residents of Zaytoun who had been trapped in other houses have given similar accounts of how Israeli soldiers were aware of their plight but refused to allow rescue workers into the neighborhood. “What these family members say consistently is that the IDF was close by,” said Sarit Michaeli, a spokeswoman for the group. ... “This wasn’t some remote area. The soldiers certainly were about and were aware of their position.”

The situation gets even worse, including an atrocity, which Bisharat had referred to, reminiscent of My Lai, when he wrote, “Israeli artillery killed more than 20 members of the Samouni family, who had sought shelter in a structure ... at the bidding of Israeli soldiers,” except that it is not clear whether the structure was their own home or another, and also “at the bidding” is too polite; many more had died, and had been knowingly forced into the house for that purpose. The account begins with round-ups and deprivations:

Access to Zaytoun ... remained highly restricted Thursday. Red Cross and Red Crescent crews were allowed back to the site during another three-hour break in the fighting, evacuating 103 people who had been trapped for days without food and water .... Other relief officials said the people rescued Thursday were crammed inside a handful of houses on the same block as the Samounis’ house. Two surviving members of the Samouni family said dozens of their relatives in the area had been rounded up by the Israeli military early Sunday and ordered to stay inside a handful of houses while soldiers conducted operations door-to-door. They said some people died in the shelling, which left a gaping hole in the roof of the Samouni home.

Thus, “On Friday, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said it had confirmed the account of what happened to the Samouni family. Calling it ‘one of the gravest incidents’ in Gaza since the start of fighting, the U.N. said Israeli soldiers had *packed about 110 Palestinians into the house Sunday, then ‘shelled the home repeatedly’ 24 hours later*” (Italics, mine).

Round-up = premeditated killing, all taking place outside the world’s scrutiny (or perhaps caring), people in shock, disbelieving, hounded and herded in scenes that would have been familiar to the victims of World War II. Tantamount to being asked to dig their own graves, then machine-gunned down, falling into them—exactly the scene replicated in Nazi concentration camps, and yet Israel dares show its face to the world! The reporters continue:

The U.N. said about 30 people were killed inside. It said three children, the youngest five months old, died after reaching a hospital. Survivors of the fighting in Zaytoun remained scattered at hospitals across Gaza on Friday .... The Israeli military had barred foreign journalists from entering Gaza. “It was horrible,” said Shifaa Samuni, 70, who was detained in the family’s house but fled with her grandson Monday afternoon after the killings.

She said two of her sons and three daughters-in-law were among the dead. “Look how much I lost,” she said at al-Quds Hospital, where she was receiving treatment for minor injuries, including wounds to her hands. “Why? We did nothing. We are a peaceful family.”

Another witness, Ahmad Talal Samuni, 23, described the neighborhood as coming “under heavy shelling and helicopter gunfire Saturday night,” and related how the soldiers “told us not to leave—not by using loudspeakers, but by shooting .... The soldiers were shooting in the air and they told us to go east, in the direction of Salah Din Street.” This may have been the same massacre, seen from another angle; the circumstances were similar, but the number of casualties, number herded into the house, and the time of attack appear to differ from the other account—in any case, this was horrible enough, whether the scene of a second massacre or the original one. Like the Chicago stockyards, herding animals into a pen for slaughter; Salah Din Street was not Fifth Avenue or the Champs Elysees.

### 3.5 *Forcible Abridgment of Human Aspirations: In Democracy’s Name*

The reporters, still drawing on Ahmad Samouni’s testimony, write: “The soldiers ordered the family into a large concrete house owned by another relative .... By then, about 70 people were gathered inside, he recalled. ‘The soldiers told us not to leave .... We were hungry. There was no milk for the babies, no medicine for the ill children.’” The narrative is resumed by Meysa Fawzi Samuni, 19, in an interview with *B’Tselem* (the reporters’ summary):

Shortly before dawn Monday, three Samouni men decided to leave the house so they could gather other relatives and bring them back .... [Then] an explosion struck the doorway of the house as the three men prepared to leave, killing one of them. Moments later, a larger explosion on the roof rocked the house. She said she fell to the floor, covering her infant daughter with her body. [Now in her own words] “Everything filled up with smoke and dust, and I heard screams and crying. After the smoke and dust cleared a bit, I looked around and saw 20–30 people who were dead, and about 20 who were wounded” .... She said she was only slightly injured; her baby also survived but lost three fingers in the explosion.

Shortly after, she, her brother-in-law, and her two younger sisters “fled and knocked on the door of another relative’s home nearby,” which “Israeli soldiers had already occupied ... and were guarding about 30



Palestinians inside, some of whom had been blindfolded.” She and her daughter were released, the brother-in-law, hands tied, blindfolded—and she wandered until she found an ambulance, “which took them to Shifa Hospital, where she later met a few relatives who had escaped the shelling on the house.” I should like to see Meysa Samouni’s words inscribed on the entrance to the Knesset: “As far as I know, the dead and the wounded who were under the ruins are still there.”

Given this context, in which the State of Israel has inflicted armed violence, forced submission, and human suffering on the Palestinian people, it is no wonder that Bisharat wants Palestinians to press their case before the International Criminal Court for the prosecution of possible Israeli war crimes. This is the clear reason for Israel’s resistance to according them legitimate standing at the Court and membership in the UN. It is singular the way America and Israel march in lockstep on the violation of international law and the denial of human rights.

As a lawyer, Bisharat rejects the Israeli formulation of Daniel Reisner, “International law progresses through violations,” which is so obviously cynical as to jeopardize the existence of the rule of law, a lesson Americans refuse to take to heart when Obama has done, and continues to do, precisely the same thing. Drone warfare is an abomination; its purpose, assassination, requires condemnation even stronger. Failure to divulge the legal memoranda providing justification for this vile practice itself speaks to exactly the same fear motivating Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians, the need to fend off accusations of war crimes, or even the initiation of investigations to that end.

I have implied the interrelatedness of seemingly different policies; yet, assuming armed drones for targeted assassination and the sustained destruction of a people, its land, its right of self-determination, its spirit, constitute a disparate mix (which I would deny), there remains the underlying, more fundamental, abridgement of human aspirations forcibly suffocated and destroyed through the use of superior power. Evil comes in various guises, not unusually parading under the name of democracy. When Americans solemnly aver we are harbingers of democracy, whether in Latin America, Southeast Asia, or the Middle East, it is usually at the point of a gun. This is in the direction of, and quite similar to, the record of the British Empire in the nineteenth century, despite the famous article of Gallagher and Robinson, describing American foreign policy under Open Door auspices (still rhetorically affirmed in our day), as the “Imperialism of Free Trade.”

Coercion and worse remain the governing principle in US international conduct. However, to be thus overawed, whether by Israel or the US, the

non-murderous, those who ask only for peace, a little breathing space, an acknowledgment of personal dignity and moral worth, to them, all the self-serving labels in the world cannot remove the stench of an incipient fascism threatening to assume full development, even if its features appear less painful and repressive: the hierarchical framework of corporatism, where emphasis is placed on the institutions of self-pacification (with war and intervention a means of diversion). Will America seek the achievement of social love, mutual respect, equity permeating the law and governing the content and character of political and economic institutions? And will Israel do the same? This is the starting place for the peace and justice which has eluded both nations.

These thoughts call up an idea, the eclipse of democracy, a justifiable pessimism in that between the lines of each account one *feels*, as actuality, the distortions of law, the interrelatedness of illegal murder, the depravity when it comes to violating human sacredness. Eclipse signifies a falling into obscurity or decline; it also signifies the passing into the shadow of a celestial body—even more accurate, except that now the shadow gives promise of consuming the celestial body, or more likely, the celestial body itself devolving into shadow, democracy without substance, democracy without rights, democracy the core of which is a moral void, not unlike that of its present leader in the White House. Democracy respects human life, not destroys it. Celestial bodies are wary of shadow, just as democracy is wary of opaqueness. Transparency may not cure the world's problems but it is an important weapon in the empowerment of the people. Few social systems are willing to come out of the shadow to reveal the foundations of their existence, least of all, perhaps, contemporary America.

#### 4 COMMENTS TO THE *NEW YORK TIMES*: POLITICAL DIARY, EARLY SAMPLING

[This portion briefly previews what a companion volume would contain, contemporary diary entries, taking the form of a political journal, to be set against the theoretical perspective presented above. It is as though a ledger had been emblazoned with the title, “The Eclipse of Democracy,” for the material points in that direction. This portion, then, can be taken as an interlude, with several further Comments scattered in later pages.]

Hence, for purposes of illustration I begin with the discussion of the drone and Israel, including the Israeli assault on Gaza in late 2012–early 2013:

[1/28/13, brief statement of creeping intervention; addendum, 1/29/13, geopolitical strategy. Claims of drones for purposes of surveillance only, now North Africa, fail the test of honesty everywhere the argument was used, because of subsequent arming.]

When do ISR operations turn into armed drones for targeted assassination? Who's kidding whom? We know from an earlier *Times* article about the extent of the Djibouti airstrip and the implication that the drone—as now appears true—is the entering wedge for more extensive regional operations. The USA is planting drone bases at all the “hot spots,” a form of creeping intervention and/or imperialism which, if everything goes as can be predicted from the results in Pakistan, we shall see BLOWBACK, the recruitment of more men to al-Qaeda because of our actions.

Addendum: My previous Comment yesterday sought to place drone warfare into context, this airstrip in N. Africa, complementing the base in Djibouti, signifying the drone as in the vanguard of US geopolitical strategy for creating a global military presence. That much should be obvious, with claims of surveillance a fig leaf to make the operation palatable to the public. What must be said is that the Obama–Brennan team is jumping head-first into war-criminal territory. This is moral depravity, compounded and abetted by an American public too selfish, fearful, deliberately mind-blank, indifferent to care. Innocent civilians are being murdered—nay, VAPORIZED—in our name. Obama can sleep well at night, the blood washed off his hands, because at his core is a moral void, overlaid with a cynicism knowing that he can act because the American people are similarly indifferent to gross moral violations of law and human decency.

[1/28/13. Roger Cohen, in an op-ed piece, criticizes Israel's post-election future, using novelist Amos Oz as a breath of sanity—correct, except Oz cannot make a clean break with government policy.]

Poor Oz. He questions absolutism, yet his is an absolutism of relativism, hiding behind a Chekhovian facade. The mumbo-jumbo, the literary view of conflict, is flat-out escapist: The Israeli public, as per Cohen's description, reveals the satiety of those who for too long coddled themselves while maltreating the inevitable Other. Whatever idealism early Zionism may or may not have expressed (and there is doubt on that score), its militarism, callousness, indifference to human life and human dignity makes Israel justifiably viewed as EVIL in the eyes of most of the world.

As a believing, observant Jew, I do not want Israel around my neck. Judaism is too important to mankind's moral history to have a blood-soaked Israel disgracing it and pulling it down. The recent election merely

confirms the utter selfishness, self-indulgence, moral emptiness of the people. Perhaps with all the big talk, Israel should put back on the agenda the bombing of Iran, so that the world in response could rein-in its base-ness, its glorification of force, its nuclear cloud hanging over the region.

[12/31/2008. A response to the Gazan invasion: the normality of genocide]

The Israeli attack on Gaza is wholly disproportionate to the provocation of rockets, and therefore raises the antecedent question: what impels a nation to display, and exercise, overwhelming force against a weaker party? I suspect that the original Zionist vision, fueled by socialist idealism, is dead, and perhaps had already been extinguished by the mid-1950s, to be replaced by its own peculiar brand of xenophobia that showed contempt for international law and organization, and a willingness to support retrograde governments which held down their own peoples.

It would be a cheap psychological shot to say that the oppressed internalize the values and mental habits of their oppressors, but Jews—the most persecuted group in the twentieth century—have, as a result, historically shifted from Left to Right and twisted out of all reason or context the meaning of “Never again,” to become, instead, in Israel’s case, the warrior-state par excellence. As a conservative Jew, I feel, particularly now, that I, and hopefully countless others, am fighting for the soul of world Jewry, who are standing up and saying “Enough” to Israel’s rigid, antidemocratic mindset.

[1/6/2009. One week later, amid vast Israeli-caused destruction; early exposure of Obama]

*The Times* persists in its apologia for Israel. Even today’s article, “Mounting Death Toll,” devotes only three short paragraphs at the end to the “severe humanitarian crisis.” Apparently, the rational, sensible, impartial, centrist solution is the call for a cease fire, after the carnage, annihilation, and indiscriminate firing—artillery, tanks, helicopters, all following upon a withering bombing attack which hit more than a thousand targets.

The world sits by, averting its eyes. One does not have to defend Hamas (which may or may not be a “proxy” for Iran) to suggest a moral catastrophe in the making: not only Israel’s sadistic display of power, but also the UN’s own cowardice in failing to intervene to stop the destruction (notwithstanding the USA’s veto power) or rally world opinion (it cannot even protect its own Gazan installations from Israeli shelling). And finally, there is the absolute callousness to human suffering of the President-elect, who

lamely claims that we have one president at a time. Barack Obama, by his SILENCE, forfeits all rights to occupying the moral high ground on whatever issues before this country in the coming years. What an auspicious start to his presidency.

[1/6/2009—still early in the assault. Evidence of brutality; Israel hides behind, and violates the teachings of, Judaism.]

Not all criticism of Israel has to be ascribed to anti-Semites, pro-terrorists, or Holocaust deniers. The regrettable aspect about current protest demonstrations is that Jews ourselves do not come to grips with the moral issues involved in the present attack on Gaza and make our voices heard. Somehow, to criticize Israel is to betray Judaism and, given the close identification between Israel and the USA, to appear unpatriotic to America. Yet, this Israel right-or-wrong attitude (and the latter is seldom admitted) forces us to rethink a blanket endorsement of Israeli actions and policies in light of the current situation.

Does the *Times* have the courage to acknowledge the evidence of its own reporters, or will it censor opinions it deems objectionable, even when they meet its guidelines of reasoned discourse? In today's edition we read that the Israeli ground offensive was made "under cover of heavy air, tank, and artillery fire." We also read that five civilians were killed and many wounded "on Sunday morning when Israeli shells or rockets landed in the market of Gaza City while people were stocking up on supplies." Consider the import of these words. The Israeli firing has been indiscriminate, that is, geared to terrorizing a population, while necessarily inflicting death and destruction on human beings. Ehud Barak states that Israelis are peace-givers, and the public relations machinery of the security cabinet, IDF, and IAF, in concert, proclaim that every measure is being taken to avoid civilian casualties. I am saddened at the outrageous self-deception, if not outright lies, being practiced. Artillery is not a precision instrument. Aerial bombardment is the method of choice when you want to dehumanize the victim and desensitize the self to gross acts of dealing death.

I believe that all Jews must stand up to the barbarism being committed in our name. Israel should not be allowed to have it both ways: to call itself a Jewish state, and, when shown that its actions violate the teachings of the Torah, to shrug off the point and say that Israel is a secular political entity. Israel hides behind Judaism, while contaminating Judaism's wellsprings of moral conduct.

Primo Levi, for one, said that the Holocaust should teach Jews compassion. The most profound human tragedy in modern history has been

trivialized, played with, indeed transmogrified, to give license to those acting in its name to become barbaric warriors in their turn.

[1/16/2009. *Times*' call for cease fire too late. Indiscriminate killing; absence of outrage.]

*The Times* writes that "we fear the assault on Gaza has passed the point of diminishing returns." Perfect. Nothing could better illustrate the callousness which press and public opinion have displayed about Israeli conduct, despite the overwhelming evidence of atrocities committed by Israel against the civilian population of Gaza (including dispatches and photographs *The Times* itself has published). The point of diminishing returns is a neat, antiseptic formulation drawn from sterile economic theory. It serves to legitimate the death and destruction inflicted by Israel in the first 20 days. Only when *The Times* and Israel alike realize that the flagrant attack on a UN building to which large numbers of civilians have fled has become a public relations disaster, NOT a human rights violation, is the call issued for a cease fire. Too late, too late; the point of diminishing returns had already set in on Day 1 of the invasion, when it became clear that the weaponry employed would result in indiscriminate killing.

Perhaps I am too harsh on *The Times*, for, in truth, much of the world also remained silent, indifferent, or actually in favor of Israeli action. To say we are in an age of denial is perhaps too charitable; jadedness, mixed with a strain of nihilism, seems closer to the truth. *The Times* has its finger on the pulse; it is no better and no worse than the state of contemporary feeling.

Only, I expect more from a great newspaper. I expected indignation when it became clear that children, in particular, were being killed, sometimes as "collateral damage," sometimes in cold blood (reports of Israeli soldiers shooting point blank at youngsters, as confirmed by the location of their wounds). I expected outrage when it was reported that Israeli soldiers stood outside destroyed buildings as dying people, calling for help, were buried in the rubble. I looked for some sign of forthrightness when the moral dimensions of the tragedy were made known. Instead, we have the standard fallback position: forget the killing, let's return to normal. The call for a cease fire is exonerative, a moral pat on the back.

# Contempt for the Law: Presidential Subterfuge

## 1 DEMOCRACY ON TRIAL: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON REPRESSION

The Memo released this week legitimating political murder is a farce, were it not a serious cover-up of extreme violations of international law and the profound negation of human decency. John Yoo's apologia for torture in the Bush II administration was egregious, and the Office of Legal Counsel was like a cancerous cell, that of right-wing zealots rubber-stamping whomever called the shots. But this Memo, anonymous in authorship, its parentage still enshrouded in secrecy, thanks to Obama's fanaticism about the National Security State, dodges every major question one expects from a forthright declaration of government policy. Of course, why expect more? Its release is a carefully planned "leak," timed to precede John Brennan's Senate testimony, as if, somehow, its content would make everything okay, answer all doubts, and let the administration come out smelling like a rose.

No, Brennan, from heightened interrogation to Svengalian promotion of the obliteration of fellow humans, to chief cyber warrior, always has the president's ear. It is not that Obama needs much coaxing in these or other foreign- and military-policy areas, particularly the vastly expanded dependence on the CIA in issuing it a license to kill, something his other favorite, JSOC, does not yet enjoy.

### 1.1 *A Conceptualization of Total War: "Associated Forces"*

The Memo, beyond its baseness (not even worthy of a bright right-wing law clerk), constantly reiterates the phrase "associated forces." The phrase is so nebulous as to take in anyone who criticizes the USA, provided at least two are found together—otherwise, a mere assassination of an individual deemed an imminent threat to the USA. "Imminent" is a catchy word, those ready to strike the homeland. Immediate action is imperative. As for "associated," we've come far since McCarthyism, when "fellow traveler" was sufficient to scare to death the beloved heartland. Now, without definition, refinement, logic, proof, we call forth "associated" in order to keep alive the general fear, justify the assassinations, and keep the defense budget on overdrive—as the social safety net is squashed.

Equally intriguing is the continued reference to the non-importance of geographical boundaries. This becomes a conceptualization of total war. All previous notions of international law and the laws of war are canceled. The implied spirit of the Memo is that the USA has not faced such a dire threat before! Moreover, don't let the courts interfere; they don't know what we know, and they aren't the super-patriots we are. This is man's work. Terrorists are everywhere (under every bed) disguised as labor organizers, antiwar activists, social workers taking their responsibility to their clients too seriously—communists under the skin. That's why we have the Espionage Act, a Siamese twin to the counterterrorism legislation. Stop parsing our Memos, we're too clever by far for you. And as for the reference to the drone murder of US citizens? They deserve it. The Bill of Rights wasn't meant to protect criminals or terrorists. If these so-called Americans are right here at home, that changes nothing, because we have already juridically established that national boundaries are a nonstarter. So much for the implied reasoning behind the spirit of the Memo goes.

What is not implied, is the grab for Executive power, in theory, dangerous, in Obama's hands, doubly so, because directed to the worst features of government: targeted assassination, surveillance, paramilitary operations, covert—just about everything, and so on. Perhaps of longest-term significance is the absolute contempt for the law. There is death-from-the-skies with no shred of habeas corpus, substantive accusations, right of counsel. Death is expeditiously conducted (many times without knowing the victims' identities). More ghoulish, there are, purely for the sake of terrorizing whole civilian populations, the well-documented "secondary strikes" on funerals and first responders.



### 1.2 *Presidential-Military Power: Shared Methods and Goals*

Drone assassination brings out the worst in a government and society. When a practice or program is vile, it should not have been contemplated, much less adopted, in the first place. The time has come to abandon it immediately and cleanly. Whether or not it is cancelled, the clear starting point would be a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to flesh out, document, publicize, and prepare for the prosecution war crimes. These are abundantly evident, despite the demand for secrecy and treating government as the exclusive domain of the Executive.

Within that context, one finds the nexus of presidential-military power, a litany of shared goals and methods, which are to be pursued without restraint, from unilateral global dominance to, specifically, calling for confrontation with China. If for no other reason, this maintains the climate and custom of perpetual war fueling counterterrorism in its own right and as a pretext for antilabor, pro-banker, antienvironmental conformity. The country goes to hell in a hand-basket, confident in its moral standing. Curiously, as things go, the armed drone acts as the linchpin for the total framework to be operable, convincing, rational (from the perverted standard of keeping the class structure intact and letting the profits flow from the top, percolating only so far down).

If one may be provocative, the question is: What is worse, a government in pursuit of such policies, or a people blandly, placidly, even adoringly accepting that? Further, why must there be notice taken only when Americans are killed? Are we *that* provincial, parochial, xenophobic, authoritarian, not to recognize that all human life is sacred, precious, every individual entitled to live in security and free from sudden, arbitrary, death?

### 1.3 *Globalization of Murder: Avoiding Discovery*

One must not internalize the mindset of the memo writers and war-crime enablers, much less the Obama–Brennan gang at the top, meeting on Terror Tuesdays in the White House, deciding on the life or death (invariably the latter) of those on the hit list, with their justifications for the globalization of murder. Why play the game of legalese, as though directives were carved in stone, when in reality the Executive writes what it wants, to create the presumption of legality? Now, Executive power is becoming unrestrained. We get a perfunctory dismissal of flagrant violations to the 4th, 5th, and 14th Amendments, as though the Constitution

were irrelevant, and that underlying the fundamental objections raised to the violations was not what we know to be true: antecedently, state-sponsored murder.

Assassination comes in many varieties and forms, none of them compatible with democratic principles or the rule of law. Israel is skilled with the gun and bulldozer, the USA with heavier armaments. There has been a failure of disclosure (the original legal memos remain classified, not the public relations job just released), failure of admission (we do not admit the identity and scope of casualties), and failure of confiding in the public (geopolitical strategy is not subject to debate, or for that matter, revelation). This strongly suggests that the secrecy, stubbornness, and, in abdicating government's responsibility to the people, villainy, have for their purpose the avoidance of discovery for the nation's commission of war crimes. Thus, we can expect further violations of international law, and the normalization of continued attempts, increasingly unilateral, to maintain across-the-board dominance, political, economic, military, cultural, ideological, whatever our leadership thinks right. More Memos of Self-Justification.

[My Comment to Feb. 6, 2013 *New York Times* editorial wherein I make a timely suggestion]:

"This dispute goes to the fundamental nature of our democracy." Yes. But *The Times* drifts off by calling for a special court, and so on, rather than saying, armed drones for targeted assassination is per se antithetical to a democracy and that the program must be stopped as a national disgrace and extreme violation of international and national law. Assassination is an affront to human decency. Yet this is Obama's signature weapon and policy. We are seeing the expansion of UNCHECKED Executive power like never before. Your article on cyberwarfare just yesterday bears that out.

You may think it irresponsible, but I shall call, not from the lunatic right, but, placing civil liberties at the heart of a democratic system, for Obama's impeachment. He has sullied and falsified America through cold-blooded actions, a political hustler and con artist, revealing, stripped of liberal veneer, a moral void, profound, deep, incapable of political leadership except that of dragging the US further into the slime of war, intervention, drones, collateral damage, denial, and, the crowning touch, nomination of John O. Brennan, Strangelovian beyond what fiction depicts, from torture to drones to cyber war, a smooth continuum of death, destruction, denial (in his case, of civilian casualties).

## 2 A DRONE COURT LEGITIMIZING ASSASSINATION: THE LOGIC UNFOLDS

[Feb. 11, 2013. Soon Brennan will be confirmed, an Obama–Brennan, Brennan–Obama, government which merely compounds the grab for Executive power already underway, to the prejudice of the Constitution and flat-out affront to humankind’s moral sensibility. Events move fast, assisted by Gresham’s Law of evil doings which foster a progressively intensifying race to the bottom. Here I must record what should be all too apparent in following Obama’s career, a self-serving record in which those he feeds on yet later finds dispensable he gets rid of. Summers and Geithner are no longer the towering Administration figures they once were. I have emphasized—I believe correctly—Brennan’s role, his closeness to Obama as an advisor, *but how long will this last?* I would not be surprised, a year or two from now, to find another taking his place.]

Drone warfare for targeted assassination is Nazism déjà vu all over again [thanks, Yogi], the London blitz in microcosm, the terrorization of a whole people. This is a war crime, pure and simple, originating at the highest levels of political authority, watched over more or less complacently by the Congress and the American public. To have a special court scrutinizing each application for the use of lethal force is a macabre joke: US justice rather than safeguarding the law has been in the vanguard of transmuting it. This is to suit a priori Reactionary goals and purposes and/or a national-interest doctrine compatible with US global hegemonic claims. These claims, which are, perhaps more than ever, being pursued and contested in a multipolar world, place a seemingly unbearable strain on American institutions unused to experiencing challenges.

Murder from the skies is a (last) desperate attempt to instill fear and respect into an international arena in which counterterrorism is an excuse for something else: to remain unmodified at home (drastic maldistribution of wealth and power), while simultaneously attempting to stabilize the world system on lines advantageous to American capital. US capitalism is, given these twin imperatives, undergoing a structural transformation into a more advanced framework, monopoly capital at a highly mature stage, perhaps qualitatively different from the past, although the signs were there since perhaps the close of World War II. The resulting militarization *and* financialization of American capitalism creates the basis for a more aggressive foreign policy, particularly a foreign *economic* policy, which is both attractive and imperative, and with drone warfare as suitable illustration,

realizable. We are seeing the logic of counterterrorism unfold, its purposeful incorporation on a political-ideological continuum with counterrevolution.

Brennan is our point man; soon all of America will be waterboarded, metaphorically at least, with Obama, glibness, ersatz liberalism all polished, teleprompter at the ready, smiling condescendingly in the wings. What follows is my NYT Comment on the discussion of a special court:

[NYT, Comment, 2/9/13. The court a rubber stamp for unconstitutional practices]

Either targeted assassination is legally and morally justified, or it is not. I believe it is not, and to invoke a FISA-like court to pass on drone warfare merely legitimates a practice which, under any circumstance, is reprehensible, the violation of international law, and—if one must be practical—wholly counterproductive. Just say, No.

The discussion has several fundamental flaws, indicative of where we, as a nation, currently are (i.e., falling into a moral void, in which the Constitution itself is openly violated without the slightest misgivings). First, the courts, including that set up under FISA, have lost their way, starting at the top. American justice has been politicized beyond what is acceptable, much less believable. Your point on FISA: 2011, 1745-0 record of approval on surveillance, with 30 alterations! The court obviously has become a rubber stamp for unconstitutional practices. Why should a drone court be different? It only would serve to legitimate rotten practices.

Second, why does justice stop at water's edge? Is murdering a foreign national any less heinous than murdering an American? Shame on those who want to limit such a court to assassination of Americans—parochial and xenophobic. Third, we face unbridled Executive power, yet that is not addressed in the discussion. The whole drone program should be scrapped, its proponents, from Obama down, reigned in, as now in WAR CRIMES territory. Assassination is a moral outrage. Period.

### 3 THE BLOOD SPAT PRESIDENT: REGULATION AS DEREGULATION

[February 12, 2013. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau provides a window into the Obama mindset, as though hurtling down a laundry chute to the bowels of the earth—his one-way passage to a moral void, as in every avenue of policymaking to which he puts his hand. The familiar

refrain, “Republicans are obstructionist,” echoed in today’s *New York Times* editorial, as explanation for why so little has been achieved on this front, suggests both that Democrats protesteth too much, to hide their own villainy (i.e., complicity in savaging working people, on behalf of bipartisan unity in forging the advanced stage of monopoly capitalism) and the *Times* itself goes the full ten yards up the field in its attempt to protect Obama at all costs—including the truth.]

### 3.1 *Government Imprimatur on Regulation: Wrist-Slapping Exercise*

There cannot be consumer financial protection until and unless:

- a) a democratization of the banking system removes the means and incentive for preying on the consumer;
- b) the extreme wealth concentration rooted in part in the selfsame system (wealth is increasingly an interlocking phenomenon, so one must give attention as well to other sources, equally vulture-like in relation to the public, from defense contractors to health insurers, and not just banking and the whole vista of financial chicanery/manipulation) must be taken down, by whatever means necessary consistent with nonviolent measures (let’s start with avowedly confiscatory taxation rates and closing ALL loopholes), then: putting banks in a straitjacket to keep them honest, the minimum, Glass-Steagall;
- c) freeing the consumer from the bondage of a parasitical culture, as so many flies drawn to flypaper (Marx), which might begin with truth-in-advertising (today a head-splitting contradiction) and exposure of the credit-card industry, followed by the enforcement of strict health-and-safety standards, from foods to automobiles, and, on the latter, additional taxes on luxury accessories.

These exceedingly small changes are nonetheless of boat-rocking proportions, wholly anathema to capitalism—and equally so, regrettably, to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). CFPB, at best, will be a wrist-slapping exercise, under Obama’s auspices, that serves to protect and legitimate offenders (the value of the government imprimatur in all present regulatory operations) rather than criminalize their behavior and remove their products. Why my dim view of what should be a salutary effort?

Here as elsewhere, Obama has imposed a paradigm of *deregulation* on government as part of the so-called liberation of wealth under the principles of market fundamentalism. Regulation, with some exceptions in the New Deal, has from its modern inception in the Bureau of Corporations (T. Roosevelt) and the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Reserve System (Wilson) been a creature of the interests presumably to be regulated. Its purpose is to resolve internal difficulties and contradictions—for example, internecine competition—they have brought upon themselves, yet could not resolve through private means, or the straight-out purpose of encouraging monopolism (under the flag of virtue, capitalist stability).

### 3.2 *The Privatization Demiurge: A Common Ideological Core*

Regulation under capitalism, at least the US variant, is a sham, the consumer (as often also the worker) being the least important factor under consideration. Obama, even jumping forward to 1980 (and decades of business-government co-partnership reducing regulation to an empty phrase), is heir to Reagan, and Clinton in particular, a synthesis of corporatism shilled by an ole' boy Arkansas twang, an unbeatable “aw shucks” moment in history, with such regular guys as Robert Rubin on guitar, in a steady march to the evisceration of government and its replacement by what was affectionately termed by the NAM and the US Chamber of Commerce in the 'twenties, the *business commonwealth*, a privatization demiurge moving to the doorsteps of fascism pure and simple.

But why Obama? Answers do not come easily. The experience of open treachery masked in affability is rare at the upper levels of state power. It is as though the iron fist were wrapped—in time for Easter—in a bunny muff, fuzzy, comforting, but muff or no muff, the fist itself has plenty of clout. The fist is the public-private integration of government and business. Together, perhaps government showing the way, they have conducted a Sherman's March through the regulatory agencies. One may resist the idea of political-structural interrelatedness, drawing from a common ideological core as the basis of fundamental policy, but what happens at, say, Interior or the SEC is exhibited across the board of the regulatory universe, a rush to the lowest common denominator. How, then, expect anything from Consumer Financial Protection, when oil drilling leases hit a new high, hedge fund operations are still, along with exotic financial instruments, on a roller-coaster ride, and environmental protection is transvalued into license to despoil and worse, from industrial pollutants to assaults on the land?

Why the Brennans, Geithners, Salazars, except that Obama backs their activities to the hilt—not because of Republican intransigence, but because he *favours* the Right on every indicator I've seen, pliable, sure, caving in, no, for the simple reason that one cannot be said to *cave* when one already desires the outcome. No one has a gun to his head when he drastically enlarges the CIA's functions, and when he makes paramilitary action a tool of provocation in the achievement of international goals. No one holds him hostage to the modernization of nuclear weaponry (which makes a mockery of his reduction of nuclear forces, since the point is to make the remaining stock more LETHAL, with the next generation of weapons in the pipeline). No one blackmails him into blatant coziness with all sorts of groups his supporters, were they not blind, would find objectionable: Wall Street, the intelligence community, his present darling, the Joint Special Ops Command (JSOC), pharmaceutical giants, in sum, a Who's Who of American Reaction.

So be it. Americans will not wake up. The armed drone for targeted assassination says it all—including the abysmal state of US public opinion, which condones—no, applauds—the strikes. Obama, President of the Blood Spat, which is all that is left, where once stood a fellow human being, when struck by a drone missile, vaporization now transferred to the economic realm as well.

I include here my Comment to the *Times* (Feb. 11), which itself remains purposefully obtuse on its editorial page, but not the work of its investigative reporters, especially on national-security and financial matters, to Obama's record:

The CFPB deserves protection. Undoubtedly Republicans have been responsible for preventing the appointment of a director. But it was Obama who first crippled the Bureau by refusing to appoint Elizabeth Warren as its head. Why always blame that party's intransigence when daily evidence mounts that Obama has been a foe of regulation, whether financial services, oil drilling, climate change, and so on? He doesn't deserve a free pass here or across the policy spectrum. The *Times'* reporters have shown this to be a failed presidency—yet the editorial page persists in one-sided accounts of accountability. Obama's nomination of Brennan to CIA should alert one to the moral bankruptcy of Obama, a point equally applicable to consumer protection, assassination, job creation, wherever the public interest is at stake yet shot down.

Obama's market assumptions conflict with the CFPB mission. When you assess blame, why not also ask: What of Obama's treatment of Paul

Volcker, the most respected financial figure in America? And why hasn't Joseph Stiglitz been brought on the team?

Please wean yourself from one-party bashing to appreciate how both major parties are implicated in the financial swindle of the American people. Also show courage in addressing the record, beginning perhaps with failure to fight for the reinstatement of Glass-Steagall and the incredible sham of the health care legislation, which benefited only the health insurance industry and Big Pharma.

#### 4 STATE OF THE UNION: BREAD AND CIRCUSES, CRUMBS TO THE FAITHFUL

[Feb. 13, 2013. The 2008 hoax has been repeated, successfully it would appear (given the sanctification bestowed on Obama's performance last night by the *New York Times*), despite a four-year record, ranging from zero to absolute negation, on every policy approach raised by the speech. The friend of government? Yes, in its militaristic dimensions; yes, its protection of major corporations, banks, hedge funds, and so on, *from* its own supposed charge of regulation; yes, its pursuit of international reputation for moral turpitude—how else characterize assassination? But no, government as dedicated to the public welfare; government, embodiment of the principle of equality; government, the vehicle for/guardian of societal democratization affecting class structure, distribution of wealth and power, business regulation. Quite the opposite, government, under Obama, signifies the public teat for corporate wealth, an image from the Gilded Age brought up to date, more blatant than ever. Blatant, objectively, and disguised beyond recognition, subjectively, so great is the persuasiveness of liberal rhetoric in a society based on the destruction of political consciousness and critical awareness. Obama, publicist for the spoliation of America on behalf of its ruling groups extraordinaire.]

What did the speech offer? A tribute to the "Middle Class" which, by its very designation, obfuscates the political-economic landscape of, first, an actual *working*, not middle, *class*, assuming its members are lucky enough to have jobs, second, structural poverty, from long-term unemployment to stagnant wages to first-timers seeking to enter the labor force to no avail, and third, even for those previously in the middle class, a decline of living standards via loss of home, equity therein, and savings, again when un- and under-employment hits—all of the above, as the incomes of the wealthiest skyrocket out of the picture. The State of the



Union is really, the State of the (Bifurcated) Union, not Republican, Democrat, not red states, blue states, but, simply, the union of great wealth and the societal remainder, gradations here a matter of statistical convenience, but concentration at the top—hence the accuracy of the phrase “ruling groups”—at what is surely at or near an all-time high.

Let Obama chant about the middle class and “growing” the economy; the reality is, and will remain, underconsumption and undemocratic wealth sharing. Universal prekindergarten? Another phony, if Chicago be our model of “education reform,” in which Arne Duncan has fulfilled the two Obama priorities in that policy area: more charter schools and the weakening of the teachers’ union, a neat package which comes under the heading of privatization. Research Institutes? Wonderful, but an actual drop in the bucket measured against the depth of unemployment (I include those who have given up, and are no longer counted in the labor force). And as for the remainder, why the SILENCE for four years (speak of Republican obstructionism, here is Obama doing the obstructing) as, for example, climate change, gun control, oil drilling, environmental protection in general, or even the suddenly discovered irregularities of the voting process?

Democrats stood on cue, Republicans similarly, sitting, as though America were torn apart by ideological cleavage, when in reality it is only this tightly wound Rightist formation, including both sides, in which differences in kind become magnified as qualitative differences. Fundamental agreement holds on, obviously, capitalism, but also, within capitalism, deference to the big guns, the rejection of progressive taxation, facilitation of monopolization and consolidation generally, a labor policy prejudicial to organization and militancy, “friendly,” not adversarial, regulation, and so on. This is particularly the case in foreign policy, the interpenetration of business and government, strongly assisted by the military, in which one finds the provision of whatever it takes to keep capitalism as *the* world system, whatever it takes to achieve unrestricted market penetration, whatever it takes to attain supremacy in international politics and trade rivalries. All of these, yet in addition there are other consequential matters in foreign policy which Democrats seem particularly motivated to support: counterrevolution in the Third World; intervention, to secure strongholds region-by-region; counterterrorism (Democrats, under Obama–Brennan, can claim ownership over targeted assassination, more so than Bush II); and in light of the massive surveillance of the American public, the need to keep alive the spirit of conformity and consent so as to free the machinery of permanent war to continue on, to both parties’ satisfaction.

As stage-managed events go, the speech went over well. It represented a blueprint for four more years of creative accounting, more in the spirit of Exxon, A.I.G., and Goldman, than the actual programs of the New Deal, such as CCC, WPA, PWA, all anathema to those last night—from the top down—supposedly favoring a positive role for government. And don't forget those who experience genuine tragedy in the death of loved ones as shooting victims, yet are mercilessly trotted out for exhibition to demonstrate Obama the caring president—despite by his personal authorization more children have been murdered through drone attacks (regrettable “collateral damage”) than in all the gun massacres for some time. Verily, manipulation, thy name is Obama.

My Comments to the *New York Times* follow, the first, written before the State of the Union, concerns, among other things, the North Korean nuclear test (timing probably not coincidental) Obama would presumably address, and the second, following the speech, which seemed to me consistent with his effort to bamboozle the public while hewing to a conservative-reactionary course:

[February 12, 2013. My Comment on corporate ascendance and aggressive foreign policy]:

North Korea's nuclear test was a “provocative” act, but no more than, and perhaps in response to, the Obama–Brennan program, currently in the foreground of US foreign and military policy, of armed drones for targeted assassination. Obama has given us bounteous examples of liberal rhetoric before, all to no avail—not because of Republican intransigence, but because he doesn't favor government-supported job creation, economic stimuli, and a strengthened social safety net.

Sen. Rubio can praise “free enterprise” and carp at Obama's alleged pro-government stance, but the truth is, Obama, like Clinton before him, and a Democratic Party slavishly enthralled to both, is the champion of deregulation, corporate ascendance in American life, and an aggressive foreign policy which centers on drone warfare as part of a global paramilitary posture, complemented by the heavy hand of his Pacific-first strategy to contain and isolate China.

(Some) troops out of Afghanistan, to pursue a Far-East encirclement policy via nuclear diplomacy (the Armitage mission to Japan to encourage nuclear armament as part of confronting China), military alliances in the region, and the “pivot” of military hardware and personnel to the new theater.

After earning his stripes as The Assassination President, who will take him seriously tonight in the State of the Union address? Gullible Americans, but not the rest of the world. Assassination is not a mark of constructive leadership.

[Feb. 13, 2013. My Comment on a reality of human suffering]:

As a nation we have again been taken in, the political schmaltz of liberal rhetoric wedded to a previous four-year record of: (a) the militarization and financialization of American capitalism; (b) an all-out campaign of aggression via armed drones for targeted assassination squarely in the realm of war crimes; (c) a pattern of deregulation which mocks Obama's plea for a rising middle class (proportionately, a sinking three-quarters in relation to the upper one-quarter); and (d) near-absolute silence until now on gun control, climate change, infrastructure, meaningful job creation and foreclosure relief. In sum, he is a con man up to his old tricks, meanwhile conducting business-as-usual with respect to assassination, placating and expanding the function of the CIA, pivoting US forces to Asia (Pacific-first strategy) to force confrontation with China, and appointments, for example, John Brennan, which invalidate all liberal rhetoric by the contempt shown civil liberties and the rule of law.

Obama offers crumbs; whether his less-government address affects the secrecy, his personal obsession, of whatever remains, is doubtful. He is running a National Security State—surveillance et al.—not even noticed by the present chorus of approval. Wall Street has sense enough not to appear gleeful. Defense contractors, health insurers, Big Pharma, ditto. However, the rosy report on putting the hard times behind us flatly contradicts a reality of human suffering in America, if anyone cared to look.

## 5 CARNIVAL OF FRAUD: OBAMA'S INTEGRATED POLICY FRAMEWORK

[February 18, 2013. The big picture is clear, from drone warfare as escalation of sought-after global US military hegemony to the trivialization and visceration of government's regulatory functions. Everything points to a business-as-usual continuation of policies and practices going back, regardless of party, at least to Reagan. Continuity does not operate as self-contained momentum. It has to be sought, functionally, through narrowing the political-ideological boundaries of society. Policy, leadership, the electoral process, all become synchronized with each other and integrated

with the realities of power as manifested in class structure and wealth distribution. Nothing should surprise, at least not since the New Deal and its custodianship of nature and the environment, its respect for the human soul through plentiful programs whose purpose was to instill hope, impart courage, and make of dignity a birthright of the individual.

That America no longer exists. I mention Reagan only for convenience; one must go back and forward in time, a developmental paradigm of ascendant, increasingly rigid capitalism, in which upper groups fear international political-social change and domestic-seeming evidences of liberation, sexual and other. They seek the security of a regimented social base, provided, of course, repression is masked in more gentle forms, consumerism, sport, protest as itself a safety-valve while steering clear from a head-on challenge to capitalism. Obama is The Man, the conservator of established structure and values, a *faux* humanitarian who is keeping the Ship of State (now, in the Western Pacific, as super-carrier battle groups) on course.]

Obama appears to have made a qualitative leap beyond his predecessors on several fronts. He has developed a more aggressive foreign policy to rekindle a Cold War beginning to diminish in intensity as Russia's quite moribund socialism already showed evidence of collapse. In its place we find the so-called *pivot* of American forces and geopolitical interest from Europe to Asia. China in the crosshairs is absolutely essential to justify massive defense expenditures, military alliances and interventions along the periphery, and, in its own right, the isolation and containment of China itself (as in its trade and investment activities in Latin America and Africa).

This pivot of national-security policy, and its consequent rapid implementation, invests his leadership with greater stature—from the standpoint of confrontational heroics, a militarized polity, and stifling the life-improvement and happiness of working people. Thus, historically, if not now, his role in enhancing American power will be more appreciated. If not Mount Rushmore-proportions, then at least he will be in company with Reagan, the Bushes, and stride for stride, kindred administration spirits in the journey from anticommunism to counterterrorism settling into form the framework of authoritarianism with “a light footprint.” *That* is what America craves, strong leadership that translates into international power and influence.

On domestic policy, as people become more sophisticated, his role there will also receive greater appreciation, particularly the patently helpful assistance *via regulation* he has rendered to banking, financial services,

defense contractors, health insurance, oil, and pharmaceuticals (as with other areas of public policy favoring wealth and the military, the list is infinitely extensible). He has provided regulatory protection, in the guise of the genuine article, to fend off legislation (not in any case forthcoming) and to establish the privileged status actually accorded by legislation (e.g., health care) and Executive department action (e.g., Interior and deepwater drilling in the Gulf and opening the North Slope).

There is internal consistency in Obama's foreign and domestic policies. This can be expected in any administration from 1950 forward, but perhaps more so here because each policy realm actively reinforces the other. An hegemonic overlay is clear wherein deregulation, market penetration, military alliance systems and their joint maneuvers, intervention, regime change, all work together to advance the interests of American capitalism, and more especially, that of the largest firms, enjoying US government protection, in commerce and banking alike.

There is also, under the heading, Carnival of Fraud, a third area to be considered, which addresses the changing character of American society. Here we enter the World of Privatization, an accelerated dismantling of what remains of the New Deal, hence the transformation into a purified monopoly-capital formation, imperialism its necessary constituent, supported by an ideology of corporatism in familiar dress: hierarchical in spirit, structure, and values.

It runs like this: the virtue of acquiescence in a destruction of the public sector, and, soon, not far behind, the social safety net. Selfless patriotism would be harnessed on behalf of business consolidations to enrich the organizers and insiders in the belief that the hierarchical framework of society, in which each *class* finds its place, conduces to the general welfare and most probably adheres to God's plan of just rewards. The rich naturally being more meritorious are therefore closer to the Divine Being. That also confirms the moral-structural paradigm of trickle-down economics.

One should be grateful to Obama for straightening out the social order so that a numerically small elite—a reasonably cohesive upper stratum, with comprehensive representation from the worlds of business, finance, and the military—can guide the nation on the path of orderly growth through the next, and hopefully last, stage of monopoly capitalism. Was this always in the cards, non-regulatory regulation, extremes of wealth and poverty, aggressive foreign-policy moves? I think, yes, given the generally non-dialectical course of American history, in which capitalism has enjoyed the status of a moral absolute.

But even then, Obama deserves high marks as an accelerant of what might be termed, in Barrington Moore's phrase, modernization from above. Obama's surefooted application of liberal rhetoric provides the democratic glow for public policy anything but democratic, as his enchanted base looks on. Nothing proves dissuasive to break the mold of mass political false consciousness, neither large-scale unemployment (artfully minimized), as the frosting on the cake of *extreme* inequalities of income, wealth, and power, nor armed drones for targeted assassination, as the murderous vehicle of a foreign policy nominally addressed to counterterrorism but, like its Cold War progenitor, really an alternative path to sustaining US unilateralism in a multipolar world.

Here unilateralism should be understood as the political-structural movement for achieving commercial-financial-military supremacy. Particularly, it is meant to ensure capitalism's global potency and long-term security, while also demonstrating America's muscularity and firmness of resolve, killing without apology, from the missiles fired, to the large number of civilian casualties aptly termed "collateral damage." To glory in the maldistribution of wealth and the vaporizing of women, children, males of military age (defined by Obama as "combatants" by virtue of being in a geographical area the US designates peremptorily a war zone—even when no declaration of war exists), attendees at funerals for the victims, and first responders who minister to the wounded, is to bring *un*-glory to Old Glory. This seems obvious, but the devil is in the details, or, in cracking the surface to get down to the details, which Obama, in his hostility to transparency, seeks to prevent, while, relatedly, covering his back so as to avoid prosecution for war crimes and, at home, recognition of malfeasance, misfeasance, and dereliction of public duties.

## 6 BANKS AS PRIVILEGED SANCTUARIES: REGULATION ITS OWN NEGATION

Gretchen Morgenson's excellent column in the *New York Times* (February 16, 2013), entitled "Don't Blink, or You'll Miss Another Bailout," shows the protective arm the New York Fed threw around Bank of America in the sweetheart deal to limit the bank's liability in marketing worthless mortgage-backed securities. At the same time, it sought to prevent A.I.G. from suing the bank for losses sustained on those securities. The Fed is famously independent from regulation by the remainder of government,

yet hardly independent from the banking community it serves. The American public still has not learned that regulation is and was set up to be *unresponsive* to the public interest; instead regulatory agencies forge working relations with the bodies to be regulated, a national pattern often duplicated on the state and municipal levels.

Regulation is the path through the revolving door to remunerative employment in the affected business, industry, or sectorial association. Structurally and ideologically, it is capitalism's guardian against its own contradictions and the social unrest it sometimes engenders. Capitalism minus regulation in America would vividly appear as a naked source of power having direct control over a compliant State, instead of, as now, power filtered through democratic shibboleths, to the same ends of enrichment and security for business, and the police functions, the better to realize the purposes of the former, for the State. The gimmickry of power and authority is useful in lulling the citizenry into believing the State, far from being a class-state, actually is there to achieve and maintain the public welfare. Its cohabitation with business rests on the mutual pleasure of both.

Morgenson writes that bank bailouts "are still going on, if more quietly, through the back door." Is this Obama's responsibility? Yes. The Fed's independence is an artful dodge, providing deniability to the Executive and secrecy so that investigation of its policies and activities, especially with respect to its chief clientage, not the public, but the member banks, will not occur. Obama's appointment of Geithner signaled the message to all concerned that banks and the system protecting them enjoyed the status of privileged sanctuaries. Mega-banks, particularly so, no matter their behavior and practices, because it had become an article of faith in Obama's White House that banking was the fountainhead of economic growth, juicing as it did the trickle-down framework of wealth accumulation.

Morgenson writes: "That the New York Fed would shower favors on a big financial institution may not surprise. It has *long shielded large banks from assertive regulation* and increased capital requirements" (Italics, mine). The concept of the "shield," stated by Gabriel Kolko in *Triumph of Conservatism* a half-century ago, still has not gained traction, so desperately do we want to think of government as acting on behalf of the public rather than the corporate order. The New York Fed and Bank of America, she continues, struck a "secret deal" last July which "came to light just last week in court filings." The "undisclosed settlement" typifies current practice, similarly, Obama's own failure to acknowledge civilian casualties from

drone attacks or the expansion of naval power and military bases in implementing the Pacific-first strategy. In both cases, one finds a disjunction between government and the American people.

What the New York Fed did was to “thwart another institution’s fraud case against the bank,” and it also “agreed to give away what may be billions of dollars in potential legal claims.” Regulation is its own negation. The Fed released B. of A. “from all legal claims arising from losses in some mortgage-backed securities the Fed received when the government bailed out” A.I.G. in 2008. And, as part of A.I.G.’s case, the Fed let the bank “off the hook even as A.I.G. was seeking to recover \$7 billion in losses on those very mortgage securities.” The rest, she writes, only “gets better,” that is, more favors, more obstruction to B. of A. claimants, more razzle-dazzle on the Fed’s part concerning an entity, Maiden Lane II, to deny payments, switches of jurisdiction, “pennies on the dollar” settlements, every trick in the book to provide a *shield* behind which the bank could receive protection.

Coincidentally, above the article, on the Internet edition, there was a paid advertisement for Obama entitled “Fireside Hangouts,” inviting the reader to a Google location where the president would answer questions. This attempt at similitude to the thought and record of FDR, whose Fireside Chats were not flimflam, is an example of the emphasis placed on subterfuge and propaganda in the selling of administration policy. Fraud mortises the structure of banking policy—the legacy of both parties, the Democrats more adept, however, in creating a carnival atmosphere, while the Republicans, stone-deaf to the requirements of international capitalism, merely march forward to the nineteenth century, which even then knew better. “Fireside Hangouts” typifies the manipulative strategy of a political culture adept at diversion and deceit.



## Nadir of Public Morality: The Age of the Drone

[Undated, c. 2012–13. I shall now develop Obama’s use of drone warfare, at the center of his policy framework, in greater detail, to bring out its wider historical-philosophical context. Beyond tactics, strategy, personality, and leadership, this is both a moral question and, by implication, a psychoanalytic snapshot of the society that approves, or is indifferent to, this course. Assassination is an indictment of a nation’s policies, however much in vogue in the modern age. Indeed, its meaning could extend to political murder in general, from saturation bombing on the collective level, to, as in Gaza, indiscriminate killing of civilians. On drone assassination, that it is *targeted* leaves no doubt the act is conscious, planned, deliberate. Whether in Gaza or Pakistan, one sees a desensitization toward human life, and on any meaningful moral calculus, the making of a war crime.

The psychological defensive mechanisms of the assailant are stiffened rather than removed when the deaths of individuals are patently obvious. Killing at a distance freezes the conscience of the executioner, whether the bombardier high in the night sky, or the artillery commander whose mind has already been numbed to hate and distort the identity of the subject target. Even then, remoteness from the scene elicits defensiveness; one cannot escape altogether the moral repugnance of the deed, merely push it out of sight, so that it rankles in the soul. The USA would like to convert its drone “pilots” into robots, to counter post-traumatic stress disorder and have efficient killing machines.

Why else the careful staging of the operation, down to the attractive surroundings? Political murder has a cushioning effect for the perpetrator: beyond remoteness from the scene (the “pilot” of the drone sits 8000 miles away, and presses a lever), the desensitization occurs because the task has been routinized and made inseparable from any other technological operation. Too, the “pilot” is conditioned to see an ideological legitimacy in the act—the impersonal Enemy deserving of death. Nonetheless, ambiguity seems the fate of some, not successfully indoctrinated (aka, brain-washed). For others, doubt lurks, except for the already hardened. Obama has not batted an eyelash.

No self-recrimination, instead, boredom, the bureaucratization of killing, characterizes both the operation and the planning. When I think of Obama, I think again of Eichmann on the Potomac. But just as Eichmann was not the hollow bureaucrat he tried to make himself out to be; Obama, too, is fully aware of his actions, and goes ahead accordingly. He is not in the stratosphere, or on the hillside, or in the lounge-like comfort of the drone “pilot.”

He is in the Situation Room of the White House, attaching names to targets, making selections, giving orders. In franker times he would stand out as a serial killer, a not-exaggerated title given that the USA is not at war in the territories in which these assassinations occur. Emotional language aside, he stands pre-eminent and unique in his role; here desensitization is *conscious*, unlike that of others, who have been groomed for passivity. For he is the prime actor in the decision-making process, the one who authorizes the pressure on the lever. Drone warfare is personal for him, the strategy of global hegemony, the tactic of striking terror into the adversary, but also the construing of leadership, in which Executive authority in this area is at one with massive surveillance and bestowing public favors on private wealth.

The drone is inextricably bound up with the historical process of American global dominance, the hard edge of Exceptionalism, the mechanism and means du jour guaranteeing national security. It is to be replaced as more impersonal, more lethal, substitutes come on line, are found, its seeming impersonality a prime selling point in melding aggression with citizens’ false consciousness. No manipulation is required or found necessary: the public is receptive, habituated to look away, entertained by the trivialization of domestic politics—as meanwhile the Empire flexes its muscles and sugar-coats its atrocities. To examine the drone-phenomenon I would like to take several analytic steps back, the context of which I spoke, some possible inter-connections between capitalism and inurement to political murder.]

# I CONTEXTUALIZATION: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON HUMAN ESTRANGEMENT

## 1.1 *Sociological Paradigm of Moral Evaluation: Marcuse*

In 1949 Herbert Marcuse, reviewing the essays of Lord Acton, stated a decisive moral-sociological proposition (the pairing, mine, not his, is significant in fashioning a critique of social systems and political economies) seldom honored by modern social science: To know a society, look to its *worst* features, because these reveal the underlying institutional and structural foundations which brought these features into being. If a democratic society generates such features from within itself, that is, the convergence of its history, social structure, political economy, it forfeits its claims to being democratic and is in process of evolving into something else, a different formation. For example, to know Germany, look to the concentration camp; China, the Cultural Revolution; America—of the many candidates, I submit here: the armed drone for targeted assassination.

None of these would be possible unless the society's cultural values and system of power are the negation of democracy, and therefore each reflects an institutional configuration which brought them to the surface, provided them "legitimacy," and, with that, gained the approval of an acquiescent, if not also supportive, population. The drone, waterboarding, rendition, regulatory agencies that do not regulate, rock-bottom poverty existing side-by-side with extreme wealth concentration, denial of habeas corpus and due process, surveillance, environmental degradation, the list as illustration could be readily extended, but I chose the drone because it reveals, by its acceptance (as in fact do the others, but more acutely), the desensitization of the American public to murderous or exploitative acts done in their name.

For analytical purposes, it is as though the drone has propelled outward in ever widening circles the institutional, structural, and cultural dry-rot of the society. This produces a malaise which suffuses the national mindset with indifference to moral concerns and transvalues barbarism into normality. What had once been viewed as incontestably vicious, akin to Nazi unmanned aerial attacks on London, and, until the last decade, to be avoided, is now the authoritative wave of the future in American weaponry.

By widening I mean, for example, the extreme secrecy of the drone program. It signifies a need for deception, tortured explanations of international law, tighter security arrangements, doctored statistics of civilian

casualties, an elaborate machinery of division of labor, in which different segments of the operation (those responsible for the targeting, ground crews, etc.) are each given only a partial picture, designed to relieve them of possible guilt feelings. All of these, by their inherent dissimulation, corrode the moral fabric and the constitutional foundations of the society.

Where dissimulation exists, cover-ups follow, necessitating a spiraling of secrecy, cover-up, and further secrecy. In light of what is at stake, not only the violations of international law and moral standards of decency, but also the military paradigm of American conceptions of security and expansion, Watergate, the famous example of the cover-up, is small potatoes compared with the issue of armed drones for targeted assassination, and as we shall see, “signature strikes” whose sole purpose is to terrorize the civilian population. By widening I also mean the metastasizing of societal corrosion, affecting politics, law, culture, everyday life itself; for what we see, with the complicity in accepting the drone, is a mental framework speaking to the interconnectedness of abusive practices. It is not surprising to find that a society that employs the drone for targeted assassination would also with no remorse adopt a punitive attitude toward the poor, indulge its fantasies in world conquest (or at least thrill to the spectacle of war, and draw a blank on the commission of war crimes), or adopt a selective, opportunist view of the rule of law.

The mental gyrations with which administration officials sought to explain the drone, once its identity was revealed, shows the cynicism surrounding the program and the government’s relation to the public. The resulting affect of indifference can only be in the direction of more indifference, more barbarity, because no resistance has been raised by the people to the forces destroying their critical judgment and political consciousness. Indifference signals the green light for traveling on the slippery slope to outright war crimes that even legal memos from the Office of Legal Counsel (which the White House refuses to make public, assuming they’ve even been written) aren’t able to refute. Submission, as now, merely whets the appetite of the leadership for more destruction and collateral damage.

The drone per se is not the prime mover of American policy, as though a technological determinism has fated the USA to rely on a single instrument of supposed national purpose. It *is* an aggressive weapon, which has no other function than to kill those deemed enemies of the State, and is not to be confused with some harmless satellite facilitating communication. As I shall point out, however, the unarmed drone for reconnaissance

purposes is essential, as part of the targeting process, to the havoc created by the armed drone.

Yet the drone does occupy a special place in the thinking of policymakers, in which its lethal quality makes it an undisguised desideratum, as terroristic instruments are intended to do, for breaking the will, increasing the suffering, creating the mental tension, and disrupting the lives of those subject to its application. (The numbers, 50 under Bush, 7000, and counting, under Obama.) Hence, there is no excuse for innocence about its purposes and consequences. If we recur to Marcuse's proposition, the drone, by the nation's acceptance of it, illuminates not only the interconnectedness of abusive practices but also the more fundamental interconnectedness of what are often treated as separate categories of societal development—structure, institutions, culture, and so on—that in reality are consonant with one another *and* radiate from the core of society, that is, the core shared in common.

Parenthetically, if the notion of a *core* of society appears too abstract, one can explore its meaning in a neglected classic of social theory, Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1887, in which Tönnies proposed two different mentalities deriving from different stages of historical development, in each of which, corresponding to an essentially medieval-communal structure of society, on one hand, and, for his period, a well-advanced industrial process of maturing capitalism, on the other, there is a modal personality type rooted in the predominant social organization. The former engendered human wholeness, in which social and productive relations did not involve merely a segment of the individual's being, but rather afforded intrinsic gratification in all phases of life, did not impose a strict separation of means and ends, and, as in the family, gave rise to spontaneous feelings and solidary bonds. In the latter formation, already reflecting a fully realized market society and economy, the earlier elements became practically transmogrified.

Tönnies, building on Adam Smith's conception of the archetypal merchant, described the social order as founded on *contract*, exchange, competition, individuals therefore relating to each other with only a part of their being, the nexus of doing business, with all other aspects excluded from social relationships. Means and ends were dissociated, as one single-mindedly pursued goals by any means possible. *Gesellschaft* was business civilization taking the form clearly recognizable today, leading to the objectification of the individual as, my point in this aside, a good part of the explanation of why armed drones for targeted

assassination are tolerated, worse still, executed, and worst of all, become thinkable, as morally acceptable, assuming moral considerations are not rejected out of hand, in the complicitous bonds of government leadership and the American public.

As harmful and destructive as the drone is, however, it is not a runaway spirit, a jinni sprung from the brow of Mars. It is *unmanned* (which adds to its aura of terror), but it has been created by, subject to the control of, and endowed with purpose through, human agency. It is the product of human beings who operate in a societal context which has stated goals, a predominant value system, mechanisms to ensure its stability, and institutional features that conduce to its well-being. The individuals who possess the power in society reflect these considerations, and, when we come to the drone, presumably accept responsibility for its results—results they have determined and programmed.

They, again presumably, are held accountable for its and their actions. A decision is made to assassinate, a decision is made to pull the trigger or release the switch, a decision is made to identify the drone as the linchpin for present and subsequent military planning, and so on to decisions large and small down the line. That, too, is part of the widening of which I spoke. But from widening to interconnectedness to core of society one has a train of analysis which takes us to the heart of what is most striking about a resort to the drone in the first place—and the people who summoned it into being, or rather, defined its role and mission.

The striking point is perhaps less its use than the popular acquiescence in its use, and relatedly, the free pass extended to the perpetrators of its use. Both those who acquiesce (society at large) and those who perpetrate (for our purposes, the president, his national security advisers, and practically speaking, the military and intelligence communities, and members of the financial and business elites) share, in their respective positions about armed drones for targeted assassination, a direct connection to what I refer to as the core of society. Each is the personification (thereby having much in common with each other, despite differences in power) of a state of mind, based on the objectification of the individual, which is rooted in the structure of society, at what might be described as its primordial level.

It does not require a Marxian analysis to say that the core, in American society, resides in capitalism, specifically now in an advanced stage, which tends to obscure the truth about capitalist social organization when Marx wrote *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and remains still truer today. What were central elements that earlier may have been

difficult to detect are—or should be—crystal clear, if it were not for the habituation to passivity and social blindness created at the systemic level. (Not that individuals can plead extenuating circumstances for their lack of resistance; a clearheaded sense of self and class is an essential condition for human freedom and democratic government alike.) How, therefore, does one characterize the core, and how is this helpful to understanding an acquiescence in the use of the armed drone for targeted assassination? Moreover, how is this also helpful for explaining the president's reliance on its use and the toleration for its consequences?

### 1.2 *Commodity Structure and Depersonalization: Marx*

Marx operates at the systemic level, nowhere better than in the *Manuscripts*, and his principal insight into capitalist organization is the commodity structure, which painstakingly he showed to be at the crux of the objectification of the individual. The human being *qua* commodity meant that human relations had under capitalism become exchange relations. This more than the social relations of production, his more familiarly known emphasis, is bedrock for what is equally the psychological and epistemological foundation of human identity. The human being in such a society is not intrinsically valued but rather is and thinks of himself or herself as, especially in her economic life, estranged from others, relating to one another in terms of what's in it for oneself, a world then of potential strangers isolated from each other, connected only for purposes of an archetypal perspective of buying or selling—we are all buyers, we are all sellers—calculating advantage at every turn as a characteristic purpose of life.

Under the dominance of a commodity regime, there is no allowance for *use* value, as opposed to exchange value, because use value predicates the whole person, not, in relation to another, with just that part of oneself necessary to the pursuit of one's goals. One entices others like flypaper to a fly. One treats the other as an object, and in doing so becomes an object oneself. To treat another human being as an object, beyond self-objectification, raises the ethnocentric distinction embedded in a society that is guided by the exchange principle: the we–they dichotomy, where the “other” stands apart—the out-group—subject to whatever punitive attitude one feels justified in taking toward a putative stranger or putatively inferior being.

To go perhaps one step further, self-objectification is itself a process of internal ethnocentrism, in which two parts of the self, psychoanalytically, are played off against each other, whether as “true” and repressed selves, or non-defensive and defensive, in both cases rational and irrational elements squaring off. Too, because so closely related, the psychodynamics of ethnocentrism—fear of the stranger, now, I’m speculating, fear of the stranger in oneself (the ever-present struggle of suppressing the *id* or its politicized expression in aggression)—give rise as well to xenophobia, wherein the we–they dichotomy flourishes, and in turn, legitimizes at one or two steps removed (here, speaking figuratively, to indicate an epistemological substructure, i.e., pre- or un-consciousness) the exchange relationship of capitalism (of which we started).

Dichotomization first of the self through alienation, then the self in relation to others, is the sociological reality of exchange relations. I find it closely related to desensitization, in which case, tending to confirm the moral blankness in the act of ordering, executing, condoning, and/or glancing elsewhere concerning drone assassination. To the degree national policy and the nation itself are involved, one has a compounded moral indictment to offer: the individual’s (particularly that of political and military leaders, starting with the president) amoral disposition, a cynicism elevated to a positive good through self-righteousness, becomes a microcosm of groupthink, the macrocosm of political-social ideology of America’s collective will and intended direction of its institutional and cultural life. Drone assassination is not happenstance. Obama is not happenstance. Both fit the reigning mindset the way a Brooks Brothers tailor fits a suit, perfect at the price, only in one case, value for money, and in the other, malicious death and destruction under the convenient assumption of national security.

To return to Marx and flypaper, the treatment of self and others is a process of objectification, which is itself mutually reinforcing whether striking first at the individual or collective level. More than likely, this is simultaneous as capitalism matures and fills out its framework. Here one observes that immediately the exchange relationship introduces the fragmentation of the human personality. There is, by necessity, an instrumental conception of the other, who is viewed as a means to one’s own ends, and oneself, as a mere onlooker, because already purposely and purposefully detached from the humanity of the other.

Intention and determination become fused, in this case to retain separation and make of it (essential to capitalism and the definition of



commodity, including the commodification of the individual) an archetypal transactional analysis defining social relations in general. One's posture, true for both parties, is wary and necessarily defensive, lest one be bested or diverted from one's goals, and with defensiveness comes a callousness to make the transaction work. Sympathizing with the needs of others is, according to the political culture of capitalism, a sign of weakness, and self-defeating if the purposes of exchange are to be realized. Evenness, fairness, mutual use value, none of these is part of the bargain.

And bargaining is what this is all about, each individual playing his/her cards close to the chest, seeking an advantage, each solipsistic-armored, impervious to the needs of the other, instead searching for weak spots in the other, ideally, going for the jugular—in a word, capitalism, even as Adam Smith would have it, trading company et al. (Already I can hear the drones rolling out and mounted for delivery.) Ultimately, the commodity permeates every aspect of life, not only the economic aspect, so that everything is colored by an exchange mentality which sees the world as an Hobbesian arena, conquer or be conquered, give no quarter, except now, ruthlessness is out, public relations is in, so as to provide civility and conspicuous consumption to gloss over the dehumanizing quality of the transactional process.

That, of course, only applies to the in-group, or strictly speaking, the in-group within the larger in-group, for the poor still are seen as the red meat of exploitation and can derive little comfort from having formal exclusion from the ethnocentric framework. They can have their feelings assuaged by assurances of membership in the all-embracing "middle class," although their position in the social structure has not changed. And they, too, like those at the top of the structural pyramid, still are enmeshed in the imperatives of exchange, so that objectification of the individual cuts across class lines, and makes possible the mobilization of the whole of society, including most of all its leadership, to project in hardened ideological form the most intense features of indifference, defensiveness, and callousness onto whomever is declared an enemy, civility and public relations be damned.

I referred above to Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* because this work develops the relation between, and integration of, mind and society with greater clarity (along with others of his early writings) than any I know. Marx's rooting of the dynamics of alienation in capitalism's commodity structure may not be exhaustive, and thus I do

not want to convey the idea that the depersonalization of the individual admits only of a single-factored explanation. For one thing, the historical development in America of a purist capitalism per se, which intensifies all of its features, including an ideological and political spectrum hostile to socialism, has place in the analysis. The extreme degree of business consolidation also has place. Structurally, it is attended by a parallel concentration of wealth and power in position to define the boundaries of acceptable thought (as in the so-called national conversation, which treats intervention, massive defense spending, and poverty as though normal and to be expected).

But remaining with Marx, I want to make several points. "Epistemology" is a big word and covers a range of problems pertinent to the grounds of knowledge and its validation; my own usage may well be arbitrary, related instead to the integration of mind and society. Simply, extrapolating from Marx and what might be termed commodity fetishism, one can say that the culture, broadly conceived, including not only the central place of the commodity, but also, specifically the political culture, has become inscribed in our thinking, perhaps even our very thought processes, with somewhat unhappy results.

Mind is not disembodied from reality, an abstraction operating on its own enclosed, self-contained terms. It requires location, viability, rootedness, a situational logic, if you will, grounded in the individual who, in turn, is grounded in society in all its myriad, wondrous influences, including, but hardly limited to, its social structure, political culture, and system of production. That, as Louis Sullivan, one of my favorite architectural theorists, would say, as in the title of his book, is mere *Kindergarten Chats*, self-evident perhaps, but relevant here within the society/individual matrix because capitalism's institutional foundations are directly relevant to the subject matter of this book: war, alienation, depersonalization, desensitization, authoritarianism, and I believe the historical-sociological process of fascistization.

Here everything points to separation, beginning with a kind of political schizophrenia. In Marx, through an elaborate discussion, one sees the individual's separation from his product, which takes on its own existence against him, the individual's separation from others, particularly but not only on class lines, and most consequential and profound his separation therefore from himself, rendering him isolated and increasingly devoid of human qualities. The initial separation, the worker from his product, can serve to illustrate the wider condition. Marx writes that "the worker is

related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object.” He continues: “The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object.” Finally, “The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside* him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own, confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.”

The individual is split down the middle; his own labor has become divorced from him, and is no longer his; indeed, the more the laborer produces, the less human he becomes. More than merely the mechanization of the psyche, this condition speaks to the externalization of the self, or better, one’s human qualities, now at the disposal both of whomever commands his labor power, but more important, such extrinsic goals as staying alive, so that self-evidently labor is not performed for intrinsic reasons of pleasure or fulfillment. It is a means to an end (avoiding starvation), and he becomes identical to his labor power (the means) in an ever-deepening loss of personal identity. I may be jumping ahead of Marx, but if one treats oneself as a means, the tendency would be to treat all others as means as well; there are then no ends in the human experience, nothing intrinsic, whether an innate idea of justice and moral right, or even the instinct for altruism, survival, affirmation of self, life, beauty—mere emptiness of disposition and belief. In other words, the fixed plight of the American, who can see no wrong in drone-targeted assassination.

To recur to the systemic schizophrenia of the individual under conditions of alienation, one finds that the laborer perpetually treats herself as a means, never an end; and hence the self-dichotomization noted above, only, still worse, not breaking out from this psychological bind sufficiently far to see and appreciate oneself as an end. The internal conflict is one-sided, the individual qua means, the individual, still a means, struggling to become an end, an intrinsic whole person. Marx leads the way in self-appraisal of and by the individual, quite earlier than and different from Freud’s analysis. If this were an exercise in mental scaffolding, Marx would occupy the foundation and basement, Freud the upper floors, neither complete without the other, and even then, no doubt, room for improvement as other boarders seek lodging.

This has much to do with armed drone assassination, because when individuals have been vaporized and reduced to blood spats, we have entrance into the inner sanctum of mind conditioning a society making

that possible, reciprocally, society conditioning mind, what I have been terming, aware of the resistance it generates, liberal fascism. Thus far, bread and circuses replace the ovens at Auschwitz. But for how long is the question, whom the recipient of this Evil fate, under what circumstances, and with what precedents established? Drone assassination remains a speck on the horizon of *total* warfare, but it is not, for that reason, harmless; rather it is the canary in the mines signaling a troubled future, an omen of what governments are capable in their pursuit of the national interest.

## 2 STRUCTURAL-IDEOLOGICAL PARADIGM OF DESENSITIZATION: RATIONALITY OF IRRATIONALITY

### 2.1 *The Anesthetizing State of Mind: Passionless Crime*

Even *Webster's*, not known for its political astuteness and shadings, recognizes that separation and/or indifference may be involved in the definition of alienation, for us crucial elements in the American mindset in the Age of the Drone. Separation of the self, then to separation from others, is locked in series with separation of the nation from its enemies. Then, the progression is extended further, because, in addition to the individual as a microcosm of separation from one's own humanness, and the societal manifestation of ethnocentrism, there is also the more generic structural-epistemological phenomenon, the separation of means and ends. There is a proliferating disconnect radiating throughout the society. On drones, 8000 miles—Situation Room to target, and even  $x$  miles—drone base to target—not to say Situation Room to drone base itself, we have separation several times over. Killing becomes wholly sanitized in the long and tortuous journey. I suspect that technology is a godsend to the murderer, impersonal execution at every level, beginning with the hit list (president, national security advisers) to the puddle (victim) where once a human stood, making administering death a routine matter.

I do not want to confuse the reader with cascading ratios, but the point is obvious. The ethnocentric core of US society and its ingrained xenophobia—from which I derive support from *The Authoritarian Personality* study—provide a perfect head-start toward practicing the emotionless high art of targeted assassination. Too, there is also the separation of means and ends in harsher form. There is death and destruction on one hand, and the arrogant perception of rightness on the other.

In between, spreading in both directions, is a vast sea of nihilism—the Shirer description earlier of the Nazi soldier machine-gunning people who were standing by a mass grave, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

*This* is the state of mind justifying the drone, from von Braun to Obama to service-members in the field. Yet a possibly worse situation of separation can also be seen: the inversion of, then collapse between, means and ends. It appears possible that the means have been elevated as an end in itself, a love of the destruction of others, or *sadism* pure and simple, as in the “signature strikes,” in which the deliberate use of a second strike has been aimed at funerals or first responders trying to reach victims. In this light, as well as in targeted assassination outright, the drone represents the legitimation of terror.

If “sadism” is too strong a term, then perhaps a more elegant synonym could be found to describe the way America wields world power. For drone attacks are not qualitatively different from the “shock-and-awe” campaign in Iraq, saturation bombing and napalm in Vietnam, and water-boarding in black-hole sites of choice. All of these examples point up the normalization of the cult of violence. In the present case (as in the others), separation, as normality itself, requires a degree of depersonalization—divorcement of subject and object—in which, human beings are seen as objects, and therefore as possessing no intrinsic value or moral worth.

This becomes the matrix for killing someone one doesn’t know, one doesn’t care about, or even has correctly identified—commissioned and done with complete impunity, and for the target-pilot in Las Vegas, sitting down to a good dinner afterward. Divorcement is critical, from Washington to Nevada to a blood spat. When war crimes are committed, the distinction between means and ends is meaningless, means become ends, ends become means, and these perhaps to still greater ends. The hegemonic character of the process is obvious, as though a slippery slope had been created for goals unmentionable (or not entertained and thought of, until sufficient precedents had been created for the initial push).

The drone describes the intersection of mind and society in war-readiness mode. It perfectly embodies a social framework long accustomed to the depersonalization of the human spirit. Historically, labor has been cheapened, the land and its resources pillaged, class privileges permanently inscribed into law, class lines themselves—despite propagandistic efforts—made to take on caste-like appearances (blacks: from slavery to segregation to underclass). And a focus has been placed on the military as the outsized elephant in the room, ever devouring national budgets, informing foreign

policy aims, and fueling aspirations for the globalization of America's interests. As in reigning down bombs and napalm on the "gooks" in Vietnam, raising whole villages and murdering their inhabitants, subjecting the captured to unspeakable torture (often with laughter in the background), or in slightly altered fashion replicating Vietnam in Iraq and Afghanistan, is it surprising that in Pakistan and now Yemen the bottom continues to fall out—wherein barbarism (i.e., lack of restraint) drives the military and foreign policy enterprise?

Atrocities committed through drone attacks are like B-52 carpet bombing or other heinous acts of war. Obliterating the victim is done without blinking an eye or shedding a tear. Distance from the immediacy of killing always helps, but the mindset also creates its own disposition to valuing remoteness, physically and psychologically, as well as indifference. Passionless crime seems somehow more dangerous than when passion is present, if for no other reason than that it is no respecter of limits, satiety, or, for those seeking to reclaim their humanity, breakdown and subsequent reintegration. It is this anesthetizing state of mind that indicts as war criminals Obama, foremost, but also Brennan, who has ascended the ladder to become, as coordinator of counterterrorism activities, among Obama's closest advisers.

*Pace*, Hannah Arendt's well-known work, her subtitle, "the banality of evil," is completely wrong-headed. It mocks the whole experience of genocide and the totality of human suffering of the Holocaust and like mass atrocities before and since. There is nothing banal about evil. The term "banal" is itself banal when used to describe horrendous events, the state of mind leading to them on the societal level, and the mind of the perpetrator in executing them. We are dealing, then, as both Marx and Marcuse point out in slightly different ways, with the structural-institutional foundations of society which generate values that sanction, and behavior and practices that carry out, morally reprehensible acts. These can, I believe, be properly designated "evil." And for Marx, in addition, there is the role of the commodity and exchange value central to these foundations, the commodification of the individual which renders her impervious to moral concerns. But not insensate, for the gist of Arendt's argument, putting a fine point on the usage of "banal," is that Eichmann was an unthinking cog in the Nazi machinery, in sum, a bureaucrat following orders.

Yet, even following orders is not grounds for moral and political exemption. The deed was horrendous, knowingly done. Eichmann was fully

conscious of his actions and their moral implications, like countless others who performed the role of executioner, and intentionally carried out orders which themselves elaborated the basic design and purposes, to which he subscribed, of the structure he served. Is Obama morally far behind? There is utmost rationality in the maintenance of the obvious irrationality, the bureaucratization of death, actually part of a unified pattern of intervention and, concerning Russia and China, global confrontation, with its meticulous planning, allocation of resources, propagandistic messages, and so on—the bureaucratization, not the banality, of evil. Before proceeding to the nitty-gritty of the armed drone for targeted assassination, I should like to return briefly to Marx and the *Manuscripts*.

I have quoted passages on the individual's separation from his product, for example, "the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien," which, alone, partially explains the degree of man's alienation in this sphere of his life. It is not sufficient. Still here, Marx speaks about how this "estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of production*—within the *producing activity* itself." And Marx poses a basic question, the antecedent condition: "How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself?" In this way, "production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation."

Whether Marx confines the analysis to factory labor (he doesn't), one can relate the discussion to even intellectual and professional life in our time, in which the product or activity seldom provides intrinsic gratification but rather is produced for the market—or the paycheck. This further mark of separation deepens the individual's objectification, or better, the externalization of one's being into channels derogating from his human status: "labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself .... The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home."

Perhaps if we stop there, we already have the makings of society in which human feeling, including the capacity for empathy, let alone the honing of a fine moral sensibility, has been negated, structurally and psychologically, by the individual's inability—even if largely unconsciously grasped—to achieve integral wholeness of personality and worth. Thus, the famous formulation: "man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be

freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating ... and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.” Humanity shrivels in a social system, not merely when material needs are unmet, but also when the integral worth of the individual is not embodied in, as their reason for being, the prevailing institutions and culture. This is a devastating indictment of capitalism in America, perfectly consistent, more than 160 years later (and further capitalist advancement, and refinement of techniques for stabilization) with the bread-and-circuses in the political and ideological arena promoting false consciousness and moral insensitivity.

## 2.2 *Gradations of Alienation: Estrangement from “Man’s Essential Nature”*

But Marx goes deeper into the condition of alienation, what may seem an arcane world of epistemology pertaining to further degrees of separation: first, man’s alienation from himself, which the preceding, alienation from the product, and alienation from the act of production, goes a long way to explaining, and second, at a more profound level, man’s separation from his species-being. One cannot affirm another when one cannot affirm, in a meaningful way, the self. Self-worth is critical to social relations of equality and mutual respect. Thus, one projects on others the hostility and fears which one attributes to them because these feelings define one’s own defensive position in an atomized world of real and potential conflict. At an extreme, one’s loathing of others mirrors a certain self-loathing because of one’s essential powerlessness to control the activities (and thoughts) of others.

The commodification of the self begins a chain of separation leading to separation from one’s humanity (one’s species-being). Each degree of separation is further divorcement from the self (and consequent ego-loss), a condition Marx places at the foundation of capitalism. The pattern of hostility toward others, growing out of the necessary and expected behavior of exchange values and a market society, very much resembles—as he recognized—the Hobbesian world of the jungle. Marx wrestled with the problem of alienation, seeking the structural-institutional offset to alienation.

Whether he succeeded, whether alienation, as he saw it, was integral to capitalism, whether at this point of perhaps rock-bottom epistemology,



I leave to the reader, because in the last analysis he sees from separation the possibility of reintegration and thus the restoration of wholeness—not under capitalism, however. Here we enter a murky area, solid, I contend, through the analysis of exchange value and the nature of the commodity in shaping attitudes toward the self and others. This is to say, the individual, mirroring and interacting with the larger society, finds and internalizes in response aggression. Ethnocentrism and xenophobia are prevalent in, and perhaps integral to, a capitalist mindset.

This is not a dry discussion about what Marx *really* meant (a favorite pastime of British Fabians), for which the book shelves are filled. Nor of course should one turn away because we are talking about Marx. The *Manuscripts* are brilliant, and much can be gained from attempting, as had Marcuse, the reconciliation between Marx and Freud, particularly on the question of alienation. Through cultivating the conditions of strong ego-formation, one takes a giant step in generalizing ego-strength toward the modal personality structure which combats alienation and provides a basis for social mutuality.

Marx writes: “The whole character of a species—its species character—is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free, conscious activity is man’s species character. Life itself appears only as a *means to life*.” What he appears to be saying—I warned about murkiness—is that life is both a means and an end, rather than life *is* life (or if we had Gertrude Stein to avoid confusion or uncertainty, life is life is life, no intermediate step allowed). Troubling is his use of “conscious,” which implies detachment or separation, thus rendering life a means to itself, the individual an onlooker on his/her activity, creative or otherwise. Yet such niggling surprises me (an example of alienation when one reveals the bifurcated self in arguing with oneself) because “conscious” is disciplined activity capable of transcending alienation and the society creating it. “Conscious” is a state of being aware, sentient, awake, that for which narcotization through repressive structures seeks to oppose and destroy. “Conscious” is more than separability; Marx here may have attached too much significance to “conscious” qua means, not conceding that means can be transformed into ends through will and human spirit. Let’s now wrestle with this further.

Unlike the animals, man is separate from his life-activity, which becomes “the object of his will and of his consciousness.” While the animal “is *its life-activity*,” man “has conscious life-activity,” and hence is separate

from, and does not “directly” merge with, it. Conscious life-activity, differentiating him from the animals, provides him his species-being. This sets up the condition that his life becomes an object for him, which makes his activity free activity. Then, however, the clincher: “Estranged labour reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life-activity, his *essential* being, a mere means to his existence.”

The issue is worth disentangling, for although alienation remains standing the incentive to breaking through (i.e., the democratization of society, where work is no longer degrading and exploitative), has to be strengthened, generally speaking, outside the framework of capitalism. Marx sees separation, not intrinsic gratification, in life-activity centered on labor, because the latter, under capitalism, both dehumanizes/alienates the worker and extracts surplus value from his hide. Non-repressive labor, non-repressive life-activity, is impossible to realize under capitalism. (Marcuse’s critique of capitalism, in *Eros and Civilization*, addresses repression head-on, his implicit argument for polymorphous sexuality, however, somewhat making light of traditional Marxian concerns like class, exploitation, and revolution.)

Here it would have been better to throw epistemology to the winds, and, as in fact Marx does in *German Ideology*, he presents the case, as does Marcuse, for labor as humanly fulfilling through a different societal order. For our purposes, this back-and-forth has value because it highlights alienation as the core of a particular life-activity, one fully realized in America, and one important to the explanation of desensitization toward taking the human life of others. Life must be celebrated, and when it is not, hammer away at the conditions to make it so. Marx has an answer, just that it has to be squeezed out of him when he is preoccupied, as he rightly should be at that point in the analysis, with separation.

He introduces the objectification of the individual from the back door at the last moment; this is helpful because, in contrast, he can view free labor, achievable because conscious, as one’s *essential* being, itself then prerequisite to one’s *existence*. Therefore, he posits a higher stage from which alienation can be overcome. Still, the difference between essential being and existence marks, and should not, a final separation. (French existentialism borrows from Marx, making separation a positive good, which maybe Marx was also doing, in both cases focusing on wholeness as the person’s final quest, in Sartre’s case, one throwing oneself *at* oneself,

emphasizing the indeterminacy of life; also, the individual as *more* than one's self, capable, then, of leaping over societal restraints.)

This brings us closer to the mindset of depersonalization in the execution of drone warfare, and the mass complicity and/or indifference in America which permits war criminality to go unpunished or unnoticed. The psychodynamics of projection helps one to understand self-loathing. Yet it is the root-fact of a world of strangers, strangers because of the atomization of work and life, itself structurally created through the nature of the commodity (and premium placed on exchange value over use value), that brings the analysis squarely to the door of capitalism.

Here a further distinction, that between estrangement and alienation, comes into play. The estranged individual may not be the product exclusively of capitalism, and may find his/her existence in socialism or, of course, fascism. But the difference here is striking: I say "estrangement," rather than "alienation," because the causal factor here is political, pertaining to the use and application of power (certainly no stranger to other *isms*), whereas with alienation, it is structural, integrated into—indeed, going to define—the foundations of the social order.

The capitalism-alienation nexus runs deeper, structural versus political, in the deformation of the human character, than is the case with estrangement. In fascism, estrangement is the holy grail of leadership, keeping the masses dependent and controlled, the be-all and end-all in shaping the individual's existence. In socialism, estrangement is still amenable to the democratization of power relations, provided there is a realized will to that achievement and end. The power relation is never automatic, except that in fascism all points of force and indoctrination work to compel the individual's submission and allegiance—historically, no deviation, while in socialism, although there are no guarantees of a non-alienated existence, at least the hope of striving for its actualization exists.

In capitalism, however, there is not an opportunity (until a systemic transformation has been gained, and even then, working through potential shortcomings in socialism is necessary) because alienation proves inseparable from commodity structure, and from that the emphasis on the distortion of the means-ends relationship. Human wholeness represents the negation of capitalism, at least the hope of socialism, and the curse—subject to eradication—of fascism. And that negation speaks directly to our problem of desensitization, the long path of philosophy to armed drone assassination.

### 2.3 *Corruption of a System: Civilizational Breakdown*

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx acts the role of physician (where he makes a signal contribution to the discussion and our understanding) more than revolutionist, because he investigates there the *etiology* of desensitization and indifference to human suffering. The patient is capitalism, his diagnosis, of course, alienation. But in light of the preceding commentary, it is clear this is not, on his part, a rush to judgment, capitalism the source of all evil, and let's find support for that declaration: ergo, commodity structure. Rather, he starts at the epistemological level, where it is difficult to fudge evidence or achieve shortcuts, assuming that was his intention (revolution on the cheap via juggling the books). As in medicine, one comes to view diagnosis as the first priority, from which treatment follows; much of social analysis has this backward, out of fear that investigating the cause or nature of a problem (here system, better yet, capitalism) would reveal unacceptable content—for example, differential power, inequality, repression, and so on—calling for fundamental solutions jeopardizing existing arrangements.

Marx adopts this pattern of thinking. He analyzes capitalism as an historically developing social system. When he marks the structural contrasts with its predecessors, we see systemic analysis at work (not wholly untypical of the period) before fragmentation and the shielding of systems became fashionable to, and endemic in, social science. The academic cover-up of capitalism is testimony to the perceptiveness of his critique. Yet, societal transformation is otherwise left vague, save for revolution, also testimony of a different kind and source, no longer academic, but history itself, in which the underlying strength and compensatory measures to avoid total breakdown and destruction have been underestimated. (On that account alone, revolution has a compelling logic, if futile emanation.)

So, commodity structure it is, and for reasons already noted, if not thoroughly explored, one finds, from that source, psychological states tolerating the commission of war crimes, the inurement to violence, the green light to killing itself, in sum, desensitization, indifference, the posture America has adopted in international relations. For that extent of illumination, whatever one's ideological position, we can be thankful. Symptoms from the fountainhead of commodity structure, together they are rolled into alienation (with estrangement the intervening step). For this issuance of protofascistic behavior, moral values have to be abandoned

as unwanted interference with national security and global hegemony, themselves stripped of normative content (except as supplied through patriotic effusions of American and/or capitalist ideology). Exchange values, at the heart of commodity structure, are non-intrinsic or neutered, where everything, humans included, is a commodity.

Values in capitalism, when and because rooted in a mindset of exchange per se, possess nothing that would support categorical human dignity. The highest bidder is the demigod, the successful bargainer has pride of place, and thus, one can speak of the non-valuation of values, as capitalist assurance the intrinsic worth of the individual is not acknowledged. The non-valuation of values cheapens and corrodes, reduces to normative flatness, makes of relativism an absolute, all that comes within the purview of society and culture, here, of importance, social relations and the integral worth of the individual.

In America, the consequences of commodity production did not become evident in the early stages of the Republic, except of course for the presence, institutionalization, and protection of *chattel* slavery, a more accurate designation than plantation slavery (where we can hear the sonorous humming in the cotton fields), “chattel” signifying a commodity having exchange value, one’s ownership over another. This was not a propitious historical start for democratic institutions *and* values. But even absent slavery (and the tone it sets for the politicization of labor subordination), one finds in America not, despite capitalist development, instant confirmation of the capitalism-alienation nexus, because estrangement (power to subject, physical repression) preceded alienation (structural divestment of feeling and affect). The working class was beaten down before it was narcotized.

Perhaps the turning point came circa post-1900, prior to which the repression of labor was standard fare, coal miners, railroad workers, and so on, with private armies to suppress strikers (frequency of strikes themselves constituting evidence of brutality and poor conditions) an adjunct to state militias and federal troops. Labor violence was met, matched, exceeded, and overcompensated for by a public-private dualism of outright suppression. That would include the Great Railway Strikes of 1877, the execution of the Haymarket defendants (1886), the Homestead Lockout (1892), and the Pullman Strike (1894), a veritable flood of industrial collective disturbance with countless local strikes and protest during the period.

Afterward, the same, repression/suppression, *physical*, through at least the 1980s, continues. But with Taylor’s “Scientific Management” an early,

auspicious sign, a perceptible change from estrangement to alienation—tipping from physical to *mental* repression—had begun to set in. It overlapped with capitalism as the system reached its mature stage and full dimensions of conditioning the labor force. Machinery, as Taylor describes the inhuman, repetitive motions of the worker, the standardization of technique and routine, the laborer truly a cog in the wheels of industry (the unforgettable scene in Chaplin's *Modern Times*, as though the American worker a latter-day Bartleby), coinciding with modern capitalism's powers over the work force to effect such an outcome, resulted in a qualitative shift to an essentially demoralized working class. The class, denied through its later history, post-Taylor, a consciousness of itself qua workers (not even proletarians, but simply having a separable interest from that of capitalists) then accepted its place in the hierarchical framework of ownership. Presently, the numbness is not even felt, except as it affects un- and under-employment, and perhaps not even then.

American capitalism succeeded where other capitalist systems encountered more forcible resistance. One suspects that although capitalism trumps the nation in setting priorities and guiding policy, the Nation (deservedly uppercase) trumps capitalism in presenting a suffusive patriotic spirit—though done on behalf of capitalism—with clear statist implications pertaining to internal order, a strong military, and global power. The success of interpenetration of government and business depends on each partner of the co-partnership asserting its separate integrity, the better to ensure the functioning of the whole. There is no adversarial relationship present, none intended, and never in doubt, which makes of Exceptionalism a valid diagram so far as it goes. It did not apply to society as a whole, unless construed as a framework of the status quo, class harmony engrafted into an hierarchical structure and culture, which left power at the top. The result was a class state, democracy a mere ideological appendage to address the domestic and world communities.

Thus, on the societal pacification of working people in America, the next step is to extend their fate to that of the entire populace, and you have alienation, which translates as the celebration of American hegemony, averting the nation's gaze to war crimes, and the nullification of critical thinking. At least when Pinkertons slugged a worker, he/she was aware of a conscious identity and not already prey to false consciousness. Certainly, by the 1950s, the psychological effects of alienation had set in. Marx, focusing on capitalism's foundations, anticipated the practical effects of commodity structure. Prior brutalization was required for, and confirms

the existence of, the magnitude and pervasiveness (indeed, totality) of alienation.

His anticipation of its consequences, not confined to working people, but spread throughout all of society, is an intellectual feat of brilliance. Implicitly, he saw self-complicity with the reigning System, self-pacification, self-absorption in the blandishments of patriotism, consumerism, the introjection of a unified culture of domination, all accounting for working class behavior, but upper groups, too, were comfortable in their ascendant role as having legitimation, adding to the tightly sealed universe of alienation. The prematurity, not to say precocity, of Marx's analysis underscores the above judgment.

### 3 HUMAN SEPARATION: EXTERNALIZATION OF THE SELF

Following the point about capitalism's negation of human wholeness as speaking directly to desensitization (as in acceptance of drone assassination), I return to the distinction between estrangement and alienation before consulting further Marx's *Manuscripts*. Estrangement is cut-and-dried: divorcement, a sundering of ties. Alienation gnaws at the soul, a constancy of separation leaving a permanent mark, not rectifiable unless and until the structure of society which produced it has changed fundamentally.

#### 3.1 *Epistemological Foundation: Exchange Value, the Organizing Principle*

I may have strayed from the conventional view of Marx, wherein the *Manuscripts* is no match for the *Manifesto* or *Das Capital*. This is a serious mistake of supporters and critics because Marx's writings achieve interrelatedness on the different subjects covered, for example, politics, economics, and ideology. Indeed, exploitation, his rightful concern, is more than a question of surplus value, long hours, low wages. It is also a matter of human self-divorcement and all that follows from it, placed on an historical-structural base, and not merely the factory whistle or the truncheon of an authority figure. Epistemology introduces us to the less-familiar Marx: its purpose for him, nominally thought, to reveal the dehumanization of class relations, actually reveals it, not with class relations, but antecedently the System itself, from which class relations derive, and thus, from capitalism's central element, the commodity.

Class may be an operable mechanism of revolution; however, in America, it has long since been relegated to the dustbin of history. From the (more important) standpoint of alienation, the preeminence of the commodity is causal and makes incumbent for its overcoming and removal a thorough structural housecleaning often not fully realized through class militancy and action. My concern remains about what comes after diagnosis, but to his credit Marx's philosophical approach does not underestimate the difficulty in achieving human freedom, an elimination of totalitarian elements that socialist societies frequently miss in their transformation from feudalism or capitalism. As for fascism, no hope there, the worst features of capitalism are nourished, praised, added to by militarism, racialism, the sought-for perfection of authoritarian techniques to stimulate fear and consent.

In America, a stop or two below arriving at the final station, humanity seems besieged on every side with the denigrating consequences of the commodity-influence, especially with respect to war, drones, and so on. Moral conscience has raised a fragile barricade against the performance of evil. Because the institutional-cultural flow is in the direction of the heightened worship of the commodity, everything is treated as a means and exchange value dominates the ideological hierarchy of values.

It seems plausible, if not ineluctable, that the quest for world dominance, the use of armed drones, the banality—here used appropriately—of politics (to preclude meaningful discussion of basic problems and structural alternatives), have come to define America at this point in its historical development. Banality is not a cultural excrescence but a studied institutional fact and effect. This is witnessed in the feigned trivialization of major social policy. A stable public is an acquiescent one, in which cultural dumbing-down is selectively advanced through politics, the media, and increasingly, the education system.

To return to Marx and the *Manuscripts*: The individual through his “working-up of the objective world ... first really proves himself to be a *species-being*. This production is his active species life.” Yet since production is alienating, as it applies to man's relations with nature and the products of his labor, in actuality “the object of [his] labour is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species life*.” Man “contemplates himself in a world that he has created,” again basically separation, so that, “in tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labour tears from him his *species life* ... and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him.”



Estranged labor degrades man's "free activity," thereby converting his species life into "a means to his physical existence." This progression in the analysis, gradations of alienation, leads Marx to conclude: "The consciousness which man has of his species is thus transformed by estrangement in such a way that the species life becomes for him a means." We are all buyers and sellers, but more, the species life—humanity per se—is meaningless when we live in a relation of antagonism to one another.

Primarily at this stage, for Marx, there is hope, at least as I would like to interpret human possibility. Conscious activity—take the example of a painter—results in separation from the object. One puts one's life into the act of production, creator and object now separated, which state, when completed, allows our painter a reintegration, creator and object as one, and no longer the latter a hostile force, real or potential. But what of social relations, how then the reconciliation or reintegration?

Exchange value is a barrier to true human, that is, non-exploitative, interchange and mutuality. Here the existentialist idea of throwing oneself at the other or the object makes sense as the volitional effort at smashing or overcoming barriers. In any case, for Marx, nothing can be achieved while the commodity in its full meaning and import remains central to the society. Alienation will persist so long as capitalism exists. It could not be otherwise, when the central organizing principle of society is exchange value, removal of which leaves capitalism a profound emptiness of purpose lacking motive force for continuance. Capitalism requires objectification of the individual as the flowering of its epistemological foundation; knowledge is subversive when it is not conformable to structure. Horizons recede, boundaries narrow, as ideology eats away at freedom of thought and activity.

What is perplexing, self-objectification (an eradication of humanity in the self) in capitalism cheapens life and ramifies throughout the social order. For that reason, it is not odd that human life is held in disregard. The armed drone is an excellent symbolic representation of the objectification of both life and death, the latter, the vaporizing of another without pause or thought, the former, the objectification of human conscience and consciousness to afford such a course. The trajectory of the drone, from start to end point, symbolically traces the course of *human* alienation, fittingly in an amoral context of war and destruction. We are not speaking of a mood of separation or even despair, but what alienation affords or even prompts, a mood of nihilism, the dropping of all civilized barriers, murder in extenso (at full length).

Cease and desist in illegal murder might be the logical and obvious first step in the restoration of one's and society's humanity, hence, praxis rather than philosophy at this precarious time. I am out of patience with Marx, for his uncontested diagnosis of the etiology of alienation does not have enough epistemological heft to give assurance of reintegration—short, in any case, of revolution, which seems hardly probable, *and* if realizable still with no assurance socialism would not interiorize capitalist premises of commodity production rather than make a clean sweep of history. Yet, if out of patience, I can also sympathize with him.

Marxists like to think of the transience of all epochal social systems, the rise and decline of civilizations as embedded in the historical course (this, not quite the same as confidence in the operation of the dialectic, emphasis being on contradiction rather than the historical-institutional-cultural process itself). Capitalism bears all the signs, however, of a monolith impervious to the atrophic consequences, and immune from the attacks and pressures, of history as it moves through time. Impregnable, probably not—but suicidal, yes, backed by the wherewithal to consummate its own destruction when social change leaves no alternative.

Thanatos ever hovers over capitalism's advanced state—and no dissuasive power within or outside itself is present, having successfully used its counterrevolutionary policies, actions, record to thwart effective opposition, including that at home. If I could place History on the back, or in the saddle, of Eros, I gladly would, but the prospect—even though socialists might think it a betrayal to say or admit—appears *less* than problematic. The inner propulsion toward systemic change may ultimately lead to a new or mixed political economy and culture, beyond a higher stage of capitalism, but civilizational characteristics and properties at present suggest a gradual disintegration and/or degradation first, rather than supersession, of existing moral and ethical teachings and principles. Nuclear weaponry is antithetical to human dignity and caring; drone assassination, accompanied by indifference to its use, is merely a preview of what to expect.

I honor Marx as a philosopher of alienation, but even he had difficulty conceptualizing, much less imagining, an ending to capitalism, other than through revolution, an outcome receding in probability, save through systemic self-immolation, made apparent through each passing day, beginning with his own. Those who presently write about the End of History are proceeding on an entirely different track from that of the foregoing. The End of Capitalism need not be the End of History—but the two are

(fast) approaching convergence. Marx could not go the final quarter-mile, and leaves humankind a clear path to overcoming estrangement, but not quite doing the same for alienation. Of course, why burden Marx, vilified, misunderstood, heaped on with scorn by much of the West since his death (and before), with solving problems not of his creation. St. Francis would be equally pilloried if his life and social teachings were widely and readily available and *acted* on.

Thus, a final word from the *Manuscripts*: “An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour, from his life-activity, from his species-being is the *estrangement of man from man*. If a man is confronted by himself, he is confronted by the *other man*.” This division within and externalization from the self leads via projection to the other of one’s own self-hatred: “What applies to a man’s relation to his work, to the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man’s relation to the other man, and to the other man’s labour and object of labour.” To be estranged from one’s species-being “means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from MAN’S ESSENTIAL NATURE” (my caps), How to achieve the latter stage is the philosopher’s stone worth striving to attain, to transmute not into gold, but into human freedom.

### 3.2 *Privatization and Objectification: Confluence of Capitalist Streams*

Here then are preconditions for the indicated structural-psychological direction, the human being’s moral void, a condition of importance in understanding the motives and parameters of national policy. There can of course be extenuating circumstances, from individual volition to avoid entrapment in the political culture, to religious teaching and values encouraging belief in human dignity, to Enlightenment aspirations toward social transcendence. But for the leaders and power apparatus including its military component, the direct connection to capitalism, as a condition for exercising authority, subjects America’s collective leadership to the traits noted: a submissiveness to hierarchical power transmission downward; the predication of force in the achievement of policy, domestic and foreign; the alienation/objectification of the mindset at the top of and throughout the systemic class pyramid.

This may appear a far cry from armed drones for targeted assassination and an American president who personally authorizes the action, down to

the individual cases, as though himself pulling the trigger. Yet, I don't believe so. I hasten to add, this is not a blanket indictment of all in America, a species of collective judgment one expects from utterly corrupted totalitarianism. Still, informally, pragmatically, in influential circles, whether political, economic, military, and so on, regrettably the attitudinal set of proto-fascism is by no means negligible.

We are here at the *core* of society, for Marx, commodity structure, but to put flesh on the bone, I suggest the inclusion of a further element pertinent to the contemporary order, one beyond commodity structure: in addition, privatization of the economy and of the individual. This last, the twofold application of privatization, to economy and individual alike, reflects the meeting of psychodynamics and structure. Here structure has the power and influence to reproduce its prototypic personality as though structure in miniaturized form, and *reciprocally*, the individual, hardly passive, as having constructed structure in the first place, contributes to its actual make-up and content so as to reflect and be consistent with his/her personality system.

In this case, structure is not enabled through reification to have this effect, but simply the locus of power placed there through the historical actions of individuals, themselves seeking the regularization of Authority and uniformity of culture, embodying that power, to prevent disruption and overcome dissent. To reify envisions an abstraction as a material or concrete thing, in other words, a passive conversion of states having little to do with human agency. Thus, individuals create a societal edifice, including ideology and culture, corresponding to, and shaped in the image of—including seeking regularization and uniformity—the hierarchical distribution of power and perceived requirements of the political economy. Societies do not just come into being, which is why class, repression, consciousness, all play a role in social organization.

Actually privatization is so much a logical outgrowth of commodity structure, that drawing distinctions between them (other than the causal one) is somewhat fatuous, except that in its own right privatization should not be lost from sight, and especially as applied to the individual. Privatization is, by definition, the segmentation of the human species. What's mine is mine, and what's yours is, well, if I work hard enough, or through stealth and cunning, or if I can rig the laws in my favor, may also become mine. It is the fending off of others. It is an absolutist doctrine and condition of possession (as in Macpherson's concept of possessive individualism). It is the single-minded act, drive, obsession with owning,

ownership to be equated then with personal worth, social standing, and self-identity. At bottom, privatization is single-mindedness, the dwarfing of other proclivities, instincts, means of self-expression; hence a distortion of human personality and potentiality. All avenues point to the exclusion of others—and the defensive posture, to hold on to one's own.

This single-minded encounter with the surrounding world—ideally at least thought to be a moral universe, yet that practically reduces to property, its ownership, its possession, even, the property right as a natural right—hardly bodes well for respect and trust to be shown others, ultimately, leading to lack of respect for oneself as well. Privatization is embodied in exchange value, in the meaning capitalism attaches to commodity structure, but it is more sharpened in its direct effect on the individual's psychological framework and disposition. Its biting quality lies in its adamant exclusiveness which dictates a meanness toward others, as if to say, my superiority trumps your lack of possessions; it also entitles me to defame you and, directly or via intermediaries, keep you in a dependent state, away from threatening my property or from getting more of your own. Privatization, without the added punitiveness and the arrogation of the right to call upon the state for protection, in practice a call for further acquisition as well (monopolism at home, imperialism abroad, as mutually reinforcing goals), is unrecognizable and not worth the candle.

When Veblen developed his idea of invidious comparison, at the heart of conspicuous consumption and pecuniary emulation, he may have had, although he did not express or develop, these ideas. Inequality is, purposefully so, a fact of capitalism, structurally so, as historically, in class and race relations, but it is also, perhaps derivatively, a *psychological* corresponding element. What is status, what the profit motive, what the subtle cues of class and cultural differentiation, why as a boy was I quick to spot the number of port holes on the side fenders of the '46 Buick (three for Super, four for Roadmaster) and make the appropriate valuation of the moral as well as pecuniary worth of the individual on that basis? And of course moral and pecuniary valuation were themselves thought inseparable, an ingrained/habituated deference to wealth integral to the capitalistic mindset. Refined techniques of consumerism, playing on peoples' already prejudged and reinforced insecurities, worked informally to support the structure of power in society. (I wish it were possible to sit down with Veblen and discuss the matter, as with Marx on social transformation and alienation.)

From privatization to desensitization, here toward the death of others, signifies one's own ego-displacement and lack of affect. It is a baby step and epistemological nightmare. The condition of desensitization allows for if not springs from an inner self-hatred created by the self-imposed loneliness of separation from others. The antagonism is virtually bred-in-the-bone of society's valuing of property qua solipsistic/exclusive ownership as the guiding principle of capitalism and, for those identified with capitalism, life itself. Ownership precludes the other (we might say, though I believe no one has, ownership is at the bottom of ethnocentrism, the we-they dichotomy, and even xenophobia, the fear of the stranger), while property, under capitalism, is a non sequitur without corresponding ownership.

The nightmare is the solipsistic character *both* of property and ownership. Under capitalism (because *social* property is institutionalized and culturally ideologically supported under socialism), the nightmare also concerns, perhaps as unconscious recognition, that property creates a moral void, makes one *alone* in a universe indifferent to one's fate. Life is transferred from the individual to the object. This in turn renders the individual as an object, an objectified consciousness (if we follow the *Manuscripts*) having little room for moral conscience, lest the latter prove reprobative and question the self-interest doctrine (itself amoral, asocial) and the traits of character and personality associated with acquisitiveness and acquisition of power over others. Acquisitiveness and acquisition, one pertaining to possessions, the other, power as well and as such, have in common covetousness, itself no stranger to capitalism, as a driven perhaps near-obsessive act that tends to bring property and *control* over property together.

They go together, acquisitiveness and acquisition of power over others; both are in the business of seeking gain, one wealth, the other power, the common thread being control, and rejection of control by others. Stated differently, each activity can be seen as an exercise in domination. This is fully legitimated by the political canons of the society. Thus we see an informal working definition of capitalism, wealth and power on the top burner, going to the top people. This cuts to systemic interstices: privatization implies and mandates the use of force; for the individual, operating alone or through the legal system, his/her possessions and ownership are backed by the institutions, values, and culture of society, and for the nation, authority and license provide the means (including full military

and intelligence resources) to further the acquisition process for those considered prime political-economic actors.

The drone is no stranger to the aims and purposes of privatization, which, internationally, has an imperialist orientation. Property, investment, markets, none can be divorced from foreign policy, intervention, and so on. The drone is the currently favored military factor, until a suitable replacement is found, to further the expansive strategy of counterterrorism. It sanitizes death to obfuscate the commission of war crimes in the eyes of world opinion. Simultaneously it keeps alive current tensions and popularizes the doctrine of permanent war. For Obama and his advisers, it promotes American military-foreign policy in an expansion of Empire, strategic, economic, political, cultural, ideological, its myriad forms bonded as one, with striking terror in arbitrary fashion the drone's chief selling point. The endeavor, which passes for normality, suggests the confluence of privatization and objectification, the latter accounting in large part for the acquiescence of the public in the military implementation of the dreams a commodity structure holds open to them (the "them" being all of us.)

The confluence of privatization and objectification, each exercises a pull on the other based on their mutual support for ownership. This serves to elaborate the primal institutional setting for the creation of human separation and externalization of the self. Commodity structure would be inoperable in their absence, thus cementing its ties still further with capitalism. Ownership legitimizes property; it is central to exchange. It also affects the mental habits which engender competition and antagonism, resolved into a state of warlike behavior, participants viewing all parties as objects.

### 3.3 *Denial of Moral Obligation: A Hobbesian-Sumnerian Perspective*

Out of this confluent relationship one sees the emphasis on individualism in American ideology. For the individual, while privatization is an unmixed blessing, objectification, save for the fact that it remains largely unconscious or unnoticed, is not. We praise individualism even though, or perhaps because, it is the summation of the rejection of social obligation. When William Graham Sumner wrote *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, he presciently recognized, much like Marx, but coming at the problem of alienation from the opposite quarter, thoroughly in favor of capitalism, that the individual existed in isolation and that acquisitiveness

had become self-justifying because it promoted a state of political-cultural nihilism (although he would not use the phrase). It is hard to make a case *for* alienation, but Sumner tried very hard, and given his popularity, largely succeeded, as if to confirm that it had struck deeper into the roots of the American psyche than anyone would have thought.

Acquisitiveness is the personalization of ownership and capitalism, all encased in a solipsistic political universe, where neither social nor moral obligation has any meaning or value. Sumner is the poet of authoritarian selfishness. Capitalism eschews social bonds and the spirit of mutuality as undermining the will to succeed, if need be to trample over others and their rights, rights misguidedly spread broadcast through Enlightenment doctrines of softness, mediocrity, and effeteness. The social element of struggle (not class struggle, but its opposite, fragmented relations as the scene for acquisition and upward mobility), is close to Sumner's heart. It describes a rawness of capitalism, creating a wider disposition to war, conquest, and the amassing of great wealth at home, which consequences are mostly ignored in the normalization of daily getting a living. (Whatever Sumner's claim to favoring international pacifism as a way of stabilizing capitalism is nullified and contradicted by his amoral call for struggle and survival of the fittest at home.)

For capitalism to forego the systemic advantages of struggle, competition, an Hobbesian world of each against all, deprives it of its rewards, incentives, essential being—a certain relish in besting others in the warlike struggle for existence. The participation in the race to wealth provides leverage, in hierarchical society, for demonstrating superiority, moral worth, and the prerogatives of status, command, unqualified acceptance, always relative to others. One hopes this becomes a never-ending quest for absolution from the pursuit of the degradative practices toward others (and the self) while in pursuit also of dominance, respect, superiority. The problem is, absolution has no place here, there being nothing wrong from the Sumnerian perspective to forgive in the first place.

One might surmise, capitalism is a moral sewer, primarily because its aggressive characteristics of behavior serve as the mainspring for whetting the profit motive, increasing the rate of profit itself, selling the public on surplus production, useless goods, the virtues of consumerism, and so on. In short, one finds a cultural web of stimulated anxieties intended to paralyze the will to resist, whether it be to planned obsolescence, wars of conquest, market-, investment-, and materials-security and/or advantage,



or simply an internal class structure of wealth concentration and enduring poverty. But why, Sumner might argue (or say to himself, although never gun-shy about expressing his views) be insinuating, morbid, or unduly provocative, the sewer better envisaged as a highway to opportunity, alienation a small price to pay for laboring under what the society considers just principles and activities? This is what makes him so fascinating to read.

A Sumnerian world (historians term it “social Darwinism”), absent struggle, competition, antagonism, which, carried far enough, or taken literally, might have made even Hobbes blanch, would simply deliquesce, melt into nothing—and, given Sumner’s close, dyed-in-the-wool, association with capitalism, one might project these same qualities onto the System. (I do not favor guilt by association. My point is that Sumner was a remarkably gifted sociologist who knew capitalism well, and with or without his analysis, capitalism exhibited these traits in his time just the same.) Therefore, in response to the title of his classic work, Sumner made clear that social classes owe *nothing* to each other, nor do the individuals who compose these classes—even to their own. Hardness of this kind typifies the objectification of the individual, as meanwhile privatization is carved in stone, certifying in law and custom the individual’s solipsistic orientation toward himself, his species-being, and the world at large.

This is a harsh thing to say—though for Sumner, the harsher the better, as proper training for life and success—about, or apply to, the individual, no longer a source of moral virtue, gained through the dictates of conscience, but one metaphorically stripped down for action as mono-causally motivated, in which objectification of self, others, surroundings, goals, all have the function of anesthetizing one (from the standpoint of human potentiality) to a pecuniary hardened-mode of life. Surprising? Not when exchange value, its relation to alienation, and the commodification of the individual, emptying him or her of intrinsic self-worth and non-pecuniary goals, are factored into the discussion.

Sumner somersaults over Marx, lands on his feet and affirms proudly Voltaire’s message to the world. Exceptionalism summarizes the national ideology. Freedom from moral obligation defines a political culture and social order greeted by hosannas in which false consciousness and exploitation are integrative systemic forces, attributes which, disseminated downward in society, necessitate historical and structural reinforcement. These are the concrete acts and policies of individuals, not abstractions the product of theorization or wishful thinking of elites. Sumner takes Locke

the extra mile, not only property, but also hegemony, the natural right of humans. The former's bluntness has permeated the mindset on gentler but nonetheless real terms of a later generation.

If the individual owns himself/herself, as seen in Macpherson's *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, this act of self-ownership is hardly emancipating; seemingly a sign of freedom, to *own* oneself, rather than *be* oneself, introduces a detachment from the self, again, separation, again, further, evidence of alienation grooved into what sounds most appealing in capitalism. Ownership brings out possessiveness, exclusive rights, exclusion of others, the world, including the self as objects, to be bought, sold, bartered—a stampede away from intrinsic worth, unalloyed character, uncompromising dignity. Capitalism does not cherish wholeness of the person—exchange, barter, appropriation, possession, none speaks to an underlying equity in human relations, each treating the other justly under moral or natural law. (As I write I realize, as a wholly unintended effect, I am describing a meeting between Marx and Emerson. For an understanding of the contemporary malaise, if only such a collaboration were true!)

The world of capitalism, not just for Karl Marx but also Adam Smith, is, from their opposite ends of the political-ideological spectrum, viewed as a Great Trading Company, in Marx, ripe for transformation, in Smith, denizens boastful of the nobility of profit-making as the elixir of civilization. In addition to possessiveness, ownership brings with it all of the questionable societal conditions and mental patterns—alienation, separation, desensitization, solipsism, and so on—which, internalized, confine the individual to, like Melville's *Bartleby*, a life within walls. One's individuality is lost (cruelly, in the act of affirming it), having only the reified walls to show for it. Self-imprisoned in an atomized habitat of fear and anxiety, the human truly becomes, in ways Marx dared not imagine, the animal, and as a result, adopts a particularly egregious form of false consciousness, a seemingly justifiable aggressiveness in response to like-conditioned individuals—Hobbesian Man in the twenty-first century.

### 3.4 *Bureaucratization of Political Murder: Presidential Sangfroid*

I have one caveat before proceeding to drone warfare. One cannot plead an Eichmann defense or Arendt explanation for the commission of immoral actions, whether shallowness or banality. Even the alienated are

not brain-damaged, intellectually challenged, or simply trite. They are, and must be held, responsible for their actions. There will never be an accounting of Obama's deeds. That because his predecessors have not faced charges of war crimes is any indication, he will not face them either. Remorse, hardly. Up and down the line, from Obama through the chain of command, to the ground crews putting the drones in a state of readiness, there has been consciousness if not conscience about the operation of targeted assassination. The elements of participation and recognition are rested in *intentionality*, purposeful action to achieve a goal.

Excuses are not acceptable; Marx's groundwork for alienation does not, nor was it meant to, provide an escape hatch for pleading unawareness, innocence, brain damage. Where lack of will or affect is found, this is itself taking a stand, one which identifies the individual with the purposes of the State. In best Thoreauvian fashion, rather than be complicit, one can always say "No," and wherever one serves, government or armed forces, resign on principle. Nothing of the kind has happened. (Thoreau is hardly the role model for today. His integrity would be deemed subversive to the aims and purposes of the American polity—Walden Pond, a body of water in North Korea.)

There are no extenuating circumstances for what is the bureaucratization of political murder. Obama meets off the Situation Room on "Terror Tuesdays" with his national security staff, flipping "baseball cards," the infamous *hit lists*, designating whom to be dispatched, in what purports to be a rational and conscious process at the highest levels of government—bloodless, illegal, expeditious, "bureaucratization" an accurate term in the circumstances. Obama's lack of emotional display fits perfectly the task at hand, target selection, which, instead of factories or installations, is of people. The side effect, collateral damage, an inevitable by-product, is easy to dismiss. Obama's personal authorization of assassination is the gold standard in presidential immorality; only Truman's casualness in dropping the atomic bombs on Japan (with those acts in mind, a reporter queried Truman whether there was anything he regretted in his life, and his reply: Yes, I'm sorry I married so late) rivals Obama's sangfroid. In his quarter-century of service in the CIA Brennan also did not have a gun to his head when he supported "heightened interrogations," from waterboarding to rendition for proxy-torturing, done, or condoned, by what is called our friends and allies.

## The Drone and Aberrant Government: Normalization of the Unthinkable

[The preceding discussion bears on the habituation to indifference necessary to accepting the drone as a weapon of choice in today's arsenal—of which Obama has signaled his assent. To obliterate a fellow human being, from a distance that is nearly halfway around the globe, could only be considered and executed if the perpetrator and those in the chain of command higher up demeaned the “target”—itself a term stripped of human content—as a mere object to be eliminated. Habituation to indifference plays into the hands of society's ruling groups, taking the form of the self-pacification of the people.

Further, this habituation is a political-cultural phenomenon, a product of institutional and ideological development in which critical thinking is discouraged, if not also viewed as subversive. The words are not sufficient, however, because becoming accustomed (i.e., the process of habituation) to something, here, an evil, cannot be passed over simply as indifference, as though an exercise in boredom. The commission of death, long distance, secretive in operation, is tyrannous, a species of absolute and oppressive power. To be indifferent to *that*, marks the act, the authorizer, executioner, and bystander (the American public) as responsible for, and the public, complicit in, the rise of totalitarianism.

One does not resort to conspiracy theory by stating that ruling groups have a disproportionate voice in guiding public opinion. This speaks to the active achievement by these groups of the unified impact which, together with structure, institutions, and culture, have an influence on the trend toward the commodification of the individual and his/her thinking

and feeling, that which brings self-pacification to fruition. Ennui is not the product of spontaneous generation. (Even this said, one must still argue against an essential passivity—the fiction the German population hid behind under Nazism—in the perpetration of horrendous crimes.)

Instead, ennui (if it be that) grows out of the class arrangements of structure, fueled by an ideology of accommodation, complacency, and arrogant certitude transmitted downward through relations of power. Capitalism is hierarchical in its structural organization of classes and distribution of power. In that context, one can expect a premium placed on integration, beyond government-business interpenetration, so that the military is absorbed into the elite structure, making capitalist development a national goal ever more dependent on its presence. The downward ideological pressure on the masses, studied efforts to ennoble counterterrorism measures as vital to the protection of the Homeland, including massive domestic surveillance, act to excuse armed drone targeted assassination.

Drones, their capacity for destruction, sadistic application, and gratuitous illegality (in kinder terms, their being entertained in the strategy of counterterrorism), embody the proposition: the normalization of the unthinkable. Safely located in a highly bureaucratized context, drones fend off public scrutiny and, for implementation, depend on the codification of their operations (allowing for a further retreat from guilt by taking refuge in the rules and regulations). They also, because partly shrouded in mystery, partly beyond the reach of accountability—given the intricate maze composed of the agencies involved—take on a sinister quality ideal for the intended purpose, which is terror. The launching pad for counterterrorism is terrorism in return. Counterterrorism and bureaucracy appear reciprocally matched; each is about the other. In national security policy, both of these focus government resources on achieving maximum terror through the armed drone. In reviewing the evidence, one begins with the excellent series of three articles that appeared in the *Washington Post* in October, 2012, and from there gradually widen the inquiry backward and forward to take in a fuller measure of the situation.]

## 1 PLAYBOOK: THE EFFICIENT WIELDING OF DEATH

### 1.1 *The Disposition Matrix: A Matching Exercise*

Greg Miller's article, "Plan for hunting terrorists signals U.S. intends to keep adding names to kill lists," reveals, in its title, the salience of his analysis: The "plan" will become institutionalized in order to bind subsequent

administrations; “adding names” opens the prospect for an indefinite period or, as conceived, a permanent state of war; and “kill lists,” is a rather blunt description of intent and reality. Miller begins: “Over the past two years the Obama administration has been secretly developing a new blueprint for pursuing terrorists, a next-generation targeting list called the ‘disposition matrix.’” As in his plan for modernizing nuclear weapons, another “next-generation” step in weapons production, one senses the supposed liberalism, which comes down to being in step with modernity. Liberalism as it has been interpreted in America has always been a misnomer, distinguished as much by its antiradicalism as its capitalist-supporting welfare provisions. Obama is nothing if not up-to-date in skillfully conveying that impression.

To be clear, the term “disposition” does not refer to mood or inclination, but to the act of disposing—as in, how to dispose of the bodies, a euphemism for murder, efficacious solutions therein. And “matrix,” Brennan’s major contribution to the conversation about “hunting [down] terrorists,” refers to the originating point for getting our man, a “playbook” if you will, that prescribes the various contingencies including interagency cooperation and resolution of disputes over jurisdiction in nailing the victim (especially when out of drone range). The bureaucratic mind is not banal; it may be cunning, even have a tincture of bloodlust (although to achieve a requisite desensitization in the commission of war crimes helps to keep that in check), but, as now, it thoroughly covers the ground, the efficient wielding of death.

The disposition matrix matches suspects with the resources for their execution. (Miller, as here, relies on US officials throughout the article.) This means the database “is designed to go beyond existing kill lists” in the disposition of suspects. The matrix, moreover, reflects a qualitative change in strategy, in which the winding down of “conventional wars” will give way to further apprehension of terrorists, “adding names to kill or capture lists for years.” The consensus estimate that “such operations are likely to be extended at least another decade,” has made targeting lists after 9/11 into, now, “fixtures of the national security apparatus.” Thus far, the number killed in the drone campaign will soon surpass the number killed in the 9/11 attacks. Yet the campaign continues. Here I cut away from Miller for a moment to note two participants, in this case, the stifflingly bureaucratic language of their mission statements, which ensure the obfuscation of the broader death-dealing mindset. (I also add a third, no mission statement.) The role they play in Brennan’s coordinated effort will be seen below.

### 1.2 *Alphabetic Directory of the Killing Machine: JSOC, NCTC, and CIA*

The first is the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), America's nonpareil assault force and perhaps symbolically the president's personal army. We read: "It [JSOC] is charged to study special operations requirements and techniques, ensure interoperability and equipment standardization, plan and conduct special operations exercises and training, and develop joint special operations tactics." Further down, "As a result [of rigorous recruitment, training, and previous combat experience], past and present members of JSOC have participated in all of the Nation's wars and contingency operations since it was activated in 1980." This is followed by a long list, from Desert One in Iran (1980) to Afghanistan (2001–present) and Iraq (2003–present).

The second is the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), whose mission statement seems about asserting maximum bureaucratic turf in relation to its "partners," a list that includes the CIA, FBI, and in neat alphabetical order, the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Energy, Health, and Human Services, and so on, as though a race within the counterterrorism community to acquire power for its own sake. Brennan will win this hands down as the chief coordinating agent for them all. NCTC succinctly (more adept staff): "Lead our nation's effort to combat terrorism at home and abroad by analyzing the threat, sharing that information with our partners, and integrating all instruments of national power to ensure unity of effort." Among its "Goals and Objectives," we find: "1.2 Strengthen the Counterterrorism Mission Manager role"; "1.3 Institutionalize cross-Government strategic planning, assessments, and integration via full implementation of the National Plan for the War on Terror and the Counterterrorism Intelligence Plan"; and "3.2 Establish a clear set of management and administrative policies, processes, and procedures."

Much of this is Brennan's brainchild. Though enough to diminish one's bloodlust over 9/11, it has for that reason the advantage of routinizing the policies, processes, and procedures of maintaining the resulting killing machine. Meanwhile, the stamp of respectability conferred by bureaucracy, it provides deniability to the president and his advisers. Max Weber's early schematic treatment of bureaucracy—the "rational-legal system" in his tripartite categorization of social organization—is contained in *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*.

This work represents a significant characterization of the import of bureaucracy for the authoritarian mindset and totalitarian mode of societal integration.

### 1.3 *Organizational Theory: Background, Max Weber*

Although such purposes were hardly his intent, its clarity and accuracy, perhaps a decade or two before becoming fully operational, testifies to his stature (beyond his writing on the Protestant Ethic) as a social scientist cum historian. We see in the analysis the planned, deliberate quality of bureaucracy, already evident in 1920 as the wave of the future, and how, structurally, it functioned (perhaps intentionally) to blur accountability, provide deniability, and remove moral constraints on behavior by dulling sensibilities (one's becoming *lost* in the endless routine itself). Thus when I note above the diminishment of bloodlust post 9/11 via the dulling effect of bureaucratization built into the drone program, I seek to provide correlates to desensitization in the efficient process of committing war crimes.

No, Weber is not the architect of drone assassination; rather, he provides a searching analysis into the reality of the organizational structure that we have reached in performing the mission. Obama–Brennan inherit what is the conventional wisdom of organizational theory (instead of bloodlust, bloodless), an amoral scaffolding in the marshaling and streamlining of Authority, whether as the form (corporatism) for conducting modern business or modern warfare. It is interesting how he is usually held up as an “answer” to Marx, when in fact their findings overlap on the profound depths of alienation integral to the modern order.

Weber's diagrammatic crispness, although not critical, implicitly, perhaps better than anyone, shows the sterility at the heart of the System. He was not, unlike Marx, prepared to indict capitalism, and for our purposes, that can remain a moot point. Yet the relevance of his ideas for an understanding of the political-ideological framework that produces and/or explains Obama, Brennan, and drone assassination, is incomparable.

Weber's contribution to the discussion illumines the mindset which makes the program practicable: amoral, detached, incurious, victim as cipher, blood spat, as standard operating procedure. (Who needs Eichmann, with so many others quick to take his place?) Here *Webster's* definition of “routine” is an uncanny anticipation of contemporary reality: “habitual or mechanical performance of an established procedure,” and my use of “routinization,” succinctly, “to discipline in or reduce to a routine.”



### 1.4 *Operational Synchronization: Re-conceptualized Military Power*

Routinization proves a tremendous boon, the great absolver, to participants—both direct and complicitous—in carrying out war crimes. From “interoperability” in one, to “Mission Manager” in the other, the victim of drone attacks, with which JSOC and NCTC are intimately involved, is a blood spat, the impersonal target to be terminated, executed, and exterminated. Due process has not been provided for in the “management and administrative policies, processes, and procedures,” and indeed, that may have been the inspiration for the drone program. Beyond expeditiousness, it represents the summary death of victims, identities frequently unknown, wholly outside the framework of international law. In this regard, collateral damage, secondary strikes, and so on, aside from confirming the moral emptiness of the attackers, from top to bottom in government and military, continues the logic of evasion and non-accountability.

It would be unseemly, after referring to JSOC and NCTC, not to mention the CIA, which has had the lead role in armed drones’ operations in Pakistan, assisted by private contractors (a.k.a., mercenaries of the Blackwater variety). Petraeus is the saintly, all-knowing, stand-out general since Marshall and Eisenhower, who gave up his command to serve his country as CIA Director. Bedecked in ribbons, above suspicion as a military leader, he was an architect of current and future policy. As reported by Greg Miller, Petraeus in mid-October made a special request to the White House for “a significant expansion” in the CIA’s stock of armed drones. Peacemaker? The scandal of an extramarital affair led to his resignation; his deeper obscenity is his reliance on drones, viewing them as the ideal weapon not only in Pakistan and Yemen but also North Africa and “other trouble spots,” and his further transformation of the CIA away from intelligence gathering to being a “central player” in the targeted killings of suspected terrorists.

Petraeus and Brennan may have played the good cop/bad cop routine, but, despite his skillful management of the press, his reputation is somewhat suspect. His mindset synchronizes well with that of Obama’s national security advisers, the only blip being that of allocation issues concerning scarce resources (armed drones), which determination is made by Brennan’s group of senior officials from the CIA, Pentagon, State, and others. We see bureaucratic wrangling between the CIA and Pentagon over who “takes possession of newly delivered drones.” One official

described it as, “Sometimes there is a food fight”; but beyond this intramural exercise in contesting for power, we also see Brennan’s strategic position, within the counterterrorism community. To that extent, there had been room for rivalry (now no longer) between the two men, in which Petraeus scripted closer collaboration between the CIA and JSOC, each carrying out operations usually associated with the other—the blurring of lines over paramilitary and intelligence functions.

One sees here the metastasizing character of drone warfare, not merely lines blurred over paramilitary and intelligence functions, but as though military power is being re-conceptualized consistent with America’s unilateral global ambitions. This is a next step in the modernization of warfare. One mistakenly takes Obama for granted, harmless, more a foil for Republican opposition than providing impetus to a major escalation of US geopolitical strategy and planning. Whether through his own initiation, or more likely the role of others, whom he appointed and/or worked with, America has taken a significant stride in the militarization of defense policy and, in the vein of traditional imperialism, has advanced in market penetration, formation of alliance systems, and intervention as such.

Together, Petraeus and Brennan indicate the tugging and hauling to shape fighting forces and develop strategies (as with the latter’s disposition matrix) designed to ensure the US position of hegemony in the emerging, more competitive, international environment. The CIA, especially under Petraeus (but also Panetta), has pride of place or at least co-sponsorship in the planning and execution of drone warfare. JSOC meanwhile has not been idle. It has moved “commando teams into suspected terrorist hotbeds in Africa,” creating in Djibouti a “launching pad” for operations, which include armed drones, “across the Horn of Africa and the Middle East,” and, to be near the nerve center of deliberations about the hit list, setting up “a secret targeting center across the Potomac River” from Washington.

## 2 “A MODEL APPROACH”: BUREAUCRATISM, DENIABILITY, AND TARGETED KILLING

Miller writes that the Obama administration, deriving political and ideological prestige from the killing of bin Laden, took “tentative steps toward greater transparency, formally acknowledging for the first time” American “use of armed drones.” This introduces his important statement: “Less visible is the extent to which Obama has *institutionalized*

the highly classified practice of targeted killing, transforming ad-hoc elements into a *counterterrorism infrastructure* capable of sustaining a seemingly permanent war” (italics, mine). Targeted killing is not a random affair; it is the norm. Institutionalized, it has a place in government that Obama seeks to make binding on future administrations. Beyond legitimating counterterrorism wherever it might lead, laying down an infrastructure also indicates bureaucratism, preserving secrecy and drawing together all the players. I do not credit Obama with ultra-sophistication and ultra-intelligence (just moderate and sufficient on both), but *this* is sheer genius in its potentially long-term impact for undermining if not destroying democratic institutions and legal principles, to the extent of achieving almost the status of Third World dictatorial machinations. If Obama did nothing more, he would—or should—go down in the history books as possessing war-criminal potential.

### 2.1 *Counterterrorism: National Policy of Global Strategy*

We see Obama’s eschewal of transparency, throwing an iron curtain around drone operations, then placing them outside the framework of international law and in direct violation of habeas corpus rights and safeguards. Here everything comes to light. The foregoing sketch about the JSOC, NCTC, and CIA, shows the readiness, tools at hand, and bureaucratic mindset to make of counterterrorism more than itself. It is a national *policy* of global strategy having implications for international power politics (e.g., the Djibouti drone base’s extensive reach beyond the regional circle I listed, to include Southern Europe) and cementing, as if this was needed, national security consciousness into the American psyche. Not to forget the drone and Miller’s provocative statement, the movement from (secretive) policy to its institutionalization covers a lot of ground. Infrastructure is necessary and brought into existence. Secrecy here becomes indispensable, possibly out of fear that discovery could lead to opposition, muddy the waters of international politics, tarnish Obama’s reputation for “liberalism,” but most basic, raise the possibility of potential war-crimes charges.

The dimension of longevity sought brings infrastructure and institutionalization into play to bind subsequent administrations to his policies; drones become the entering wedge for more, including the doctrine of permanent war. Secrecy, Obama’s near-obsession with it for its own sake, further defines his leadership traits. He has an ingrained hostility toward transparency as

tying his hands, questioning his motives, not allowing him to project his fantasies of dynamic leadership whereby successes can be inflated. Throughout his first term, Obama, as if to underscore his contempt for transparency, used the Espionage Act against whistleblowers, carrying the shadow of McCarthyism to unconscionable lengths. Practically speaking, then, we see the idealization of permanent war, supported by a pyramidal structure of power resting on multiple security agencies, and, in the background, the full weight of the American military in a state of readiness.

The solidification of structure for purposes of war and defense, under his watch, has brought America to that state far exceeding that of his predecessors of both parties since the 1960s if not earlier. This represents a qualitative change, especially when the pivot to the Far East is factored in. Well beyond the Wilsonian vision and execution of world order, as Gordon Levin has brilliantly described in *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics*, Obama has integrated military and trade policies as part of the weaponization of America's posture in international politics. Economic and military paradigms of development, sustainability, and hegemony become interchangeable, each a reinforcement of the other. Not far behind in order of Washington priorities is the modernization of the nuclear stockpile, together with drone assassination, market expansion, paramilitary operational engagements, all in all a busy time for the unsung labors of the Obama Administration.

If we recur to Marcuse, the armed drone, given its underpinnings and support system, is not happenstance; it reveals, instead, the inner workings and aims of government, a predisposition to war, repression, and illegality, to gain—and always retain—global material and ideological leadership. That the drone has been given the imprimatur of government, because still largely shrouded in secrecy, is a neat trick. It is fair to say, assassination conveys a sense of being in the air, normalized, buried in the rule books, as the “management and administrative policies, processes, and procedures” of which we spoke. That there is more than meets the eye in the government's drone policy, that it cannot be treated in isolation—the targeted killing of a few (suspected) terrorists—but represents part of a more unified military plan, can be seen in Miller's article. He found that “spokesmen” for the White House, the CIA, and other agencies would not comment on the disposition matrix or other programs, but, “privately, officials acknowledge that the development of the matrix is part of a series of moves, in Washington and overseas, to embed counterterrorism tools into U.S. policy for the long haul.”

## 2.2 *Codification, to Widening Engagement: Contempt for Human Dignity*

As the term “embed” suggests, and the phrase “long haul” amplifies the idea, we understate (by ascribing a modish Leftism to him) Obama’s depth of commitment to military solutions and militarism as the new norm in the conduct of foreign policy, Nobel peace prize notwithstanding. (Actually, it is not a new norm, but integral throughout the years of Cold War preparation and engagement, the Nobel award adding an ironic twist of legitimacy to the commitment.) Brennan shares in this endeavor, “seeking to codify the administration’s approach to generating capture/kill lists, part of a broader effort to guide future administrations through the counterterrorism processes that Obama has embraced.” Codification provides the confidence that comes with bureaucratic certitude, in this case, the avenue to widening engagement, as well as adding a binding quality to the policy. Counterterrorism is seen more and more as an architectural framework for American foreign policy. None of this, I suspect, has reached public awareness, Miller’s work, then, the more commendable for setting down what he finds.

Thus, Obama’s legacy will not be health care, which in any case is flawed and fraudulent, *viz.*, a gift to health insurers and the pharmaceutical industry, but rather the pulverization of human beings into blood spats. (The phrase “blood spat” occurs several times in my discussion. I use it because it appears below in the approving statement of a high official, and accurately describes the result of being struck by a missile from an armed drone: an individual’s annihilation. “Vaporization” provides an equally correct and accurate designation for the result of a targeted killing.) It is as though Marcuse and Marx’s emphasis on political, structural, and cultural interconnections has been confirmed. Here one finds an institutional and visceral contempt for human dignity and the societal aspirations of those deemed outside the pale of accepted values.

The legal grounds for targeted killings, “the congressional authorization to use military force granted after the Sept. 11 attacks,” and the nation’s right to self-defense, are unconvincing, particularly when the White House refuses to release the legal memos supporting its case or even confirm “the CIA’s involvement or the identities of those who are killed.” That non-state actors had been employed raises the question of the appropriateness of either a congressional authorization or a formal declaration of war, both of which lack specificity and invite an open season

of hunting. Failure to release the relevant documents only compounds the arbitrary character of the response.

One senses that 9/11, however tragic the loss of human life and physical and psychological pain for countless others, the government response was as though poised to turn the horrific event to geopolitical advantage. That is a harsh thing to say, but quickly we see counterterrorism now elevated as central and dominant in policymaking, the invasion of Iraq, and expanded Executive power, for example, the planning for and subsequent fruition of the NSA massive surveillance campaign. A qualitative shift has occurred in raising national security to a new high in public attention. To this observer, counterterrorism has never lost its opportunistic character, *totalism* built into the response, as inaugurating the permanent-war doctrine.

America, from that point, was placed on a war footing. Miller does not venture into these controversial waters; his reporting is a straightforward account on the rush to judgment. He observes, Americans, instead of requiring the legal memos, were expected to look away—away from “secret lethal programs involving the CIA and JSOC,” or the matrix, “developed by the NCTC,” out of which they grew. Secrecy well before Obama, but with a choice to be made in 2008, after intervention had been underway, he merely continued, expanded, and intensified the ideas, assumptions, and policies of his predecessor. Brennan’s disposition matrix is permitted to run wild. Miller writes: It “augments those organizations’ separate but overlapping kill lists,” provides “a single, continually evolving database in which biographies, locations, known associations and affiliated organizations are all catalogued,” and offers “strategies for taking targets down.” Database is another certification of bureaucratic legitimation intended to quiet second thoughts, if any, about hit lists, assassinations, presidential involvement, what Weber, when the scene is described, might have called the rationalization of targeted killing into a science of defined roles and procedures.

### 2.3 *Meticulous Attention to Contingencies: Stretching Government Power*

Properly processing and updating the assassination schema was presumably the vexing part, “targets” not waiting to be vaporized, but here again, disadvantage was turned to advantage: trail the victim wherever he goes, cross borders, build additional bases, and so on, as though the hit list was

now synonymous with mission creep. (My interpretation still; Miller not responsible for my views.) Targets on the move, fleeing, hiding, Miller writes that one former official was thus prompted to say, “We had a disposition problem.” Killing someone in Pakistan or Afghanistan, sure, but, he also said, “You weren’t going to fire a drone if they were moving through Turkey or Iran.” Hence, the meticulous attention to contingencies (for which Brennan was well-known)—while the savagery of drone strikes goes unnoticed. Whomever said the devil is in the details, had it right, mission creep, a danger signal in the moral confusion of means and ends possessing transformative significance. Americans have increasingly lost interest in the openness of government purposely hidden under the cloak of opaqueness.

Given “al-Qaeda’s morphing structure,” the armed drone becomes a global weapon, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, being only the start, especially with complications raised by the Arab spring, which “upended” US partnerships. The result, Miller notes, of “the creation of the matrix and the institutionalization of kill/capture lists” has been “a shift that is as psychological as it is strategic.” (In passing, one justification for targeted killings is that capture is thought often infeasible, the pairing of kill/capture putting an ostensibly humane gloss on primarily a kill-operation—the individual reduced to a blood spat or vaporized being hard to collect and place behind bars.) Prior to 9/11 we “recoiled at the idea of targeted killing.” No more. It “is now so routine that the Obama administration has spent much of the past year codifying and streamlining the processes that sustain it.” This has significance beyond the precise role assigned to Brennan, even though the process of routinizing drone operations is the means for enhancing his position and relation to the president.

We are witnessing a power grab, or more diplomatically, the expansion of Executive authority. It is not clear whether emphasis was on making drone assassination operational, or conversely, using the drone as a pretext or opportune moment for stretching the power of the president, a long-term structural proposition in the realignment of the governmental framework. In such cases, a choice was perhaps unnecessary, the reasoning for both complementary. Obama had, previously to his focus on drones, brought JSOC, NCTC, and CIA (albeit, all three with Brennan’s help) closer under his command. Here we see a new stage, a centralization of power in the Executive, which bodes poorly for democratic institutions (my point, not emphasized in the drone literature).

No longer would the Pentagon and the National Security Council have “overlapping roles in scrutinizing the names being added to U.S. target lists.” Instead, more agencies are added (Brennan *and* Obama’s astute power play), so that through the additional parties a dispersal of authority occurs, making it easier to centralize decision-making in the president’s hands: “Now the system functions like a funnel, starting with input from half a dozen agencies and narrowing through layers of reviews until proposed revisions are laid on Brennan’s desk, and subsequently *presented to the president*” (Italics, mine). Obama is specifically implicated in the designation of victims of drone assassination. The funnel-imagery bespeaks the sharing of responsibility, a collective complicity in the illegal deed, drawing the agencies inward toward the Executive so as to ensure common agreement and against internal dissent.

The buck stops here, or rather, should, that is, accountability for collateral damage (a.k.a., civilian deaths) as well as other damage caused by the armed drone. It doesn’t; the buck disappears in the bureaucratic labyrinth, instead of resting on Obama’s shoulders and that of his leader and expert on counterterrorism. (Bureaucracy has a way, perhaps is purposefully structured in that regard, to cover the backs of those on top.) In addition, the role of the NCTC—Brennan had been its founding director—is now expanded from clearing house to “targeting hub,” also giving it control of “a key function,” the custodian for the criteria used to cull names from the databases for targeting lists. The criteria are “dictated by the White House.” Miller’s coverage of the interior of the counterterrorism framework is invaluable in showing Obama’s hands-on role in the killing fields, participation throughout the activity of selection and execution. What must be added is that targeted assassination per se (with or without collateral damage) is not condemned, whether by the *Post* or the Administration, and that the criteria for the targeting had been drawn in such a way as to avoid prosecution while still carrying out the practice.

Obama throughout the bureaucratic process is afforded deniability (except when he boasted about the death of bin Laden). The pattern begins with the imposition of several layers of review, first at NCTC, attended by the CIA, State, and JSOC, among others, with “additions to kill lists ... rest[ing] exclusively with the White House.” Next the panel of National Security Council officials, chaired by Brennan, takes over. The president though is not out of the picture: “Obama approves the criteria



for lists and signs off on drone strikes outside Pakistan, where decisions on when to fire are made by the director of the CIA.” Obama does not attend “deputies meetings,” although Brennan will leave the Situation Room to seek his guidance.

Miller, under the heading “A model approach,” writes: “For an administration that is the first to embrace targeted killing on a wide scale, officials seem confident that they have devised an approach that is so bureaucratically, legally and morally sound that future administrations will follow suit.” The contrived character of the process, with disregard for the rule of law, is clear throughout the pattern followed. This includes, most important, its institutionalization, a policy-connective sparing Obama from later criticism. It thus cemented more firmly the commitment to a doctrine and practice of permanent war. And what can be done with respect to terrorism can be done with respect to, and encourage the creation of, other adversarial contexts. Drone activity in Yemen acts as a precedent for casting a wider net, leading, beyond counterterrorism, to possible confrontation with China and Russia, so elastic the logic of policymaking becomes.

Certitude mixes with righteousness, little or no dissent in evidence. Miller’s is not a hostile account (the *Washington Post* has excellent ins to the intelligence community), which thus makes this statement all the more persuasive: “In focusing on bureaucratic refinements, the administration has largely avoided confronting more fundamental questions about the lists. Internal doubts about the effectiveness of the drone campaign are almost nonexistent.” It appears that attention to refinements, true to the bureaucratic personality, obviates the need to raise moral questions. Effectiveness—itself antiseptic, amoral—is measured by the success in hitting the target.

As for future administrations following suit, a certain hubristic nod to self-congratulation sets in. Miller quotes a former director of the CIA’s counterterrorism center: “When we institutionalize certain things, including targeted killing, it does cross a threshold that makes it harder to cross back.” Crossing back marks a reversion to democratic principles and practices, the last thing that is wanted. As Obama, busily institutionalizing targeted assassination, emerges in full militaristic light, his next four years will see more carnage while the American people sleep the tender sleep of self-righteousness (and false consciousness).

#### 2.4 *Brennan: Prescription for Permanent War*

If internal doubts about the effectiveness of the program are almost non-existent, those concerning its morality vanish into thin air. For much of this, we have Brennan to thank, his disposition matrix and all. In the second article of the *Washington Post's* three-part series, Karen De Young explores his background, present role, and closeness to Obama. In “A CIA veteran transforms U.S. counterterrorism policy,” she finds that Brennan appears shrouded in controversy, a position he seems to cultivate. The withdrawal of his nomination as CIA director is widely believed to be because he sanctioned rendition, waterboarding, and heightened interrogation generally, thus creating a public-relations embarrassment for the Obama administration. Brennan denies the charges, although critics say that while at CIA—a 25-year veteran—he never once deplored its methods (nor did he resign on principle).

In any case, Obama gave him a still *higher* position as coordinator of the entire program. De Young makes clear that he has the president’s ear and that an affinity between the two exists, on concepts, ideas, and policies. If Brennan’s protestations of innocence are true, it follows that, because we know torture was and probably still is practiced by the CIA, there are others still more implicated in war crimes than he. Yet, from contemporary evidence, I suspect that, like the professional virgin, he protests too much. On Brennan’s watch, atrocities are standard procedure, and, as with armed drones, the American people appear unconcerned.

Brennan’s “playbook” (his term), the disposition matrix, takes up, step-by-step, how targeted killings are to be conducted, from the selection of targets to legal justifications (these have not, other than for a few phrases, been made public). In an interview, he explains that he is setting up standards, criteria, for a ““decision-making process that will govern our counterterrorism actions—we’re talking about direct action, lethal action—so that irrespective of the venue where they are taking place, we have a high confidence that they’re being done for the right reasons in the right way.”” Righteousness knows no bounds. The venue is all-inclusive, and the methodology all-encompassing. This, too, is a trait of the bureaucratic mindset; presumably, generalization equals legalization, or better, legitimation.

The one-size-fits-all bid for universal approval adds verisimilitude to policy in general, here targeted assassination. He is, De Young writes, “the principal architect of a policy that has transformed counterterrorism,” so

that it is no longer based on conventional warfare, and becomes instead “a high-tech global effort to track down and eliminate perceived enemies *one by one*” (Italics, mine). Again, particularly as names are added, we find a prescription for permanent war. But it is one that, rather than being “a disparate collection of tactics,”—CIA drones, Special Ops forces, economic and military aid—is now founded on “a White House-centered strategy with Brennan at its core.”

All agencies are invited “to weigh in,” offering “differing perspectives” to the president, yet Brennan “wields enormous power in shaping decisions on ‘kill’ lists and the allocation of armed drones, the war’s signature weapon.” He alone takes recommendations “to Obama for a final sign-off.” Another De Young nugget: “There is widespread agreement that Obama and Brennan, one of the president’s most trusted aides, are like-minded on counterterrorism policy.” And Brennan’s words: “Ever since the first couple of months, I felt there was a real similarity of views that gave me a sense of comfort. I don’t think we’ve had a disagreement.” De Young again: “But the concentration of power in one person, who is unelected and unconfirmed by Congress, does not sit well with critics.” Their concern is that “Brennan runs a policy so secret that it is impossible for outsiders to judge whether it complies with the laws of war or U.S. values—or even determine the total number of people killed.”

Brennan professes a commitment to “greater transparency,” yet Human Rights Watch said “there has been no clear accounting of civilian loss,” nor any “opportunity to meaningfully examine the administration’s assertions” about not having injured or killed innocent civilians. The former head of NCTC, Michael Leiter, states that Brennan was “a critical player in getting the president comfortable with the tools of the trade,” a comment which speaks volumes about Obama’s absorption into the military-intelligence mindset. The quotations from De Young point up a hidden, non-disclosed Obama; an ideological true believer, his presence with, use of, and legitimation for, the hit lists, wrapped in impenetrable covering, compounds the profile of one seeking power intolerant of criticism and, below the surface, volatile, self-protective, fearful of being thought weak and indecisive.

Brennan is not that different, especially on the moralization of motives, the hard-edged self-justification of (similar) positions, in slaying monsters and dragons (Russians, Chinese, surrogates for terrorists, themselves a scapegoat for venting spleen and applying torture). I hope it won’t be construed as religious profiling to suggest that Brennan’s righteousness

appears related to his “classic Jesuit education,” which De Young sees as having forged his critical thinking, and which I interpret as a rigid view of his “bedrock belief in a ‘just war,’” the latter reflecting, again my interpretation, a Manichaeic view of the world, power struggles, and moral systems. De Young may be correct that a Jesuit education strengthens critical thinking, but in that case, evidence that Brennan in fact was not given to self-criticism, doubtfulness, and questioning his own assumptions—*also* integral to a classic Jesuit education—would suggest that he took away the wrong meaning from his instruction or else confused self-righteousness with righteousness, a failing most if not all religions seek to overcome.

Brennan’s quarter-century stint in the CIA is consistent with what earlier would have been a fierce anticommunism, now transferred to counterterrorism. There was a pervasive enemy at the gates. Beyond zealotry, one finds an underlying connection between anticommunism and counterterrorism. The psychodynamics are similar, if not the same—the perceived threat, whether internal or external, of subverting a cherished way of life, necessitating a total and urgent reaction. The response is self-commending, admits of no shading, and is therefore (somehow) moral. Neither Brennan’s CIA experience nor his intellectual baggage proved a liability to Obama; “their first conversation during the transition [after the 2008 election] revealed profound harmony on issues of intelligence and what the president-elect called the ‘war against al-Qaeda.’” To an administration inexperienced about “the secret details of national security threats and responsibilities, Brennan was a godsend.”

In fact, inexperienced or not, Obama brought in national security advisers, many drawn from career and think-tank backgrounds, some of whom served in previous administrations, who were either privy to the “secret details,” *or* passed the test of support for war, intervention, and regime change. This is similar to their counterparts in financial and banking policy, those recruited to Justice on a limited view of civil liberties, and all down the line in cabinet appointments—those with especial credentials for integrity, Paul Volcker, Elizabeth Warren, soon marginalized and placed outside the loop of decision-making, replaced by those who predictably followed the corporate/party line. In speculating on continuities between Obama and his predecessors, one need only, in addition to members from previous administrations, look at the new appointees to fill out the bureaucracy, whether Treasury, Interior, or State.

I dwell on Brennan’s relationship to Obama and the formulation of policy to underscore a basic point. As with Miller, De Young is a veteran

national security reporter; her account, because it is not hostile, carries, I think, special weight. She writes: “Brennan and others on the inside found that Obama, hailed as a peacemaker by the left and criticized by the right as a naïve pacifist, was willing to move *more aggressively* than Bush against perceived extremists” (Italics, mine). By implication, Obama had joined the ranks of the military-intelligence complex, if not already thus predisposed, through sharing their assumptions and geopolitical vision. The projection of a mythic Left-of-center posture, which Obama cultivated, suggests the neediness of an adoring constituency, profoundly in the depths of false consciousness, for reassurance from a strong caring leader, Blacks particularly in the foreground of his base. The ideal hawk comes disguised as a dove, avid birdwatchers unable to tell the difference.

Brennan, because of his emphasis on Yemen, and not just Pakistan, demonstrated a more global perspective than did the previous administration. In fact, giving CIA a free hand in Pakistan reveals Obama’s own deference to, or desire to please, the agency, which “has standing permission to attack targets on an approved list in Pakistan without asking the White House.” Yemen, instead, was to be the new model, “a step-by-step program of escalation,” starting from sharing intelligence with, and giving “enhanced capability” to, local authorities, and establishing bases in Africa for launching drone strikes.

De Young describes the whole process as “opaque,” the administration claiming virtue, as in a supposed compliance with “domestic and international law,” its critics seeing, rather, “a secretive killing machine of questionable legality and limitless expansion.” They note that the Obama administration “has yet to provide even minimal details about targeting decisions or to take responsibility for the vast majority of attacks.” The ACLU has appealed “repeated court refusals to force the administration to release more information.” The *Washington Post* is not *Pravda*; De Young’s implied criticism of the whole process is not to be taken lightly.

My reference to Obama as the “Blood Spat” president is not altogether unjustified, nor are my references to his opposition to transparency. The cloud hanging over the White House is made up of designed violation of international law combined with personal immodesty about the uses of power—that one is somehow exempt from moral judgment (even when none for the moment is offered). This is still the first term, as though Obama senses the license to disregard precedent (De Young’s statement

that he “was willing to move more aggressively than Bush against perceived extremists”) and therefore, in the next term, we might expect him to test the waters for an even more global footprint, military, economic, ideological. While perceiving extremists, the Administration might also look in the mirror.

### 3 ENLARGING THE BOUNDARIES OF SYSTEMIC CORROSION: A PERPETUAL-WAR MINDSET

This illustrates the widening circle of corrosion taking place: stonewalling by the executive and judicial branches; the drone, symbolically, at the heart of the National Security State, presided over, as part of his tarnished record on civil liberties, by Obama. Nearly 3000 have been killed in drone attacks. In Pakistan, “more than 300 strikes [were] launched under Obama,” creating the blowback one expects, “turning the vast majority of the population vehemently against” the USA. Ironically, Brennan’s play-book is also criticized within the security establishment, this because it puts rules and regulations into writing!

For example, “the CIA ... is said to oppose codifying procedures that might lock it into roles it cannot expand or maneuver around in the future.” Or, as directors of other agencies say, we agree with rules on targeting already in place, but according to one official, “when it is written down on paper, institutions may look at it in a different way.” Hence, the further spread of corrosion: Erase all possible traces that can refer back to war crimes. Brennan, as rumored, may not stay, although the disposition matrix will remain, and with Obama’s reelection, more opaqueness, still less accountability, more deaths over the next four years, can be expected.

#### 3.1 *Djibouti: Widening and Intensifying the Drone Campaign*

The third article in the *Post*-series, “Remote U.S. base at core of secret operations,” by Craig Whitlock, describes the shift in emphasis of the Obama–Brennan paradigm of counterterrorism, from Pakistan, in which it was believed al-Qaeda’s ranks had been weakened if not destroyed, to Africa and the Middle East, where its offshoots were gaining strength. As the title suggests, secrecy remains uppermost in the construction and operation of this “combat hub” for the administration’s policy in the area. The site is Djibouti, where “around the clock, about 16 times a day, drones

take off or land at a U.S. military base,” the launching pad for drone attacks on Somalia and Yemen. Camp Lemonnier, “a sun-baked Third World outpost,” originally founded by the French Foreign Legion, then made into a “staging ground for U.S. Marines looking for a foothold in the region a decade ago,” has in the last two years been “clandestinely transformed into the busiest Predator drone base outside the Afghan war zone, a model for fighting a new generation of terrorist groups.”

Secrecy prevails, and implicitly we see Obama’s “model” as binding on future administrations, in what is viewed as a never-ending war. Whitlock notes, the administration “has gone to extraordinary lengths to conceal the legal and operational details of its targeted-killing program . . . . Virtually the entire 500-acre camp is dedicated to counterterrorism, making it the only installation of its kind in the Pentagon’s global network of bases.” He reiterates: “Secrecy blankets most of the camp’s activities.” Which of the two, concealing the legal or operational details, is more significant, is a moot question; the act of concealment is particularly important, for these areas work in tandem, pointing up the knowingly weak rationales (why otherwise be secretive on what purports to be lawful?) for activities that probably cannot stand the light of day.

Whether from the Office of Legal Counsel or some other group or agency, there is an ideological, not to say moral, shabbiness in the arguments and reasoning set forth to justify, and surrounding, drone warfare. Secrecy is here self-evidently tantamount to a cover-up, especially of what can be seen as a far greater military operation, with greater preparedness and planning, than the Las Vegas “pilot” base. Camp Lemonnier is of major proportions, as installations go, and the geopolitical strategy, beyond striking at individual terrorists, is obvious in its continental aspirations. If the US Marines once established a foothold, current usage suggests foothold now enlarged to major footprint, Pentagon jargon for desired permanence, with both Africa and the Middle East brought within America’s military sphere of interest.

Secrecy notwithstanding, Whitlock reports that documents, “obtained by the Post,” have brought to light the sharp increase in drone activity, the “Pentagon’s ambitious plan to further intensify drone operations” there, and the “central role” of JSOC in these operations. Tellingly he reveals that Obama “has increasingly relied on [JSOC] to execute the nation’s most sensitive counterterrorism missions.” Special Ops forces “plan raids

and coordinate drone flights from inside a high-security compound” at the camp, “ringed by concertina wire.” They “work incognito, concealing their names even from conventional troops on the base,” again perhaps to forestall possible identification for war crimes, or simply, as part of the corps’ mystique, wanting secrecy for its own sake. So much of counterterrorism fails to meet the light of day, concertina wire (a coiled barbed wire) symbolizes secrecy which symbolizes drone assassination which symbolizes—one can continue the series up the political-structural ladder.

As have the previous writers, Whitlock notes that “the Obama administration has taken a series of steps [the matrix and playbook] to sustain the drone campaign for another decade,” while the Pentagon, once viewing the camp as temporary, treats it as “now hardening into the U.S. military’s first permanent drone war base.” The permanent emplacement of Djibouti as a drone base suggests the kind of advanced planning and sophisticated thinking designed to bind later administrations, but also, because, given the degree of secrecy, the general public does not know who or what is involved, a surreptitious effort to commit the nation to perpetual war. That is serious, and might (again) ordinarily seem like conspiracy theory, except that secrecy by government is met with at every turn. If there is conspiracy, it lies not with the writer, or the reader, but with government itself, committed to policies and acts not divulged to the public.

Only through persistent questioning did the *Post* get the military even to admit the presence of drones at the base. Partly, I surmise, the fear had to do with making a proper accounting of civilian casualties, particularly (see below) the killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen, and shortly after, his 16-year-old son. Partly it may have had to do with the larger US geopolitical design, irrespective of terrorism, that of establishing a major presence in the region for both strategic and economic reasons. Djibouti lay “sandwiched between East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula,” and its port “offers easy access to the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.” Of course, America’s drones and aircraft were only minutes away from “hot spots” in Yemen and Somalia. It is uncanny the way counterterrorism and hegemony seem to go together. As the Pentagon’s deputy assistant secretary for Africa succinctly put it: ““This is not an outpost in the middle of nowhere that is of marginal interest. This is a very important location in terms of U.S. interests, in terms of freedom of navigation, when it comes to power projection.””



### 3.2 *Segmentation of Roles: Operational Framework*

One almost feels counterterrorism and the drone in particular are convenient for framing a geopolitical strategy of maximum outreach in American power, influence, and values, a military-structural context of expansion in which “power projection” may be Pentagon-code for imperialism, and with “freedom of navigation” the possibility of US control of international financial-commercial markets, and oil supply. But “power projection,” especially when combined with “freedom of navigation,” may also, relatedly, have strict military application, the movement and deployment of US naval power, as “assets,” including super-carriers, now becoming increasingly placed in the region (a real or potential war theater), for reasons, beyond oil, that have to do with the aforementioned geopolitical design.

The adventitious character of counterterrorism would be less apparent, even blatant, if it did not correspond to broader geopolitical and geostrategic purposes, particularly in the case of the Middle East. The joining of Pacific and Middle East policies, both implemented with military power (in some ways, as in the use of naval forces, reflecting common planning), further underscores Obama’s role in US global expansion.

Obama is attempting the military penetration of hitherto neglected—that is, by the USA—areas (just as in his Pacific-first strategy), Africa and the Middle East clearly on the foreign-policy agenda. The purpose would be to arrest or retard nationalist and revolutionary currents—witness the Arab Spring—in rapidly developing Third World countries. Thus, counterterrorism and counterrevolution appear in process of long-term convergence, as the USA confronts a multipolar world (China, Russia, Europe, Japan, and even, in its backyard, Brazil), and, partly on that account, although equally, must confront its own senescence in all but military ways, and therefore prospects of a devolutionary trend as a world power.

The inescapable feeling is the recognition in Washington that this is a signal historical moment, America facing the necessity of choosing expansion as the remedy for decline and senescence. This may have been implied in the Turner Thesis of the early 1890s, and even a not-whimsical reading of the Open Door as more than a paean to market glory and penetration, but under Obama, the coinciding of world political-structural trends and America’s need for sustainable growth, has given greater urgency to fears of waning strength in international politics. Certainly, a new aggressiveness in US foreign policy is noticeable.

In the midst of this “sun-baked Third World outpost” one nonetheless finds bureaucratism run amuck (i.e., secrecy, along with the segmentation of roles). It took an accident report to reveal inadvertently the presence at the base of JSOC and “a special collection of Navy SEALs, Delta Force Soldiers, Air Force commandos and Marines known simply as ‘the task force.’” Whitlock continues: “Everybody on the base is aware of what they do, but the topic is taboo.” The army general and base commander stated, “I can’t acknowledge the task force.” The JSOC major who coordinated Predator hunts went by the alias “Frog,” and “did not reveal his real name to anyone without a need to know, not even the ground-crew supervisors and operators and mechanics who cared for the Predators.” Here, secrecy also concerns another kind: not only clandestine, unacknowledged, hidden activities, but also *concealment*, as in the psychological dynamics of denial, inability to face the truth, complicity, turning away, that is, lies, deceptions, topics that are taboo, not propitious signs of national power and presidential conduct.

Secrecy can be a game that James Bond wannabes like to play, or it can—this is more probable—be a way to keep truth and reality at arms’ length so as to conduct the dirty work without remorse. Yet this and the segmentation of roles, also to the latter effect, are carried to absurd lengths: “Information about each Predator mission was kept so tightly *compartmentalized* that the ground crews were ignorant of the drones’ targets and destinations” (Italics, mine). The Predator that crashed revealed the drones’ existence. “Word spread quickly about the mysterious insect-shaped plane that had dropped from the sky.” The imagery itself is horrifying, as though a plague of locusts visited death from the skies upon people. As we’ll see from testimony, the reality is still more menacing than the imagery.

Equally frightening is the total context. By design it had ensured a lack of accountability and the assuaging of guilt feelings, if any were still to be found. Even the “official Air Force panel assigned to investigate” the Predator crash could not identify “Frog” or therefore “track him down for questioning.” Distance too is a great dissolver of self-recrimination, as in the case of the targeters: “The remote-control drones in Djibouti are flown, via satellite link, by pilots 8,000 miles away in the United States, sitting at consoles in air-conditioned quarters at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada and Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico.” *Eight thousand miles away*: desensitization has also run amuck, to which bureaucratism is a willing accomplice.

The Predator crash opened a veritable can of worms, secrecy-enshrouded targeted killing on a major scale. It appears that only accidents have a way of exposing hitherto concealed evidence which citizens in a democracy are entitled to know, so that they might evaluate the actions, especially illegal ones and those in violation of international law, that are taken in their name. Otherwise evidence is covered up, part of the exigencies of the National Security State, thereby permitting continuance of questionable practices.

Thus, three-and-one-half months earlier, Whitlock, also in the *Post*, wrote an article entitled “Mysterious fatal crash offers rare look at U.S. commando presence in Mali,” which, although not specifically on drones, illumines the role of JSOC in Africa and the broader geopolitical aims and stabilizing thrust in a different part of Africa. Here, the crash: “In pre-dawn darkness a Toyota Land Cruiser skidded off a bridge in North Africa in the spring, plunging into the Niger River. When rescuers arrived, they found the bodies of three U.S. Army commandos—alongside three dead women.”

### 3.3 *Special Operations Forces in Africa: Transition in Strategy*

Immediately, the cover-up began. “What the men were doing in the impoverished country of Mali,” Whitlock writes, “and why they were still there a month after the United States suspended military relations with its government, is at the crux of a mystery that officials have not fully explained even 10 weeks later.” What the crash did, it “exposed a team of Special Operations forces that had been working for months in Mali, a Saharan country racked by civil war and a rising Islamist insurgency.” He continues: “More broadly, the crash has provided a rare glimpse of elite U.S. commando units in North Africa, where they have been secretly engaged in counterterrorism actions against al-Qaeda affiliates.”

This comes before the three-part series above; already reporters recognize the pattern of the military posture: “The Obama administration has not publicly acknowledged the existence of the missions, although it has spoken in general about plans to rely on Special Operations forces as a cornerstone of its global counterterrorism strategy.” He speaks of the Pentagon’s having “swelled the ranks and resources” of JSOC, including the usual components, “the Navy SEALs and the Army’s Delta Force,” while “the overall number of U.S. troops is shrinking.” The curtain descends: Aside from the Moroccan prostitutes riding in the vehicle, “U.S.

officials have revealed few details about the soldiers' mission or their backgrounds, beyond a brief news release announcing their deaths hours after the accident."

Presumably, Special Ops forces in Africa and elsewhere "work openly to distribute humanitarian aid and train local militaries," but Whitlock concedes that the "civil-affairs assignments can provide credible cover for clandestine counterterrorism units." Two of the men were identified as part of a unit based at Fort Bragg, but the third, only after persistent inquiries, was identified two months later as a member of the Intelligence and Security Command (Fort Belvoir), "a little-known and secretive branch of the Army that specializes in communications intercepts," working closely with JSOC to "capture or kill terrorism suspects overseas." Mali was alleged to be rich in the pickings, "a refuge for Islamist militants allied with al-Qaeda."

The usual suspects emerge from the shadows: classified programs, one code-named Creek Sand, another code-named Oasis Enabler, with their surveillance aircraft, private contractors (much of this revealed by WikiLeaks), and an ambitious program combining "U.S. military advisers" working "alongside elite, American-trained Malian units." Inexplicably, the ambassador, to the chagrin of Africa Command, rejected the program, concerned about a possible backlash. ("It is unclear whether the plan was carried out.") This was all to little avail as the situation deteriorated in northern Mali. In a final section, "Little details not adding up," Whitlock begins to question the accident itself, pointing out how little information government provided—as for example, one was described as a "communications expert," to whom the Army "posthumously" awarded the Meritorious Service medal "but declined to say why."

Whether or not drones are present (there are operational and strategic similarities to Djibouti, down to the kinds of personnel involved), this seemingly minor incident shows, in miniature, the corrupting influence of secrecy, which masks the aggressive use of Special Ops and paramilitary forces in areas not at war with the USA. Counterterrorism would appear in this case to be the pretext, or opportunity, for an active program of intervention in a nation's domestic affairs—so normal by US standards as to be hardly worth noticing. In an earlier period, anticommunism and counterrevolution would also suit.

## On Distance and Disconnection: Entering a Moral Black Hole

[State-sponsored murder reveals, save for the rare conscience-stricken individual who may ultimately face a psychological breakdown, the mindset of the executioner. As the “pilot” of the drone, he/she sits comfortably in splendid isolation, exhibiting all of the moral and mental vitality of a zombie, an automaton with little possibility of reanimation. It is important, in sketching a more rounded picture of the drone operation, the hell that the Obama administration unleashed, to examine the impersonal mechanics of the process *on the ground*. This is not merely the chummy “Terror Tuesday” sessions, replete with hit lists, off the Situation Room, but the air-conditioned trailers parked in Nevada and New Mexico, so far away from public view as almost to make secrecy unnecessary.

In one respect, Arendt is right, the banality of evil can be seen in the little details of ordinary life and military operations—the trailers, air-conditioning, and so on, of the proxy death chambers, that of the pilots 8000 miles from the scene of the carnage they inflict, perhaps humming, in suitable updating, “Zap Go the Strings of My Heart.” In this case a laser-guided armed drone is readied at one’s fingertips. But automaton or not, the “pilot” receives rather than gives orders, which travel all the way down the command and control structure from the president’s desk. It is *he*, in this case, Obama, who is more morally culpable than the executioner of policy. Here I should like to examine the operator and the operation.]

## I POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER: AN OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE

An excellent account appeared in a stunning series in the German paper *Der Spiegel*, which covered aspects of drone warfare, the persons, and their emotional states, who are directly involved in the killings. Neither the *Post* nor the *Times* perhaps instinctively saw fit to report this deeply on these matters. Nicola Abe's case study of Brandon Bryant helps one understand (though I cannot sympathize with) the strong yet delayed feelings of guilt of some of the service members who experienced the psychodynamics of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The article is entitled "Dreams in Infrared: The Woes of an American Drone Operator," December 14, 2012.

Conceivably, the afflicted are in a sense the noble ones in an ignominious sea. For at least the enormity of their acts have broken through their encrusted defensive walls, in some measure the product of their having been intentionally trained and habituated to feel nothing, an anomic mental state that, by whatever means, or for whatever reason, they have personally transcended to face their own guilt. They have fought the battle within themselves about the moral responsibility for performing reprehensible acts, in some cases winning, probably more often losing, either way bearing the scars to show for it.

I find it hard to exonerate the perpetrator for his/her crime, a crime that exponentially is raised to a war crime; passivity in the transmission belt of wielding death is no consolation for the victim, who is often forgotten when PTSD is approached primarily if not exclusively from the side of the executioner. There is obviously blame enough to go around, my concern being that our case study, Brandon Bryant, not divert attention from Obama, Brennan, the hit-list, the enormous collateral damage inflicted by drone warfare, a cumulative outpouring of moral wrong that makes the total framework anything but banal.

This is no mean struggle given the obliteration of conscience that comes from training, indoctrination, orientation, and in the case of drone "pilots," so far from the killing fields themselves, all pointing to an habituation to administering death—no compunction, no questions asked, answered, or expected. Those afflicted with PTSD lost the battle, and therefore won the war with themselves; they are able to salvage what is left of their souls, and, painful as the struggle has been, can claim some moral dignity and moral understanding of themselves. Not coincidentally, the

other case studies in Abe's article, who feel nothing, no regrets, other than the close quarters of their air-conditioned trailers, probably shall never be medical candidates for PTSD.

### 1.1 *The Simulation of War: Air-Conditioned Nightmare*

Abe begins, so succinctly as to provide the synopsis of a book: "A soldier sets out to graduate at the top of his class. He succeeds, and he becomes a drone pilot working with a special unit of the United States Air Force in New Mexico. He kills dozens of people. But then, one day, he realizes that he can't do it anymore." The description of the operators' workplace reads like the basement level of hell, without the fire and heat, tomb-like, cons away from any semblance of moral perception (appropriately, one kind of drone missile is named "Hellfire"): "For more than five years, Brandon Bryant worked in an oblong, *windowless* container about the size of a trailer, where the air-conditioning was kept at 17 degrees Celsius (63 degrees Fahrenheit) and, for security reasons, the door *couldn't be opened*. Bryant and his coworkers sat in front of 14 computer monitors and four keyboards. When Bryant pressed a button in New Mexico, *someone died on the other side of the world*" (Italics, mine).

The italicized portions aptly convey the hideously restrictive atmosphere and the profound impersonality of the action, as though in fact we have entered a chilling (no pun intended) New World. But as Abe continues, that description seems not far-fetched: "The container is filled with the humming of computers. It's the brain of the drone, known as a cockpit in Air Force parlance. But the pilots in the container aren't flying through the air. They're just sitting at the controls."

The scene appears designedly to suggest, for those in the trailer, the simulation of war, rather than war itself. They're just sitting at the controls. One vignette says it all, the glibness—again, Arendt's banality-of-evil argument—with which killing is accepted, the twisting and turning (except perhaps for Bryant) which occurs in fleeing from the truth, and from reality:

Bryant was one of them, and he remembers one incident very clearly when a Predator drone was circling in a figure-eight pattern in the sky above Afghanistan .... There was a flat-roofed house made of mud, with a shed to hold goats in the crosshairs, *as Bryant recalls*. [Abe could not have known about the details of the trailer or the operation without Bryant's cooperation.] When he received the order to fire, he pressed a button with his left

hand and marked the roof with a laser. The pilot sitting next to him pressed the trigger on a joystick, causing the drone to launch a Hellfire missile. *There were 16 seconds left until impact* (Italics, mine).

Sixteen seconds, and 6250 miles away to be exact (rather than 8000 miles in some theaters of war); little time to draw back in the event of discovering possible civilian casualties, a dangerous interval, assuming one even cared. Built into the drone attack was this arbitrary power to reign down death, an instrument of terror in which proper safeguards have been built *out* of the so-called mission, as though ensuring structurally and mechanically a diabolical result. And that is what happened.

### 1.2 *Ground Zero: Casual Obliteration*

Bryant stood transfixed, virtually paralyzed to alter course. Nor probably would he have been expected to. “‘These moments are like in slow motion,’ he says today. Images taken with an infrared camera attached to the drone appeared on his monitor, transmitted by satellite, with a two-to-five-second time delay.” Abe captures the scene well: “With seven seconds left to go, there was no one to be seen on the ground. Bryant could still have diverted the missile at that point. Then it was down to three seconds. Bryant felt as if he had to count each individual pixel on the monitor. *Suddenly a child walked around the corner*, he says.” The rest I wish could be etched in the president’s mind. As I write this, Newtown was just a week ago; Obama, carefully scripted, came to shed a tear. But there were no tears for the child standing by “a flat-roofed house made of mud” thousands of miles away, murdered in cold blood—whose identity then became a subject for jest or denial.

The account continues: “Second zero was the moment in which Bryant’s digital world collided with the real one in a village between Baghlan and Mazar-e-Sharif. Bryant saw a flash on the screen: the explosion. Parts of the building collapsed. *The child had disappeared*. Bryant had a sick feeling in his stomach.” What follows makes us all Nazified for allowing this mindset to become tolerated, applauded, inscribed in the national psyche: “‘Did we just kill a kid?’ he asked the man sitting next to him. ‘Yeah, I guess that was a kid,’ the pilot replied. ‘Was that a kid?’ they wrote into a chat window on the monitor. Then, someone they didn’t know answered, someone sitting in a military command center somewhere in the world who had observed their attack. ‘*No. That was a dog*,’ the person wrote” (Italics, mine). Abe concluded, “They reviewed the scene on video. A dog on two legs?” I am reminded of the William L. Shirer account



of the S.S. guard who machine-gunned Jewish inmates in a death camp after they had dug a mass grave, *a cigarette dangling from his lips*.

What then of the moral indifference associated with impersonal killing? Factoring distance and disconnection into the war paradigm ensures against self-knowledge, or more brutally, makes realizable, as the desideratum, efficient killing without suffering casualties of one's own. Here warfare mirrors the assumptions of the alienated society from which it comes, human separation as a negation of accountability and moral obligation—a ruthlessness judged by the results: the *net* number killed, the ratio of enemy over one's own forces. Since nothing happens, except PTSD, to a numerically few, and upward through the chain of command, the drone, like germ warfare, is self-commending, and equally pernicious.

This chain of command bears not merely ultimate but immediate and proximate responsibility for the commission of drone killing. One then must ask: what is it about political leadership that engenders moral-spiritual emptiness in favor of callous indifference when it comes to taking human life? Is it that one is drawn, as through a selective process, to aspire and attain to such leadership? Conversely, does moral indifference result from occupying such leadership, a drawing out from the experience (a kind of role-model theory) in which compromise trumps principle and self-aggrandizement is a determinant of success—and even survival? Obama seems to be a product of both, self-preselection to move ahead, self-opacity/denial paving the way to further and continued advancement?

It is as though entrance into politics seals the individual's moral fate, a corruption of the heart and mind, even when the starting point was principled, selfless, devotedly humane. A self-selected process appears to be at work, in which false consciousness, more pernicious than its usual form, leads the individual to deceive himself/herself, knowing that in time a personal transformation will occur, though—the semi-unconscious part—first refusing to acknowledge base motivations. I have met few politicians who were whole persons, Adlai Stevenson being one, who in moments of exhaustion or crisis reveal their true selves. I am not a clinician, yet I see Obama as, not Stevenson, not Dr. King, nor knowingly unscrupulous, but turning his inward aggression onto the world. Innocence in that case is more detrimental to a democratic society than calculated deception and treachery because it allows stored up poisons, undisclosed to the psyche, to reach the boiling point and explode. Innocence permits aggression a clear field knowing little or no restraint.

## 2 AVOIDING STRUCTURAL FLABBINESS: THE MURDER OF CHILDREN, A NECESSARY PRICE

Murder is obscene; also its denial. Too many dogs on two legs are roaming the barren landscape. All of the killing-framework is set in the crosshairs of a drone policy ordered and engineered by Obama, and carried out by his surrogates in uniform. Whether in Newtown, CT, or the White House Situation Room, descending Air Force One with snappy salute, surrounded by top brass or an oversized American flag as background for creating the indelible image of Commander-in-Chief, Obama remains a two-dimensional, cardboard figure, who *thirsts* for power, confident the utter havoc for which he is responsible—but not made accountable—will neither disturb his serenity nor even become detected.

Actually, the correlation between flatness of persona and thirst for power is not so surprising, because, as Nietzsche grasped in *Genealogy of Morals*, it is the weak, not the strong at heart, who are capable of eruptive personal and societal behavior. Their moral compass is unhinged by self-pity and resentment; an emptiness becomes the seedbed for violence, or specifically in Obama's case, for undue attraction to power and admiration for those who possess it. Power fills out the moral void, although the other traits of personality and character have not vanished.

### 2.1 *Infanticide and the Logic of War: Proclivity Toward Violence*

Why is this relevant? What does Newtown have to do with a village between Baghlan and Mazar-e-Sharif? The children slain in one and the children slain in countless villages wherever drones operate? It may seem a stretch to say that the national climate, orchestrated from the top, but with deep historical roots in American culture, has facilitated the many gun massacres in recent years. Yet society legitimates violence through a celebration of war and intervention; perversely, it savors, for many better off, the punitive attitude adopted toward the poor, as though they were themselves at best unpatriotic and at worst potential terrorists at home, threats to the American way of life, in our metaphorical crosshairs as fit candidates for annihilation. Simply being poor is considered a crime, an affront to social decency. Much of the murderous demiurge (an autonomous creative force or decisive power, but here substitute “destructive” for “creative”) running rampant through American society could be

obviated or diminished in effectiveness if the nation in fact had grounded its existence in democratic theory and practice and continued to do so.

This would mean, among other things, puncturing the hubristic national mindset which confers the license to identify and kill all perceived enemies and threats through taking exaggerated military action. It also means obstructing the psychological process of introjection, on the individual's part, of precisely that militarism as itself the extension of one's own power, might, and fantasy of omnipotence (a.k.a., the individualism as now practiced). Introjection may be an unconscious process, but *what* is incorporated, as in values, into the psyche, is another matter.

Instead of identification with power, force, or militarism, a society grounded in peace and justice (not as empty phrases, but real conditions of policy and having equalitarian implications for social structure and political legitimacy) will afford an introjection process of very different content and values than now presently exists in America. Whatever the number of US military bases in the world, variously estimated at 300–1000, a numbers-discrepancy due to lack of government transparency, this proliferation of force and the commensurate activities thereon, is not conducive to social peace at home. Vaporizing little children as “collateral damage” likewise is not conducive to social peace, if by social peace we mean, weakening the trend toward (and perhaps unconscious motivation for) gun violence in America.

Foreign policy and domestic policy are inseparable. Even the best efforts to draw an iron curtain around what US forces are doing abroad, cannot shut out influences which legitimize similar practices at home, or violence as integral to the national ethos. Similarly, what happens at home merely fortifies the will to aggression overseas. A nation may try an elementary bifurcation of policy, but unsuccessfully *and* itself held undesirable, lest one or the other weaken the integrated political-ideological culture defining the whole. The reduction of gun violence, nourished as it is by war, intervention, regime change, paramilitary operations, in sum, the mystique of hegemonic glorification (once termed nationalism, but with an imperialist inflection), can be brought about by personal leadership in the form of genuine exhortation *done with clean hands* in the service of peace and justice. *That* has not happened.

With such leadership would come a respect for the dignity and rights of all people, international modesty in the conduct of trade, foreign relations based on rejection of counterrevolution, and moderating the quest for ideological-cultural supremacy, the pervasive American “footprint.” This

requires a unitary posture of a quite opposite kind which could set right the climate of mutual respect and obligation as prerequisite to discouraging such violence. This will not be forthcoming from Obama. A numbers game, as standard operating procedure, has gone on since at least the time of Vietnam, except when boasting of casualties inflicted is needed to bolster national morale.

The denial of civilian, including children's, casualties, can be attributed to various factors, for example: hypocrisy on Obama's part; studied indifference; temperamental aloofness, coldness, fear of introspection; and self-righteousness, feelings of certitude, intransigence when cornered. Possibly worst of all is ideological conviction in the hierarchical arrangement of society, including militarism, US world preeminence, market fundamentalism along with its corollaries, trickle-down economics, and widening differentials of wealth and power. Probably *all of the preceding* are significant, for hypocrisy alone is too simplistic an explanation. Instead, the context, as with these other factors, must be supplied, if we are to measure the cruelty of armed drones for targeted assassination.

The reigning thinking qua desensitization is that murdered children would be a small price to pay for American greatness. Domestic gun violence at home, while deplorable, requires actions to stop it perhaps equally deplorable in weakening the nation's moral fiber (i.e., fighting spirit), the necessary hard edge that must not be compromised in a hostile world. Much of the societal response to what is perceived—think, an ingrained ethnocentrism and xenophobia—as a permanent state of ideological tensions, is intuitive or instinctive, though, actually, it is an habituation to claims of Exceptionalism justifying corresponding power. It is intuitive only in that it follows from military and market imperatives.

The turnaround is difficult to envision. It would signify a qualitative change in historical development, the transformation of America into an humane, socially, politically, economically, and racially democratic nation. But precisely *that* would mean an America no longer itself; and for that reason, resistance to change, to democratization every which way, of institutions, culture, politics, and so on, would run smack against the collective intuition and instinct, as being too great a price to pay for the world power—and the paradigm of the militarization of capitalism—America currently enjoys and would thus have to give up.

## 2.2 *Statistics of Mass Murder: Bureau of Investigative Journalism*

Hegemony is an all-or-nothing proposition; tamper with it, and structural flabbiness follows. As Lord Acton proclaimed, a society can be judged by its worst features, a sociological as well as moral insight, for what hegemony entails is the totalization of the polity, from the internal discipline of passivity and obedience, to the integration of its separable units (politics, economics, culture, etc.), to its war-making capacities and capabilities. Totalization, of course, may signify no more than effective structural-ideological coordination, so that the important matter is less the formal properties of a social system (although tightness facilitates domination) than internal power arrangements and the substance of ideology. Aspirations in hegemonic terms as a nation, something few Americans would disclaim, already gets society off on the wrong foot, in which implicit authoritarianism is joined to militarism (for hegemony to be more than fantasy) that translates into what is presently clearly recognizable: structural-cultural pacification at home, expansionist, imperialist policy abroad. Acton, if he were given to symbolic analysis, would have no trouble singling out the drone program as illustrative of, or candidate for, the worst feature unlocking the societal mechanisms of inequality and repression.

Totalization of the social order requires a focus. Drone assassination, as I use it here, may *not* be the *crème de la crème* of repression; even symbolically, waterboarding, torture in general, are equally revelatory of deeper forces at work. But more basic still, capitalism, particularly as a systemic source of alienation, as well as class-structured differentials in wealth and power, is symptomatic of, if not *is*, repression indicative of, if one followed my reasoning, Actonian logic. The moral consequences of the drone program are shunted aside or not even recognized; the program is rendered innocuous and/or invisible from the standpoint of the national conversation.

Yet *that*, an obvious example of denial, is instead for policymakers necessitous, especially given the circumstances of objective and perceived decline. It becomes one arrow, but by no means the only one, in the quiver of Goliath starting to shake in his boots, fighting off doubts, willing perhaps, if forced, to bring down upon him global condemnation as itself a means of displaying strength, warning off others from encroachment in the game of geopolitical struggle. Obama evinces a Strangelove-persona in

adopting programs from his predecessors. He tweaks them for greater lethality in the case of drones, or expands, as in nuclear modernization and the increase of naval power, the magnitude of destructive force available to the nation.

On my part this would be empty rhetoric if it were not for the data compiled by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, acknowledged for the accuracy of its findings. Obama did not originate drone warfare. Antecedent development and practice in the post-World War II era gives emphasis to Israel—frightening because *its* antecedent model was the Nazi unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over England. Here one can speculate on the technological sharing and cross-fertilization of ideas and personnel between Israel and the USA in accelerating the latter's use of drone warfare, a speculation justified by the wider record of military and intelligence close cooperation between the two nations on weaponry and weapons' design. One begins with some numbers, in themselves less convincing than the stark individual case studies slowly emerging. Their slowness is due partly to the painstaking documentation, including in-depth interviews, of the more authoritative work, and partly, a dawning awareness of the drones' sinister nature, forcing greater attention to the problem.

The problem is genocide in microcosm, a miniaturization of the global battlefield wherein US interests are thwarted or even contravened. The opposition to American policy, actions, or influence is deemed unacceptable, and especially to those in government, intolerable. Drone warfare pretends to be point-specific, that is, targeted assassination, which, bad enough, takes in far more collateral damage than admitted. The general is embodied in the specific, with assassination a warning to all comers. Those who oppose US policy can expect a merciless response, as in saturation bombing, when Goliath's toes are stepped on. In many cases of human vaporization, the identity of the victim is either irrelevant or unknown, the act possessing towering significance of America's intentions and reserves of power.

This is unrestrained violence engaged in with impunity. It is doubly felt because of the arbitrary nature of the attack and the failure of international law and political organization to intervene to stop it. The result is an international moral vacuum. There are not constitutional protections for US citizens, the enforcement of principles and teachings affecting citizen and non-citizen alike, or the weight of moral-ethical considerations which might question the slaughtering, in many cases without warning or proper

identification, of humans now reduced to ciphers on a screen in an air-conditioned trailer.

War crimes bespeak, up and down the chain of command, not mere cynicism, wholly inadequate, but nihilism, to describe the deed. First, briefly, there are the numbers, and from there the liquidation of human beings, who before the fact have been suitably memorialized in the *baseball cards* handed out in the Situation Room (as one participant described the scene). That is, if the victims ever make it to that stage: many were and will always remain unknown to Obama and the Team.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism has provided the following figures through January 2012, hence Obama's approximately first three years in office; the reader, under "Methodology," will find in the BIJ reports and articles a careful discussion of the procedures followed, sources consulted, investigations mounted, and interviews conducted on location. CIA Drone Strikes in Pakistan, 2004–12: Total US Strikes 354; Obama Strikes 302; Total Reported Killed 2597–3398; Civilians 473–899; Children 176; Total Reported Injured 1256–1414. These were not high estimates, but individually verified (many deaths and injuries have gone unreported).

Obama instituted *six times* the number of drone attacks than did Bush. In 2009 Obama launched more attacks than his predecessor did in five years, and in 2010 (after a lull in 2009 because of the deteriorating US–Pakistan relations, due largely to the drones) there was a still larger discrepancy between the two. The record of children killed by drone attacks *under* Obama far exceeds those killed by gun violence during his presidency, his plea for the end to these deaths in America (somewhat problematic to begin with, given his *three years of silence* on the issue) finding no counterpart plea for the children of Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, all of whom are at risk on a daily basis.

The arcane and sometimes unreliable world of numbers deserves further discussion here, although I shall address civilian deaths again if somewhat informally. For now, we have the report by Gareth Porter, which appeared in *Truthout*, August 17, 2012, titled "Cover-Up of Civilian Drone Deaths Revealed by New Evidence." Porter has not done original field work, but the thrust of his article is the consistent underreporting of civilian deaths, in this case, through examining the data of the New America Foundation (NAF), a liberal think tank, that is, pro-Obama administration and a rejection of anything to its left. Porter writes: "Detailed information from the families of those killed in drone strikes in

Pakistan and from local sources on strikes that have targeted mourners and rescue workers [more on that later] provides credible new evidence that the *majority* of the deaths in the drone war in Pakistan have been *civilian noncombatants*—not ‘militants,’ as the Obama administration has claimed” (Italics, mine).

By contrast, the NAF on its web site “has been systematically understating the deaths of large numbers of civilians by using a methodology that methodically counts them as ‘militants.’” One reason for the flawed methodology is the NAF’s acceptance of Obama’s sleight-of-hand in defining combatants, the “new practice in 2009 of automatically considering any military-age male killed in a drone strike as a ‘militant’ unless intelligence proves otherwise.” Another reason is the widespread dependence on media reports, few founded on first-hand accounts and many on semiofficial or official estimates and/or handouts. He continues: “The detailed data from the two unrelated sources covering a total 24 drone strikes from 2008 through 2011 show that civilian casualties *accounted for 74 percent of the death toll*, whereas the NAF tally for the same 24 strikes showed civilian casualties *accounted for only 30 percent of the total*” (Italics, mine).

I find the article somewhat pedantic—his meticulous analysis of NAF data, case by case—but also persuasive, because of two details. First, much of the material collected, “from families of the victims of the strikes,” was done by a Pakistani lawyer, UK-trained, named Mirza Shahzad Akbar, who then, with his Islamabad-based Foundation for Fundamental Rights, “initiated a lawsuit seeking \$500 million in damages” publicly naming the CIA station chief in Islamabad and other US officials “on behalf [of] the families of victims of drone strikes.”

This took courage; the others named were “then-CIA Director Leon Panetta and then-Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates,” but what Akbar did which was unpardonable was to blow the cover of Jonathan Banks [the station chief] who “was forced to quickly leave the country.” As Porter writes, “The Obama administration has sought to discredit Akbar,” questioning his credentials and claiming he was working for Pakistani intelligence (ISI) as well as attacking him “in interviews with Scott Shane” of *The Times*, who did not bite.

An interesting side about the interviews with relatives that Akbar and his colleagues collected, where bias might be expected, was also mentioned: “Although relatives of drone strike victims could have a personal interest in declaring the innocence of their relatives, the details provided by relatives in legal affidavits, such as the age, employment and other



characteristics of the victims, appear in almost every case to support their claims that those killed were not actively involved with al-Qaeda or other military organizations.” We will presently see the killing of a 16-year-old boy whom the administration claimed was older so as to count him as a combatant, ordinarily a case that might slip under the radar, except that (a) his father, killed shortly before in another drone strike, was a well-known cleric *and* American citizen, and (b) the boy too was an American citizen, raising a supremely important constitutional issue about taking the life of a citizen without due process which has still not been sufficiently addressed.

Moreover, that the boy’s relatives gave the lie to the administration’s tactics by producing his birth certificate, shows, as in Akbar’s work, why documentation is vital for establishing credibility about civilian deaths in the face of government statistics and leaders’ statements. In presenting data on the deprivation of human rights, error is a luxury the investigator cannot afford, so readily will his findings be ridiculed by those perpetrating the violence. Akbar has turned over the data he collected to NYU’s Global Justice Clinic and Stanford’s Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic, which will be part of their joint report written by Law School faculty, *Living Under Drones*, to be discussed below.

The administration’s response to Akbar, as also that of NAF, when its findings were called into question, reveals the skewed nature of the political-ideological spectrum in America. There is a breaking down of symmetry (in practical terms, impartiality) by the tilting—especially by liberals, in the six post-New Deal decades—to the right, when government and its activities have been challenged. Obama is a master at the cover-up, institutionally, through maintaining a degree of secrecy and opacity shielding government. This is embodied in throwing the mantle of classification around the actual documentation of its activities, supported by a compliant federal court system and a remarkably vigilant Department of Justice.

More familiarly, it is a burrowing deeply under the protection of the National Security State, and personally, using these defenses effectively to anticipate, prevent, and fend off the questioning of his own policies and decisions. We see in this asymmetrical pattern, therefore, an accommodating to the right, called by supporters “pragmatism” and “realism”; however severe the parochial, infantile, self-serving attacks, Obama comes away smiling, hand-on-the shoulder, utterly compromised (probably “settling for” the position he actually favors in the first place), and a somewhat

ruthless, vindictive, confrontational, rigid posture toward the left—such little that remains of it.

Porter catches a glimpse of that when he states, apropos both White House and NAF denials of civilian casualties, which he finds hard to credit: “The history of the CIA’s drone-strike program also undermines the credibility of the Obama administration’s claims, as well as Bergen’s methodology [Peter Bergen, ‘terrorism expert,’ who headed the NAF data project]. It suggests that the CIA and White House have been forced to resort to a blatant distortion in order to continue to claim that civilian casualties are few and far between.” This precisely puts a finger on the structural dynamics bringing Obama and the CIA together, a growing closeness of association we will note throughout and one, as in Obama’s swift reaction to the outing of Jonathan Banks and Akbar’s suit seeking damages from Panetta, founded on his continued dependence on, and enlarging the role of, the Agency.

Obama has its back, as the CIA develops its previously ruled out—as contrary to its charter—paramilitary capabilities. CIA and JSOC, becoming near-cemented together *because* of drone warfare, appear increasingly as his twin private armies. And as for the breaking down of symmetry, the property of striking a balance between right and left (although one would have supposed liberalism had a predisposition to the left—obviously, no longer true), I am tempted to view the Obama administration as having inherited from its predecessors what I might term “the Pinochet-effect,” which symbolically has to do with purging all traces of an Allende in our midst.

Second, Porter makes mincemeat of most if not all of the NAF’s findings, as for example his analysis of how the Administration’s definition of “militant” set the tone for NAF findings in which, in 2010, “the percentage of ‘militants’ or ‘suspected militants’ jumped dramatically to 96 percent, evidently reflecting the application of the new definition of ‘militant’ for an entire year for the first time.” The government cooked the books, NAF slavishly following suit. Thus, “The NAF figures for 2011 were almost identical, with 93–96 percent of the casualties recorded as ‘militants.’ The new policy enabled Brennan to claim in June 2011 that there had not been a ‘single collateral death’ from drone strikes in Pakistan for more than a year, although he said two months later the government had not ‘found credible evidence of collateral deaths.’”

### 2.3 *Examples Compiled by Porter: Sustaining an Expansionist Posture*

Sept. 7, 2009: “NAF records three to five ‘militants’ killed in the strike and five to seven civilians, but the survivor of the blast, a 15-year-old boy who lost both legs, reported that the only three people killed were two cousins and an uncle who had been in a wheelchair for ten years.”

Dec. 31, 2009: “NAF records two to five ‘militants’ killed. But according to the owner of the house, the only three people killed were the owner’s brother, a secondary school teacher at a local public school; the owner’s son, who was working at the local public school for girls, and a mason who was working on construction of the village mosque, and was staying with his family.”

January 8, 2010: “NAF records three to five ‘militants’ killed in the strike, but the family of one of those killed, a government schoolteacher, said that he was killed along with three others standing next to a shop near a car that was the target of the attack.”

And this does not include the earlier targeting of a madrassa, October 30, 2006, in which 83 students were killed, 26 under the age of 15, for which the Pakistan air force sought to claim responsibility in order to cover-up the CIA-conducted strike, nor does it include, apropos of several killings, the criterion used for drone strikes announced by Michael Hayden, CIA Director, that these were permissible “against houses or cars merely on the basis of behavior that matched a ‘pattern of life’ associated with al-Qaeda or other groups.”

The armed drone is an avowed provocation in international politics, a battering ram—or mechanism of choice—in sustaining an expansionist military-and-trade global posture. In that context, which makes absolutely good sense to policymakers, including the military, which helps to initiate and is the proud recipient of expansion, terrorism is not exactly forgotten or an afterthought. It is a convenience or blessing in disguise, allowing the USA to continue a course of expansion it would have anyway, with or without the threat of terrorism. Pursuit of terrorists has given America, by its own reckoning and/or legal reasoning, *carte blanche* to restore its unilateral supremacy in a world of multiple power centers.

The logic is impeccable (in a war criminal sort of way), whether or not articulated on paper. Drones require bases, bases require military protection and diplomatic intercession, and these in turn act to shape the internal governmental processes of the host countries, all tied together in the

neat ideological bundle, permanent war. Drones intimidate all comers, as signaling the vaster sources of power and military instruments held in reserve.

When Jean-Paul Sartre once said, in “Portrait of the Anti-Semite,” that anti-Semitism was directed to everything but the Jew, the same may be said of counterterrorism, its direction to everything but the terrorist—and instead, keeping alive the militarization of the economy, politics, and culture of American society, while simultaneously affording the means of strengthening hegemonic influences abroad. That only slightly understates the significance of terrorism in its own right, itself a problematic historical occurrence had not the USA, along with the legacy of European colonialism and imperialism, created a heavy, not light, “footprint” in the Middle East and Asia (the politics of oil, being only one element in the imperialist mix) destabilizing political-religious conditions. This is not to deny that terrorism constitutes what today is termed an existentialist threat, but only that, absent colonialism/imperialism, it would probably have taken a more moderate, non-expansionist, form—if at all. History cannot be easily undone; we shall never know.

### 3 DEAFENING WALL OF SILENCE: YOUNG ABDULRAHMAN—A “BYSTANDER”

Secrecy appears vital to the entire enterprise. For example, Whitlock, in the *Post* again (Oct. 22, 2011), discusses the cover-up of killings—whether drone or airstrike—of American citizens, a chilling denial of due process and basic principles of the rule of law. Although the disposition matrix is questionable enough, when citizenship rights also come into play, we see the Obama–Brennan juggernaut of twisted constitutional doctrine at full tilt.

#### 3.1 *Stonewalling: Perpetual Motion Machine of Death*

First, Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born cleric, and reputed propagandist for al-Qaeda, was killed on September 30, a case to which we will return, and then two weeks later, the point now about secrecy, his son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, was also killed. Entitled “U.S. airstrike that killed American teen in Yemen raises legal, ethical questions,” the article is an indictment of administration policy—a warning that should have been

heeded when the *Post* as well as the *New York Times* rushed to endorse Obama for reelection, and wasn't. (Over and over, we see the giant disconnect in these papers between their investigative reporting and editorial page.)

Whitlock writes that "one week after a U.S. military airstrike killed a 16-year-old American citizen in Yemen, no one in the Obama administration, Pentagon or Congress has taken responsibility for his death, or even publicly acknowledged that it happened." It is difficult to determine which is worse, the killing of a youth, the killing of an American citizen without consideration of habeas corpus rights (or determination of guilt in any form), government lack of accountability, or failing to admit the crime—actually, one does not have to choose, because these factors are integrally a unit.

In the seventeenth century this would have been termed a despotism (the exercise of arbitrary power) and today passed off by the official reply to troublesome questions (as in the Djibouti article) in which the pretext is invoked, "operational security considerations prevent us from commenting on specific missions." Only a bureaucratic mindset could think up such phrasing, a chilling, vacuous formulation to ensure utmost deniability. As for interrelatedness, crime is followed by cover-up, is followed by crime, starting with the extralegal killing, antecedently, the despotic claims of the National Security State, all enveloped by the appeal to deniability as license for, and incentive to, coming full circle for still more extralegal killings. The Obama administration has perfected a perpetual motion machine of death, antiseptic because not touched by human hands—and rather, as though manna from heaven.

The wall of silence is deafening. Actually, still a third American citizen, Samir Khan, from Charlotte, was also killed, Sept. 30, by a CIA drone attack, but he was an "al-Qaeda propagandist," which made things alright. For the "Obama administration has said that U.S. citizens do not have immunity from being targeted for death if they are al-Qaeda members." Proof, if ever, comes after the fact, after the blood spat is washed away or mopped up.

In a totalitarian political-structural formation (and its characteristic mindset), pressures, institutional and cultural, emanate to help shape a consistent world view favorable to a ruling stratum of wealth and power. One finds this mode of thinking and reasoning present here. Silence, stonewalling, exemption from the law, denial of murderous intent and

sinister purpose, all are brought out together in connection with drone warfare as though an evil spirit radiating outward in all directions.

This is an unseemly display of State power, beyond the ideological defense of capitalism (also present), and thus having statist implications in its own right. In any discussion of systemic tendencies toward fascism, the State cannot be a mere appendage of capitalism, but a living partner capable of acting in its own right, though seldom in adverse relationship to its collegial soul mate. Without the State, the military factor, absolutely vital to the stabilization, protection, and expansion of capitalism, would not be possible. Nor then would be war, intervention, and regime change, necessitous as well when capitalism faces obstacles to its further development. America?

This is the wish-list of all authoritarians: *no immunity* from execution, because of real or imagined association. Why not insert for “al-Qaeda members” whoever is the target-of-fashion, with, despite American citizenship, no right to due process? And if not a citizen, is that license for running roughshod over all civilized restraints in place, including national and international law?

This president has a curious relationship to the subject of his teaching (international law, University of Chicago): rejection of its principles, and determination to write the book on how, in practice, they can be subverted. Stonewalling may not be a presumption of guilt, and abrogation of habeas corpus rights may be a temporary expedient. Yet, seeds are planted. Dangerous precedents have been set. The historical agenda is further opened for a synthesis of capitalism and the State in the direction already borne out as corporatist in character. If America is not Germany 1935, but only Italy 1928, still there is a cumulative motion in place, a numerically small composite upper group (including the military) perfectly matched with a working class manifesting all the earmarks of *plebeian fascism*, which makes totalitarian social organization of more than passing interest.

### 3.2 *Judicious Murder of Children: A Purported Golden Mean*

What is judicious is in the eye of the beholder (or Authority). An ethnocentric/xenophobic cast of mind is not likely to exercise sound judgment (Webster’s) except as interpreted by the in-group arrogating to itself the associated traits of wisdom, balance, and fairness, and denying the out-group any semblance of character, rationality, and standing. The psychodynamics of authoritarianism freezes in a stereotypic mold the Enemy/

stranger/generic other. This means a categorical rejection of human rights, political respect, even down to acknowledging one's human identity, when it comes to the adversary. In other words, the target of a drone assassination has been depersonalized, stripped not only of procedural rights but substantive precepts of justice. Depersonalization places the victim outside the rule of law and, by contrast, accords the perpetrator elevated moral status for having slain the dragon.

Welcome to the Obama Administration. It maintains a double standard when dealing with its victims. Collateral damage is an instrument of terror, even when realized by neglect, indeed, especially when realized by neglect, or better still, inadvertence, because testifying to unlimited power, flavored by an air of insouciance confirming a higher moral status and the right to act with impunity. In the informal, yet systemic, construction of ideology, capitalism in America is doubly blessed by the absence of authentic class conflict, and antecedently, authentic class consciousness. For how else explain the way children become the plaything, or cementing glue, of the social order, unifying what in reality are widely disparate class- and race-differentiated standings, enough so to reproduce in America the same widely separated shares of income and power found elsewhere under advanced capitalism?

As for the children, they are the subject of a schizophrenic mindset, allowing for their leverage to set up the dichotomization of values and practices starting with the child and ramifying into every nook and cranny of society. In its effect, this is as though encouraging human separation while promoting class reconciliation. America macroscopically establishes the in-group/out-group political conceptualization seen microscopically in the individuation of targeted assassination.

Schizophrenia/dichotomization: the mindset, not organized via conspiracy theory, but, as Karl Mannheim might have held in *Ideology and Utopia*, the sociology of knowledge pressed into the service (knowingly) of politicizing the foundations of (class)-epistemology to bring all levels of society together in the adulation shown capitalism. The mindset is adept at distinguishing between the child in Yemen or Somalia (of little or no account, the unfortunate casualty of war), and the child of Newtown, CT., one of *ours*, to be cherished, safeguarded, nurtured in the American Dream, with family-centered life the foundation of society (all of which has been denied and ruled inapplicable for the child in a distant land).

The drone cuts out the personal relationship: we, the moral, sentient beings; they, ciphers, without feelings, without values, without family.

A Yemini village is not small-town New England, and rather, a target locus on a monitor, where known activists presumably reside, to be extirpated and therefore not in position to bother America again. The dead child in Somalia might as well be wrapped in yesterday's newspaper, so little does his/her life possess intrinsic meaning or the child's killing reach into our conscience.

Perhaps as easily done as said, when the drone "pilot" pulls the trigger from 8000 miles away, the act of killing reaches new depths of depersonalization. It affects both the executioner and the victim. As I write, the Newtown tragedy happened four days ago. Obama came, he spoke, he may even have shed a tear—the consummate hypocrite who, memorializing the slain children, personally is responsible for the murder, via armed drones, of countless children, many younger than Abdulrahman, every one of whom entitled to live and to experience in life a cherished innocence and the security of loving parents.

Obama soils the memory of the Newtown children by failing to take a stand on gun control in four years of office, a fair test—which he failed—of moral character. The prevalence of gun violence in America ought to have compelled a moral person in a position of authority to demand effective action. Instead, we find the mouthing of pious platitudes, a politically expeditious response allowing himself to cover his back for reelection while ingratiating himself with elite groups clustered around the gun culture, as itself shorthand for a range of reactionary issues expressed *sub-rosa*, such as militarism and, perhaps difficult to imagine, racism.

Even more, he soils their memory, indeed, mocks them in their death, by *taking* a stand, feet first, no scruples, pangs of conscience, or inner doubts, on behalf of targeted assassination, with its inevitable, and perhaps intended, "collateral damage." The phrase is as vile as "that's the way the ball bounces" in explaining away carpet bombing, napalm, and wanton murder in earlier wars (Korea, Vietnam), or phrases adapted for Iraq and Afghanistan, beginning with "shock and awe." They all have in common the utter negation of the individual's humanity and right to live and the perpetrator's numbness to, if not also glorification of, the death and destruction he inflicts.

In the wake of Newtown, the *New York Times*, in an editorial titled, "Reason to Hope After the Newtown Rampage," praises Obama for his resolution in the wake of tragedy. It begins with the self-justification for counterterrorism, not an especially good omen: "Americans are ready to shoulder burdens—as we did after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks by accepting



increased security when we travel *and military actions we might previously have avoided*" (Italics, mine). "Increased security when we travel" is merely the frosting of the Homeland Security reason for being. It has brought a climate of surveillance, largely for its own sake, to fruition, whichever agency, such as NSA, happens to be in charge. And with surveillance has come widespread abuses questioning, casting doubt on the existence of, transparency and legitimacy.

## “Greater Leverage”: Military-Speak for Imperialism

[This is controversial ground, placing drone assassination, a comparatively small expenditure of human and material resources, at the center of US government policy. It is controversial, not because of the possible inflation of its role in the conduct of American foreign policy, but because the reference *is to assassination*, hardly an article of policy to be proud of. Yet it is precisely the drone that deserves further analysis for its connection to the wider framework of political-commercial-military expansion.

No one, not even Obama and Brennan (or Hayden, one of many others in the defense establishment), credit the drone for its own sake, a self-contained instrument of power, as pivotal or decisive in advancing American international goals. Bloodlust alone is recognized as having little explanatory power, although it may not be far from the surface in energizing policymaking and defining goals, so that one has no alternative but to search for a wider significance.

I briefly alluded to Obama as Eichmann on the Potomac, which, in the final analysis, beyond the Eichmann-inference, leads me ultimately to style him, “The Assassination President.” This is not because he is consumed by the act of assassination, but because he willingly entertains it, almost as one would nuclear weapons in miniature, as the means of striking fear into the hearts of the world community in order for America to pursue unimpeded its self-defined global posture, one where imperialism definitely has its place.]

## 1 DRONE BASES: THE PRETEXT FOR GEOPOLITICAL EXPANSION

This view of policy, the focus on drone warfare, makes it the more necessary, not to appear simplistic, to stay with a close textual analysis that I might make understandable the anatomy of war atrocities. For sensitive feelings, I shall call it instead, “the normalization of the unthinkable.” To continue with background, still mining the *Post*, let’s go back (September 20, 2011), to the two veteran national-security reporters, Whitlock and Miller, in their article, “U.S. assembling secret drone bases in Africa, Arabian Peninsula, officials say.” Secrecy and the span of drone activities make for an indissoluble bond: “The Obama administration is assembling a constellation of secret drone bases for counterterrorism operations in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula as part of a newly aggressive campaign to attack al-Qaeda affiliates in Somalia and Yemen, U.S. officials say.”

### *1.1 Ideological Triumphalism: Wearing Down Opposition to Orthodoxy*

Besides the drones from Djibouti, “the CIA is building a secret airstrip in the Arabian Peninsula so it can deploy armed drones over Yemen.” What the writers term “the rapid expansion of the undeclared drone wars,” because al-Qaeda, weakened in Pakistan, has spread through its affiliates to Yemen and Somalia, the USA “is known to have used drones to carry out lethal attacks in at least six countries,” which also includes Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. The Seychelles provides almost comic relief, with negotiations for arming the drones already there being conducted in complete secrecy with its president, who is fearful that the issue is “politically extremely sensitive,” to be treated with the “utmost discreet care.”

Again, planning is conscious, well thought out, and consistent with the idea of permanent war: “Overall, officials said, the cluster of bases reflects an effort to have wider geographic coverage, greater leverage with countries in the region and backup facilities if individual airstrips are forced to close.” By “greater leverage,” one assumes that to mean installing bases helps to establish a regional presence for the USA. This translates, among other things, into direct intervention in local affairs to protect the bases, and to facilitate investment and market penetration.

America, of course, has learned from British imperial practice, especially in Africa. But instead of placing missionaries in harm's way, as an excuse for going in, under the guise of protecting them, to establish a presence the drone becomes America's missionary-pretext to accomplish the same end: presence, penetration, influence, only now, beyond the tricks of the trade, a fulsome geostrategic framework which allows the USA in Africa to extend its reach in every direction, including the Mediterranean and Southern Europe.

We see the interrelatedness of policies, trends, actions, at every turn, contradictions to a democratic government and society resolvable at a slightly higher level of abstraction, then establishing a new plateau of uniformity and systemic integration. What is thought of as contradiction is merely the halfway point to the further tightening of a cohesive structural-ideological framework. No wonder the difficulty of mounting a critique of the existing order, still less, the work of isolated voices finding belief and acceptance in the populace at large. Soon even those voices will be quieted, not necessarily through repression, for the proto-fascism congealing into final form is more consensual, an ideological triumphalism rooted in the institutional wearing down of resistance to the New Orthodoxy, in which militarism informs capitalism with spirit, ambition, and vitality.

### *1.2 Continuities: Acceptability of Imperialism/Militarism*

Three broad areas currently prominent, but promising long-term prospects for continuity both separately and together, come readily to mind, dovetailing with what I see as the doctrine of permanent war. First, a climate of fear has been created, growing out of the legitimate concern about terrorism, yet much-abused in the claims advanced by government as a violation of civil liberties (the program of massive surveillance, enlargement of Executive powers, etc.), and, indirectly, as a variation of mission creep, a further climate of intimidation and acquiescence in relation to *all* of government policy (use of Espionage Act prosecutions against whistleblowers).

Counterterrorism thus becomes the fulcrum for damping down criticism and dissent affecting fundamentals of capitalism, and for engendering consent to massive defense spending and military operations.

Second, as a barrier to transparency, and what that implies for the stifling of criticism of public policy, there is the acceptance and practice of the overclassification of government documents, secrecy in the determination

of policy choices, with consequences for decision-making on war, intervention, and confrontation, and the general concealment, and shielding from scrutiny, of the full market-basket of repressive practices of the National Security State. Third, as a logical corollary or near-inevitable outcome of the preceding two, there is a shrinkage of the political-ideological spectrum on which permissible policy and action occur and legitimacy is determined and given moral weight. This narrowing of acceptable boundaries for economic, social, and cultural change signifies by a circuitous route an endorsement of market fundamentalism and promotion of the permanent-war mentality (enemies created as circumstances dictate).

On military actions heretofore not tolerated there is approval of targeted assassination, once thought on a moral plane with poison gas, now readily passing muster. *The Times* does not think of overall context, the interconnections to be made between, for example, abrogation of civil liberties at home and the prosecution of an illegal, unwarranted war. More concretely, it fails to recognize the interrelatedness between surveillance, the Espionage Act, denial of habeas corpus rights to detainees, timidity in the face of gun violence and forthright defense of victims, on one hand, and hit lists, opaqueness, secret bases, and an intensification of drone attacks on the other. Obama can do no wrong, even though his is hands-on application for each of these abuses.

Then the editorial suggests, “So we have found real reason to find hope”—why? Because “President Obama said it *unequivocally* on Sunday” (Italics, mine)—said what, other than a vague exhortation to do better? There is ample reason to dwell on the editorial, again for the sake of *context*, not because one is hardly surprised by the paper’s position, but because it graphically reveals the mindset, its own and that of the Administration. That is, Obama evades responsibility for targeted assassination through envelopment in a framework, cultural, political, ideological, of counterterrorism, an *end*, at least for now, to end all ends as people become inured to violence and strive only for acceptance and approval, at whatever cost to others. For *The Times*, there is here an implicit golden mean: a sundering of the psychological-cultural connection between gun violence and drone assassination, in which, by stipulating the injunction, don’t question, and instead, acquiesce, the horror of dead children at home becomes wholly unrelated to the dead children abroad, done by our own hand.

By “golden mean” I have in mind this further statement from the editorial: “it is past time for *both sides* of the gun debate to be *less inflexible*,” in other words, those who advocate for unlimited gun rights and those who represent stiff regulation to stop the mass murder occurring are equally extreme and at fault for not reaching an acceptable settlement. As *The Times* concludes: “We must respect the legitimate concerns of law-abiding, safety conscious gun owners, in order to find common-ground against unyielding *ideologues*” (Italics, mine). Assassination is not an extreme, merely a legitimate policy of national security, calling critical attention to which makes one an ideologue. And while serial killing is an extreme, this gives to “law-abiding, safety conscious gun owners” an aura of centrist moderation.

The logic is not there, but the wish defines the outcome, placing gun rights in the acceptable mode, and by extension, assassination, both now centrist in inspiration through the rejection of extremes. In foreign policy, for government *not* to avail itself with all possible means to ensure the nation’s security (and prosperity) is an extreme, tantamount, one supposes, to an invitation to being conquered by implacable foes, along with, the other extreme, presumably, all-out thermonuclear war. In practice, the politicization of Centrism functions to project absurdities at the extremes to justify the desired course in the “middle,” here drone assassination and its numerous correlates aimed at military-political hegemony. Obama is now Pangloss, his message: responsible aggression is the best of all possible worlds.

The “logic” is perhaps more insidious than, but bearing a relation to, that of the falling domino theory. Both are self-serving, both are based on the projection of one’s hates, fears, and anxieties onto another, and in the process magnifying the hostility and power of the reputed adversary. Both, in addition, advance a moral claim of centrism as, more than exemption from extremes, an absolute good in its own right. For drone warfare, acquiescence is a mark of sweet reasonableness. Enemies jeopardize the freedom of the Homeland. Kill abroad, not at home. Children of the “enemy,” because they will grow up to be “enemies” in turn, must be shown no mercy, and instead are fit candidates for collateral damage.

The ideologue, transposed from the “gun debate” to the world of drone warfare, presents an example of unacceptable extreme types. On one hand there is the individual who deplores violence, assassination, government secrecy (particularly in institutionalizing the disposition matrix so that it binds future administrations), manifestly an extremist, unpatriotic

and wanting to catch America unprepared. Then there is the counterpart-ideologue who favors saturation bombing of whole regions harboring suspected terrorists or perhaps even dreams of mass incarceration of suspected fellow travelers at home, assorted peaceniks, labor militants, those who fail to cheer stealth-bomber flyovers at football games (or worse, don't attend the games). Our ideologue is an obvious menace, who either wants to bring America to its knees through inadequate defense and cultural mechanisms to stimulate patriotism or who fully enlists in, and subscribes to the values of, the all-out war on terror based on mutual deterrence and nuclear conflagration. The resounding chorus of Americans shouts, a plague on both your houses.

*Or do they?* Have we already become a Nation of Ideologues? To call the individual who deplors assassination, and so on, except for illustrative purposes in sketching the mindset of those adept at the politicization of Centrism, an ideologue, only plays into the (ideological) hands of the proponents of current defense/military policy. Sanity is not an extreme position; Centrism *is*—in the present climate. Moderation signifies foregoing global conflagration for mere targeted assassination, paramilitary operations, battle groups in the South China Sea, the modernization of the nuclear arsenal. When it rains, it pours: world politics becoming increasingly caricatured, Centrism shifts on its axis to embrace immoderation, extending to the Right, all but ignoring the Left. The drone replaces peace and accommodation (itself implicitly ridiculed as Chamberlain-style appeasement) as the agency for the resolution of conflict, a context precipitating rather than diminishing or eliminating conflict. Peace and accommodation cannot exist through the medium of assassination, the globalization of military bases, diplomatic efforts at containment and isolation, or homegrown demagoguery about Exceptionalism.

Precisely here, in this devilishly contrived centrist framework, Obama *is* the golden mean. He is basking behind a bureaucratic determinism that would be the envy of Max Weber in its regard for the scrupulous observance of procedures as denoting utmost rationalism. Yet for Weber, the procedures were not intended to sanctify illegal acts, nor have a brain-numbing effect to dull moral sensibilities. Ideally for him, the bureaucratic mode of social organization would result in a rational-legal order, with emphasis on both rationality and legality.

In practice, however, the belief in and vision of rationality did not take into account its amoral inner core, ruling out of consideration the questions of political philosophy germane to the normative betterment of

humanity. What makes bureaucracy so compelling in modern times is its purported neutrality, its antiseptic transmission of repression through interconnected channels to keep the overall System in command-mode, well-oiled, seamless, the answer to, and solution for, the rise of class consciousness among working people.

Weber becomes the spokesperson for structural sterility, which even then improves upon the false-Centrism of prevailing liberal discourse. Neutrality, as in detailing rules and procedures, is a snare and delusion. It is formulated and enforced from above, that is, within the hierarchical structure of bureaucracy; it also gives a false sense of security for their supposed universality and impartiality. It serves systemic needs and the class objectives of upper groups.

Weber can be thought a scholar of systemic factors promoting desensitization, but the results of that condition—for example, the meticulous pursuit of drone assassination, following Eichmann-like procedures set out for efficient killing operations—were located already in the structure of modern industry, business, and government. Obama, as with so much else, such as the Pacific-first strategy, is the recipient of, and faithfully reflects, others’ ideas. He becomes less the architect than executioner of, and sounding board for, the *now* and *future*, neither dummy nor ventriloquist, but embodiment of the structure of power he faithfully represents.

I do not credit him with originality; rather, he has the appropriate predisposition, receptivity, values, even careerist ambitions and drive (though there is little further to go) for presiding over an overtly corporatist if not actualized fascist societal framework. The conceptualization of policy turns Weber on his head: the fig leaf of rationality covers a multitude of structural-cultural irrationalities, notably, for the present discussion, where the presumption of rationality breeds a spirit of self-justification and -righteousness, the judicious murder of children abroad via an elaborate multiagency review of hit lists, the process giving assurance of rationality and moderation, to which must be added the government’s stamp of legitimacy.

A context of the impersonal, in thought and deed, demonstrates the good intentions of the practitioners of violence, laundering war criminals and their crimes. Amorality is built into structures designed for greater efficiency, the objective deliberately not specified; hierarchy imposed on structure ensures the achievement of class purposes. I credit Weber, whatever his intent, for elucidating the anatomy of modern social organization. The ever-receding number of those opposed, have at least clarity of perception on their side.



## 2 THE COMPOSITE ENEMY: DISPLAYING STRENGTH ON NATIONAL SECURITY

We are back to Eichmann on the Potomac, a bloodlust qua bloodless direction of policy and thought in the search for non-culpability in the execution of horrendous acts, a normalization of procedure supported, in Obama's case, by soothing words of moderation for consumption at home, while changing very little. Gun violence antedates drone assassination, both, however, in reciprocal relationship because, in helping us understand one the other, they are on the same continuum of normless estimation of human worth. This takes the form of contempt for human dignity, including our own, given the alacrity with which we exercise self-debasement in the cruelty shown others. So on gun violence, we find under Obama recommendations for smaller ammunition clips, perhaps, reduced lethality of assault weapons, perhaps, gun violence presumed corrected; gun control in any meaningful sense nonetheless languishes, the resultant gun culture the soul-mate and helpmate of the vigorous promotion of an armed-drone policy.

### *2.1 A Unitary Formation: Violence and Societal Integration*

Death is indivisible. It doesn't take Linus Pauling or Bertrand Russell (voices of sanity and peace in my generation, in addition to the brilliant work they did in their own respective disciplines) to tell us that. So long as drone assassination continues abroad, expect gun violence at home. Not only is death indivisible, but it is contagious, the product of a political culture of exploitation at home, imperialism and conquest abroad. And when assassination is seen as inexpedient, the wider framework and doctrine of permanent war will do as well in encouraging the violence at home.

This is not to say that upper groups, the composite elite structure, welcome violence in American life, only that counteractive policies and ideological themes are per se unacceptable. Too much would be given up, from the domestic redistribution of wealth and power, to strict anti-imperialism in foreign policy, even to entertain ideas, policies, and practices finding their way ultimately to the eradication of gun violence (and much else necessary to the maintenance of a corporatist framework). And so, consciously desired or not, violence perforce continues.

Lincoln’s contention, a nation cannot be half slave/half free, has its parallel with respect to violence. Social systems cannot subsist on bifurcation; their unitary formation, as the locus of power arrangements, is absolutely essential to class structure, a centralization of authority, and ideological cohesion. The tighter the integration of all essential elements—polity, economy, culture, and so on—in the nation-state, the more credible appear the policies and social control of ruling groups acting in its name. For our purposes, historical-structural consistency necessitates the mutual reinforcement on both sides of the divide: peace and justice, or more of the same—aggression, intervention, the drone circling overhead ready to strike. And strike it does, as we will see in the case of a “high value” target (although to make him “high-value,” and hence, whose killing would redound to the reputation of Obama and the program, requires crediting him with a higher status in al-Qaeda than he actually enjoyed).

## 2.2 *A Composite Enemy: Transference to Other Policies*

In this case, Guantanamo was lamely explained as, he missed his opportunity, and now it was too late for taking action. The writers see this as Obama’s failure to anticipate opposition to the closing, so that he had not formulated a concrete plan in time. Instead, I conjecture that he favored its continuation, both as a symbol of American power and his own toughness against the reputed enemy.

I say “reputed” because the wider perennial Enemies, Russia, China, Third World social revolution, are first compositely organized and then distilled into one—all terrorists from the standpoint of American national security. The drone thereby emerges as a world-beater, giving consolation, satisfaction, not to say, legitimation, that the USA is engaged in a global defensive war to maintain its Way of Life. Yet Obama appreciated the symbolic value of Guantanamo, recognizing its disutility in America’s global effort, just as in the Cold War, to appear as the guardian of democracy. The solution, ignore while retaining Guantanamo, while pursuing the armed-drone program to ensure that no more living “combatants” remain to be imprisoned: that is, the take-no-prisoners philosophy and strategy.

The seeming lapse in policy determination is anything but that. With Guantanamo all but shunted aside, we then meet a president on his own chosen turf. His antiterrorist/antiradical credential now displayed, Obama—despite Republicans’ lack of understanding and sophistication

on these and perhaps all matters (enough to uncritically label him somehow radical and weak on defense and security)—is free to move ahead in areas having nothing directly to do with terrorism.

Displaying strength on the national security front translates into, or transfers over to, public, if not congressional, support for highly conservative policies on a wide range of issues, seemingly liberal because under Obama's and the Democratic Party's auspices. He receives a free pass on prevention of effective regulation affecting banking and finance, climate change, the environment, oil drilling, gun control, and the degradation of civil liberties. Simultaneously he uses executive authority to promote secrecy in government, widen the paramilitary dimensions of the CIA and JSOC, and maintain pressure on public opinion to be prepared for a state of permanent war.

The drone program validates his credentials on defense; reciprocally, by contributing to his military image of patriotism, this justifies the program. That his opposition sees weakness, only testifies to how far Right the political spectrum has swung, gradually over time. Nothing appears to satisfy the Right, including many of his own supporters and the party. This condition works well for him through endowing policies of war, intervention, and support of business with a Centrist reputation: even Centristism has become an unacceptable tilt to the Left. Just once I would like to refer to it with a capital "P" so as to indicate that its poisons seep into the remotest pores of government and society. The fact that it goes largely unnoticed testifies instead to the opposite, an everyday acceptance of killing and assassination as normal and, for many, the badge of greatness, like having a #1 ranking in football, as part of the justification for its existence. This has to involve myth-making about the president.

Whether or not Obama consciously diverts attention from the military for its own sake does not matter. For he can still prosecute an international strategy combining national security and capitalist development/expansion, free from public awareness and political interference, and perhaps even go one step further. Concentrating on the military as a self-contained context serves to subordinate capitalism as the prime consideration, without of course diminishing the latter's importance. This provides evidences of power finding intrinsic value in war, intervention, and regime change.

Conversely, it raises the military factor into prominence in order to distract from strictly capitalist ambitions and goals, the military a presumably attractive sideshow by which to disguise the ongoing promotion of

policies (both domestic and foreign, respectively, monopolistic, hegemonic) that favor the systemic development and expansion of American capitalism. The result is the same: the militarization of capitalism, placing it on a par with, or, unilateral fashion, *above* its capitalist rivals and/or peers, and at the same time resisting Left social-revolutionary governments and movements with an eye to their transformation or destruction.

### 2.3 *Masquerade: Ideologue Disguised as a Pragmatist*

Thus in explaining Obama’s failure to act on closing Guantanamo, Becker and Shane accept the idea that he would like this to happen yet dwells in a fantasy-land about its realization (a conclusion difficult to accept): “It was not only Mr. Obama’s distaste for legislative backslapping and arm-twisting, but also part of a deeper pattern, said an administration official who has watched him closely: the president seemed to have ‘a sense that if he *sketches a vision*, it will happen—without his really having thought through the mechanism by which it will happen’” (Italics, mine). His refusal to engage in “backslapping,” testimony to sterling character (and raised every time there is Executive inaction or legislative defeat), contra-indicated by his coming up through Chicago politics, may keep intact Obama’s reputation as a realist and pragmatist, but the record—which the reporters admit—speaks otherwise. An ideologue masking as a pragmatist has gotten him quite far. When Holder and Secretary Clinton “volunteered to fight for it [the closing] on Capitol Hill,” Rahm Emanuel, with Obama’s “backing,” warned them off. The ostensible reason, health care “had to go first.”

This is instructive, like the shell game Obama plays with the military and capitalism. Which takes priority, Guantanamo or health care, as if a choice had to be made between them, when in reality we see him disengage from one issue, only to be superficial on the other, and then nullify the effect on both. Guantanamo was easy, empty promises, a show of interest; health care could not be treated so cavalierly, presumably a signature issue that would provide excellent liberal mileage. Meanwhile not only were other issues, domestic and foreign, pursued, but health care itself had been watered down and fraudulently offered as an effective measure and alternative to the existing practice.

This is Obama at his best. Health insurers and Big Pharma are the chief recipients of benefits in this area; while dissident voices in the health-care

community are silenced or drowned out, neither a single-payer system nor the public option is adopted. Health care, too, may have been a pretext or diversion so as to continue the military status quo and actually raise the ante. The claim of administering to the health needs of the country, while methodically going about the murder of its enemies, real and imagined, in distant lands, *and* by remote control, reflects the schizophrenic mental context incumbent upon a nation and people warlike in disposition claiming the mantle of democracy and peace.

The plan “to transfer from Guantanamo to Northern Virginia two Uighurs,”—Chinese “considered no threat” to the USA—was greeted with such uproar that “[t]he administration backed down.” One might reject the idea that Obama is Machiavellian, and conclude that he is spineless. But neither is true. His strategic retreats are not that at all, although it is a useful fiction of leadership to say one is awaiting a better day to fight. Rather, he favors the outcome—less apparent in this case, than on global warming, taxation, cultural issues, and much more, in which he never intended a fight other than as a subterfuge to placate an adoring base.

The official watching the whole episode noted, “Lyndon Johnson would have steamrolled the guy [a Virginia Republican congressman].” In hindsight, Lyndon Johnson, given Vietnam, is hardly an exemplar of democratic leadership, but why couldn’t Obama do the same, steamroll the opposition or at least put up a good fight, on this and other issues across the policy spectrum? The presidency is an office of great power which Obama is *not* afraid to use, as witness his claims to executive authority to create a virtual Iron Curtain around government, from secretive special-operations missions, National Security Council massive surveillance programs, and lack of transparency in general, to drone assassinations in particular. Gertrude Stein might put it this way: a whole chain of refusals—refusal to backslap, to refusal to engage (hence, complete secrecy on programs), to refusal to address the public candidly and accurately, to refusal to let the sunshine in, for fear that budging on any area of concern might not stand the test of legality, honesty, or democracy.

Obama’s policies are Chinese boxes to be disassembled. Taking them out one by one, the observer is met each time by a new layer of opacity, perhaps code for modern liberalism in self-protective mode, where humane gestures and language provide cover for structural inequalities and differentials of wealth, status, and power *intended* as results. Hypocrisy is an antiquated explanation, the modern state already having transvalued

the political terminology so that consciousness of duplicity is erased and mouthing democratic platitudes sufficing to accommodate all alike. Obama, like a sensitive tuning fork, resonates usually calmly and perfectly with the existing political economy and military apparatus, verily a leader for all seasons.

Here, Becker and Shane provide an example of bureaucratism and its adaption to the use of force: “It is the strangest of bureaucratic rituals: Every week or so, more than 100 members of the government’s sprawling national security apparatus gather, by secure video teleconference, to pore over terrorist suspects’ biographies and recommend to the president *who should be the next to die*” (Italics, mine). This Kafkaesque scene, electronically connected, lethal in intent and inspiration, contrasts with Obama’s claim, seen momentarily in the article, to have been influenced by, and perhaps represent the heritage of, Augustine and Aquinas. The scene, the mechanization of death, only gets more strange: “This secret ‘nominations’ process is an invention of the Obama administration, a grim debating society that vets the PowerPoint slides bearing the names, aliases and life stories of suspected members of Al Qaeda’s branch in Yemen or its allies in Somalia’s Shabab militia.” One must give credit where credit is due, an Obama “invention,” with PowerPoint slides replacing baseball cards in the presentation of the hit list, unless the baseball cards are still part of the CIA’s vetting process, separate from this one.

### 3 A MAN-OF-DESTINY COMPLEXION: ASSUMING MORAL (?) RESPONSIBILITY

What follows is public relations on the administration’s part, negated by the evidence of drone attacks and civilian deaths. Presumably, each candidate for death is the subject of free and full discussion; the “participants do not hesitate to call out a challenge,” and “given the contentious discussions, it can take five or six sessions for a name to be approved.” That the whole proceeding is macabre, tending toward moral revulsion, is not even considered, nor perhaps would it be, by a complacent American public. The reporters further note, as though a rhythm of normalization has set in: “a parallel, more cloistered selection process at the C.I.A. focuses largely on Pakistan.” One would think individuals were being judged for a Miss America contest—antiseptic, weighing beauty and talent, and so on, screening based on a merit system down to the decimal place.

From immaculate deliberation, we come next to the “trust me” argument; the president, in his wisdom, can do no wrong. If culpability were ever in doubt, it should not be now: “The nominations go to the White House, where by his own insistence and guided by Mr. Brennan, Mr. Obama must approve any name. He signs off on every strike in Yemen and Somalia and also on the more complex and risky strikes in Pakistan—about a third of the total.” This is evidence of an indictable war crime, perversely, execution without apparent malice. Obama’s maneuverability or wiggle room in these circumstances goes from morally limited to nonexistent, yet politically acceptable and even praiseworthy, judging by contemporary standards. Hand-selected rubbing out, distance from the scene only compounding the evident depersonalization of the victim.

Add to culpability, accountability, of which it is certain Obama’s authorization of targeted assassination will not come back to haunt him or lead to criminal proceedings. And from there, he is further removed from guilt because having thrust up defensive walls to prevent a recognition of wrongdoing applied to himself he displays arrogance and hubris, metaphorically, a get-out-jail card, no matter his actions. The “trust me” argument is therefore fascinating, putting the moral standing of targeted assassination beyond reach. Thus the writers continue: “Aides say Mr. Obama has several reasons for becoming so immersed in lethal counterterrorism operations. A student of writings on war by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, he believes that he should take *moral responsibility* for such actions. And he knows that bad strikes can tarnish America’s image and derail diplomacy” (Italics, mine). While it is certainly true that “bad strikes” are a stain on the nation’s honor, what of *all* strikes, which much of the world has come to recognize as both counterproductive and criminal?

Augustine is a fig leaf, having little bearing on officialdom’s response to targeted assassination. The response is opportunistic, rather than moral; Team Obama, including national security advisers, reveal an amoral cynicism, especially when they come to “moral responsibility,” at the nub of the whole “just war” declaration. Here, qualifications, such as opportunism, do not matter; moral responsibility does not parse, it possesses intrinsic worth. How Obama and his aides can claim this for him or his actions passes belief. Let Obama tell that to Awlaki, whose death he authorized, pronouncing the decision “an easy one,” or better, Awlaki’s son, the 16-year-old, whose death was dismissed as accidental, while authorities

claimed he was older and hence a combatant. The Obama administration has not accepted moral responsibility for the killings, save an occasional shedding of crocodile tears.

Likewise, hubris, although retribution is unlikely to follow, also figures here, to complete the series, beginning with culpability and accountability (arrogance, so much on display, is hardly worth discussing), for a description of Obama’s decision-making traits. William Daley, Obama’s then chief-of-staff, writes: “He realizes this isn’t science, this is judgments made off of, most of the time, human intelligence. The president accepts as a fact that a certain amount of screw-ups are going to happen, and to him, that calls for a more judicious process.” Our Augustine wanna-be questions, not the program as such, but its “screw-ups,” accordingly, what is not integral to it, and in any case evinces a spirit of near-invincibility, or better, man-of-destiny complexion, in reaching wise decisions.

The reporters discuss the extent of Obama’s immersion in the process: “But the control he exercises also appears to reflect Mr. Obama’s striking self-confidence: he believes, according to several people who have worked closely with him, that his own judgment should be brought to bear on strikes.” This apparently inordinate degree of hands-on involvement in the drone strikes, not for purposes of protecting America’s reputation through attempting to minimize errors, or even as the means of asserting his presidential prerogative in order to safeguard his power, indicates that he has entered the realm of the psychopathology of war, violence, and terror.

#### 4 A PROPINQUITY TO VIOLENCE: PLUNGING INTO THE MAELSTROM OF DEPRAVITY

Lest the reader find my use of the term “psychopathology” a form of overreach, the meaning here is strictly limited to a personality structure characterized by a basic disjuncture, in simplified form, the “clear perception of reality except for the individual’s social and moral obligations” (*part* of a concise definition in Webster’s 9th Collegiate). The possible attendant problems deriving from that state have for our purposes now been deliberately left out of my usage. Medically, of course, there is a good deal more that could be said, which, because requiring clinical materials, is outside my scope, and in any event is not my intent.



#### 4.1 *A Perversion of Reason: The Use of Force*

Obama's rationality should not be thought in doubt; nevertheless, that rationality is placed in the service of irrational goals and their inhumane consequences, all predicated on the reliance and use of force. Descartes is turned upside down. The rational component therefore drives forward and is harnessed to the effectiveness of the instruments of force. What does this say about reason, except its readiness to perversion, depending on the structural-social-ideological setting. Rationality informed by psychopathological tendencies intensifies its own possibly irrational component, an uneasy reconciliation of alternative states of mind.

It is enough to present the evidence and take note of a certain propinquity of Obama to *violence* in its myriad guises, forms, and protocols—that is, conventions governing the treatment—of the drone program. This propinquity to violence would also apply, relatedly, if, beyond drones, one traced his heavy engagement with the military in general, such as pushing forward the \$400B F35 joint strike fighter, his ordering of the largest joint military exercises with Israel ever, or his repositioning of American naval power in the Pacific as part of the campaign to maximize the US presence in South Asia, largely as a step in the containment of China.

The drone is a singular exhibition of presidential muscle. The present national security adviser, Donilon, asked by the reporters “what surprised him most” about Obama, quickly replied, “He’s a president who is quite comfortable with *the use of force* on behalf of the United States” (Italics, mine). This was said in praise. In 2007, already campaigning, Obama called for attacking terrorist bases in Pakistan, whether with Pakistan’s approval or not, to which other prospective candidates—Romney, Biden, Mrs. Clinton—pounced on what they considered a greenhorn’s campaign bluster. When Romney likened Obama to Dr. Strangelove, we see pot-and-kettle analogies reaching new heights; in fact, Obama has so enlarged the conversation about terrorism and permissible tactics that all three today could regard the policy as normal.

The writers agree: “In office, however, Mr. Obama has done exactly what he had promised, coming quickly to rely on the judgment of Mr. Brennan.” Brennan fares well here; Becker and Shane, while admitting that “[h]e had been forced, under fire,” to withdraw his name as C.I.A. director because he was identified with waterboarding, treat him as a moderating influence with respect to Guantanamo and civil liberties. “The president,” they add, “values Mr. Brennan’s experience in assessing

intelligence, from his own agency or others, and for the sobriety with which he approaches lethal operations, other aides say.” The account of White House “aides” is hard to reconcile with the disposition matrix and the collateral deaths Brennan himself ignores or denies.

The writers, perhaps to redress the balance, offer another view: “Yet the administration’s very success at killing terrorism suspects has been shadowed by a suspicion: that Mr. Obama has avoided the complications of detention by deciding, in effect, to take no prisoners alive. While scores of suspects have been killed under Mr. Obama, only one has been taken into American custody, and the president has balked at adding new prisoners to Guantanamo.”

The phrase “in effect” may be face-saving, but the kill-to-capture ratio chillingly relates to taking “no prisoners alive.” Saxby Chambliss, the US senator from Georgia and ranking Republican on intelligence, has no reason to compliment Obama, and yet he appears to do so in this statement: “Their policy is to take out high-value targets, versus capturing high-value targets. They are not going to advertise that, but that’s what they are doing.” The aides of Obama deny this, holding that, instead, “many terrorist suspects are in foreign prisons because of American tips,” which seems a veiled reference to rendition or else, proxy-torturing.

Crediting Obama’s intentions to minimize civilian casualties, Becker and Shane nevertheless state that, finding war “a messy business,” Obama’s “actions show that pursuing an enemy unbound by rules has required moral, legal and practical *trade-offs* that his speeches did not envision” (Italics, mine). At what point do these trade-offs cross the line to barbaric acts, suggesting the USA is not the only party “unbound by rules”? Their own example is striking, that of Baitullah Mehsud, head of the Pakistan Taliban.

Mehsud’s group “mainly targeted the Pakistan government,” which, as the CIA pondered the situation, meant a strike would not satisfy administration criteria for targeted killing; “he was not an imminent threat” to the USA. The seeming conundrum, as in the Awlaki killing, meant official reason prevailed. “But Pakistani officials wanted him dead, and the American drone program rested on their tacit approval.” We note, then, a community of interest founded on mutual back-scratching. This was written in May 2012, and Pakistani sentiment against both the USA and the drones, an inseparable connection in their minds, has since intensified. Yet Mehsud, an “early test” of Obama’s policy, was in the USA’s crosshairs. A formula had to be worked out to conduct the strike.

Obama and his advisers resolved the issue by finding that Mehsud “represented a threat, if not to the homeland, to American personnel in Pakistan.” Verbal gymnastics, maneuverability, wiggle room—even Panetta, then CIA director, and not bashful on such matters, expressed his doubts to Brennan about the strike, because Mehsud’s killing would “not meet Mr. Obama’s standard of ‘near certainty’ of no innocents being killed.” The writers: “In fact, a strike would certainly result in such deaths: he was with his wife at his in-laws’ home.” Under Obama, standards for protecting the innocent, like his rhetoric, are to be met with skepticism. Besides, the statistics can be altered; above all, the USA was determined to execute Mehsud. The result was predictable: “Mr. Obama, through Mr. Brennan, told the C.I.A. to take the shot, and Mr. Mehsud was killed, along with his wife and, by some reports, other family members as well, said a senior intelligence official.” Collateral damage, in the Administration’s view, did not alter the plan of action, Obama’s standard of “near certainty” proving elastic.

For the reporters, the subsequent Christmas Day attempted bombing in Detroit, along with the Fort Hood massacre “by an Army psychiatrist who had embraced radical Islam,” explains Obama’s “resolve” against terrorism. According to Holder, Obama “was simmering about how a 23-year-old bomber had penetrated billions of dollars worth of American security measures.” Michael Leiter, then head of the National Counterterrorism Center, said: “After that, as president, it seemed like he felt in his gut the threat to the United States.” Whether Detroit and Fort Hood were in fact a wake-up call, or one more step in his growing advocacy for force, Obama, on the basis of the attempted Detroit bombing, now turned his attention to Yemen, significantly, a move away from focusing on “Al Qaeda’s core,” finding “himself directing strikes in another complicated Muslim country.”

#### 4.2 *Indiscriminate Killing: The Planned Second Strike*

The switch from Pakistan to Yemen revealed that nothing had changed. Despite internal hand-wringing in the administration about the effect of civilian casualties on American prestige in the world, Obama held to his course. The first strike in Yemen (December 17, 2009) had a grim outcome: “It killed not only its intended target, but also two neighboring families, and left behind a trail of *cluster bombs* that subsequently killed more innocents” (*Italics, mine*). The writers try in vain to find exonerative

grounds for Obama, but the presence of cluster bombs demonstrates malice aforethought—no wiggle room in this case: “It was hardly the kind of precise operation that Mr. Obama favored.” Once more, blowback is evident, not only loss of prestige, but atrocities for all to see: “Videos of children’s bodies and angry tribesmen holding up American missile parts flooded You Tube, fueling a ferocious backlash that Yemini officials said bolstered Al Qaeda.”

Contrary to official pronouncements, this was not a case of being unwittingly duped by the propaganda of militants. “Children’s bodies,” unlike stock explanations, cannot be faked. Obama and Brennan were reportedly shaken by the “sloppy strike,” and, presumably, “once again they tried to impose some discipline.” Yet, this experience behind them, Obama plunges further into the maelstrom of depravity (i.e., moral corruption): “In Pakistan, Mr. Obama had approved not only ‘personality’ strikes aimed at named, high-value terrorists, but ‘signature’ strikes that targeted training camps and suspicious compounds in areas controlled by militants.” This is too generous, by far. Signature strikes, beyond training camps, are knowingly evil—even when every kind of exculpatory rationale is provided. The attack, really collective murder, is directed against individuals who are nameless, present for whatever purpose, in groups, and thus, by twisted logic, held necessarily to be militants, combatants, enemies because they are found in areas “controlled” by our adversaries.

That is the least of it, indiscriminate killing through a process of guilt by (geographical) association. The more terrifying practice is the planned *second strike*, attacks on those who come to bury or provide medical help to the victims, on the theory that they too, by virtue of their presence, must be militants, combatants, enemies. In many cases, the innocent are struck down to the *nth* power—successive waves in a causally-linked chain of aberrations—sufficient to qualify the signature strike as a notorious and premeditated war crime, a genocide in spirit if not numbers. The official authorizing the strike (the higher in rank the better, as consonant with the principle of accountability and the rule of law) merits a place in the docket of the International Criminal Court. Collateral damage, premeditation, unidentified subjects, serial pounding, an urge to obliterate: to the *nth* power can also apply to the striker as well as the strike, the successive layers of protection to rationalize and neutralize the evilness of the deed. And by striker, I mean not the targeter in a Nevada air-conditioned trailer, or his CIA colleague in Pakistan, but the Obama administration led by the president.

## 5 THE WAR MACHINE GRINDS ON: RECEDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Obama runs a tight ship; dissent is discouraged, penalties, sure and swift. Lack of transparency makes it difficult to know the character of internal debate and discussion. Three quick points: one, secrecy is so tight that we have no notion of actual dissent; two, the administration is known for its unity (as a condition of serving); and three, administration officials guilty of breaching the secrecy or expressing dissent quickly become former officials. That more criticism of the drone program by officials is not reported in the press is less the fault of reporters than that Obama has built an intimidating Iron Curtain, especially around this program, which stifles newsgathering. Too, administration members are chosen by how well they fit in, that is, their fundamental agreement already with his policies and objectives. It is unfair to blame Obama alone for heinous criminal actions—his entire administration is implicated in targeted assassination, directly involved or not, through a refusal to speak out. We should be grateful for whatever opposition we found, even when, as so often, it is accompanied by gallows humor (itself a sign that guilt is swept under the rug).

Becker and Shane did their best: “But some State Department officials have complained to the White House that the criteria used by the C.I.A. for identifying a terrorist ‘signature’ were too lax. The joke was that when the C.I.A. sees ‘three guys doing jumping jacks,’ the agency thinks it is a terrorist training camp, said one senior official. Men loading a truck with fertilizer could be bombmakers—but they might also be farmers, skeptics argued.” Yet, skepticism, even “complain[ing] to the White House,” although better than nothing, fails to examine either drone attacks (and their consequences for maintaining support of a permanent-war doctrine) or the assumptions on which they are based. If only we could be sure these are surgical strikes, the reasoning goes, then all is alright.

### 5.1 *Pursuing Extralegal Goals: Targeted Killing*

The merry go-round swirls faster; the war machine crunches all before it. And the likelihood of accountability grows darker the more Obama proclaims concerns about civilian deaths. He urged caution in Yemen on signature strikes, “a governor, if you will, on the throttle,” as one adviser put it. The writers, perhaps themselves skeptical, draw back in crediting internal criticisms and the president’s moderating influence: “Mr. Obama

had drawn a line. But within two years, he stepped across it. Signature strikes in Pakistan were killing large numbers of terrorist suspects, even when C.I.A. analysts were not certain beforehand of their presence.” Yemen, “roiled by the Arab Spring unrest,” saw “Qaeda affiliate” territorial gains.

Aside from the qualifying term “suspects,” which implies recognition the victims may or may not be terrorists, the reporters hint at further troubling points: the impact of the Arab Spring on US policy, which, if viewed unsympathetically, as appears true, even when written in late May, merely multiplies the threat in US eyes; and the term “affiliate,” almost a reflex action in judging Islamist movements, ratifies the course of ongoing engagement or permanent war, and therefore the program of armed drones for targeted assassination.

Bureaucratism, in the use of acronyms, acts to depersonalize strikes: “Today, the Defense Department can target suspects in Yemen whose names they do not know. Officials say the criteria are tighter than those for signature strikes, requiring evidence of a threat to the United States, and they have even given them a new name—TADS, for Terrorist Attack Disruption Strikes.”

Worse than tawdry, repellent, the whole operation of targeting suspects whose names officials do not know, in addition, requiring evidence of a threat to the USA, makes of drone assassination hypocrisy (how, when the identity of suspects is unknown, can evidence be gathered against them?), cruelty, a searing moral crime. As the writers remark on the whole TADS business: “But the details are a closely guarded secret—part of a pattern for a president who came into office promising transparency.” The killing of Awlaki, who was said to have plotted the Detroit Christmas bombing and inspired the Fort Hood shootings, gave Obama confidence, for these reasons, to authorize the strike, despite the legal difficulties: “That record, and Mr. Awlaki’s calls for more attacks, presented Mr. Obama with an urgent question: Could he order the targeted killing of an American citizen, in a country with which the United States was not at war, in secret and without the benefit of a trial?”

Awlaki’s role in the bombing had not been verified, yet at a glance one sees the aforementioned grinding on, as though Obama were jumping over hurdles in a track meet, racing to a predetermined finish: (1) prejudgment of the crime, (2) the targeted killing itself, (3) an American citizen, (4) a country with which the USA was not at war, (5) secrecy, and (6) without benefit of trial (the essence of drone assassination). Each and

every factor, making a mockery of international law, habeas corpus rights, government transparency, and the crime of *murder* itself, reveals the lengths to which Obama would go in pursuing extralegal goals, and also reveals the role of secrecy to hide traducement of the rule of law.

AG Holder, a good team player, was there to help: “The Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel prepared a lengthy memo justifying that extraordinary step [killing an American citizen, etc.], asserting that while the Fifth Amendment’s guarantee of due process applied, it could be satisfied by *internal deliberations in the executive branch*” (Italics, mine). It is not that these deliberations were confined to the executive branch, which some have argued violates the separation of powers, but that they were internal, thereby reducing the victim to a cipher, a nonentity, irrelevant to due process—as if DOJ personified hubris in extreme form. The legal memo was kept secret.

## 5.2 *Setting a Precedent: The New Mode of Warfare*

There were objections that the drone strikes were “crowding out consideration of a broader strategy against radicalization,” those, like Mrs. Clinton, who “strongly supported the strikes,” arguing that “the drones-only approach at Situation Room meetings” was focusing discussion “exclusively on the pros, cons and timing of particular strikes.” For her, a totality of response, military in thrust, appeared most meet. Obama seemed to agree, but, aside from some damage control, “an executive order setting up a sophisticated, interagency war room at the State Department to counter the jihadi narrative” with “video online” and “talking points to embassies,” he hewed to his course of targeted assassination.

How was he able to stave off criticism? For as Becker and Shane observe, “Obama’s record has not drawn anything like the sweeping criticism from allies that his predecessor faced.” Out of the mouths of former Bush officials sometimes come pearls of wisdom, as now, when John Bellinger III, “a top national security lawyer” under Bush, explains that Obama’s “liberal reputation and ‘softer packaging’ have protected him.” Bellinger states, “‘After the global outrage over Guantanamo, it’s remarkable that the rest of the world has looked the other way while the Obama administration has conducted hundreds of drone strikes in several different countries, including killing at least some civilians.’” Reputation, packaging, Bellinger knew his man. Nevertheless, he, too, “supports the strikes.”

Obama is not Hamlet. The writers’ efforts to give him an introspective cast (quite absurd, in light of his arrogant self-assertiveness, especially on matters concerning lethality), in which they credit his effort to bring the war to a close in Iraq and to prepare to do so in Afghanistan, thereby “refocus[ing] the fight on Al Qaeda and hugely reduc[ing] the death toll both of American soldiers and Muslim civilians,” has left, presumably, a troubling sense of what comes next: “But in moments of reflection, Mr. Obama may have reason to wonder about unfinished business and unintended consequences.” The famous Cairo speech, June 2009, in which Obama said (perhaps thanks to the phrasemaking of Ben Rhodes), “The United States is not—and never will be—at war with Islam,” prompted this critical remark: “His focus on strikes has made it impossible to forge, for now, the new relationship with the Muslim world that he had envisioned. Both Pakistan and Yemen are arguably less stable and more hostile to the United States than when Mr. Obama became president.”

I’ve noted the writers’ silence up till now on passing judgment, but once the door is open a crack, and the facts are permitted to sink in, these sentences indeed stand out: “Justly or not, drones have become a provocative symbol of American power, running roughshod over national sovereignty and killing innocents. With China and Russia watching, the United States has set an international precedent for sending drones over borders to kill enemies.”

A dangerous principle has been established, an open-sky’s policy for drone assassination; moreover, the drone as a weapon of choice in which terror defines the salience of modern warfare—the world a promiscuous checkerboard of entry. No one is safe, national borders irrelevant, distance the same, and the world itself subject to non-traditional weaponry, as though at the mercy of a technological determinism where the human factor disappears from view. Perhaps Becker and Shane had once read Chalmers Johnson; blowback, the concept he advanced several years ago, fits the situation perfectly today.

The international precedent has been set, with drones a new mode of warfare (the technology readily available to others) for disrespecting if not obliterating borders. Because of the nature of the beast, this blurs the definition and identities of the enemy so as to make killing innocents a logical consequence of drone warfare. And the writers on their part also may have been prescient when they spoke about “unfinished business and unintended consequences,” in that Obama, low-keyed, liberal reputation,



“softer packaging,” has quite possibly signified a sea change, or at least a qualitative shift, in American foreign policy and military strategy.

The “unfinished business” takes several interrelated forms. It provides an ideological base line, which results in a seemingly permanent war of counterterrorism, necessitating embroilment on the level of drone warfare across several continents. This creates disrespect for international law and the infringement of the Constitution at home, and entails greater secrecy in the planning and operations of government. This platform in place, along with the repositioning of military forces to the Pacific and Asia, one finds, taken together, a unilateral hegemonic drive for continued ascendancy in the context of globalization.

As for the “unintended consequences,” one can only imagine the potential for disruption and conflict in international politics. While ordinary people may worry about these consequences, Obama assuredly does not. He seems to regard confrontation as a validation of his leadership. Cool as a cucumber, these consequences, for him, do not exist—what I termed, invincibility, a man-of-destiny complex, or simply, hubris, nominally to transform, but more likely, *arrest*, history.

## A Moment in American Policy: The Death of Anwar al-Awlaki

Further context is helpful for exploring drone warfare, the foreign policy that stands behind it, and the system of capitalism which fuses financialization and militarization, both progressing in lockstep. The latter has become ascendant because of the burdens America faces in continuing a course of expansion while systemic decay or senescence also sets in. Three policy directions, among others, can be seen in Obama's first three years in office pertinent to our discussion. First, there is the mobilization of force: his global expansion of drone attacks but also emphasis on the military factor in the conduct of American foreign policy. Although brought under the aegis of counterterrorism, policy sharply focuses on open markets directed to the Far East and the effective containment of China. Second, there is the heightened convergence of operating principles in reshaping American capitalism for the challenges of globalization. As a favored working construct among policymakers, globalization, going back to Wilson's universalization of capitalism as both a national and world system, now becomes updated to make for specific inclusion of privatization, deregulation, and market fundamentalism. Third, there is the gradual separation of government from public reach, the better to conduct military affairs and ensure business hegemony against domestic critics or international rivals. Interpenetration structurally plays no favorites; if business appears to have the upperhand, co-partnership nevertheless requires government autonomy as critical to fulfilling its protective and stimulatory functions.

In all three cases, policy trends operating for decades come to a focal point under Obama, where, it might be said, their distillation and integration constitute a qualitative change in the nature of US capitalism. “Credit” does not go to him as a sophisticated political-economic leader for the distillation of the policy framework; rather, he has been in basic agreement with the main contours of domestic and foreign policy, including the geopolitical and military parts, since taking office, if not before. The “pivot” to Asia, including the containment of China, in emphasis sets him somewhat apart from his Europe-centric (formative Cold War orientation vis-à-vis Russia) predecessors, as does his acceleration of the drone campaign.

## I DEATH OF US CITIZEN: ABROGATION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

Whitlock writes that this “absence of official accountability” for the youth’s death “deepens the legal and ethical murkiness of the Obama administration’s campaign to kill alleged enemies of the state *outside of traditional war zones*” (Italics, mine). This Kafkaesque scenario makes a shamble of both domestic-constitutional and international law, not only killing a citizen (“a Denver native”), which of course means the deprivation of customary legal rights and procedures, violating US law in these circumstances, but also the disregarding of boundaries so that all “alleged enemies” can be killed at will, anywhere, anytime, an open hunting season on humans, no license needed.

Abdulrahman’s plight surely fulfills Marcuse/Acton’s point about perceiving the institutional bedrock of a society through looking at its worst features. What kind of president and counterterrorism leader do we find when such a killing is tolerated, or even possible? Or what kind of democracy when rationales are presented, such as “the right to launch attacks against al-Qaeda members anywhere in the world,” there being “no difference between a battlefield in Afghanistan and a suspected terrorist hideout in Yemen or Somalia”? Or again, the killing of “an American teenager” by “the U.S. military in a country with which Washington is not at war”? This last, more than his youth and citizenship, gives us pause as to the meaning of Abdulrahman’s death.

### 1.1 *Deniability and Opaqueness: Flaunting Government Power*

War is no longer sufficient ground for the prosecution of war. Wrenched from its historical context, war is placed outside the framework of international law—almost whimsical, were not the consequences so terrible. Obama, putatively the constitutional scholar, tramples law under foot by his rejection of all rights and conduct, in favor of extolling the blood spat. Even national boundaries are of no further moment. Strike; strike swiftly; strike (not so) cleanly! Collateral damage is the remnant-thinking of an ancient regime, no longer applicable to modern times. Hobbes would not have approved, for the very ritualization of warlike human relations implied an ordered framework, and even Clausewitz would have demurred at the unscrupulous, normless, resort to drone warfare. Still, the inevitable: Government officials “have refused to answer questions for the record about how or why Awlaki was killed Oct. 14 in a remote part of Yemen, along with eight other people.”

When the US military kills civilians “in traditional war zones,” there is usually an investigation, and “the results are often declassified and released as public records.” Not so here, as the cancerous growth of covert operations becomes aligned with obfuscations which preserve deniability and opaqueness, which preserves secretive decision-making that cannot bear the light of day, such as pursuing geopolitical goals requiring massive defense spending and a permanent war mentality. Obama of course had no reticence about “trumpet[ing]” the killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, a presumed celebrity target, two weeks before, by CIA drones. Obama only hours later made the triumphant announcement.

But of the son, officials would be “willing to talk only on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter.” One said the son was “a bystander, in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Two others falsely claimed he was in his twenties, “calling him a ‘military-age male,’” as though that was ample justification (and conformed to Obama’s directive on the reclassification of the so-called militant). The family “released a copy of his U.S. birth certificate showing that he turned 16 on Aug. 26.” More cover-up, cynicism, and moral blindness followed: “Defense Department officials declined to answer questions about the airstrike or say whether any official investigations or reviews were underway.” The technique of stonewalling, whether or not a tacit admission of guilt, flaunts government power and flouts the law, transparency, and democracy itself.

Perhaps because JSOC did the killing, its own identity and record potentially open to view, secrecy was the more imperative. Like the drone, secrecy is not an end in itself. In this case we see a convergence of purpose (beyond complementary specialties in the exercise of force), in which avoidance of war-crimes prosecution is hardly a negligible factor. JSOC Command passed queries along to Central Command, which declined to comment, as did State and the National Security Council.

### *1.2 Convergence of Forces: CIA and Elite Military Units*

[Obama is the mere inheritor of a unified pattern of globalized/militarized capitalism. (Actually, in less coordinated terms, this dates from the end of World War II—and, in certain facets, trade, the Far East, a regulatory system favorable to business, the late nineteenth century.) My remark on his Wilsonian origins accords Obama greater distinction than he deserves. It holds only on his mobilization of government for purposes of trade and anticommunism; he lacks the other's sophistication in advocating for a Centrist paradigm that addressed problems raised by the Right as well as the Left.

Obama's policy framework is at odds with democratic principles, particularly in charting the use of force and systemically distancing government from popular determination in, much less the comprehension of, the political economy. This makes for a climate hostile to civil liberties and government transparency. The monopolization of knowledge is a class weapon; ignorance, as ruling groups and their representatives believe, is bliss (themselves excluded). Massive NSA surveillance surely complements—along with rigid enforcement of the Espionage Act—trends toward the silencing of dissent and habituation to looking the other way in the commission of war crimes.

Obama's refinement of repression, as a qualitative acceleration occurs, is made palatable under the banner of liberalism, the systemic financial-military integration of structure defining the Obama Era. With this wider context, we return to the armed drone for targeted assassination, the high-tech solution to keeping alive the martial spirit at home, the pretext for establishing more bases abroad, and the symbol of unmediated annihilation and destruction as warning to whomever obstructs America's goals and stature in the world.]

Like father like son, American citizens were caught in the crosshairs of US counterterrorism policy. Anwar al-Awlaki (officially, al-Aulaqi) also

provided, however, the testing ground for cooperative ventures between the CIA and JSOC. In the CIA's case, this illustrates Obama's expansion of its mission, from, originally, intelligence, to now, an operational, paramilitary role, as seen first in Pakistan. Obama, in granting the Agency greater leeway than his predecessors, reveals his closeness to the intelligence community, something his 2008 base never sought and subsequent base simply ignored. But Awlaki's killing was a major step, beyond what Miller's article states in its title, important as that was, "Strike on Awlaki demonstrates collaboration between CIA and military" (September 30, 2011), because it pointed toward the future.

Namely, the war was if not infinitely extensible, then at least long-term in nature, and that citizens' rights were no longer applicable, habeas corpus, cross examination, evidence, jury, counsel all ignored. This is a dramatic example of Obama's contemptuous treatment of the rule of law and civil liberties. (The same applies, of course, to his campaign of massive surveillance.) Further, as will be seen, CIA involvement had conferred special license of its exemption from their operation and established character.

The father, rather, was a sitting duck: "Traveling from secret bases on opposite sides of Yemen, armed drones from the CIA and the military's Joint Special Operations Command converged" on target and "unleashed a flurry of missiles." The CIA controlled the operation, which "was so seamless that even hours later, it remained unclear whether a drone supplied by the CIA or the military fired the missile" that killed him. This is no slight matter; bragging rights comes with the territory. The death, Miller writes, "represents the latest, and perhaps most literal, illustration to date of the convergence between the CIA and the nation's elite military units in the counterterrorism fight." This civilian-military unified effort denies traditional lines of authority and blurs mission assignments, another example of Obama's dallying with the law.

Obama coldly pronounced the killing, "a tribute to our intelligence community." Awlaki's death also reveals the new emphasis placed on Yemen and Somalia, a "constellation of drone bases" now surrounding them, including "a new CIA facility in the Arabian Peninsula" which took part in the attack. And the reason for CIA supervision of the operation—a compound of lack of transparency, the twisting of legal thinking, and perhaps deniability: "The attack on Awlaki blended capabilities from both sides and was carried out under CIA authority that allowed for greater latitude in conducting lethal operations outside conventional war zones."

## 2 ROGUE GOVERNMENT: LINES OF AUTHORITY BLURRED

The CIA, unrestrained, accorded “greater latitude” outside the framework of domestic and international law, is essentially the go-to executor of presidential authority, the ideal vehicle, then, for prosecuting “lethal operations” not only outside conventional war zones, but also outside, and hidden from, the rule of law. It is less important to say that the CIA is a rogue government, than to notice the jurisdictional deception: traditional war zones have long-recognized rules of conduct, but abstracting the use of force from the proscribed context creates a protected informal context for illicit non-legal activities—hence, Obama’s emphasis on paramilitary operations which otherwise would not stand close scrutiny. It is not that the CIA is rogue, but that the government itself *is*, given to hiding its aggressions (and thus favoring lack of transparency).

### 2.1 *Revolving Door of Counterterrorism: Readjusted Civilian-Military Relations*

The one-two punch, JSOC the muscular extension of the CIA, reflects a broader blurring, as in “leadership ranks,” with Panetta going from CIA director to Secretary of Defense, and Petraeus (while he lasted, long enough to order more armed drones) from army general to CIA director. This suggests the revolving door of counterterrorism, analogous to the revolving door of business and government, except that now we have the militarization of government in more explicit (though paradoxically more invisible) terms. It also suggests, beyond the revolving door, the collapse of the line separating civilian and military authority, as does the operational actuality of conducting joint CIA-JSOC missions, lethal in intent and execution.

Obama has readjusted civilian-military relations, to the ultimate weakening of the former, and in the process—besides raising havoc with the Constitution—has shaped a unified strike force easily adaptable to secretive missions at home as well as abroad. Add to that contractors (e.g., Blackwater/Xe mercenaries), as already reported in the drone operations in Pakistan, and we have a heady brew. The military, under Obama, is increasingly taking on a paramilitary complexion. This is seen in the endeavor to evade, and gain consequent practical exemption from, international law, codes of military conduct, and previously clear lines of demarcation.

And conversely, the paramilitary is increasingly taking on a military complexion as constituting America's leading edge in missions of intervention and regime change, which are ideally suited to blurred lines of authority and consequent new arrangements of amassing and deploying force. Legitimation of Blackwater/Xe had already created a bad precedent, moving the unified whole of government forces in an escapist (from international law) direction, an added element of privatization merely confirming the mindset of illegality and counterrevolution.

Obama's boast about Awlaki's killing, that it is "a tribute to our intelligence community," can be coupled with the reason for the CIA's "greater latitude in conducting lethal operations outside conventional war zones," to illustrate the Administration's contempt for the rule of law and democratic processes. For involved is Obama's confident assertion of presidential protection, the invoking of the state secrets doctrine, and the profound depths to which secrecy itself has been carried as a generalized stance covering policies which go beyond national-security matters to operant secretiveness as a way of governance.

The marriage, at least for purposes of assassination, of the CIA and JSOC, should, by all reasonable standards of law and morality, raise questions about the killing of Awlaki and the program. It should also expose the failure of liberalism as a bastion of civil liberties and guardian of constitutional processes. The death of al-Awlaki is one of thousands, given the recent history of American imperialism, yet it uniquely emblems that history and removes the fig leaf from Obama's claim to statesmanship and rectitude.

## 2.2 *Legal Denial of Rights: "A Due Process in War"*

On the same date as Miller's article (September 30, 2011), Peter Finn, also in the *Post*, examines this moment of internal government discussion in the aptly titled, "Secret U.S. memo sanctioned killing of Awlaki." The event fresh in mind, he writes: "The Justice Department wrote a secret memorandum authorizing the lethal targeting of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born radical cleric who was killed by a U.S. drone strike Friday." This was not the work of a small cabal; all interested parties signed on (perhaps closing ranks to win presidential approval, perhaps to cover their respective careers and/or mount a collective defense arguing for deniability): "The document was produced following a review of the legal issues raised by striking a U.S. citizen and involved senior lawyers from across



the administration. There was *no dissent* about the legality of killing Awlaki, the officials said” (Italics, mine). The wheels of justice (?) grind on, in bureaucratic harmony and unanimity. Habeas corpus has been cheapened, trampled upon, secrecy only compounding the effect, “senior lawyers from across the administration” giving ironic punctuation to the lawless character of US jurisprudential theory and practice.

From one official (“who spoke on the condition of anonymity”): “What constitutes due process in this case is a due process in war.” According to another, the CIA “did not know” that Samir Khan—a US citizen whom, as we saw, was another casualty—“was with Awlaki, but they also considered Khan a belligerent whose presence near the target would not have stopped the attack.” This whole line of argument, due process as signifying and applicable to “a due process in war,” vulgarizes, distorts, and belittles a foundation stone of Anglo-American law. To have specifically qualified it, wrenched out of its Constitutional and jurisprudential meaning, alerts one to the war-criminal mindset operating in Washington and accepted at the highest levels of government. Whether Khan was listed as collateral damage, the official did not say.

Finn, possibly intentionally, shows the escalation of Awlaki’s rank which justifies the killing: “President Obama and various administration officials referred to Awlaki publicly for the first time Friday as the ‘external operations’ chief for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, a label that may be intended to underscore his status as an operational leader who posed an imminent threat.” Throughout these verbal gymnastics, Justice remained on point: “A Justice Department spokeswoman declined to comment. The administration officials refused to disclose the exact legal analysis used to authorize targeting Awlaki, or how they considered any Fifth Amendment right to due process.” When the rule of law becomes riddled with exceptions and double standards, starting with the dichotomization of due process itself, and parsing the distinctions of rights accorded citizenship, so that none avails one who is deemed beyond the pale—all of which Obama signs on to—the fabric of a law-based society is torn up and labels fail to suffice: constitutional autocracy(?), authoritarian democracy(?), or simply, creeping fascism(?), and so on.

Due process and the Fifth Amendment were a dead letter from the start under Obama. His use of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers and obsession with leaks that might penetrate the thick shell of government secrecy tell us as much. In practice, the Fifth is especially to be honored

when it is posthumously conferred—that is, exculpatory evidence presented *after* the victim has been reduced to a blood spat.

### 2.3 *Continuum of Repression: Failure to Observe Due Process*

The whole atmosphere of the “legal” discussion reminds one of the late-1940s and early-1950s, when the House Un-American Activities Committee was in full flower. Parallels to that period abound here, as in the prejudgment of guilt, the lynch-mob mindset (today more tactfully called, extrajudicial killings), the certitude of rightness because the US government confers its blessing and administers the respective frameworks: defamation of character, elimination of person. The latter must be taken literally, targeted assassination.

One supposes defamation (late 1940s–1950s) is preferable to elimination (the present-day case), yet they exist on the same continuum of repression, indicating a progression geared to all the (ideological) traffic will bear. I remember well the former, having attended several congressional witch-hunting sessions in the Capitol. They were not surprising given the antiradical political climate which subsisted throughout the preceding half-century, as in the persecution of the Wobblies and the Palmer Red Raids, an incisive account found in Preston’s *Aliens and Dissenters*. Thus, fast-forward to Obama’s Espionage Act usage, and one senses anti-radicalism, rather than going away, is indelibly bound up with US historical development, as in the much earlier Alien and Sedition Acts, a sparkling insight into the mental framework of Exceptionalism.

A difference between the respective decades is that drone attacks occur oftentimes without knowing the identity of the victim, whereas at least then, in the glare of the lights and cameras, the victims’ names were gotten straight, even if the evidence may have been hearsay or fabricated. Fear was rife in the early 1950s in academic circles (and even, or especially, in Hollywood, the dream factory of Americanism which could not tolerate a Left presence and intrusiveness). A societal process of ideological restrictiveness took hold to silence dissent, and matched America’s toe-to-toe confrontation with Russia.

Sixty years later, the climate of fear, alternatively, the aspiration for hegemony, wears the face of liberalism, with little changed in the interim. Not only did HUAC ensure the correct naming of the witness, but the purpose was to ruin the individual’s career and life, as in fact often happened. Obama’s lack of awareness of the miscarriages of justice in the

earlier period (or perhaps his—and society’s—selective learning process at work), and thus failure or refusal to recognize the need for observing due-process rights, cannot be blamed on Harvard Law School, where the tradition of Zachariah Chaffee once did and perhaps still does hold.

The wheels of execution turned inexorably. Obama’s hit list, the presumed legitimation of vigilantism, has met with little criticism, extrajudicial killing exempted from Constitutional processes and interpretation. Meanwhile the absence of a formal declaration of war opens the vista of a no-man’s-land where anything goes (a further act of contempt for the law in its basic application, superseding all rights and guarantees). Hardly the designated sheriff of the Wild West, Obama nonetheless was out to get his man (and all others on the kill list). Finn describes a situation, judicial proceedings were used to obfuscate and invalidate the law: “Last year, the Obama administration invoked the state secrets privilege to argue successfully for the dismissal of a lawsuit brought in U.S. District Court in Washington by Awlaki’s father, Nasser, seeking to block the targeting of his son. Judge John Bates found that in Awlaki’s case, targeting was a ‘political question’ to be decided by the executive branch.”

#### 2.4 *Extrajudicial Execution: Contempt for Rule of Law*

Although the civil liberties community has by and large given Obama a free pass, here at least they acted. The ACLU and the Center for Constitutional Rights “argued on behalf of Awlaki’s father last year that there is no ‘battlefield’ in Yemen and that the administration should be forced to articulate publicly its legal standards for killing any citizen outside the United States who is suspected of terrorism.” Otherwise, “such a killing would amount to an extrajudicial execution and would violate U.S. and international law.” Beyond HUAC, drone murder might be likened to a high-tech lynching, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and points further afield as the reincarnation of the American South in its heyday, or Washington *sans* rope later. In all of this, the drone takes on additional meaning as the weapon of choice for battering down the Constitution. Permanent damage is being inflicted on the foundation of civil liberties and civil rights. Even in the context of immediacy, assassination and paramilitary operations are given a leg up for the future.

Whether one speaks of extrajudicial execution, targeted assassination, or presidential murder (the effective agency in the killing), all amount to the same thing: the administration’s running roughshod over the law. This

has warped the judgment and activities of the Department of Justice, which has, even though part of the Executive, given up its independence in favor of close cooperation with Obama. DOJ's location therein, if merely the mouthpiece for Executive Authority, severely compromises the Department's role as protector of the nation, not, as is also the case with the Office of Legal Counsel, the stone wall behind which usurpation is possible and, as in the Awlaki killing, practiced.

Attorney General Holder has specialized in invoking the state secrets privilege to have the dismissal of law suits against acts of government potentially unlawful and prejudicial to an individual's rights as well as to prevent the divulgence of information, which, if released, could deny the government's contentions and legal reasoning. Here, too, as with Judge Bates, we see court-sanctioned violations of established law. This is one more element added to the mix demonstrating contempt for the rule of law under Obama's presidency. The law exists in political-structural complicity with Executive Authority. Machiavelli could not have wished for a clearer test of princely power.

Thus, we see the lawless character of his presidency, its concerted diminution of civil liberties with counterterrorism the possible pretext for this occurrence, and the contrived atmosphere of impending crisis which acts to distract attention from military engagement abroad and corporate consolidation at home. The picture is somewhat unified: global intervention and regime change, having for its purpose America's role in strengthening its own and international capitalism; on the domestic side, the stabilization and expansion of American capitalism by means, among other things, of the rollback of labor rights and the proliferation of American banking within the US political economy and its consequent power in the world. Together, a mighty engine is effected; its ultimate objective still unclear. Meanwhile, further analysis of Awlaki's death remains in order.

### 3    SECRETY: PROTECTIVE WALLS OF GOVERNMENT CLASSIFICATION

A final article from the *Post* is noteworthy, Karen De Young's "Secrecy defines Obama's drone war" (December 19, 2011). From what has been said, the title is not surprising; the term "defines" places secrecy front and center, a not enviable position for advancing claims of accountability, transparency, and democracy, as is the administration's wont. De Young

cuts to the chase. While in the period from September to the time of writing (mid-December) “at least 60 people have died in 14 reported CIA drone strikes in Pakistan’s tribal regions,” the administration “has named only one of the dead,” an Haqqani official. Meanwhile, “the identities of the rest remain classified, as does the existence of the drone program itself.”

### 3.1 *Resistance to Disclosure: A War Mentality*

Here in microcosm one sees the National Security State in action, the wall built around government. This is a decisive attribute of, and consequence of, the drone program, wherein the use of classification fends off critical analysis or even the determination of legality. Drones obviously are not the only reason for classification; the administration shows in many of its activities and areas of interest, often wherever possible, resistance to disclosure, transparency, and accountability. But the drone *does* play a significant and growing part in the overall trend. Lethality is often bruted about, in contrast to reluctance, at times bordering on anger, about discussion of legality.

De Young does not go down that path, the issue of legality. But her observation is on target: “Because the names of the dead and the threat they were believed to pose are secret, it is impossible for anyone without access to U.S. intelligence to assess whether the deaths were justified.” As she notes, we have only the government’s assurance in the matter: “The administration has said that its covert, targeted killings with remote-controlled aircraft in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and potentially beyond [already a year ago the scope of drone operations is fully appreciated] are proper under both domestic and international law. It has said that the targets are chosen under strict criteria, with rigorous internal oversight.” Yet the government does not take the public into its confidence, one more example of the disconnect—viewed as in the very nature of covert operations—between the political leadership and the citizenry. Instead, we learn merely, for example, that Abdulrahman was a “bystander.”

The law is not the only thing twisted; so is the mentality, which offers as a rationale for the drone program, frequently expressed, that it saves lives, presumably through surgical strikes. Sub-arguments, when admitted, include the usual cost-benefit analysis, cold-blooded in conception. The remoteness from the target obviates the need for ground forces, and hence, drone warfare costs less in American lives. Too, the result of no

boots on the ground is cost effectiveness, as compared to supplying and transporting those forces.

De Young writes: The administration “has parried reports of collateral damage and the alleged killing of innocents by saying that drones, with their surveillance capabilities and precision missiles, result in far fewer mistakes than less sophisticated weapons.” If that were true, then the strikes that do take place on funerals and first responders to the attack would have to be considered deliberate. As Obama sees it, there is no “collateral damage”—every militant deserves execution, even one who is in the same vicinity, or rides in the same car—though he would be loath to admit the planning and premeditation of an attack.

Perhaps more disturbing is Washington’s fascination with “sophisticated weapons,” surgical strikes (they are hardly that) which convey the passion for sterile cleanliness integral to authoritarian thought patterns. Efficiency (the trains running on time, so dear to Nazism and Italian fascism) follows the same line of thinking, related closely to antiseptic solutions to death—as in vaporization and blood spats, leaving little trace behind. Such weaponry takes on a mystique all its own, by association part of Obama’s liberalism, which is to say, modernity, ends unspecified. One advantage of the drone and the mindset accompanying its use is that modernized weaponry, if it is to be programmed into the pipeline, requires a vastly enlarged arms budget, defense monies sufficient to the task. Again, the drone is not solely responsible for wider policy trends—Obama’s nuclear modernization program may prove more costly—but its role is not negligible either. The drone epitomizes the war mentality, the more invaluable the more kept under cover.

As for the “*alleged* killing of innocents,” De Young’s facts seem to belie the use of the adjective (*Italics, mine*): “Yet in carrying out hundreds of strikes over three years—resulting in an estimated 1,350 to 2,250 deaths in Pakistan—it has provided virtually no details to support these assertions [surveillance capabilities and precision missiles ... far fewer mistakes].” The confidence in making these assertions lies in part in the secrecy maintained throughout all aspects of the program, but it also reflects a brazen quality in proceeding forward, precisely because of the secrecy. Once more De Young is helpful, here calling attention to the wide hole in the government’s case: “In outlining its legal reasoning, the administration has cited broad congressional authorizations and presidential approvals, the international laws of war and the right to self-defense. But it has not offered the American public, uneasy allies or international authorities any specifics

that would make it possible to judge how it is applying those laws.” To be sure, “administration” is a colorless word; the reference, however, is to Obama’s role in drone warfare.

### 3.2 *Law and Justice Part Company: Honor Among Thieves*

Specifics are not wanted, nor are evaluative standards as to their application. With the Iraq and Afghan wars (presumably) “winding down,” human rights groups and “international law experts” are beginning to question “the legal justification for the program.” Some administration officials, “who agreed to discuss intelligence matters on the condition of anonymity,” want greater disclosure. Yet, the argument usually rests on opportunist factors (e.g., “Everybody knows anyway,” states one, and a law professor adds, let’s not antagonize the public by appearing “way too discretionary,” etc.), which fail to call the program into question.

Officials favoring “more openness about the drone program are in a minority,” and their reasoning, as in Pakistan, lies in its being “the primary cause of widespread anti-Americanism.” Few appear concerned about the morality of targeted assassination, only that it is proving counterproductive. De Young has a section, “Secrecy’s fierce defenders,” in which we find that the CIA has raised “much of the resistance to increased disclosure,” its position being that “the release of *any* information about the program ... would aid the enemy” (*Italics, mine*). On down the line, there is a sense that disclosure is akin to subverting the Republic—Obama’s National Security State in full bloom.

Here the details in her account reveal an evilness hardly banal. One argument against disclosure is that the targeting personnel, in “calculat[ing] how much potential collateral damage [aka, killing of innocent civilians] is acceptable relative to the value of the target,” fear that “an insurgent leader aware of such logic” might hide himself “in the midst of enough civilians to make the strike too costly.” Not to worry, for one bad apple is justification enough to blast the whole barrel, as one sees in numerous reports of collateral damage.

Collateral damage per se is not at issue, only the ratio others-killed to target, and since we are never told, would the calculation be 100–1? 5000–1? Does it really matter—human life being what it is, to the target-maker and the chain-of-command all the way to the top, that is, bodies, ciphers, gooks, not even worth the bookkeeping? The Office of Legal Counsel (Department of Justice) “has opposed the declassification of any

portion of its opinion justifying the targeted killing” of Awlaki, his American citizenship notwithstanding. When the Department of Justice refuses to make public its own legal opinion, law and justice part company. JSOC, which “carried out strikes in Yemen and Somalia,” likewise “refuses to discuss drones or any other aspect of its secret counterterrorism operations.”

There is surely honor among thieves. We are told, trust Obama, take his pronouncements on faith: “Senior administration officials say they deserve to be trusted on drones, in part because Obama kept his pledge to do away with the CIA’s secret prisons and the use of harsh interrogation techniques.” But has he? One can be skeptical, given the breadth and depth of secrecy over *all* counterterrorism *and* the retention of Guantanamo. The latter concern was raised in his first year in office, and nothing had been heard since. As for waterboarding, one of the drawbacks of secrecy is disbelief in the protestations of the leader. He may have done as he says, but who’s to say and—with no admission of moral wrong—how much of a concession, while the hardships of the drone campaign continue, does this represent?

Waterboarding, except to Brennan and the CIA, if rejected at all, is done so on opportunist grounds, national prestige, and so on. Brennan and the Agency are at least more consistent; they proclaim the practice an absolute good. In full knowledge of the facts, he denies all. Once more De Young adds confirmation to the present analysis: “At home, the drone program has escaped serious public questioning because it is widely perceived as successful in eliminating insurgent leaders, has not put U.S. personnel at physical risk and has taken place largely out of sight.” “Eliminating insurgent leaders” raises no eyebrows (nor does it rise to the stature of a moral question), an absence of protest perfectly embodying the general statement of desensitization—something the administration is counting on.

### 3.3 *A Closed Society: Punitive Attitude Toward Openness*

Disclosure (to make public) has become a crime, more so under Obama than his predecessors. He uses the Espionage Act, which carries the presumption of disloyalty to America, to silence, discredit, and prosecute whistleblowers who may themselves have damaging evidence to present. Done more politely than the smear tactics of McCarthy of an earlier period, Obama’s subtlety is no safeguard against a more pernicious



expression, a generalized antiradicalism that goes beyond the revelation of supposed State secrets. Prosecution of whistleblowers under the Espionage Act is a special case of the larger dynamics—entirely appropriate to government in a closed society. Naturally, it stifles dissent, but also it shifts the political spectrum rightward, the imposition of a more inelastic Americanism which brings militarism and markets to the foreground of US policy and global behavior. The drone program can be thought of as the tail that wags the dog, except that a punitive attitude toward openness is so prevalent that it would be hard to know the order of priorities on what information is to be censored or suppressed. And therefore taking no chances, on national-security grounds, government and public alike exercise self-restraint on what is permissible to discuss and/or criticize.

Obama's forte is grazing the truth in the revealment of public policy. And with that protective attitude toward the National Security State, he is drawn closer, or rather, draws himself closer, to the military and intelligence communities, as though falling into a giant vortex of patriotic values. When the State Department's legal adviser wanted in a speech to present the program's "legal justification," one official in attendance at the National Security Council meeting where the idea was taken up described the scene: "the immediate reaction was you can't talk about our covert programs." An official, holding that "the need for secrecy is unquestioned in conventional wars," brings us to the basement of cynicism: "In World War II, they were killing people all over the place, with lots and lots of mis-hits. The civil liberties community wasn't saying we want to see targeting lists of what you're hitting. George Washington did not turn over his targeting list to the British."

When the American Bar Association invited top Pentagon and CIA lawyers to discuss the Awlaki case, potentially raising the issue of drone killings of American citizens, the lawyers "declined to address it directly." Instead they affirmed their view that US citizens are "legitimate targets" when, as "allied with al-Qaeda," they are "at war" with America. And De Young's comment: "Others counter that such blanket assertions serve only to convince critics that wrongdoing is being concealed."

## Transgressions of Moral Law: Enlarged Scope of Legal Authority

### I MISSION/TERRITORIAL CREEP: AUMF, NO EXPIRATION DATE

There are three separate programs: “the least controversial,” armed drones in combat, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya; and “the secret parts,” the CIA in Pakistan; and CIA and JSOC drones “in Yemen, Somalia and conceivably beyond.” All three are covered by the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) which Congress passed in the wake of 9/11. It provides the presumed legitimation, along with the right of self-defense, for this program and, as seen here, practically anything else which could be placed under the heading of counterterrorism. The key provision, having no expiration date, “gives the president sole power to use ‘all necessary and appropriate force’ against nations, groups or persons who committed or aided the attacks, and to prevent future attacks.” This was sweeping power and authority. For Bush and then Obama—there are clear continuities of policy in their respective administrations—this was an obvious confidence-building measure. It would put the nation in fighting trim in the (permanent) war on terrorism, itself ensuring presidential closeness to the military and a step, given its draconian potential, toward government-military integration.

There is much that is wrong here. The opportunistic use of 9/11 empowers presidential unilateralism paralleled by the further sidestepping of congressional approval for formal declarations of war. In effect, the informality of war-making is specifically geared to non-state actors, which,

the precedent established, could then move from persons to groups to nations. Mission creep, an ideal geopolitical matrix for drone warfare, is inscribed in the marrow of Administration policy. The separate programs, having CIA and JSOC involvement, might also be thought of as territorial creep, creating beachheads for the demonstration of American power in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. But what strikes one is the provision in AUMF for no expiration date, the formula making possible the doctrine and practice of permanent war. Liberalism, Obama's rhetorical strong suit, clothes the political-structural-ideological integration of presidential power and armed forces, a veritable militarization of the nation-state: Sparta on the Potomac.

### *1.1 Sanction for Lethal Action: Expanding Authority*

AUMF did not come out of thin air; 9/11 or no 9/11, the spirit of the Act was long in the works, having its genesis in antiradical and anti-alien legislation and crackdowns during and following World War I, and, of course, McCarthyism and red-baiting following World War II. More to the point, *recent* examples have contributed directly to its content. As De Young points out, "The CIA has separate legal authority to conduct counterterrorism operations under a secret presidential order, or finding," signed by Reagan, and Clinton, going one better, "signed an amendment, called a Memorandum of Notification, overriding a long-standing ban on assassinations overseas." It also provided for "lethal' counterterrorism actions against a short list of named targets," in which "killing was approved only if capture was not deemed 'feasible.'" The finding and Memorandum had little discussion, despite the fact that assassination would be committed in the name of the people, even though hearings, debate, and legislation would certainly have been in order.

Immediately following 9/11 Bush dropped "the list of named targets and the caveat on 'feasible' capture." In both cases, license was granted collateral damage and promiscuous killing, identity no longer essential in the first, and, erasing the line between killing and capture in the second, lethality became an end in itself. Named or not, anyone was fair game. In the words of one Bush official, "All of that conditional language was not included. This was straight-out legal authority .... By design, it was written as broadly as possible." Under Obama both trends were increased, more unidentified, fewer captured, as though the purpose of drone warfare was not the elimination of enemies so much as demonstrating prowess and striking terror as a subdual force where geostrategic interests demanded.

### 1.2 *Self-legitimizing Authority: Neutralizing Moral Principles*

Counterterrorism, with antiradicalism and anticommunism as precedent, was off to a lively start. Bush II had set in motion drone policy (and much else), the aforementioned official observing, “there was ‘no parsing on how do you kill them,’” while “the authorization [for killing] did not address targets’ nationality or set geographical boundaries, and there was ‘nothing about the permission of the government’ of any country where a terrorist might be found.” Bush skillfully executed the disconnect: these were only “policy questions,” the “parameters to be set by the White House as it defined its friends and enemies in what it called a ‘global war.’” Policy abstracted from a moral framework leads both to extrajudicial killings (“as it defined its friends and enemies”) and the permanent-war doctrine, with the latter’s global compass added for good measure. Policy by negating or neutralizing moral principles becomes its own morality, one of self-defined parameters necessitating and making easier the depersonalization of targets. Policy, in this light, draws to itself all of the arguments for self-legitimation, a perspective applied to drones which sets a dangerous precedent for treating other substantive areas, and—whether or not the original intention—making of the drone a leading edge for enlarging Executive authority.

Obama could then proceed without skipping a beat, exactly the mindset and policy framework of his administration as well. Thus, “within days of Obama’s inauguration, the new White House legal team began examining all existing covert authorizations.” And it liked what it saw. In the 2008 campaign, Obama pledged, “my administration has faith in the rule of law.” Although he presumably had shut “down Bush’s secret detention and interrogation programs” he found the drone program to be “effective and justifiable, and the existing authorities [which included the CIA’s unilateral authority in Pakistan] were left in place.” When one speaks of Bush–Obama continuities of policy, it is clear that Obama from the start was determined to embark on an extensible, intensified drone program—exceeding, in practice, what his predecessor had contemplated.

### 1.3 *Moral Law: The Jurisprudential Universe*

Law has an inner consistency, a paradigm of acceptance in which principles of conduct suppose some form of authority to support it, yet that also rests on the individual’s moral obligation. This tightly bound nexus of command and consent follows stipulated rules which commend themselves to

impartiality, fairness, and human reason. As stated here, there should not be conflict or contradiction between law as understood in its political-social-civic capacity and in that of its specifically moral dimension of belief and action. The moral law does not occupy a secondary place in the jurisprudential universe. It is integrated with and duly complements the place, as generally construed, of law in society. Thus, when there is a transgression of moral law by the exercise of—or as worded, the enlarged scope of—legal authority, we have a structural fissure in society itself, in that morality no longer underwrites the existence of law, and law takes on the character of existing power relations.

Law becomes politicized, losing its universality and quality of permanence (of course, subject to modification and change, but not for the sake of political convenience). This is precisely where we are at with the Bush–Obama *continuity of execution* of drone warfare. As legal authority expands, the moral law is diminished—until the latter is a mere façade to foster criminality. Nor, apropos of criminality, is the structural fissure confined to domestic society; perhaps its most telling consequence occurs in the arena of international law, the violation of which cannot but reverberate back to the domestic society.

The expansion of legal authority, theoretically, the type-form for usurpation, becomes confirmation of the trend through the consequent diminution of moral authority. This contradiction of political-structural purpose defines the anatomy of law itself when, as here, *legal* is already politicized and lacks moral standing. Drone warfare alerts one to the ways large and small the Obama administration shows contempt for the underlying principle, that is, the rule of law (inseparable from its moral foundations).

## 2 AUTHORIZATION FOR DRONE KILLINGS: SELECTION OF VICTIMS

From the foregoing, one sees the smooth transition between administrations on essentials: the largely uncritical acceptance of the Bush policy framework, and with “policy,” a refusal to think about anything but its narrow execution. Hence, the ends become self-justifying, and the moral dimensions of both means and ends are thought irrelevant. In fact, though, Obama actually ups the ante. There is more of everything: more drones, more second (or signature) strikes, more lethality, more receding into the bowels of secrecy. According to “a former Obama official,” there were “no new legal opinions” sought, nor any “challenge to the CIA’s unilateral

authority to choose targets and launch strikes in Pakistan.” Also, “Nothing was changed in terms of the review process.” Elsewhere, still a wide swath, CIA and JSOC actions “required White House approval,” and the Bush definition of “armed conflict” was narrowed for justificatory purposes to refer to “al-Qaeda and its associates.”

### 2.1 *Politicizing 9/11: Judicial Complicity*

By keeping the Bush framework intact, less attention would be called to its extensions, so that the deliberate narrowing was a conscious deception because it had the opposite intended effect in which all militants became associates and therefore fair game. Obama used the fiction that 9/11 and self-defense would provide adequate legal defense for drone strikes, which “some international law experts” believe have “nothing to do with defense against a previous assault or an ‘imminent’ attack.” Still, secrecy under Obama deepened. So, too, did an ingrained pattern of personalism, decision-making via Executive power, the drone an ideal hook on which to mount its expansion. In rather striking terms, caudillismo makes an appearance in both the articulation of policy and the selection of targets for annihilation.

ACLU and Human Rights Watch sued for the release of documents, and uniformly failed in their efforts. One US District Judge held for the CIA on the novel ground that then-Director Panetta “‘never acknowledged the CIA’s involvement in such [a] program.’” Supposedly, what remains unacknowledged—even though he boasted of its hits—doesn’t exist, or the complainant has no standing in court. The State Department counsel who had been previously silenced now was cleared to speak before the same body and he declared, “without elaboration,” that it was the administration’s “‘considered view . . . that U.S. targeting practices, including lethal operations conducted with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles [i.e., drones] comply with all applicable law, including the laws of war.’”

Never was elaboration so needed, and so withheld. Judicial complicity, seen time and again, indicates the corrosive atmosphere in which law has been regarded, as though Executive authority had engulfed, if not Congress, then at least the judiciary. Obama bears responsibility in part for this, not because it has occurred on his watch, but because, as with State (not alone in this respect), government stonewalls the constitutional apparatus of disclosure, “elaboration” an unclean word. His contempt for transparency is active, not passive.

Brennan, stating that the USA was “engaged in an armed conflict with al-Qaeda,” took the same line, that the USA “takes the legal position that—in accordance with international law—we have the authority to take action against al-Qaeda and its associated forces without doing a separate self-defense analysis each time.” Self-defense is self-evident, and perhaps self-fulfilling: a war for the long haul. Apparently, not going to the trouble of presenting a brief demonstrating accord with international law creates the impression of undeniable certitude—with neither courts nor Congress registering objection.

This deterioration of legal reasoning opens the path to abuse and further abuse. Brennan, late summer, 2010, stated, “there hasn’t been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency [and] precision of the capabilities we’ve been able to develop.” When vigorously challenged, he “clarified it to say there were no civilian deaths that the administration *had confirmed*” (Italics, mine). Secrecy, redefining “militant” to include all males in a certain age group, and plain deception serve to minimize, or deny outright, civilian casualties.

## 2.2 *Sardonicism: The Kill/Capture Distinction*

Turning from the *Washington Post* to the *New York Times*, one notes that, given the *Times*’ partiality to Obama, investigative reporting which tends to indict the Administration is, as compared with the *Post*, quite rare. Despite having excellent reporters on national-security assignment, its editorial policy tends to placate the White House, possibly to ensure access. On a host of issues, from foreign policy to civil liberties to economic regulation, its response is largely uncritical. This leaves little room for, or interest in, drone attacks and targeted assassination. A noteworthy exception is Jo Becker and Scott Shane’s article, “Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will,” May 29, 2012. The date is important. Five months before the *Post*’s three-part series, and seven months before the previous piece by De Young, some of the most pressing issues had already surfaced and, through its imprimatur, *The Times* has placed the existence of a “kill list” beyond doubt. However, the title remains, for that reason, problematic with reference to “Principles,” although “Will” is amply demonstrated. As before, secrecy appears central to drone operations, including that pertaining to civilian casualties.

The writers begin: “This was the enemy, served up in the latest chart from the intelligence agencies: 15 Qaeda suspects in Yemen with Western

ties. The mug shots and brief biographies resembled a high school yearbook layout. Several were Americans. Two were teenagers, including a girl who looked even younger than her 17 years.” We hear the voice of death from on high, absent, one hopes, a certain sardonicism implied in poring over mug shots. They continue: “President Obama, overseeing the regular Tuesday counterterrorism meeting of two dozen security officials in the White House Situation Room, took a moment to study the faces.” This was January 2010, a time to hunker down, because, as they bring out, the near-catastrophe over Detroit on Christmas Day steeled the president’s resolve to go full tilt after al-Qaeda. Whether the idea was already present, they do not say, but the fact of drone warfare, the presence of Brennan, and the idea of binding future administrations to the Obama paradigm of counterterrorism, argues that it was, and that the airline plot as a catalyst provided something of a pretext for public relations effect.

When children are involved, this calls for, not scrapping the mission, but using discretion, that is, centralizing decision-making in the presidency, a burden he did not seem reluctant to assume: “Mr. Obama has placed himself at the helm of a top secret ‘nominations’ process to designate terrorists for kill or capture, of which the capture part has become largely theoretical.” It is difficult, though, to deny the sardonicism—scorn, mockery, derision—in the proceedings, this with human life at stake, making Obama little more than a *capo* (the USA becoming the crime syndicate) in which he not only authorizes but participates in the nomination process. If it were not this serious, one would think immediately of a Brechtian script. Capture, again unlikely, the hands-on determination of the death penalty ill behooves the high office of president.

Obama presumably sought “to align the fight against Al Qaeda with American values”—conveniently left undefined, as was the fight itself *and*, because Obama defined members as males of military age in the general area, al-Qaeda as well. The writers continue: “the chart, introducing people whose death he might soon be asked to order, underscored just what a moral and legal conundrum this could be.” Their own evidence suggests, though, he did not flinch from the authorization process. Paradox, or consistent in his premises and actions?

### 2.3 *Act of Enabling: An “Aggressive Counterterrorism Record”*

Thus, “Mr. Obama is the liberal law professor who campaigned against the Iraq war and torture, and then insisted on approving every new name on



the expanding ‘kill list,’ poring over terrorist suspects’ biographies on what one official calls the macabre ‘baseball cards’ of an unconventional war.” If a strike “at a top terrorist arises—but his family is with him,” Obama alone makes the “final moral calculation.” Liberalism is not thereby negated (although perhaps law professor quite disappoints), because its current state finds nothing inappropriate about hit lists, baseball cards—the facetiousness attached to the business of death—and unflinching dedication, that is, amoral attitude, to the task at hand, the selection of victims.

It would appear that Obama admirably wants to assume responsibility for these actions and restrict their scope. Scope is actually widened, frequency, increased, and, as for responsibility and accountability, secrecy has long taken care of that. Becker and Shane, whatever their sympathies, are candid and honest: “Nothing else in Mr. Obama’s first term has baffled liberal supporters and confounded conservative critics alike as his aggressive counterterrorism record. His actions have often remained inscrutable, obscured by awkward secrecy rules, polarized political commentary and the president’s own deep reserve.” The admission is stunning, despite the attempt at attenuation. Aggressive, yes; inscrutable, hardly. As commonly known, Obama plays his cards close to his chest. The “awkward secrecy rules” are his own creation and insistence, and both inscrutableness and “deep reserve” are public masks inseparable from secrecy itself.

The reporters conducted interviews with “three dozen” current and former advisers who have described an evolution unprecedented “in presidential history,” in which Obama is “personally overseeing the shadow war with Al Qaeda.” Again, paradox, or in fact consistency? The article continues: “They [advisers] describe a paradoxical leader who shunned the legislative deal-making required to close ... Guantanamo ... but approves lethal action without hand-wringing.” Shun? Or simply, he wanted Guantanamo to remain open, at one with the approval of “lethal action.” Then comes another stunning admission: “When he applies his lawyering skills to counterterrorism, it is usually to *enable*, not constrain, his ferocious campaign against Al Qaeda—even when it comes to killing an American cleric in Yemen, a decision that Mr. Obama told colleagues was ‘*an easy one*’” (Italics, mine).

Officials have portrayed the decision as presumptively difficult and, given the stakes, anguished, but not Obama himself. One wonders about whether other decisions of a similar kind were also easy. Deep reserve often translates (judging by Obama’s flippant response to colleagues) in

his case as sangfroid, an imperturbability which allows one to live with oneself in authorizing the vaporization of fellow humans. Obama was privately warned of “careless targeting,” and “presidential acquiescence in a formula for counting civilian deaths,” in fact his own formula, “that some officials think is skewed to produce low numbers.” Perhaps “deep reserve” signifies as well cogitating on plausible denial and devising a satisfactory definition of militant which is so inclusive as to ensure zero civilian deaths, except a sprinkling of women and children.

### 3 JUST-WAR DOCTRINE: A PLAYTHING OF MORALITY

Becker and Shane make a significant contribution to the discussion of drones: Because of its “failure to forge a clear detention policy,”—for example, Guantanamo, rendition, black holes—the Administration is shifting its emphasis away from taking prisoners, to, as some in Congress see it, “a take-no-prisoners policy.” The difficulties of capture, imprisonment, and bad publicity from revelations of torture, have made the death of militants expedient, efficient, and from a geopolitical standpoint, presumably effective. This also reflects the logic of Brennan’s disposition matrix. Incarceration becoming increasingly impractical, there is little choice but extinguishment (making an end to the menace). Rather than build more Guantanamo-like facilities, make militants (always bearing in mind collateral damage and mistaken identities, or simply signature strikes) targets for assassination. An element of bureaucratic crudity cannot be gainsaid, falling under the heading of cost-effectiveness, an argument frequently advanced for drones.

#### 3.1 *Embedded Ethnocentrism: Moral Priority of Capitalism*

Cameron Munter, whose complex and ambiguous position we shall see later, while still ambassador to Pakistan, complained to colleagues that CIA strikes were driving US policy there, stating, according to the account, as one colleague reported: “he didn’t realize his main job was to kill people.” The writers alerted us early to Brennan’s ascension in the Obama White House and his role in making policy as well as reinforcing the policies of the president: “Beside the president *at every step* is his counterterrorism adviser, John O. Brennan, who is variously compared by colleagues to a dogged police detective, tracking terrorists from his cave-like office in the White House basement, or a priest whose blessing has

become *indispensable* to Mr. Obama, echoing the president's attempt to apply the 'just war' theories of Christian philosophers to a brutal modern conflict" (Italics, mine).

The latter is especially interesting, a patina of moralism, often the case with protestations of a just war when objective determination proves otherwise. Drone assassination may be cost-effective but hardly comports with the rule of law or any recognizable code of moral law. When war itself is morally questionable, the basis for invoking claims of justice has to be strong indeed. This raises doubts where *means* and ends should be expected to coincide. Yet the emblematic blood spat without recourse even to proper identification of the victim, much less a deliberate killing of bystanders in secondary strikes, leaves one bemused by the designation. Obama and Brennan have made a plaything of morality, legitimating atrocities, converting war crimes into just wars, an alchemic trick transmuting Mephistopheles into St. Francis of Assisi. Voters for Obama had expected otherwise in 2008, or now, in 2012. Leaving the determination of a "just war" to Obama, his advisers, and a substantial segment of the public (without regard to party), courts disaster—at best, endless war as a liberal crusade.

As currently applied, the "just war" has been adopted as justification for wars, interventions, even loosely interpreted as trade embargoes, for whatever hostile action the USA chooses to be engaged in—a mindset illustrating the militarization of Exceptionalism. This is not hypocrisy, merely the long-term implication of an embedded ethnocentric doctrine which is grounded in a supposedly purist model of capitalism unique to the American historical experience, separating the nation from all others. Whether conceptualized as the moral priority assigned to capitalism or a heightened standard of patriotism meant to be implemented through the political culture (the two working in tandem as a unified statement of the national creed) the ethnocentric form posits the critical distinction embodied in Exceptionalism: the dichotomy of we—they, superior-inferior, friend-enemy, in each case totalized as an all-or-nothing proposition. Distinctions of wealth and race, and their comparative invidious statuses, draw upon the basic ethnocentrism.

Matter-of-factly, this framework, more ideological than psychological, can morally justify the annihilation of the outsider, or if not acted on but left in suspension, then serve as the basis for permanent hostility and war. That of course is the reason for my principal criticism of American policy, not merely foreign but domestic policy as well, because the two cannot be

separated. Moral legitimation predicated on war, intervention, domination of any kind (or for any purpose) is a species of special pleading which, placed on ideological foundations, and given impetus and actuality of power by military or other means, leads to totalitarian societal formations. Seeking moral justification for immoral ends may pass for statecraft, but is wholly antidemocratic. It is also antithetical, whatever the pretenses, to a moral social system.

“Just-war” doctrine, I believe, is subject to the foregoing criticism, whether annihilation of the outsider or permanent war. The “take-no-prisoners” policy is one such rendering, and when transferred onto the existing geopolitical arena, early “Christian philosophers” notwithstanding, another would be, in which those in the Situation Room are busily engaged, global hegemony and market fundamentalism dignified as natural rights, manifest destiny, or self-fulfilling prophesies. Today, counterterrorism has its obvious political-economic utility in hot pursuit of the national interest. This brief comment on Exceptionalism in relation to the just-war doctrine perfectly enunciates the rationale America employs perhaps subconsciously in conducting drone assassinations.

The writers are dogged in pinning down the just-war theme: “But the strikes that have eviscerated Al Qaeda . . . have also tested both men’s commitment to the principles they have repeatedly said are necessary to defeat the enemy in the long term.” The principles, in application, however, are suspect and lead to blowback: “Drones have replaced Guantanamo as the recruiting tool of choice for militants; in his 2010 guilty plea, Faisal Shahzad, who had tried to set off a car bomb in Times Square, justified targeting civilians by telling the judge, ‘*When the drones hit, they don’t see children*’” (Italics, mine).

Policymakers, beginning with Obama, have one-track minds. They are oblivious to the wider practical meaning of collateral damage, the many innocent victims vaporized (studiously denied or discounted) and also the psychological infliction of pain, as in the whirring sound, constantly overhead, not knowing when or where the next missile will strike. This gives Chalmers Johnson’s idea of blowback tangible meaning. Even when, as in Shahzad’s case, retaliation proves ineffectual, it is understandable—except to those who think in terms of body counts, human ciphers, blips on the radar screen, ultimately, blood spats in waiting.

As the evidence mounts, particularly the Stanford-NYU report, the administration’s moral compass becomes increasingly suspect. The quoted remarks here of Dennis C. Blair, who was “director of national intelligence

until he was fired in May 2010,” are instructive. He viewed the “discussions inside the White House of long-term strategy against Al Qaeda” as being “sidelined by the intense focus on strikes,” and his own reaction was: “The steady refrain in the White House was, ‘This is the only game in town—reminded me of *body counts in Vietnam*’” (Italics, mine). Blair, a retired admiral, began his military career there.

It is hard to reconcile noble purpose with cynicism, as the mentality of “body counts” makes clear, and as the obsession with strikes takes over. Also, we have the testimony of William Daley, Obama’s chief of staff in 2011. His concern: Obama and his advisers “‘understood that they could not keep adding new names to a kill list, from ever lower on the Qaeda totem pole.’” The writers state the obvious: “What remains unanswered is how much killing will be enough.” The additive mindset supplants conventional laws on engagement, and transforms the drone strike into legitimized terrorism. (Here one wonders, who are the true terrorists now, and whether terrorism is a function solely of non-state identity and status, or might not government sponsorship be included in the definition.)

Obama appears untroubled over the additive mindset, given the logic of permanent war. Enough is never enough. Daley, superbly capturing the tone of the White House, says “‘One guy gets knocked off, and the guy’s driver, who’s No. 21, becomes 20? At what point are you just filling the bucket with numbers?’” At least Daley is asking questions. Yet is the White House discussion evidenced in hit lists, body counts, baseball cards the moral sensibility one associates with just-war philosophy? Obama and his national-security team might have stepped out of a scene from Brecht’s “Arturo Ui”—rhymes with phooey, as the playwright notes—or more directly, Al Capone’s Chicago, Brecht’s intent in hinting at the political gangsterism attending fascism.

### 3.2 *The Lawyerly Mind: Conserving Essentials of Repressive Practice*

Those enraptured by the 2008 election hadn’t noticed yet the way Obama surrounded himself in photos with military brass. Here the writers begin the section, “Maintain My Options,” with what first appears as praise: “A phalanx of retired generals and admirals stood behind Mr. Obama on the second day of his presidency, providing martial cover as he signed several executive orders to make good on campaign pledges. Brutal interrogation techniques were banned, he declared. And the prison at Guantanamo Bay

would be closed.” So far, so good; one can taste the elation. Then, the writers bring us back to earth: “What the new president did not say was that the orders contained a few subtle loopholes. They reflected a still unfamiliar Barack Obama, a realist who, unlike some of his fervent supporters, *was never carried away by his own rhetoric*. Instead, he was already putting his lawyerly mind to carving out the maximum amount of maneuvering room to fight terrorism as he saw fit” (Italics, mine).

My criticism lies with the term “realist,” for that and his vaunted pragmatism are, rather, hardened ideology, realism and pragmatism placed in the service of “the maximum amount of maneuvering room” for more generalized *ends* than only fighting terrorism. (Even thusly, one detects, before anything is done, that assurances are subtly being conveyed to the military and intelligence communities no basic changes impend.) This lawyerly posture is still in the making, realism and pragmatism *means* to the realization of a generalized counterrevolutionary, and not only counterterrorist, political-structural framework. It is already made up of authoritarian premises of hierarchy, himself placed in the upper reaches, militarism, antiradicalism, and deference shown the supposed “prime movers” in business and finance. Realism and pragmatism because confined to means, places greater emphasis on tactics, rhetoric, the employment of drones, however important to policymaking, *also* a means, in achieving that world view.

Obama devoted his “maneuvering room” not to a dovish attempt at mitigating the harshness of counterterrorism, but to conserving essentials of going policy while seeming not to, as on the CIA practice of rendition. The Agency’s lead counsel, John Rizzo, feared the executive orders would prohibit it “from operating detention facilities” and close “black sites” where harsh interrogation took place. No, he was assured by Gregory Craig, the White House counsel; if the practice had to do with holding suspects for a short stay, then “a new definition of ‘detention facility’ was inserted, excluding places used to hold people ‘on a short-term, transitory basis.’” Becker and Shane: “Problem solved—and no messy public explanation damped Mr. Obama’s celebration.” Or as they write about Craig’s assurance, “the new president had no intention of ending rendition.” Cynicism has no shame, simple redefinitions of policy sufficing to conduct business as usual.

There are always loopholes, even though one thinks Obama has ended horrendous practices. Small details like this help to explain his closeness to the aforementioned communities of interest, a feeling which appears, espe-

cially with JSOC, and the military in general, to have been reciprocated. One lesson quickly to be drawn, but has not been, is, to know the president know the backstop, the array of advisers, in Obama's case, whom he draws into government. (Craig, while he lasted, is a good example, but also Rubin and Summers on the domestic side, Brennan on the international, and particularly Pentagon civilian personnel.)

On Guantanamo, there is more of the same, compromise of the stated position, the feigned reluctance disguising fundamental moderation he seeks all along: "Even before he was sworn in, Mr. Obama's advisers had warned him against taking a categorical position on what would be done with Guantanamo detainees. The deft insertion of some wiggle words in the president's order showed that the advice was followed." A different set of advisers—if such were possible in national-security circles—would have afforded him less wiggle room or made it unnecessary. These were *his* advisers. In the period since, there was no change of posture; at best, belligerent or confrontational internationalism has held sway.

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## Stirrings Toward Usurpation: Defying the Rule of Law

[From “maneuvering room” to “wiggle words,” we are making progress—even if the country is not—for now we begin to appreciate how much we have been flimflammed. Obama’s order provided that “some detainees would be transferred to prisons in other countries (despite the supposed prohibition, this meant proxy-torturing, thereby completing the original rendition policy), or released,” others would be “prosecuted—if ‘feasible’—in criminal courts,” and military commissions, which he ostensibly had opposed, “were not mentioned—*and thus not ruled out*” (Italics, mine). Becker and Shane’s last five words are analytically priceless in describing the dynamics of Executive overreach, as in what followed: “A few sharp-eyed observers inside and outside the government understood what the public did not. Without showing his hand, Mr. Obama had preserved three major policies—rendition, military commissions and *indefinite detention*—that have been targets of human rights groups since the 2001 terrorist attacks” (Italics, mine).

I italicize indefinite detention because the practice categorically violates the rule of law. It is repugnant to democratic government and human rights; its practitioners (here, Obama) forfeit all respect, as leaders or persons, to the decent regard of humankind. No amount of pleading about being at “war” with a stateless entity can overturn fundamental rights; in doing so one sinks to the same depraved level alleged to characterize the enemy. Obama is treading on—tearing up—sacred ground, not least habeas corpus rights and the safeguarding of the innocent in opposition to



tyranny that required centuries of sacrifice to achieve. (“Without showing his hand” perfectly illustrates the problem.)]

When he shifted from military commissions to civilian courts, with the requirement therein to read the suspect his rights, Obama again executed a deft maneuver. The suspect, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the one planning to detonate a bomb on the Detroit-bound airliner at Christmas 2009 and thought by the writers to have galvanized Obama into greater action, was questioned by the FBI for 50 minutes—without the required warning. The FBI “gained valuable intelligence,” which the Administration sought to use in trial. “Sensing vulnerability on both a practical and political level” [why not also a legal level?], he called in AG Holder to the White House to plan strategy on how to make the questioning admissible into evidence. They chose a 1984 case, *New York v. Quarles*, in which the Court “ruled that statements made by a suspect in response to urgent public safety questions ... could be introduced into evidence even if the suspect had *not* been advised of the right to remain silent” (Italics, mine).

The president and the attorney general found a way around, hence conspired to subvert, *Miranda*, questionable behavior for those charged with upholding justice and the rule of law. Obama asked Holder, “How far ... could Quarles be stretched?” Holder’s answer was that in terrorism cases, “the court would allow indefinite questioning on a fairly broad range of subjects.” The denouement: “Satisfied with the edgy new interpretation, Mr. Obama gave his blessing, Mr. Holder recalled.” Not a scene from *The Godfather*, but neither is it calculated to instill confidence in either government or the justice system, this kind of close-quarter defiance of legal principles and practice at the highest levels of Executive authority makes one suspicious of the bedrock of the Republic, as though it is shifting and slipping into quicksand.

## I DEMANDING A FREE HAND: REDEFINITION OF THE COMBATANT

Obama affords little ground for compromise; he gives nothing away. Only the liberal rhetorical flourish conceals his maneuvering. Hence, he is willing to transfer cases to civilian courts, yet on condition that the defendant’s *Miranda* rights have been whittled down. An important juridical rationale for moving trials from military commissions to civilian courts is to preserve *Miranda* rights, which are not applicable in the former. But,

this switching of jurisdictions is without meaning, knowing the protection of rights in the latter has been narrowed. Perhaps that is what is meant by “lawyerly,” but cunning or adroit will also do.

### 1.1 *“Capitalism in One Country”: America’s Hegemonic Will*

Becker and Shane don’t quite draw this connection between Miranda and civilian courts, although they do recognize the cheapening of the former; where they shine is on seeing the perhaps more significant connection: “That same mind-set would be brought to bear as the president intensified what would become a withering campaign to use unmanned aircraft to kill Qaeda terrorists.” All appears as forethought, building step-by-step to the expansion of Executive authority, thereby conferring on Obama a free hand to operate in other realms (both in foreign and domestic policy) as well.

There is a sequential or cumulative development of policy initiatives—here, two are especially relevant. First, drone warfare is used to widen the application of secrecy to other areas of national-security planning and execution (e.g., nuclear modernization); second, it is also used as leverage for intensifying the geopolitical framework of his predecessors (e.g., keeping an iron fist in international politics, whether as the confrontation with Russia and China or regime change in Central America), which serves to accelerate America’s further global aspirations. If need be, America would become the lone force committed to the stabilization of the world economic structure (a policy Wilson also identified with, but was too premature in achieving).

To invert and transform Stalin’s defense of “socialism in one country,” Obama, faced with a decentralized international system of rising powers, sought, in refutation of America’s possible destiny, to represent “capitalism in one country.” This signified a breaking out, the avoidance of decay, diminished performance, ultimate isolation, through the vigorous, that is, military, effort at forcible expansion. Asia appeared to Obama, with his Pacific-first strategy, increasingly the New Frontier of trade-investment-manufacturing opportunities. Success for this to happen is predicated on generalized intimidation, specific intervention, and where possible, surgical regime change. The drone is here likened to a multitasking instrument signaling the raw use of power to confirm America’s hegemonic will and assertiveness.

Policy takes on an inner momentum. It’s all about creating and acting on precedents to protect, and exempt from the rule of law, the drone

campaign as surface phenomenon, meanwhile both expanding the protection to capitalism itself and enlarging the area of exemption to ensure the weakening of the rule of law *in principle*. This last was necessarily to foster domestic economic concentration and prevent obstructions to a course of imperialism abroad. The drone was always a means, never an end. A monstrous flaunting of illegal, immoral national conduct, it could not be acknowledged as an end, moral or otherwise, and thus, better to ignore or play down its role in American foreign policy.

In fact, it was reprehensible, and for Obama and his national-security staff to enshroud it in secrecy reflects at least a spark of awareness, which changed nothing, of its nature. Its utility, probably not admitted except intuitively, was that it represented a defilement of international norms while contributing to the desensitization of those at home, assuming people even take the trouble to notice, toward assassination and the forward progress of military-commercial expansion. Thus, even for starters, drone warfare was the whole geopolitical framework in process of further elaboration. Hardly the groundwork for the policy of conducting just wars, it was also not what one expects from the president and his counterterrorism team.

Immediately after taking office, Obama “got word that the first strike under his administration had killed a number of innocent Pakistanis.” He demanded “to know how this happened,” and “in response to his concern, the C.I.A. downsized its munitions for more pinpoint strikes.” (Given the strikes from two directions that killed Awlaki, and the evidence of damage—see below—one has reason for skepticism.) Obama also insisted on personally deciding “whether to go ahead” when civilian casualties were possibly involved—again a step that is problematic in light of the large number of civilian deaths recorded in Pakistan.

### *1.2 Code for Geopolitical Framework: Posthumous Vindication*

Even in the best light, a presumed endeavor to safeguard civilian lives, a dark cloud appears: Obama’s “directive reinforced the need for caution ... but did not significantly change the program.” More basic, he juggled the numbers. It was Obama’s own definition of the combatant, which bears repeating here, that made a travesty of the civilian casualty count: “It was also because Mr. Obama embraced a disputed method for counting civilian casualties that did little to box him in. It in effect counts all military-age

males in a strike zone as combatants, according to several administration officials, unless there is explicit intelligence *posthumously* proving them innocent” (Italics, mine).

Yet one queries the reporters’ use of the term “embrace,” for Obama did not embrace so much as create the standard for determining civilian casualties. As stated, he did not want to “box” himself in, which meant, he wanted sufficient latitude to act with Executive discretion, that is, unrestrained and with impunity in the conduct of operations. That in itself speaks volumes about his potential disregard for international law *and* approaching closeness to the military and intelligence communities, for whom restrictions on drone warfare would be anathema. The proverbial box, from which he sought escape to pursue extrajudicial killings, was the law, the rule of law, ultimately, civilized conduct and democratic values.

In Obama’s redefinition of the combatant, the “strike zone” goes to the heart of targeted assassination. Its operational definition is where the signature strikes are most likely to occur—not of known, identifiable individuals, but any gathering of people, large or small, which the target authorization finds suspicious. Worse still, it includes deliberate strikes, as noted, at the funerals of victims and at the rescue efforts of first responders. And the “strike zone” is, because of collateral damage, most liable to the charge of war crimes, and therefore in need of legal exemption and political exoneration.

Obama combines “combatant” and “strike zone” in his redefinition of, now, counterterrorism itself. He adds to that the sarcasm and cynicism of the rectification formula for those wrongly murdered and those lumped into the sterile category of collateral damage. This is posthumous vindication for both, often the *same*. Together, he presents the argument for his not wanting to be boxed in. For a nation priding itself on the rule of law, the whole breaking-out mental-set, its clear association with usurpation, is a warning signal thus far unheeded by both political parties—a consensus of averting the gaze, shared by the public, of possible war crimes.

Obama’s associates do not see it that way. Becker and Shane: “This counting method may partly explain the official claims of extraordinarily low collateral deaths. In a speech last year Mr. Brennan, Mr. Obama’s trusted adviser, said that not a single noncombatant had been killed in a year of strikes.” Nor was he alone—the administration marches in lock step: “And in a recent interview, a senior administration official said that the number of civilians killed in drone strikes in Pakistan under Mr. Obama

was in the ‘single digits’—and that independent counts of scores or hundreds of civilian deaths [try 1350–2250 for starters] unwittingly draw on false propagandist claims by militants.” Long since, a proneness to authoritarianism in America, when it occurs, has been associated with a numbers game, here the minimization of innocents killed, under McCarthyism, an exaggeration of Communists in government (“I hold in my hand.”), in both cases, a poisoning of the political climate in pursuit of illegal or extra-legal ends.

It is enough to be labeled a combatant to ensure the promiscuous taking of life. This attitude is well within the ideological experience of America. During the Palmer Red Raids of the World War I period, the I.W.W. could serve as a stand-in for militant labor, political dissent, or even unconventional life-styles, and more recent and specific, as noted, the whole generation of McCarthyism was integral to the shaping of the Cold War. In the late 1940s–early 1950s, when I was growing up, the common refrain in response to radicalism, racial justice, dissent in general, was—analogue to today’s use of “combatant”—communist dupe, fellow traveler, or simply, Go back to Russia where you belong. The firing of academics was a gentler mode of response to, but on the same continuum with, the vaporization of the Enemy: hate, mistrust, fear, a ready-mix of thought and feeling in both contexts. (Similarly today, the same defensive mindset: if one is a Jewish critic of Israel one must be a self-hating Jew.)

None of this is off-topic, for the “senior administration official” betrays a willful blindness and desire to silence or humiliate critics of government policy, and also escape responsibility for the consequences of current policy, particularly the drone program, which so typifies how the program itself is conducted, its assumptions, and, above all, its leadership. A collective enemy is envisioned as a way of focusing fear, hatred, mistrust onto a scapegoat, the better to protect and purify government and capitalism alike from unacceptable social change. The amorphous target, its source, its nature, adds to the wish to vanquish, defeat, subdue the perceived threat. One former senior intelligence official, however, broke ranks (speaking anonymously): “‘It bothers me when they say there were seven guys, so they must all be militants. They count the corpses and they’re not really sure *who they are*’” (Italics, mine).

## 2 AN IDEOLOGUE MASKING AS A PRAGMATIST: PRESERVING THE MILITARY STATUS QUO

From combatant to Guantanamo is like traversing a polished floor, more trickery wrapped in pretend-ambiguity, the result further consolidation of Executive war-making powers and a counterrevolutionary stance in world affairs. If justice had the same structural-ideological impetus behind it that militarism in fact does, greater democratization of the polity would have been seen before now, and the nation's place in the global system would be more pacific and (in the good sense) internationally oriented.

### 2.1 *The Composite Enemy: Tracing the Path Backward*

Like the drone, Guantanamo provides a litmus test of US conduct and assumptions. Obama, four months into his term, promised, standing before the Constitution at National Archives, that he would close the prison. Time passed, nothing has happened. Republicans, who, under Bush, favored its closing, then regrouped and used “the issue to portray Mr. Obama as soft on terrorism.” One almost involuntarily wants to say, “soft on communism,” to complete the statement, so obvious is the mood, shared by both parties, and hence by the administration and its critics alike, that counterterrorism has become a surrogate for—and catering to the same need to create unity and consensus through hate for an enemy—anticommunism.

In this case, Guantanamo was lamely explained as, he missed his opportunity, and now it was too late for him for taking action. The writers see this as Obama's failure to anticipate opposition to the closing, so that he had not formulated a concrete plan in time. Instead, I conjecture that he favored its continuation from the start (what I meant by pretend-ambiguity), both as a symbol of American power and his own toughness against the reputed enemy. I say “reputed” because the wider perennial Enemies, Russia, China, and Third World social revolution, are first compositely organized and then distilled into one. All have become terrorists in the eyes of policymakers, from the standpoint of American national security; the grafting onto this historical-ideological base of counterterrorism makes the US response to it the more predictable and intelligible for that reason. As with the use of “combatant,” the ever-indispensable enemy keeps the wheels of progress turning.

America conveniently plays the role of Perennial Victim, as it does with its other perceived enemies, Russia, and so on, which makes it therefore easier to bank on the earlier—and I think still continuing—Cold War context to subsume counterterrorism into the psychodynamics of the anticommunism-mindset. Demonization trumps rationality. Government policy, from drone warfare to massive domestic surveillance, embodies a classic example of ideological creep in which measures either intensify the spread and threat of terrorism (as does drone warfare) or are extraneous and irrelevant to that threat (the use of terrorism to abridge civil liberties at home). Islamic jihadists constitute a present danger. That is undeniable; it should not be minimized.

But America's role in creating the jihadists' genesis, and converting that into a global menace, is never faced. There is something adventitious about the whole situation. I use "adventitious" advisedly, because terrorism appears inextricable from the geopolitical structure of world politics created in the half-century following the close of World War II. By the early nineties we see the igniting of social conflict whose roots go back to decades of Cold War confrontation that encroached upon and destabilized the periphery, the Arab world as well.

History is not strict recapitulation, but it is, or can be, continuity. The long-term ideological-psychological forces of ethnocentrism, possibly derived from unrestrained capitalism, with slavery and the pressing forward against Native Americans, and continuing later in the period of industrial violence and racial segregation, shaped the mentality of recent times. There has been an imputation of superior/inferior rankings, found in the dichotomy of in-group and out-group, from the earliest stages of American history. Add xenophobia to the ethnocentric mix, hence a basal fear of the stranger, and the ideological-political-cultural construct of Enemy in its historical permutations stands out clearly; the societal cement connecting racial discrimination, labor suppression, antiradicalism, now, counterterrorism, is one continuous flow of national-structural continuity.

This has had some bearing on the perception first of the Soviet Union and shortly after, China, accompanied by a Red Scare at home, which translated into the Korean War, Cuban Missile Crisis, and steady drumbeat toward war-preparation afterward. When I say anticommunism spawned counterterrorism, I recognize much has changed during the period of transformation, yet the pattern of intervention, as in Vietnam, and the constant factor of military spending, suggests the connective historical tissue that has led

America into embroilment with the Arab world. Had America taken a different tack after 1945 and not persisted from that point on in a course of hegemony, had it not been swept with anti-Left currents at home, one cannot know, but it is possible that neither anticommunism nor counterterrorism would have been much of an issue.

Today, as I note, terrorism *is* a threat, and it may be too late to normalize international politics and world relations, but present measures, including drone warfare, are not helping matters. Nor are the numerous US interventions, the global system of military bases, including that in Saudi Arabia (a motivating factor in bin Laden's rise and appeal). Emphasis on Special Ops, regime change, Great Powers' Confrontation, bilateral and regional alliance systems, a nation tense, quick to take offense, a pot smoldering with resentments, all of this, perhaps considered essential as tonic for nourishing the will to maintain global ascendance, bodes poorly for the settled arrangements making for peace and good will. More dots have to be connected to avoid a one-sided defensive position on America's part.

Previously, one could point to geostrategic and geopolitical concerns about a regularized supply of, and profits to be drawn from, oil as a principal source of international friction and growing tension. Yet sufficient accommodation and mutual advantage had been reached, not least via US oil companies' heavy investment, to define a paramount American interest often veiled in national-security terms, to warrant that thinking more than oil is at stake. The Cold War provides a flash of insight; not oil but global hegemony is at risk because of a declining American position in the world, to compensate for which more strident behavior, political, economic, military, and ideological, can be seen. Beyond intervention and global market penetration, we've seen a consistent record of hostile acts, practically all *volitional* in character, in reaction to world conditions unfavorable to continued unilateral American dominance.

Hence, the drone: it antedates Obama, but under his guidance there has been a manifold increase in its use and intensity. The weapon marks an underlying sense of desperation, its undisguised terroristic function and plain crudity. It emerges as a world-beater, giving consolation, satisfaction, not to say, legitimation, to the belief that the USA is engaged in a global defensive war to maintain its Way of Life. In the same way, on a lesser scale of policy, Obama appreciates the symbolic value of Guantanamo. He recognizes its disutility in America's global effort to appear as the guardian of democracy, yet persists in its retention for the power it connotes and the belligerence it displays in the face of world opinion. Indeed, the drone and



Guantanamo are interrelated. The ultimate phasing out of the latter will occur when pursuit of the armed drone program ensures that no more living “combatants” remain to be imprisoned, a confirmation of the take-no-prisoners philosophy and strategy.

Although the discussion of Guantanamo may seem far afield from drone warfare, our subject-matter here, it serves to illustrate a unified policy context within which alone drone warfare makes sense. Obama is not frivolous or scatter-brained; targeted assassination is not an *ad-hoc* procedure or solution, but integral to the geopolitical planning and strategy for the continuation of American power. As one circles the policy wagons, one finds Guantanamo popping up, as it were, in the conversation on national security, as though a gigantic war map dominated the Situation Room, strings tied pointing every which way as testimony to the many irons that the USA has in the fire, universal in scope.

We’ve seen that Obama’s seeming lack in policy determination on Guantanamo actually enables him to proceed on his own, validate his anti-terrorist/antiradical credentials, and thus, beyond terrorism, and in partial answer to Republican charges of weakness on that front, turns instead to laying the wider groundwork for the political sponsorship of and support for capitalism. This is done in ways large and small, whether fiscal, banking, environment, plus the whole gamut tucked under the canopy of privatization, which, transcending terrorism, helps to define his presidency.

The strength he shows on national-security issues, which leads to public, if not congressional, support for generalized policies of conservatism, covers a range of on issues, appearing liberal because having his and the Democrats’ support. Obama escapes criticism on his failure to have effective regulation on banking and finance, climate change, oil drilling, gun control, and the violation of civil liberties. His use of executive authority favors secrecy in government, widens the active and cooperative role of the CIA and JSOC in conducting paramilitary operations, and seeks to condition the public to accept a state of permanent war.

The drone program enhances Obama’s credibility on defense, which aura of patriotism in turn gives credibility to the program. That his opposition sees weakness, only testifies to how far Right the political spectrum has swung, gradually over time. Nothing appears to satisfy the Right, including many of his own supporters and the Democratic Party. This condition works well for him through endowing policies of war, intervention, and support of business with a Centrist reputation (and even Centrism has become widely regarded as an unacceptable tilt to the Left).

## 2.2 *Political-Military Expansion: Capitalist Preconditions*

The rightward spectrum shift, by including Democrats, has occurred at least partly because of Obama's lack of leadership on professedly progressive lines. Absent Democratic opposition, one notes a policy creep—deregulation, drones, and so on—of toxicity (from a radical standpoint) which governs the tone and substance of public discourse at every class level in society. His party's record goes largely unnoticed, facilitating still more the everyday acceptance of drone assassination as standard operating procedure when, as here, the nation is believed to be under threat by its enemies. Hunkering down, contesting charges of left-wing sympathies, the Democratic Party inflates the role of Obama as a wartime-leader-in-the-making. At the same time, his militarism is perceived as through gauze, militarist (by necessity), pacifist (by choice).

Obama does not have to consciously divert attention from the military, for the result of policy would be the same because his global strategy makes capitalist expansion inextricably linked to national security, the advance of either maximizing the effect of the other. This relieves notice on the latter so that it can become independent in the pursuit of hegemonic goals (for its own and capitalism's sake). Party disagreements notwithstanding, the *goals* of political economy are within the bipartisan consensus, only the rough edges sticking out. Public awareness, however, is less than adequate. Although the same consensus prevails on such diverse initiatives as trade pacts and nuclear modernization, a more-or-less excluded public is the rule, and if the public is informed, then only belatedly, of specifics. (It takes the cooperation of both parties to achieve the policy and attitude of non-transparency in government.)

Yet, even for the assistance and consequent favoritism shown capitalism, Obama seems peculiarly receptive to a concentration on the military as a self-contained context. This subordinates capitalism, in the process of determining priorities, as the prime consideration. The military-attraction appears abnormal. It is not the simple adulation implied in ceremonial observance, but the need for ego-strengthening realized through dependence on, and attachment to, power. Perhaps the idea of the armed forces represents the family he seems never to have had—easily dismissed cheap psychologizing except for the fact that he observingly requires reinforcement and sustenance to shore up a defensive fortress covering-up his utter human coldness.

This may be an artificial distinction because military power and capitalism are inseparable in his thinking and there is no reason for him to have to choose between them. Nevertheless, one finds a certain confusion or ambivalence here. Obama's fascination with, attraction to, and willingness to use, power—in its military, rather than its legislative, manifestations—can be seen in the intrinsic value it is accorded necessarily in his promotion of war, intervention, and regime change. The purpose may be to enhance the position of capitalism, but the latter means to that end have taken on a life of their own and, apparently, for their own sake, if the activities of the CIA and JSOC, other paramilitary operations, and the building of drone installations are any indication.

This is to say, Obama is embarked on a one-man crusade to modernize the military. Its most overt case is that undertaking the current downsizing of the nuclear arsenal contingent on its realizing greater lethality. Too, his China adventure is predicated on increased reliance on naval power in location (South China Sea) stimulating the forces of confrontation. Both have received little attention, though givens of policy, along with encouraging EU forces on the Russian border (further globalizing a counterrevolutionary posture having unilateral hegemonic intent).

In large, though, the future, as Obama and his advisers see it, appears to lie in paramilitary forces and operations, fusing counterrevolution and globalization via intervention, regime change, and, using drones as rationale, hopscotching around in search of terrorists in order to establish semi-permanent bases in strategic locations. Of this policy spread, I am inclined to think the Pacific-first strategy is closest to Obama's thinking, the drone for that reason particularly useful and important for its intimidatory presence. Also the geostrategic thrust to the Pacific has been accompanied by negotiated joint-maneuvers, military alliances, and synthesized international intelligence networks. In this light, capitalism is not an afterthought, but neither is it an exclusive preoccupation.

Conversely, to play devil's advocate, but also canvass an alternative possibility (which actually arrives at the same destination) one can speculate that the military-factor is a dodge. Obama has raised it into prominence in order to distract from strictly capitalist ambitions and goals. With the military an attractive sideshow, this would disguise the ongoing promotion of policies (both domestic and foreign, respectively, monopolistic, hegemonic) that favor capitalism's systemic development and expansion.

The conundrum, if it be that, is of America's own creation, and not just that of Obama or other recent political leadership, because capitalism has

supposed an active military presence since at least the Open Door policy of the late nineteenth century. Mahan would have been a perfect substitute for Brennan, particularly given Obama's Pacific-first strategy. Militarized US capitalism may not have really begun until Theodore Roosevelt's post-1900 Battleship Navy and systemically not brought to fruition until after World War II. The mere fact of inseparableness, capitalism and the military conjoined and in long historical association, leaves the question of honors for taking precedence moot.

The result is the same, capitalist militarization, or the militarization of capitalism. In either case this places the American formation on a par with, or, in unilateral fashion, above and beyond its capitalist rivals and/or peers, in the forthright pursuit of market and military supremacy. The US global role appears more assertive, further under constant strain, than certainly is necessary and desirable for an harmonious intra-capitalist world in peaceful relation with other ideological formations, socialist or communist. An inherent will to expansion and exclusivity, assuming the role of international capitalist leadership since the time of Wilson, has shaped policy, perhaps even under FDR. As part of that foreign-policy vision and framework, sufficient power was judged essential to maintain an independent course, at the same time resisting Left social-revolutionary governments and movements with an eye to their transformation or destruction.

As one contemplates the contours and thrust of American foreign policy, its embedment in the foundations of US capitalist development becomes crystal clear. It is as though, foremost, the identicalness of America and capitalism is confirmed by the historical record, so that systemic imperatives—absent any hint of determinism per se—shape decision-making within narrowly structural-ideological boundaries. A system is no longer a system, no longer able to reproduce its basic characteristics, unless its composite leadership, political, economic, and so on, are able to reinforce what is already the product of its historical-cultural internal developmental properties themselves created through human intervention.

From drone warfare to Obama's leadership are topics which follow the natural contours of discussion. Neither would be quite the same without the other: the drone, aided by Obama's commitment to its use, frequency, and need for secrecy (including the tabulation of victims), Obama, the ready means offered by the drone for mounting informal war (extrajudicial killings) on several fronts in several continents. The result is to confirm

America's global power and presumed steadiness of resolve (to hark back to Cold War ideology still very much present).

As noted, an open-sky's policy for drone assassination creates a dangerous precedent. The drone can be rendered ubiquitous, canceling national boundaries and striking terror as its principal effect on populations, especially via arbitrary targeting to achieve that effect. Given its transnational capabilities and frightening associations, the drone becomes a weapon of choice in which terror defines the salience of modern warfare.

### 3 THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE: PLACATION OF POWER GROUPS

I referred before to two men, Cameron Munter, who subsequently resigned as Ambassador to Pakistan, and Dennis Blair, who was *fired* as director of national intelligence, both worth a closer look in order to note the near-miniscule anti-drone position in the administration and its ultimate complexity. Munter, who, because he felt CIA strikes drove policy in that country, stated that "he didn't realize his main job was to kill people." Then we see the complexity of Munter's position set forth in Nicholas Schmidle's *New Yorker* article (November 26, 2012) describing it as more nuanced. A visiting professor at Columbia Law School, Munter "wants to set the record straight." His corrective: "Of course I knew part of my job was killing people." His 20-months assignment was a period of US-Pakistan tensions, obviously, the bin Laden killing, also a CIA contractor's killing of two Pakistanis (Munter worked to secure his release), and the US strafing of border posts, killing 24 Pakistani soldiers. Obama never apologized for the last of these, and throughout the period, largely responsible for the deterioration of relations, CIA drone strikes were relentless.

Given Munter's original statement, the US infringement of Pakistan's sovereignty, and the loss of life, one would have expected unqualified opposition to drones. Instead, "he distinguished three types of drone attacks," approving the killing of high-value targets ("I don't have a problem with that"), in case of "imminent threats" ("Those, too, are fairly uncontroversial, at least inside our government"), and only in the case of signature strikes did he demur. True, he was troubled, but drone attacks per se were not at issue; he invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter, "giv[ing] us the right to go after these people." The self-defense principle,

similar to Congress's authorization for the whole war, cuts a wide swath in permitting here offensive action.

Still, one takes what one can get. He called signature strikes “targeting based on behavior, rather than identity,” which sentiment alone would be enough to sour his relations with the CIA. In the law class, he added: “When you kill people and you don’t know who they are, what are you leaving yourself open to?” His bottom line was, he favored “judicious use of drones.” As for the rest, he deplored giving the CIA contractor/mercenary protection through diplomatic immunity. He also believed the CIA had disproportionate power in the government. Still, his qualified acceptance of the armed drone is troubling—the best one can hope for in an Obama administration (from which he resigned!). A perhaps odd postscript: “[U]pon returning to Washington Munter received a medal from the C.I.A., awarded to him by David Petraeus.”

Dennis Blair, whom we recall was the “retired admiral who began his naval service” during Vietnam, and who found White House discussions of “long-term strategy against Al Qaeda” focused narrowly on strikes, said, in words worth repeating: “The steady refrain in the White House was, ‘This is the only game in town—reminded me of body counts in Vietnam.’” The continuities in the American mindset are instructive, as though adversaries were always required, their interchangeability assumed. In the Becker-Shane piece, he also said that the “strike campaign was dangerously seductive,” and elaborated: “It is the politically advantageous thing to do—low cost, no U.S. casualties, gives the appearance of toughness.” In addition, “It plays well domestically, and it is unpopular only in other countries. Any damage it does to the national interest only shows up over the long run.” Given the Washington consensus on war, intervention, regime change, all characteristic of policy (the particular emphasis dependent on circumstances), it is not surprising that Blair was forced out of government.

Fired, resigned, in Blair’s case, there is a fine line between them. Mark Mazzetti, a seasoned *Times* national-security reporter, wrote an article in May 2010, “Facing a Rift, U.S. Spy Chief to Step Down,” in which he describes Blair as having had an “often tumultuous tenure as director of national intelligence,” which “was marked by frequent clashes with White House officials and other spy chiefs” in the intelligence community. Fired, if one reads between the lines: “The departure of Mr. Blair, a retired admiral, had been rumored for months, but was made official when President Obama called him Thursday and asked him to step down.” Blair deplored

body counts. His superiors, from Presidents Johnson through Bush II, and now Obama, with the exception of Carter, apparently did not. But more was involved, specifically, his running battle with the CIA, because the Agency sought to “cut down the size and power of the national intelligence director’s staff,” and therefore weaken any attempts at supervision over CIA policies and activities. Mazzetti’s comment is shrewd: “Mr. Blair’s departure could strengthen the hand of the C.I.A. operatives, who have bristled at directives from Mr. Blair’s office. In recent months, Mr. Blair has been outspoken about reining in the C.I.A.’s covert activities, citing their propensity to backfire and tarnish America’s image.”

One searches almost in vain for dissent in the Obama administration. It is barely visible, which points up the narrow range of acceptable opinion and policy, that which focused on a purported Centrism unifying domestic and foreign policy. Systemic requirements of advanced/mature capitalism take precedence over social-welfare measures at home, cooperation and peace abroad. Internationalism translates as US unilateral global leadership, complemented at home by the stabilization of the class system to ensure unimpeded business development assuming mega-proportions and the corresponding influence of finance and banking. Drone warfare, just as Obama himself, is symptomatic of the whole, military force the ultimate safeguard to continued political-economic expansion (as critical to obviating the structural-cultural trends toward capitalist decline).

This analysis appears problematic, in light of contemporary fractiousness in Washington among the political parties, at best, though, not fundamental disagreement but alternative ideological pathways to the same goal, hegemonic in inspiration abroad, hierarchical in structure at home. It is so peculiar that Obama, more than acknowledged conservative presidents, has succeeded in creating a *closed* system—for example, the inelastic boundaries of policy discussion—of government. Militarism has provided informal leverage in shaping a compliant populace, which is blind to a consolidating interpenetration, an activist foreign policy, decaying cities, degradation of the environment, all while the inner momentum of capitalist development encounters few if any obstacles (except those it creates for itself).

From an ideological perspective on the Right of the political-cultural spectrum, Obama deserves high marks for his stewardship of monopoly capital, market expansion, and war itself, as well as sublimating and/or subduing Left (real or potential) criticisms of his policies. However, he does not receive the deserved accolades, so far has the spectrum become

brittle in its rightward tilt. Even Centrism is not appreciated for subsuming intervention, monopolism, and surveillance, rendering them compatible with, if not indeed the modern core of, liberalism. No wonder he at times gives the impression of being underappreciated and unwanted. The game he is playing, coupled with a certain stubbornness, simply will not work when blatancy on behalf of conservative aims and purposes is preferable to subtlety to the same ends. Hence, because he won't acknowledge his role, and covers himself with liberal rhetoric to deceive his social base, he faces a primordial Republican party and general public (including many uncritical Democrats whom he helped to conservatize) unable to perceive his yeoman service on behalf of capitalism.

If John Maynard Keynes were somehow running for president, he would face the same thoughtless opposition, despite his avowed support of capitalism (though not current US foreign-policy implications deriving from that support). One might say that Obama is a replay of FDR and the New Deal, but nothing is farther from the truth. Keynes was many-sided; Roosevelt took his progressive implications and built upon them. For Obama, Keynes, if anything, is merely the conservation of capitalism, stripped of potentially creative welfare and employment programs of national reconstruction. For Republicans, capitalism is crystallized hierarchy (democratization in any form a species of communism). Especially on the regulatory framework, Obama is closer to Republicans than to Keynes *or* Roosevelt.

#### 4 A NEW THEATER OF WAR: CIA PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

The drone operations in Pakistan, with their high civilian casualties, and where the Agency had control over the program, is a classic example of “covert activities,” in need, Blair believed, of checks on its freedom of action. Opposing the CIA is a thankless task in any case, more so here because, whether or not Mazzetti's intention, one sees Obama's favoritism shown the CIA, his willingness to allow it to function as a loose cannon, and the cover he provides—even at the sacrifice of his national intelligence director—for it to conduct the drone program as it sees fit. The CIA becomes indistinguishable from armed drones in Obama's eyes, and hence, a vote of confidence for both. Mazzetti writes: “The administration has largely embraced the C.I.A. operations, especially the agency's



campaign to kill militants in Pakistan's tribal areas with *drone aircraft*" (Italics, mine).

For Blair, this is not a fight over bureaucratic turf, but over principle. All of the usual niceties were observed: he "praised intelligence operatives" that fateful Thursday, and Obama praised him. As is evident from his relationship to the president, Blair was not Brennan. Nor was he him on counterterrorism policy, claims of "just wars" by Brennan notwithstanding: "Officials said that Mr. Obama called Mr. Blair on Thursday to ask for his resignation, but that the two men had several discussions in person about the subject this week. Their relationship has been characterized as professional but not close, and some administration officials said Mr. Blair often felt left out of discussions about important security matters."

Independent thought is not wanted, nor sought, in the White House. America lost an honest public servant on the crowded altar of drone warfare, the CIA, and Brennan, presumably an "easy" decision again for Obama, just as in other areas in which public servants were cast out. Paul Volcker was marginalized from the start, although his good name served for a time as cover to shelter Obama from his failure to pursue financial regulation. Elizabeth Warren was similarly treated, so as not to evade the provision of consumer protection to a sorely put-upon populace.

Blair, Volcker, and Warren—the latter two are not irrelevant to the discussion of armed drones for targeted assassination because there is a pattern here. Obama placates power groups—military, banking, and industrial (perhaps in descending order)—which bask in the warmth of the National Security State, the militarization of culture and society, and a display of muscle, preferably in sinister, arbitrary, frightening ways. For Obama, America would not be America without the drone. Postscript: "Some intelligence experts and Republican lawmakers say they believe that the White House has tried to micromanage America's spy agencies, and there was a particularly tense relationship between Mr. Blair and John O. Brennan, the White House counterterrorism director."

As the scene shifts in importance from Pakistan to Yemen and Somalia, Blair no longer a policymaking factor, it is clear that the CIA has lost none of its influence. De Young, of the *Post*, writes in September 2011 ("Who is the Boss, CIA or the JSOC? Drones in Yemen") that now, "The Obama administration has significantly increased the frequency of drone strikes and other air attacks against the Al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen in recent

months amid rising concern about political collapse there.” My knowledge of Yemeni politics is limited; suffice it to say there is internal opposition to Saleh’s 33-year rule, the role of the CIA and JSOC being to attack the insurgent movement (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP) victorious in South Yemen, and which opposes him. The interest in this article lies in the broader mode of operations De Young reveals, notably, Administration assumptions about a new battleground, and the heavy-handed secrecy adopted surrounding the operations. Meanwhile, the Senate Intelligence Committee is proposing legislation that would tighten secrecy still more, severely limiting who would be allowed to speak about intelligence matters—further evidence of the crushing of government transparency.

In Pakistan, “the CIA has presidential authorization to launch drone strikes at will,” while each strike in Yemen and Somalia “requires White House approval,” according to senior officials, themselves “not authorized to discuss the matter on the record” but who could reveal that the “intended targets” were drawn from “an approved list of key members” of AQAP, “deemed by U.S. intelligence officials to be involved in planning attacks against the West.” Although local media reported strikes in Yemen and Somalia, “the administration has made no public acknowledgment of the escalated campaign, and officials who discussed the increase declined to provide numbers.” We learn, however, that AQAP has been designated the “more significant threat” to the USA than al-Qaeda in Pakistan and has established ties with Al-Shabab in Somalia, itself “under overhead surveillance for years.”

As noted above, a new theater of war, the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, has been opened, despite reservations of some (unnamed) officials about “the legal and moral justification for intervening in what, until recently, has been a largely domestic conflict.” The daily march of counterterrorism, often shrouded in secrecy, appears to *create* more enemies as it goes along. For example, splinter groups, more radicalized (in a fundamentalist/jihadist sense) than their progenitors, have provided a self-fulfilling prophesy fueling the American intent on a doctrine of permanent war. It is as though America craves terrorism as a means of energizing its own global ambitions and keeping its people receptive and on edge for what lay ahead.

One can speculate that these groups, grounded in local circumstances, took on an “anti-Western cause” because of the intervention, and otherwise did not pose a threat to the US homeland. De Young describes a local scene that could support such a view: “In the Yemini capital Sanaa,

thousands of anti-government protesters have been camping out in what is known as Change Square for several months, demanding an end to Saleh's rule. The camp has remained quiet for weeks, but Reuters, citing doctors, reported Saturday that soldiers opened fire near the camp overnight and wounded eight protesters .... As the political conflict drags on, concern has increased over insurgent expansion and future cooperation with whatever government emerges in Yemen."

Intervention often creates blowback, especially when an unpopular regime is shored up, as appears to be the case with the Saleh government. Perhaps a hands-off or sympathetic course would have obviated anti-American hostility. We see instead two points worth emphasis: Brennan's defense of war against suspected enemies, and Obama's dramatic escalation of the drone attacks in the region. One cannot emphasize enough what appears tautological, that intervention engenders blowback. The US role is invariably on the side of repression or seeks to undermine social movements of change, (usually interrelated phenomena).

## Echoes of the Cold War: A Strategy of Preemptive Strikes

Brennan, in remarks “prepared for delivery” at Harvard Law School, presented the administration’s standard defense of its actions regarding preemptive strikes, that “its legal authority to conduct such strikes, whether with fixed-wing planes, cruise missiles or drones, derives from the 2001 congressional resolution authorizing attacks against al-Qaeda and protection of the U.S. homeland, as well as the international law of self-defense.” In Brennan’s own words, “The United States does not view our authority to use military force against al-Qaeda as being *restricted solely* to ‘hot’ battlefields like Afghanistan. We reserve the right to take *unilateral action* if and when other governments are unwilling or unable to take the necessary actions themselves.” (Italics, mine) This self-defined permission to attack, applicable to lands not at war with the USA, and victims frequently unidentified, cuts a wide swath through the doctrine of “self-defense,” and the means chosen to implement the attack. It also illustrates what Brennan considers “just wars,” unilateral, self-defined as to cause, cold (where there is no war declaration) rather than “hot” battlefields, and so on.

What Brennan believes, Obama does; what Brennan does, Obama believes. Yemen is a particularly good example of this cross-fertilization of ideas and policies. For if not, all Obama had to do was, like Blair, issue Brennan his marching orders. As for escalation, De Young reports: “Until May, 2011 the first and only known drone strike in Yemen was launched by the CIA in 2002.” However, “as part of its stepped-up military cooperation with Yemen, the Obama administration has used manned aircraft

to strike at targets indicated by U.S. and Yemini military intelligence forces on the ground.” Then JSOC and CIA joint action beginning in May 2011 resulted in strikes against AQAP operatives—“the CIA [being] also tasked with expanding its Yemen operations, and the agency is building its own drone base in the region.” Obama pulls out all the stops. The presumed target is AQAP, but the objective condition is to maintain a dictator in power.

## I     CONTAINMENT RENEWED: POSTURE OF GLOBAL SUPREMACY

Counterterrorism is supposed to be *new*, a direct, necessary, swift, and wholly justified response to Islamic radicalism, 9/11 both symbolizing and actualizing an epochal change in US foreign and domestic policy. History has presumably turned a page; al-Qaeda and affiliates now have replaced communism in general, Russia and China in particular, as the significant adversary, threatening the Homeland, in world politics. No doctrine is readily at hand to legitimate the transformation and specify the threat, as was the case with George Kennan’s containment doctrine after World War II. Obama comes close, gathering the strands of policymaking since 9/11 into a reasonably coherent framework, which tilts from Russia and Eastern Europe to China and the Pacific, but that is still below the radar (despite extensive military preparations) or prioritized as of secondary importance compared with the concentration on terrorism itself.

Yet everything about the foregoing is wrong. There is a perfect correspondence between pre- and post-9/11. The original Cold War has neither been displaced nor put on the shelf in the minds of the Bush II and Obama administrations, themselves in splendid continuity, the more recent one a mere intensification of the former, both with respect to Russia and China (here Obama focusing more on Asia) and drone-warfare policy (Obama’s qualitative shift on numbers of strikes and proliferation of bases). Direction and quantity do not a qualitative change make; whether or not anticommunism is a tight fit with counterterrorism, the destination remains the same: supremacy over the Enemy du jour, leading to America’s universalization of its political-ideological-military dominance.

This does not mean that counterterrorism is entirely a surrogate for, still less a direct and exhaustive replacement of, anticommunism. In fact, quite the opposite is true. It is the convenient fusion of policy goals, under

the heading of national-security considerations, for America's claim to the self-defined right of unilateral action, as in Brennan's words above: "We [the US] reserve the right to take unilateral action if and when other governments are unwilling or unable to take the necessary actions themselves." This is an all-purpose pronouncement. It can apply to anticommunism, still adapted to Russia and China, as in organizing NATO forces on the Russian border, or to the display of air and naval power in the region of the South China Sea, in both cases deliberately stirring up agitation inclined toward further confrontation. It can also apply to counterterrorism, where drones are the ace-in-hand, and forward geostrategic positions, like Djibouti, the means of implementation. In other words, a close look at Obama administration actions and pronouncements yields a singular conclusion: an endeavor to cement a military-political-commercial posture of global supremacy, expectantly, on a permanent basis, with whatever the available means and opportunities at hand.

Every step by the CIA, JSOC, counterrevolutionary intervention in Africa and the Middle East, most recently (as of the time of writing), Yemen and Somalia and the battle with AQAP, serves to strengthen and reinforce the tenets of unilateralism and hegemony. Meanwhile the larger scene, including Pakistan and Afghanistan, continues the main policy outlines bridging the alleged 9/11 divide to reflect America's power and prestige internationally. The result is an amalgam of purpose wherein, literally, the sky's the limit. The putative switch in operations to drone warfare is not a switch, but the normal extension of expedient weaponry as an offshoot of the main-stem course of military policy and expansion.

### *1.1 A Crisis Mentality: Timeliness of Fallen-Domino Theory*

Obama is less an innovator in or architect of Grand Policy/Strategy here than a faithful disciple of American power tutored by national-security advisers, military and civilian, and influenced by Washington's political-ideological climate. His emotional ties to the vast reaches of power, and his actual expressed friendship for the intelligence and military communities, indicates as much. It doesn't take a mastermind to act or think as he does. Obama's submergence in the collective mindset of government-business interpenetration, not only of structure, but also increasingly of values, provides an acclimatizing experience to advanced policy thinking. Here militarism and capitalism become conjoined, if not yet fully inseparable

(though moving in that direction). This is sufficient background, when the predisposition—as now—is there, for the education of a president.

Each detail of drone warfare speaks to offensive capability, not defensive safeguarding of the Homeland. The gradually filling universe of military bases with drone-launching capacity acts to underscore the point. His two favorites, CIA and JSOC, poised, firmly in place, Obama must feel supremely confident about the ostensibly new setting for the further projection of military operations. Ideally, De Young reminds us, turf wars between military rivals over custody of the kill list would not arise: “It is not clear whether the unilateral strike authority the CIA has in Pakistan will be extended to Yemen. Administration officials have described the expanded drone campaign as utilizing a ‘mix of assets,’ and a senior military official said he knew of no plans or discussions ‘to change the nature of operations.’”

The drone, widely suitable to the different services and agencies, creates an opportunity for greater coordination if not unification of US military force. This is not De Young’s point, but it is already previewed by the CIA’s assignment of a paramilitary as well as intelligence function. She nevertheless concludes, with the words of the same official: “The new base doesn’t connote that [the CIA] will be in the lead. It offers better teamwork and collaboration between the agencies.” The drone, an agent of military fellowship, is something that has eluded the Pentagon since its establishment.

It would be of considerable moment if Yemen supplanted Russia and China as *sole* concern to the USA, the absurdity of which immediately comes to mind as one contemplates the intricacies of international politics. Even poor Yemen is installed in the Cold War vortex. There is the jockeying for power positions worldwide by the Major Powers, and even if that were not the case, the constant friction, conflicting alliance systems, overlay of ideological justifications, would still see, with respect to America, as now throughout, the insistence on a free hand for intervention and regime change.

What is most proclaimed to be defensive turns out to be wholly offensive in tactics and strategy. Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Yemen, it is as though policymakers labor under or are driven by the assumptions of the fallen-domino theory, not a relic of the late 1940s, but as timely today in characterizing planning and strategy. If Iraq goes, so goes the world, if Afghanistan goes, ditto Yemen; soon we’ll be fighting on the shores of

Long Island. Obama's escalation of drone attacks in Yemen captures the earlier atmosphere. We see a crisis mentality, itself, I would argue, manufactured for the occasion, just as six decades ago, for the long-term pursuit of national self-interest.

### 1.2 *Re-creation of Cold War: Relaxation of Targeting Rules*

Apropos of this, Adam Entous, Siobhan Gorman, and Julian Barnes, in an article entitled "U.S. Relaxes Drone Rules," in *The Wall Street Journal* (April 26, 2012), provide a perhaps unintended revelation of the program's features. By the relaxation of drone rules, one means their promiscuous application and the advantages thought therein to apply. For example, Obama's closeness to the CIA is facilitated. Expansion—beyond self-evident market imperialism—is also made practicable, here for purposes of intervention into the internal politics and policies of another country. Then too, the widening of target selection creates the need for base openings and proximity to further spheres of intended control, not to mention, because including the often nameless, establishing drones as an instrument of terror. With all of that in mind, use of drones helps promote the re-creation of Cold War fears of an imminent threat to the nation's peace and welfare. For why else conduct wars, unless this last is excuse, or plea for extenuating circumstances, as the rationale for aggressive intent and offensive operations? None of this figures in the reporters' concerns, but may be a useful introduction to their findings, the relaxation of drone rules of use and targeting.

The reporters write: "The Obama administration has given the Central Intelligence Agency and U.S. military [i.e., JSOC] *greater leeway* to target suspected al Qaeda militants in Yemen with drones, responding to worries a new haven is being established from which to mount attacks on the West" (Italics, mine). Oddly, the year before, Obama claimed he would tighten the reins on the CIA for indiscriminate targeting, euphemistically, mistakes—precisely the key demand of Dennis Blair's in the Situation Room, and largely responsible for his firing—which, that example in mind, suggests a promise the president apparently never intended to keep. Instead, "mistakes," that is, collateral damage, or bluntly, striking down the anonymous, became official policy, and not a mistake, but intentional in prosecuting the war: "The policy shift [focusing on AQAP], as described by senior U.S. officials, includes targeting fighters whose names aren't



known but who are deemed to be high-value terrorism targets or threats to the U.S.” As here, threats are impliedly if not invariably linked back to the USA: the falling-domino effect.

Yet I am puzzled, how can one whose name is not known be a high-value terrorism target or threat to America? In fairness, at least, officials, in reality, Obama, who signs on to the killings, claim to draw the line on how far down in the ranks to proceed, although in Pakistan drone attacks on foot soldiers, which created an eruption in relations between the two countries, makes one suspicious the order of restraint would be carried out in Yemen. The writers continue: “The White House stopped short of authorizing attacks on groups of lower-level foot soldiers who are battling the Yemini government, the officials said.” Counterterrorism, to this point, looks suspiciously like taking sides in a civil war, the USA supporting the regime in power. That aside for now, there are still the nameless, with Pakistan a guide to drone warfare: “The U.S. already authorizes drone strikes in Pakistan against those suspected of militant activities but who haven’t necessarily been identified by name.” To its credit, *The Wall Street Journal* makes mention nameless human beings are being targeted, although it doesn’t quite follow through on the insight.

## 2 BALANCING INTERESTS: IMPLICATIONS OF INTERVENTION

Drone warfare involves creating precedents. What happens in Pakistan can happen in Yemen. What happens in Yemen can happen anywhere else where US interests are perceived to be in danger. In short, America has reversed the direction of the falling-domino theory; whomever does the initiating calls the tune. This is one reason the borderless nature of drone attacks should be seen as alarming. In addition to blatant violations of international law and historical principles of jurisprudence, the drone can be serviceable in counterrevolution, whether in Latin America or other Third World contexts of possible social upheaval. The writers note the balancing act Obama and his team face in the execution of policy: Action has its worries, here, that “[t]he expansion of the drone campaign in Yemen” raises the problem for the White House of “balancing concerns about al Qaeda’s apparently growing foothold in southern Yemen against fears that greater CIA and military involvement could propel the U.S. into another regional conflict.” Washington is not weighing moral considerations, only what is and is not feasible.

Here the *Journal* does itself proud; no one else quite fleshes out the issue, in Yemen, and therefore the wider policy framework, of the implications of intervention. In showing a body of opinion calling for still greater intervention, it may have unwittingly emphasized the prospect of an inevitable blowback. “Some military and intelligence officials,” the reporters state, “privately complain that the White House is too cautious,” and hence, that “more-aggressive U.S. action is necessary” to fight AQAP’s “growing threat ... and to help the Yemeni government regain control of southern provinces where the group and its allies hold sway.” The alchemy of counterterrorism and resistance to popular forces (presumably both of which the *Journal* favors) is a prime stimulus to policymaking, although—the doubt raised—probably not to be accomplished by another land war.

The widely current aversion to the latter is, of course, what makes the drone so attractive, no boots on the ground a self-justifying *moral* formula. Admittedly, according to “[a]dvocates of expanding the scope of U.S. drone strikes in Yemen,” the killing of Awlaki the previous September also helped to strengthen AQAP recruitment. The concern, whether the issue be the rise of popular forces or the enlargement of suspected terrorist groups, is, have drone strikes proven counterproductive, and not only in Yemen but Pakistan as well? A perhaps still deeper issue is the American tendency to equate popular forces (opposed to governments the US favors) with suspected terrorist groups, placing policy squarely on behalf of established friendly regimes. This has been the pattern, even antedating the close of World War II, as in Greece, then throughout the Cold War and, principally, in Latin America. Intervention is a two-edged sword. At this point it has become difficult to distinguish between jihadists and popular support for change, largely because America confuses the two as mutually unacceptable, a deeply flawed geopolitical-ideological vision because underwriting acceptance of the doctrine of permanent war.

Yemen is not Pakistan. Yet the USA proceeds as though dealing with a single, unified, ubiquitous foe. This has been standard practice in American history, owing from the start to the absence of a variegated pattern of structural development. The result has been the genesis for a more purist, undiluted, non-dialectical mode of capitalism than found in Europe, where capitalist values and institutions had to be extricated from, and born out of the struggle with, feudalism. Absent that struggle, the historical carry-over of dissenting, antagonistic groups to provide historical impetus for *alternative* patterns of development and class alignments, US society

has become brittle and ideologically rigid, its power structure centered on, and free to implement, a constancy of assumptions (hegemonic, ethnocentric, expansionist), thus a political culture of monochromatic Exceptionalism, wary of all but itself.

### 3 A UNIFIED FOE: PSYCHODYNAMICS OF DEMONIZATION

In America the idea of a unified foe crystallized in the late nineteenth century, first on the domestic front, although in foreign policy the Monroe Doctrine had already furnished an indication of the wish to preserve America from unwanted ideas and draw closer within an hermitically enclosed political environment until ready to spring forward as a world power (still inscribing its own values on the global system). Plantation slavery also gave rise to systemic fear, even outside its precincts, of a unified foe on a subterranean level, until the Civil War finally destroyed its framework—without, however, impairment to racial discrimination as a national pastime in its aftermath to the present. (The ideological connection between the plantation-slavery historical experience and subsequent ethnocentrism and xenophobia contributing to mistrust of destabilization and/or democratic authority, would also be relevant here.)

Fear of a unified foe, however, takes on recognizable *ideological* form in the context of modern industrial society, oddly coinciding with an elaboration of racial segregation, in the generation that began with the railroad strikes of 1877. Here America witnessed a cumulative wave of industrial violence spanning the remainder of the nineteenth century—for example, Haymarket, Homestead, Pullman—met by concerted repression (state and federal militias, Pinkertons, Iron and Coal police, etc., often as instigators precipitating the violence). This experience was perhaps a logical or expected outcome of unimpeded capitalist development. Force was acceptable in the maintenance of order (again, plantation slavery a model to be nationally applied in constraining the actions and aspirations of working people), inscribing the idea and practice of antiradicalism on America's political-economic-cultural identity and psyche.

#### 3.1 “Broadening the Aperture”: A Species of Overreach

The Enemy, early on, appeared everywhere, as though a derivative fear of the affirmation of Exceptionalism, that which had to be consolidated in the face of jealous potential adversaries envious of America's natural

Innocence and goodness. For that matter, 1877 onward, the specific context for modern industrialism, had ample precedents from seventeenth-century Puritanism (transplanted to the New World) through the ideas justifying and legitimating the American Revolution. Here separation trumps freedom in the idealization of political struggle, leading to a Hamiltonian synthesis of national purpose.

Thus there are continuities, pre- and industrial in time, pointing toward a closed system of thinking with implications and consequences for erecting systemic boundaries favoring self-glorification of America and demonization of the Other. The hop, skip, and a jump from antiradicalism to anticommunism to counterterrorism has been without pause, and is presently intermixed. This helps to explain why, whether at home or abroad, the Enemy is construed and characterized as monolithic, embracing and giving cohesion to all supposed subversive forces.

This suggests the psychodynamics alluded to of ethnocentrism. Putative enemies, largely undifferentiated, have been demonized as the means of buttressing a stereotype, here an inclusive enemy. In more recent times, one finds a convergence, since World War I Era, on the communist, readily convertible, by way of the militant laborer, into the terrorist, having as their goals the destruction, morally and spiritually, for one, that and in addition physically, the other two, of the “homeland,” and therefore standing in contradistinction to freedom-loving Americans acting in defense of home and hearth.

The dichotomy, we—they, presumably unleashes democratic energies good against communists and terrorists alike (industrial labor now largely pacified after several post-1945 decades of either absorption or repression). In the present case, AQAP may well be terrorist-inspired, although the looseness with which the phrase “al-Qaeda *affiliate*” is applied to disparate groups, and to Awlaki’s case, too, makes one want firmer evidence of intent *and* execution. But distinguishing it from democratic currents, real and potential, appears beyond the imagination and will of American policymakers, civilian and military. Everything is a blur, the whole fiasco in the US response to the Arab Spring, fueled by the nation’s ideological rigidity and refusal to negotiate directly—for fear of seeming weak, or losing face—with those we declare to be our enemies.

9/11 happened. But rather than speculate on how it might operationally have been avoided through say greater interagency cooperation in the intelligence community, which leaves everything else the same, one must examine *precedent* conditions: the record of a long-term commitment to

intervention in the region, whether favoritism shown Israel, the location of military bases in Saudi Arabia, or designating the Middle East, in addition to oil, as epicenter for achieving global stabilization. The USA would be militarily positioned advantageously with respect to Russia, Europe, North Africa, essentially already the world posture of America over more than a half-century—oil, counterrevolution, regime change, leaving a heavy footprint on the international system. That renders America a live target in the minds of those protesting about a variety of discontents in their domestic societies.

Vulnerability comes with arrogance and losing the capacities for empathy toward human suffering and respect for human diversity. A nation truly democratic would not attract the hostility or attention of revolutionists, real or pretended; for no target would present itself to them. That may sound naive, that no matter the American global posture, conflict with Islamic jihadism was inevitable—a position I cannot accept. Civil wars in the Muslim world were historically ready to break out for several decades; whatever the outcome, were they allowed to proceed, whether repression or democratization, American non-interference may have averted 9/11, terrorist acts in Europe, and presumed threats to America.

In the *Journal* article, the writers capture the muddle of Yemini politics and the US involvement in attempting to shape the outcome. They describe the political situation: “The Islamists capitalized on last year’s unrest,” which deposed Saleh and, according to American intelligence, “created a security vacuum.” This allowed “Islamists allied with AQAP [to] operate freely in the southern provinces” and create “the potential for a regional haven” there. Havens, also like the one in Pakistan, cannot be tolerated, as they are the arena for training and re-grouping. One US official, speaking anonymously, did connect dissident and terrorist purposes, but as rooted in the same group (implying there *may* have been more to terrorism than striking against America; perhaps, withdrawing support from an unpopular leader *may* have removed AQAP’s hostility toward the USA): “AQAP’s antigovernment insurgency and its terrorist plotting against the West are two sides of the same coin.”

Whether or not the official connected dissident and terrorist purposes, “antigovernment insurgency” is a force to be reckoned—and worked—with as an independent dynamic of protest unfortunately precluded from the American foreign-policy paradigm. Protest need not embellish “terrorist plotting,” which could have been neutralized or eliminated if

America did not habitually back the wrong horse. Democratization, not demonization, can be a winning card, as stirrings which informed the Arab Spring are making clear.

Drone attacks hardly invite popular approval. The reporters note that the “program is controversial in Yemen, where many opposition leaders and intelligence officials believe the strikes have given al Qaeda and its allies a powerful recruiting tool.” So much so, that “[t]he Yemeni government has taken public credit for some attacks that are actually American,” presumably to shield the USA from public obloquy. In the negotiations for expanding the program, the USA pressed forward “amid the political instability of Yemen’s anti-regime uprising,” and gained the approval of the new president. The USA then “applied considerable pressure to step up the program,” while the Yemenis, perhaps surprisingly, expressed reservations, “fearing what one [Yemeni official] called an ‘out-of-control’ drone program like the U.S. campaign in Pakistan.” As one asked, “Every Yemeni is armed. So how can they differentiate between suspected militants and armed Yemenis?”

Protests about care in targeting were met by the usual US administration assurances that “precautions to avoid civilian casualties” were always taken. (Here think Awlaki’s young son, and Awlaki himself, neither of whom enjoyed the right of due process of law.) In justifying the program, “U.S. counterterrorism officials said they are currently tracking several direct threats to the U.S. connected to AQAP.” However, they “wouldn’t provide further details because that information is classified.” And here, current tracking opens to view a step-by-step process of expanding the mission, “an interagency decision ... based on deliberations about the growing threat from AQAP and concerns about the safe haven.”

In the words of one official, the White House is “*broadening the aperture*” for CIA and JSOC strikes (Italics, mine). The target area has been authoritatively expanded. The concept of “broadening the aperture” has to be savored for its revelation of the American mindset with respect to foreign policy in general, and drone warfare (as part of the confrontation with the Islamic world) in particular—both a species of unwise overreach. In addition, there is the original framework of the Cold War, superseded or not at present, with Russia and China. Global alliances may be in a state of protean formation for the future.

Broadening the aperture is a superlative mental construct for highlighting the psychodynamics of indifference to human life. The individual inhabits a free-fire zone under the microscope of the drone operator, and

behind him/her all the way up the chain of command to the president, who personally selects the target. What, then, of the psychodynamics involved, desensitization as per my earlier non-technical discussion?

### 3.2 *Confidence-Building: Capitalism/Military Power, a Symbiotic Relationship*

Here (again non-technical) I turn to Herbert Marcuse for preliminary guidance; his *Reason and Revolution*, *Eros and Civilization*, and *One-Dimensional Man* are particularly helpful to an understanding of the commodification rampant throughout the economic and cultural life of society and the objectification of human sensibility reaching down to the individual's very thought processes. I began with Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, which, with the foregoing, helps to fix the context for drone warfare. Nothing about the drone should be taken for granted, including why its existence in the first place.

Our concern is a series of questions: Why the drone? Why the anesthetizing of the American conscience and consciousness to its use, including the bloodless phrase, collateral damage, wherein a politicized vocabulary matches the dehumanizing consequences of societal actions? And what is the role of leadership in making the drone a centerpiece of present geopolitical thinking and military planning? Marcuse (recall his *AHR* review of Lord Acton's writings) said that a society's worst features most reveal its inner nature because they "uncover the deepest layer of the whole system, the structure which holds it together, the essential condition for the efficiency of its political and economic organization." Marx might have said, *surplus value*, but we have other fish to fry.

The drone is a somewhat crude symbolization, a visible sign, for what remains partially invisible or concealed, the need for US global political and economic dominance, as the confidence-building means for assuring its national security—and patently, for assuring the security of its political economy. Confidence-building refers to ideological reinforcement, that is, the cumulative historical experience over the centuries (the equation of capitalism and America). Moreover, political-economic security and national security go hand-in-hand, so that on political economy reference is made, among other things, to trade supremacy, control over a disproportionate share of the world's natural resources, and the suppression of alternative pathways to modernization and economic growth. The entire social formation no longer rests on capitalism alone, but in symbiotic relationship

with military power, or more accurately, since symbiosis refers to intimate association or close union of dissimilar entities, we must go the further step, systemic integration of the two, capitalism and the military.

Poor unappreciated drone: it is left standing on top of the analytical pile, when in reality its value lies in symbolizing the militarization of capitalism and the imperatives for continued stimulation and growth. Unlike the nuclear arsenal, it is not an exhaustive or final solution to ensure hegemony. Yet, in the real world, where nations clash and survival is on everyone's mind, the blood spat has more utility than the mushroom cloud, drone warfare being thinkable, doable, still able to communicate terror and fear *sans* ultimate reprisal.

If the drone symbolizes American capitalist power, it also does service, through a perhaps tortuous ideological corridor, for antiradicalism. This is not because radicals in America object to its use; to begin with, there are few radicals any longer, and their minds seem wrapped around cultural issues, neither capitalism nor foreign policy among their interests or defining their protest-orientation. Rather, one finds counterterrorism a new variant of, or stand-in for, antiradicalism, which allows the drone going from *a* to *b* to transfer the fear of the terrorist to be the fear of the radical. This generalized fear also works from radical to terrorist, the reciprocal flow of ethnocentrism and xenophobia in American society—a stigmatization of radicalism going back at least to the Molly Maguires and the IWW, and further back still to the late eighteenth–early nineteenth centuries, from seamen in the Revolution to workingmen's parties in Jackson's time.

Counterterrorism combines with antiradicalism in the American psyche at large, and especially among policymakers, even though the social forces and movements being opposed represent a potpourri of syncretic elements historically and frequently at odds with each other or simply separable in genesis and location. That, of course, doesn't matter; one must speak of the psychological totalism of fear, spread diffusely, as its anxiety-producing, impelling force. To reach this historical mode of character formation requires the homogeneousness of political culture, repression physical or mental, the closure of ideological boundaries, being the flip-side of conformity—in America, blocks of epochs readily definable in that way, such as suppression of labor in the late nineteenth century, McCarthyism, as part of a generalized conservatizing of the body politic, in the mid-twentieth century.



## 4 MAGICAL POWERS OF THE DRONE: OBAMA'S SIGNATURE WEAPON

Robert Jay Lifton's *Thought Control and the Psychology of Totalism* uses the terms differently, with the Chinese practice of brain-washing, "a tendency toward all-or-nothing emotional alignments," presenting a new identity of one's "reformed" side. Come to think of it, that is also the goal of American conformism, the *summum bonum* of Exceptionalism if not advanced capitalism itself, a consistent theme or strand of antiradicalism readily translatable into all manner of fears and dislikes. Exceptionalism and ethnocentrism are hand-maidens; when their mutual bonding weakens or faces external pressures of a discomfiting kind, their mutual and reciprocal militarization, through the powers of the State, is called into play.

If the drone were other than an instrument of terror, it would not be attended to, artillery, and so on, being sufficient to the task of localized destruction. But the drone for Obama appears to have magical powers; it personalizes death, death as obliteration, what no other instrument (save nuclear) presently accomplishes. And for the victim, it personalizes death to the thousandth power, breaking the will to resist, compelling submission to the application of piteous strength (in line with the American military strategy of overkill). The president's proclivity to escalation, as with drone assassination, bears out this attraction to the totalism-dimension of warfare—from naval power in the Pacific to paramilitary forces globally—and the necessity of bending the Enemy to one's will (i.e., *his* will and the nation's will). Sadistic, not as sexual perversion, but delight in cruelty, perhaps best describes this mindset, promoting human vaporization its telling feature.

### 4.1 *Instrument of Collective Punishment: The Generic Enemy/Outsider*

In the American political imagination, there is behind every tree a terrorist *cum* radical, or *qua* radical—in either case, conferring license on the USA to kill in the name of national security. This is never done in the name of trade, investment, resources, or prestige, for its own sake or to overpower others. Conversely, behind the same universal tree stands the radical *cum* terrorist or *qua* terrorist. The identity of the two appears mandatory to reinforce the self-righteous expression of American Exceptionalism.

Neither one, terrorist or radical, is wanted, while confusing the two, possibly deliberate, is convenient in eliminating both.

Exceptionalism is per se ethnocentric, then, because it refers to standing apart, often with the implication of *superior*, a social-structural dichotomization of authority, power, and human life, generally (though not admitted) on class lines. The initial radicalism-designation was essential for differentiating capitalism from its critics. It draws supporters of the former together as the proverbial in-group, while allowing for the punitive treatment of the latter, critics/radicals as the out-group, unacceptable to, and to be ridden from the midst of, the decent *folk*. It is no historical coincidence that Nazism had significant impetus from antiradicalism, this as a crucial step toward the purification of the remainder, an elaborate ideology of the folk.

This describes the context for giving the drone importance and legitimacy. It helps account for its acceptance by the American public. "Hit lists," assassination, we expect such tactics from gangsters and drug lords, never, however, from the military, that is, the legitimated source for the use of force. Hit lists and assassination, authorized by an American president, closeted with his national security advisers, conjures up the vision of the Nation in peril, the measures therefore purely defensive, obligatory (for honor and survival), brave, and commendable.

The sinister nature of the drone is neutralized, elevated in fact to the status of an absolute moral good. This is a perhaps unprecedented example of covert salesmanship (the product, patriotism, the outcome, a disposition toward war, or just short of that, a justified preeminence to pursue with impunity goals presumably shared by all). It is a propagandistic *coup de theatre*. The situation is tolerated, rather than labeled a war crime, because each of the targets, now fused as one, is rendered despicable, unworthy of legal protection, the pariah, worthy instead, in this case, of instant death, without warning or due process or, in many cases, even proper identification of the victim. Terror becomes a principal weapon of counterterrorism.

Demonization is rampant when democratization is absent. Drone warfare is the military-ideological instrument of collective punishment. It could not be otherwise, knowingly so, given the limitations of targeting, and near-inevitable resulting collateral damage. Add to collective punishment its psychological accompaniment, collective demonization, which ensures that the unidentified still have received their just desserts, a generic Enemy being essential to salve the war-criminal's conscience (assuming it

exists). Symbol and use become combined in the drone when one views its function in practice. Its nominal purpose is the expeditious tracking and killing of individuals held to be terrorists, its larger purpose, to strike fear into the lives of whole communities, purely destructive in intent and execution.

Numerous reports attest to the imprecise or malicious character of target selection. Individuals are killed in the company of family and friends, who themselves suffer the same fate. Funerals are a favorite target (when the victim is buried, the reasoning goes, those in attendance *must* be like-minded, i.e., terrorists, and subject to the same penalty), and so on. With the drone, there is no shading: death, not capture; what is left, according to officials, is a blood spat. Symbolism is invested in the drone's operations because their location, numbers, and destructiveness have been largely enshrouded in secrecy, and the honest accounting of victims, especially, collateral damage, has not been forthcoming, nor apologies offered.

#### 4.2 *A Nuclear Weapon Writ Small: Gradations of Force*

For these reasons, the drone has been endowed with an aura of mystery, strength, and, thought highly positive, to be faintly sinister or evil. The strategy of the drone attacks reminds one of the standard Nazi tactic of taking hostages in retaliation for the acts of a single individual, then executing them, the hostages often representing randomized killings. In the eyewitness report of one such drone incident, a small group had gathered to help a man change a tire, any gathering considered fair game for reigning down death from the skies. People in the affected areas literally fear for their lives and are afraid even to go outdoors.

Throughout the history of warfare, collateral damage has been present, but now, in modern warfare, it has been raised to a new principle, rendered more cynical, ugly, inhumane, and for the victims more horrifying. The drone, because of the nature of the weapon, its means of delivery (a bureaucrat or technician, sitting comfortably a distance away, relying on skimpy if not faulty intelligence, pressing the button), and the authorization for its use coming from the highest levels of government, suggests ultimate disconnection from the murderous deed. It is very like, on a smaller scale, employing the use of nuclear bombs.

I earlier referred to Emerson's brilliant, enigmatic aphorism, "The ocean is a large drop; a drop is a small ocean," an entry from his *Journal*, June 3, 1836. His concern is to show the relation between the universal

and the particular, that they are reciprocal (and that soul and matter are coterminous); but even there, thrusting forward a common thread he invites me to suggest the analogy between the drone and the nuclear weapon. Both are instruments of death, and in their usage merely, as viewed by the victims, gradations in the use of force, either one being total in its destruction. Thus to revert to the aphorism, in which the relation between macrocosm (nuclear weapon) and microcosm (drone) is stated, one can say, the nuclear weapon is a large drone, the drone a small nuclear weapon. The imagery is frightening. It calls attention to a continuum of lethality, the drone being on a slippery slope of callous murder, with *no* attenuating circumstances or mitigating features. We are dealing with war criminals.

## Epilogue: Threads Left Unexplored: Objectification and Bureaucratization

Actually, the foregoing connection is not entirely fortuitous. Tying together drone and nuclear weapon is an attitudinal set which stems from the earlier nuclear weapons threat. America was rightly terrified by the initial Atomic Era, from Hiroshima to the Cuban Missile Crisis (and precedent Nazi buzz bombs reigning down on England). The period is epitomized by Herman Kahn's macabre, callous writings and the military applications of game theory, so that a score of years later, habituated, perhaps numbed, to a popularly conceptualized Armageddon, the USA experienced what gradually came about as the normalization of the unthinkable. Drone warfare can be viewed as a direct projection from the earlier, formative, political-scientific context, except for one thing: the ghoulish twenty-first-century addition, assassination and collateral damage.

Civilian casualties, as noted, are not new; perhaps the Bush–Obama administrations simply reproduce, with new terms and cosmetic changes, what has been centuries-old human fate. Yet, that is not grounds for shrugging one's shoulders and turning away. The pattern has been lies, playing with statistics, underestimating deaths, classifying as militants all males in a certain (wide) age group, the cover-ups, then more, to cover up the cover-ups, and the continued lies. Like Watergate, the cover-up may be as big as the story.

This time is more consequential, for at stake is fundamental policy in international politics. Patterns are notorious for being more than themselves; in this case, a configuration which possesses coherence and internal consistency, interrelationships a defining characteristic. The drone is by no

means the culmination of policy; if anything, it sets the stage, a plateau, for continued development. When I note the normalization of the unthinkable I recognize, as surely does the reader, that, rather than a culmination, it may be the *tip* of the iceberg, whether nuclear war or a fascistic form of government and society.

## I FROM NASCENT TO UNRESTRAINED BOURGEOISIE: LACK OF VARIEGATED DEVELOPMENT

Obviously the critical reader would say, why fascist, why not communist? In America, unlike Russia and China (here Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* is instructive on comparative systems), the historical circumstances were never ripe for communism, that is, the absence of feudalism, a weak bourgeoisie, and the significant role of revolution for skipping over the capitalist stage and moving directly to socialism/communism. Instead (with Hartz's *Liberal Tradition in America*), capitalism filled out the American ideological universe; as though a fragment of the whole of Europe, America's revolution, already capitalistic, confirmed that the nation would feature a nascent bourgeoisie becoming an unrestrained bourgeoisie which experienced unrelieved capitalist growth, particularly with the abolition of slavery. But even slavery in America was less a stage or form of feudalism than itself capitalistically organized in pre-modern form, signaling the clearing away of remaining systemic obstacles to capitalism in absolute or purist terms.

Returning to the present, one finds capitalism so ideologically entrenched in the American social system, indeed, identical with it, that alternative modes of historical development, or even prospects in that direction, have no structural foundation from which to continue building. And with absolutism, and by definition, the lack of variegation, the tendency toward rigidification, both of structure and ideology, has followed. I place variegated systemic internal properties high on my list of political-economic-cultural formations predisposed to democratic government and polity because opening historical and structural opportunities for unrestricted development according to the people's wishes and creative powers. The life-flow of criticism and dissent has not coagulated forcing a clamping down on the range of opinion and action. Systemic variegation (that which overdetermined capitalism, as in America, is *not*), is the enemy of ethnocentrism and the National Security State alike, and all that which it entails.

This (overdetermined capitalism) need not fulfill a classic Marxian paradigm; Keynes, among others, has helped to prevent breakdown, collapse, revolution, and hence, greater historical longevity and staying power than Marx had envisioned or hoped. Yet, as everything from intra-capitalist rivalry on the international scene, to widespread poverty, intensive wealth concentration, crumbling infrastructure, on the domestic, capitalism is not out of the woods, and may never attain the goals its proponents fervently believe possible—unless the goals themselves, led by inequality, they find desirable and useful to the system’s development and stability.

### *1.1 Politicization of Modernity: A Bridge to Liberalism*

And in the present, the pattern itself is inculpatory. Lies, underestimations of casualties, and cover-ups are mere surface phenomena, evidenced by the fact that these practices of grazing the truth had to be resorted to in the first place. They imply the existence of anterior, hidden, darker objectives in the minds if not on the table of policymakers—again, the veering toward further confrontation if not war, absent a vigorous political process and public discussion. Secrecy is more than itself, a nervous mannerism bespeaking style of leadership. It becomes life-threatening, if not to the nation, then to democracy within the nation. Secrecy is the promise of presumptive evidence of war-guilt in foreign affairs, felonious conduct in domestic.

This brings us to Obama and Brennan, the latter in position to coordinate all policy options and information, the former, predisposed to redefining the military paradigm based on advanced technology. Obama represents the politicization of modernity, wherein modernity, inscribed in modern warfare, forms a bridge to liberalism—innovation, associated with and claimed by the amorphous and presumed Left—and liberalism to humaneness, to an unsophisticated public in America. Why liberalism derives prestige from modernity is plain silly, as though the supposed opposition to the status quo carries moral license to convert corporatism to democratic ends while titillating the masses with progressive-sounding promises and provisions.

Although false consciousness draws no distinction between political parties, liberals have been particularly adept at ringing its charges, a sure-fire way of selling war, corporate deregulation, massive surveillance as verifiably progressive. Obama rides the wave of this deception, turning on their head the law, social justice, even racial equality, as war, intervention,

the increasingly *unequal* distribution of wealth make a mockery of the democratic process. Hence, we see that moral conscience is abandoned in the unapologetic attacks on funerals and first responders. Target selection = nihilism; liberalism = a less than frank acknowledgment of capitalist principles of ownership, invidious societal rankings, a tendency toward ethnocentrism based on exclusion of others in the acquisition and enjoyment of property.

The drone, especially, targeted assassination, carries the redefined military paradigm beyond symbolization into the visible world of continued war atrocities through interventions, regime change, special operations forces, advanced technological weaponry providing greater lethality, all done at the expense of traditional modes of fighting with massive land and naval forces. Although these last will neither disappear nor even be neglected, we find something new, as though a platform had been constructed for pressing the demand for continued hegemony by means of wedding the modern and traditional, grafting the first on the second, to shift toward paramilitary operations without compromising the heavy industrial-military base.

### 1.2 *Traditionalizing Modernity: Accommodation to International Law*

The footprint wears sandals, boots on the ground when all else fails—as meanwhile, air power delivers shock and awe forays (pillage quantitatively greater than drone attacks, but their useful complement when needed). Modernity, however, falls under the category of *means*; weaponry offers a menu of options to suit all occasions, but only enlarges rather than revises traditional conduct and policies. The *ends*, traditional geopolitical aims, remain the same—for example, increasing trade-and-investment opportunities, establishing/maintaining a global ring of military bases, and arrogating to itself the right to stabilize world power-relations and turn them to America's advantage. A good example of this is the Pacific-first repositioning of US foreign policy in order to encircle, contain the influence of, and realize military superiority over China.

No longer does one set of policies fit all. Perhaps it never did, but Obama has been skillful in blending traditional (China) and modern (multi-continental counterterrorism via drone warfare) policymaking. This has not been achieved by himself alone, of course. The national-security establishment is a Washington growth industry being drawn from



military to think tank to numerous government agencies, sharing on the whole a common vision. The thrust of foreign policy is to energize and maximize the power of traditional forces by means of more mobile, elastic, and secretive operations.

The effect is indispensable for tunneling underneath the restraints of international law. This innovative, informal form of warfare, supposes war-criminality. It is hardly harmless, like a species of victimless crime; rather, to divest the social safety net of its ameliorative and welfare possibilities, through massive defense spending, is an example of legitimated violence as practiced by government on its people. Also, being aggressive in intent, extralegal in execution, formidable in destructive results, this mode of warfare attempts to rewrite the book on imperialism using a selective mix of strategies and tactics in the hopes of confusing the world community. Drones by themselves cannot accomplish everything. They are an announcement of the ruthless use of power.

The drone, symbol and implementer of national policy and imperialist aspirations, is the ideal *modus operandi* for waging the war on terror because it itself is an agency of terror. The war on terror is designed to kill individuals who have been designated real, supposed, or potential terrorists, the spirit behind which is to inspire fear and dread—an individualized version of shock-and-awe—in populations deemed hostile to American interests. Its technological aura implicitly equates with modernity, a circuitous rationale of sharing in liberalism and progress, which renders it Obama's weapon of choice for going after individual terrorists, a choice having long-term policy implications more or less consciously understood.

Its continuing use through constantly adding new names to the “kill list” has sought to bind future administrations to the drone, therefore conceptualizing, creating the context for, and the commitment to a state of permanent war. Using the drone as a new forward point in the integration of counterterrorism with traditional goals largely imperialist in character has the effect of drawing on widespread emotional support for the former to obscure even the existence of the latter. This property or function of obfuscation as to Greater Policy makes the drone essential, beyond the needs of counterterrorism, if America is to be America, its inner dynamic and structural momentum as an expansionist power otherwise standing out too visibly for comfort. Yet, timidity of self-avowal and expression is falling away; secrecy remains, but the virtues of force are well-advertised.

## 2 PROJECTION OF CAPITALISM, NEGATION OF RADICALISM: SYSTEMIC PRESERVATION

Obama represents the *new* (or does he?), yet paradoxically he traces directly back to Woodrow Wilson on both domestic and foreign policy. Centrism, the reputed course of Wilsonian policy, assisted by a deep coloration of idealism, is actually a formative context for corporatism. This refers not simply to large corporations which enjoyed the protection of his Administration, but the structural fruition, via the Federal Reserve System, Federal Trade Commission, and specific legislative gains to business, realized by means of government-business interpenetration. This framework for the stabilization of mature capitalism had both domestic- and foreign-policy consequences which are recapitulated and updated (when necessary) by Obama.

### 2.1 *Functional Equivalents: Internationalism (Wilson), Counterrevolution (Obama)*

These are but a few of the intersecting points defining their endeavor of projecting American capitalist development onto the world scene, while also attacking and negating radicalism, at home and abroad, as—in their respective stages of capitalism—a continuous act of systemic preservation: Wilson’s witch-hunt of radicals, Obama’s NSC program of massive surveillance; Wilson’s intervention in the Russian Revolution, Obama’s endemic interventionism extended by a worldwide network of military bases; their similarities on the meaning of internationalism as counterrevolution and regime change; a tendency in both toward unilateralism masking as free-market ideology; regulation in the service, at bottom, of deregulation; each president solicitous of banking interests, and both equally felicitous in mouthing platitudes of democracy.

Wilson did not have al-Qaeda to contend with, but a functional equivalent for him would have been the Wobblies. They were presumed sworn enemies of civilization that had to be, along with other evidences of communism and anarcho-syndicalism, imprisoned, possibly, in his mind’s eye, liquidated, so strong his despicement of the Far Left. He was unflinching in his assertion of righteousness and unwillingness to brook criticism. Obama, whom one does not associate with Wilson, shares with him reference points of policy and character. Notably, their persistent underlying antiradicalism is saddled to a personality structure

of ego-aggrandizement and certitude, masked by the appearance of reason and humility.

This raises for us the intriguing question of basic flaws in the historical progression of liberalism: Centrism is a misnomer, disguising an opportunistic shift to the Right because antiradicalism imposes political-structural boundaries on the extent of democratization of wealth and power to be permitted or sought. Was democratization ever sought by liberalism in the first place? Is even its historical progression mistaken as other than adapting to new developments basic premises on regulation, internationalism, and class structure—all of which presage a modified hierarchical social order? And modifications are consonant with sophisticated steps toward political stabilization and economic consolidation.

## 2.2 *Moral-Sociological Perspective: Penetrating Layers of Hierarchy*

Obama has appropriated counterterrorism for Wilsonian ends. Antiradicalism, unrestrained capitalist development, intervention, all come under his and its purview. The National Security State, in reality the Advanced Capitalist State, now, more than with Wilson, has a significant military underpinning as befitting US global requirements and ambitions in the later period. In Obama's case, counterterrorism places America on the side of the angels, an enviable position not afforded the mundane activities of mature capitalism. The idea of saving civilization *from* an amorphous threat and *for* market fundamentalism is quintessential Wilsonian, America once again making the world safe for democracy and at the same time equating democracy with market fundamentalism.

Obama stands on Wilson's shoulders when it comes to essentials. For example, Wilson offers a model for Obama if one substitutes Bolshevik for terrorist. Expansion is promoted by addressing an enemy whose presence obstructs the path taken by society toward the consolidation of its economy and the instilling of social patriotism among its citizenry. The drone, like the Palmer Raids, keeps to the fore the identity of the target, so that my equation of counterterrorism with antiradicalism corresponds, for Wilson, to the pat equation of Bolshevik with labor radical, mandating, with popular approval, a relentless pursuit, true for each period, of ethnocentric and authoritarian policy and goals.

A moral-sociological perspective on the state of realized democratization in America should be purposely harsh for piercing through the pro-

tective layers encasing an hierarchical structure of power. These layers include, but are not limited to, a political system of major parties' closure, assisted through an electoral process designed to discourage social dissidence, as to effectively circumscribe the boundaries of discussion of political, economic, and structural alternatives to the existing order. Politics is merely confirmatory of underlying arrangements of power which arise from the foundations of the political economy and the class structure embodied in it. The political system is unintelligible without taking account of both the continuous rightward shift in the American ideological spectrum, narrowing the range of political ideas and solutions as well as of public-interest areas thought susceptible to popular control, and the equally continuous process of economic concentration, chiefly in the financial sector yet interlocked via the merger movement with monopolization in industry.

Both social-structural processes, the rightward ideological shift and the systemization of power via economic concentration, proceed in tandem, overlap, and mutually reinforce one another. They finally locate on any meaningful chart of capitalist social organization registering a high degree of integration. The stage of mature capitalism in America has become the springboard for an authoritarian framework of culture and society. It is focused on the concurrent arrestment of political consciousness, so as to ensure the unimpeded quest for wealth, property, their mutual security, and the promotion of institutional mechanisms of repression.

These mechanisms of repression, though held usually in abeyance, serve to enforce a regimen of conformity, passivity, and dedication to the whims, policies, and visions of upper political-economic groups. Not surprisingly, dissembling from above is greeted with hosannas from below, hence the popular identification with such projects as the armed drone for targeted assassination. Political economy and social structure, as expected, have achieved a high degree of systemic congruence, leaving the individual a plaything squeezed between capitalism and class in which government policy goes largely unnoticed. Obama's rejection of transparency in government creates a sanctuary for national-security planning, an interior free-zone not open to the public.

In this context, Obama's secret weapon is secrecy itself. It envelopes highly questionable policy (notably, the vastly increased numbers of and reliance on drones) within the structural cocoon of the National Security State. Moral objections, not only to drones, are met by a stone wall of silence, the ever-useful military plea—repeated in connection with the

drone, its victims, and collateral damage to civilian populations—of no comment, these are “operational security concerns.” The anesthetizing quality of government and military jargon contributes to the mental-emotional disconnection from a moral order. A tacit permission emanates from the political culture for hardness toward human life on the part of those responsible for destroying it, and projected onto their victims as non-human barriers to progress.

Appearing glamorous more than menacing to the power-wielder and a supine public, the armed drone becomes viewed as a technological wonder operated from half-a-world away, capable of zapping the bad guys and creating a first line of defense protecting America from its enemies. Killing has been sanitized, an antiseptic air strike having no loss of American lives, and death is wholly depersonalized, the individual, often not identified or only incorrectly so, becoming objectified in crosshairs from 8000 miles away. Distance breeds callousness, depersonalization brings together victim and perpetrator in a world of consuming alienation run amuck, as though the climax of Ravel’s *La Valse*, civilization careening out of control and descending into the abyss.

### 3 HEGEMONY/HUBRIS: FACTORS IN AMERICA’S DECLINE

Only, the victim here is not to blame, and, more often than not, is the product of world historical forces shaped by Western, particularly US, imperialism. Even as recent as a half-century ago, Islamic jihadism was the minute exception, not the increasing rule. Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* was like a shot across the bow, alerting one that the Cold War was not the only attraction in town, the bowels of the globe simmering readying for explosion at multiple points, to which America, in pursuit of its own self-interest, was stone *deaf*. So now, there is an Enemy before us, to which or whom we can only eliminate or objectify, and while the first goes on, through drone killings, the second appears the more important, because realizable, goal. Actually, objectification is the converse side of elimination, both options, in the parlance of policymakers, on the table.

#### 3.1 *Monochromatic Warfare: Inurement to Human Suffering*

I here reiterate, Islamic jihadism *is* a threat, not only to America but to the West in general. But it is a threat borne of tragedy and shortsightedness, and one that could have been avoided through maintaining an ami-

cable if not more forthright posture of peace on the world scene and the curbing of its own hubristic impulses. The dimension of tragedy arises because of the calamitous result of a protagonist motivated by hegemonic purpose seeking, hubristic, to take on a superior force, dominance of the world community, in the face of both its own descending arc of power and influence and the rise of new centers of solidly founded power and influence. The protagonist, America, in its supreme confidence, refuses to concede the possibility of failure—in crasser terms, blowback for having mounted campaigns of intervention and regime change, installed military bases conveying menace to the affected peoples: hegemony/hubris, pointing, as though in a Greek drama, to retribution and perhaps even downfall. Spengler, of course, would have understood, as would Aeschylus.

The enemy qua object relieves everyone who is involved in the execution, from the president to the mechanics on the ground to the one who presses the button, of any moral qualms, let alone scruples, unlikely to have been held in the first place. Never before, one surmises, has warfare, as standard operating procedure, been reduced to such monochromatic anonymousness, the enveloping indifference overlaid on suppressed/unthinkable cruelty. The act of destroying an object, which presupposes the objectification of the individual in the first place, in this case a fellow human being frequently accompanied by his/her family, whom one cannot credit with being human, speaks to the objectification of the perpetrator and the bureaucratization of the entire transmission line of authority which led to the killing.

Objectification and bureaucratization are a consummate pair, as though the stars of mature capitalism—or any authoritarian social order requiring that the individual be synchronized with its purposes, though I remain here with capitalism and America—were in perfect alignment. The command system thrives on being inured to human suffering and misery, whether the supposed terrorist annihilated in Yemen or the unemployed worker whose home has been foreclosed in Ypsilanti. The political culture of alienation has taken over. How else account for Obama's submissive base, which, in the case of drones, registers zero on the Richter scale of social awareness? And how else account for Obama himself, who orders death by the shovel-full without even a grimace?

Arendt lived too early; her banality-of-evil thesis on Eichmann perhaps downplayed the whole Nazi apparatus of power that made his actions and mindset possible. The thesis would have been equally appropriate currently when applied to a national policy of drone assassination, here factoring in more prominently that apparatus of power. In that way, the banality of evil would be seen not as banality, just evil. One need not convert Obama directly into Eichmann to see that evil is rooted in the structure of power conditioning the attitude and role of leadership when suffused in the anonymity of mass killings. When I note that Obama does not grimace when he orders the death of others, one cannot permit his war on government transparency to be made an extenuating circumstance for explaining the public's own refusal to countenance criticism of any sort. The drone in particular is so far outside its ken as to indicate profound cynicism for any but the most solipsistic concerns. Arendt errs in singling out the individual when a psychology and structure of totalism makes behavior and policy intelligible—for, as in Germany, the nation as well.

Society attempts to deny, obfuscate, or explain away its mechanisms of repression. Indeed, it celebrates them as the peculiar genius of order necessary to growth in all its dimensions, starting with the economy. Here one must be careful, however, not to reify society as something apart from the individuals living in it. Reification is the avenue to exoneration. We are not Skinner's rats pulled this way and that, but humans accountable for our actions and the structures and institutions we preside over. It is *we* who give the commands, wield the power, and bear responsibility for what happens—for good or ill, although the Skinner box may serve as the ideal metaphor for describing the contemporary order: Americans caged in a political-cultural environment for experiments in operant conditioning (consumerism, acceptance and glorification of war, an ethnocentric mindset), pressing the lever of patriotism/conformity to gain a reward or avoid punishment. Skinner never realized that as a psychologist he was offering sound sociological insights into the nature of power and authoritarian systems.

### 3.2 *Societal Conservation: Internal Genesis of False Consciousness*

The Garrison State, cousin to its National Security counterpart, has all Americans jumping through hoops, leaders and led alike, imbued with an ethos of marching in lockstep, so that each can evade responsibility for the

deeds committed in the name of the whole. The deeds nonetheless are authored at the upper reaches of the pinnacle of power; the people, a sounding board or passive agent of consent, are there to give their blessings. One must think beyond reification to personal responsibility, for what is reified is *not* society but our imposed image of it, the product of false consciousness induced by the institutional-cultural matrix reflecting the realities of power.

Capitalism and class (I use them here as convenient societal constructs, not as things-in-themselves) are on a mission, the internal conservation of the social order, gradually evolving into a militarized US-defined pattern of globalization. Needless to say, the evolution, stemming from internal conservation, would not be possible unless the social order already contained the political-structural-cultural elements defining the future course of that order or society. Here, particularly, this would mean the institutional genesis of false consciousness (I would speculate, in the commodity structure of capitalism) accounting for the garrison-state mindset.

The problem of a submissive public lies in plebeian fascism complementing corporatist fascism, of which historically, in both Germany and Italy, it had been a part. The collapse or suppression of working-class radicalism has been a precondition for the rise of fascist regimes, which in time translates into co-optation from above, complicity from below. In Germany, the free corps' assault on the Spartacus movement, and the *murder* of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, illustrates the brutality in fulfilling that precondition. If neither plebeian nor corporatist fascism has yet been fully actualized in America, the ideological direction seems set in that historical path. As with so much else in an integrated social order, these strands of fascistization feed on and mutually reinforce one another, but that does not mean they are of equal valence in promoting the interaction.

The poor and working classes cannot be exempted from responsibility for their indifference to and comparative lack of involvement in the present crisis of societal deterioration, evidenced by America's global ambitions, market activities, and, domestically, the choking of reasoned debate and stifling of civil liberties. But neither can they be held chiefly responsible. For if they are not wholly controlled from above, they have been effectively removed from the decision-making process governing all areas of public policy, and equally removed from wealth-making



opportunities because of the concentration, in the political economy, of wealth and power.

The resulting political inertia in failing to check the retrogradation of society from both ends—or throughout—the societal framework, thus eroding institutional and cultural features of democracy thought inherent in America, has exacted its toll: the trend toward fascistization of the polity. As a result, power is transmitted downward through a well-defined class structure; this allows a tripartite ruling group, composed of political-business-military elites, to have their way. (For the sake of clarity, it should be stated that business would include its industrial and financial components, prominent in the historical dynamics of other societies.) The structure affords this group the opportunity and necessary leverage for implementing plans of global hegemony, eviscerating the content of government regulation (veering toward a disemboweled regulatory system), and narcotizing the public so that a personal outlook displaces the shaping of solidary bonds of mutual obligation and stultifies critical thinking.

### 3.3 *Systemic Foundations of Power: Advancing Monopolistic Integration*

One does not adhere to conspiracy theory in pointing to the social-control aspects of structural frameworks, themselves not a product of trial and error, but the accurate diagram of power—including class—relations. Hegemony, deregulation, narcotization, these are expected goals of ruling groups, which naturally operate in their self-interest. As for whether “ruling group” is a valid designation, or only Marxist blarney, one need only study wealth distribution, interlocking financial and/or industrial holdings, and the illusion-free anatomy of public policy.

Since the close of World War II, there has been a tendency in history, political science, and sociology to avoid the discussion of *class* and particularly its relation to power, as though somehow playing into the hands of communists or itself communistic. (I can remember, in 1960, the commotion created by then comparatively unknown German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf’s article on class in the *American Journal of Sociology*, and my excitement in chasing down the street when Barrington Moore passed by, to tell him about this rarity.) This, of course, is unfortunate, not least, in displaying intellectual cowardice about investigating how societies are organized and integrated: their mechanisms of repression and reasons for them; the psychodynamics of class relations; and broadly the structuring

of the grounds for interaction between mind and society. One has the impression that a sociology of knowledge has been informally shaped by ruling elites so that in practice self-knowledge and political consciousness are viewed as dangerous to social order.

Obama to a peculiar degree personifies, brings together, and ultimately synthesizes these three power centers—political, business, and military—through endowing them with a common purpose: to maintain a sophisticated pattern of capitalist development, corporatist in structure, outlook, and function. I am not speaking of an archetypal model, but of the concrete planning and execution already in evidence and underway. Political stabilization provides a check on popular discontent. Military prowess, resources, and their threatened or actual deployment, provide the intimidating force in international politics necessary to secure favorable positions in world trade, supplies of natural resources (including oil), and commensurate political influence in the areas of interest. As America knowingly dissolves its industrial base, greater investment opportunities and the relocation of manufacturing to low-wage centers of production become significant.

The strength of business *is* the national interest, and is not simply *in* the national interest. For at least a century, since the time of Theodore Roosevelt's Bureau of Corporations, one finds the inseparability of America and capitalism actualized in the interpenetration of government and business. Here, war has been an accelerant of economic consolidation, and the political and military dimensions of power the perfect midwife in advancing the process of monopolistic integration as the norm for social organization. Perhaps ordinarily, ideology follows structure; in this case, either the positions are reversed, or they represent a partnership in development.

#### 4 MORAL INDICTMENT OF CORPORATISM: IDEOLOGICAL/STRUCTURAL CONNECTIVITY

The foregoing pattern of societal decay signifies a moral indictment of advanced capitalism in America. Combined structural and social forces are shaping the class system of an hierarchical polity which promotes false consciousness and discourages critical thinking as the condition of its well-being. Power is institutionalized in this society through ideological means. This reflects both a highly stratified class order and, *that*, now the locus of

an informally organized ruling group, the extensive use of force for accomplishing stabilization of class relations and expansion of capitalist development.

One might query, what does moral indictment have to do with capitalist development? As matters stand, nothing; the ideological cards are stacked against inner probing, the system, self-enclosed in order to fabricate its own morality (unrecognizable to Kant), so that practices are validated before and after the fact. Because ideology plays such an important role in America's historical course (if word coinage were allowed one might speak of the ideologization of America, as the key to its political-structural identity), its division of labor would be: structure does the work of development; ideology provides the protective mode. But ideology should not be confused with moral indictment, which sufficiently acute would criticize both structure *and* ideology as equally inhumane constituents of capitalism.

When as here ideology provides structural connectivity for societal organization, class becomes an agency of dissemination of values through the body politic. False consciousness is the result, and morality per se becomes subject to class content, interpretation, and needs. This is why it is essential to preserve the independence of moral indictment, to prevent its bending and discoloration at the hands of that to which it is applied. This is also why moral indictment, by presenting standards which supply ethical content which criticizes existing relations of wealth and power, are declared unfit for societal guidance and philosophical acceptance. Instead, they become easily dismissible as absolutistic, because they penetrate ideological walls protecting inequality and privilege.

The critical standard implied here becomes a useful analytical tool for apprehending the core of society, which also reveals its historical development and social purpose. Embedded in that core is the commitment to market fundamentalism at home, via globalization, to be superimposed on world economic and political arrangements and relations. Ideology plays a conspicuous role in this because capitalism itself cannot provide sufficiently for the welfare of its people, and therefore requires a degree of culture-molding to gain assent for systemic defects (e.g., depression, unemployment, work-related issues) and psychological disorders (e.g., alienation, depersonalization) in a potentially disruptive social base.

#### 4.1 *Wider Parameters of Societal Degradation: Culture-Molding*

Equating market freedom with human freedom, however self-serving, instills conviction in policymakers to compel acceptance of American premises of order, property, and America's rightful role as world leader against a unified destructive threat (the syncretic joining of the forces of darkness: terrorism and radicalism). Culture-molding is a serious business, ideology being indispensable to that end. When repression falls out of favor, as in the harshness evidenced in the milestone events of labor history, ideology comes to the rescue, marking a soft-landing in the engineering of consent. Of course, ideology has a longer, more durable, history in America as an integrative force clearly antedating the Revolution. Yet it could not, and has not been expected to, perform unaided, the hint of force always standing ready in the background.

And in a proper understanding of force, in the foreground as well; the Pinkerton, the bayonet, those antiquated tanks MacArthur used to chase the unemployed out of the Anacostia Flats in 1932, where authoritative strength is applied to crush heads, is merely one aspect of force. The sum-total of political-cultural pressures to conform to a stated ideal, is another and far more likely source (although historical reversion, particularly as a matter of racial social-control and the handling of radical street demonstrations, seems to be coming back).

In a sense, ideology replaces force as the conveyor of accommodation. Value-saturation stoked by undercurrents of militarism, and the diversion of protest into cultural politics (transgender bathrooms soon will vie with war, intervention, maldistribution of wealth, and the drone for the attention of "radicals"). Hence, even ideology itself becomes internally self-corrupting, away from its primary task in America, the comprehensive defense of capitalism, and *to* trivialized hot pursuits of the moment having little to do with peace, exploitation, and class—I speak here as a radical concerned about the wider parameters of societal degradation.

Ideology grows more rigid, the commitment to order, more inflexible. Whether ideology, given the self-serving function it performs for its adherents, possesses an inner ossification from being largely unchallenged, its rigidity through time is familiar. Ideology's role in modern history has perhaps been underappreciated, particularly when given strong political-cultural reinforcement. It can equally precede or follow structure, in either case providing a political formula for consolidation of the social order

conveying confirmation of the power of ascendant groups and confirmation of their success. (Between the writings of Gaetano Mosca and Karl Mannheim, there is much to explore, extrapolate from, and add to, in the role ideology occupies in systemic conservation and prevention of social change.)

#### 4.2 *Anticipation of Impending Senility: Critique of Mock-Centrism*

If ideology replaces force as the conveyor of accommodation, it also perhaps more importantly replaces force as the path to societal legitimation. When it is repressive, by definition, it fosters totalitarian structures, or even when it is moribund. Only when it remains vital can ideology have democratic consequences—here not vitality, which suited Nazism, but content, live principles and their application, is determinative—which is only possible when constantly tested and not the product of mechanical repetition. Words dry up; underlying sensibility, prescribed from above or when taken for granted, suffers atrophy. To remain vital requires adversity, constant challenge and testing, else a spirit of self-evidence, stagnation and rote acceptance set in.

Ossification describes American ideology in the present, a tendency toward being molded into a rigid, sterile, conventional condition (Webster's). And rendered thusly in all its brittleness, fears go on a rampage, the result: an at-all-costs mindset emerges in America which moves society increasingly rightward on the political spectrum. This is done so casually and matter-of-factly as to occupy a centrist position, a collective pretention of moderation when in reality the opposite is true. Mock-centrism is false consciousness enveloping the polity. The actual movement Right can be seen in current policy: military intervention, the doctrine of permanent war, rendition, torture, denial of habeas corpus, indefinite detention, all in the service of market freedom (aka, human freedom). It appears to be normal, hardly noticed.

Possibly the maturity of the system unnerves all within it. Maturity, though the feeling is widely suppressed, breeds a subtle fear of impending senility, and with that, a more specific, tangible fear of the prospects of the nation's decline, in a world of more limited freedom of action. In consequence, a paralysis of mind and will sets in inclining the individual to extremism, which helps explain the spectrum-shift rightward. That is one explanation for present attitudes as found in contemporary policymaking.

*Or*, again possibly, integral to capitalism at whatever stage of its development, particularly telling in a more advanced stage, one finds a desensitization of the individual is created through commodity structure and alienation. From the standpoint of a makeover to the anomic (lack of purpose or ideals) individual, I find, with Marx and Pappenheim, that argument compelling. *Or*, simply, why not say that explanation is unnecessary? American history has been one of discrimination along practically every meaningful index, race, gender, age, class, education, health, opportunity, status, religion, political and economic standing, that comes to mind, as though the natural state (both Locke and Hobbes, down to the present) of capitalism. To the widely unequal wealth-and-power distribution, and disposition to ethnocentrism, a feigning of the ideology of Exceptionalism leaves in its wake a nation of bored-out-of-its-wits proponents of *violence* and/or couch potatoes.

In this systemic matrix of false consciousness, one cannot expect moral outrage over the armed drone for targeted assassination. Instead, there is merely indifference, a response to death and human suffering possible only when account is taken of the particular stage of capitalism presently reached in America: maturity, signifying an integrated system of power and the morose spirit of nihilism or destructiveness. In this stage, several characteristics can be mentioned, each related back to alienation and desensitization grounded in capitalism from its inception, and now historically modernized to take account of industrialism and a clearer delineation of class and power. Chiefly, there are social and cultural mechanisms of repression designed for the purpose of instilling dedication to the predominant principles, ideology, and values of the social order. What conditions their predominance is their compatibility with capitalism, its defense, its expansion.

The political-structural pattern is of the gradually diminished leeway for alternative paths as business further consolidates, wealth further concentrates, the memory of protest and the means to effectuate it wane, and a systemic basis for economic cooperation is realized at the highest levels of society. An overwhelming sense of *closure* tyrannizes over the contemporary mindset, so that opposition to the foregoing trends is ineffectual to nonexistent. Worse still, they are so well incorporated into the social fabric of stabilization as to appear both efficacious and healthy when in fact nothing has changed. Democracy becomes identical to the sum of business consolidation, wealth concentration, waning social protest, and the

formation by elite-groups of a close-knit political economy operating in their favor. Social protest is rendered harmless, yet still satisfying to an already-neutered protester (what Marcuse in *Reason and Revolution* once referred to in the Epilogue as capitalism's capacity to absorb its own negativity).

### 4.3 *Coinciding of Forces: Integrative Elements*

The preceding background has not been secured automatically, that is, through a metahistorical deterministic formula or framework. Rather, it is the product of intra-capitalist structural-ideological tendencies themselves shaped and carried forward by human intention, class action, and the accretion of military, commercial, and industrial power. Accordingly, one is brought abruptly to earth by the Obama administration's policies of regularizing capitalistic needs and requirements coinciding precisely with the particular stage of development of capitalism itself. The man, the times, the system—more, the policies, conjoining deregulation and intervention, with a heavy footprint in all things military, together give meaning to the coinciding of forces.

Here drone assassination becomes a supremely integrative factor in pulling together domestic and foreign policy. Politics and structure fit America—at a time of largely self-created crisis—like a glove, or rather, mailed fist. The threat (and actual use) of force is crucial to all else in the US paradigm of growth and sustainability. Domestically, pressures toward social and cultural homogeneity appear to be a failure at this point, as the dissociative behavior patterns become increasingly evident (school shootings, an indicator). In foreign policy, an unrelenting drive for hegemony also meets with obstacles and disruption. In both cases, the more that goals recede, the more that force is required to restore them. Drone warfare is not a wholly negligible factor in unifying the people at home, terrorizing the enemy abroad.

Presidential authority plays an important role here. Relatively unencumbered, it is assisted by Obama's close association with the military and intelligence communities, a situation which does not appear to disturb his supporters (assuming they even care). The armed drone defines the center of gravity of the Obama administration. Its existence would not be possible had not America satisfied these, among other, three conditions: (a) it arrogated to itself the role of unilateral global superpower, self-appointed to regulate and shape world trade-and-investment patterns best suited to

its national interest; (b) it historically and, again, through self-advocacy, implemented this global pattern by military means, including a perpetual state of readiness directed to all supposed enemies, domestic and foreign; and (c) it received the uncritical approval of a large part of its citizenry, conditioned to accept government policies, the more secretive the greater the acceptance.

As for the last named, more than at any time since World War II, the American public is in the throes of false consciousness. Previously perceived or experienced repression has now become internalized as the norm and worthy of submission. McCarthyism, having seemingly lost, had actually won, not so much quantitatively, the number hounded out of government, harassed in countless other arenas, and those who took their lives in despair, horrific as all of that was, but qualitatively (and less painful, but more lasting), the major shift of an entire nation rightward, ideologically self-conscious about its dedication to capitalism, obsession with antiradicalism, and transmutation of racism, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism into a more genteel, less strident voice for stability, order, authority.

The ingredients of proto-fascism were in hand for several decades, only becoming pronouncedly uglier when countervailing forces, for example, the peace movement, civil rights, labor militancy, had lost their charge and/or had been absorbed into the mainstream, Obama being the most recent Siren luring the Left to its destruction. McCarthy is testimony, of course, not to the demagoguery of a single person, but a society broken in mind and conviction sufficiently to allow demagoguery do its thinking for it.

The result is that social protest, directed to consequential systemic issues of war and peace, and the structure of *class* power, is at the lowest ebb in a generation. The field is thereby left open to the combined forces of business and government to hasten the rightward shift of the social order. Radicalism remains stranded in a stagnant pool, driveling about cultural issues, as meanwhile wars, interventions, drone killings, continue apace—against a backdrop of financial and business concentration, intensifying disparities of income, wealth, and power, and a political system disconnected (on purpose, it seems) from the needs of the people, health to infrastructure and back.

This could only happen if the people were intimidated or self-enclosed within a universe of repressive-patriotic discourse, and thereby manipulated in a process of conditioning based on the devaluing of human life, as in demonizing and depersonalizing the so-called other as a mere cipher if not hard-bitten enemy. Pride in brutality, especially when pressed into the



service of preserving innocence, Exceptionalism, a pristine way of life, trumps whatever moral scruples remain in confronting—here, the drone—a course of action, amoral, impersonal, and by any jurisprudential standard violating international law and the rule of law itself. Toleration of crime, particularly on this scale, becomes complicity in its execution and furtherance. By Marcuse's reasoning, the drone *is* America, and for Obama, whatever his wishes in the matter, his signature entry into the history books.

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