
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The larger the island of knowledge, the longer the shoreline of wonder.

— *Ralph W. Sockman*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The National Security-State and JFK, Part 4

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



Within a few hours of John Kennedy's assassination, an anti-Castro organization in New Orleans called the DRE (Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil) issued a press release publicizing that Lee Harvey Oswald, who had just been arrested in connection with the assassination, was a communist. The allegation quickly caught steam and word spread all across the world that Kennedy had been killed by a communist. The Warren Commission, which was the official body charged with investigating the assassination, ultimately concluded that Kennedy had, in fact, been killed by a communist.

What no one knew at the time — and what no one would discover

for several decades — was that the DRE was being funded by the CIA to the tune of around \$50,000 per month (\$400,000 in inflation-adjusted dollars) and was closely supervised by a CIA agent named George Joannides.

The question that naturally arises is: Was the president really killed by a bona fide communist or was his assassination instead a sophisticated “blame it on a communist” strategy to distract attention from the CIA as the orchestrator of one of its state-sponsored regime-change operations? As I pointed out in part 3, the CIA and the Pentagon would later teach the “blame a communist” strategy to Latin American military officials as a way to avoid detection in secret state-sponsored assassinations.

The notion that Oswald was a genuine communist is filled with anomalies, mysteries, and contradictions.

How many genuine communists have ever joined the Marines? Marines hate communists. They kill communists. Why would a genuine communist want to join an organization that hated and killed communists?

Oswald joined the Marines in 1956, just a few years after the Korean War, during which U.S. Ma-

rines and other U.S. forces killed and injured millions of North Koreans, all of whom were considered to be commies. The entire country, including rural villages, had been flattened by massive U.S. carpet-bombing campaigns.

Moreover, the war was never ended by treaty. There was simply a suspension of hostilities. It could be resumed at a moment's notice, with U.S. Marines and other military personnel being called upon to kill even more North Koreans, not to mention Chinese communists.

Would a genuine communist ever be permitted to be a U.S. Marine?

If Oswald was a genuine communist, why would he want to put himself in the position of having to kill fellow communists or be killed by fellow communists?

In June 1963, Kennedy delivered a public speech at American University in which he sent shock waves all across the world and especially within the U.S. national-security establishment. Known today as the Peace Speech, Kennedy announced an end to the Cold War and his aim to establish a peaceful and friendly coexistence with the Soviet Union. The speech was so well-received in the Soviet Union that it was broad-

cast all across the country, the first time that had ever happened. Soon after that, Kennedy entered into a highly publicized nuclear test-ban treaty with the Soviets.

Why would a genuine communist want to kill a president who was clearly reaching out to the communist world in a spirit of peace, friendship, and mutual coexistence, especially knowing that his vice-president, Lyndon Johnson, who most people knew hated the Kennedys, would very likely be hewing to the Cold War line that guided the U.S. national-security establishment?

Prior to his employment at the Texas School Book Depository, Oswald was employed at a graphic-arts company in Dallas named Jaggars-Stiles-Stovall, which developed top-secret photographs for the CIA. Would a genuine communist ever have been permitted to work at that type of facility?

Indeed, would a genuine communist ever be permitted to be a U.S. Marine, especially at the height of the Cold War, when U.S. officials were doing everything they could to ferret out, smear, and destroy anyone suspected of being a communist? Would the U.S. military have permitted a genuine communist to serve at Atsugi Air Force

Base in Japan, where the top-secret U-2 fly plane was based?

When Oswald announced his defection to the Soviet Union in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, he told embassy officials that he planned to tell the Soviets everything he knew, which would necessarily have included the classified information he had acquired during his assignment in Japan. Yet he was permitted to return to the United States without being abused, harassed, smeared, subpoenaed, or indicted (or, it seems, even debriefed). Compare his treatment, for example, to that of Martin Luther King, who was only suspected of being a communist.

Oswald was permitted to return to the United States without being abused, harassed, smeared, subpoenaed, or indicted.

Moreover, at the height of the Cold War and the U.S. anti-communist crusade, Oswald was permitted to bring back a Russian wife, who could easily have been accused of being a communist, especially given that one of her uncles was closely connected to Russian intelligence. Why would they easily let what could be a Russian spy into the United States when they were

doing everything they could to cleanse America (and the world) of communists?

When Oswald moved to his hometown of New Orleans in April 1963, he secured a job at Reily Coffee Company, which was owned by a right-wing anti-communist. Why would a person like that hire a genuine communist?

Is there a rational explanation for all that? Actually, there is.

Intelligence agent?

Soon after the Warren Commission was established, the commission's chairman, Earl Warren, called a top-secret emergency meeting of the commission. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss information that Warren had received that Oswald had actually been working for U.S. intelligence or as an FBI informant or both. To resolve the matter, the question was put to the heads of the FBI and the CIA, both of whom denied it. Believing that the FBI and the CIA would never lie about such a matter, Warren put the issue to rest and ordered that the proceedings of that particular meeting never be disclosed to the American people or anyone else.

But that Oswald was working for U.S. intelligence is the only scenario that makes sense. Within that

particular framework all the mysteries, anomalies, and contradictions disappear.

When Oswald was growing up, his favorite television program was *I Led Three Lives*, which was about an American businessman who posed as a communist while secretly serving as an informant for the FBI. Many of the segments of *I Led Three Lives* are posted on YouTube. It's worth watching at least one or two, not only to get a sense of what life was like in Cold War America but also to see what could have been going through the mind of young Oswald as he watched his favorite television program.

It is not difficult to imagine Oswald's fantasizing about becoming a G-man when he grew up and even following in the footsteps of Herbert Philbrick, the patriotic, anti-communist hero of *I Led Three Lives*. It would certainly explain why Oswald would begin studying communism as a teenager. After all, to successfully pose as a communist among genuine communists would require a deep understanding of communism and socialism.

That would explain why Oswald would become a Marine and have no reservations about the possibility of being immediately called upon to kill communists. It would ex-

plain how Oswald would be assigned to Atsugi Air Force Base, how he would learn fluent Russian in the Marines, and why his self-publicizing as a communist Marine would not cause any concern within the anti-communist military bureaucracy.

The U.S. Marine Corps has long served as a primary source for recruiting CIA agents.

Given that the U.S. Marine Corps has long served as a primary source for recruiting CIA agents, it would not surprise anyone that Oswald would be among the CIA's recruits or hires. It would also explain how he was easily able to secure an early discharge and how he was able to make it to the Soviet Union with hardly any money. It would also explain why he would be infiltrated into the Soviet Union — as a false defector. It would explain his employment at Jaggars-Stiles-Stovall in Dallas and the Reily Coffee Company in New Orleans.

Oswald moved from Dallas to New Orleans in the spring of 1963 and became the representative of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, an organization, interesting enough, that the CIA, the FBI, and the rest of the U.S. national-security establish-

ment was spying on, infiltrating, and trying to destroy, notwithstanding the fact that its mission was simply to establish normal relations with Cuba.

Oswald made contact with the DRE, the organization that the CIA was secretly supervising and funding.

It was during that time that Oswald made contact with the DRE, the organization that the CIA was secretly supervising and funding and that would, several months later, be the first organization publicizing Oswald's supposed communist connections to the world.

Oswald's initial contact with the DRE, an anti-Castro, anti-communist organization, was rather unusual. He approached the head of the organization, a man named Carlos Bringuier, and offered to work for the DRE. Oswald offered to help train DRE agents, even giving Bringuier his U.S. Marine Corps manual, apparently to help establish his military credentials.

Later, Bringuier got word that Oswald was out on the streets of New Orleans passing out pamphlets promoting the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. In what was obviously a major mistake, some of

Oswald's FPCC pamphlets had 544 Camp Street in New Orleans stamped on them as the return address. That was the address of the office of a former FBI agent named Guy Bannister, an office Oswald had been seen visiting.

In what has all the earmarks of a concocted fight, Bringuier and Oswald went after each other, with Oswald even inviting Bringuier to hit him. Both were arrested for disorderly conduct. Bringuier pled not guilty and the charges were dismissed. Oswald, on the other hand, pled guilty, thereby ensuring him more publicity. Later, in a public radio debate between Oswald and Bringuier, the latter publicly exposed Oswald as a communist.

During the entire proceedings of the Warren Commission, the CIA kept secret the fact that the CIA had been supervising and funding the DRE.

In the 1970s, the House Committee on Assassinations opened a reinvestigation of the Kennedy assassination. A renowned Philadelphia prosecutor — Richard Sprague — was named investigative counsel for the committee and immediately made it clear that the CIA would be a target of interest in the investigation. When the independent-minded Sprague refused to sign the CIA's

secrecy agreements, he was forced out of his position and he returned to Philadelphia. He was replaced by a lawyer named Robert Blakey, who agreed to sign the CIA's secrecy agreements and displayed a much more deferential attitude toward the CIA.

Neither Joannides nor the CIA disclosed to the House Committee Joannides's role with the DRE.

Two young law students, Edwin Lopez and Dan Hardway, were assigned the task of examining CIA records relating to the assassination, including records relating to the still-mysterious trip that Oswald supposedly made to Mexico City prior to the assassination. At first, CIA officials cooperated with Lopez and Hardway, so long as their records examination took place within CIA offices.

Obstruction

After a while, however, the CIA realized that the two young law students knew exactly what they were doing and what they were looking for. That was when the CIA brought in a CIA agent to serve as a liaison between the House Select Committee and the CIA. That liaison agent was none other than George Joan-

nides, the CIA agent who had been secretly supervising the DRE, both before the assassination and on the day it issued the press release publicizing Oswald's communist connection.

As it turned out, Joannides's job was not to serve as a liaison or a facilitator but rather as an obstructionist. His mission was to prevent Lopez and Hardway and the House Select Committee from delving any further into the assassination-related records of the CIA. That's why Oswald's supposed trip to Mexico City, where he appeared to be fortifying his public persona as a communist, is still so shrouded in mystery.

Needless to say, neither Joannides nor the CIA disclosed to the House Committee Joannides's role with the DRE before or after the assassination. They chose to keep that secret.

In 1992, Congress enacted the JFK Records Act, which required all federal agencies, including the CIA, to disclose their Kennedy-related records to the public. The enforcement entity for the act was the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB).

Throughout the term of the ARRB, the CIA not only did *not* disclose its files relating to Joan-

nides, and the DRE, it decided to keep the entire matter secret from the ARRB, just as it had done from the Warren Commission in the 1960s and the House Select Committee in the 1970s.

Blakey stated, "If I'd known his role in 1963, I would have put Joannides under oath."

The CIA's decades-long secrecy on Joannides and the DRE came to an end in 2001, when former *Washington Post* reporter Jefferson Morley revealed the matter in an article in the *Miami New Times*.

When Robert Blakey, the lawyer who had replaced Richard Sprague as counsel for the House Select Committee, discovered what the CIA had done, he was livid. He stated, "If I'd known his role in 1963, I would have put Joannides under oath — he would have been a witness, not a facilitator. How do we know what he didn't give us?"

In an addendum to an interview posted at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/oswald/interviews/blakey.html#addendum>, Blakey added,

I was not told of Joannides' background with the DRE, a focal point of the investiga-

tion. Had I known who he was, he would have been a witness who would have been interrogated under oath by the staff or by the committee. He would never have been acceptable to us as a point of contact with us to retrieve documents. In fact, I have now learned, as I note above, that Joannides was the point of contact between the agency and the DRE during the period Oswald was in contact with the DRE. That the agency would put a "material witness" in as a "filter" between the committee and its quests for documents was a flat-out breach of the understanding the Committee had with the Agency that it would cooperate with the investigation.

The committee's researchers immediately complained to me that Joannides was, in fact, not facilitating but obstructing our obtaining of documents. I contacted [Deputy Counsel Scott] Breckinridge and Joannides. Their side of the story wrote off the complaints to the young age and attitude of the people.

They were certainly right about one question: the com-

mittee's researchers did not trust the Agency. Indeed, that is precisely why they were in their positions. We wanted to test the Agency's integrity. I wrote off the complaints. I was wrong; the researchers were right. I now believe the process lacked integrity precisely because of Joannides.

The later reaction of federal judge John Tunheim, who chaired the ARRB, was not much different: "If we had known of his role in Miami in 1963, we would have pressed for all his records.... I think we were probably misled by the agency. This material should be released."

But the Joannides material will not be released because the CIA will still not permit it to be released. In fact, when the National Archives released its final batch of Kennedy-assassination records last month — including records that the CIA suc-

ceeded in keeping secret for more than half a century — the CIA's Joannides files were not among them.

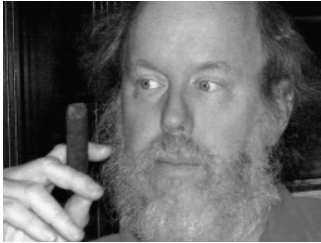
The reason: They say that the release of those 50-year-old records would constitute a grave threat to "national security." Of course, there is another possibility — that the release of the records would add to ever-growing amount of circumstantial evidence of a national-security regime-change operation on November 22, 1963.

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

NEXT MONTH:
**"A Republic,
If You Can Keep It"**
by Jacob G. Hornberger

Why Ruby Ridge Still Matters

by James Bovard



In the wake of violent clashes between protesters last August in Charlottesville, many people demanded a federal crackdown on suspected dangerous extremists. The federal government has previously carried out similar heavy-handed suppression efforts with disastrous results. Rather than intellectually purifying the nation, such efforts are far more likely to turn nitwits into martyrs.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Washington's efforts to stomp out bad ideas spawned federal crime waves. The FBI's COINTELPRO program utterly exempted itself from the Constitution and federal, state, and local laws. The FBI set up its own 250-member Klan organization "to attract membership away from the United Klans of America," as a 1976 Senate report noted. One federally funded informant admit-

ted that he and other Klansmen had "beaten people severely, had boarded buses and kicked people off; had went [sic] in restaurants and beaten them with blackjacks, chains, pistols." Other FBI COINTELPRO operations sought to destroy black activists, including Martin Luther King Jr. One FBI office boasted of spurring "shootings, beatings, and a high degree of unrest ... in the ghetto area of southeast San Diego." Because the instigators were federal agents, they faced no criminal penalty for behavior that would have sent other Americans to prison.

Once the FBI committed to subverting dissident speech, its crackdowns became a bureaucratic growth industry that eventually targeted even the Women's Liberation Movement. Tom Charles Huston, an aide to President Richard Nixon, gave testimony in 1975 about COINTELPRO's tendency "to move from the kid with a bomb to the kid with a picket sign, and from the kid with the picket sign to the kid with the bumper sticker of the opposing candidate. And you just keep going down the line."

The best-known case of federal targeting of right-wingers occurred in 1992 at Ruby Ridge.

A recent *Washington Post* article with the untimely headline "Why

the American Left Gave Up on Political Violence” (Antifa’s violent rampages made headlines in the following weekends), asserted that alienated right-wingers had “sparked the deadly standoff in Ruby Ridge, Idaho.” Similarly, National Public Radio asserted in August that “Ruby Ridge is still a rallying cry for people on the militant far right.”

The feds sought to pressure Weaver to become an informant against the Aryan Nation, but he refused.

Randy Weaver and his family lived in an isolated cabin in the mountains of northern Idaho. Weaver was a white separatist who believed races should live apart; he had no record of violence against other races — or anyone else. An undercover federal agent targeted him and entrapped him into selling a sawed-off shotgun. The feds sought to pressure Weaver, who often indulged in anti-government bluster, to become an informant against the Aryan Nation, but he refused.

After Weaver was sent the wrong court date and (understandably) failed to show up, the feds used any and all means to take him down. Idaho lawyer David Nevin noted that U.S. “marshals called in military aer-

ial reconnaissance and had photos studied by the Defense Mapping Agency. They prowled the woods around Weaver’s cabin with night-vision equipment. They had psychological profiles performed and installed \$130,000 worth of long-range solar-powered spy cameras. They intercepted the Weavers’ mail. They even knew the menstrual cycle of Weaver’s teenage daughter, and planned an arrest scenario around it.”

The murders

On August 21, 1992, six U.S. Marshals outfitted in full camouflage and carrying machine guns trespassed onto the Weavers’ property. Three marshals circled close to the Weaver cabin and threw rocks to provoke the Weavers’ dogs. As Weaver’s 14-year old son, Sammy, and Kevin Harris, a 25-year old family friend living in the cabin, ran towards the barking, a marshal shot and killed a dog. Sammy Weaver fired in the direction those shots came from. As he was leaving the scene, a marshal shot him in the back and killed him. Harris responded by fatally shooting a federal marshal who had fired seven shots in the melee. (The U.S. Marshals Service later gave its highest valor awards to the marshals who carried out the ambush.)

The FBI decided that Weaver was such a bad person that the Constitution no longer applied. Snipers from the FBI Hostage Rescue Team were sent in the next day and ordered to shoot to kill any adult male outside the Weaver cabin. The rules of engagement epitomized federal overreach against citizens whom the government despised. A 1997 federal appeals court decision derided the rules as “a gross deviation from constitutional principles and a wholly unwarranted return to a lawless and arbitrary wild-west school of law enforcement.” A 2001 federal appeals court ruling noted that “a group of FBI agents formulated rules of engagement that permitted their colleagues to hide in the bushes and gun down men who posed no immediate threat. Such wartime rules are patently unconstitutional for a police action.”

On August 22, 1992, FBI sniper Lon Horiuchi shot Randy Weaver in the back after he stepped out of his cabin. As he struggled to return to his home, Horiuchi shot and killed Vicki Weaver, who was standing in the cabin door holding their 10-month old baby. A confidential 1994 Justice Department task force report was appalled that people were gunned down before receiving any warning: “The absence of a

[surrender demand] subjected the Government to charges that it was setting Weaver up for attack.”

The FBI decided that Weaver was such a bad person that the Constitution no longer applied.

Weaver and Harris, who never fired any shots at FBI agents, surrendered after an 11-day siege. At their 1993 trial, federal prosecutors asserted that Weaver long conspired to have an armed confrontation with the government. The feds made the bizarre claim that his moving from Iowa to a spot near the Canadian border in 1985 was part of that plot. U.S. Marshal Dave Hunt, in later congressional testimony, repeatedly stressed that Weaver had criticized the federal government as a “lawless government.” Did federal agents feel compelled to silence any citizen who publicly proclaimed that the government is lawless?

An Idaho jury found Weaver not guilty of almost all charges and ruled that Harris’s shooting of the U.S. Marshal was self-defense. Federal Judge Edward Lodge released a lengthy list detailing the Justice Department’s and FBI’s misconduct and fabrication of evidence in the case.

The cover-up

In January 1995, FBI chief Louis Freeh announced that the FBI had completed its self-investigation, which effectively confirmed that the bureau was still immaculate. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Times*, I bashed that ruling and the continuing cover-up. Freeh responded by denouncing my “misleading or patently false conclusions” and “inflammatory and unfounded allegations.”

In the summer of 1995, the FBI and Justice Department’s elaborate cover-up unraveled. (I acquired a copy of a damning 542-page confidential Justice Department report on Ruby Ridge and highlighted its findings in the *Wall Street Journal*.) The cover-up eventually unraveled and a top FBI official was sent to prison for destroying key evidence. The feds in 1995 paid the Weaver family \$3 million to settle their wrongful-death lawsuit.

When Boundary County, Idaho, sought in 1998 to prosecute the FBI sniper who killed Vicki Weaver, the Clinton administration torpedoed their lawsuit by invoking the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution (which blocks local and state governments from challenging federal power). Seth Waxman, the Solicitor General of the United States, ab-

solved the FBI agent because “Federal law-enforcement officials are privileged to do what would otherwise be unlawful if done by a private citizen.” But that is exactly why Ruby Ridge enraged so many Americans. And it was not simply a right-wing cause: the American Civil Liberties Union joined the National Rifle Association in condemning federal misconduct at Ruby Ridge.

Judge Lodge released a lengthy list detailing the Justice Department’s and FBI’s misconduct and fabrication of evidence.

Ruby Ridge could become even more important and incendiary in the coming years. Former President Barack Obama is reported to favor Massachusetts’s former governor Deval Patrick as his candidate for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. When he was a top official in the Justice Department in 1994, Patrick whitewashed FBI abuses at Ruby Ridge. A 542-page confidential Justice Department task force report recommended federal criminal charges against the FBI sniper who killed Vicki Weaver. Patrick overturned that recommendation because he insisted that “excessive force” had not been used.

“One shot, one kill” was apparently irrelevant to his analysis. In an era where Americans are increasingly protesting law-enforcement abuses, Patrick’s ruling on Ruby Ridge may come back to haunt him.

Jurors scorned federal claims that the men were part of a conspiracy against the government.

The federal government can quickly lose its credibility when it is perceived as conducting an ideological vendetta. Last August, a Nevada jury, in what the Associated Press labeled a “stunning setback to federal prosecutors,” found four supporters of rancher Cliven Bundy not guilty for their role in a 2014 confrontation with federal agents in a dispute over cattle grazing on government land. Even though federal judge Gloria Navarro prohibited defendants from invoking their constitutional rights, jurors scorned federal claims that the men were part of a conspiracy against the government. (To nail the Bundys and their supporters, the FBI even created a fake documentary film company that sought to create incriminating evidence while interviewing key participants in the standoff.) This was the second trial

for some of the defendants after the initial jury refused to convict (but did not formally reach “not guilty” verdicts). After the second jury deadlocked on some of the charges against some defendants, the Justice Department announced that it would try them a third time. This travesty of fairness — prosecuting people into financial destruction regardless of the government’s losses — did not receive 1 percent of the denunciations from the media that it deserved.

Federal crackdowns on dissidents may be assisted by growing enthusiasm for censorship among establishment voices. *The New York Times* op-ed page and other prominent media venues have recently published calls to suppress dangerous ideas. There are increasing demands to treat certain ideas as the equivalent of violence, thereby attempting to justify preemptive violence by Antifa or other militants against their adherents.

In a nation with hundreds of millions of people, there will be plenty of folks with anti-social or harebrained notions. But if someone is living alone on a mountaintop, as long as he is not a cannibal, who cares what he believes? Even if the government could forcibly eliminate everyone with heretical

beliefs, the sheer extent of repression would spawn legions of new rabble-rousers. Freedom of speech is a more reliable antidote to toxic ideologies than unleashing the FBI or other federal agencies.

Bad precedents can be far more deadly than bad ideas. If the government is entitled to effectively label certain individuals or groups or notions as public enemies, it is naive to expect due process and fair play to follow. Ruby Ridge illustrates the folly of treating noxious ideas like ticking time bombs. The vast majority of devotees of deluded

dogmas will be duds — unless the government detonates the scene.

James Bovard is a policy advisor to The Future of Freedom Foundation and is the author of an ebook memoir, Public Policy Hooligan, as well as Attention Deficit Democracy and eight other books.

NEXT MONTH:
“Guilt by
Musical Association
by James Bovard

If the ruling power in America possessed both ... the right to issue orders of all kinds but also the capability and habit of carrying out those orders; if it not only laid down general principles of government but also concerned itself with the details of applying those principles; and if it dealt not only with the country's major interests but also descended to the limit of individual interests, then liberty would soon be banished from the New World.

— Alexis de Tocqueville

Middlemen, Government, and the Free Market

by *Laurence M. Vance*



There are multitudes of ways in which goods are exchanged on the free market. The most common way that most people purchase merchandise is by shopping at a general or specialty retail store: Walmart, Sears, Kroger, Home Depot, Office Depot, Target, Best Buy, Walgreens, and so on. But in addition to retail stores, goods are also sold through auctions, flea markets, convenience stores, outlet and factory stores, garage sales, eBay, warehouse clubs, pawn shops, vending machines, food trucks, roadside stands, farmers' markets, street vendors, subscriptions, e-commerce, and car dealers.

Most merchandise is not purchased directly from the corporations and other entities that manu-

facture or produce it. Rather, it is bought through a middleman. There are some notable exceptions, of course. Companies such as Apple have retail stores in which they sell only Apple products. Some clothing companies have factory stores in outlet malls where they sell only their clothes. In general though, general or specialty retail stores are the norm. Best Buy might offer for sale three different brands of televisions in addition to its own. Home Depot might have five different brands of hammers. Walmart might stock ten different brands of toothpaste. Convenience stores might sell fifteen different types of candy bars. Amazon might make available for purchase every brand of television, hammer, toothpaste, and candy bar that exists. Entities such as auctions, markets, and eBay facilitate the meeting of buyers and sellers, and receive a fee for doing it, either up front, as a percentage of the sale price, or both. Vending machines are nothing but mechanical middlemen.

Middlemen

Middlemen (sometimes called exchangers or merchants) have been much maligned throughout history as parasites, exploiters, and profiteers who add nothing of value

to products and unnecessarily increase the cost of goods. Even the pickers on the television show *American Pickers* have been criticized for ripping people off by buying things dirt cheap so they can turn around and sell them for a huge profit. The phrases “cut out the middleman,” “direct to consumers,” and “factory direct” are sometimes used in advertising by certain businesses. The idea is that without going through middlemen, goods consumers purchase from them are cheaper than they would otherwise be. It is just assumed that the goods would be of the same quality, and available in the same quantities as they are now.

**“We see that exchangers
are as necessary to the cheapness
of production as producers
themselves.”**

But is that how things really are? Consider the case of factory-outlet stores. The United States has more than 12,000 outlet locations. They were traditionally a place for retailers to sell goods, usually clothes, that were still on the shelves at the end of the last season, to get rid of overstock, or to sell off factory seconds. But now many retailers are manufacturing specific lines of clothing

just for their outlet locations. According to the research firm Buxton, roughly 86 percent of the stock in outlet stores is made specifically for the outlet. Banana Republic and J. Crew confirmed to CBC’s *Marketplace* that their outlet stores sell *only* made-for-outlet products. A study by *Consumer Reports* found that although most outlet-store goods were 3 percent to 72 percent cheaper than in retail locations, some items were actually the exact same price or more expensive. And there is generally a reason that goods at outlet stores are cheaper: they are of a quality inferior to what consumers could expect to see in a regular retail store. For example, *Consumer Reports* bought two pairs of ballet shoes from J. Crew — one from an outlet and one from a regular location. Although the footwear looked almost identical, “the outlet shoes were made in China using a synthetic material and the retail shoes were made in Italy using real leather.”

Nineteenth-century economist Francis Wayland’s defense of middlemen in his book *The Elements of Political Economy* is still relevant today:

We see that exchangers are as necessary to the cheapness of production as producers them-

selves. Hence, we also see how absurd is the outcry sometimes raised against them, because it is said they produce nothing. Did not a large class of the community devote themselves to this employment, it is impossible to conceive what would be the price of the most common and necessary utensil. Were the farmer obliged to carry his wheat or his cattle to Sheffield, to exchange for needles for his wife, or for a sickle for himself, who could estimate what these utensils would cost? If the laborer were obliged to go to Birmingham for a spade, which he must use in New York, what would be the price of a spade, and how would he ever be able to gain a subsistence?

And more recently, economist Robert P. Murphy writes in *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*,

By “buying low and selling high,” middlemen perform the vital service of shipping goods from the site of production to retail outlets where they are demanded by the consumers. The hated “mark-up” (the difference between

the farmer’s price for his goods and the retail price to the consumer) is proportional to the importance of his actions.

There are a number of benefits of middlemen.

Without middlemen, goods would be in short supply.

Middlemen bring together buyers and sellers, producers and consumers, businesses and customers. The largest middlemen — department stores and supermarkets — are characterized by more efficiency, greater selection, and lower prices than are found in small independent stores. In most cases, without middlemen, goods would be in short supply, if available at all, and prices would be higher, not lower. Middlemen allow producers to focus on what they do best. As explained by Richie Siegel, founder of Loose Threads, a media company known for its in-depth analysis of consumer, retail, and commerce industries,

The single biggest benefit of a middleman is what it lets a business focus on. To use a wholesale brand as an example, having a retailer take care of the merchandising, selling

and servicing of the product enables the brand to focus on designing and producing the best product possible. The retailer charges the brand for taking care of the end selling by buying the product at the wholesale cost, which is half price. The retailer gets to double the wholesale cost and capture this margin because it is providing a valuable service and has a specific skill set that enables it to succeed. If a brand wants to cut out a wholesaler and sell to the end customer, that's totally fine. But now the brand has to pick up the retailer's slack, which includes both a cost and a skill set gap. To capture the full margin, the brand now has to thrive at marketing, merchandising, customer acquisition, and customer service, all on top of designing and producing great products.

In a free market, the role of middlemen can change. It used to be that you purchased airline tickets through a travel agent. Now you can purchase airline tickets through a travel agent; from other middlemen such as Expedia, Orbitz, or KAYAK; or directly from the airlines.

Large companies such as Proctor & Gamble — the maker of Bounty paper towels, Charmin bathroom tissue, Crest toothpaste, Dawn dishwashing liquid, Pampers disposable diapers, Tide laundry detergent, and other established brands — could rent space in a mall or shopping center or build stand-alone stores to sell its products. However, it chooses not to, and instead relies on Walmart, Target, Costco, and other middlemen to sell its goods. In a free market, companies decide on the best way or ways to offer their products to consumers.

Mandated middlemen

Whether a company uses middlemen to sell its products is entirely up to the company. Except when it is not. Automakers in the United States do not sell their cars directly to consumers. No American who wants to purchase a new Mustang or Camaro goes down to his local Ford or Chevy store. All car sales are made through independently owned and operated car dealerships. In fact, by the 1950s, all of the states had passed dealer-franchise laws that prohibited automakers from owning licensed dealerships or selling cars directly to consumers. According to a recent report by *Reason*,

In the late 1990s, Ford attempted to circumvent the dealerships in Texas by starting its own stores and selling used cars through their own company website. The Texas Department of Transportation ruled that this violated the state's franchise laws and ordered Ford to shut down operations. Ford was also hit with a \$1.7 million state fine. The following year, then Texas Governor George W. Bush signed a law that strengthened protections for the dealership cartel.

A Republican state legislator in Texas introduced a bill in the 2017 legislative session that would get rid of car-dealership rules. "What my bill basically says is that a manufacturer of an automobile can sell direct to the consumer if they want to," said Rep. Jason Isaac. Texas lawmakers didn't act on the bill this session. To do so would mean going up against "the politically connected Texas Auto Dealers Association (TADA), which opposes any efforts to change franchise laws." During a speech at the Automotive Press Association in 2016, National Automobile Dealers Association chairman Jeff Carlson maintained that

"consumers preferred the dealership sales model" and that dealership networks were "the best, most efficient, and most pro-consumer way of selling new cars and trucks." But how can that be the case when it is consumers' only option? How can it be the case when the car dealership is a government-mandated middleman?

"What my bill says is that a manufacturer of an automobile can sell direct to the consumer,"
said Rep. Jason Isaac.

And consider the situation of automaker Tesla. It generally sells its electric cars directly to consumers at the Tesla website. It operates stores and galleries, usually in malls, in about twenty states and Washington, D.C., that serve as showrooms to provide prospective shoppers with information about Tesla vehicles. Showrooms generally have only a few cars in inventory for display and test drives. Potential purchasers are directed to the company's website to customize and reserve their vehicles. In Connecticut, Louisiana, Michigan, Texas, and West Virginia, Tesla is forbidden by law to sell cars directly to consumers. Some states limit the number of Tesla stores allowed

within their borders. Car dealers and dealer associations in some states have filed numerous lawsuits against Tesla to prevent the company from selling cars directly to consumers. The TADA even claims that allowing Tesla to sell directly to consumers is a violation of “true free-market” principles by giving [Tesla CEO Elon] Musk and Tesla “a monopoly just for them.” (It should be pointed out that although sales of Tesla electric vehicles are subsidized by a “Qualified Plug-in Electric Drive Motor Vehicle Credit” that can be as high as \$7,500, the existence of this tax credit is unrelated to its direct-to-consumers business model.)

Government as a middleman

The only thing worse than a government-mandated middleman is a government middleman. Now, no government in the United States at any level (federal, state, or local) forces producers to sell all of their products to it so it can then turn around and sell the products to consumers. However, governments do function as middlemen in a variety of ways — usually under the guise of protecting consumers — when they require, mandate, or restrict certain actions of individuals and businesses if they are to engage

in commerce or prohibit them from doing so altogether.

The results of government’s playing the role of a middleman are that the supply of goods and services is artificially restricted, businesses are burdened with complying with government regulations, prices for consumers are increased, competition is stifled, property rights are violated, and personal and economic liberties are infringed.

Governments function as middlemen in a variety of ways — usually under the guise of protecting consumers.

Here are just some of the ways in which government functions as a middleman:

Government functions as a middleman when it requires a license from the government to work in certain occupations.

Government functions as a middleman when it mandates that employers must pay their employees a minimum wage.

Government functions as a middleman when it sets rules for overtime pay.

Government functions as a middleman when it mandates that employers must provide their employees health insurance.

Government functions as a middleman when it mandates that businesses be accessible to the handicapped.

Government functions as a middleman when it restricts alcohol sales on Sundays.

Government functions as a middleman when it requires businesses to serve everyone.

Government functions as a middleman when it mandates that businesses have a certain number of parking spaces for the handicapped.

Government functions as a middleman when it sets Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards for cars and trucks.

Government functions as a middleman when it prevents businesses from raising prices under the threat of being charged with price gouging.

Government functions as a middleman when it restricts car sales on Sundays.

Government functions as a middleman when it limits the maximum interest rate that lenders can charge borrowers.

Government functions as a middleman when it outlaws smoking in restaurants, bars, and places of business.

Government functions as a middleman when it tells employers

that they can't discriminate in hiring.

Government functions as a middleman when it prevents one company from buying another company.

Government functions as a middleman when it imposes excise taxes on gasoline, tobacco, and alcohol.

Government functions as a middleman when it limits the maximum interest rate that lenders can charge borrowers.

Government functions as a middleman when it restricts the hours that alcohol can be sold in stores or served in bars and restaurants.

Government functions as a middleman when it tells clubs and organizations whom they have to admit as members.

Government functions as a middleman when it redistributes wealth from one segment of society to another.

Government functions as a middleman when it mandates that employers provide family leave.

Government functions as a middleman when it decrees that you must obtain permission to travel to certain countries.

Government functions as a middleman when it tells property owners that they can't discriminate when renting a house or apartment.

Government functions as a middleman when it operates liquor stores and prevents private entities from doing so.

Government functions as a middleman when it requires that employers permit their employees to wear a hijab, yarmulke, scarf, or turban.

Government functions as a middleman when it subsidizes flights at rural airports.

Government functions as a middleman when it forbids people to pump their own gas.

Government functions as a middleman when it makes it difficult for Uber or Lyft to pick up passengers.

Government functions as a middleman when it builds sports stadiums.

Government functions as a middleman when it transfers income from one American to another.

Government functions as a middleman when it mandates that service dogs be allowed in stores.

Government functions as a middleman when it limits the number of taxis that can operate in a city.

Government functions as a middleman when it sets taxi fares.

Government functions as a middleman when it requires that all taxicabs have a medallion to operate.

Government functions as a middleman when it enacts compulsory school-attendance laws.

Government functions as a middleman when it prevents companies from merging.

Government functions as a middleman when it prohibits the sale of alcohol.

Government functions as a middleman when it delivers the mail and forbids private companies to do so.

Government functions as a middleman when it guarantees mortgages.

Government functions as a middleman when it requires that all taxicabs must have a medallion to operate.

Government functions as a middleman when it builds public housing.

Government functions as a middleman when it limits the amount of beer and wine that one can produce at home.

Government functions as a

middleman when it outlaws the possession of drugs.

Government functions as a middleman when it requires a license from the government to get married.

Government functions as a middleman when it sets the drinking age at 21.

Government functions as a middleman when it interferes with the voluntary, peaceful activity of consenting adults.

Is there anything wrong with companies' offering a good salary, overtime pay, health insurance, or family-leave benefits? Of course not. Is there anything wrong with businesses' being handicap-accessible or having parking spaces for the handicapped? No. Is there anything wrong with stores' restricting the days or hours that they sell alcohol? Definitely not. Is there anything wrong with businesses, clubs, organizations, or landlords who welcome everyone? Not at all. Is there anything wrong with car manufac-

turers' producing fuel-efficient vehicles? Certainly not.

Is there anything wrong with restaurants, bars, or places of business that prohibit smoking? Surely you jest.

Clearly, free-market middlemen should be distinguished from government middlemen. Middlemen in the free market perform a valuable service; government middlemen, not so much.

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NEXT MONTH:
**“The Problem with
Conservatism”**
by Laurence M. Vance

Sarah Grimké and Angelina Grimké Weld: Abolitionists and Feminists

by Neera K. Badhwar



The American women's rights movement was born in the bosom of the abolitionist movement. The 19th-century abolitionists and feminists Sarah (1792–1873) and Angelina Grimké (1805–1879) were the first female agents of the American Anti-Slavery Society, as well as pioneers of the American women's rights movement. Their arguments for women's rights anticipated many of John Stuart Mill's arguments in *The Subjection of Women*. It is interesting that many Muslim feminists in Islamic countries and in the West are now making similar arguments for women's rights, so I will conclude with a brief discussion of their efforts.

The Grimké's feminism arose largely out of the hurdles they encountered as abolitionists. Those hurdles were put up not only by defenders of slavery in the North who profited from the cheap cotton produced by the South, but also by abolitionists who deemed it improper for women to appear on the public stage. They were vilified and even threatened with violence for their public appearances. Their struggle for the right to speak out against slavery publicly shows how radically culture can oppress people even in the absence of legal oppression. Drawing on *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina*, by Gerda Lerner, I will start with a brief biographical note on the Grimké's.

Sarah and Angelina Grimké were born into a prominent slaveholding family in Charleston, South Carolina. Their independent spirits were evident even in their early years. Like most children, they hated slavery when they were little. But unlike most children, Sarah and Angelina did not gradually come to accept it as normal. At a young age, Sarah was given a little slave girl of her own as a birthday present. She hated the idea, and treated the girl like a friend instead of a slave. She also violated the law by teaching her to read and write late at night in her

bedroom, till she was discovered by her father. When the girl died a few years later, Sarah was inconsolable, to her mother's great mystification, for weren't there plenty of little slave girls to replace the one who had died?

When Sarah was 26, she accompanied her ill father to Philadelphia to consult a doctor. There she became acquainted with some Quakers, whose condemnation of slavery revived her anti-slavery sentiments. In 1821, she left Charleston for good for Philadelphia. Angelina, who had often protested against slavery to her mother, joined Sarah a few years later. Both had realized that there was little they could do about slavery as long as they lived in Charleston. After all, they had failed to influence even their own family members. Sarah and Angelina Grimké converted to Quakerism and spent the early 1830s doing social work with the Quakers, before eventually becoming active in the cause of abolition, and then feminism.

Abolitionism and feminism

Their activism started in 1835, when Angelina sent William Lloyd Garrison a passionate letter about the evils of slavery, and expressing her distress at the opposition to abolition in the North, and her appre-

ciation of Garrison for standing up to the mobs and public denunciations. Garrison published her letter in his magazine *The Liberator*, without her knowledge. That put Angelina squarely in the public eye, and she started attending female anti-slavery meetings and speaking about slavery to women in sewing circles and private parlors. After initially disapproving of her action, Sarah joined her in attending anti-slavery meetings. The Female Anti-Slavery Society had several free colored men and women as members, including Sarah Douglass and her mother, Grace, who became lifelong friends of the Grimké sisters.

Angelina started attending female anti-slavery meetings and speaking about slavery to women.

In 1836 Angelina and Sarah became the first women to receive training as abolitionist agents at the Agents' Convention of the American Anti-Slavery Convention. They started giving talks at female anti-slavery meetings in New York, Boston, and surrounding towns and villages. But soon they were addressing mixed audiences at the American Anti-Slavery Society and other organizations, inviting the disapproval of many, including their Quaker

friends, their abolitionist friends, and the churches, for their unwomanly activities. Some urged the sisters not to divert attention from the great wrong being done to slaves “in a selfish crusade against some paltry grievances,” a complaint familiar to feminists of every age. To which Angelina replied, “If we have no right to act, then may we well be termed ‘the white slaves of the North,’ for like our brethren in bonds, we must seal our lips in silence and despair.” In the same spirit, John Stuart Mill was to remark many years later, “There remain no legal slaves [in England], except the mistress of every house.”

Angelina thought, “Women ought to feel a peculiar sympathy in the colored man’s wrong, for, like him, she has been accused of mental inferiority, and denied the privileges of a liberal education.” On a more theoretical level, she saw that all rights are connected and had the same justification, and hoped that “the ultimate result will be the breaking of every yoke.” The sisters were thus naturally led to join their work on abolition with a crusade for women’s rights.

In 1836, Angelina published *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, in which she drew upon the Bible to argue that slavery was

immoral, in direct contradiction to the Southern clergy’s use of the Bible to claim the exact opposite. One of her arguments dealt with what looked like God’s condemnation of Canaanites to perpetual servitude, an argument that apologists for slavery often used to justify the practice. Angelina argued that God was merely prophesying what would happen, not commanding what ought to happen. After all, the Bible also prophesies sin, without condoning it. Moreover, God gave Adam dominion over all things and animals, but not over other human beings.

They were addressing mixed audiences, inviting the disapproval of many for their unwomanly activities.

Angelina exhorted Southern women to read the Declaration of Independence and the Bible to see for themselves that slavery was wrong, and then to persuade their husbands, fathers, and sons of its evils. After all, she pointed out, British women had spread the gospel of emancipation with their pens, paint brushes, and needles, and helped bring about the Emancipation Bill of Great Britain. And American women were now doing the same in the North.

Unfortunately, Southern women never got to read Angelina's *Appeal*, because it was publicly burned by the postmaster of South Carolina. But Angelina's argumentative strategy was used by Sarah Grimké in her fight for women's rights. By the late 1830s the Grimké sisters were known not only as abolitionists but also as defenders of women's rights. Although they were not the first women to lecture publicly on the emancipation of women, they were the first to link emancipation of women to emancipation of slaves, and the first to speak publicly to mixed audiences. They were also more influential than their predecessors.

Their influence, however, was dearly bought. They were often threatened by mobs who threw bricks into the windows of the lecture halls, ridiculed by the media, and denounced by churches. Garrison was the only prominent abolitionist who wholeheartedly supported the Grimké sisters from the beginning, publishing their letters and appeals for women's rights as well as for abolition. But Garrison's promotion of women's rights within the anti-slavery movement split the abolition movement, because some of his close associates disagreed with the fusion of the two issues.

Like Angelina, Sarah also took her stand on the Declaration of Independence that all humans have an equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and used the Bible to refute the advocates of female subordination. In her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* (1837), Sarah said that she didn't trust the King James translation, because it had been translated by men living in a patriarchal culture, so she would use the Hebrew version. (Of course, the Hebrew Bible was also written by men in a patriarchal culture, but perhaps Sarah thought that the translation had added another layer of anti-female bias to the text.)

The Grimké sisters were known not only as abolitionists but also as defenders of women's rights.

The Bible presented two main challenges. One was that Eve was clearly inferior to Adam, since it was she who had given in to the serpent's temptation and, in turn, tempted Adam. Nonsense, replied Sarah, given that Adam simply followed his wife in her transgression! Not exactly an example of strength of mind! The other main challenge lay in God's seeming commandment to Eve: "Thou wilt be subject unto thy

husband, and he will rule over thee” [Gen 3:16]. Sarah met this challenge head-on, arguing, as Angelina had done with the statement about the servitude of Canaanites, that the statement was a prophecy, not a command. She pointed out that Hebrew uses the same word for “will” and “shall,” and translators have simply expressed their prejudices in translating it as “shall.” The Bible also states that Adam and Eve will have to contend with thorns and thistles in their earthly abode. Imagine translating that as a command instead of a prophecy!

Sarah did not ask for special favors for women. All she wanted, she said, was that men “take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy.” That would give women the chance to prove that they really were equal. And if they weren’t, they would “soon give evidence of ... their inferiority, and shrink back into ... obscurity....”

But why go through this rigma-
role? Isn’t it obvious that woman is intellectually and morally inferior to men? Well, says Sarah, if she is, it’s because man has “done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought,

and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior.”

The same argument, of course, had been made by slaveholders: look at these people — they are intellectually and morally deficient and not fit for anything else! They are slaves because they are slave-like! Slavery is good not only for us but also for them.

Sarah pointed out the harm done to women’s intellect by the denial of equal rights.

Sarah also pointed out the harm done to women’s intellect and character by the denial of equal rights. “Woman” has become used to being treated like a doll, “a plaything to please his eye and amuse his hours of leisure.” The adage, “Rule by obedience and by submission sway,” teaches women to be hypocrites, to “pretend to submit” in order to gain their point. Women’s loss of the right to property after marriage, and lack of a right to custody of their children, she said, “are one of the greatest outrages,” fostering “loss of self-respect, independence and degradation.” The men, for their part, shut “themselves up in the self made circle of their superiority.”

In his three autobiographies and other work, Frederick Douglass

made similar arguments about the negative effects of slavery on the character of both slaves and slaveholders.

“Whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do.”

To women, Sarah said: Stop going along with your own degradation and realize that “whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do.” Inequality of rights “creates antagonism” between the two sexes, equality will bring them closer together. Further, equal rights to person and property “will release woman from the horrors of forced maternity.”

The historian Gerda Lerner claims that “forced maternity” is a euphemism for marital rape, an issue common among 19th-century feminists. It’s sobering to recall that marital rape was criminalized in all 50 states of the United States only in 1993.

John Stuart Mill was later to give many of the arguments that Sarah Grimké first gave for women’s liberation in *The Subjection of Women*: recognizing women’s equal rights would allow women to show that they were not inherently inferior to men, whatever inferiority they ex-

hibited as a group was due to their oppression, and such oppression harmed women’s characters as well as those of men, who were given to self-worship and a self-deluded sense of superiority just for being men. Mill also argued that, since women had no right to refuse to have sex with their husbands, they were sexual slaves. All this added up to marriages devoid of true intimacy and friendship.

Moral concerns

An important aspect of the Grimké’s fight for equal rights is that it was grounded in their realization that their unequal status prevented them from expressing their moral concerns.

As Angelina said in her address to a committee of the Massachusetts legislature (February, 1838) — the first time a woman had addressed any legislative body in America — as citizens, women are partners “in a nation’s guilt and shame.” Their “honor, happiness and well-being are bound up in its politics, government and laws.” And as moral beings, they “owe it to the suffering slave and to the deluded master” to do all they can “to overturn a system of complicated crimes.”

Another important aspect of the Grimké’s fight is that they didn’t fo-

cus only on changing the law and the attitudes of men. They also recognized — and urged — the importance of women’s making an attempt to grow psychologically and morally by their own efforts, to feel and act confidently in the company of men, and to see themselves as moral agents who were responsible for themselves. In this, they have much to teach some contemporary feminists in the West who have adopted the strategy or ideology of victimhood to change the law and social attitudes.

There is a nascent feminist movement in some Muslim countries.

The Grimké’s holistic approach to women’s rights was in keeping with their approach to abolition, where they argued not only for an immediate emancipation of slaves (against gradualism) and legal equality for free blacks, but also their full integration within American society (against colonization), and thus for a psychological and moral change in whites, including abolitionists. For even in the North, where slavery had been abolished, race prejudice continued strong, and it was race prejudice that had led to segregation of free blacks and

the plan for colonizing them in Liberia.

Western women have won all the legal freedoms that the Grimké’s and later feminists fought for. The lot of Muslim women in most Muslim countries is, however, even more dire than that of Western women in the 19th century. Some people have criticized contemporary Western feminists for focusing exclusively on their own relatively minor grievances instead of fighting for the rights of Muslim women. But that assumes that Muslim women would welcome such a move, or that it would be a helpful move. Both assumptions are doubtful. In any case, there is a nascent feminist movement in some Muslim countries, a movement that bears some resemblance to the 19th-century feminist movement in the United States. As Elizabeth Segran pointed out in “The Rise of the Islamic Feminists” in the December 4, 2013, issue of *The Nation*, in 2008 the Malaysian feminist Zainah Anwar established Sisters of Islam, and in 2009, she and other women from different Muslim countries established Musawah (meaning “equality” in Arabic). They work with scholars to find Islamic justifications for equality for women, organize workshops, and produce educational materials.

Their main argument is similar to that of the Grimkés: the Koran does not justify women's subordination to men; it has been interpreted to do so by its male readers. For example, the word "iddribuhunna" in Arabic has a double meaning: to beat, and to go their own separate ways. Men have taken it to mean that they have a right to beat their wives, but it's better understood as saying that men and women can go their own separate ways if a marriage is not working out. So there is no good reason to think that the Koran sanctions wife-beating, and doesn't sanction a woman's right to a divorce. The important point is that Sharia laws have not come down from God; they are interpretations of God's word. As Anwar says, "Human engagement with the divine text produces laws that are fallible and open to change." Because women were excluded from the writing of family law, family law heavily favors men. Even the Pakistani judge Muhammad Khalid Masud agrees that because Islamic scriptures were written in a patriarchal culture, the Koran "must be historicized" before it can be applied to modern issues.

Then there are secular feminists who eschew the Koran and argue

for equality within the framework of the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW, of course, is a far cry from the Declaration of Independence, inflated as it is with a wish-list of all desirable things rather than merely equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Nevertheless, Muslim feminists have won some promising changes. In 2004, Morocco passed a law that states that spouses are equal partners, and gives women the right to divorce. Saudi Arabia recently passed a law against domestic abuse and gave women legal permission to drive. These legal successes are pathetic for the 21st century, but they constitute progress all the same. Perhaps the Grimké sisters will provide inspiration to Muslim women.

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Debauching the Currency

by James Cook



Often people who make gloomy predictions about the economy have an ulterior motive. They want to sell a newsletter, a book, precious metals, or even storage food. In some cases they have no basis for their views other than an opinion. I like to think that what I write originates with the economic thinkers of the Austrian School of economics. They issued many warnings and gloomy predictions. I believe they are right and at some point our economy and monetary system will falter. In fact, a sudden crisis can appear at any time. Panic and fear can paralyze the nation and high and mighty assets can quickly turn to dust. A great leveling lurks off shore. When it crashes down upon us, as it inevitably will, we are likely

to suffer through the worst financial collapse in history.

The greatest of the Austrian School economists was Ludwig von Mises (1881–1973). He is the antithesis of the Keynesians who run the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury. He issued this powerful warning: “Endeavors to keep the rate of interest below the height it would attain on a market not sabotaged by credit expansion are doomed to failure in the long run. In the short run they result in an artificial boom which inevitably ends in a crash and slump. If one wants to avert depressions, one must abstain from any tampering with the rate of interest.”

Mises predicted, “The monetary and credit policies of all nations are headed for a new catastrophe, probably more disastrous than any of the older slumps.” He also warned, “There is no hope left for a civilization when the masses favor harmful policies.” Mises deplored money creation, monetary easing, and the inflationary policies of today. He wrote, “Inflationism ... is an expedient of people who do not care a whit for the future of their nation and its civilization.” He warned, “Inflationism cannot last; if not radically stopped in time, it must lead inexorably to a complete break-

down.” He knew whom to blame. “It is government interference that has destroyed money in the past and it is government interference that is destroying money again.” And he knew why it does it: “Progressives need inflation in order to finance their policy of reckless spending and of lavishly subsidizing and bribing the voter.” Mises insisted the outcome was dire: “Continuous inflation must finally end in the crack-up boom and the complete breakdown of the currency system.”

“Inflation is itself a dishonest act on the part of the government.”

Two distinguishing economic professors who were followers of Ludwig von Mises issued their own warnings. Murray Rothbard (1926–1995) wrote, “The natural tendency of government, once in charge of money, is to inflate and to destroy the value of the currency.” He also pointed out what happens when inflationary policies are practiced worldwide, “At the end of the road will be a horrendous worldwide hyperinflation, with no way of escaping into sounder or less inflated currencies.”

Han Sennholz (1922–2007) had this to say: “The ultimate destina-

tion of the present road of political fiat is hyperinflation with all its omnious economic, social, and political consequences. On this road, no federal plan, program, income policy, control, nationalization, threat, fine, or prison can prevent the continuous erosion and ultimate destruction of the dollar.”

My friend the late economist Kurt Richebächer (1918–2007) warned, “The U.S. credit and debt excesses of the past years are beyond past experience in history.” Along the same line, the economist Jörg Hülsmann writes, “The government’s fiat makes inflation perennial, and as a result we observe the formation of inflation-specific institutions and habits. Thus fiat inflation leaves a characteristic cultural and spiritual stain on human society.” The late editor of the *London Times* and economic thinker William Rees-Mogg (1928–2012) wrote, “Inflation gradually pushes the whole community towards speculation, since ordinary life begins to require speculators’ skills.”

Diluting milk

The author and economist Henry Hazlitt (1894–1993) explained, “It is not merely that inflation breeds dishonesty in a nation. Inflation is itself a dishonest act on the

part of the government, and sets the example for private citizens. When modern governments inflate by increasing the paper money supply, directly or indirectly, they do in principle what kings once did when they clipped coins. Diluting the money supply with paper is the moral equivalent of diluting the milk supply with water.”

The philosopher and economist Leonard Read (1898–1983) knew why governments inflate: “Inflation makes the extension of socialism possible by providing the financial chaos in which it flourishes. The fact is that socialism and inflation are simultaneously cause and effect; they feed on each other.”

What then will be the outcome? The noted banker and economist John Exter (1910–2001) warned, “The market place is a crime and punishment world, and this Federal Reserve credit expansion is the greatest monetary crime of all time. Accordingly the punishment will be far and away the greatest punishment of all time.” Another answer

came from economist Virgil Jordan (1892–1965): “Ultimately with God’s aid, Truth always emerges and finally prevails supreme in its power over the destiny of mankind, and terrible the retribution for those who deny, defy, or betray it.”

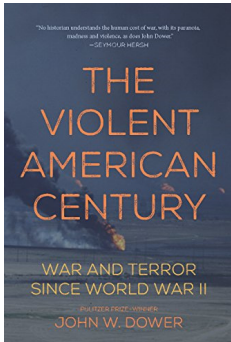
This is a time when investors are feeling great optimism. The possibility of a financial crisis seems remote. However, economic disasters do not announce their coming. A panic unfolds unexpectedly; otherwise it wouldn’t be a panic. One should not rest easy given the debt, deficits, and money creation promoted by liberal central bankers and socialist economists. A collapse can come at any time, as we saw in 2008. No one should forsake the protection of precious metals or decide not to have a hedge against a hyperinflationary disaster and depression.

James Cook is the founder of Investment Rarities Incorporated.

Another Bloody American Century

by Matthew Harwood

The Violent American Century: War and Terror since World War II by John W. Dower (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017; 184 pages)



Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) was livid. “In the dead of night,” the California Democrat wrote on Twitter in July, House Speaker Paul Ryan did something “underhanded and undemocratic.” He stripped out her bipartisan amendment to repeal the 2001 Authorization to Use Military Force against al-Qaeda from the Defense Appropriations bill. Congress passed the AUMF three days after 9/11 to give the president the authority to go after al-Qaeda, which had attacked America on that crys-

tal-clear morning in September. There was only one member of Congress to cast a lonely vote against the resolution: Barbara Lee.

In what can only be described as prophetic, Lee warned at the time of the AUMF vote that “we must be careful not to embark on an open-ended war with neither an exit strategy nor a focused target.” She likened the authorization to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution that got America bogged down in Vietnam. But she wasn’t worried only about a new war’s impact on the United States and its military. “If we rush to launch a counterattack,” she said, “we run too great a risk that women, children, and other noncombatants will be caught in the crossfire.” Lee closed her speech with a line that should haunt the consciences of all Americans: “As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore.”

In the past 16 years, the AUMF has allowed the unleashing of America’s signature high-tech violence across the Greater Middle East, with no end in sight. Since 9/11, the United States has bombed at least seven countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, and Syria. Each and every time George W. Bush or Barack Obama authorized the use of force in another country outside of the

2003 invasion of Iraq, they claimed the AUMF as their authority, even though one of the targets of its strikes, the Islamic State, couldn't have attacked America on 9/11, since the group didn't exist then.

While events have proven Lee correct, she was too kind to her fellow Americans and their representatives in Congress. Americans have always engaged in the evil they say they deplore. As Pulitzer Prize-winning historian John W. Dower documents in his terse volume *The Violent American Century: War and Terror since World War II*, the American capacity for bloodletting is bottomless and its appetite for destruction insatiable.

Dower's slim volume takes aim at the notion that we should take heart from the indication that human violence is on the decline since World War II. The most influential of the "declinists," as Dower calls them, is Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker. In his 2011 book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Pinker goes as far as to call the Cold War "the Long Peace" and the years after the Berlin Wall fell down "the New Peace." Dower will have none of that. "This so-called postwar peace was, and still is, saturated in blood and wracked with suffering," he writes.

But what really rankles Dower is the conventional wisdom behind why the world has experienced such "peace" since the end of World War II: the absence of war between great powers, principally the United States and the Soviet Union. Dower's irritation stems from two related reasons. In America, the belief remains solid that the world didn't end in a thermonuclear ball of fire because of the "wisdom, virtue, and firepower of U.S. 'peace-keeping.'" And such belief, writes Dower, "obscures the degree to which the United States bears responsibility for contributing to, rather than impeding, militarization and mayhem after 1945."

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The rest of the Dower's book is a concise history of how a nation that emerged from World War II largely unscathed became "essentially bipolar — hubristic and overwhelmingly powerful by all material measures, yet fearful and insecure." Military planners, according to Dower, exploited this paradox as a way to ensure the national-security

state became a permanent fixture in American life while convincing the general population that empire equaled safety. There's nothing really new here in Dower's postwar history that leftists such as Noam Chomsky, conservatives such as Andrew Bacevich, and libertarians such as Robert Higgs haven't explored in greater detail. But the value of Dower's book is its length — it's a perfect introduction to the dark heart of American foreign and military policy since 1945 — and what he chooses to emphasize, namely the imperial mindset that pursues U.S. hegemony at the risk of wiping out humanity.

With nuclear diplomacy now in the hands of the Trump administration, Dower offers a necessary reminder that U.S. nuclear policy almost destroyed the world more than once and continues to fuel nuclear-arms races across the world. During the mid 1980s, the nuclear stockpile of warheads between the United States and the Soviet Union exceeded 60,000, more than enough to wipe out humanity multiple times over. As the American nuclear strategist Albert Wohlstetter wrote in 1959, the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a “delicate balance of terror.” Three years later, that balance

was almost upended as the nuclear enemies almost pushed their respective buttons over the Cuban Missile Crisis.

And the close calls didn't end there, Dower reminds us. It's nothing sort of a miracle that an accident or human mistake didn't end in nuclear oblivion. “In a jittery world of massive-retaliation group-think,” writes Dower, “major alarms about a possible Soviet attack were triggered by a flock of birds, sunlight reflected off clouds, the rising moon, a training tape mistakenly inserted in the warning system, and a faulty computer chip costing forty-six cents.”

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In behavior that can only be described as shocking the conscience, American nuclear planners after the close call in Cuba wanted adversaries to believe U.S. leaders were crazy enough to use nuclear weapons tactically. In October 1969, the Nixon White House developed a short-lived plan named Operation Duck Hook, whereby Washington would lead Hanoi to believe the unbelievable — that Richard Nixon

would nuke North Vietnam to end the war. “They’ll believe any threat of force that Nixon makes because it’s Nixon.... I call it the Madman Theory, Bob,” one of Nixon’s top cronies, H.R. Haldeman, recalled the president telling him. “I want the North Vietnamese to believe I’ve reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war.”

Such irresponsibility in strategy led some of the nuclear priesthood to confess their sins and renounce their immoral beliefs and actions. Dower focuses on two men, Gen. Lee Butler, the last commander of Strategic Air Command, and William Perry, the secretary of Defense under George H.W. Bush. Both of them looked back on their careers with regret. Butler noted how the nuclear doctrine of mutually assured destruction evolved into the use of nuclear weapons as conventional weapons, including nuclear land and sea mines as well as “warheads on artillery shells that could be launched from jeeps.”

Perry, similarly, looked back on the conception of nukes as conventional weapons in dismay, “as though they were simply organic evolutions of prenuclear arms,” and decried it as “extraordinarily reckless.” According to Perry, “We acted as if the world had not changed

with the emergence of the nuclear age, the age in which the world had changed as never before.” Butler, for his part, wrote that “mankind escaped the Cold War without a nuclear holocaust by some combination of diplomatic skill, blind luck and divine intervention, probably the latter in great proportion.”

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Unfortunately, nuclear planners haven’t learned the lessons of Butler and Perry. In the unending irony of Obama’s presidency, the commander in chief who was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize, mainly for his work on nuclear disarmament, committed an estimated \$1 trillion over the next 30 years to modernize America’s nuclear capability. As Dower wisely observes, “The ceaseless U.S. quest to maintain massive ‘technological asymmetry’ militarily is guaranteed to keep arms races of every sort going.” Washington continues to pursue this course, even though the risk of nuclear war has only increased as more countries join the nuclear club, which now stands at nine, and the bellicose rhetoric between Pyongyang and Washington intensifies.

It's partly because of continued American interventionism and aggression, especially under the 2001 AUMF, that nuclear proliferation continues. One of the lessons that North Korea learned from the Iraq War and America's intervention in Libya was that nuclear warheads are the only defense against U.S.-led efforts at regime change. The Libya case study is the most instructive: dictator Muammar Qaddafi gave up his nuclear weapons program in 2003 and ended up sodomized by a stick and with a bullet through his head after U.S. bombing helped rebels overthrow his regime in 2011. As one North Korean official put it before the U.S.-NATO bombing of Libya began, "It is now being fully exposed before the world that Libya's 'nuclear dismantlement,' much touted by the U.S. in the past, turned out to be a mode of aggression, a way of coaxing the victim with sweet words to disarm itself and then to swallow it up by force."

No one in the U.S. national-security apparatus, or among the populace, should be surprised that Kim Jong-un is intent on perfecting an intercontinental ballistic missile that could threaten the United States with a nuclear warhead. He

made the only rational move to protect his dictatorship from U.S.-led regime change. Or as Donald Trump said, correctly, Kim is "a pretty smart cookie."

In a world suddenly concerned about nuclear catastrophe, Dower's emphasis on America's responsibility for nuclear proliferation and recklessness feels prescient and worth remembering. And for all the data marshalled by the declinists to show a decrease in global violence — no matter how often that bloodshed can be traced back to U.S. shores since the end of World War II — it takes only one frenzied decision to trigger the extinction of the species. So as we watch helplessly on cable news as one megalomaniac stares down another, Dower wants Americans to know this: This is an existential nightmare of our own making.

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