

January 2003

Re-examining the ruins of Iraq, reclaiming the signifier of "Democracy"

Keith Goshorn
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/csp>

Recommended Citation

Goshorn, Keith (2003) "Re-examining the ruins of Iraq, reclaiming the signifier of "Democracy";" *Culture, Society, and Praxis*: Vol. 1 : No. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/csp/vol1/iss2/2>

This Main Theme / Tema Central is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Culture, Society, and Praxis by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Re-Examining The Ruins Of Iraq, Reclaiming The Signifier Of "Democracy."

Proposals for scholarly research projects to place the "Attack on Iraq" into a larger frame of cultural, political, and historical understanding.

By Keith Goshorn

Keith Goshorn previously was Professeur Associé, Dept. d'Etudes Anglophones, Université Stendhal, Grenoble III, France, and previous to that was a Fellow at the Center for Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He received an interdisciplinary Ph.D in Theories of Interpretation from the Graduate Institute of Liberal Arts (interdisciplinary integrated humanities and social science program) at Emory University, Atlanta, GA. in 1992. His dissertation was focused on French sociologist Jean Baudrillard and titled: Recuperation as a Figure of Postmodernity: Testing the Uses of Baudrillard's Cultural Theory.

In the place of a longer, fully developed essay which will take more time and distance than the present circumstances currently afford us, I would like to merely offer here some very partial, cursory summaries that might point anyone in the larger learning community of students and scholars reached by this journal towards what I believe to be important and partially neglected scholarly work necessary to understand the full picture of the historical episode we have just experienced in the U.S military intervention in Iraq, and of the larger project of which it is a supposed to be a component, an announced war without end, the "War of Terrorism." The "war" on Iraq, or the "attack" on Iraq, is in some ways both unique and yet repetitive of older well-established versions of American military interventions which expose the unavoidable dimensions of either imperial or neo-colonial motivations. (Even the project of forcibly installing democracy, for those who choose to believe such a motivation, would still technically fall into the category of imperial or neo-colonial imposition of another political ideology/rulership upon a sovereign country which had a different system/rulership.)

Anyone who is interested in this general subject should want to better understand how this strain of American history is modulating into the present of the early 21st century. But the advantage of the rather diverse array of choices below is that any one of them leads off into a complicated and challenging morass of political, cultural, economic, and historical problems that will inevitably deepen one's analysis of the complex contemporary world in which we currently find ourselves. With a sufficient amount of interest from students and faculty, we might eventually be able to unite our efforts into an on-going research team to share our findings and deepen our mutual understanding. I would hope that at least a few more papers might be produced which could serve as a follow-up to these tentative remarks and signals below. (It should be quickly apparent, however, that each of these are focus areas are of a sort that is either assiduously avoided by most mainstream commercial media and many university public discussion, or is quickly dismissed or avoided if someone does press for answers therein. Taking them on requires a certain courage and dedication to the importance of demanding as deep of an

understanding as possible in this complex of historical events that will no doubt affect our world for some time to come.)

A central requirement for critically engaging with any of these sub-projects is the need to disentangle one's perspective from the royal "We" that has been so thoroughly ingrained in American culture. Americans have long been socialized into speaking about actions of the United States government abroad, no matter how good or bad one might believe them to be, as "We" did this, or "We" did that, while speaking about domestic events easily lapses into the more skeptical posture of "they" did this or "they" did that. What "we" all need to, or should properly be obliged to do as citizens of a democracy is of course to question what purposes are being served by all major decisions, and only then deciding whether we should support or not support them. "We" also should be acutely aware of our own history where it has been precisely in times of war or proposed wars that some kind of stifling of civic dissent has invariably occurred, of citizens' free expression has been forcibly repressed or legally prohibited. (For those who said nothing in the recent lead-up to the Iraq intervention, now is your much safer chance to speak your mind after the fact. The delayed response of the intimidated does have an uncomfortable similarity with the formal preference for a more "distanced" approach of the critical scholar, the "ready excuse" we might say. And among scholars and intellectuals America has always had both the brave and the cowardly souls.)

While I personally prefer a somewhat updated version of Edward Said's influential style of "oppositional criticism," a stance for grounding whatever methodology or theoretical paradigm one might choose to follow, this choice predictably generates a certain percentage of guaranteed opponents from those who like the current arrangements

of power just as they are. But along with a call for "...an acute awareness of and sophistication in theory" Said reminds us that we must also be vigilant in avoiding "theoretical elaboration for its own sake" (something critics like Ma'sud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton love to ridicule as mere "ludic theory.") Of course the conceptual terminology of both "opposition" and "resistance" have their own inherent blind-spots and must themselves be problematized for the dualistic traps inherent in them, as the most committed political scholars have already done. (How does defining one's position as *against* something else not also serve to reinforce the reality of that which one wishes to resist or oppose?) Yet any oppositional posture vis-à-vis the "official" or "legitimized" position of the dominant cultural or political power demands that we offer immediate relevance and forces us to engage with the present in a manner that can communicate to a wider public audience rather than only to specialists of a particular disciplinary field. This also prevents us from resting too safely within the refuge of the Ivory Tower. And if we enlist some of our friends and colleagues to join in this spirit, this posture also may lead us towards a more "engaged department," as some like to say. Said's point of critical reference has often been Antonio Gramsci (to whom we are all indebted for his analysis of social and *cultural* hegemony): "Gramsci suggests that knowledge of history always involves getting over and somehow compensating for the fact that history's traces are routinely effaced." We may never know all that really happened, all of that which finally determined the outcome in Iraq we see today, but we sharpen our senses for the future by the effort of trying to do so. And because we know that many traces are always buried deeply by those in power, we are not deterred by the inevitable attacks when our speculative analyses make some so uncomfortable that

they reach for the desperate repellent gesture of branding what they don't want to confront with the tired epithets of "conspiracy theories" in order to discredit the messenger. The oppositional historian knows that in the terrain of American politics, public or professional opprobrium is the simply the risk one must constantly be willing to take.

While in my own classes I try to convince students that they should try to include a certain minimum percentage of book-length academic studies in any given research project, the constraints on that content today can and often should be balanced by a thorough sampling of internet sources and alternative media not subject to the demands of time and length or professional disciplinary boundaries. Fortunately by the third year of the new century there is emerging a rich if hazardous middle ground between mere "topical" journalism and "serious" scholarly "research," and the fully engaged scholar must learn to critically negotiate the full terrain between the far ends of the spectrum of available information and analysis. To depend on any given part alone today is to invite both folly and ignorance.

I. Stages in the event-stream leading up to the invasion:

There are of course extreme difficulties in practicing theory on the moving train of the present. For historians or political analysts, the problem with approaching current events is that the unique close-up view of the immediate present provides only a moving screen of changing images which unavoidably forces one into the role of provisional *commentator* and away from the more nuanced theoretical analysis the one might reach with the distance of time and circumspection. At the same time, we recall the mass media penchant for leading the audience into a very a-historical immersion

in the swamp of the present by continuously dropping one major event to be suddenly replaced by another of often less importance. When this happens we are always pushed ahead without the benefit of ever processing any attempted closure on the previous story, and in the wake of this momentum all sorts of premature polemical assessments are inevitably left in the public memory, effectively those which have suited the advertising protocols of the major corporate media outlets, themselves not only major corporations, but they themselves owned and controlled, for instance, by the vested interests of major war profiteers such as General Electric and Westinghouse. Becoming acutely aware of the informational strategies of commercial media is necessary to differentiate between mere political commentary and that more difficult exercise of theoretical analysis from a certain distance only afforded by time. Obviously one must place critical limits on the chosen frame of focus and take extreme care in judging where to follow and where not when presented with the constant seduction of countless leads pointing off in different directions. This is another indication of the problem of the "surplus of information" which challenges us all today.

But we might also consider as a separate research project gathering data on the basic proposition that a given person's political position in American culture is directly related to the range and kind of media sources he or she depends upon for daily news and information. Otherwise said, what variables in positions on the Iraq intervention and the necessity for an on-going "War on Terrorism" can be found by comparing (1) those who depend only on corporate commercial networks with (2) those who supplement that media input with a wide range of alternative and international media, available from internet sources or otherwise, and (3) those who more or less

avoid or neglect all media coverage of such major events altogether? We need to begin to ask directly: does the national political divide parallel the media divide between those who depend on corporate media networks for their news and those who seek out alternative sources of international or internet media?

Before proceeding further, let me remind the reader that to take up work in the various research areas that are roughly outlined below one does not need to agree with the preliminary observations offered here and there; these introductory remarks are intended as much for those who might have a different reading of the same event/issue to challenge and try to take apart any suggestions/conclusions with which they might emphatically disagree. Even those who do agree with an apparent interpretation below should raise arguments that might be or have been waged against such dissenting analyses that often run counter to the version Americans are most accustomed to hearing. These focus areas on just some of the many nearly countless remaining controversies surrounding the genesis of the “war” on Iraq that we saw on television.

II. Analyze who really supported the Iraq war and who did not? (Within the United States and at least some other regional or national groups categorized by social, economic, religious, and political similarities.) Which ‘side’ really won--those who were for or those against--and in what ways did each of them lose?

“From Europe through Africa and Asia to the Far East, public opinion is solidly ranged against America. The dissidents include the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Nelson Mandela.” Haroon Siddiqui, “The World Rebels Against America,” *Toronto Star*, 01/26/03.

Beyond the multi-millions worldwide and the at least the several millions among Americans--ordinary citizens as well as political, cultural and religious leaders--who emerged to join the global anti-war movement, it is important to remember that there was also a significant percentage of dissident voices within both the Pentagon and the CIA leading up to the actual US attack on Iraq. While George W. Bush is being publicly credited by American commercial media for “winning” this “war” (perhaps in retrospect a real stretch of the imagination to define it as such), there is nonetheless a remaining feeling in much of the rest of the world that Bush had already lost the “political war” before any bombs were dropped, so thoroughly disenchanted if not outraged were many people in other parts of the world with the attitude and actions of *his* regime. While the central cry of the American anti-war movement --“Regime change begins at home!” has not yet come to pass, there is nevertheless a worldwide feeling that something important *had* changed. The large and widespread “we” who opposed this militarist endeavor for a thousand different reasons no doubt at first experienced depressing moments of failure after such concerted efforts by so many different people. But after a few weeks it appears that the peace movements will not be deterred or defeated by the predictable flag-waving American domestic ritual of self-congratulatory, self-adulation, or the self-serving patriotic narratives of what a “great victory” this was for “freedom and democracy,” and the smug pronouncements that this quick victory proved all the protesters to be wrong in their warnings. Yes, for those who sought for peace and diplomacy to prevail over high-tech violence, there was a widespread feeling of depression after realizing that such a far-reaching opposition was in the end defeated by the militarist machine with all the full resources

of a cheerleading mass media working as if in its direct employ.

But the significance of how quickly this spontaneous global network emerged should not be lost. This was the bona fide global *coalition* force allied against the strongest concentration of aggressive ideologues ever amassed for an American military campaign, and if the coalition of the peaceful did not "win," it still might eventually prevail as the worldview it was promoting may yet seep through the defenses of the more frightened masses aroused by the threat of "terrorist attacks." This global peace network--undeniably enabled by the rising groundwork of the "global justice" movement--was already powerful enough to move even some corporate journalists to describe it as the new "global superpower." And there was a powerful uplifting force palpable at its various and frequent assemblies, the novel feeling among its participants that for the first time one really was a member of a global community, rather than some mere national minority. Its simultaneous demonstrations around the world were empowering with a new sense of international civil society, with the recognition that currently it was for the moment the only force available which had a chance of challenging the warlords of the Military-Industrial-Complex. Its relationship with the global justice movement were always clear as its organizers and its individual marchers constantly reminded onlookers that it was citizen taxpayer money that was ultimately paying for this war. Their speeches and their literature constantly stressed that these billions of dollars were being taken directly away from social services, education, and health care, threatening to reduce the quality of life of many ordinary citizens in the world's largest capitalist economy to levels no better than those found in the world's "undeveloped" countries. All of which served to spotlight the

state of capture of the American government by a form of "crony capitalism" in which profits from rebuilding what the bombing would destroy were already being handed out to the close corporate partners that financed the election of their own custom-made candidates, before the invasion of Iraq had even begun.

In the meantime, what is needed by United States history and political scholars is a more complete understanding of why so precious little formal opposition appeared within the American Congress when citizen group inquiries revealed that the vast majority of constituency calls to Senator and Representative offices were to urge their representatives to vote *against* any war resolution. This willingness to go against their constituencies is something that cannot be written off to popular theories of the mere cowardice or weakness of the current Democratic Party. What is being implied when we hear the popular analysis that the Democrats "prefer to stay on the corporate gravy train," rather than act as any sort of functional political opposition that in terms of basic political theory is necessary for any democratic republic to merit its name? What has been the role of the DNC-Democratic National Committee in creating a Republican-*light* version for furthering an over-all corporate agenda, a Team B fallback when Team A falters? Or perhaps more accurately a "Corporate-*light*" version of the corporate hardball team. Internationally there is one conclusion that is difficult to dispute: the worldwide image/reputation of the United States as a nation to be admired has been significantly damaged. The United States may well be more *feared* by more people now, but it is certainly not more respected. Indeed, many polls leading up to the invasion of Iraq, including at least one taken in the United States, indicate that American military power is perceived as a greater threat to world peace and security than that of any

other nation, and more so than Iran, Iraq or North Korea. This state of affairs is not without a long history (conveniently ignored by most American media pundits and political commentators), but it has been largely exacerbated by the current Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld/Ashcroft administration and the exceptional ideological posture of their advisors. Look further, then, into the background of these advisors—Wolfowitz/Perle/Feith/Woolsey, etc.—and discuss the full implications of their controversial “Project For A New American Century.”

How far are we justified in allowing our logical speculations to run when this larger project spoke of the need for “a Pearl Harbor-like incident” to galvanize public support? What are we to conclude from the available pre-existing policy plan that had already called for the invasion of Iraq as soon as possible? Investigate the available documents of this policy agenda which was conceived several years before this administration existed and or well before their announcement of the sudden need for an “endless war” on “terrorism” and described an inevitable future of continual conflict regulated by instilling permanent international fear of US military/economic retaliation.

Suggested basic starting point: “The Deep Politics of Regime Removal in Iraq: Overt Conquest, Covert Operations,” especially Part three: “The US War Lobby and the Disciples of NSC-68” and others in the series by Larry Chin. Available at <http://www.onlinejournal.com/>

III. The Politics of Representation: Investigating the great gulf between contrasting/competing American “Language Games.”

What can be learned by studying the rhetorical postures and linguistic assumptions apparent in the unspoken battle between what we might call *foundational literalists* and the contrasting *skeptical ironists*? The first camp, the probable heartland majority, are those who never suspect a problem with *representation*, those who see everyday language and political terminology as transparent and self-evident: they are the people who think everyone else sees the same images and finds the same meaning as they do when they speak of “liberty” or “freedom” or “democracy” or “American values,” and those who find it unnecessary to consider what American “interests” might specifically mean, those who are unable to engage in either self-reflexive criticism or skeptical analysis of any presumptions of “America’s” greatness and inherent goodness, or those who have successfully been socialized to believe that all “evil-doers” in the world live in other countries--except for those here who openly criticize America. How then does simplistic self-identification with self-evident meanings and the unproblematic referents (signifieds) in the basic vocabulary of the American “patriotic consensual narrative” determine a different worldview from those other very different Americans who instead hear unintended ironies in the speech and writing of others, especially in the words of politicians and Presidents. Here we speak of those who might smile or laugh when they hear an American President describing the lies and crimes of a certain foreign leader while not realizing his remarks might have a resounding ring of self-description to those who fear his actions far more than that distant foreign leader. Research genres: Language and politics, the ageless problem of a troubling *alterity/Otherness*.

IV. Revisiting *orientalism*: 21st century crusades and the repeated looting of the Middle East.

Eight to nine hundred years after the Christian Crusaders crossed over from Europe and performed one of the bloodiest pogroms in human history, the U. S led call to "cleanse" Islam and the middle East/Central Asia of its current "heretical" beliefs and false prophets, there is a great need to retrace these recent efforts for their full teleological and practical political/economic motivations and compare that with the past. How does the demonization of false "prophets"—Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, etc.—mask a crude desire of capitalist profit in new 21st century imperial wars? Let us not forget that before more than one astonished onlookers pointed out the mad folly of their narrow un-historically informed vision, the George W. Bush administration had originally announced that their campaign for "regime change" in Iraq would be called "The Crusade for Freedom" or some other variants employing the term "crusade." In an administration already known for its lack of any sense of irony, and despite the contradictory embarrassments of the previous Afghanistan campaign labeled "Project Enduring Freedom," US Defense Department war planners apparently were totally unaware of the kind of deep resonance such a term might have for the Arab world. The Christian Crusades of the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries are still remembered in that part of the world not only for their bloody mass slaughter of whole villages of "infidels," but for the unrestrained looting of priceless artifacts of cultural and religious history and wholesale destruction of the wealth of the subjected cities and kingdoms. Not only was control of the oil wealth of Iraq and its related geo-strategic advantages the fundamental basis of US interest and British interest, but the inhabitants of the region have a very lively memory of their colonial occupation by Great Britain after World War I as well as of the

much earlier European Christian crusaders. The further twist in this history which is still being acted out is the wholesale looting of the national museums in Baghdad and smaller Islamic libraries along with countless other buildings of lesser symbolic value. A major controversy still to be resolved here is over the various charges of museum looting of the 6000-year-old world treasures, allegedly undertaken by parties working with knowledgeable professional art dealers or experts in Mesopotamian antiquities. The heavily symbolic laden narrative of these events is made worse by multiple reports that in spite of pre-war warnings from around the world to protect these museums, the US Army apparently did little or nothing to stop the looting, while they did immediately stand guard over the Ministry of Oil building and the Ministry of the Interior where the files of Saddam Hussein's secret police were stored, in particular those relating to political opponents and "subversive groups." Post war screening begins by US to re-instate as many Iraqi officials as possible into their former positions. Many of Saddam Hussein's successful strategies for maintaining "law and order" will apparently be repeated by the new military rulers of Iraq. (Potential relative historical parallel for comparison: after the Nuremberg Trials held by the Allies at the end of world War II, many former Nazi Party members were returned to their former civilian roles in public administration positions. Subsequent political results still being debated today.)

Obviously points of analytic departure in all of the above: international relations to cultural /archeological issues to economic policies and military strategy.

Starting point literature:

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, and *Covering Islam*, Random House, 1982

E. Shohat and R. Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* Routledge, 1994.

V. The unconscious damage of specious signifiers: overturning the “Security” paradigm:

What is behind the growing charges that the American government’s long-standing mantra of protecting our “security” has been in practice a cover for promoting policies of *insecurity*, that such constant warnings about our endangered “national security” are the hallmarks of a classic *National Security State* grounded in the dual threat of potential outside attack that justifies forceful authority and repression? How do these same practices and policies cast the United States in the international arena as the most feared and fearful “Rogue State” of all? Are such consequences unintended by-products, or are they by intentional design given ideological proclivities of advisors and profit advantages of resident investors? How does the shift from a conflict between sovereign states to the “global police actions” engendered by the “defensive” need to protect “our security”?

(Starting point literature: Giorgio Agamben, “Security and Terror,” *Theory & Event*, 5:4, 2002; “The Sovereign Police,” Noam Chomsky, *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs*, South End Press, 2000.

VI. Facing up to the risks of an increasing militarization of American culture and the normalization of war as a part of daily life:

“I shall welcome any war, for I think this country needs one.” Theodore Roosevelt, in an 1897 letter to a friend, quoted in Howard Zinn, *A Peoples History of the United States*, p. 290.

How is the average citizen of the United States to interpret the fact that his or her country is involved in some kind of major military intervention in some other part of the world from the Persian Gulf War in 1991 lesser involvements in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia followed most recently by Afghanistan and Iraq again and that his or her tax dollars are automatically approved to pay for such extremely costly military endeavors?

Starting point literature:

Arundhati Roy, “War is Peace” *Outlook*, *The London Guardian* and *Znet* archives
 Relevant commentary in “Latinos on the Front Lines,” Professor Jorge Malicar, U.C. San Diego, available on [http:// www. La Voz de Aztlan.org](http://www.LaVozdeAztlan.org)
 Noam Chomsky, *World Orders, Old and New*, Columbia University Press, 1994

VII. Answering the question: What is *al Qaeda* and what does it possibly have to do with Iraq?

No direct connection of *al Qaeda* with Saddam Hussein’s secular Baathist government has yet been proved from a long history of mutual enmity between the two. Beyond the familiar White House Press Release depiction of a dangerous, mysterious “global terrorist network,” what other ways can this well-sold representation be understood? London-based international intellectual, novelist, editor, and political analyst, Tariq Ali has argued for understanding the Bush administration of Right-wing Christian Corporatists as an appropriate reciprocal mirror for the Taliban/*Al Qaeda* axis of right-wing Islamicist extremists. For his non-Muslim atheist sensibility, they both represent perfect expressions of humorless conservative fundamentalists convinced of their own provincial understanding of the larger world of diverse global cultures—thus the title of

his popular collection of essays, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads, and Modernity* (Verso Press, 2002), where the hardback cover features the heads of Osama bin Laden and George Bush superimposed over each others bodies. More recently in public appearances before American academic audiences, Ali has portrayed the actions of the Bush regime in Afghanistan and Iraq as tactics of "Christian Bolsheviks" for their blunt, stubborn refusal to listen to *any* reasoned arguments against their policies. Anyone who has been paying attention to world history knows of the origins of *al Queda* in the Muslim Mujahedin fighters recruited from around the world in the early 1980's to create a popular front guerilla army for Afghanistan trained by the American CIA in its proxy war with the Soviet Union. But Tariq Ali goes further in arguing that the US notion of "Islamic terror" symbolized today by *al Queda* is a virtual construction of the American Empire when Bush spokespersons assert that "Its practitioners are evil, the threat is global, and for that reason, bombs have to be dropped wherever and whenever necessary." (SF Chronicle interview: 05/04/03) Taking one bold step further, Professor of Economics Michel Chossudovsky at the University of Ottawa argues that *al Queda* is not only a direct creation of US military intelligence, but that it is best understood today as a functional "instrument of US foreign policy." (KPFA Pacifica Radio Berkeley/Fresno, 94.1) interview "Globalization and Militarization," *Guns and Butter* program, 10/02)

Starting point literature: extensive international archives compiled at www.globalresearch.ca (Montréal, Canada)

VIII. "Predatory" Capitalism and "Economic Weapons of Mass Destruction:

Investigate existing discourse about globalization policies administered by the International Money Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization, (IMF/WB/WTO) and critical comparisons made between harsh economic demands imposed upon so-called "developing" nations and the poorest sectors of those countries subsequent suffering even more than before unto starvation and death. Among many critics pursuing this line of argument has been economist Saskia Sassen who remarked at a recent conference on globalization that all things considered, various legal programs ranging from economic sanctions on Iraq to the structural adjustment programs of IMF/WB loans have killed far more persons than all literal "weapons of mass destruction" combined since the implementation of the neo-liberal (corporate/finance capital) globalization model in recent decades. One underlying problematic: "Globalization means among other things the progressive separation of power from politics." –Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, 1996.

Starting point literature: Susan George, *The Lugano Report*, and globalization research archives available at website of The Transnational Institute, (Amsterdam), and the North-South Institute, led by Phillipine Professor and well-known global justice movement activist, Walden Bello.

Examples of other forms of more domestic "predatory" practices of corporate enterprise may be reviewed in the archives of *Multinational Monitor.org* and *Corpwatch.org*
Suggested strategy: stage counter arguments based upon official government statements/documents or from others who support those points of view and sympathetic media coverage.

IX. On the irrepressible appeal of the *allegorical mafia: neo-liberal corporate capitalism, "protection rackets,"*

**”organized crime,” and military
“gangsterism.” (Le plus les choses
changent, le plus elles sont la même.)”:**

Symbolic ruling trope: the “Black Hand” phenomenon menace to New York small shopkeepers early in the twentieth century--as various businesses and their owners were repeatedly vandalized, robbed, or beaten after a “Black Hand” marker appeared. When regular protection was subsequently offered to all at a monthly price to prevent such attacks, the existence of the protection “racket” came into unmistakable focus: pay up or else. The local “police” were often included in this calculus.

Textual exhibits for re-interpretation and analysis:

From *War as a Racket*, the memoirs of much decorated US Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler, (1888-1940):

“There isn’t a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its ‘finger-men’ to point out enemies, its ‘muscle-men’ to destroy enemies, its ‘brain-men’ to plan war preparations, and a “Big Boss” Super-Nationalistic-Capitalism.... It may seem odd for me, a military man to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent thirty-three years and four months in active military service...And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.” (quoted in Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, Verso, 2002 p. 260)

Michael Parenti, Chapter 3 “Conspiracy, Phobia, and Reality,” section 1: “The JFK Assassination I: Defending the Gangster State,” *Dirty Truths: Reflections on Politics, Media, Ideology, Conspiracy*, City Lights Press, 1996

Aaron McGruder, nationally syndicated political cartoon satirist during invited 2002 lecture on the effects of “9-11” on American culture, presented for the Center for Ethics at Emory University, Atlanta, and broadcast on C-Span cable television: “Bush and Cheney.... They’re gangsters you know, they’re gangsters for real!... And they’re going to punk you and what’s more, they’re going to make you think you like it. ...*That’s* how bad they are!”

Paraphrase of Giovanni Arrighi lecture comments, UC Santa Barbara Conference “Towards a Critical Globalization” 05/03/03:

US military could be said to be used as imperial “protection racket,” protecting peoples who did not ask to be “protected” (recent example: Iraq, 2003) or engaging in euphemistic campaigns of self-appointed “humanitarian intervention” on “behalf” of the United Nations (Somalia, Kosovo) while exacting imperial “tribute” for its global policing (other nations pay for cost of Persian Gulf War, 1991. (Professor of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University, author of *The Long Twentieth Century*, and several other historical studies of long-term capitalist ebbs and flows.)

America’s fascination with countless narratives about a mythological “mafia”: what accounts for the long-standing American romance with literature, film, television series on various narratives of people and families involved at some lever with “organized crime”? Consider the allegorical dimension of narratives that mimic the love/hate, fear/attraction relationship to organized crime for profit as a semi-conscious allegorical vehicle for addressing the same relationship to that which cannot be spoken, the violent gangsterism of capitalist business/ corporate culture in their postmodern sanitized public relations dress. Consider the implications of

the fact that of all the countries to which Italians immigrated, only in the United States did an organized Mafia develop and thrive as a significant criminal force. Research the track record of the FBI, the federal agency formed to combat such syndication of criminal activities for profit, and how under J. Edgar Hoover it basically left such organized activities untouched, but, like the American CIA on a global scale, even formed various alliances of convenience with them.

Open your research with an initial debate on any of these examples above, for or against, and continue to do key word searches in following up on the implications of the larger analogy.

Common ground?-- unreconstructed, unrepentant *masculinism* and thwarted "mastery" replaced by violent domination.

X. The Well-emptied Signifier of "Democracy" ("Democracy is whatever we want to say it is.")

Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003: "Democracy by Bombing":

US Emissary William Holcomb, commenting flatly on proposed .N.A.T.O. action against Serbian Premier Milosovic: "What the Serbs need is a good bombing."

Consider carefully the historical background of the resurrected doctrine of "Pre-emptive Strikes," "Shock and Awe," Homeland Security," and other shameless borrowings from the German Third Reich: Read carefully the much-cited and artful allegorical vehicle constructed by Thom Hartmann, "When Democracy Failed," at Common Dreams.org., April 16, 2003. Begin counting the number of parallels he suggests and explain their dual contexts, and argue for or against as many as you can find.

Relevant background literature:

William Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, Common Courage Press, 2000.

Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda Versus Freedom and Liberty, University of Illinois Press, 1997

Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, Hill and Wang, 1991, especially Chapter 10, "The Decline of the Democratic Ideal"

XI. Sanitizing Grotesque Death and Dying: Demythologizing the Depraved and Distorting Rhetoric of "Humanitarian" Bombing":

Undertake a simple deconstruction of the lately accelerating rhetoric of new technologies: "smart bombs" and "precision weapons" being utilized not only to enhance and expand military attack and methods of killing, but to propagate to the public as well as military personnel a narrative of "clean" war and "painless" killing that somehow eliminate or minimizes human suffering must. Examine journalistic coverage. Consider reasons for public acceptance. Is it related to Americans developing immunity to such ethical concerns from long history of being insulated from the realities of actual wartime carnage (or so deeply immersed in a form of futurist celebration à la Martinelli and other early 20th century *Futurists* and other proto-fascists when aerial and tank high-tech warfare was aestheticized into something transcending the visceral blood and gore)? How with fifty-some and still counting US military interventions in other countries since WWII do most American citizens deny that they live in a highly militarized culture? How do peace activists try to expose what they see as the flawed narrative (sometimes even accepted by anti-war critics) that "The US military has gone to great lengths to minimize casualties through the development of high tech weapons..." , etc., or "I must admit that the US military

have really learned how to conduct war with almost no casualties.” Such assumptions miss the more important dimensions here that is this war strategies the ratio of dead and maimed civilians to military casualties is dramatically increased. While ever since the backlash of the Vietnam, war US governments have been forced to try to reduce the death count among their own soldiers for strictly political reasons, the false picture of smart bombs and precision weapons is belied by a constantly increasing legacy of innocent civilian victims, most of whom are children, caused by the high percentage of “unexploded ordinance” (UXO’s in military shorthand).

Or consider the vast and complex scenario of “depleted uranium” contamination continuing after the first Persian Gulf war and augmented by more exposure to US military personnel, as well as possibly civilian employees in various assembly plants. Seek out detailed research by US Air Force Colonel La Roque who estimates that 400,000 veterans from Persian Gulf wars are suffering debilitating, life-threatening effects—find interview by Dennis Bernstein on KPFA radio program Flashpoints (searchable archives).

Consider why the United States military can decide to drop 1500 cluster bombs in Iraq (mostly anti-personnel “mincemeat” bombs that break up into many smaller sub-units many of which do not detonate but remain active for long periods of time after, notorious for claiming countless later innocent victims most often children). Discuss how even with some media coverage of same results in Vietnam, Laos, Persian Gulf War, and other US military interventions, the American public after having acquiesced to the Iraq war quickly learns again to ignore the inevitable consequences of such actions? Ethical/political questions around sales and manufacture within US of cluster bombs,

land mines, and other anti-personnel weapons.

Investigate international War Crimes charges against the US military which have been widely discussed in other countries and also by many voices within the larger network of American anti-war activists submitted to Belgian Courts: Use of cluster bombs against civilian targets, firing on ambulances during war, killing of anti-US demonstrators in multiple after the war. Research leads: *Democracy Now* radio archives: interviews 4/7/03) Here it is mandatory that one revisit the US government decision to refuse to endorse the foundation of an International Criminal Court, an institution that nearly all other countries of the world have enthusiastically embraced as a necessary step in making the future a much less dangerous place

Orwellian obscenity and the recourse to state violence and terrorism

Defense Department Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the heavy death-skull face. Rumsfeld pontificating in the first flush of US bombing during first press conference: almost beside himself in raving about “all the humanity that has gone into making these bombs” and “the type of bombing we are doing now” Rumsfeld went continued: “Let me comment on some news comparisons I’ve heard made with the bombing of European cities in a previous war: There is no comparison at all!”

Throughout this war Iraqi civilian casualties were systematically ignored and uncounted in media coverage and military briefings. Even the relatively liberal SF Chronicle which carried a front page toll of “Coalition casualties to date” and estimates of Iraqi soldiers. Explore racial/religious assumptions.

General research genre: the normalization of war and violence as part of daily life.

XII. On the illusory margins of *realpolitik*: American Military-Industrial Capitalism as high-stakes, high-tech hucksterism:

Retrace the steps from Edward Bernays, the "father" of modern propaganda earlier in the twentieth century to Karl Rove's packaging of Presidential candidate G.W. Bush, to Hill and Knowlton Company's Public Relations for the Pentagon: privatizing the professional *selling* of war campaigns to the public. Explore the personnel background of a firm such as Hill & Knowlton and their other clients,

April, 2003: Frequent proclamations by Washington officials in the weeks immediately before, during, and after the invasion of Iraq: "We don't want the oil." Or "The profits from Iraqi oil belong to the Iraqi people." A short six months earlier in 2002, US government officials were publicly offering other countries a cut of the spoils of the Iraqi wells if they would "...join them in the war effort against the tyrant Saddam Hussein."

The April/03 Saddam statue event in "liberation" of Baghdad as "psy-op" (military/intelligence psychological operation of public perception manipulation): investigate further the non-corporate media reports of this staged and controlled propaganda event to spin the proper story of the "liberation" of the Iraqi people ([See Washington DC Indymedia site](#)).

Ari Fleischer, White House Press Secretary: "The President of course, "...does not want to go to war, but he will if he must." The "war without end" credo. Scattered doubters and some peace activists reply with "Don't they realize that this war will only cause more terrorism and still more wars to come in the future?" Responses range from saying they are insane to stupid to reckless gamblers before other voices step in with the most obvious and logical conclusion that is still a forbidden" explanation within the US:

if so many of the Bush administration and friends are heavily invested in "defense" holdings like the Carlyle Group whose stocks rise every time a war breaks out, why wouldn't they want an "endless war"? Central to this project is the need to seriously address one dimension that has been assiduously avoided by most commercial news coverage: QUI BONO? Who profits? Here we most consider what at least some non-corporate analysts have been questioning--the role of the direct profit motive in expending ever more military ordnance and the expenditures to deploy in advance a massive military assemblage halfway around the world, a project of enormous and still incalculable cost that will be paid almost entirely by the American citizens as taxpayers. How might you respond to those who argue that the US government has been effectively captured by a career cadre of professional looters of the national treasury, foremost among them the "deeply embedded" representatives of the "weapons" industry? (Are not "Defense contractors" the single greatest beneficiaries of all federal "contracts"?)

Former BBC journalist Greg Palast on the Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld administration: "I can never tell with them where the policy ends and the checkbook begins."

Paul Virilio, "The Primal Accident," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1993: "Was not the nineteenth century's positivist euphoria over the 'great march of progress' one of the most insidious forms of the bourgeois illusion, the effect of which was to provide a cover for the fearsome military and industrial progression of the mode of scientific destruction?"

What fundamental underlying narratives of frontier expansionism and exceptionalism, of American "Manifest Destiny" mythologies from the nineteenth century remain submerged within recent

twenty-first century military adventurism, whether openly described as “humanitarian interventions” or effectively global police actions to reign in some other cultures “threatening” actions? Consider Ronald Takaki’s unpacking of the male psyches of Theodore Roosevelt and influential military advisor Admiral Alfred Mahan through their doctrines of “race patriotism”: “The American ‘possession’ or ‘control’ of territory in the Far East, he (Mahan) argued, would result from decadent conditions there and the lack of Asian power to resist encroachments for a more ‘virile’ nation. ‘Civilized’ men required more territory, and like all natural forces, the impulse to expand would take the direction of least resistance. when the came upon some “wasteland rich in possibilities, but unfruitful through the incapacity or negligence” of its inhabitants, the ‘incompetent’ race had assays ‘fallen back and disappeared before the persistent impact of the superior’ Thus, no one had a ‘natural right’ to land; the right to own and control territory depended upon ‘political fitness.’ Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America*, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 268-269.

XIII. Why was there no extended conflict in the Iraq War? Or is there?

Were the Iraqi soldiers simply demoralized, not wanting to give their lives for the Baath regime, or simply realizing that there could be no valor but only stupidity in fighting against an overwhelmingly more powerful military machine with infinitely more weapons and money at its disposal? What other possible reasons were there? Western researchers surely need to investigate numerous speculations discussed in the Arab world and its media that some kind of back-channel deal struck had been struck at the last

minute by the Saudis with either Saddam Hussein, or with the US, or more likely with both, in order to limit the war on Iraq and thereby spare the region from the economic damage and potential political chaos of an extended, perhaps expanded war that could lead to the toppling of other regimes in the region. Did some kind of an official covert arrangement allow Saddam Hussein to escape as a condition for minimal military resistance in exchange for allowing the Bush administration to have its “short battle” and thus a political victory for consumption at home and worldwide? (Requires serious research into the Middle East press and other international media sources as well as uncompromised independent internet news sources such as the Indymedia sites.)

XIV. Oil

The choices are infinite, the side roads many, the experience frequently sordid. Take your pick: from Halliburton to Enron to Unocal to Bidas, etc. The implications? More than you ever wanted to know.

“Iraq’s oil and other natural resources belong to all the Iraqi people—and the United State will respect this fact.” Stephen Hadley, US Deputy National Security Advisor, 2/11/03

“When US plans for geo-strategic dominance through control of oil align with Israeli territorial designs, the net result would seem to be a reversion to pre-democratic standards of political domination.” Ali Masrumi, interviewed on *DEMOCRACY NOW*, Pacifica Radio news program.

XV. Understanding the “War on Terrorism” as a subset of a long-standing “counter-subversive tradition” in American history:

Still the indispensable source of original theorizing in this area of threatening Others, within and without, is Michael Rogin's, *Ronald Reagan the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, University of California Press, 1987.

"...the counter-subversive response transformed interest conflicts into psychologically based anxieties over national security and American identity. Exaggerated responses to the domestic Communist menace narrowed the bounds of permissible political disagreement and generated a national security state."

Start by explaining this statement with possible examples and engage in a discussion of what it means to be a "national security state."

Analyze and debate the following contentions; that the whole unfolding massive apparatus of the "War on Terrorism" and its domestic component, The Patriot Act and the Department of Homeland Security, are properly understood as a calculated bureaucratic replacement for the huge institutionalized federal funding lines and necessary *raison d'être* which were jeopardized by the end of the Cold War. Is this new apparatus not the necessary substitute for an already huge budget amounting to a phenomenal percentage of all government spending? Is there any real comparison between these two callings to "metaphorical" war? On what basis can one justify an even larger budget for combating an enemy which numbers at best in the tens of thousands than was spent on a potential and imagined threat from a bona fide military super power backed by a population of millions? (the Soviet Union) Do not both 'communists' and 'terrorists' exist far more as manufactured collective phantoms than plausible physical threats, and therefore deserve to be challenged first and foremost by those who can understand and analyze

these difference? (historical and political scholars and intellectuals).

Consider the contention by Richard Slotkin's unparalleled study of the mythologies of the American frontier and expansionism over three centuries that such metaphorical wars (like the wars against the "savage" red men) "...provid(ed) a symbolic surrogate for a range of domestic, social, and political conflicts by projecting the 'fury' of class resentments outward against the Indian." (or other partially mythologized enemy) What case can we make here of the potential brewing class rage that might have followed the continued exposure of corporate scandals and white collar criminality if another greater more threatening menace had not occurred to displace public attention? (The point here is not to argue that the one necessarily created the other, but to understand how these relations stand in a larger field of inherently undeterminable events.)

Other critical sources:

David Campbell, "Cold Wars: Securing Identity, Identifying Danger." In *The Rhetorical Republic: Governing Representations in American Politics*, eds., Fred. Dolan and Thomas. Dumm, University. of Massachusetts Press, 1993.

Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*, University. of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

XVI. The awkward and revealing disparity between "state" terrorism and independent "retail" terrorism:

"We should not forget that the major organization of terror after the war, the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS) was established by a French General who thought

of himself as patriotic and who was convinced that terrorism was the only answer to the guerilla phenomenon in Algeria and Indochina. When politics ...reduces itself to police, the difference between state and terrorism threatens to disappear. In the end it may lead to security and terrorism forming a single deadly system in which they mutually justify and legitimate each other's actions."

Giorgio Gambian, "Security and Terror," *Theory & Event*, 5/4, 2002.

The first buildings "secured" by US soldiers entering Baghdad were the Iraq Ministry of Oil and the Ministry of the Interior, the latter the storage site for the dossiers of Saddam Hussein's many political opponents or suspected members of the "subversive" classes. These names were useful for the next successor, facilitating the proper "annexation of Iraq. What do you respond to those who are now saying: "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss."?"

Starting point literature:

Edward Hermann, Chomsky, Robert Merrill and Brown, eds., *Violent Persuasions: The Politics and Imagery of Terrorism*, eds., D. Brown and R. Merrill, Bay Press, 1993

William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since W II*, Common Courage Press, 1986.

Also relevant: Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Rise of Religious Violence*, University of California Press, 2000.

XVII. From World Wars to regional "low-intensity" proxy wars to "humanitarian interventions" to global policing:

Who appointed the United States Defense Department as "global policeman"? In whose name does the US military act when they invade a sovereign country without a Congressional Declaration of war? By what legal right does it undertake these

actions? Discuss the complex issues of US Constitutional law and the gradual eclipse of the internal "balance of power" mechanisms. To what extent does this represent a seizure of power by the Executive Branch from the Congress and the Courts?

The Bush regime's categorizing of their military policing with such names as "Operation Infinite Justice" makes their "cowboy" style all the more grimly humorous to foreigners.

In a difficult but fruitful theorizing of the escalating global problem of permanent warfare, Giorgio Agamben refers us back to earlier problems in imperial history, to issues of the Sovereign in the Roman Empire. From these reflections he returns to the present to point out that "The investiture of the sovereign (the head of state) as cop has another (inevitable) result: it entails a criminalization of the adversary."--"The Sovereign Police," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

XVIII. Gender Studies: mastery and masculinity, mastery and weaker others, domination and fascism, and displacements of the masculinist psyche:

Recalling the Jungian psychological axiom that once killed, dead gods of the past return in (the symptoms of) our diseases: What is the relationship between rising masculine violence and the deeper cultural reaction of American males to their loss of previous dominance and mastery of females in the wake of late twentieth century gains by the women's movement for equality in the domestic sphere, the workplace, and politics and public life? How is this connected to the persistence of militarism?

Recommended Literature:

Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*, Indiana University Press, 1994.

James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post Vietnam America*, Hill and Wang, 1994.

Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination & Difference*, Verso Press, 1995.

Essential Background: the highly influential study attempting to arrived at a gender-based theory of fascism: Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Volume One, Women, floods, bodies, history*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 