

Democracy In America - It's Spelled C-O-R-R-U-P-T-I-O-N

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Global Research, February 01, 2006

1 February 2006

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

The headlines are blaring daily about another big corruption scandal that has the makings of being the mother of them all – at least for a generation or so. We won't know how big until one well-connected influence peddling lobbyist under multiple indictments involving crony capitalism and corruption begins to sing to the Justice Department after copping a plea in return for a lighter sentence. It's likely that before this ends, it may involve many Republican members of Congress and some Democrats including some high level ones from both parties as well as their aides, members of the Executive Branch and various other Republican party figures. It may even go higher than most observers now expect.

While we're focused on the current political and financial scandal, we're not hearing or reading that corruption can take different forms. And they extend to the core principles of how this country is governed, who wins, who loses and what it means for a nation calling itself a democracy as well as for all other nations affected by our policies and actions. I'd like to suggest a broader definition of corruption that reflects the scope of what's covered below.

Corruption Defined For This Essay

For purposes of this essay, corruption includes all policies and actions by those elected or other officials in or connected to government, the net result of which improperly, unjustly or illegally distributes the nation's wealth (and that of other nations we exploit and dominate) to benefit an elite minority and at the expense of the vast majority of the people (at home and abroad). It includes and involves those individuals, organizations and institutions that are the main beneficiaries of these government policies and actions (business, the military, academia and even organized religion) or that work cooperatively with them or aid them. In a word, it's the net result of the incestuous relationship between government and the powerful and influential "special interests" that benefit most from it that deprives or takes from the many, the most defenseless and most in need and gives to the elite and well-off few. While retaining a facade of fairness, it does it through a sham democracy for those of privilege by rigging the political process to work for their benefit. And it functions within or outside the law, and usually both ways.

Corruption – Political And Financial

What corruption usually refers to is the misuse of power by elected or appointed officials in return for illegal cash bribes, payoffs of various sorts or other forms or items of value received for special favors or preferential treatment such as favorable legislation or voting the "right way." It can be as crude as wads of cash in paper bags or smaller amounts in envelopes or as subtle as promises of high paid future employment, expensive junkets, sky

box seats at sporting events or meals in fancy restaurants. It also assumes those in power can be bought. The only issue is the price and what's for sale.

It's a fair guess most people believe this stuff goes on all the time, and they're probably right. Usually the offenders don't get caught, but using the "roach" theory, when one does it's likely there's a lot more of them out there we haven't (yet) found. In sum, the way the political system works is best explained in the title of the Greg Palast book - The Best Democracy Money Can Buy. Those who can pay can play, and those who can't have no say, don't get their way and had better pray for a better day.

What's it all mean? It means the political game is rigged, the books are cooked and the notion that voters go to the polls to elect representatives who'll serve their interests is cockeyed hooey. The real game is "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." But you better have lots of "scratch." As stated above, it's an incestuous relationship between powerful interests, usually big business and government with high-powered, well paid lobbyists (aka influencing peddling "bagmen") "greasing the wheels" to make the system work. All "players" win, and the dirty game goes on and on and never ends. The public knows the game's going on but not the sordid details until a "player" stumbles, gets caught and the latest chicanery comes to light. Then the game plan is punish the "bad apple" and cleanse an otherwise honest system. Does anyone really believe that? The real game plan is "cut your losses" and go back to business as usual but out of the public's eye and daily headlines. The same thing is true in government and in big business. Anything goes that's self-serving, as long as you don't get caught. That's the only crime. And when it comes to exploiting other nations, there are no rules. It's "snatch and grab" all you can, just like a street bully does it against an easy mark.

The Nation's Business - The Power Of Transnational Corporations

Calvin Coolidge, our 30th president, said "the business of America is business." If he were alive today, he might rephrase that maxim and say it's big business, really big. Ralph Nader has updated and corrected Coolidge by saying the country is run by giant corporations, and both political parties are just proxies for them. In Nader's colorful language, it's government for General Motors, by Dupont and for Exxon Mobil. If the 50 largest corporations were nations, half of the largest 100 of them would be corporations. And along with size goes power and influence - to decide who governs, serves on our courts and occupies the White House. The voting public may think they have a say, but that's just an illusion, or more accurately a delusion. The big business power brokers make all the rules and decide everything important. Their cronies and proxies then "grease the wheels" with lots of "grease" to be sure all goes as planned. Big business also decides what laws are enacted or changed. They even write them to assure what they want gets in and what they don't want stays out. It all goes on sub rosa, and the public has no say or right of appeal when provisions harm their interests. Most often the public is in the dark and doesn't even know or understand it's been harmed.

We call this "democracy." In fact, it's a distorted variant of it that's only a democracy for the few - the privileged class sociologist and social scientist C. Wright Mills called "The Power Elite" in his notable 1956 book by that title. Mills' elite included those "in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society"....the ones who "rule the big corporations.....run the machinery of state.... direct the military establishment. They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure...." In Mills' day, large corporations had great power but would be judged small or medium-sized compared to their largest

behemoth counterparts today. Since 1950 the nation's gross domestic product has increased in size over 35-fold in constant dollars. It's well over \$10 trillion today. The largest U.S. corporations, however, have increased even faster because of their many mergers and acquisitions in addition to their growth. A single division of General Electric today, with its many divisions, is larger than the entire company was 50 years ago. With that size has come enormous power and influence, so much so that if Mills were alive and revised his book today, corporate America would dominate and virtually own "the strategic command posts" he wrote about. All other institutions are now subordinate and function to serve these omnipotent giants. Using part of the title of David Korten's book, today giant transnational "corporations rule the world."

THE LAW AND HOW IT AFFECTS CORPORATE BEHAVIOR

All publicly owned corporations are mandated above all else to serve only the best interests of their shareholders. The courts have deemed this to mean, and it's now a settled issue in corporate law, that these businesses must work to maximize shareholder value and do so by increasing profits. Corporate law prohibits the board of directors or senior executives from taking any action that may deviate from that primary responsibility, such as providing services to the community or safeguarding the environment. If doing so adds expense and reduces profits, the corporation would be in violation of its mandate and liable to suit by shareholders for harming profitability and share value. It would also subject the CEO and other top executives to likely dismissal.

Corporate power and influence grew over many generations and was aided by favorable legislation and many important Supreme Court decisions. However, the crucial, defining moment happened in 1886 when the Supreme Court granted corporations the legal status of personhood in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railway* - a simple tax dispute case unrelated to the issue of corporate personhood. The story of that decision, how it came about and what it means is lucidly explained in Thom Hartmann's important book - *Unequal Protection*. Hartmann documents and explains that it wasn't the Justices who decided corporations are persons, but the Court's reporter (J.C. Bancroft Davis) who after the decision was rendered wrote it in his "headnotes". The Court did nothing to refute them, likely by intent, and the result was what corporations had long coveted.

That decision, most people never heard of but one of the most crucial in our history, changed everything. It granted corporations the same constitutional rights as people, but because of their limited liability status, protected shareholders from the obligations of their debts, other obligations, and many of the responsibilities individuals legally have. For many years prior to *Santa Clara*, corporations wanted but were never able to gain this right and all the benefits from it. After they finally had it, they were able to win many additional favorable court decisions that continue to the present day. They also gained much regulatory relief, favorable legislation and, at the same time, were protected by their limited liability status. All this through the years allowed corporations to increase their power and helped them grow to the size and dominance they've now achieved.

Think of it. Corporations aren't human, they can live forever, change their identity, reside in many places simultaneously in many countries, can't be imprisoned for wrongdoing and can change themselves into new persons at will for any reason. They have the same rights and protections under the Bill of Rights as people but not the responsibilities. And they got all this because a court reporter gave it to them in his "headnotes", after the fact, in a Supreme Court decision involving a lawsuit unrelated to this crucial right wanted and now

granted. From that right, corporations were then unbound, free to grow and gain immense power and be able to become the dominant institution that now runs the country, the world and all our lives. Most important, they got an unwritten license from their government servants in all 3 branches to operate freely for their own benefit and others of their privileged class and at the expense of the great majority everywhere. Because of the harm they cause to so many from their behavior, the damage they do to the environment, and the costly wars fought on their behalf to enhance their profits, it's fair to say, in military terminology, the giant transnationals today are truly "weapons of mass destruction."

It's important to note a little known event in our early history that might have changed everything had Thomas Jefferson and James Madison gotten their way. Jefferson and Madison were able to add the first 10 amendments, or Bill of Rights, to our Constitution but lost a battle with the Federalists led by John Adams and Alexander Hamilton to include 2 others. Jefferson and Madison believed that to protect the liberty of the people the Bill of Rights should include "freedom from monopolies in commerce" (what are now giant corporations) and "freedom from a permanent military", or standing armies. Adams and Hamilton believed otherwise, and the final compromise included the first 10 amendments that are now the law but not the other 2. Had Jefferson and Madison gotten their way, try to imagine how different our subsequent history might have been and what our country might be like today.

In 2003, *The Corporation*, the film, was made. It was based on law professor Joel Bakan's book - *The Corporation: the Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*. With commentaries from diverse observers ranging from Noam Chomsky and Michael Moore to Milton Friedman and corporate CEOs, the film explores the nature of corporations and how they operate. It portrays a classic conflict between an overriding concern with the "bottom line" and social good. Overall, the picture painted is not pretty, especially a dramatic moment drawn from the work of Canadian psychiatrist Robert Hare who concludes the corporation meets the clinical definition of a psychopath. It's amoral, deceitful, manipulative, completely self-interested, it breaches social and legal standards yet suffers no guilt, it has a callous unconcern for others and a disregard for their safety and is unable to maintain long-term relationships. It could also be argued (but not mentioned in the film) that corporations also fit the definition of a sociopath whose behavior is extremely antisocial, is lacking in conscience and has no sense of social or moral responsibility.

The Growth Of Social Services - Unlike Today, Responsible Government Once Added New Ones

The golden age of social service benefits and worker protections and rights emerged during the Great Depression years of the 1930s, but didn't begin then. As early as our colonial times there was a recognition of an obligation to help the needy although there was no organized effort. But as the nation became less agrarian and more industrial, a number of States began to add services like cash allowances, mothers' pensions and by the mid-twenties old age assistance to the blind. Also, at that time and earlier, the States and Federal government began to recognize the need for a social insurance approach to public welfare that would be financed through contributions and would guarantee protection for all rather than just public assistance for the needy.

Social insurance first began in 1908 with a Federal workers' compensation law for some government employees. States then followed with their own, and by 1929 these laws were in effect in all but 4 States. There were other social efforts as well, such as State and local

retirement plans and Federal benefits and services for veterans. Also, the private sector shared a responsibility by beginning to provide health care, pensions, life insurance and sickness payments to their employees.

The Great Depression and “the New Deal”

By 1932, the hard times of the Great Depression and loose regulation that preceded it demanded a greater Federal government role to aid the needy and reform the economy. In his 1933 inaugural address Franklin Roosevelt said he would not stand by and watch the Depression deepen and asked the Congress for the power to combat the emergency. He claimed “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself”, but that was little comfort to the 25% of the working public unemployed that year. In his 1937 inaugural address, FDR agreed with them when he said “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.” From the beginning of his presidency Roosevelt knew he had to act, but it wasn’t out of compassion for the needy he spoke of. With support from some key corporate chieftains, he and they knew he had to do it to save capitalism, to bail out the bankers and the rich, and to prevent a possible workers’ revolution similar to what happened in Russia in 1917.

And act he did with loans and grants to help the States and landmark measures like the FDIC, insuring bank deposits, the SEC, to regulate the stock exchanges, and the NLRB, with the passage of the Wagner Act, that guaranteed labor the right to bargain collectively on equal terms with management. Most important were a broad array of social programs. They included Federal emergency relief, public works programs, and other initiatives, begun under an “alphabet soup” listing of names that tried to jump-start a moribund economy by providing work and relief for the unemployed. The seminal moment came in 1935 with the passage of the Social Security Act that to this day is the single most important piece of social legislation in our history and the one most responsible for keeping a vast number of the elderly out of poverty as well as providing other services and benefits for those in need.

Other important social legislation in the 1930s included Unemployment Insurance (a State – Federal government partnership with States as administrators), the Railroad Retirement System, Public Housing and Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Insurance.

Post – WW II Social Programs

After WW II there was the National School Lunch Program, Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disability (later the SSI program), Social Security Disability Insurance, Medical Assistance for the Aged (prior to Medicaid), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the Food Stamp Program, School Breakfast Program, Black Lung Benefits Program, Supplemental Security Income Program, the WIC food assistance program, Earned Income Tax Credit, Low Income Home Energy Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) among others. Along with Social Security, the other most important social program established was Medicare and along with it Medicaid in 1965. Those 2 programs assured the elderly and indigent of health care coverage at affordable cost or at minimal or no cost to the needy. All of the above was the good news, except for TANF which will be discussed below.

The Erosion Of Social Services

Things began to change after 1980 and the election of Ronald Reagan. Since then and over the last 25 years, it’s been a long downhill slide that’s included the erosion of worker rights,

and continued cuts in vital social and other needed services directly or in more subtle ways. The 2 bedrock social programs so far have remained largely in tact, but even they have been eroded through higher payroll taxes (that affect low and middle income workers), raising the retirement age, and increases in Medicare premiums and cuts in Medicaid for the poor.

The Reagan Years

Ronald Reagan's administration was characterized by large increases in military spending, big tax cuts mainly benefitting the rich and big business while at the same time slashing social spending and running up huge budget deficits. Domestic discretionary spending (which includes most all social spending other than Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid) was cut by one-third from 1981 to 1988. Programs for those with low incomes were hardest hit suffering a 54% cut during the Reagan years, subsidized housing (adjusted for inflation) lost over 80% of its support, training and employment services over 68%, and housing assistance for the elderly 47%.

The Reagan administration also showed its contempt for organized labor and one-sided support for big business beginning with the firing of 11,000 striking air traffic controllers in August, 1981, jailing its PATCO leaders, fining the union millions of dollars and finally "busting" the union. It also used federal tax dollars to finance strike-breaking and worked to reduce worker health and safety protections and to change federal statutes guaranteeing worker rights to organize and bargain collectively.

The George H.W. Bush years

The elder George Bush was elected on promises of a "kinder and gentler" presidency. He sought not to continue the Reagan slash and burn tactics and instead worked to reverse some of them. Working with a Democrat controlled Congress, there were increases in federal spending for education, child care and advanced technology R & D. He also approved legislation to improve the interstate highway system. Probably his most important act was his signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 that was probably the most significant piece of civil rights legislation in a decade and provided the disabled with important rights they hadn't had. Bush also reauthorized the Clean Air Act that mandated higher air quality standards and required cleaner burning fuels. Clearly, the elder Bush presidency was a respite from the one-sided business-friendly agenda of the Reagan years. In a budget deal with the Congress he even raised taxes (anathema for Republicans), going back on his campaign pledge of "no new taxes." Republicans never forgave him, and the electorate denied him a second term.

The Clinton Years

Aside from the few social gains under the elder Bush, the other Reagan era cuts have never been recouped. In fact, they continued to decline through the Clinton years. In addition, the Clinton administration made its own "contribution" to the continued assault on the needy with the passage a heartless and disgraceful "welfare reform" bill called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). Prior to that time, welfare payments to the needy were distributed through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children or AFDC program. That program worked well but came under attack after Republicans gained control of both Houses of Congress in 1994 and cutting welfare became point 3 (out of 10 points) in the Republicans' Contract with America (that opponents

called the Contract on America).

Under “welfare reform” a time limit was set, and no one could receive welfare payments for more than 5 years. The 1996 act created a new program for distributing aid called the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF that called for the Federal government to provide fixed block grants to the states (unrelated to the amount of need for help) and let them administer aid at their discretion. Also, under this plan, most recipients must participate in some kind of work or training for work to get help. This created a great hardship for many recipients, especially single mothers with small children. That hardship got even worse during and after the 2001-2002 recession, when the economy was first losing large numbers of jobs, and then even after recovery when job growth was only modest and still is less than robust. And most new jobs now created are in lower paying service areas and temporary or part-time positions, often with few or no benefits like health care insurance.

The Clinton administration’s main social initiative was its failed attempt to reform how Americans get their health care. It was a complicated plan based on the notion of “managed competition” and marketplace medicine rather than a “single-payer”, government run national health insurance program like those in Western Europe and Canada. It tried to convince the public to accept less choice for more affordability and coverage for all. But it wanted to do it by allowing big insurers and health maintenance organizations (HMOs) to run the show. Because these organizations are committed to maximizing profits, they need to control costs. That means less care for the sick, especially the expensive kind they go all out to restrict.

Thankfully Clinton’s Health Security plan arrived stillborn but only because it pitted the interests of competing health care providers against each other in a zero-sum game. Under the Clinton plan, “big Pharma” would have been a “big loser” with “big insurers” and “big HMOs” able to buy drugs at lower prices. But “big Pharma” and other private interest losers had their own “big guns” and were able defeat another feeble attempt at so-called health care reform and also prevent any needed government control over the delivery of health care services.

The George W. Bush years

After the Clinton years, the pace of social spending cuts accelerated under George Bush and continues unabated with the Bush administration’s stated intent to make annual additional cuts. The Bush years so far have been characterized by very big increases in military spending including tens of billions annually since 2003 off-the-books to fund the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and continued conflicts in both countries – with no end in sight. (Before it ends, the Iraq conflict is expected to cost between \$1 and \$2 trillion according to an estimate released in January, 2005 by Nobel Laureate and former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz). In addition, there have been several rounds of tax cuts mostly benefitting the rich and big business. The net result has been big annual budget deficits and increased hardship for the most disadvantaged.

Education under G.W. Bush

Some of the damage done since Bush took office has included his disastrous education initiative called The No Child Left Behind Act which focuses on testing. It’s been a boon to corporations involved in testing but done nothing to enhance learning. Teachers hate it as it

forces them to teach “to the test” rather than educate their students properly in the course material. The result in recent years is that the quality of education in urban schools has deteriorated and the level of racial segregation is now as great as in the 1960s according to Jonathan Kozol in his new book *The Shame of the Nation*. The data in big cities is shocking. In Chicago where I live in 2002-03, 87% of public school enrollment was black or Hispanic; in Washington, D.C. it’s a startling 94%; in St. Louis it’s 82%; in Philadelphia and Cleveland 79%; in Los Angeles 84%; in Detroit startling again at 96%; in Baltimore 89%; in New York almost 75%. Looking ahead, things seem to be getting worse, not better.

The Bush education agenda also includes so-called school vouchers that disguise a broader goal to privatize public education and aid parochial (religious) schools. The use of them has been upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* city of Cleveland case in a 5 - 4 ruling but under strict conditions that the program be part of multiple educational options, offer parents real choice between religious and secular schools and ensure that benefits go to public and private schools, religious or not. Despite this narrow circumscribing, in many areas where they’re now allowed, 80% of vouchers are for use in schools where the central mission is religious education or training. This is a serious blow to the health of democracy by violating the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. But it’s also a blow that threatens the institution of public education that’s been in place throughout our history and has been the bedrock of primary and secondary education until choice through vouchers was first proposed in the 1980s by conservative economist Milton Friedman.

Those supporting vouchers believe choice will improve school performance through competition in the marketplace. But those opposing them fear, with justification, that draining already inadequate funding from the public schools will eventually destroy them. In addition, the monetary amount of vouchers offered is only a small fraction of the tuition cost at most private schools, making them unusable for low-income parents. It’s also likely and already proven in some cases that where public corporations run the schools the quality of education suffers because of these corporations’ legally mandated requirement to maximize profits. To do so may and usually does require them to cut costs and reduce services, and that can only result in lower quality education.

Things aren’t much better for those needing college aid either as the Bush administration for 3 straight years cut or froze the maximum allowable Pell Grant amount. In the face of inexorable tuition and fee increases (way above the inflation rate) combined with a trend toward less government aid, this means a growing number of low-income students are now deprived of a chance for higher education.

Health care under G. W. Bush

The state of health care has also gotten worse under George Bush with about 46 million having no coverage in 2004 and many millions more being underinsured. The situation is greatly exacerbated by spiralling health care costs including rising premiums on Medicare Part B, and cuts in Medicaid. It’s questionable what relief if any will result from the Medicare Act of 2003 that added prescription drug coverage for Medicare recipients. The plan is confusing, even Kafkaesque in some ways, and doesn’t at all benefit many on Medicare. This writer, now on Medicare, won’t touch it. It does benefit its main intended beneficiary, the big pharmaceutical companies that get big subsidies from it and can maintain and charge high prices - now you see a benefit, and now you don’t. And in the latest disturbing twist, as the new plan takes effect, some of the largest pharmaceutical companies are ending their

programs of providing free or deeply discounted drugs to needy seniors and the disabled. As many as 1 million people may be affected who earn too much to qualify for government aid and who will now have the added burden of higher out-of-pocket costs for the medications they need, if they can afford them at all.

Other Bush Social Policies

Ordinary working people have also suffered under Bush's policies. His administration killed OSHA workplace ergonomic rules that were more than 10 years in the making, revoked grants to study workplace safety and health, cut funding for job training, cut enforcement positions in OSHA and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (a key reason for the recent Sago and Alma mine deaths in W. Virginia and 230 total coal miner deaths in 206 mine accidents), proposed paying welfare recipients below-minimum wages, denied Homeland Security employees the right to collective bargaining and protection for being a whistleblower, blocked release of funds to monitor the health of rescue workers at Ground Zero in New York, cut health care benefits for veterans, proposed privatizing 850,000 federal jobs over a number of years, changed overtime work rules (despite House and Senate majority votes against his proposed changes) that will deprive millions of overtime pay, made it much harder for low-income workers to get the Earned Income Tax Credit and much more.

If they get their way, the Bush heartless agenda also intends to cut 30% of the funding to train doctors at children's hospitals; wants a 15% cut in winter energy assistance for the needy; another 15% cut in budget to repair rundown public housing; a 13% cut for the Corps of Engineers for programs to prevent flooding; a 10% cut for efforts to reduce job-related deaths, injuries and ailments; and added cuts in funding for environmental protection programs, transportation improvements and aid to farm families forced off their land. The U.S. Senate at year end 2005, also passed a budget reconciliation bill (part of a House - Senate conference committee) that cuts \$40 billion over 5 years in entitlement programs - mainly affecting student loans and Medicaid benefits. Once the slight differences between the House and Senate bills are reconciled and the bill is signed into law, it will become the first entitlement cutback since so-called "welfare reform" in 1996.

The Bush administration's top domestic priority goal has been to privatize Social Security, beginning with just a small portion of it. So far mass public opposition combined with multiple Washington scandals and Bush's plummeting approval rating has stopped it and temporarily taken it off the agenda. While the administration won't admit it, their real goal is to end Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid by privatizing all 3 programs. If they ever succeed in doing this, it would wreak severe harm on the many millions of lower income recipients especially who rely on these programs to keep them out of poverty and give them essential health care that might otherwise be unaffordable. The privatization of Medicare prescription drug benefits (a terrible bill passed in the middle of the night by a forced vote through intimidation after the first roll call vote defeated it) is one step toward the full privatization of all health care, the overall result of which will likely greatly increase the number of uninsured and force many others to "buy" lesser quality coverage (and thus less health care) than they now receive.

The Net Result Of Policies Since 1980

The net result of the last 25 years has been a steady, disturbing erosion of the most essential social services people rely on. And it's come at a time when those services are

more needed than ever since the Great Depression years. Manufacturing and other higher paying jobs have been exported for years to lower wage countries, and since the 1980s, union membership and worker bargaining power have greatly declined. The result is a nation oriented to services and mostly offering lower paying jobs with fewer or no benefits. One almost unlimited job opportunity is available. It could be promoted with the slogan "join the navy (or army, air force or marines) and see the world" - or at least a certain part of it in the Middle East. Most of those now joining up will never get the benefits they're promised - another deception. Instead, they'll be commodified and consumed on the endless battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan and other planned conflicts in an insane endless war to "win hearts and minds", "spread democracy", force all others to think and act as we do, and rule the world.

Along with a permanent state of war and garrison state, there's also been a continued transfer of wealth from the poor and middle class to the most well-off through personal and corporate tax cuts (a third of the 275 largest companies paid no federal income tax in at least one year from 2001 - 2003 or got a refund). Corporations have also gotten big corporate welfare subsidies (the public pays for them with our taxes) including huge increases in military spending, which goes to the defense contractors and the many thousands of other companies that receive sub-contracts or sell to the defense related sector. The Center for Defense Information reported that since 1945 over \$21 trillion in constant dollars has been spent on the military. Its been done largely to benefit big corporations and fight wars for them, not to defend the nation against real enemies. And its result has been the denial of a fair portion of it being used for vitally needed social services. Unless these policies can be stopped and reversed, essential social benefits will continue to be lost, oppressive corporate power will get stronger, and the gap between rich and poor will become even greater, increasing poverty and destroying the principles this country was founded on of equal opportunity and freedom and justice for all. As former Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis once explained - "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." Unless we can reinvigorate the democracy Brandeis spoke of, America the beautiful will only exist for the privileged few and no one else.

How They Get Away With It

I've long believed the greatest threat to democracy is an uninformed electorate. Unfortunately, that disturbing state clearly characterizes the overall U.S. public that's locked in a prison of its collective mind created by state controlled programming or brainwashing. To control the public, especially when the state is ill-serving it, only techniques of mind control will work. If it's done effectively, the public can be convinced to go along with some of the most audacious policies that go against its own self-interest by a combination of state-induced fear, distraction, consumerism and when the first three fail lockdown.

George Orwell explained that "those who control the present control the past, and those who control the past control the future." It's called programming the public mind or thought control. That's how it worked in Orwell's classic "1984", and it's disturbingly similar today in the U.S. In "1984" Big Brother was watching (through the omnipresent telescreen) to be sure people were "good citizens." Today, Big Brother in the U.S. is "Uncle Sam" watching to keep us in line and using the Orwellian techniques of "newspeak", "doublethink" and "beat em up and lock em up" when the propaganda message is misunderstood, ignored or resisted. It worked in the fictional "1984", and it works well most often for most of us in the real but often surreal-like world right here, but more subtly except when things get rough.

The Doctrine Of The “Free Market” – How It’s Pursued, Protected And Preserved

In the west, especially in the U.S., we’re taught to believe in the doctrine of the “free market” uber alles, and that government should stay out of the way except to protect us from enemies (46 million with no health insurance and millions of poor single mothers and their children denied further desperately needed welfare help might disagree). The result is a society based on consumerism and a shop-till-you-drop and buy the latest and greatest “gadgets and trinkets” mindset. And a subset of sorts of consumerism is the element of “distraction.” Instead of focusing on the state of the world or affairs of state, the government and its corporate media allies want us concentrating on the alluring array at the mall or who’ll win the Super Bowl. We’ll take care of the rest, they tell us. Trust us, we know what’s best. As far as we can throw them, I’d respond. And I’d add the wisdom and admonition of the great independent American journalist I.F. Stone when he explained that: “All governments are run by liars. Nothing they say should be believed.” He then shortened it to two words in his advice to aspiring journalists: “Governments lie.”

Stone would have easily recognized and reported fearlessly on the mendacity of the Bush administration’s current behavior. By using an ill-defined sham threat of terrorism and easy-picking dictators like Saddam, other “crazed Arabs” (Noam Chomsky’s characterization), and labeling all other leaders who forget “who’s boss” threats to our security, they’ve created an unjustifiable fear to support a permanent state of war, national security state, and “lockdown” America. They’ve done it to justify a strong military and homeland guardians to protect us from all those “barbarians at our gates.” As Machiavelli said in *The Prince* – “It’s better to be feared than loved.” But when that leads to the unrestrained and reckless use of power, its outcome is a Hobbesian “war of all against all.” The threat is bogus, a big lie, but it’s repeated endlessly until almost everyone believes it. What’s really intended is a plan to serve the interests of giant, powerful corporations whose bottom line depends on big government spending to support them. Those corporations also depend on military muscle when needed to open and secure new markets abroad so they can grow even bigger, more powerful and, above all, more profitable. Our military is used to open those new markets, not protect us from predators. Its called empire building.

George Washington understood it even in his day when he referred to the nation as a “rising empire.” He helped build it during the Revolutionary War by his savage treatment of native Indians, all of whom he thought of as subhumans (American Untermenschen). He compared them to wolves and “beasts of prey” and called for their total destruction. And he did it when he sent General John Sullivan and 5,000 troops to attack the noncombatant Onondaga people in 1779 with orders to destroy all their villages, homes, fields, food supplies, cattle herds and orchards. He hoped to kill as many as possible and succeeded. He also stole Indian land including from the Onieda people who aided Washington when he was most in need at Valley Forge. The “Father of our country” and all other leaders who followed him pursued a genocidal assault against our native people that was one of the inspirations and models for Adolph Hitler in designing his own plan to exterminate the Jews, Gypsies, Slavs and other Untermenschen of his day.

Imperialism by its very nature is predatory and brutal. It’s a scorched earth, take-no-prisoners strategy to achieve continued economic and geopolitical growth and expansion. It’s in the DNA of a capitalist system as the great political economist Harry Magdoff, who died on January 1 at age 92, explained in his 1969 book *The Age of Imperialism* when he wrote: “Imperialism is not a matter of choice for a capitalist society; it is the way of life of

such a society.” Historian Henry Steele Commager said it his way when he once wrote that a national security state and its bureaucracy lends its great talents (and resources) “not to devising ways of reducing tensions and avoiding war, but to ways of exacerbating tensions and preparing for war.....For in this Alice-in-Wonderland bureaucratic world you achieve peace through war, order through chaos, security through violence, the reign of law through lawlessness.”

And in his unguarded and candid pithy statement, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge also explained it in 1895 when he said “commerce follows the flag.” He might have added that the flag also follows commerce. The U.S. had no real enemies then and none since WW II, but all administrations had to convince us we did so they could divert a huge amount of the federal budget to the military and national security. To do it enemies had to be “invented” – the Russians (they were never coming), Saddam (never a threat), North Korea (they’ve been seeking normalization with us since the late 1980s), and today in Iran (the ayatollahs and elected government also want normalization) and in Venezuela (President Hugo Chavez is a peaceful populist democrat loved by the great majority of his people).

Since WW II, the absence of a real threat has been the greatest threat all U.S. administrations have feared most and had to overcome to pursue their real agenda. When the Soviet Union began disintegrating in the late 80s and finally broke up into 15 independent states at the end of 1991, the first Bush administration was desperate to find a new enemy. They did first with Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian tyrant and former close ally, in late 1989 and then with Saddam, another once close ally, in 1991. Now the war drums are getting louder against Iran and Syria and are also audible against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. And, of course, an endless war continues against so-called, mostly unnamed “terrorists” as well as the real thing in Iraq and Afghanistan. At a budgeted cost (on and off the books) that likely exceeds \$600 billion a year (including the 2 real wars and the national and homeland security costs), business is a big winner, but the public loses and must be convinced otherwise, and future generations have to pay the cost.

The convincing goes on from cradle to grave. From pre-school to the doctoral level, we’re taught acceptable doctrine. And our senses are bombarded constantly through the dominant corporate media and their public relations partners as well as the sights and sounds we encounter all around us at work, in our cities and communities, even in our places of worship. There’s almost no escape except to venture on our own to discover hidden truths willfully kept from us. But if we’re too good at discovery and even better at spreading the “heretical doctrine” of truths that refute the party line, communicating effectively with the greater public, we then risk the power of the state acting to stop us by any means – just like it tries to overthrow leaders of “outlier” nations that dare “go their own way” and forget “who’s boss.”

The Shame Of What’s Called Our System Of Justice

The U.S. “gulag” prison system is proof enough that they mean business and will act tough to squelch any serious dissent. (We already know plenty about what goes on at the Pentagon and CIA authorized “torture-prisons” at Guantanamo and many Abu Graibs around the world.) Conditions have grown especially repressive against the poor and disadvantaged and immigrants of color under the Bush administration’s fear-induced permanent state of war and sham “global war on terrorism.” The notion of due process has been usurped by systemic criminal injustice for those unable to afford a proper defense, most often the poor and people of color. As a result, the prison population has grown each year and more people

are behind bars today than in any other country. In June, 2004 that number reached 2.1 million, and nearly half of them were blacks and another 15% hispanics. Those imprisoned for non-violent offenses accounted for about half the total prison population and half of those (about 500,000) are drug related. And there's a sizable number of political prisoners, especially post 9/11, locked up on bogus charges because of their views and ability to spread them, not any crimes they committed. Some are on death row and at times murdered by the state despite their innocence.

The death penalty itself is the most contentious part of the criminal-injustice system and how prisoners are treated once incarcerated. Only 2 countries in the Global North, the U.S. and Japan, have so far failed to ban it. In the U.S. at year end 2004, 36 states and the Federal prison system held 3,315 prisoners on death row. Since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, over 1000 executions have taken place. (In Japan, only about 50 have been executed in the last dozen years and about an equal number are awaiting execution.) Many opponents of the death penalty call these acts institutionalized, state-sponsored, ritualistic acts of torture-murder. They say "torture" because often the prisoner is so hated that their executioners "deliberately" try to inflict pain during the process of killing them. And while that alone is inhumane and barbaric enough, all too often the accused are innocent. But because most often they're a person of color, poor and unable to afford a proper defense, they become victims of a system based not on justice but on vengeance, indifference and the belief by elected officials that being "tough on crime" is a good vote-getter.

As a result, a huge prison-industrial complex system has arisen, and spending for it continues to grow exponentially and now exceeds \$40 billion annually. (The annual per prisoner cost today almost equals a year's tuition at Harvard.) In some states the annual budget for prisons exceeds that for education, and overall the rate of prison spending growth has greatly exceeded that for education over the past 25 years. All this is part of an effort to control dissent by a combination of a state-induced climate of fear and hard line police state tactics to keep a restive population in line. The population should be even more restive as the wealth gap grows, wages have stagnated and at times fallen, low paid service jobs replace higher paying manufacturing ones as more good jobs are exported and lost, and social services continue to erode. There's less carrot and more stick as the Bush administration has cracked down hard at home against dissent and conducted a racist war against immigrants, muslims and people of color.

The Ultimate Corruption - A Hostile Takeover Of World Civil Society By A Lawless, Rampaging Rogue State

The Bush administration has used the pretext of what happened on 9/11 as justification for all its policies and actions since that fateful day. In so doing it trashed the Constitution, international law, all treaty obligations in their way, the Geneva and Hague Conventions, other UN Conventions and Covenants including the Universal Declaration of Human rights, the Magna Carta establishing the foundation for our sacred habeas rights, and whatever else they decide to disregard. Law for them is only what they say it is. They rampage unchecked and unchallenged in pursuit of a reckless and insane intent to rule the world even if they destroy it in the attempt. They continue committing the most egregious war crimes and crimes against humanity in two ongoing immoral and illegal wars while claiming (through lies and deceit) to be doing it in the name of "democracy." In fact, they're committing mass slaughter using illegal weapons, illegal occupations, exploitation and unrestrained depravity without end to control the world's resources, markets and cheap

labor.

Now they're planning new wars and coups against "uncooperative" and "independent" heads of state who've ignored the message of "who's boss" and "gone their own way." They plan to continue taking (stealing) from the most disadvantaged and ordinary working people at home and most desperately in need worldwide to fund their endless imperial wars to enrich their corporate partners (masters) and further serve the most privileged and well-off. In sum, they've spat in the face of all humanity in their scorched earth, take no prisoners policies. They've created a permanent "darkness at noon", a totalitarian nightmare like the dystopian "1984" where the US is a real life Oceania. No one anywhere is safe, we're all being illegally surveilled, unwanted or unacceptable history and truths go down the "memory hole" of silence, and anyone, anywhere, for any reason may be forcibly taken away to be "detained", tortured, even murdered - all in the name of "democracy" and a government fighting to protect us and keep us "free." Orwell summed it up well when he wrote: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face— forever...."

Where It's Led Us And What's Ahead

Things are far more dire than the public now realizes. Using wartime contingency "national security initiatives" established during the Reagan years that gave the President the power to suspend the Constitution and impose martial law, George Bush signed executive orders post 9/11 giving himself absolute power in times of whatever he alone decides is a "national emergency." That power would make him a dictator, accountable to no one, and he's given himself the right to seize it any time he chooses and for any pretext he claims warrants it. Both Reagan and Bush may have used Richard Nixon as their criminal role model in approving their own plans to achieve absolute power. In his reckless attempt to quell dissent, Nixon in 1970 approved the "Houston plan" that authorized illegal wiretapping, mail intercepts and home and office burglarizing to obtain sensitive records - all activities that moved the nation a long way toward becoming a police state and led to the Watergate scandal.

Things today appear far worse than under Nixon or Reagan. And an unambiguous signal of what's now at stake was clear and present at the January signing ceremony for the FY 06 Defense Authorization Bill. That bill contained the McCain Amendment (banning the torture of detainees) and Graham-Levin Amendment (effectively denying detainees their sacred habeas rights and taking a reckless first step toward denying those rights to all of us). At the ceremony, George Bush made an unguarded and extraordinary statement. In it he effectively nullified "McCain" entirely by claiming the right to govern as a "Unitary Executive" with the power to abrogate the separation of powers doctrine (implied though not specifically stated in the Constitution), bypass the Congress and courts and act as he chooses to protect national security. In effect, he was saying to protect the nation, he would ignore the law if he chooses and govern by presidential edict - an unequivocal usurpation of dictatorial power. In doing this Bush also violated the notion of "judicial supremacy" articulated by Chief Justice John Marshall in 1803 in the famous *Marbury v. Madison* case, which established the principle that the Court is the final arbiter of what is and is not the law. Most disturbing, Bush's declaration met no howls of protest or headline stories in the corporate media. It's just business as usual as the nation moves perilously closer to a full-blown totalitarian state - with delusions of grandeur. What this administration wants is nothing less than is stated in their language of "full spectrum dominance." It's their intent to control the whole planet, including the oceans, air above it and all outer space by any

means including using war as a strategy to achieve it. They actually put this stuff in writing anyone can look up and read and get scared as hell.

How can this be stopped before it's too late? There may be little time left, and we must use it and act. The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal after WW II said we're obliged to act to avoid being complicit in war crimes and related criminal acts. They said: "Anyone with knowledge of illegal activity and an opportunity to do something is a potential criminal under international law unless the person takes affirmative measures to prevent the commission of the crimes." The ultimate and final authority rests with the people.

The all-powerful rampaging U.S. juggernaut is not invulnerable. It faces at least 2 serious challenges. One is its own imperial arrogance, hubris and potentially fatal overreach that may hasten its own demise. The other is mass world public opinion that by using its "ultimate authority", becoming aroused and energized, flexing its collective muscle, can make even superpowers give ground. The great Indian writer, Arundhati Roy, told us her view how to do it in her 2003 book *War Talk* when she wrote:

"We can re-invent civil disobedience in a million different ways.....we can come up with a million ways of becoming a collective pain in the ass.

When George Bush says 'you're either with us, or you are with the terrorists,' we can say 'No thank you.' We can let him know that the people of the world do not need to choose between a Malevolent Mickey Mouse and the Mad Mullahs.

Our strategy should be not only to confront the Empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of

oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our

joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness - and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling - their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them."

The renowned anthropologist, Margaret Mead, author of 44 books and thousands of articles and who "shone a light of understanding on human nature" and believed we should "cherish the life of the world" thought it was even simpler to achieve a better world when she wrote: "Never underestimate the ability of a small group of committed individuals to change the world." And Gandhi observed that "even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled."

I would just add that with our collective will, in large or smaller numbers, we can indeed shake the world, remake it in our own just image, and reclaim it from theirs.

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Democracy In America - It's Spelled C-O-R-R-U-P-T-I-O-N - By Stephen Lendman

The headlines are blaring daily about another big corruption scandal that has the makings of being the mother of them all - at least for a generation or so. We won't know how big until one well-connected influence peddling lobbyist under multiple indictments involving crony capitalism and corruption begins to sing to the Justice Department after copping a plea in return for a lighter sentence. It's likely that before this ends, it may involve many Republican members of Congress and some Democrats including some high level ones from both parties as well as their aides, members of the Executive Branch and various other Republican party figures. It may even go higher than most observers now expect.

While we're focused on the current political and financial scandal, we're not hearing or reading that corruption can take different forms. And they extend to the core principles of how this country is governed, who wins, who loses and what it means for a nation calling itself a democracy as well as for all other nations affected by our policies and actions. I'd like to suggest a broader definition of corruption that reflects the scope of what's covered below.

Corruption Defined For This Essay

For purposes of this essay, corruption includes all policies and actions by those elected or other officials in or connected to government, the net result of which improperly, unjustly or illegally distributes the nation's wealth (and that of other nations we exploit and dominate) to benefit an elite minority and at the expense of the vast majority of the people (at home and abroad). It includes and involves those individuals, organizations and institutions that are the main beneficiaries of these government policies and actions (business, the military, academia and even organized religion) or that work cooperatively with them or aid them. In a word, it's the net result of the incestuous relationship between government and the powerful and influential "special interests" that benefit most from it that deprives or takes from the many, the most defenseless and most in need and gives to the elite and well-off few. While retaining a facade of fairness, it does it through a sham democracy for those of privilege by rigging the political process to work for their benefit. And it functions within or outside the law, and usually both ways.

Corruption - Political And Financial

What corruption usually refers to is the misuse of power by elected or appointed officials in return for illegal cash bribes, payoffs of various sorts or other forms or items of value received for special favors or preferential treatment such as favorable legislation or voting the "right way." It can be as crude as wads of cash in paper bags or smaller amounts in envelopes or as subtle as promises of high paid future employment, expensive junkets, sky box seats at sporting events or meals in fancy restaurants. It also assumes those in power can be bought. The only issue is the price and what's for sale.

It's a fair guess most people believe this stuff goes on all the time, and they're probably right. Usually the offenders don't get caught, but using the "roach" theory, when one does it's likely there's a lot more of them out there we haven't (yet) found. In sum, the way the political system works is best explained in the title of the Greg Palast book - The Best Democracy Money Can Buy. Those who can pay can play, and those who can't have no say, don't get their way and had better pray for a better day.

What's it all mean? It means the political game is rigged, the books are cooked and the notion that voters go to the polls to elect representatives who'll serve their interests is cockeyed hooey. The real game is "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." But you better have lots of "scratch." As stated above, it's an incestuous relationship between powerful interests, usually big business and government with high-powered, well paid lobbyists (aka influencing peddling "bagmen") "greasing the wheels" to make the system work. All "players" win, and the dirty game goes on and on and never ends. The public knows the game's going on but not the sordid details until a "player" stumbles, gets caught and the latest chicanery comes to light. Then the game plan is punish the "bad apple" and cleanse an otherwise honest system. Does anyone really believe that? The real game plan is "cut your losses" and go back to business as usual but out of the public's eye and daily headlines. The same thing is true in government and in big business. Anything goes that's self-serving, as long as you don't get caught. That's the only crime. And when it comes to exploiting other nations, there are no rules. It's "snatch and grab" all you can, just like a street bully does it against an easy mark.

The Nation's Business - The Power Of Transnational Corporations

Calvin Coolidge, our 30th president, said "the business of America is business." If he were alive today, he might rephrase that maxim and say it's big business, really big. Ralph Nader has updated and corrected Coolidge by saying the country is run by giant corporations, and both political parties are just proxies for them. In Nader's colorful language, it's government for General Motors, by Dupont and for Exxon Mobil. If the 50 largest corporations were nations, half of the largest 100 of them would be corporations. And along with size goes power and influence - to decide who governs, serves on our courts and occupies the White House. The voting public may think they have a say, but that's just an illusion, or more accurately a delusion. The big business power brokers make all the rules and decide everything important. Their cronies and proxies then "grease the wheels" with lots of "grease" to be sure all goes as planned. Big business also decides what laws are enacted or changed. They even write them to assure what they want gets in and what they don't want stays out. It all goes on sub rosa, and the public has no say or right of appeal when provisions harm their interests. Most often the public is in the dark and doesn't even know or understand it's been harmed.

We call this "democracy." In fact, it's a distorted variant of it that's only a democracy for the few - the privileged class sociologist and social scientist C. Wright Mills called "The Power Elite" in his notable 1956 book by that title. Mills' elite included those "in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society"....the ones who "rule the big corporations.....run the machinery of state.... direct the military establishment. They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure...." In Mills' day, large corporations had great power but would be judged small or medium-sized compared to their largest behemoth counterparts today. Since 1950 the nation's gross domestic product has increased in size over 35-fold in constant dollars. It's well over \$10 trillion today. The largest U.S. corporations, however, have increased even faster because of their many mergers and acquisitions in addition to their growth. A single division of General Electric today, with its many divisions, is larger than the entire company was 50 years ago. With that size has come enormous power and influence, so much so that if Mills were alive and revised his book today, corporate America would dominate and virtually own "the strategic command posts" he wrote about. All other institutions are now subordinate and function to serve these omnipotent giants. Using part of the title of David Korten's book, today giant transnational

“corporations rule the world.”

THE LAW AND HOW IT AFFECTS CORPORATE BEHAVIOR

All publicly owned corporations are mandated above all else to serve only the best interests of their shareholders. The courts have deemed this to mean, and it's now a settled issue in corporate law, that these businesses must work to maximize shareholder value and do so by increasing profits. Corporate law prohibits the board of directors or senior executives from taking any action that may deviate from that primary responsibility, such as providing services to the community or safeguarding the environment. If doing so adds expense and reduces profits, the corporation would be in violation of its mandate and liable to suit by shareholders for harming profitability and share value. It would also subject the CEO and other top executives to likely dismissal.

Corporate power and influence grew over many generations and was aided by favorable legislation and many important Supreme Court decisions. However, the crucial, defining moment happened in 1886 when the Supreme Court granted corporations the legal status of personhood in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railway* – a simple tax dispute case unrelated to the issue of corporate personhood. The story of that decision, how it came about and what it means is lucidly explained in Thom Hartmann's important book – *Unequal Protection*. Hartmann documents and explains that it wasn't the Justices who decided corporations are persons, but the Court's reporter (J.C. Bancroft Davis) who after the decision was rendered wrote it in his “headnotes”. The Court did nothing to refute them, likely by intent, and the result was what corporations had long coveted.

That decision, most people never heard of but one of the most crucial in our history, changed everything. It granted corporations the same constitutional rights as people, but because of their limited liability status, protected shareholders from the obligations of their debts, other obligations, and many of the responsibilities individuals legally have. For many years prior to Santa Clara, corporations wanted but were never able to gain this right and all the benefits from it. After they finally had it, they were able to win many additional favorable court decisions that continue to the present day. They also gained much regulatory relief, favorable legislation and, at the same time, were protected by their limited liability status. All this through the years allowed corporations to increase their power and helped them grow to the size and dominance they've now achieved.

Think of it. Corporations aren't human, they can live forever, change their identity, reside in many places simultaneously in many countries, can't be imprisoned for wrongdoing and can change themselves into new persons at will for any reason. They have the same rights and protections under the Bill of Rights as people but not the responsibilities. And they got all this because a court reporter gave it to them in his “headnotes”, after the fact, in a Supreme Court decision involving a lawsuit unrelated to this crucial right wanted and now granted. From that right, corporations were then unbound, free to grow and gain immense power and be able to become the dominant institution that now runs the country, the world and all our lives. Most important, they got an unwritten license from their government servants in all 3 branches to operate freely for their own benefit and others of their privileged class and at the expense of the great majority everywhere. Because of the harm they cause to so many from their behavior, the damage they do to the environment, and the costly wars fought on their behalf to enhance their profits, it's fair to say, in military terminology, the giant transnationals today are truly “weapons of mass destruction.”

It's important to note a little known event in our early history that might have changed everything had Thomas Jefferson and James Madison gotten their way. Jefferson and Madison were able to add the first 10 amendments, or Bill of Rights, to our Constitution but lost a battle with the Federalists led by John Adams and Alexander Hamilton to include 2 others. Jefferson and Madison believed that to protect the liberty of the people the Bill of Rights should include "freedom from monopolies in commerce" (what are now giant corporations) and "freedom from a permanent military", or standing armies. Adams and Hamilton believed otherwise, and the final compromise included the first 10 amendments that are now the law but not the other 2. Had Jefferson and Madison gotten their way, try to imagine how different our subsequent history might have been and what our country might be like today.

In 2003, *The Corporation*, the film, was made. It was based on law professor Joel Bakan's book - *The Corporation: the Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*. With commentaries from diverse observers ranging from Noam Chomsky and Michael Moore to Milton Friedman and corporate CEOs, the film explores the nature of corporations and how they operate. It portrays a classic conflict between an overriding concern with the "bottom line" and social good. Overall, the picture painted is not pretty, especially a dramatic moment drawn from the work of Canadian psychiatrist Robert Hare who concludes the corporation meets the clinical definition of a psychopath. It's amoral, deceitful, manipulative, completely self-interested, it breaches social and legal standards yet suffers no guilt, it has a callous unconcern for others and a disregard for their safety and is unable to maintain long-term relationships. It could also be argued (but not mentioned in the film) that corporations also fit the definition of a sociopath whose behavior is extremely antisocial, is lacking in conscience and has no sense of social or moral responsibility.

The Growth Of Social Services - Unlike Today, Responsible Government Once Added New Ones

The golden age of social service benefits and worker protections and rights emerged during the Great Depression years of the 1930s, but didn't begin then. As early as our colonial times there was a recognition of an obligation to help the needy although there was no organized effort. But as the nation became less agrarian and more industrial, a number of States began to add services like cash allowances, mothers' pensions and by the mid-twenties old age assistance to the blind. Also, at that time and earlier, the States and Federal government began to recognize the need for a social insurance approach to public welfare that would be financed through contributions and would guarantee protection for all rather than just public assistance for the needy.

Social insurance first began in 1908 with a Federal workers' compensation law for some government employees. States then followed with their own, and by 1929 these laws were in effect in all but 4 States. There were other social efforts as well, such as State and local retirement plans and Federal benefits and services for veterans. Also, the private sector shared a responsibility by beginning to provide health care, pensions, life insurance and sickness payments to their employees.

the Great Depression and "the New Deal"

By 1932, the hard times of the Great Depression and loose regulation that preceded it demanded a greater Federal government role to aid the needy and reform the economy. In his 1933 inaugural address Franklin Roosevelt said he would not stand by and watch the

Depression deepen and asked the Congress for the power to combat the emergency. He claimed “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself”, but that was little comfort to the 25% of the working public unemployed that year. In his 1937 inaugural address, FDR agreed with them when he said “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.” From the beginning of his presidency Roosevelt knew he had to act, but it wasn’t out of compassion for the needy he spoke of. With support from some key corporate chieftains, he and they knew he had to do it to save capitalism, to bail out the bankers and the rich, and to prevent a possible workers’ revolution similar to what happened in Russia in 1917.

And act he did with loans and grants to help the States and landmark measures like the FDIC, insuring bank deposits, the SEC, to regulate the stock exchanges, and the NLRB, with the passage of the Wagner Act, that guaranteed labor the right to bargain collectively on equal terms with management. Most important were a broad array of social programs. They included Federal emergency relief, public works programs, and other initiatives, begun under an “alphabet soup” listing of names that tried to jump-start a moribund economy by providing work and relief for the unemployed. The seminal moment came in 1935 with the passage of the Social Security Act that to this day is the single most important piece of social legislation in our history and the one most responsible for keeping a vast number of the elderly out of poverty as well as providing other services and benefits for those in need.

Other important social legislation in the 1930s included Unemployment Insurance (a State – Federal government partnership with States as administrators), the Railroad Retirement System, Public Housing and Social Security Old-Age and Survivors Insurance.

Post – WW II Social Programs

After WW II there was the National School Lunch Program, Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disability (later the SSI program), Social Security Disability Insurance, Medical Assistance for the Aged (prior to Medicaid), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the Food Stamp Program, School Breakfast Program, Black Lung Benefits Program, Supplemental Security Income Program, the WIC food assistance program, Earned Income Tax Credit, Low Income Home Energy Assistance and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) among others. Along with Social Security, the other most important social program established was Medicare and along with it Medicaid in 1965. Those 2 programs assured the elderly and indigent of health care coverage at affordable cost or at minimal or no cost to the needy. All of the above was the good news, except for TANF which will be discussed below.

The Erosion Of Social Services

Things began to change after 1980 and the election of Ronald Reagan. Since then and over the last 25 years, it’s been a long downhill slide that’s included the erosion of worker rights, and continued cuts in vital social and other needed services directly or in more subtle ways. The 2 bedrock social programs so far have remained largely in tact, but even they have been eroded through higher payroll taxes (that affect low and middle income workers), raising the retirement age, and increases in Medicare premiums and cuts in Medicaid for the poor.

The Reagan Years

Ronald Reagan’s administration was characterized by large increases in military spending,

big tax cuts mainly benefitting the rich and big business while at the same time slashing social spending and running up huge budget deficits. Domestic discretionary spending (which includes most all social spending other than Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid) was cut by one-third from 1981 to 1988. Programs for those with low incomes were hardest hit suffering a 54% cut during the Reagan years, subsidized housing (adjusted for inflation) lost over 80% of its support, training and employment services over 68%, and housing assistance for the elderly 47%.

The Reagan administration also showed its contempt for organized labor and one-sided support for big business beginning with the firing of 11,000 striking air traffic controllers in August, 1981, jailing its PATCO leaders, fining the union millions of dollars and finally “busting” the union. It also used federal tax dollars to finance strike-breaking and worked to reduce worker health and safety protections and to change federal statutes guaranteeing worker rights to organize and bargain collectively.

The George H.W. Bush years

The elder George Bush was elected on promises of a “kinder and gentler” presidency. He sought not to continue the Reagan slash and burn tactics and instead worked to reverse some of them. Working with a Democrat controlled Congress, there were increases in federal spending for education, child care and advanced technology R & D. He also approved legislation to improve the interstate highway system. Probably his most important act was his signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 that was probably the most significant piece of civil rights legislation in a decade and provided the disabled with important rights they hadn’t had. Bush also reauthorized the Clean Air Act that mandated higher air quality standards and required cleaner burning fuels. Clearly, the elder Bush presidency was a respite from the one-sided business-friendly agenda of the Reagan years. In a budget deal with the Congress he even raised taxes (anathema for Republicans), going back on his campaign pledge of “no new taxes.” Republicans never forgave him, and the electorate denied him a second term.

The Clinton Years

Aside from the few social gains under the elder Bush, the other Reagan era cuts have never been recouped. In fact, they continued to decline through the Clinton years. In addition, the Clinton administration made its own “contribution” to the continued assault on the needy with the passage a heartless and disgraceful “welfare reform” bill called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). Prior to that time, welfare payments to the needy were distributed through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children or AFDC program. That program worked well but came under attack after Republicans gained control of both Houses of Congress in 1994 and cutting welfare became point 3 (out of 10 points) in the Republicans’ Contract with America (that opponents called the Contract on America).

Under “welfare reform” a time limit was set, and no one could receive welfare payments for more than 5 years. The 1996 act created a new program for distributing aid called the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF that called for the Federal government to provide fixed block grants to the states (unrelated to the amount of need for help) and let them administer aid at their discretion. Also, under this plan, most recipients must participate in some kind of work or training for work to get help. This created a great hardship for many recipients, especially single mothers with small children. That hardship

got even worse during and after the 2001-2002 recession, when the economy was first losing large numbers of jobs, and then even after recovery when job growth was only modest and still is less than robust. And most new jobs now created are in lower paying service areas and temporary or part-time positions, often with few or no benefits like health care insurance.

The Clinton administration's main social initiative was its failed attempt to reform how Americans get their health care. It was a complicated plan based on the notion of "managed competition" and marketplace medicine rather than a "single-payer", government run national health insurance program like those in Western Europe and Canada. It tried to convince the public to accept less choice for more affordability and coverage for all. But it wanted to do it by allowing big insurers and health maintenance organizations (HMOs) to run the show. Because these organizations are committed to maximizing profits, they need to control costs. That means less care for the sick, especially the expensive kind they go all out to restrict.

Thankfully Clinton's Health Security plan arrived stillborn but only because it pitted the interests of competing health care providers against each other in a zero-sum game. Under the Clinton plan, "big Pharma" would have been a "big loser" with "big insurers" and "big HMOs" able to buy drugs at lower prices. But "big Pharma" and other private interest losers had their own "big guns" and were able to defeat another feeble attempt at so-called health care reform and also prevent any needed government control over the delivery of health care services.

The George W. Bush years

After the Clinton years, the pace of social spending cuts accelerated under George Bush and continues unabated with the Bush administration's stated intent to make annual additional cuts. The Bush years so far have been characterized by very big increases in military spending including tens of billions annually since 2003 off-the-books to fund the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and continued conflicts in both countries - with no end in sight. (Before it ends, the Iraq conflict is expected to cost between \$1 and \$2 trillion according to an estimate released in January, 2005 by Nobel Laureate and former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz). In addition, there have been several rounds of tax cuts mostly benefitting the rich and big business. The net result has been big annual budget deficits and increased hardship for the most disadvantaged.

Education under G.W. Bush

Some of the damage done since Bush took office has included his disastrous education initiative called The No Child Left Behind Act which focuses on testing. It's been a boon to corporations involved in testing but done nothing to enhance learning. Teachers hate it as it forces them to teach "to the test" rather than educate their students properly in the course material. The result in recent years is that the quality of education in urban schools has deteriorated and the level of racial segregation is now as great as in the 1960s according to Jonathan Kozol in his new book *The Shame of the Nation*. The data in big cities is shocking. In Chicago where I live in 2002-03, 87% of public school enrollment was black or Hispanic; in Washington, D.C. it's a startling 94%; in St. Louis it's 82%; in Philadelphia and Cleveland 79%; in Los Angeles 84%; in Detroit startling again at 96%; in Baltimore 89%; in New York almost 75%. Looking ahead, things seem to be getting worse, not better.

The Bush education agenda also includes so-called school vouchers that disguise a broader goal to privatize public education and aid parochial (religious) schools. The use of them has been upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* city of Cleveland case in a 5 - 4 ruling but under strict conditions that the program be part of multiple educational options, offer parents real choice between religious and secular schools and ensure that benefits go to public and private schools, religious or not. Despite this narrow circumscribing, in many areas where they're now allowed, 80% of vouchers are for use in schools where the central mission is religious education or training. This is a serious blow to the health of democracy by violating the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. But it's also a blow that threatens the institution of public education that's been in place throughout our history and has been the bedrock of primary and secondary education until choice through vouchers was first proposed in the 1980s by conservative economist Milton Friedman.

Those supporting vouchers believe choice will improve school performance through competition in the marketplace. But those opposing them fear, with justification, that draining already inadequate funding from the public schools will eventually destroy them. In addition, the monetary amount of vouchers offered is only a small fraction of the tuition cost at most private schools, making them unusable for low-income parents. It's also likely and already proven in some cases that where public corporations run the schools the quality of education suffers because of these corporations' legally mandated requirement to maximize profits. To do so may and usually does require them to cut costs and reduce services, and that can only result in lower quality education.

Things aren't much better for those needing college aid either as the Bush administration for 3 straight years cut or froze the maximum allowable Pell Grant amount. In the face of inexorable tuition and fee increases (way above the inflation rate) combined with a trend toward less government aid, this means a growing number of low-income students are now deprived of a chance for higher education.

Health care under G. W. Bush

The state of health care has also gotten worse under George Bush with about 46 million having no coverage in 2004 and many millions more being underinsured. The situation is greatly exacerbated by spiralling health care costs including rising premiums on Medicare Part B, and cuts in Medicaid. It's questionable what relief if any will result from the Medicare Act of 2003 that added prescription drug coverage for Medicare recipients. The plan is confusing, even Kafkaesque in some ways, and doesn't at all benefit many on Medicare. This writer, now on Medicare, won't touch it. It does benefit its main intended beneficiary, the big pharmaceutical companies that get big subsidies from it and can maintain and charge high prices - now you see a benefit, and now you don't. And in the latest disturbing twist, as the new plan takes effect, some of the largest pharmaceutical companies are ending their programs of providing free or deeply discounted drugs to needy seniors and the disabled. As many as 1 million people may be affected who earn too much to qualify for government aid and who will now have the added burden of higher out-of-pocket costs for the medications they need, if they can afford them at all.

Other Bush Social Policies

Ordinary working people have also suffered under Bush's policies. His administration killed OSHA workplace ergonomic rules that were more than 10 years in the making, revoked

grants to study workplace safety and health, cut funding for job training, cut enforcement positions in OSHA and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (a key reason for the recent Sago and Alma mine deaths in W. Virginia and 230 total coal miner deaths in 206 mine accidents), proposed paying welfare recipients below-minimum wages, denied Homeland Security employees the right to collective bargaining and protection for being a whistleblower, blocked release of funds to monitor the health of rescue workers at Ground Zero in New York, cut health care benefits for veterans, proposed privatizing 850,000 federal jobs over a number of years, changed overtime work rules (despite House and Senate majority votes against his proposed changes) that will deprive millions of overtime pay, made it much harder for low-income workers to get the Earned Income Tax Credit and much more.

If they get their way, the Bush heartless agenda also intends to cut 30% of the funding to train doctors at children's hospitals; wants a 15% cut in winter energy assistance for the needy; another 15% cut in budget to repair rundown public housing; a 13% cut for the Corps of Engineers for programs to prevent flooding; a 10% cut for efforts to reduce job-related deaths, injuries and ailments; and added cuts in funding for environmental protection programs, transportation improvements and aid to farm families forced off their land. The U.S. Senate at year end 2005, also passed a budget reconciliation bill (part of a House - Senate conference committee) that cuts \$40 billion over 5 years in entitlement programs - mainly affecting student loans and Medicaid benefits. Once the slight differences between the House and Senate bills are reconciled and the bill is signed into law, it will become the first entitlement cutback since so-called "welfare reform" in 1996.

The Bush administration's top domestic priority goal has been to privatize Social Security, beginning with just a small portion of it. So far mass public opposition combined with multiple Washington scandals and Bush's plummeting approval rating has stopped it and temporarily taken it off the agenda. While the administration won't admit it, their real goal is to end Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid by privatizing all 3 programs. If they ever succeed in doing this, it would wreak severe harm on the many millions of lower income recipients especially who rely on these programs to keep them out of poverty and give them essential health care that might otherwise be unaffordable. The privatization of Medicare prescription drug benefits (a terrible bill passed in the middle of the night by a forced vote through intimidation after the first roll call vote defeated it) is one step toward the full privatization of all health care, the overall result of which will likely greatly increase the number of uninsured and force many others to "buy" lesser quality coverage (and thus less health care) than they now receive.

The Net Result Of Policies Since 1980

The net result of the last 25 years has been a steady, disturbing erosion of the most essential social services people rely on. And it's come at a time when those services are more needed than ever since the Great Depression years. Manufacturing and other higher paying jobs have been exported for years to lower wage countries, and since the 1980s, union membership and worker bargaining power have greatly declined. The result is a nation oriented to services and mostly offering lower paying jobs with fewer or no benefits. One almost unlimited job opportunity is available. It could be promoted with the slogan "join the navy (or army, air force or marines) and see the world" - or at least a certain part of it in the Middle East. Most of those now joining up will never get the benefits they're promised - another deception. Instead, they'll be commodified and consumed on the endless battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan and other planned conflicts in an insane endless war to "win

hearts and minds”, “spread democracy”, force all others to think and act as we do, and rule the world.

Along with a permanent state of war and garrison state, there’s also been a continued transfer of wealth from the poor and middle class to the most well-off through personal and corporate tax cuts (a third of the 275 largest companies paid no federal income tax in at least one year from 2001 – 2003 or got a refund). Corporations have also gotten big corporate welfare subsidies (the public pays for them with our taxes) including huge increases in military spending, which goes to the defense contractors and the many thousands of other companies that receive sub-contracts or sell to the defense related sector. The Center for Defense Information reported that since 1945 over \$21 trillion in constant dollars has been spent on the military. Its been done largely to benefit big corporations and fight wars for them, not to defend the nation against real enemies. And its result has been the denial of a fair portion of it being used for vitally needed social services. Unless these policies can be stopped and reversed, essential social benefits will continue to be lost, oppressive corporate power will get stronger, and the gap between rich and poor will become even greater, increasing poverty and destroying the principles this country was founded on of equal opportunity and freedom and justice for all. As former Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis once explained – “We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.” Unless we can reinvigorate the democracy Brandeis spoke of, America the beautiful will only exist for the privileged few and no one else.

How They Get Away With It

I’ve long believed the greatest threat to democracy is an uninformed electorate. Unfortunately, that disturbing state clearly characterizes the overall U.S. public that’s locked in a prison of its collective mind created by state controlled programming or brainwashing. To control the public, especially when the state is ill-serving it, only techniques of mind control will work. If it’s done effectively, the public can be convinced to go along with some of the most audacious policies that go against its own self-interest by a combination of state-induced fear, distraction, consumerism and when the first three fail lockdown.

George Orwell explained that “those who control the present control the past, and those who control the past control the future.” It’s called programming the public mind or thought control. That’s how it worked in Orwell’s classic “1984”, and it’s disturbingly similar today in the U.S. In “1984” Big Brother was watching (through the omnipresent telescreen) to be sure people were “good citizens.” Today, Big Brother in the U.S. is “Uncle Sam” watching to keep us in line and using the Orwellian techniques of “newspeak”, “doublethink” and “beat em up and lock em up” when the propaganda message is misunderstood, ignored or resisted. It worked in the fictional “1984”, and it works well most often for most of us in the real but often surreal-like world right here, but more subtly except when things get rough.

The Doctrine Of The “Free Market” – How It’s Pursued, Protected And Preserved

In the west, especially in the U.S., we’re taught to believe in the doctrine of the “free market” uber alles, and that government should stay out of the way except to protect us from enemies (46 million with no health insurance and millions of poor single mothers and their children denied further desperately needed welfare help might disagree). The result is a society based on consumerism and a shop-till-you-drop and buy the latest and greatest “gadgets and trinkets” mindset. And a subset of sorts of consumerism is the element of

“distraction.” Instead of focusing on the state of the world or affairs of state, the government and its corporate media allies want us concentrating on the alluring array at the mall or who’ll win the Super Bowl. We’ll take care of the rest, they tell us. Trust us, we know what’s best. As far as we can throw them, I’d respond. And I’d add the wisdom and admonition of the great independent American journalist I.F. Stone when he explained that: “All governments are run by liars. Nothing they say should be believed.” He then shortened it to two words in his advice to aspiring journalists: “Governments lie.”

Stone would have easily recognized and reported fearlessly on the mendacity of the Bush administration’s current behavior. By using an ill-defined sham threat of terrorism and easy-picking dictators like Saddam, other “crazed Arabs” (Noam Chomsky’s characterization), and labeling all other leaders who forget “who’s boss” threats to our security, they’ve created an unjustifiable fear to support a permanent state of war, national security state, and “lockdown” America. They’ve done it to justify a strong military and homeland guardians to protect us from all those “barbarians at our gates.” As Machiavelli said in *The Prince* – “It’s better to be feared than loved.” But when that leads to the unrestrained and reckless use of power, its outcome is a Hobbesian “war of all against all.” The threat is bogus, a big lie, but it’s repeated endlessly until almost everyone believes it. What’s really intended is a plan to serve the interests of giant, powerful corporations whose bottom line depends on big government spending to support them. Those corporations also depend on military muscle when needed to open and secure new markets abroad so they can grow even bigger, more powerful and, above all, more profitable. Our military is used to open those new markets, not protect us from predators. Its called empire building.

George Washington understood it even in his day when he referred to the nation as a “rising empire.” He helped build it during the Revolutionary War by his savage treatment of native Indians, all of whom he thought of as subhumans (American Untermenschen). He compared them to wolves and “beasts of prey” and called for their total destruction. And he did it when he sent General John Sullivan and 5,000 troops to attack the noncombatant Onondaga people in 1779 with orders to destroy all their villages, homes, fields, food supplies, cattle herds and orchards. He hoped to kill as many as possible and succeeded. He also stole Indian land including from the Onieda people who aided Washington when he was most in need at Valley Forge. The “Father of our country” and all other leaders who followed him pursued a genocidal assault against our native people that was one of the inspirations and models for Adolph Hitler in designing his own plan to exterminate the Jews, Gypsies, Slavs and other Untermenschen of his day.

Imperialism by its very nature is predatory and brutal. It’s a scorched earth, take-no-prisoners strategy to achieve continued economic and geopolitical growth and expansion. It’s in the DNA of a capitalist system as the great political economist Harry Magdoff, who died on January 1 at age 92, explained in his 1969 book *The Age of Imperialism* when he wrote: “Imperialism is not a matter of choice for a capitalist society; it is the way of life of such a society.” Historian Henry Steele Commager said it his way when he once wrote that a national security state and its bureaucracy lends its great talents (and resources) “not to devising ways of reducing tensions and avoiding war, but to ways of exacerbating tensions and preparing for war.....For in this Alice-in-Wonderland bureaucratic world you achieve peace through war, order through chaos, security through violence, the reign of law through lawlessness.”

And in his unguarded and candid pithy statement, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge also explained it in 1895 when he said “commerce follows the flag.” He might have added that

the flag also follows commerce. The U.S. had no real enemies then and none since WW II, but all administrations had to convince us we did so they could divert a huge amount of the federal budget to the military and national security. To do it enemies had to be “invented” – the Russians (they were never coming), Saddam (never a threat), North Korea (they’ve been seeking normalization with us since the late 1980s), and today in Iran (the ayatollahs and elected government also want normalization) and in Venezuela (President Hugo Chavez is a peaceful populist democrat loved by the great majority of his people).

Since WW II, the absence of a real threat has been the greatest threat all U.S. administrations have feared most and had to overcome to pursue their real agenda. When the Soviet Union began disintegrating in the late 80s and finally broke up into 15 independent states at the end of 1991, the first Bush administration was desperate to find a new enemy. They did first with Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian tyrant and former close ally, in late 1989 and then with Saddam, another once close ally, in 1991. Now the war drums are getting louder against Iran and Syria and are also audible against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. And, of course, an endless war continues against so-called, mostly unnamed “terrorists” as well as the real thing in Iraq and Afghanistan. At a budgeted cost (on and off the books) that likely exceeds \$600 billion a year (including the 2 real wars and the national and homeland security costs), business is a big winner, but the public loses and must be convinced otherwise, and future generations have to pay the cost.

The convincing goes on from cradle to grave. From pre-school to the doctoral level, we’re taught acceptable doctrine. And our senses are bombarded constantly through the dominant corporate media and their public relations partners as well as the sights and sounds we encounter all around us at work, in our cities and communities, even in our places of worship. There’s almost no escape except to venture on our own to discover hidden truths willfully kept from us. But if we’re too good at discovery and even better at spreading the “heretical doctrine” of truths that refute the party line, communicating effectively with the greater public, we then risk the power of the state acting to stop us by any means – just like it tries to overthrow leaders of “outlier” nations that dare “go their own way” and forget “who’s boss.”

The Shame Of What’s Called Our System Of Justice

The U.S. “gulag” prison system is proof enough that they mean business and will act tough to squelch any serious dissent. (We already know plenty about what goes on at the Pentagon and CIA authorized “torture-prisons” at Guantanamo and many Abu Graibs around the world.) Conditions have grown especially repressive against the poor and disadvantaged and immigrants of color under the Bush administration’s fear-induced permanent state of war and sham “global war on terrorism.” The notion of due process has been usurped by systemic criminal injustice for those unable to afford a proper defense, most often the poor and people of color. As a result, the prison population has grown each year and more people are behind bars today than in any other country. In June, 2004 that number reached 2.1 million, and nearly half of them were blacks and another 15% hispanics. Those imprisoned for non-violent offenses accounted for about half the total prison population and half of those (about 500,000) are drug related. And there’s a sizable number of political prisoners, especially post 9/11, locked up on bogus charges because of their views and ability to spread them, not any crimes they committed. Some are on death row and at times murdered by the state despite their innocence.

The death penalty itself is the most contentious part of the criminal-injustice system and

how prisoners are treated once incarcerated. Only 2 countries in the Global North, the U.S. and Japan, have so far failed to ban it. In the U.S. at year end 2004, 36 states and the Federal prison system held 3,315 prisoners on death row. Since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, over 1000 executions have taken place. (In Japan, only about 50 have been executed in the last dozen years and about an equal number are awaiting execution.) Many opponents of the death penalty call these acts institutionalized, state-sponsored, ritualistic acts of torture-murder. They say "torture" because often the prisoner is so hated that their executioners "deliberately" try to inflict pain during the process of killing them. And while that alone is inhumane and barbaric enough, all too often the accused are innocent. But because most often they're a person of color, poor and unable to afford a proper defense, they become victims of a system based not on justice but on vengeance, indifference and the belief by elected officials that being "tough on crime" is a good vote-getter.

As a result, a huge prison-industrial complex system has arisen, and spending for it continues to grow exponentially and now exceeds \$40 billion annually. (The annual per prisoner cost today almost equals a year's tuition at Harvard.) In some states the annual budget for prisons exceeds that for education, and overall the rate of prison spending growth has greatly exceeded that for education over the past 25 years. All this is part of an effort to control dissent by a combination of a state-induced climate of fear and hard line police state tactics to keep a restive population in line. The population should be even more restive as the wealth gap grows, wages have stagnated and at times fallen, low paid service jobs replace higher paying manufacturing ones as more good jobs are exported and lost, and social services continue to erode. There's less carrot and more stick as the Bush administration has cracked down hard at home against dissent and conducted a racist war against immigrants, muslims and people of color.

The Ultimate Corruption - A Hostile Takeover Of World Civil Society By A Lawless, Rampaging Rogue State

The Bush administration has used the pretext of what happened on 9/11 as justification for all its policies and actions since that fateful day. In so doing it trashed the Constitution, international law, all treaty obligations in their way, the Geneva and Hague Conventions, other UN Conventions and Covenants including the Universal Declaration of Human rights, the Magna Carta establishing the foundation for our sacred habeas rights, and whatever else they decide to disregard. Law for them is only what they say it is. They rampage unchecked and unchallenged in pursuit of a reckless and insane intent to rule the world even if they destroy it in the attempt. They continue committing the most egregious war crimes and crimes against humanity in two ongoing immoral and illegal wars while claiming (through lies and deceit) to be doing it in the name of "democracy." In fact, they're committing mass slaughter using illegal weapons, illegal occupations, exploitation and unrestrained depravity without end to control the world's resources, markets and cheap labor.

Now they're planning new wars and coups against "uncooperative" and "independent" heads of state who've ignored the message of "who's boss" and "gone their own way." They plan to continue taking (stealing) from the most disadvantaged and ordinary working people at home and most desperately in need worldwide to fund their endless imperial wars to enrich their corporate partners (masters) and further serve the most privileged and well-off. In sum, they've spat in the face of all humanity in their scorched earth, take no prisoners policies. They've created a permanent "darkness at noon", a totalitarian nightmare like the

dystopian “1984” where the US is a real life Oceania. No one anywhere is safe, we’re all being illegally surveilled, unwanted or unacceptable history and truths go down the “memory hole” of silence, and anyone, anywhere, for any reason may be forcibly taken away to be “detained”, tortured, even murdered - all in the name of “democracy” and a government fighting to protect us and keep us “free.” Orwell summed it up well when he wrote: “If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face— forever....”

Where It’s Led Us And What’s Ahead

Things are far more dire than the public now realizes. Using wartime contingency “national security initiatives” established during the Reagan years that gave the President the power to suspend the Constitution and impose martial law, George Bush signed executive orders post 9/11 giving himself absolute power in times of whatever he alone decides is a “national emergency.” That power would make him a dictator, accountable to no one, and he’s given himself the right to seize it any time he chooses and for any pretext he claims warrants it. Both Reagan and Bush may have used Richard Nixon as their criminal role model in approving their own plans to achieve absolute power. In his reckless attempt to quell dissent, Nixon in 1970 approved the “Houston plan” that authorized illegal wiretapping, mail intercepts and home and office burglarizing to obtain sensitive records - all activities that moved the nation a long way toward becoming a police state and led to the Watergate scandal.

Things today appear far worse than under Nixon or Reagan. And an unambiguous signal of what’s now at stake was clear and present at the January signing ceremony for the FY 06 Defense Authorization Bill. That bill contained the McCain Amendment (banning the torture of detainees) and Graham-Levin Amendment (effectively denying detainees their sacred habeas rights and taking a reckless first step toward denying those rights to all of us). At the ceremony, George Bush made an unguarded and extraordinary statement. In it he effectively nullified “McCain” entirely by claiming the right to govern as a “Unitary Executive” with the power to abrogate the separation of powers doctrine (implied though not specifically stated in the Constitution), bypass the Congress and courts and act as he chooses to protect national security. In effect, he was saying to protect the nation, he would ignore the law if he chooses and govern by presidential edict - an unequivocal usurpation of dictatorial power. In doing this Bush also violated the notion of “judicial supremacy” articulated by Chief Justice John Marshall in 1803 in the famous *Marbury v. Madison* case, which established the principle that the Court is the final arbiter of what is and is not the law. Most disturbing, Bush’s declaration met no howls of protest or headline stories in the corporate media. It’s just business as usual as the nation moves perilously closer to a full-blown totalitarian state - with delusions of grandeur. What this administration wants is nothing less than is stated in their language of “full spectrum dominance.” It’s their intent to control the whole planet, including the oceans, air above it and all outer space by any means including using war as a strategy to achieve it. They actually put this stuff in writing anyone can look up and read and get scared as hell.

How can this be stopped before it’s too late? There may be little time left, and we must use it and act. The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal after WW II said we’re obliged to act to avoid being complicit in war crimes and related criminal acts. They said: “Anyone with knowledge of illegal activity and an opportunity to do something is a potential criminal under international law unless the person takes affirmative measures to prevent the commission of the crimes.” The ultimate and final authority rests with the people.

The all-powerful rampaging U.S. juggernaut is not invulnerable. It faces at least 2 serious challenges. One is its own imperial arrogance, hubris and potentially fatal overreach that may hasten its own demise. The other is mass world public opinion that by using its “ultimate authority”, becoming aroused and energized, flexing its collective muscle, can make even superpowers give ground. The great Indian writer, Arundhati Roy, told us her view how to do it in her 2003 book *War Talk* when she wrote:

“We can re-invent civil disobedience in a million different ways.....we can come up with a million ways of becoming a collective pain in the ass.

When George Bush says ‘you’re either with us, or you are with the terrorists,’ we can say ‘No thank you.’ We can let him know that the people of the world do not need to choose between a Malevolent Mickey Mouse and the Mad Mullahs.

Our strategy should be not only to confront the Empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness - and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we’re being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling - their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few.

They need us more than we need them.”

The renowned anthropologist, Margaret Mead, author of 44 books and thousands of articles and who “shone a light of understanding on human nature” and believed we should “cherish the life of the world” thought it was even simpler to achieve a better world when she wrote:

“Never underestimate the ability of a small group of committed individuals to change the world.” And Gandhi observed that “even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled.”

I would just add that with our collective will, in large or smaller numbers, we can indeed shake the world, remake it in our own just image, and reclaim it from theirs.

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