

Fake U.S. History: How “American Exceptionalism” Hides Shame, Creates Stupidity and Dangerous Imperialism

By [S. Brian Willson](#)

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Premise

The culture and nation state of the United States of America is founded on the egregious and forceful dispossession of others. You might even call it an earlier version of fascism – institutional dehumanization for private profit. A myth, or grand lie, was created that we are an exceptional people, effectively pre-empting openly experiencing the important feeling of social shame and, in turn, blocking any accountability or genuine inquiry into our genocidal origins built on stolen land and labor, that murdered millions with impunity.

Thus, we live by fantasy of our superiority, which functionally makes us stupid, as if in a stupor. Applying the legal exclusionary rule to the culture at large, the USA is the “fruit of the poisonous tree”, as with most “civilizations”, founded on forcefully stolen land and labor, thereby lacking any moral or legal validity.

Introduction

When I was a child in rural upstate New York in the 1940s and 1950s, I enjoyed small town life and the tranquility of a luscious surrounding nature. I had pictures of baseball stars plastered on all four of my bedroom walls. I recited a grateful prayer in my little sanctuary before going to sleep each night: “Thank you God for allowing me to have been born and raised in the United States, the greatest country in the history of the world, endowed by our Creator to bring prosperity to the impoverished, and Christianity to the heathen”. It was a wonderful story, greatly enhanced by our nation’s celebrated reputed victory over Fascism in Europe. Life was good, or so I thought.

Having been born on July 4, 1941, I was a patriotic baby of the World War II generation. My family was lower middle class, devout Baptists and, like my parents, I believed that the FBI under the “leadership” of J. Edgar Hoover protected our democratic Christian freedoms from the Russians. The Cold War propaganda was nothing short of spectacular, virtually all unchallenged by anyone I knew.



Brian Willson (right)

But there was another factor operating. Coinciding with the celebrated post-World War II victory, the nation experienced a unique 35-year blip in its history – an age of a large middle class imbibing in insatiable consumerism and optimism. My family replaced their icebox with a new electric refrigerator after the war, bought their first automobile, and by 1958 had purchased an 11-inch B&W television set. It was proof that we are an *exceptional* people, and God’s chosen people to boot. However, this optimism was tempered by fear of the Soviet Union that severely prevented genuine liberal dialogue and critical thinking education.

1950s: “Positive Thinking/Prosperity Gospel” - Norman Vincent Peale and US Exceptionalism

Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993), a Dutch Reformed minister, wrote *The Power of Positive Thinking* in 1952, a bestseller for 186 consecutive weeks, a book prominently in our home library, as it was in the Trump family home in Queens, New York. Peale also wrote a monthly magazine, *Guideposts*, which my parents read regularly. Peale served as a guru for the post-depression, post-World War II generation with his cult-like, self-help “bible” for achieving material success with divine blessings. Peale described himself as a “missionary to American business”, opposing unions and the New Deal. Thus, he was exceedingly popular with ambitious US Americans, especially White folks, both the rich, and those seeking riches.

Donald L. Trump, as a 6-year-old child began to regularly attend Peale’s New York City church with his parents. Peale officiated at Trump’s first marriage with Ivana Zelnickova, and both Trump’s sisters were married at Peale’s church. To this day, Trump lauds Peale for his success, unrestrained self-confidence, and from whom he learned modern branding. In Trump’s 2015 book, *Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again*[1], he proclaimed that “I am a Christian...I love God, and I love having a relationship with Him...[and] the Bible is the most important book ever written”.

Many theologians considered Peale as “God’s salesman”, critiquing him as a dangerous con man and fraud since he convinced people to believe that all basic problems were *personal*, unrelated to social, political, or economic contexts. Personal failures, Peale, said, were a sign of spiritual weakness, preaching that everyone has the power to make oneself happy and rich. It fits perfectly with US American exceptionalism and Trump’s narcissism[2].

Viet Nam - Great Awakening of the Grand Lie

I was in Viet Nam in 1969 where I turned 28 years, having been drafted in 1966 during my fourth semester of law school. It was there that my Disney bliss rapidly evaporated. The entrance sign to my squadron’s in-country headquarters said, “Welcome to Indian Country”.

This reminded me of the slogan, “the only good Indian is a dead Indian”, hinting the same plight for the Vietnamese. Incidentally, Trump, five years my junior, enjoyed five deferments enabling him to avoid Viet Nam.

While performing auxiliary duty as a USAF Combat Security officer, I documented the immediate aftermath of atrocities committed from the air that annihilated inhabited, undefended villages. I was sickened from the sight of hundreds of villagers lying dead and suffering horribly in *their* villages. I wondered who the fuck am I, a 6’ 3” White man, 9,000 miles from my rural farming village in New York State? These Vietnamese were in *their* homevillages. Village life was the essence of Vietnamese culture and we were systematically destroying it. I felt depressingly *unauthentic*, like a dumb ideological robot, and began to realize that being a privileged White man was in fact an emotional and intellectual disability. White male supremacy was a powerful force, as it enabled a kind of mindless “sliding” through life, pre-empting the need to ask serious questions. However, my discovery of empathy began to radicalize me. I wondered whether we had become sadistic criminal *psychopaths*? Or have we always been? Hmm?!

Accumulating high body counts, from babies to grandparents, and every age in between, was politically comforting to US politicians and to a large number of their their taxpaying constituents. We simply created a fiction that we were killing the “enemy” to satisfy the emotional, and political momentum of stopping the bogeyman – Communism – when in fact we were murdering innocent Vietnamese peasants. Mass murder was normalized. When the US war ended in 1975, 13,000 of 21,000 Vietnamese villages had been deliberately wiped out. Huge B-52 bombers left 26 *million* bomb craters, while targeting and destroying almost 950 churches and pagodas, 350 clearly marked hospitals, nearly 3,000 educational institutions, over 15,000 bridges, 18 power plants, 40 factories, 10 million cubic meters of dikes, and 25 million acres of farmland. The US also chemically poisoned food supplies and forests. Our cultural corruption is so extreme we proudly ordered B-52 death machines flying five *miles* high blessed by God-fearing chaplains to bomb unarmed, mostly Buddhist peasants living nine thousand miles across the Pacific. What?!

Several million peasants were gruesomely, senselessly murdered, with countless additional millions permanently maimed. It was barbaric. It was *genocidal*. I felt personal *shame* for my participation, and intense anger of betrayal. At times I felt suicidal. My White male conditioning had made me “disabled”, i.e., a kind of *stupidity* whose mind hadn’t even thought to seriously ask *why* I was putting my life on the line in a small country across the seas I knew nothing about? I had been part of a massive conspiracy to violate international law and destroy a sovereign people. Huh?! But I had been conditioned to think that “America” was nonetheless, exceptional.

Criminal Cruelty to Prevent Vietnamese Autonomy

US premeditated policy *intended* to destroy Vietnamese self-determination. As historian William Blum has succinctly concluded: “the thread common to the diverse targets of [US] American intervention...in virtually every case involving the Third World... has been, in one form or another, a policy of ‘self-determination’: the desire ...to pursue a path of development independent of US foreign policy objectives”[3].

The US war (as with virtually all wars), was based on a *Grand lie*, in this case that the majority Vietnamese were being invaded by other Vietnamese who the US called

“Communists”. And it was maintained by grotesque lies – every day – such as identifying all dead Vietnamese as a victory (body counts), all carried out by heinous war crimes. Official reports abounded about our making progress in the war – lies. The *fictional* “democratic” South Vietnamese government created by the US and CIA was so unpopular the US military was forced to invade and occupy South Viet Nam for 10 years with nearly 550,000 troops supported by countless daily bombing missions and unprecedented use of chemical warfare. We murdered millions and it still didn’t work. How demonic can you get?

Fake history about Viet Nam was confirmed in the 1971 release of the *Pentagon Papers*. Despite this, the highly publicized Burns-Novick 2017, *The Vietnam War* TV documentary, claimed the war was “begun in good faith by decent people out of fateful misunderstandings”. Lies die hard.

Dishonest Intelligence

Ralph McGehee, former starter on three Notre Dame national championship football teams in the late 1940s, a *cum laude* graduate, became one of the 700 CIA officers in Viet Nam. He was shocked when discovering the daily intelligence *he* was gathering was totally bastardized in official reports. Depressed about the dishonest intelligence system, he became suicidal. McGehee reported that the repressive, oligarchic government of US puppet Nguyen Van Thieu was so unpopular and corrupt that most Vietnamese were organized, committed, and dedicated to *his defeat*, and a Vietnamese Communist victory[4].

Cold War Redux

Now 78, fifty years out of Viet Nam, I am aghast that we are living through an even more virulent, Cold War. Cold War I propaganda cast an overwhelming toxic spell on the minds of three generations, including many intelligent people. Relentless rhetoric accomplished a near total indoctrination of our entire US culture. Virtually all systems colluded and cooperated to preserve unquestioning belief in the unique nobility of the US American system while instilling rabid, paranoid fear of “enemies” — in our midst as well as “out there”. We rationalized pathologically inexplicable behavior around the world, as well as at home. Indoctrination is so pervasive it generates a universally compelling mythology that conceals its own contradictions.

Today, the corporate and social media narrative managers so tightly control propaganda that once again our minds are saturated with rages against the evil “adversary”, Russia. The neoliberal religion of privatization makes everyone and everything for sale as a commodity, dictating both domestic and foreign policy. It is enforced at home by an overreaching national security state of surveillance (our Fourth Estate), and abroad with the most brutal “wholesale” terrorist machinery in history. The US government, and its compliant military, enables obscene profits for its Military-Congressional-Intelligence-Banking-Wall Street-Drug Complex. The US population *de facto* consents to destroying Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syrian and others, i.e, with diabolical imperialism.

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Fool me three times, shame on both of us -US author Stephen King.

Orwell

In George Orwell’s novel, 1984[5], the Ministry of Truth rearranges facts and rewrites

history. On the face of the building in which it is housed are engraved the slogans: “War Is Peace; Freedom Is Slavery; Ignorance Is Strength”. Language is one of the most important tools of the totalitarian state. If all citizens accept the lies that the ruling party imposes – if all records tell the same tale – then the lie passes into history and becomes truth. All that is needed is an unending series of victories over our own memory. This is called Reality control. In Orwell’s Newspeak, doublethink is the official state language. Everything becomes pretend, the lies told over and over in many different forms throughout time.[6] Meanwhile, wars easily continue[7], facilitated by deceit and lies[8], elaborate propaganda mind-control systems[9] that permeate our education institutions[10] and Hollywood[11] and are promoted by the concentrated monopoly of corporate mass media[12]. Our collective minds are systematically colonized to accept the unacceptable.

This McCarthy-like new Cold War dangerously speeds the world toward nuclear holocaust. I raise the question: Are we **stupid**? Can we not see that our behavior is leading to our ecocide/suicide – climate catastrophe and nuclear war?

US Exceptionalism Has Been Fatal - Creates Stupid, Shameful Monsters

The origins of the Grand Lie of Viet Nam, and the horrific cruelties committed there, are discoverable in the very origins of US America. The psychological and cultural conditioning growing up in US America, especially for a Eurocentric White male like myself, is emotionally and intellectually comfortable. But the noble “exceptional” history we have been taught about ourselves proves to be fantastic fakery which *continues* to serve as a comfortable escape from experiencing and feeling the horrible truth of the collective *shame* of our unspeakable criminal genocidal origins. Capitalism itself would not have existed without centuries of egregious colonial plunder of millions of Indigenous Americans, or millions of enslaved Africans. So, not only does the lie of “*exceptionalism*” enable us to avoid extremely unpleasant thoughts and feelings, but it also discourages asking enlightening, delving questions, about who we *really* are as a people. This makes us dangerously *stupid*. Why mess with the apparent successful myth of being exceptional? But thoughtlessness – a suspension of critical thinking – today leads to a dangerous, nuclear, arrogant war-making society. Not unintelligent, but stupid. And the power brokers, and many in the population, have a vested interest in *remaining stupid* to protect the comfortable original lie, that requires countless subsequent lies, in turn, to preserve that original lie. We have told ourselves a nice story. But it is a lie and as long as we continue to believe in our superiority we deepen our stupidity.

Thus, throughout our history we have lived by a slick Grand “American” lie, granting us comfort and security in our “superior” cultural identity. Spellbound and flattered we live by our favorite mythological maxims: “Founding Fathers”, “democracy”, “Constitution”, “Rule of Law”, and “greatest country ever”. Our political-religion of US American predatory corporate capitalism (privatization) blocks experiencing the most critical of all social emotions – *empathy*– that ties all humanity together, something I so painfully, but thankfully learned in Viet Nam. The Grand lie is so huge and pervasive we do not generally recognize it.

Cultural analysts such as Lewis Mumford have described how unchecked “power punctuates the entire history of mankind with outbursts of collective paranoia and tribal delusions of grandeur mingled with malevolent suspicions, murderous hatreds, and atrociously inhumane acts”.[13] So, in effect, much of human civilization history is based on institutionalized dehumanization, a form of Fascism. Mumford again: “A personal over-concentration of

power as an end in itself is suspect to the psychologist as an attempt to conceal inferiority, impotence, and anxiety. When this inferiority is combined with defensive inordinate ambitions, uncontrolled hostility and suspicion, and a loss of any sense of the subject's own limitation, 'delusions of grandeur' result, which is the typical syndrome of paranoia, one of the most difficult psychological states to exorcise"[14].

The US nation, as a criminal enterprise, is a perfect example of what Mumford described as a civilization maintained by "collective paranoia" without sense of "limitation", the result being "delusions of grandeur", the typical syndrome of paranoia, one of the most difficult psychological states to exorcise". Built on forceful dispossession, deceit, and fantasy, the USA lives with a DNA of selfishness, arrogance and violence that began long ago, and we seem content to leave it be, increasing our dangerousness to ourselves and the world.

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Viet Nam veteran, trained lawyer, author, Blood on the Tracks: The Life and Times of S. Brian Willson (PM Press, 2011); Don't Thank Me For My Service: My Viet Nam Awakening to the Long History of US Lies (Clarity Press, 2018); subject of documentary Paying the Price For Peace: The Story of S. Brian Willson(Bo Boudart Productions, 2016); essays: brianwillson.com.

Brian Willson is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG)

Notes

[1] Simon & Schuster, pp 130-1.

[2] Chris Lehman, "The Self-Help Guru Who Shaped Trump's Worldview: How the Commander-in-Chief Succumbs to the Perils of Positive Thinking", *In These Times*, December 13, 2017; Gwenda Blair, "How Norman Vincent Peale Taught Donald Trump to Worship Himself", *PoliticoMagazine*, October 6, 2015.

[3] William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*(Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995), 15.

[4] Ralph McGehee, *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*(New York: Sheridan Square, 1983), 125-26, 147-157.

[5] George Orwell, *1984: A Novel*(New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1949).

[6] S. Brian Willson, "The Pretend Society," <http://www.brianwillson.com/the-pretend-society>

[7] Norman Solomon, *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* (Hoboken,

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Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq(New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2003); John R. MacArthur, *Second*

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[9] Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research & Psychological Warfare*1945-1960 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Herbert I. Schiller, *The Mind Managers*(Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

[10] John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*(Vancouver, Canada, New Society, 1992); Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*(New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

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[12] Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*(Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

[13] Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development*(New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 204.

[14] Mumford, 1967, 218.

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