

Review: Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies

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Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies is a selection of essays. They reveal what stirs author Ed Curtin’s heart, his mind, and his path toward clarity. With each chapter he passionately reflects on the state of his country and what matters most to him. It is a compelling read.

The epigraph at the beginning of *Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies*, “In a dark time, the eye begins to see,” comes from Theodore Roethke’s poem “In A Dark Time”. Here the poet describes a state of disorientation and dislocation of identity. Roethke asserts this is essential to achieve clarity, insight and wisdom. In a dark time, one discovers the fragmented and broken state of things. With this fitting epigraph, Ed Curtin proceeds to alert his readers to the fragmented and broken state of things in America, and the task of its citizenry to begin to see more clearly.

The topics Curtin, a former professor at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, takes up are not original to him. But they are marked with his own articulate original stamp. One aspect of his novel contribution is that Curtin steps beyond standard frameworks of political analyses.

Three themes have permeated his attention from a young age: truth, death and freedom. He cites an excerpt from an interview with the poet Kenneth Rexroth who told journalist Lawrence Lipton in 1959 “Since all society is organized in the interest of exploiting classes and since if men knew this they would cease to work and society would fall apart, it has always been necessary, at least since the urban revolutions, for societies to be governed ideologically by a system of fraud.” Rexroth referred to this system of fraud as the “social lie.” And in *Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies*, Curtin takes on the task of describing the roots of the fraud, and its’ more recent manifestations. He also takes time to point out, despite the burdens’ society grapples with in an age of deceit, that beauty, art, love, and whimsy are among the qualities that persist as signs of grace.

In his essay “Inside America’s Doll House: A Vast Tapestry Of Lies,” Curtin cites Jim Garrison, the District Attorney of New Orleans who in 1969 brought to trial a a case naming persons connected to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Garrison attempted to show that the assassination of JFK was the work of the CIA and Allen Dulles. However, Garrison was routinely described as a lunatic by CIA-connected media spokespersons. It was Garrison’s conclusion that American citizens passively consumed television news that was laced with propaganda. Such propaganda was manufactured to preclude Americans from

“understanding...what is really happening....” Garrison warned that Americans were living “in a doll’s house.” Building on the hard lessons Jim Garrison learned from the trial in 1969, Ed Curtin observes “In the doll’s house into which America gradually has been converted, a great many of our basic assumptions are totally illusory.” His book was also released on November 22, 2020, some 57 years after JFK’s assassination.

Curtin notes that in 2009 President “Obama backed the 2009 coup d’état in Honduras that has resulted in so many deaths at the hands of U.S. trained killers, and now” followers of Trump complain about “all these ‘non-white’ people fleeing to the U.S. to escape a hell created by the U.S....”

After 2009. it was learned that U.S. officers at the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies trained members of the Honduran military to oust democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya. In 2009 and the years following Honduras has had one of the highest rates of murder in the world. These have been driven by death squads connected to the Honduran military. But this coup mattered little to both President’s Obama and Trump. While Hondurans have paid the price in murder, increased debt and poverty.

Examples of what Curtin raises continue since his book was published in late 2020. For Venezuelans it matters little whether a Republican or a Democrat is president in the USA. Under Donald Trump there was a failed attempt in May 2020 to kidnap Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. And on the first day of his presidency, Joe Biden signed an executive order declaring the United States recognizes Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the nations’ president. This despite Maduro winning over 67% of the popular vote in 2018; That the second candidate in the election results was Henri Falcón who won 21%; And Juan Guaidó wasn’t even a candidate in 2018. Imagine if Venezuela protested the result of the 2020 United States election, and recognized Mitt Romney as president (who ran in 2012 but didn’t run in 2020).

With Biden there is a change of tone from Trump, but many American foreign policies remain the same. Former President Jimmy Carter said of Venezuela’s 2012 elections when Hugo Chavez was re-elected: “...of the 92 elections that we’ve (Carter Centre Foundation in Atlanta) monitored, I would say the election process in Venezuela is the best in the world.” But that story that doesn’t conform the with media’s narrative. So, it goes down the memory hole.

Curtin notes that while average Americans have not constructed the doll’s house they live in, they are complicit. It is average Americans who have accepted “decades of fabricated reality for so-called peace of mind.” A consequence of accepting illusory narratives is that people are not really free. In order to cope with a plausible lie, consumers of the news play dumb. And Curtin notes most Americans “want to be nice (Latin, *nescire*, not to know, to be ignorant) and to be liked.” As they become a people of the lie, repeating the lies they are fed, a memetic desire arises in society. And the repetition of these lies fuels violence and scapegoating. The doll’s house that Americans (and many citizens of other countries who consume the news uncritically) live in, are reinforced by contracts they have made with the world. This is in order to enhance their social standing, financial status, professional advancement and maintain familial harmony. That kind of peace of mind and contentment require individuals not to venture out far from the doll house, in case they encounter truths they find hard to handle.

Curtin notes that the Central Intelligence Agency began to use the term “conspiracy theory”

in a memo on April 1, 1967. This was to discredit assassination theories about other plausible actors in the death of the slain president on November 22, 1963. And he notes that it just so happens that the term “9/11” was first used on September 12, 2001, by future *New York Times* editor Bill Keller to designate the language for how to refer to the day of the attacks. By using a term synonymous with dialing an emergency number in the United States, the term became fused with feelings of “anxiety, depression, panic and confusion.”

It is useful to note that at the time of the attacks on September 11, 2001, the emergency number in Saudi Arabia was 999. The numbers in Yemen were 191 and 194. The emergency numbers in the United Arab Emirates were 112, 998 and 999. The emergency number in Libya was 1515. The number in Kuwait was 112. The numbers in Iraq were 104, 115 and 122. In Syria emergency numbers were 110, 112 and 113. In Lebanon the numbers variously were 112, 140, 175 and 999. The emergency numbers in Egypt were 122, 123 and 180. Across continental Europe the emergency number to call on September 11, 2001, was 112. The emergency numbers in Iran were 110, 112, 115 and 125. Curiously, 911 was a number to dial an emergency uniquely in the United States, Canada, Mexico (as well as 065, 066 and 068), and South America. 911 was not an emergency number in the states where Arabs were alleged to have plotted to attack the Pentagon and the World Trade Center.

In some future scenario – were it to ever happen – might rogue American terrorists fly planes into skyscrapers in Tehran, Iran? And in such a scenario, might such terrorists plot an attack on a January 10th, 12th or 15th of a given year, fusing the day of the atrocity with the abbreviation for a date synonymous with one of the numbers Iranians dialed in case of an emergency?

In his essay “Why I Don’t Speak of 9/11 Anymore,” Curtin notices that by “referring to September 11 as 9/11,” Keller ensured “an endless national emergency became wedded to an endless war on terror aimed at preventing Hitler-like terrorists from obliterating us with nuclear weapons that could create another ground zero or holocaust. It is a term that pushes all the right buttons evoking unending social fear and anxiety. It is language as sorcery; it is propaganda at its best.”

Because Curtin suspects that the repetition of the term “9/11” is embedded in an advanced form of mind-control, he refuses to use the term in relation to the attacks. Instead, he uses the phrase “the attacks of September 11, 2001.” Whatever vocabulary we use to refer to the attacks, Curtin advises that we find one that can unbind us from the mesmerizing impact of its official shorthand repeated endlessly, subliminally evoking confusion, depression and panic in its hearers.

As our post-modern society has evolved, the task of creating propaganda is more complex. And so, the complexity of society drives a majority to want ready-made frameworks for understanding their reality coherently. Curtin shows that “people want to be provided with myths to direct them to the ‘truth,’ but that so-called truth has been preconceived within the overarching myth provided by propaganda.”

Nonetheless, the propaganda is efficient enough to allow most people to deduce that they’ve reached their conclusions of their own free will. Most people will assume that they’ve been provided with a suitable range of information about the key points of a given topic in order to decide what is trustworthy. However, the same consumers of the news will regard as inconceivable that the narrative they’ve been led to accept contains cherry-picked

news that omits perspectives that are off-message. Surely, wouldn't any dissenting voices that are worth knowing about would be given a hearing on the six o'clock news?

Curtin concurs with author Lisa Pease who wrote in her book *A Lie Too Big To Fail: The Real History of the Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy*, "The way the CIA took over America in the 1960s is *the* story of our time, and too few recognize this. We can't fix a problem we can't even acknowledge exists." To support his assessment, Curtin points to numerous examples in different chapters across his book. This includes a chapter on "The Message From Dallas, JFK and The Unspeakable," where he summarizes JFK author James W. Douglass' layer-by-layer excavation of a CIA-backed assassination of a president who had turned from war-making toward peace-making.

In another chapter titled "What Are We Working For 'At Eternity's Gate'," Curtin writes about the rat-race. He recalls a summer job as a clerk in a General Motors office in Manhattan. The "bait" was the salary, and so his youth was spent that summer confined to a boring job. As I read Curtin's description, I thought about some of the jobs I had: working a night shift as a hotel security guard, a cleaner at a private golf club, and working at a vehicle repair shop for the Ministry of Forests for the Province of British Columbia. The latter I spent a summer affixing forestry vehicle identification serial numbers on the side of government trucks.

The author mentions a film about the life of Vincent Van Gogh, titled *At Eternity's Gate*, which offers a vision of new possibilities for what it means to work, to be alive. For Van Gogh it was the "act of painting" that was "the stroke of genius." And so, for the impoverished painter it was not the completion of paintings that was important, but immersing himself in painting. This was the key to life. In this essay, Curtin invites the reader to contemplate what it means to live and to ask ourselves why we work. He tells us "For Vincent the answer was simple: reality. But reality is not given to us and is far from simple; we must create it in acts that penetrate the screens and clichés that wall us off from it." One of the screens that Curtin had to penetrate was a slogan he was taught as a United States Marine: "my rifle is my life." Curtin saw through the slogan, recognizing that being human meant to be a lover of life and being committed to waging peace.

In yet another essay, "The Sexual Passion of Winston Smith", Curtin details the commodification of society, where everything can be bought and sold. As he speaks about the body's commodification, Curtin reminds us that part of the body - "the tongue is a bell, tolling out its (language's) meaning." It is finally the tongue that helps us in speech to "tell the truth that propagandists try to deny."

In his book, the author offers suggestions for pointing a way forward that can help us search for truth in a landscape of falsehoods. One of these is poetry. He points out that citizens in Chile, Ireland and Russia know their national poets and can quote their works "by heart." But in America poets and poetry are ignored. A new generation is too busy checking Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. But Curtin argues "Poetry is the search for truth. It marries outer to inner." The best of what poetry can offer helps a society "address questions of value and ultimate concern...of truth and lies." He contrasts these with the "screen and selfie culture (where) these matters are irrelevant."

In addition to truth and lies, Curtin points to myriad oddities that dot the landscape of America's cultural past. Many of the rock n' roll bands in the mid-sixties were viewed as part of a countercultural/anti-war protest movement against the establishment. There are books like one by Alex Constantine, *The Covert War Against Rock*, that document operations by

the CIA and FBI to discredit and disrupt the lives of pop-rock stars identified as subversive. Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon and others had extensive intelligence files on them. Constantine cites a leaked intelligence memorandum discussed in testimony before the Church Committee on April 26, 1976.

Regarding certain recording artists, the FBI wrote to its agents: "Show them as scurrilous and depraved. Call attention to their habits and living conditions, explore every possible embarrassment. Send in women and sex, break up marriages. Have members arrested on marijuana charges....Send articles to newspapers showing their depravity. Use narcotics and free sex to entrap. Use misinformation to confuse and disrupt....Provoke target groups into rivalries that may result in death."

But was another arm of the intelligence community simultaneously grooming anti-establishment recording artists? In *Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies* Curtin notes that Buffalo Springfield performed in concert, along with the Beach Boys, at the United States Military Academy at West Point, in Orange County, New York, on November 25, 1967. Curtin points out that this is "a very odd venue for a 'dissident' rock group." Their Top Ten hit in the spring of '67 - "For What It's Worth" - invited radio listeners to consider, though it wasn't "exactly clear", what was "appening," to "stop," and "look" at what was "going down." How did members of the Buffalo Springfield feel about performing at the military academy when there were "battle lines being drawn?" And what an odd thing for cadets at West Point to be listening to lyrics that warn: "step out of line, the man come and take you away."

Citing David McGowan's *Weird Scenes Inside the Canyon*, Curtin notes that "Papa" John Philips of the Mamas and the Papas attended the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, and that his dad was a Marine Corps Captain. "John's wife had worked at the Pentagon and her father was involved in covert intelligence in Vietnam." The Doors Jim Morrison, a neighbor and friend of Philips, was the son of U.S. Navy Admiral George Morrison who was *the* commander of American Naval ships during the Gulf of Tonkin incident that accelerated the Vietnam War. Frank Zappa's father happened to be a chemical warfare specialist.

Curtin notes others like David Crosby and Stephen Stills were also from military family backgrounds. And many of these young musicians all converged at Laurel Canyon. "Although they were draft age, none of them (were) drafted as they played music, dropped acid, and created the folk-rock movement..." Were these musicians' part of intelligence community operations, as much as the agents who were harassing them? Or as David McGowan asks, was "the entire youth culture of the 1960s...created not as a grass-roots challenge to the status quo, but as a cynical exercise in discrediting and marginalizing the budding anti-war movement and creating a fake opposition that could be easily controlled and led astray...?"

With each chapter, Ed Curtin takes us into different rooms in the doll's house, and helps us connect the dots. His stories and reflections - in an age of "fake news" are essential reading.

In the quest for truth, readers of *Seeking Truth in a Country of Lies* will be advised to take the road less travelled. This road requires we quiet our minds, and welcome silence. It is a road less travelled where each must ask what can I do to help transform our terrible, corrupt, beautiful world longing to be more human, just and peaceful.

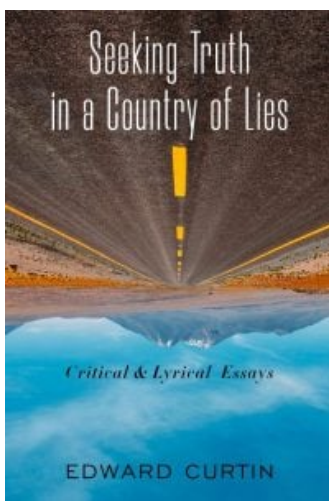
Curtin does not intend for us as readers to simply finish his book unfazed. He hopes his chapters might rouse us to find ways to resist in this age of permanent war and oligarchy, in a world still longing for peace and justice.

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