

Speaking Truth to Empire: The Legacy of William Blum

Alison Banville salutes the remarkable impact of the man who comprehensively chronicled US interventions

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On December 9 William Blum died. He was one of the great truth-tellers of this or any other era and an example of everything a real journalist should be.

Blum began working for the US State Department as a computer programmer in the mid-'60s but the man who declared that he wanted to "take part in the great anti-communist crusade" had the scales fall from his eyes as the Vietnam war unfolded and he quit, founding The Washington Free Press, one of the New Left's first independent newspapers.

Bill held a passionate determination to tell the truth about US foreign policy aims, and this he did for the rest of his life. Two of his books in particular should be required reading for us all, but especially for anyone with aspirations to be a journalist (rather than a state stenographer as most end up).

Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II and Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower are vital records of the rapacious truth of US policy when it comes to other nations: a violent, predatory blueprint underpinned by an utter contempt for democracy.

We need this record, because the big lie of the US as a force for good in the world is continually propagated by a corporate media fundamentally aligned with state power. Stark proof of this can be seen every single day on the BBC, ITN, Sky or Channel 4 News. Sceptical that the latter should be so maligned? You could read my series, What's Wrong With Channel 4 News? at [bsnews.info](#) or check out 21st Century Wire's Ch4N archive. And as for "liberal" newspapers like the Guardian, just visit the Media Lens archive for evidence of its shameful record of cheerleading for every illegal and immoral war you could name.

There is simply nowhere to go in the corporate media for an alternative to the big lie. And that is why Bill Blum's work is indispensable. His chronicle stands as a mighty refutation of the huge deception that seeks to wipe the truth from the historical record so that the public is primed to accept whichever false justification is presented to it for the next murderous military intervention. But these rationales cannot stand if we are armed with the knowledge of what really happened, and Blum has left us, along with his books and many articles, one of the most effective weapons with which to counter the myth of a benevolent United States in its relations with the rest of the world.

Go to [williamblum.org](#) and you will find a page with the words:

“Overthrowing Other People’s Governments — The Master List. Instances of the United States overthrowing, or attempting to overthrow, a foreign government since the second world war. (*indicates successful ouster of a government).”

And then comes the list itself, beginning with:

- China 1949 to early 1960s
- Albania 1949-53
- East Germany 1950s
- Iran 1953*
- Guatemala 1954*
- Costa Rica mid-1950s
- Syria 1956-7

And on it goes, citing 57 countries in all and bringing us all the way up to the present day. The list is all the more powerful for its succinctness, each entry a tragedy and a crime, with incalculable suffering behind it. The document is stark and it is shocking and we need it now as much as ever.

Comedian Rob Newman, during his quite brilliant show A History of Oil, recounts that he was listening to the Today Programme on BBC’s Radio 4 and noticed that the headline being repeated, “on the hour, every hour” was this: “The G8 has today endorsed an American plan to bring democracy to the Middle East.” There it is, the big lie.

No corporate journalist ever questions it, having been carefully “selected for obedience” as they are, the result being that the least independent minded and most slavish of all are the Jon Snows, Krishnan Guru-Murthys and the other gallery of well-known faces in the mainstream media landscape, no matter how radical and maverick they believe themselves to be.

Newman tells his audience: “There is in our own time an absolute taboo among the corporate news media and the political class against mentioning anything to do with the strategic and economic reasons for war.” And that is exactly why the Master List is so important — we are in a constant fight to keep the truth of the historical record alive in the face of a relentless propaganda machine and the stakes are as high as they could be.

The corporate media has blood on its hands — I do not say that lightly. Because without the amplification of the big lie, these blood-soaked invasions could never have been dressed up as “humanitarian” interventions in which literally millions of innocent people have suffered and died.

Of course, corporate journalists do not take kindly to being exposed by real journalists, which is why the New York Times used this headline to report Bill’s death: “William Blum, US policy critic cited by bin Laden, dies at 85”.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), the US-based media watch group, commented: “Yes, to the Times, the most important thing about Bill Blum’s life is that Osama bin Laden once remarked to Americans, in a tape released from hiding, that Rogue State would be ‘useful for you to read’ ... Should (Blum) have denied that his book would be ‘useful...to read,’ or wished aloud that bin Laden had been a supporter of the State Department’s policies? There are certainly some policies where you’d find the State Department, al-Qaida

and the New York Times on one side, and Blum on the other.”

Considering the fact that the US has long colluded with radical Islam and is doing so right now in its financial and military support for jihadist terrorists in Syria, including al-Nusra (al-Qaida in Syria), the word irony doesn't really cover it. And for Britain's own long record of colluding with Islamists, even as the public was told these were the enemy we must all fear and despise, see the book *Secret Affairs* by Mark Curtis.

We would all, I hope, wish to evolve during our short time on this troubled planet, and Bill Blum appears to have been on a path of accelerated growth. From the belly of the beast to independence and freedom, he shared his journey and the vital knowledge and insights he gained along the way. Read his work — you might just be moved to send every corporate journalist you see repeating the big lie a copy of *The Master List*.

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