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Preface

Rampant, seemingly endless wars, both hot and cold. Widespread and wide-ranging environmental catastrophe. Unparalleled levels of global wealth and income inequality. And, in response to these and other symptoms of system breakdown, increasingly repressive and authoritarian regimes, playing upon virulently divisive rhetoric. Conditions that characterize everyday life for billions on the planet at this moment. This book is based on a course that we have co-taught at the University of Arizona over the past three years that has attempted to connect this set of existential conditions to their underlying, systemic causes. The course has also endeavored to make these connections in ways that point to coalitional politics and efficacious actions.

The principal aims of the course, and now of this book, are to think about the predominant way society is organized socially, politically, economically, culturally, and then to make the theoretical, historical, and practical connections between that way of organizing society and the kinds of consequential outcomes that are produced by doing so. And secondly, by demonstrating the systemic structural underpinnings of these seemingly disconnected issues, we hope to provide a set of rationales for political cohesion and coalition among the numerous and diverse groups that are working toward economic, social, political, and environmental justice. Particularly as presented by the major mechanisms that shape widely shared worldviews, these phenomena almost always appear, on the surface, as though they are completely unrelated to each other. This predominant characterization is true even for practitioners and activists, and therefore rarely elicits the kinds of political cohesion and coalition that are necessary for effective, coherent, and progressive responses.

Clearly, a great deal has changed on the US and international political stage since we first offered the course in 2017, but our goal, over the past three years, has been to try to emphasize the continuities in the issues that are of concern to us. That is, while we are interested in reflecting on changing conditions, we are principally focused on contextualizing such change within a broad sweep of historical, political, economic, and social phenomena. We want to make these changes explicable and highlight their inherent connections, rather than simply leave them, as often is done, as unrelated and distinct events. We endeavor to illuminate some of the new forms and emphases these issues have taken over the past several years, but again in a manner that demonstrates their linkages and grounding in long-standing systemic and institutional frameworks.

We begin, both in the course and in this book, by asking a very basic question: How do we know what we think we know about the world? In this initial inquiry, we take up a set of questions that examine the ways in which people come to understand how the world works. This set of processes, usefully understood as the production, reinforcement, and changing of common sense, is a constant project. Those who are advantaged by the status quo are continually at work to make us understand that the

way things are is the way things should be. And thus, the ways in which we understand the world are very much connected to the ways in which we interact with the world. We are also intent on elucidating the complex linkages between common sense and power. Here we take up the Gramscian notions of hegemony, the definition and role of intellectuals, and the ways in which the economy (broadly understood) and other dimensions of society interact to produce the varied experiences of everyday life for different classes and categories of people.

In the second chapter, we undertake an examination of what we think about as the predominant, current common sense in much (though not all) of the world. If, as we contend, common sense is a very useful notion for understanding how we think and understand the world, what is the current common sense? We, along with other analysts, call the prevailing common sense *capitalist realism*. We interpret this term to be not merely descriptive of the dominant political economic framework, but also to highlight proponents' additional assertion that there is really no meaningful alternative to organizing society along the lines of late-stage industrial state capitalism. Clearly, much of society, certainly US society but many other societies as well, is organized along these lines. This is the basic framework within which we will attempt to understand the resultant issues and consequences. Again, there have been substantial changes within and among the variants of late-stage capitalism over the past several years, and our assessment situates these changes within appropriate continuities and contexts.

In the third chapter, we begin to examine some of the more consequential effects that have resulted (as would be expected, we argue) from organizing societies along the lines of a capitalist realist political economy. We begin with the multipronged relationships between capitalism and the various historical and contemporary mechanisms that capitalists (and their vital partners within state systems) have used to spread this form of political economy around the globe. These processes have been known most commonly as colonialism or imperialism (in either their historical or neo-forms), and have often been accompanied by the often-necessarily related processes of militarism. In this chapter, we will think very carefully about how capital, when uninhibited by constraints against mobility, goes around the globe looking for the conditions that will maximize surplus value and profit. Historically (and contemporaneously as well), these have often included cheaper labor or resources, and/or more lucrative markets. More recently, alluring conditions have also included more desirable regulatory (e.g., environmental or labor), monetary, or fiscal environments to maximize profit accumulation. These adventures, quite often necessitating incursions on the prerogatives and sovereignties of others, have produced a long and bloody history and present, and a likely calamitous future.

In chapter 4, we move on to examine the most significant effects of the relationship between a capitalist political economy and the environment, which, we would argue, now constitute a second set of existential crises. While there are certainly variants of the abstract capitalist model, one persistent and typical tendency is to assess the planet as either storehouse (of needed resource inputs, including energy resources) and/or sink (for waste products of all kinds, due in large measure to a continually sought novelty, and the concomitant obsolescence of the old). As a consequence of this orientation, nature, as both inherent worth and utilitarian guarantor of sustainable life, must be subjected to the ruthless calculus of costs and benefits. In such evaluations anything that fails to maximize profits or minimize losses must be discounted, ideally to a value of zero. In combination with an intensifying focus on

shorter and shorter time frames for a maximum return on investment, a competition-driven imperative to externalize all costs that do not contribute to the bottom line has produced the by-now exhaustive litany of environmental woes, including the climate catastrophe that now threatens life on the planet as we have known it.

In the subsequent chapter (chapter 5), we begin to examine the more mundane, everyday violence of capitalism in its present neoliberal, globalized, and financialized form. Though not necessarily as dramatic in some ways as militarism or environmental catastrophe, these quotidian issues are emblematic of the kinds of impacts that are being produced for billions of people in their everyday lives on the ground around the world. Beginning largely in the late 1970s and flourishing in the early 1980s (though the original ideas actually date back much further), especially in the US and UK, neoliberalism has been an ongoing project of elites to claw back the few gains made by other classes in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The central tenets include the elimination (or preferably the privatization) of government services of all kinds, an all-out assault on the ability of labor to organize, the massive deregulation of every segment of the economy, and the absolute faith in market-based principles to adjudicate all elements of social, political, cultural, and economic life. The results have been staggering levels of wealth and income inequality, the disappearance or significant shredding of even the most grudging social safety net provisions, the loss of the "commons" in virtually all sectors, and the truncation (ideally to zero) of public expectations for anything that might be provided by something called "society."

These then are three broad categories of consequences that we take up below: militarism (and threats of war and "terrorism"), environmental catastrophe, and the seemingly more mundane suite of neoliberal effects. But these phenomena produce reactions. Once these effects are out in the world, we need to think about the way in which social movements cohere around them, and demands for progressive change are asserted. But at the same time, we want to think about the ways in which elites (who are advantaged by maintaining or reinforcing the status quo) respond to those reactions. These are the matters that we take up in chapter six. Over the past several years (as in the many decades before), we have seen an enormous panoply of social movements for social, political, and economic justice: anti-austerity movements, environmental activism, human rights promotion (including expansions of the definition of "human" and the list of rights themselves), criminal justice reform, poverty elimination/reduction, and many others. One disheartening continuity has been the successful ability of elites to keep these movements separated from, and often, in fact, antagonistic to each other. One of our key objectives here is to demonstrate the fundamental linkages among these seemingly disparate issues, in order to provide the rationale and impetus for coalition and unity.

In the face of rising resistance, elites have been able to exploit present discontent in order to pit elements of society against each other. We also take up this side of the question in chapter six. Often this set of strategies is delivered in the guise of so-called populism (or nationalism, or patriotism, or nativism, etc.), in which blame for present conditions is placed on the most vulnerable segments of populations (immigrants, non-dominant communities, the old, the young, the differently abled, "deviants" from sexual or other norms), who are then relentlessly scapegoated for the sake of the "virtuous" and deserving elements of society. This has (at least) the twofold effect of vesting additional power in the hands of authoritarian "populists" who will protect the worthy from the unworthy, and of diverting attention and blame away from those in the society who really make the decisions that produce the unwanted consequences.

In the final chapter, we examine some concrete elements involved in working toward progressive change, as well as some of the obstacles that constrain those efforts. It is crucial to bear in mind, as we try to convey to students in our courses, that these issues and problems do have solutions. There are people working on answers and implementing them. Their work demonstrates that useful change can be accomplished, but also that there are barriers, almost always quite significant barriers. Many of these obstacles are institutional and built into the systems of power. As an important part of any remedial work, we have to try to understand these barriers, and configure ways to overcome them. Despite such impediments, however, strenuous attempts at remedies cannot be avoided.

That, then, is the arc of the book. We begin by examining how we think we understand the world: thinking about how the world is principally organized, at least for the purposes we want to talk about; some of the most crucial consequences of that organization; and then thinking about the ways in which movements organize around those kinds of impacts. Each chapter is composed of (rather lightly and somewhat amended) edited versions of the lectures we have given over the past three years, but relying principally on those we delivered in the spring of 2019. Reflecting their differing, though linked, intentions, the two parts of each chapter are quite distinctive stylistically. In the first part of each chapter (based on Waterstone's lectures), we endeavor to elaborate a theoretical, conceptual, and historical overview of the particular topic. The more formal style, therefore, generally elaborates this analytic and deliberately abstract emphasis. In the second part of each chapter (based on Chomsky's lectures), we present a set of quite concrete historical and contemporaneous illustrations to drive home the more abstract points. Here, the tone and style, driven by the grounded empirical nature of the material, take on a more narrative and conversational tenor. Though in the course these two components have actually comprised separate lectures, in our delivery of them, we have been able to point out their most important linkages quite explicitly. Based upon extensive feedback, for the more than one thousand students who have taken the course over the past three years, this combination and integration of content and style has proven to be both provocative and productive. At every opportunity, here, as we hope to broaden the circulation of these ideas beyond the classroom, we will repeat that approach of drawing out the connections between the two complementary parts of each chapter.

One final word about organization and content. In order to substantiate and reinforce the points about the necessity and possibility of progressive change, and to help relieve some of the doom and gloom of the lectures, in the most recent version of the course, we included twice-weekly visits (with two exceptions, when we only had one visitor in a particular week) from activists and practitioners working on the issues under discussion during that week. Some of these were local guests who visited the class in person; others were virtual visitors who came in electronically from around the country. As part of a section for each chapter on further resources (located all together at the end of the book), which will include all of the required and suggested readings for each chapter as well as a few key, additional references, we will also present a very brief overview of the presentation by each of our visitors, as well as links to their organizations. Again our sense, from student feedback, is that these visits accomplished our intended purpose of providing class participants with hope that change is possible, and with some entrée into that sphere of activity.

The younger generation in our courses, and those reading this book, are facing problems that have never arisen in human history, in all of history. Will the species survive? Will organized human life survive? Those questions cannot be avoided. There is no way to sit on the sidelines. If one takes that option, it is essentially making a choice for the worst. This book is our attempt to articulate what more efficacious actions might look like and how they might be undertaken.

CHAPTER 1

Common Sense, the Taken-for-Granted, and Power

Waterstone Lecture, January 15, 2019

How do we know what we think we know about the world? How do we navigate through our day-to-day lives, and how do we negotiate novel situations? In this first chapter, we are interested in taking up questions about the mechanisms involved in producing, reinforcing, and sometimes changing the interpretive processes through which people come to conclusions (sometimes correct, but often incorrect or inaccurate) about: (1) how the world *does* operate in specific circumstances; and (2) how the world *might* or *should* operate. While we begin this discussion at a somewhat abstract and general level, we are concerned throughout with thinking about such matters within the contexts that are of foremost interest to us; that is, in public social, political, and economic contexts rather than in predominantly private spheres of thought and activity. As a beginning shorthand, we will term what many people in a particular time and place believe *common sense*.

THE NOTION OF COMMON SENSE

"Central to the notion of common sense is that its truths need no sophistication to grasp, and no proof to accept. Their truth is agreed to by the whole social body, and immediately apparent to anyone of normal intelligence." This definition, from Kate Crehan's book (2016), includes a number of very slippery concepts, things that we should be very troubled by whenever we see them, things like "the whole social body," "anyone of normal intelligence," and things or ideas that we accept simply on their face without proof. All of those things should be alerts to us. But they are elements clearly of what we think we understand about the notion of common sense. In fact, that's part of how common sense works, through these kinds of unexamined, taken-for-granted mechanisms.

There are several different senses of common sense. The first one from Aristotle is that common sense is actually a sixth sense that organizes the other five senses and allows us to understand the world. In other words, we experience all kinds of sensory input, whether it's through hearing or through sight, smell, touch, or taste, but there is a sixth sense, which, according to Aristotle, allows us to integrate all of that and make things that come into our brain meaningful. That's one notion of common sense, a kind of mechanistic notion.

Second is what people in a particular time and place know about the world and how it works. Scale actually matters here; that is the closer you are, the more proximity you have to others, the more common is your common sense (at least as posited in this sort

of framing), and the more distinguished from distant others. This notion is where we get a phrase like, "Well, it's only common sense. Of course that's how things operate." That's another sort of notion of common sense.

A third one is one that actually puts a normative valence on some common sense and gives it a kind of positive inflection. This notion of common sense makes it the equivalent of good sense. This variant is sometimes characterized as street smarts versus book smarts. You know what your gut tells you. We have many people who operate in society that way. This is where a phrase like "Use your common sense" is employed. In other words, "You know how the world works, right, so use your good sense."

Now let's turn to a formulation that characterizes all of this a little bit differently: British sociologist and social theorist Anthony Giddens and his notion of practical consciousness (1984). This is related to common sense. The first two of the framings of common sense just described (the Aristotelian notion and the notion of what everybody sort of knows about how the world works) are related to what Giddens thinks of as practical consciousness, which he describes as an accumulation of learned behavior for navigating the situations that confront us in our everyday lives. He calls it practical consciousness, and he distinguishes it from what he defines as discursive consciousness (1984).

When utilizing discursive consciousness, one must have an internal conversation that tells you how to operate in the world. You have to think about things very carefully. Practical consciousness doesn't work that way. You actually sort of know, under many circumstances, how to behave, what to expect, what will happen in the world if you behave a particular way, which is why last year I opened by yelling at people because it's not what we think we understand about a situation like this. It's not part of the decorum. It's unexpected.

But practical consciousness is rarely raised to this kind of discursive internal conversation level. This is essential. The fact that we don't have to think about every single thing we do and how we operate in the world is a very good thing. Otherwise, we would essentially be paralyzed. If we had to relearn every instance in which we operate in the world every day, we would in fact be constrained from behaving at all. So it's a good thing that much of what we do in our interactions is routinized in this way; that is, that it is, in fact, a practical rather than a discursive consciousness.

There are some circumstances where we become aware that we are operating in a rule-bound way. One of those circumstances is when we are in novel situations. For example, when we travel and come into settings where we don't know the rules. A couple of things happen then. If you've had this experience, you know this is the case. One thing, you have to think a bit about how to behave, what's the proper behavior, what will keep you in a safe zone rather than encountering things that become uncomfortable. So that's one of the things that happen: you begin to think about how things work in unfamiliar settings. If they work differently than how they work where you usually operate, well, you might wonder how will I find out how things work? That's one thing that happens.

The second thing that happens if we're at least conscious of that process, is that we begin to understand that much of behavior is in fact rule-bound. It's rule-governed, even if in most situations we don't have to think about those rules, or even the fact that there are rules.

This is a very important kind of step, to think about the fact that much of behavior is rule-bound, and this is what Giddens is thinking about when he says that practical

consciousness works for most everyday situations, but there are circumstances in which we begin to become aware that we have internalized a whole number of rule-governed behaviors (1984). In fact, to use a phrase that I want to emphasize, we take things for granted.

A second circumstance in which we might move from practical to discursive consciousness is when we are operating in situations where we think we know the rules, but something unexpected happens. Either something unpredictable occurs, or we don't like the consequences. But again, this kind of situation produces in us this notion that life is rather rule-bound and that we need to understand how things work.

One important question that Giddens asks about all of this, and that we'll come back and think about, is where do all these rules come from? How do these rules of behavior come into play? I'll come back to this in a little bit more detail in a minute, but just for the moment, let me introduce this very unfortunate word that Giddens coined. This is a process that he calls structuration (1984).

What he means by that is that people through their practices make and reinforce the rules, but then forget about the fact that they are people-made rules. The rules begin to take on a character that looks like they simply operate independently of society. That issue where we forget that we are the rule makers is what makes the status quo so persistent to some degree. Again, we come to take the rules of everyday life for granted. This is how things work; this is how things should work. It's just common sense. I'll come back and talk about that. I also want to make clear, at this point, that not everyone is in an equal position in making these rules and making them stick, and we'll come back and think about that.

Where does our common sense come from? How do we learn these rules? One quote from Kate Crehan again: "In a sense, we all have our own particular stock of common sense. Much of this will be shared by others in our immediate environment [that is this proximity issue], diverging as those others become more distant. So we're acculturated into understanding these rules" (2016).

The earliest influences clearly, and this will be fairly prosaic, are our parents and immediate family. There is some notion that some of this learning actually occurs in the womb, but not going to get into that at the moment. After our immediate family, our extended family, our friends, the educational system, including religious education if that's part of our background, the media, very broadly defined, the culture apparatuses, the kinds of things that get our attention, and then our own accumulated experience.

I just want to note here a little caution, which again I'll say a bit more about in a bit. Our own accumulated experience becomes increasingly solidified over time. That is, we start to think we know how the world works, and things that accord with that evolving viewpoint we take in much more easily than things that seem to contradict how we think the world works. This evolution is a kind of ongoing process to the extent that we need to understand further and further how the world works.

It's also important here to distinguish between what's possible to know and understand firsthand from information that must be delivered second-, third-, fourth-hand by a various media; that is, mediated information, which is more and more the case. I mean, we know less and less about the world firsthand than we do through other sources of information.

It is also critical to point out that nothing enters our brains or minds unfiltered. Going back to the idea from Aristotle, the first definition of common sense (i.e., the extra sense that allows us to make meaningful what other senses tell us about the

world) sidesteps the very important question of how this additional sense is itself built. What I'm suggesting is that part of our acculturation, part of the way we develop a sense of the common sense, is to develop a set of filters that tells us what's important, what's not important, how we should interpret what we get as stimuli. Some of that can be right, some of it can be wrong.

So the issue of taken-for-grantedness, and reinforcement of common sense, is a very important phenomenon. This is, in fact, what I just described, that is that we begin to filter those things that don't really accord with how we think the world works, and we reject those things that really are contradictory. This is especially the case, I would suggest, and is becoming increasingly the case, through what we think about as either this bubble or silo effect. This is where we're channeled in many of our media interactions, particularly into things that we seem to have already accepted.

So anytime you see a prompt, "If you liked this, you will love that," know that this tactic works according to algorithms that produce this channeling effect. This is happening in all kinds of ways on social media and even in the mainstream media. People are CNN people, or they're MSNBC people, or they are Fox News people. So there's a tendency to sort of silo ourselves or put ourselves in these bubbles, and that's becoming increasingly the case.

Now, an important question: Are we thinking about common sense (singular) or are we thinking about common senses (plural)? All too often, one rational being's obvious fact is another's questionable or flat-out wrong assertion. There is more than one common sense, and even seemingly incontrovertible facts have a way of shifting over time. Even for ourselves, something that we may have believed at one point in time, if we are open-minded, we might believe something quite different at a later date. But quite clearly, there are different common senses operating simultaneously. These are the sources of controversy and argumentation.

The notion of the single common sense, "[w]hich all men have in common in any given civilization is quite foreign to the spirit of the [Gramsci prison] notebooks. For Gramsci as for Marx, any given civilization is so fractured by inequality that understanding it requires us to begin with that inequality. Those most elementary things which are the first to be forgot, the fact that there really do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led. Common sense in all its multitudinous confusion is the product of a fractured world" (Crehan 2016).

Yes, there are multiple common senses operating at any particular time and place. There are always competing common senses at play, which tells us several things. Immediately, it tells us that common sense is unstable. It changes over time. It changes from place to place, from one group, for example a social class, from one setting to another, and so on. This also tells us that common sense is both malleable and subject to manipulation. It's not a stable thing. Common sense can shift.

Let's begin to tie those notions of what common sense is about to political action. Ultimately, as Kate Crehan argues, "what interests Gramsci is the knowledge that mobilizes political movements capable of bringing about radical transformations" (2016). This is what Gramsci was interested in. One of his central questions was trying to understand how the Italian people came to accept Mussolini and fascism. So he was very interested in coming to grips with that kind of question.

The most important knowledge would seem to be precisely knowledge that when embodied in self-aware collectivities has the potential to act in the world. For Gramsci, the primary such collectivities as a good Marxist were class, classes. He was interested in class struggle.

The webs of intelligibility in which our socialization wraps us from the day of our birth are a reality from which we all begin. We are all to some degree creatures of popular opinion, and yet of certain historical moments, there is radical social transformation. When and why does this happen? Running through the Gramsci notebooks is the question, what is the relationship between popular opinion, another phrasing of common sense, and social transformation? How are these things tied together, if they are tied together at all? This was a central question for Gramsci and one that Marx really did not take up to any significant degree. So Gramsci is thought of in many ways as a cultural theorist of Marxism.

"Despite all his criticisms" of common sense—and Gramsci was quite critical of it; he thinks of it as a kind of hodgepodge, and he thinks of it as very unsophisticated in many ways—"Gramsci's attitude wasn't wholly negative. Embedded within the chaotic confusion of common sense, that is both home and prison, he identifies what he terms *buon senso* [good sense]" (Crehan, 2016). That is, we feel comfortable in our notion of common sense, but we're also bounded by it. That's home and prison in this case. And there's a kernel of good sense in common sense.

The phrase "being philosophical about it," in addition to calling for patience or resignation, can also be seen, and it was for Gramsci, as an invitation for people to reflect and to realize fully that whatever happens is basically rational and must be confronted as such. This is the way in which good sense can be extracted out of common sense, but it's a process. It's a process that Gramsci says has to be extracted, made coherent by intellectuals, that this is the role of intellectuals for Gramsci.

But he has a very ecumenical notion of intellectuals. Anyone, in Gramsci's view, given the opportunity, could be an intellectual, that is, a person who could reflect on the conditions of their own material existence and think about why that existence has the characteristics that it does. So for Gramsci, anyone could be an intellectual.

The role of intellectuals is to extract the good sense out of the hodgepodge of common sense. Gramsci thinks about intellectuals as falling roughly into two categories. Organic intellectuals are those that remain connected to their class and further class interests. Now by saying that, that doesn't necessarily mean of one sort of political stripe or another. Adam Smith, the classical economist, I would argue, is an organic intellectual for his class, the bourgeois class.

Traditional intellectuals, as Gramsci describes them, are people who are interested in being apologists or explainers or supporters of the status quo. The traditional intellectuals are also what Marx would have called the vulgar economists, with whom he was engaged in conversation and contention. So the role of intellectuals is to extract the kernels of good sense out of common sense.

Okay. Now, let me turn from the abstract for a minute and think about a concrete example of something that we think about as common sense, which we will come back to in certain ways through other parts of the course. So as common sense, the American dream. If I say that phrase, do you get a picture in your mind immediately? What does it look like?

The American dream, here it is: In America (and this is not just confined to America of course), if you work hard, play by the rules, you will succeed. Work hard, play by the rules, you will succeed. That's part of the dream. Typically, it also includes a metric for what constitutes success. It almost invariably takes a commodified form, success. Since that's the kind of reward a capitalist system can and must deliver.

For example, a recurrent formulation is a home of one's own. Now, I don't want to go very far into a discussion of why this particular measure of success, that is, a home of

one's own in the suburbs and so forth, was the preferred form of connoting and illustrating the American dream. But it had a great deal to do with the rise of mass consumption. The phrase itself, the American dream, was coined in the '30s basically in the heart of the Depression. Much of this framing was pointed at the need to keep the economy rumbling at a great pace when World War II ended. So one of the ways in which industry could keep going was to promulgate not collective consumption, but individual consumption. So everybody had to have their own house. And, consequently, everybody had to have their own Kelvinator, their own appliances. You couldn't share these things in common. That wasn't enough market. So the American dream takes a particular, that is, a commodified, form.

The American dream, as common sense, also has some taken-for-granted presumptions underlying it. The first is that America is a meritocracy. That is, a system in which people's success in life depends on their talents, abilities, and efforts. This is one of the presumptions underlying the notion that if you work hard, play by the rules, you will succeed. There's an ethos of individual achievement. You get this on your own —the self-made man, the self-made woman.

This translates into a number of other societies. Some of you may remember the iron lady, Margaret Thatcher. One of her many, many quotable quotes was "There is no such thing as society," spoken as she was dismantling British society at the time. There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and then it's kind of, after that, and their families, okay, if you can keep them together under those circumstances.

Another tacit presumption is that the rules are fair and are known or knowable to all, that is, that we operate on a level playing field. If these presumptions are violated, then the formulation of the American dream is very much in jeopardy. But if we presume that these things are the case, then we might be persuaded that the American dream is in fact a viable conception of society.

But I'm going to suggest ... I'm not going to suggest. I'm just going to say, there's an obverse meaning to take away from the common sense understanding of how our society operates. That obverse meaning is this: In America, if you don't succeed, you are either not working hard enough, or you are not playing by the rules, or both. So if you don't succeed, and this is the obverse of thinking about the American dream as it's laid out, essentially, your failure is your own fault. This is another corollary of the individualized notion of how society works. All the opportunities are there. If you fail, it is your fault. There is nothing structural or systemic or unfair getting in your way, either historically, contemporaneously, or into the future.

Let's think about these presumptions and the obverse for a minute. How can you work hard if there are no jobs for you? Which is increasingly the prospect, as we think about the export of jobs that has occurred; as we think about automation taking jobs away; as we think about productivity going up but the demand for labor going down. One of the problems might be, "Well, I'd like to work hard, I just can't find work." Or what if your job pays so poorly that despite working very hard, and sometimes at more than one job at a time, you still can't make ends meet? So the pay structure doesn't allow success, despite hard work.

Anybody who's interested in this kind of thing, I'd recommend any of the works by Barbara Ehrenreich, either *Nickel and Dimed* or some of her more recent works, in which she talks about the fact that many people are working really, really hard and simply can't get by. What if the rules are rigged against you in some way and are unfair?

I know we are in a post-racial society, but I suspect there are still a few impediments. We are also now in the feminist utopia. So fifty-nine cents on the dollar should go just as far as a dollar on the dollar, right? Or what if there are unwritten or unspoken rules that discriminate against some people? Or what if there are early impediments to equal educational opportunities or family connections or other factors that make the playing field anything but level, which, as I suggested, should be the hallmark of a meritocracy?

An interesting study was done by the Center for Budget Priorities called *Born on Third Base*. This is an analysis of people who are on the Fortune 400. This is not the Fortune 500, which charts companies, but the Fortune 400, which lists the richest individuals in the world. This study does an assessment of how those people started out. Third base means you've inherited at least $50 million. So our current president wouldn't qualify at least in his first six years of life. But then they go all the way down to first base, which is still pretty substantial. A first-base person would be someone like Bill Gates, who's one of the poster children for the self-made person. He had the opportunity to go to Harvard and by his own admission was not a self-made person, and has really been helped by society a great deal, including all the infrastructure paid for by public R&D upon which the computer industry itself was built.

But in any event, they go through this list, and it turns out that only 35 percent of people on the Fortune 400 were born anywhere but first base (itself a space with substantial material advantages). Most people don't even know there's a ball field, okay, let alone come anywhere close to be on-deck circle or anything else like that. But these early advantages or impediments, either to educational opportunities or family connections, may have something to do with your success, no matter how hard you work, or how much you play by the rules.

So the American dream is like that. But if we let the common sense notion of the American dream stand just for a moment, here are a couple questions that we should ask of any taken-for-granted elements of the political, social, and economic status quo. The first is who benefits from this view of society? That is, if we believe the American dream, that to succeed, people must work hard, must play by certain rules that are written not by them, but with which they must comply. If we believe that, who benefits from that kind of orientation to society and who loses? We should always be thinking about who are the winners and the losers here.

It also suggests some questions about the political, social, and economic implications of such an understanding. For example, what does it mean about the role of government? If everything is by your own bootstraps, does government have any role in helping people out? Or what about civil society? Does anything require the intervention of civil society? Or should we just let the tender mercies of the market tell us how things ought to operate? But taking the American dream in its typical formulation has very serious implications for what we think about the role of any of these institutions. So we need to think carefully about that. And it's one of the reasons we can see assaults on things like welfare, unless it's called a subsidy, assaults on entitlement programs, so-called, even though we've paid for them.

But if your belief is that people just make it or don't make it simply on their own by their own dint of activity and effort, then there really is no role for society. People simply make it or they don't make it. But as I say, thinking about this has some implications for that.

If you have a high tolerance for obscenity, I would urge you to find this on YouTube. The late George Carlin. I'd urge you to take a look at "The American Dream. You Have

to Be Asleep to Believe It."

All right. Now let's turn to the relationship between common sense and power. Here's a quote from the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall. It's a little bit long but it's worth going through:

> Why then is common sense so important? Because it is a terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed. It is the already formed and taken for granted terrain on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery, the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into account, contest and transform if they were to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically effective. (Hall 1986)

Basically, what Hall is talking about here is that we have embedded within us very heavily cemented notions of how the world works. If we want to change people's minds and think about the world operating differently, we have to contend with those deeply embedded and vitally held conceptions of how the world operates. He uses this language quite deliberately. We have to contend. This is a struggle.

So "popular beliefs, the culture of a people," Gramsci argues, "are not matters, are not arenas that can be left to look after themselves. They are themselves material forces. Common sense is a field of struggle and contestation" (Hall 1986). That is, for Hall, this is an arena for very fierce battles. The reason for this, of course, is that to have one's view of how the world operates become predominant is a very potent form of political power. If you can convince people that your sense of how the world ought to operate *is* the way it ought to operate, this is an extremely powerful political tool.

This form of power is also related to Gramsci's important concept of hegemony. One definition of hegemony, and there are other definitions, I mean, we have some definitions of hegemony in common parlance, like the US is the world's only hegemon, which is a debatable point no matter what, but that's not exactly the meaning I'm using here. Hegemony, as I'm using the term here, is governance with the consent of the governed.

The alternative form of governance is coercion. Now think about it, if you're an elite and you want to govern people, which of these forms is preferable? Well, of the two, hegemony is much more desirable for the governors since governance with consent does not produce opposition and resistance by definition. If people are consenting to be governed, why would they object? Why would they resist?

It should also be noted, though, that these two forms are never mutually exclusive, but rather they exist on a continuum, since governance structures invariably reserve to themselves the exclusive and legitimate use of coercion when necessary or when consent fails. These forms are related to each other. But given the option, governors would prefer the hegemonic form rather than the coercive form, which does produce resistance.

But why do people consent to be governed? This is the way in which we're going to now begin to tie this back to questions of common sense and so forth. It's a question of legitimacy. The ruled must believe that the rulers are operating in their interest. This is the basis upon which people cede consent or give consent to be governed. They think the governors, their rulers, are operating in their interest. So they accord those rulers legitimation. In fact, the failure of this form of governance is often referred to or often is contained in a legitimation crisis, that is, when legitimacy begins to fail.

How is this belief developed, that governors act in the interest of the governed? By the rulers promulgating and constantly reinforcing a particular common sense about the world, not only is the way they are operating the way the world is, but it's the way the world should be. I just want to emphasize that this is a constant project. Rulers have to constantly promulgate and reinforce this idea that they are operating in the public good on behalf of the governed. It is a constant project.

In the second half of this chapter, we present a number of cases, both from recent history and from contemporary situations that illustrate the ends of this continuum. We make the point that for societies that purport to be democratic, consent, based upon a constantly reinforced common sensical understanding of the legitimacy of the rulers, is not only the most desirable form of governance, but is necessary to maintain the veneer (whether thick or thin) of democracy itself. For more dictatorial or despotic regimes, even the pretense of consent is less necessary, at least for a time.

By definition, everything in opposition to that common sense becomes quite literally unthinkable and becomes—and I use this term advisedly—nonsense. It is not sensical to object to the governors, if they're acting in your interest. This is the fundamental idea that underpins the way in which this form of governance works. And many, many philosophers have articulated it, but it is that the governors are acting in the interests of those who are being governed, and therefore have legitimate control over the reins of governance.

Again from Kate Crehan's book, "the narratives that become hegemonic are those that reflect the world as seen from the vantage point of the rulers rather than the ruled typically" (2016). We'll come back to this. Again from Stuart Hall: "First, hegemony is a very particular historically specific and temporary moment in the life of a society. It's rare for this degree of unity to be achieved, enabling a society to set itself a quite new historical agenda under the leadership of a specific formation or constellation of social forces [with a critical part here]. Such periods of settlement are unlikely to persist forever." There's nothing automatic about them. They have to be actively constructed and positively maintained. Otherwise, such hegemonies risk falling apart.

We can see this when we see schisms even within the ruling class, and there are many times when that occurs, and those may be moments of interesting opportunity. But hegemony is unstable and begins to break down when rulers lose their legitimacy. This can happen when the ruled no longer believe, for a whole variety of possible reasons, that governance is in their interest. This is what I refer to as a legitimation crisis. It's at that point that governance structures even lose the ability to wield coercion uncontested.

Gramsci makes a very clear argument that before coercion can be legitimately utilized, governance structures have to have won a war of position, that is, they already have to be seen as legitimate before they can legitimately wield even coercive forms of government. So when this begins to break down, and you can begin to think about all kinds of reasons why people would start to lose faith that their leaders are, in fact, acting in their interests. We're at a particularly fraught moment right now [winter 2018–2019], I would say. I mean, I don't know how many of you were thinking of not coming tonight in sympathy with the government shutdown. I thought about it momentarily, but I decided I'd come in and do this.

But in any event, there are moments clearly when the seeming solidity of the governance structures are revealed to be rather fragile. And when they are, this is a moment when people begin to call into question all kinds of things about the way in

which their society operates. So legitimation crises are extremely troubling moments for governance structures and for elites. As Hall is arguing here, this is invariably the case. And people who want radical change need to be prepared for those moments.

Also from Creehan's book: "For there to be fundamental social change therefore, there needs to be cultural transformation. That is to say a new common sense, and with it a new culture that enables subalterns, that is those who are ruled or governed, to imagine another reality" (2016). Part of the potency of common sense, and this is why I used the alternative word "nonsense" a moment ago, part of the potency of the common sense, is to rule out our thinking any differently about the world. That is, to subjugate our own mental capacity to imagine the world otherwise.

It's why I used that phrase, which I took from Mark Fisher (2009), which he took from an unnamed and unclaimed source about capitalist realism. It is now easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. That's an emblematic form of this kind of notion of the constraints on our own imagination. We know we're hurdling over several different cliffs, as Noam talked about last Thursday, and yet we can't seem to imagine our way out of this form that is so genocidal, suicidal, planet-cidal, right?

As Crehan is arguing, based on Gramsci, we need to be able to formulate a new common sense to combat the existing one and open up the possibilities of different imaginaries. "The value of Gramsci's concept of common sense is that it offers us a way of thinking about the texture of everyday life that encompasses its givenness [that is, the way in which we're thrown into it at birth]—how it both constitutes our subjectivity, the way we think about ourselves, and confronts us as an external and solid reality" (2016). This is back to Giddens's notion of structuration (1984).

The way the world works doesn't seem to have been created by us. It simply seems to confront us as a kind of materiality that we have no say in changing. This is what we really need to be combating. "But that also acknowledges its contradictions, fluidity and flexibility. For all its apparent solidity, it [that is, common sense] is continually being modified by how actual people in actual places live it" (Giddens 1984). So it's important, it's vitally important, to understand the sort of fluid nature of common sense, that it is not solid in the way that it's constantly being told to us.

In a work by Edward Bernays there is, in fact, a conversation about how all of this actually works. This is Edward Bernays: "Propaganda is the executive arm of the invisible government" (1928). So Bernays, interesting character, he was twice, and in two different ways, a nephew of Sigmund Freud and fancied himself a kind of amateur psychologist of the popular mind. Very early on, he was the self-described father of public relations. He invented the form, according to himself. He was involved in a whole number of early activities, some of which we'll talk about a bit later. He was involved in the Creel Commission, which was organized with Walter Lippmann and others to motivate a very reluctant US public into supporting the US entry into World War I under Woodrow Wilson. We return to this effort in a bit more detail below.

So he was involved in a number of those kinds of things. One of his most famous and long-standing sets of efforts had to do with tobacco. He really was very, very influential in getting people to smoke. Later in life, in an autobiographical kind of mea culpa, he regretted that activity. But one of the things that he did (and this is just by way of illustration of the sort of mental attitude he had about public opinion), one of the last impediments to the market for cigarettes was getting women to smoke, and particularly getting women to smoke in public.

So one of the large grandstand events that Bernays organized was a liberty march in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade in New York. He hired about thirty debutantes. I don't know if that word draws any resonance. These were young women of society who were going to be introduced to society. He had them march in the parade, each of them holding aloft a little torch of freedom. That little torch of freedom was a Lucky Strike cigarette. This was the kind of thing he was engaged in.

But here are some of his views: "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government, which is the true ruling power of our country." Some people might now call that the deep state. I wouldn't, but some people might. "We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested largely by men we have never heard of" (1928). He is referring to himself and other people who are behind the scenes manipulating public opinion, which is another phrase for common sense.

"In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons ... who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind" (1928).

Now for Bernays, this was a very good thing. I mean, in his mind, this was a good thing, and this is the reason for it: "Truth is mighty and must prevail. And if anybody, and any body of men believe that they have discovered a valuable truth, it is not merely their privilege, but their duty to disseminate that truth. If they realize, as they quickly must, that this spreading of truth can be done upon a large scale and effectively only by organized effort, they will make use of the press and the platform as the best means to give it wide circulation" (1928). So he was engaged, remember, in the onset of public relations and mass marketing. So he's starting to use these levers that had become recently available for disseminating these truths.

"Propaganda becomes vicious and reprehensible only when its authors consciously and deliberately disseminate what they know to be lies, or when they aim at effects which they know to be prejudicial to the common good" (1928). But of course the common good is defined by these people, so it's almost invariable that they will not be defined as the common good. But the danger is there, and he's warning people about it.

"The imaginatively managed event can compete successfully with other events for attention. Newsworthy events involving people usually do not happen by accident, they are planned deliberately to accomplish a purpose to influence our ideas and actions" (1928). And many of the things that Bernays was engaged in were these kinds of grandstanding, large-scale public events. So as I say, he sort of describes himself as the father of public relations. This is part of the mechanism that he used. We return to Bernays in the second part of the chapter in order to connect some of his work in "public relations" to projections of US political and military power.

All right. Let's bring this a little bit up-to-date. This is in a piece by Chris Hedges called "The Permanent Lie," and it will now start to resonate in slightly different ways with the contemporary moment. "The most ominous danger we face comes from the marginalization and destruction of institutions, including the courts, academia, legislative bodies, cultural organizations and the press that once ensured that civil discourse was rooted in reality and fact, helped us distinguish lies from truth, and facilitated justice" (2017).

"The permanent lie is not circumscribed by reality. It is perpetuated even in the face of overwhelming evidence that discredits it. It is irrational. Those who speak in the language of truth and fact are attacked as liars, traitors and purveyors of fake news" (Hedges 2017). So this is what Hedges is concerned about happening at the moment. Then he quotes Hannah Arendt from her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies with factual truth is not that the lie will now be accepted as truth and truth be defamed as a lie, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world—and the category of truth versus falsehood is among the mental means to this end—is being destroyed" (quoted in Hedges 2017).

So it's not that a particular lie is believed, or that a particular truth is devalued, but the mechanisms that we have for discerning one from the other are themselves under assault. This is what Arendt was concerned about and what Hedges now sees coming back around.

The press and the media more generally are often described as the enemy of the people, which has some very long ... There's a long history of such attacks as part of authoritarian regimes, which we'll discuss further a little bit later on. Assaults on journalism and journalists. So the pieces that are in today's readings describe a very significant uptick in the sort of ways in which journalism, journalists, and facticity and evidence are really being very much undermined by activities.

Finally, Edward Bernays again. "Freedom of speech and its democratic corollary, a free press have *tacitly* expanded our Bill of Rights to include the *right of persuasion*" (1947). Again, he's justifying this activity of his. "This development was an *inevitable* result of the expansion of the media of free speech and persuasion. All these media provide open doors to the public mind." So he's saying that this is just ... it's a kind of technological determinism. Once you have the platform there, of course people are going to use it for these purposes. "*Anyone* of us through these media may influence the attitudes and actions of our fellow citizens." I've added those emphases just so you'll know which words are again a little bit suspect and slippery.

So we've already established the fact that common sense is malleable. Now we have to look at the very uneven power landscape on which such contests, over the common sense, are waged. This discussion will focus mostly on the US media landscape, but the basic points apply quite well to many other media environments (with some exceptions for state-owned media, for better or worse). It's clear from the Bernays piece that even at that time, 1947, particular actors in society are in much more advantageous positions to influence public opinion than others, another name for common sense. What's happened since that time?

This a quote from Katherine Graham, the former publisher, during the Watergate episode, of the *Washington Post*: "News is what someone wants suppressed; everything else is just advertising." What's happened since that time? Mass media, and I'll talk about social media in a minute. At the moment, and this is always in a little bit of flux and a little bit confusing, six corporations control 90 percent of what we read, watch, or listen to. Six corporations. It's a little bit mystifying for me to put it that way. When I say six corporations, it makes it sound as though there's nobody there really making decisions, but in fact corporations don't decide, people in them decide things. We'll talk about the ways in which these corporations decide things in a minute.

In 1983, 90 percent of what Americans saw, watched, heard, and so forth, was controlled by fifty corporations. By this point in 2012, six corporations. And the number six is a little bit misleading, because all of the cross-linkages among these companies make it even fewer than the apparent six in some ways. There are all kinds

sites and different content and so forth. That's a very different view of how the internet would operate than the way it operates currently.

Now we're back to the starting point regarding filters that we use to make sense of the world. Because we take certain things about the world for granted when we encounter new data, we accept it or reject it based in large part on whether it corresponds with or contradicts what we think we already know. This is what I had said earlier. This is being increasingly reinforced by the so-called bubble or silo effect in which computer algorithms channel our online behavior so that we rarely encounter views with which we disagree.

Unless we train ourselves to be open-minded and skeptical, which is actually what critical thinking and learning are all about, we continue to accept the status quo even when we are disadvantaged by it. We are also diminished in our capacity to imagine alternatives to the taken-for-granted status quo, and we come to accept its inevitability.

Being open to new views is a very difficult and destabilizing proposition, since we have a stake, a very potent stake in thinking we know how the world operates. That practical consciousness that I described at the beginning is extremely useful for us. We have to have it. So we abandon it very, very reluctantly, and we abandon it in large measure depending on what's at stake. But it's necessary to break down the taken-for-granted common senses that are not in our interest, and that's partly what this course is about. We're going to think about what is the prevailing common sense in the next chapter and then begin to think about what are the consequences of accepting that as inevitable.

Chomsky Lecture, January 17, 2019

The main topic that we're discussing this week is Gramsci's concept of hegemonic common sense, and how it plays out in practice. The assigned reading for today was chosen in part because it provides many striking illustrations of the effective imposition of hegemonic common sense. But also, in part, because it quotes an early and perceptive commentary on this concept, in the mid-eighteenth century, by Scottish philosopher David Hume, one of the great figures of the Enlightenment and a founder of classical liberalism. The quote is from a study of his called "Of the First Principles of Government"—a very important work on democratic theory. In the background is the first modern democratic revolution, in England in the preceding century.

In the opening paragraph, Hume gives a brief exposition of something like the Gramscian concept. Hume writes that he found nothing more surprising "than to see the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and to observe the implicit submission with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is brought about, we shall find, that as Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. 'Tis therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular."

Words worth pondering.

The maxim applies with far more force to governments that are free and popular—governments like ours—than to despotic and military governments. These can freely

resort to violence, which often suffices, whatever public opinion may be—at least as long as those who exercise the violence, the security forces, remain loyal.

I discuss Hume's essay in my book *Deterring Democracy*. The book opens with Hume's remarks on consent and goes on to discuss the exercise of violence in despotic and military governments. For quite substantial reasons to which I'll return, it concentrates on the US-supported military dictatorships in Central America in the 1980s, which carried out a brutal war against their populations. Hundreds of thousands were killed; huge numbers hideously tortured and mutilated. The countries were ruined. The trauma persists.

The book was published thirty years ago, so the examples might seem no longer pertinent. But that's a mistake. In fact, they're quite relevant today. They provide a crucial background for front-page news as Trump demands a "beautiful wall" to protect us from the invasion of rapists, murders, Islamic terrorists, and the like. The reality of the invasion is very vivid in our immediate experience here in Tucson, not far from the harsh desert where miserable people fleeing from our destruction of their countries are dying in the searing heat—and sometimes being given some succor by the heroic activists of No More Deaths. All happening right here. Many are fleeing from the horrors of the 1980s and the brutal legacy that they left, others from more recent US crimes to which we'll return.

As many of you know, there's an ongoing trial of volunteers from No More Deaths at the federal court in Tucson—in one case, a felony charge that could bring twenty years in prison. The trials are for such crimes as leaving food and water in the desert for desperate people who are fleeing the results of our crimes.[fn1]

In the past, No More Deaths had a tacit agreement with the border patrols, which allowed them to carry out their humanitarian work with a certain degree of impunity, but that's changed. Enforcement has sharply increased under the Trump administration's hardline immigration stance. Hence the trials, and also a lot of sadistic acts, like border patrols destroying food and water so that people will die of thirst and starve when they wander in the desert. Sometimes helicopters hover over groups of refugees and scatter them into the desert so that they'll get lost and be more likely to die in agony and join the many corpses that are constantly being found.

We cannot emphasize too often that these rapists, criminals, and Islamic terrorists are fleeing from the wreckage of US crimes in Central America, some of which are discussed in today's reading. Now, these days, that reading should probably have trigger warnings. For example, Father Santiago's vivid description of the hideous scene he witnessed with his own eyes, just an instance of what was happening throughout the region (Chomsky 1991).

In the last year or two, the flight of refugees is mostly from Honduras. There's a caravan being formed right now in Honduras. You've probably read about it. There's a reason why the refugee flow is now coming from Honduras. In 2009, a mildly reformist government came into office in Honduras, breaking with a brutal history of terror and repression. The president, Mel Zelaya, proposed some measures to overcome the horrors of the traditional Honduran system, in which the US had been directly involved, particularly during Reagan's wars in the eighties, when Honduras was turned into a base for US-run terrorist operations in the region.

Zelaya's efforts didn't last long. He was thrown out by a military coup, which was condemned throughout the hemisphere, throughout the world. With an exception. The Obama-Clinton administration refused to call it a military coup because if they had, US law would have required that they stop sending arms to the military junta that had

restored a brutal dictatorship. Washington would not agree to that, so it endorsed the coup regime under the ludicrous pretense that it was restoring democracy.

The military dictatorship ran what they called "an election," which was mostly ridiculed and dismissed. Again, with one notable exception. The Obama-Clinton administration praised it as an encouraging step toward democracy, so we could continue to support this promising new regime as it instituted a reign of terror.

Honduras, which was always dangerous enough, became maybe the homicide capital of the world. There were huge atrocities, and soon people were fleeing in desperation. Honduras was the source of the plurality of the refugees fleeing from Central America in the last few years, and that's where the caravans are starting from. The US role in the flight of refugees is not secret. It's all public. You can easily find out about it—except on the front pages of newspapers, where it should be highlighted.

Throughout the hideous decade of the 1980s, there was never any secret about what was happening. It was reported extensively by church sources and all the major human rights and aid groups, by solidarity organizations, and by the thousands of Americans who flocked to Central America to help the victims—something entirely new in the gruesome history of imperialism, and a tribute to important strains of American society and culture. Like No More Deaths today, right here in Tucson.

The earlier role of the US in Central America, Latin America altogether, is terrible enough. We'll come back to that later. But the crimes escalated sharply under Reagan in the 1980s. The terrible decade opened with the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, recently designated as a saint. He was known as the "voice for the voiceless." He was a simple man, of remarkable integrity and courage, who understood well that the course he was following would probably lead to martyrdom. He was assassinated while reading mass, by close US allies, as was known at once and reported by US ambassador to El Salvador Robert White—who was withdrawn, because he was considered a little too open about what was happening. The voice for the voiceless was stilled by the assassins shortly after sending a letter to President Carter urging him to withhold military aid from the governing junta, which, he warned, will use it to "sharpen injustice and repression against the people's organizations [struggling] for respect for their most basic human rights." Exactly as happened.

Right after the assassination, the Reagan administration came into office, and sharply escalated the war. Archbishop Romero's successor, Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, described the US-backed crimes as "a war of extermination and genocide against a defenseless civilian population." That was El Salvador. They were sort of lucky. It was still worse in Guatemala in those years.

In both countries, the crimes go back much earlier. In Guatemala they intensified after the overthrow of a popular democratic government by a CIA coup in 1954. That initiated decades of state terror and repression, raised to new horrors under Reagan. What was taking place in Guatemala in the eighties was so horrendous that Congress intervened and imposed constraints on the US supply of weapons to the mass murderers who were running the country. Undeterred, Reagan created an international terror network to replace direct US participation in the slaughter.

There are others who create international terrorist networks, highly publicized and bitterly condemned for their crimes. They hire killers, like the infamous Carlos the Jackal. The US is a much bigger player, so we hire terrorist states, not just individual killers. They're much more effective. The primary component of Reagan's terror network was the Argentine neo-Nazi regime that was the worst of all the Latin

American monsters of those years. The competition for that honor is pretty fierce, but they were the winners.

They were also the favorite of Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, and their associates. So it's natural that they should be picked to direct the slaughter and torture in Guatemala when Washington had to pull out directly. But that didn't last long; the Argentine military dictatorship was overthrown. A democratic regime was slowly introduced, so Argentine neo-Nazi killers were no longer available for service in Guatemala. Washington's international terror network had to turn to others: Taiwanese mercenaries, but primarily, Israel, which provided direct support and weapons for horrifying crimes, using its considerable expertise in repression and violence. To this day, the Guatemalan military, which continues its rampages, is supplied with Israeli weapons, standard issue for their forces.

In the early eighties, the atrocities amounted to virtual genocide in the Mayan highlands of Guatemala under a killer later sentenced for genocide. While it was underway, he was lauded by Reagan as a fine man, "totally dedicated to democracy" and given a "bum rap" by human rights organizations. People are still fleeing from that bitter legacy.

The decade of the eighties began with the assassination of the archbishop and closed in 1989, symbolically, with the assassination of six leading Latin American intellectuals, Jesuit priests, in their rooms at the Jesuit university of San Salvador. The assassins also murdered their housekeeper and her daughter to make sure there would be no witnesses. This was right at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the celebration of the liberation of Soviet satellites. The murderers were from a US-trained brigade, the Atlacatl Brigade, known as El Salvador's finest, which had already compiled a horrible record of murders and atrocities.

We can find out more about this from the foreign press. Several years ago (November 21, 2009), a major Spanish journal, *El Mundo*, published facsimiles of official documents showing that the assassination was undertaken on the direct orders of the Salvadoran High Command, which was, of course, always in close contact with the US Embassy. As far as I can determine, the media here never published that crucial information, but you can find it. I published it, the only reference here to my knowledge. The Free Press has other priorities.

A good bit has been learned about the wars in El Salvador and Guatemala since *Deterring Democracy* was published thirty years ago. As the wars wound down, Truth Commissions were established in both countries. Their research revealed that the overwhelming majority of the crimes were carried out by the security forces that were armed, trained, directed by the Reagan administration. I'll come back to all of that and its backgrounds, particularly since the Kennedy years. This is bipartisan. It's highly instructive.

There has never been a Truth Commission here. That's unthinkable, a violation of common sense.

Truth Commissions often have a considerable impact, in Argentina, to take one case. So does their absence. The most important country in Latin America, Brazil, did not have one. They had a brutal military dictatorship, but there was no reckoning. Actually, the Catholic Church did publish an inquiry, but there was no real Truth Commission. The effects are in the headlines right now. In Brazil, something similar to military dictatorship is taking shape. It's tolerated, even supported, in part because people don't even remember the military dictatorship and its many crimes. Younger people may not even know about it. The new Bolsonaro administration even denies


image
not
available

Centuries later, the prophets were honored. But not at the time. At the time, the people who were honored were the flatterers at the Court, those who were later called false prophets. The experts in legitimation. And so it goes right through history. An interesting story.

Take Gramsci. When he was condemned to prison by the Mussolini dictatorship, the prosecutor said that we must stop this brain from functioning for twenty years. Now that was fascism. We are a little harsher. Romero and the Jesuit intellectuals—and a long list of other religious martyrs—simply had their brains blown out and were silenced forever, not just for twenty years.

And you have to make sure that they're unknown forever. It's very interesting to see how this works in detail. So let's go back to Boston, the most liberal city in the country. In 1990, shortly after the assassination of the Jesuit intellectuals, the American Psychological Association had its conference in Boston. There was a series of panels. I was participating in one, which was devoted to the work of one of the murdered Jesuit intellectuals, a prominent social psychologist. The conference was covered by the *Boston Globe*, at the time I think the most liberal newspaper in the country, which had excellent Latin America coverage, probably the best in the country.

The *Globe* covered the conference, but not this section. Instead the journal preferred a paper on male facial expressions that are attractive to women. That was much more important. You have to have your priorities straight. It's necessary to cultivate the right kind of intellectuals.

I don't mean to blame the reporter, who had probably never heard of the massacre of the Jesuit intellectuals a few months earlier.

Well, I'll leave to your imagination what the reaction would be if things like this were going on in the old Soviet Union under the Kremlin dictatorship.

The essential point was made by the acute and often bitter critic H. L. Mencken, referring to an Irish American writer who was in and out of jail on trivial charges: "If [he] were a Russian, read in translation, all the professors would be hymning him."

All too accurate.

Actually, George Orwell had some interesting things to say about this. You've all read *Animal Farm* in school, I'm sure. But it's pretty unlikely that you've read Orwell's preface to *Animal Farm*, which was not published. It was discovered many years later in his collected papers. It sometimes appears in contemporary editions, but was probably missing from the book you read.

You'll recall that *Animal Farm* is a satirical critique of Bolshevik Russia, the totalitarian enemy. But the preface, directed to the people of free England, says that they shouldn't feel too self-righteous about it. England too has literary censorship, of a kind appropriate to free societies in thrall to hegemonic common sense. "The sinister fact about literary censorship in England," Orwell wrote, "is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for any official ban." He did not explore the reasons in any depth, merely noting the control of the press by "wealthy men who have every motive to be dishonest on certain important topics," reinforced by the "general tacit agreement that 'it wouldn't do' to mention that particular fact." As a result, "Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness." Relegated to the category of wild men in the wings, if noticed at all.

An essential mechanism of censorship, in Orwell's view, is a good education. If you've gone to the best schools, you have instilled into you the understanding that there are certain things it wouldn't do to say, or, we may add, even to think. It all

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