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US HISTORY OF IMPERIAL CONQUEST

How Latin America Saved the United States from Itself

“Latin America doesn’t matter,” Richard Nixon once said, “people don’t give one shit” about the place. Not quite. Ever since the very first report from Jamestown settlers to London in 1607 warned of the “devouringe Spaniard,” British colonists and then US elites defined themselves in relation to their Spanish- (and Portuguese-) speaking neighbors to the south.

The following selection of documents, most of which are referenced in the first chapter of Empire’s Workshop, illustrates this preoccupation across the centuries. They start with a diary entry from the Puritan Samuel Sewall, a Salem witch trial judge, hoping that a passing comet would strike Mexico City and spark a “revolution.” “I have long pray’d for Mexico,” he wrote, “that God would open the Mexican fountain” – one of the first examples of the Shock Doctrine in the Americas.

Documents and Resources:

- Opening the Mexican Fountain – A Page from Samuel Sewall’s Diary
The Bombing of Santa Domingo, the Havana, Porto Rico, and Mexico Itself – Samuel Sewall (1704)

The Nineteenth Century – A War For Humanity

- Down Upon Central and South America – An Excerpt from Josiah Strong’s Our Country (1885)
- America’s War For Humanity (1898)

The Twentieth Century – Completing The Revolution

- The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1904)
- Alejandro Alvarez on The Monroe Doctrine (1909)
- Ernest Gruening on Haiti and DR from The Nation (1922)
- Your Americanism and Mine FDR (1933)
- Two Bolivars – George Marshall’s OAS speech (1948)
- Louis Halle’s 1950 Y article on Latin America
- Edward Bernays and the 1954 Guatemala Coup (1954)
- We Must Complete the Revolution JFK (1961)
- John Berger on Che’s Death (1968)
- ITT in Chile 1970-1971
- The National Security Archive Guatemala Page
- Death Comes in a Ford Falcon – Karen Robert

Chapter Two
The Most Important Place in the World

In the 1970s, with the United States reeling from cascading crises – Watergate, Vietnam, dissent and skepticism at home, résistance to its authority abroad, and the longest recession since the Great Depression – the New Right, as illustrated by the following documents, turned to Latin America to regroup. In particular, it used Reagan’s Central American wars to revive militarism and free-market absolutism, infusing that revival with moral righteousness. This fusion — militarism and market absolutism sanctioned by moralism — is, I argue
in *Empire’s Workshop*, not just the foundation of the modern conservative movement but the successor to the New Deal consensus, accepted by US political elites across the spectrum.

Documents and Resources:

- Nixon in Caracas – 1958 ([Video 1](#)) ([Video 2](#))
- Kissinger Blocks Demarche on Assassinations to Condor States
- The Trials of Henry Kissinger ([Part 1](#)) ([Part 2](#))
- Morality in Foreign Policy – 1976 Republican Platform
- Time Magazine on the Linowitz Report (1977)
- The Committee of Santa Fe (1981)
- Jeane Kirkpatrick on The Hobbes Problem
- Who Among Us would Tell These Brave Young Men – Reagan’s 1986 Speech in Support of Contras

**Chapter Three**

**Going Primitive**

A cornerstone of the emerging New Right consensus was a rehabilitation of counterinsurgent warfare, which had become discredited after Vietnam. The primary venue for this rehabilitation was in Central America: 1. El Salvador was the perfect corrective to Vietnam, a chance for counterinsurgents to get their doctrine right; 2. and in Nicaragua, where the US supported the anti-Sandinista “insurgents” – really a bunch of old-regime murderers, torturers, and rapists – militarists had the opportunity to imagine counterinsurgency not just as a defense maneuver but an offensive thrust, to move beyond “containment” and “roll back” socialism in the name of democracy. The road to the Baghdad (and the Bush Doctrine) passed through Nicaragua (and the Reagan Doctrine).

Documents and Resources:

- Genocide is not an Alternative
- A Step Toward the Primitive
Chapter Four
Bringing it All Back Home

Reagan’s Central American policy allowed the first generation of neoconservatives (who went on to play a dominant role in shaping George W. Bush’s post 9/11 diplomacy) a way of circumventing domestic dissent and drive a war forward over majority opposition. This is what the Iran-Contra scandal was about, a notoriously confusing crime that was less a conspiracy than the foreign-policy debut of the New Right, bringing together for the first time in purposeful activity all the major constituencies that continue to dominate US politics: neoconservatives, the Religious Right, free-marketeers, and militarists.

The following documents are divided into two sets: the first provide examples of how Iran-Contra allowed New Right activists opportunities to contain dissent at home, to bypass moderates in the CIA and the State Department, discredit critics in Congress, slander skeptical reporters, and feed disinformation to the general public – in effect to run, via the Office of Public Diplomacy, what a congressional inquiry described as a covert psychological operation on domestic soil.

My favorite illustration of Iran-Contra, which I don’t discuss in the book, is this You Tube clip of Colonel Oliver North silently listening to the sermonizing of Democratic Senator George Mitchell. It perfectly captures the self-assured ascendency of the New Right and the rambling recession of the New Deal, so anxious it can’t stop talking, accepting the basic premise of Reagan’s (and North’s) foreign policy – that the Sandinistas are a threat that the US has the duty and right to respond to – but disagreeing with the procedure. Call it “Ollie
Shrugs.”

The second set indicates how the **fight against Latin American liberation theology** allowed for the ideological fortification and unification of the New Right, bringing together for the first time secular neoconservatives and the conservative religious activists. In other words, progressive Catholic humanism was the first “political religion” that united modern conservative activists, before they turned to Islam. Documents include analysis of liberation theology by influential religious-right theologians and the mission statement of the “mainline” Institute on Democracy and Religion, affiliated with the American Enterprise Institute.

Also included is a column by David Brooks on the 2010 Haitian earthquake as an example of how ideas that today justify extreme global inequality harmonize with the Religious Right’s attacks in the 1980s on liberation theology: compare Brooks’ essay with the section extracted from David Chilton’s *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators*, titled here as “Remoralizing Markets and Controlling Heathens;” Or with Pat Robertson’s remark that Haitians suffered their earthquake because they were “cursed” for a “pact with the devil”. Call this vulgar Weberianism, available in either secular or religious varieties.

Documents and Resources:

- Iran-Contra as Domestic Covert Ops
  - Chronological Event Checklist
  - Iran-Contra’s Untold Story – Public Diplomacy as Covert Op – Peter Kornbluh Robert Parry
  - Make My Day! Michael Rogen on Iran-Contra
  - National Security Archive Public Diplomacy Page
  - Ninety-Day Plan of Office of Public Diplomacy
  - Otto Reich Gets the A-Team (1985)
  - Public Diplomacy Plan for Explaining US Policy
  - Ron Chilcote on How to Teach Iran-Contra

Targeting Grassroots Dissent, Building Grassroots Consent
Even before the Central American wars were brought to a close with the end of the Cold War, Latin America, as the following documents illustrate, became the place where neoliberalism – an extreme version of what would be called Reaganomics – would be put into place, first in Chile and then the rest of Latin America (and eventually most of the world). The “Chile model” entailed not just neoclassical economics but the New Right fusion of defining democracy in terms of individual economic freedom and restoring the power of a militarized executive branch. In putting this model into place, free-market ideologues were as fervent and uncompromising as the left revolutionaries they sought to displace. As Friedrich von Hayek, author of the influential *The Road to Serfdom*, put it in an interview he gave in Chile in 1981, reproduced here, Pinochet’s death-squad dictatorship was necessary to establish a “stable
democracy and liberty, clean of impurities. This is the only way I can justify it – and recommend it.”

Documents and Resources:

- Letter from Margaret Thatcher to Friedrich Hayek (1982)
- Liberty, Clean of Impurities Interview with F Von Hayek Chile 1981
- New International Economic Order
- Reagan in Cancun (1981)
- Hayek Defends Pinochet’s Defensor Pacis

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- Borders.com

DELUSIONAL NATIONAL MYTHS LEADING TO IMPERIAL DREAMS


Lawlessness of US Empire

in Crisis. (With excerpts from “An Essay on Watergate.”) Seven Locks, 1988

Rise of Imperial Presidency


Noam Chomsky, “Anniversaries From ‘Unhistory’”

Op-Ed, NationofChange, Feb. 7, 2012: George Orwell coined the useful term “unperson” for creatures denied personhood because they don’t abide by state doctrine. We may add the term “unhistory” to refer to the fate of unpersons, expunged from history on similar grounds. The unhistory of unpersons is illuminated by the fate of anniversaries. Important ones are usually commemorated, with due solemnity when appropriate: Pearl Harbor, for example. Some are not, and we can learn a lot about ourselves by extricating them from unhistory. READ | DISCUSS | SHARE

http://www.nationofchange.org/anniversaries-unhistory-1328625093

See OMNI’s Newsletter on Torture.
ONE OF THE LEGAL RATIONALIZERS: JOHN YOO

A Bush Justice Dept. attorney who wrote memoranda justifying harsh interrogations of terrorism suspects, and in August 2002 was the principal author of a memorandum sent to the CIA authorizing “waterboarding.”

On May 2, 2012 a federal appeals court dismissed the lawsuit against Yoo by Jose Padilla claiming Yoo was responsible for violating his constitutional rights when Padilla was detained for three years as an “enemy combatant” and tortured: “Immunity Stands in Detainee Suit.” 

Book excerpt: With Liberty and Justice for Some

How Ford's pardon of Nixon launched a new era of elite immunity -- and pervasive, limitless corruption

By Glenn Greenwald

Following is an excerpt from Glenn Greenwald’s new book, With Liberty and Justice for Some: How Law is Used to Destroy Equality and Protect the Powerful; this is from the section of the book examining how the Ford pardon of Nixon entrenched the corrupt precepts of modern elite immunity:

As multiple episodes demonstrate, a belief that elite immunity is both necessary and justified became the prevailing ethos in the nation’s most influential circles. In countless instances over recent years, prominent political and media figures have insisted that serious crimes by the most powerful should be overlooked— either in the name of the common good, or in the name of a warped conception of fairness according to which those with the greatest power are the most entitled to deference and understanding.

This is what makes the contemporary form of American lawlessness new and unprecedented. It is now perfectly common, and perfectly acceptable, to openly advocate elite immunity. And this advocacy has had its intended effect: the United States has become a nation that does not apply the rule of law to its elite class, which is another way of saying that the United States does not apply the rule of law. . . .

If the threat of real punishment for criminality is removed, for many rational people there will be little incentive to abide by the law and much incentive to break it. Alexander Hamilton, in Federalist 15, explained why.

It is essential to the idea of a law, that it be attended with a sanction; or, in other words, a penalty or punishment for disobedience. If there be no penalty annexed to disobedience, the resolutions or commands which pretend to be laws will, in fact, amount to nothing more than advice or recommendation.

For the nation’s most powerful elites, the law has indeed been whittled down to “nothing more than advice or recommendation.” Although there have been episodes of unpunished elite malfeasance
throughout American history, the *explicit*, systematic embrace of the notion that such malfeasance should be shielded from legal consequences begins with the Watergate scandal— one of the clearest cases of widespread, deliberate criminality at the highest level of the U.S. government.

By the scandal’s conclusion, few contested that not only Nixon’s top aides but Nixon himself had committed serious felonies— either in authorizing the break-in and related illegalities, or in obstructing the ensuing investigation. Nonetheless, Nixon was ultimately shielded from all legal consequences thanks to the pardon granted by his handpicked vice president, Gerald Ford— who, it was widely believed, secured his appointment by agreeing to protect Nixon from prosecution.

Ford first explained his decision to pardon Nixon in a speech to the nation on September 8, 1974. The new president began by paying lip service to the rule of law: “I deeply believe in equal justice for all Americans, what ever their station or former station. The law, whether human or divine, is no respecter of persons; but”— and here he tacked on a newly concocted amendment designed to gut that phrase’s meaning—“the law is a respecter of reality.” Ford then proceeded to recite what have by now become the standard clichés our political class uses to justify immunity. Watergate, he intoned, is an American tragedy in which we all have played a part. It could go on and on and on, or someone must write the end to it. I have concluded that only I can do that, and if I can, I must.

The facts, as I see them, are that a former President of the United States, instead of enjoying equal treatment with any other citizen accused of violating the law, would be cruelly and excessively penalized either in preserving the presumption of his innocence or in obtaining a speedy determination of his guilt in order to repay a legal debt to society. During this long period of delay and potential litigation, ugly passions would again be aroused. And our people would again be polarized in their opinions. And the credibility of our free institutions of government would again be challenged at home and abroad.

My conscience tells me clearly and certainly that I cannot prolong the bad dreams that continue to reopen a chapter that is closed. My conscience tells me that only I, as President, have the constitutional power to firmly shut and seal this book. My conscience tells me it is my duty, not merely to proclaim domestic tranquility but to use every means that I have to insure it.

Remarkably, Ford explicitly pointed to Nixon’s lofty status as a reason to exempt him from the accountability applied to ordinary Americans— a complete reversal and rejection of the central covenant of the American founding. Ford’s signature line—“Our long national nightmare is over”—put a heroic spin on the betrayal of the rule of law: we end the “nightmare” of high-level criminality by sweeping it under the rug, protecting the wrongdoers, and pretending their crimes never happened.

Upon Ford’s death in December 2006, prominent figures rushed forth to consecrate his pardon of Nixon as an act of great nobility, magnanimity, and self-sacrifice, and thus to glorify its underlying premises. Leading the charge, not surprisingly, was Dick Cheney, Ford’s former chief of staff and the then-vice president. By 2006, Cheney himself had been accused of involvement in a wide variety of illegal acts, from establishing a worldwide torture regime and spying on Americans without warrants to outing a covert CIA agent and obstructing the resulting investigation.

Cheney’s own interests were thus clearly served by exploiting Ford’s death to bolster the propagandistic notion that elite immunity is dispensed not for the benefit of the powerful but rather in patriotic service of the common good. At Ford’s funeral, Cheney eulogized his former boss by heralding the pardon as an act of national salvation.

In fairness to Dick Cheney, we heard the same message from others, almost note for note. The *Washington Post*’s David Broder— the so-called dean of the Washington press corps— spoke for many
My guess is that there would have been strong public pressure for prosecution of Richard Nixon, since several of his White House associates were already facing criminal charges. A lengthy trial would have been a difficult ordeal for the country, something President Ford wanted to spare Americans.

The actual beneficiary of the pardon, of course, was not “Americans” but Richard Nixon. Thanks to Ford’s act, Nixon himself was shielded from the kind of punishment that, as a “law-and-order” Republican, he had devoted his career to imposing on ordinary Americans when they broke the law, no matter how petty the offense. Yet this grant of immunity to the nation’s most powerful figure was endlessly cast as a generous gift to the American public, which—we were repeatedly told—had been spared the agony, acrimony, and shame of seeing their leader held accountable for his crimes as any other citizen would be.

The Nixon pardon, and the way it was sold to the country, became the template for justifying elite immunity. Nowadays, with only rare exceptions, each time top members of the nation’s political class are caught committing a crime, the same reasons are hauled out to get them off the hook. Prosecuting public officials mires us in a “divisive” past when we should be looking forward. It is wrong to “criminalize policy disputes”—meaning crimes committed with the use of political power. Political elites who commit crimes in carrying out their duties are “well-intentioned” and so do not deserve to be treated as if they were common criminals; moreover, politicians who are forced out of office and have their reputations damaged already “suffer enough.” To prosecute them would only engender a cycle of retribution. Political harmony thus trumps the need to enforce the rule of law.

Of course, all criminal prosecutions are, by definition, exercises in looking to the past rather than the future. All prosecutions impose substantial burdens on the accused, cost enormous amounts of time and money to resolve, and are plagued by numerous imperfections. The nation always faces pressing challenges and urgent problems from which headline-grabbing prosecutions will distract attention. All individuals accused of serious crimes suffer in multiple ways long before—and completely independent of—any actual punishment. And while it is true that criminal proceedings involving politicians who commit crimes in office inevitably engender partisan divisions and undermine political harmony, citing these circumstances as just cause for legal immunity is, by definition, creating a license to break the law.

That dynamic expresses the underlying motive of the political and media classes’ general defense of 

**elite immunity:** by protecting the lawbreaking license for other powerful individuals, they strengthen a custom of which they might avail themselves if they too break the law and get caught. It is class-based, self-interested advocacy. That is why belief in this prerogative and the devotion to protecting it transcend political ideology, partisan affiliation, the supposed wall between political and media figures, and every other pretense of division within elite classes. It is in the interest of every member of the privileged political and financial class, regardless of role or position, to maintain the vitality of this immunity. And what we have seen over the last decade is the inevitable by-product of **elite immunity:** pervasive, limitless elite corruption and criminality. . . .For more on the book, see [here](#). 

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**OBAMA AND DRONES**

*From:* George Monbiot <news@monbiot.com>
*Date:* December 18, 2012 1:10:29 AM CST
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*Subject:* Monbiot.com
Some dead children are mourned; others are dehumanised.

By George Monbiot, published in the Guardian 17th December 2012

“Mere words cannot match the depths of your sorrow, nor can they heal your wounded hearts ... These tragedies must end. And to end them, we must change.”

Every parent can connect with what Barack Obama said about the murder of 20 children in Newtown, Connecticut. There can scarcely be a person on earth with access to the media who is untouched by the grief of the people of that town.

It must follow that what applies to the children murdered there by a deranged young man also applies to the children murdered by a sombre American president. These children are just as important, just as real, just as deserving of the world’s concern. Yet there are no presidential speeches or presidential tears for them; no pictures on the front pages of the world’s newspapers; no interviews with grieving relatives; no minute analysis of what happened and why.

If the victims of Mr Obama’s drone strikes are mentioned by the state at all, they are discussed in terms which suggest that they are less than human. The people who operate the drones, Rolling Stone magazine reports, describe their casualties as “bug splats”, “since viewing the body through a grainy-green video image gives the sense of an insect being crushed.”

Or they are reduced to vegetation: justifying the drone war, Obama’s counterterrorism adviser Bruce Riedel explained that “you’ve got to mow the lawn all the time. The minute you stop mowing, the grass is going to grow back.”

Like Bush’s government in Iraq, Barack Obama’s administration neither documents nor acknowledges the civilian casualties of the CIA’s drone strikes in north-west Pakistan. But a report by the law schools at Stanford and New York universities suggests that during the first three years of his time in office, the 259 strikes for which he is ultimately responsible killed between 297 and 569 civilians, of whom 64 were children. These are figures extracted from credible reports: there may be more which have not been fully documented.

The wider effects on the children of the region have been devastating. Many have been withdrawn from school because of fears that large gatherings of any kind are being targeted. There have been several strikes on schools since George W Bush launched the drone programme that Obama has expanded so enthusiastically: one of Bush’s blunders killed 69 children.

The study reports that children scream in terror when they hear the sound of a drone. A local psychologist says that their fear and the horrors they witness is causing permanent mental scarring. Children wounded in drone attacks told the researchers that they are too traumatised to go back to school and have abandoned hopes of the careers they might have had: their dreams as well as their bodies have been broken.

Obama does not kill children deliberately. But their deaths are an inevitable outcome of the way his drones are deployed. We do not know what emotional effect these deaths might have on him, as neither he nor his officials will discuss the matter: almost everything to do with the CIA’s extrajudicial killings in Pakistan is kept secret. But you get the impression that no one in the administration is losing much sleep over it.

Two days before the murders in Newtown, Obama’s press secretary was asked about women and children being killed by drones. He refused to answer, on the grounds that such matters are “classified”. Instead, he directed the journalist to a speech by John Brennan, Obama’s counterterrorism assistant. Brennan insists that “al-Qaida's killing of innocents, mostly Muslim men, women and children, has badly tarnished its appeal and image in the eyes of Muslims”. He appears unable to see that the drone war has done the same for the United States. To Brennan the people of north-west Pakistan are neither insects nor grass: his targets are a “cancerous tumour”, the rest of society “the tissue around it”. Beware of anyone who describes a human being other than a human being.
Yes, he conceded, there is occasionally a little “collateral damage”, but the US takes “extraordinary care [to] ensure precision and avoid the loss of innocent life.” It will act only if there’s “an actual ongoing threat” to American lives(9). This is cock and bull with bells on.

The “signature strike” doctrine developed under Obama, which has no discernable basis in law, merely looks for patterns(10). A party of unknown men carrying guns (which scarcely distinguishes them from the rest of the male population of north-west Pakistan), or a group of unknown people who look as if they might be plotting something. This is how wedding and funeral parties get wiped out; this is why 40 elders discussing royalties from a chromite mine were blown up in March last year(11). It is one of the reasons why children continue to be killed.

Obama has scarcely mentioned the drone programme and has said nothing about its killing of children. The only statement I can find is a brief and vague response during a videoconference last January(12). The killings have been left to others to justify. In October the Democratic cheerleader Joe Klein claimed on MSNBC that “the bottom line in the end is whose 4 year-old get killed? What we’re doing is limiting the possibility that 4 year-olds here will suffer terror.”(13) As the estimable Glenn Greenwald has pointed out, killing 4 year-olds is what terrorists do(14). It doesn’t prevent more of them, as grief and revenge are often accomplices.

Most of the world’s media, which has rightly commemorated the children of Newtown, either ignores Obama’s murders or accuses those killed are “militants”. The children of north-west Pakistan, it seems, are not like our children. They have no names, no pictures, no flowers and teddy bears. They belong to the other: to the non-human world of bugs and grass and tissue.

“Are we,” Obama asked on Sunday, “prepared to say that such violence visited on our children year after year after year is somehow the price of our freedom?”(15) It’s a valid question. He should apply it to the violence he is visiting on the children of Pakistan.

www.monbiot.com

References:

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/17/obama-speech-newtown-school-shooting


6. International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School and Global Justice Clinic at NYU School


9. John Brennan, as above.
10. International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic at Stanford Law School and Global Justice Clinic at NYU School of Law, September 2012, as above.


15. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/17/obama-speech-newtown-school-shooting

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