What’s at stake: Mindless celebration of the Flag ensures decline of democracy. Flag Day should be a time of rigorous critical thinking about the injuries to our Democracy by empire and illegal wars, expansion of secrecy and surveillance, and domination of elections by money. Asking our troops to risk their lives for imperial aggressions while anti-democratic individuals and groups shrivel liberties at home is the worst of deception and cruelty and can only end in national self-destruction.

OMNI’S NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL DAYS PROJECT.

Half of the Project affirms nonviolent DAYs, such as United Nations Day in Support of Victims of Torture, UN Nuclear Abolition Day, and Human Rights Day. The other half offers alternatives to violent, imperial, commercialized, or self-directed days, as with Peace Forces Day (Armed Forces Day). See end of newsletter for full list.

My blog:
War Department/Peace Department
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:
See end of Newsletter for #3 and #4 Contents.

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Some Good News: President Obama’s Developing Understanding of US “Exceptionalism” (see newsletters)

Andre Damon, USA 2015

The state of American society as 2015 begins

6 January 2015. (The 2 Parties are the Corporate Party? That Party assails the working class? Our troops fought for this in the dozens of invasions and interventions? No distinction between Republicans and Democrats? –Dick)

As the New Year begins, the social crisis gripping tens of millions of working people in the United States is worsening. Hunger, poverty and long-term joblessness remain at the highest levels in decades, while vital social services continue to be slashed.
One would never know this from reading the press, watching the evening news, or listening to the statements of politicians. The official discourse is dominated by the supposed revival of the American economy, characterized by record corporate profits and stock prices. The fact that the great majority of the population finds it increasingly difficult to make ends meet finds no reflection in the media or official politics.

The incoming Republican-dominated Congress, working with the Obama administration, will focus on cutting corporate taxes and business regulations, planning new wars, and expanding the repressive apparatus of the state. No representative of the political establishment, including the supposedly outspoken liberal Elizabeth Warren and the “independent socialist” Bernie Sanders, is proposing any significant measures to address the deepening social crisis.

The constant of domestic policy—enthusiastically pursued by both big-business parties—is an unrelenting assault on the working class.

Critical social programs are being cut further. Last week, funding for a two-year temporary increase in fees paid to doctors who treat Medicaid patients expired, leading to a reduction in payments of up to 43 percent. The fee cut will lead doctors to stop accepting Medicaid patients under conditions where millions more low-income people are being added to the Medicaid rolls as part of Obamacare.

This week, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that another one million people are scheduled to lose food stamp benefits next year as a result of the imposition of a three-month limit on food stamps for childless adults. Federal food stamp funds were cut by billions of dollars on two separate occasions over the past three years.

These regressive and antisocial policies are being reproduced at the state and local level. The city of Detroit, which just exited from the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history after slashing municipal workers’ pensions and health benefits, is notifying the owners of 35,000 occupied homes that they will be foreclosed upon unless they pay back taxes. The threatened foreclosures could affect nearly 100,000 people, or one in seven of the city’s residents.

The announcement comes as the city continues the systematic shutoff of water service to tens of thousands of residents.

The Detroit bankruptcy has served as a model for plundering workers’ benefits and privatizing public facilities for other cities across the US. The mass foreclosure and water shutoff programs will similarly serve as a precedent for purging potentially valuable urban real estate of working-class and poor residents.

These policies will exacerbate the social crisis facing the working class, which has been devastated not only by the 2008 crash, but also by a “recovery” characterized by falling wages and worsening working and living conditions.

Falling wages have contributed to a rise in poverty, which increased from 12.6 percent of the population in 2007 to 14.5 percent in 2013. According to the Census Bureau’s Supplemental
Poverty Measure (SPM), 47 percent of Americans have incomes below 200 percent of the official poverty level, making half of the country either poor or near poor.

According to one study using the SPM as a baseline, “Nearly two-thirds of New York City residents struggled to make ends meet at some point during 2012.”

Nearly one in four US children lives in poverty, the highest level in 20 years. One in five children does not get enough to eat, and the overall rate of food insecurity has grown from 11 percent in 2007 to 16 percent in 2013.

While the official unemployment rate has declined, the share of working-age men who are employed hit its lowest level on record in November 2014. This figure has fallen from 86.7 percent in 1948 to 69 percent today. The share of employees working at temp agencies has climbed during the economic “recovery.” More than 12 million people, or ten percent of the labor force, worked for a temporary employment agency at some point in 2013.

The share of the national income going to the richest 1 percent, and, above all, the top 0.1 and 0.01 percentiles, grows by leaps and bounds. Democracy can be nothing but a hoax in a society characterized by such levels of inequality.

The American political system is not a democracy; it is a plutocracy—a government of, by and for the rich. The financial aristocracy of bankers and financial parasites runs the country by means of the CIA, the military and a thoroughly bribed retinue of politicians from the White House and Congress down to City Hall.

Last week, Bloomberg reported that “three of the country’s wealthiest political contributors each saw their net worth grow in 2014 by more than $3.7 billion, the entire cost of the midterm elections.” This means that it is within the capacity of one person to buy not just a few congressmen or senators, but an entire election. Nothing that in any way challenges the interests of the oligarchy can be broached, much less implemented, within this framework. The “partisan gridlock” that prevails in Congress is largely a form of political theater for the purpose of deceiving the public and obscuring the overriding bipartisan consensus for austerity at home and war abroad.

The growing divergence between the needs and aspirations of the great majority of the population and an increasingly sclerotic political system, expressed in the record low turnout in last year’s election, must ultimately produce revolutionary consequences. There are already signs, such as the wave of protests against police killings, of mass social struggles to come.

They can succeed only if they take the form of an independent political struggle of the working class against both parties of big business and the capitalist system they defend.

Andre Damon
PENTAGON, NFL, PROPAGANDA

The military is buying patriotism: A Memorial Day nightmare about Pentagon budgets — and veterans used as a sideshow.
DAVID MASCIOTRA.
Salon MONDAY, MAY 25, 2015 05:00 AM CDT

This holiday, let's tell the truth: We remember our fallen veterans by not making new ones

HTTP://WWW.SALON.COM/2015/05/25/THE_MILITARY_IS_BUYING_PATRIOTISM_A_MEMORIAL_DAY_NIGHTMARE_ABOUT_PENTAGON_BUDGETS_AND_VETERANS_USED_AS_A_SIDESHOW/

The American empire is dying, and the economy is declining. Dysfunction and disrepair define the sick status and mechanized failure of educational, medical and governmental institutions. One in 10 Americans take antidepressants, unemployment and underemployment soar, poverty blights and obliterates inner cities and rural villages alike, 45 million adults are functionally illiterate, and anyone with all but the lowest lucidity can see clearly that the political system operates as bribery for the highest bidder. Given that the top 1 percent own 40 percent of the wealth, it is likely that the extortionists who purchase political representation all shop at the same clothing store.

In an America suffering from increasing infirmity, anything that allows for denial of reality and comforts delusions of superiority becomes essential and central to the national identity. The United States military, with its garish parades and idolatrous rituals of uniform and flag consecration, functions as the final and fading echo of its country's creed: “We are better than the rest.”

The real religion of America is America, but as the old gods of economic triumph, middle-class stability and cultural achievement begin to die, chances for sacrament become slim. Commentators and Senators were aggrieved to learn that one of America’s favorite ceremonial rites was nothing more than the slick synthesis of public relations and
propaganda.

The New Jersey Star-Ledger reports that from 2011 to 2014, the Department of Defense paid 14 NFL teams a total $5.4 million, while the National Guard paid 11 teams $5.3 million, to “honor America’s heroes” before football games, and during halftime shows. Not every NFL ceremony was part of the pay to play scam, but many of those maudlin, red, white and blue salutes to the soldiers, Marines, airmen and sailors, complete with jet plane fly overs, marching bands and giant banners were no different than the advertisements for Coca-Cola or Viagra.

There is an ironic symbiosis between the NFL and the Department of Defense. Both institutions capture American zeal for grandiose displays of strength, bravado and gladiatorial machismo. They both benefit, however, from an unwillingness on the part of the public to closely examine what transpires beneath the surface of spectacle. A friend of mine once made the dark joke while watching a football game, “I’m just here for the concussions.” The administration of the NFL has tried to deny the connection between gridiron combat and early dementia, but the evidence is overwhelming.

The Pentagon is obstinate in its refusal to deal with the sexual assault epidemic in the military, where some reports suggest one-third of servicewomen are raped, and most of them are too frightened of the consequences to their careers to report the crime. Twenty-one percent of all domestic violence cases are committed by combat veterans. Stacy Bannerman, a leading advocate for the service and protection of military families, has written a bill that would provide military spouses suffering from violence and harassment transition funding to escape their tormentors, and begin new lives. The Pentagon is resistant, and not one Senator has yet to sponsor the bill. Meanwhile, the U.S. government and military establishment has apparently proceeded without shame or hesitation to allocate taxpayer money to the let the world know they are ready for some football, and commercialize the catastrophe of war.

MORE HTTP://WWW.SALON.COM/2015/05/25/THE_MILITARY_IS_BUYING_PATRIOTISM_A_MEMORIAL_DAY_NIGHTMARE_ABOUT_PENTAGON_BUDGETS_AND_VETERANS_USED_AS_A_SIDESHOW/

THE US EMPIRE FOR FREEDOM?

DAVID VINE ON DIEGO GARCIA AND HARMs OF US BASES
First, they tried to shoot the dogs. Next, they tried to poison them with strychnine. When both failed as efficient killing methods, British government agents and U.S. Navy personnel used raw meat to lure the pets into a sealed shed. Locking them inside, they gassed the howling animals with exhaust piped in from U.S. military vehicles. Then, setting coconut husks ablaze, they burned the dogs' carcasses as their owners were left to watch and ponder their own fate.

The truth about the U.S. military base on the British-controlled Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia is often hard to believe. It would be easy enough to confuse the real story with fictional accounts of the island found in the *Transformers* movies, on the television series *24*, and in Internet conspiracy theories about the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370.

Continue Reading...
American military bases encircle the globe. More than two decades after the end of the Cold War, the U.S. still stations its troops at nearly a thousand locations in foreign lands. These bases are usually taken for granted or overlooked entirely, a little-noticed part of the Pentagon's vast operations. But in an eye-opening account, *Base Nation* shows that the worldwide network of bases brings with it a panoply of ills—and actually makes the nation less safe in the long run.

SNOWDEN NEWSLETTER #6, December 4, 2014.

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2014/12/snowden-surveillance-newsletter-6.html

*September 22, 2013*

**Tomgram: Calabrese and Harwood, Privacy Down the Drain**

Click here to read more of this dispatch: [http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175750/tomgram%3A_calabrese_and_harwood%2C_privacy_down_the_drain/#more](http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175750/tomgram%3A_calabrese_and_harwood%2C_privacy_down_the_drain/#more)

In the U.S. these days, privacy is so been-there-done-that. Just this week, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, a secret outfit that hears only the government side of any argument and has generally been a rubberstamp for surveillance requests, declassified an opinion backing the full-scale collection and retention of the phone records (“metadata”) of American citizens. That staggering act was, the judge claimed, in no way in violation of the Fourth Amendment or of American privacy. She also gave us a little peek at corporate courage in our brave new surveillance world, writing that “no holder of records [i.e., telecommunications company] who has received an order to
produce bulk telephony metadata has challenged the legality of such an order.”

That story, like so many others in recent months, arrived thanks to the revelations of Edward Snowden about the ever-widening powers of the National Security Agency (NSA), led by a general who, we now know, lives in a world of intergalactic fantasies of power and control out of Star Trek: The Next Generation and once even worked in an Army intelligence war room created by a Hollywood set designer in the style of that show. As Christopher Calabrese and Matthew Harwood indicate today, however, gigantic as the NSA’s intrusions on privacy might be, they are only part of an uncomfortably large story in which many U.S. agencies and outfits feel free to take possession of our lives in ever more technologically advanced and intrusive ways.

Just this week, in fact, the American Civil Liberties Union (for which both Calabrese and Harwood work) released an important new report on the post-9/11 morphing of the FBI into a “secret domestic intelligence agency.” In addition to the subterranean surveillance of protesters and religious groups, the Washington Post offered this summary list of the ways in which, according to that report, the Bureau has expanded in the twenty-first century: “The changes highlighted in the report include the FBI’s racial and ethnic mapping program, which allows the FBI to collect demographic information to map American communities by race and ethnicity; the use of secret National Security Letters, which asked for account information from telecommunications companies, financial institutions, and credit agencies and required no judicial approval; warrantless wiretapping; and the
recent revelations about the government’s use of Section 215 of the Patriot Act to track all U.S. telephone calls.”

- All of this and, as you’ll see in today’s piece, so much more has been done in the name of American “safety,” the mantra with which Washington has funded and built its new version of a global surveillance state. Tom

- **Destroying the Right to Be Left Alone**
  The NSA Isn’t the Only Government Agency Exploiting Technology to Make Privacy Obsolete
  By Christopher Calabrese and Matthew Harwood

- For at least the last six years, government agents have been exploiting an AT&T database filled with the records of billions of American phone calls from as far back as 1987. The rationale behind this dragnet intrusion, codenamed Hemisphere, is to find suspicious links between people with “burner” phones (prepaid mobile phones easy to buy, use, and quickly dispose of), which are popular with drug dealers. The secret information gleaned from this relationship with the telecommunications giant has been used to convict Americans of various crimes, all without the defendants or the courts having any idea how the feds stumbled upon them in the first place. The program is so secret, so powerful, and so alarming that agents “are instructed to never refer to Hemisphere in any official document,” according to a recently released government PowerPoint slide.

- You’re probably assuming that we’re talking about another blanket National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance program
focused on the communications of innocent Americans, as revealed by the whistleblower Edward Snowden. We could be, but we’re not. We’re talking about a program of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), a domestic law enforcement agency.

While in these last months the NSA has cast a long, dark shadow over American privacy, don’t for a second imagine that it’s the only government agency systematically and often secretly intruding on our lives. In fact, a remarkable traffic jam of local, state, and federal government authorities turn out to be exploiting technology to wriggle into the most intimate crevices of our lives, take notes, use them for their own purposes, or simply file them away for years on end. MORE Tomgram: Calabrese and Harwood, Privacy Down the Drain

THE RICH BUY ELECTIONS

OMNI

CITIZENS UNITED, MCCUTCHEON, CORPORATE PERSONHOOD, CAMPAIGN FINANCE NEWSLETTER


http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2015/02/citizens-united-mccutcheon-corporate.html

CREDO AND FRIENDS OF THE EARTH: OVERTURN CITIZENS UNITED
President Obama Endorses Campaign

CREDO, Tell Congress: Overturn Citizens United

79%  We've reached 118,855 of our goal of 150,000.

Sign the petition

Tell Congress:

"January 21 was the fifth anniversary of the terrible Citizens United Supreme Court decision. Pass a constitutional amendment overturning Citizens United."


You'll receive periodic updates on offers and activism opportunities.

Tell Congress: Overturn Citizens United

The 2014 election – the most expensive midterm in American history – painfully showed just how much damage the flood of political spending unleashed by the Citizens United and McCutcheon Supreme Court decisions has done to our democracy.1

Backed by a geyser of money supplied by ultra-wealthy donors and corporations, radical right-wing extremists swept Senate and House races across the country.

The domination of politics by corporations and the mega-rich is a profound threat to democracy and freedom in the United States, and we have to fight back.

Early this year, CREDO and dozens of allied organizations plan to deliver 5 million petition signatures to Congress calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United – we've hit this ambitious goal, and now we need your help to go even bigger.

Tell Congress: Overturn Citizens United.

An overwhelming majority of Americans oppose the toxic influence of money in politics, and we have enormous momentum in the fight to overturn Citizens United.
Last year, a majority of senators cast a historic vote in favor of a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United. And although the amendment didn't receive the needed 67 votes to pass, we now know who is on record in favor of letting big money buy our elections.2

At the state and local level, we're already winning major victories. Sixteen states and roughly 600 communities have formally demanded that Congress vote to pass a constitutional amendment making it clear that corporations are not people and money is not speech.

It's incredibly difficult to pass a constitutional amendment, and it usually takes decades of grassroots organizing and pressure on elected officials to amend the constitution. This fight will be no exception. I hope you'll add your voice to the millions of other Americans who are speaking out against money in politics.

Tell Congress: Overturn Citizens United.

2. John Nichols, "The Senate Judiciary Committee Just Backed an Amendment to Overturn ‘Citizens United’" The Nation, July 10, 2014

Help us get 5 million signatures to end Citizens United

January 7, 2015

Michelle Chan, Friends of the Earth foe@foe.org via uark.edu

Tell Congress: Overturn Citizens United!

Dear Dick,
I don’t have to tell you how the flood of polluter money in politics has had a devastating impact on our environment. From the failure to regulate dangerous bee-killing pesticides to the massive giveaway of billions of taxpayer dollars to the fossil fuels industry, excessive corporate power has not only poisoned our environment but our democracy as well.

January 21st will mark the 5th anniversary of the case, in which the Supreme Court ruled that corporations had a First Amendment right to spend unlimited amounts of “independent expenditures” in an effort to sway our elections.

We must put an end to this unlimited spending.

Tell Congress: Overturn Citizens United NOW!

Like me, I am sure you have seen the significant impact that this ruling has had in the last few election cycles. For example, last year the Chamber of Commerce spent $31 million to ensure its favorite candidates got into office, helping make the 2014 mid-term elections the most expensive in history.

That’s why more than 3.5 million Americans of all political stripes have signed on to a petition calling for Congress to reverse Citizens United. We hope to get to 5 million, so that we can send a powerful message to Capitol Hill later this month.

Help us reach our goal of 5 million people saying “enough” to unlimited corporate spending in our elections: Take action today!

As you know, this unchecked corporate spending has had huge environmental consequences. For example, if you look at this outgoing Congress, climate change deniers took an average of $346,975 from the fossil fuels industry, while members who do acknowledge climate change took less than a third of that ($96,999).

The evidence is clear: unless we get big money out of politics, we will never have a fair shake at protecting people and the planet.

Add your voice: Tell Congress to overturn Citizens United!

Let’s get money out and voters in!

In solidarity,

Michelle Chan,
Economic policy program director,
Friends of the Earth
Obama’s new patriotism

Greg Jaffe.  June 3, 2015

How Obama has used his presidency to redefine ‘American exceptionalism’

N O  O N E ,  L E A S T  O F  A L L  P R E S I D E N T  O B A M A , had expected the conversation to take the turn that it did.

The president, his speechwriter and a few top aides were supposed to be discussing Obama’s upcoming speech in Selma, Ala., in early March. Instead, they were talking about controversial comments made by former New York City mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani a few days earlier.

“I know this is a horrible thing to say,” Giuliani told a small group of Republican donors, “but I do not believe that the president loves America. . . . He wasn’t brought up the way you were brought up and I was brought up, through love of this country.”
Obama’s Chief Speechwriter Cody Keenan provided early drafts of the President’s address in Selma, complete with Obama’s handwritten notes. Click on the photo above to see parts of these drafts and to read the full transcript of the speech. (Photo by Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

Obama was headed to Selma in a little more than a week for the 50th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday march, in which Alabama state troopers brutally beat protesters demanding the right to vote. Giuliani’s remarks had inadvertently goaded Obama into delivering a speech that would crystallize one of the most provocative ideas of his presidency.

“How do we think about the idea of America?” Obama asked, according to notes taken by his speechwriter. That first question led to others. What made the country that Obama had led, and sometimes criticized, exceptional? Did the president’s race, upbringing and time overseas provide a different view of what it meant to love America?

Today, just about every Republican presidential candidate is condemning Obama for a failure to grasp America’s exceptional nature. They say he’s too quick to criticize the country for its failings at home. When it comes to the exercise of American power overseas, they contend that he’s too cautious, too skeptical and insufficiently convinced of America’s unmatched role as a force for good.

Obama has “demonstrated a disregard for our moral purpose that at times flirted with disdain,” Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) said in a May speech at the Council on Foreign Relations.

The criticism reflects, in part, Obama’s effort in the seventh year of his presidency to articulate a new and radical form of American exceptionalism. While American exceptionalism in recent decades has centered around the exercise of American power and influence in the world, Obama’s conception is more inwardly focused. It’s a patriotism that embraces the darker moments in American history and celebrates the ability of the unsung and the outsiders to challenge the country’s elite and force change. MORE

http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2015/06/03/obama-and-american-
exceptionalism/

The president's patriotism: It's complicated | The Economist

www.economist.com/blogs/.../2015/02/presidents-patriotis... The Economist

Feb 20th 2015, 21:49 by W.W. | CHATTANOOGA ... of America’s founding ideals supplies left-leaning Americans with ample basis for patriotic affection. That said ...

See OMNI’s newsletters on *US exceptionalism*, where you will find an abundance of readings like books by Andrew Bacevich:  


**Contents #3 June 14, 2012**

- OMNI's National Days Project
- Patriotism for Citizens of the World
- Flag Burning
- Nationalism and the Flag
- Patriotism and the Flag

**Contents #4 June 14, 2013**

- Google June 11, 2013: Patriotic or Commercial Expressions
- Dick, President as Cheerleader
- Scahill, *Dirty Wars* Book and Film
Obama, Guantanamo, Torture, and Murder

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/  For a knowledge-based peace, justice, and ecology movement and an informed citizenry as the foundation for change.

END FLAG DAY JUNE 14 LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL DAY NEWSLETTER

--
Dick Bennett

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