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# The People Vs. The United States

an explanation of the invisible war that surrounds  
us

The Conspiracy to Incite a Riot

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chains that confine you but also keep you safe, dangling above the abyss that the system has dug out of our lives.

To choose your own side in the social war is to jump into that abyss. But this is the only chance we have at living.

And as soon as you take the plunge, you will find there are others who have your back, others who will fight alongside you. For the first time, you will know what it means not to be alone.

Until then, keep your eyes open. Don't believe the lies they tell about us. You may think that by fighting back, we are being irresponsible, but know that we are not the empty-headed whiners, not the self-absorbed brats they may portray us as. We know very well the consequences of our actions, and each of us face down the possibility of death or life imprisonment every day. We all have friends who have been tortured or killed in this fight. We continue to fight, because we are in love with all the possible worlds that are not allowed to bloom.

You may think we are the ideological, cold-blooded monsters they say we are, but hear how loudly the blood rushes through our hearts. If we can wish death on politicians, cops, and CEOs, it is only because we cannot ignore the feeling of rage for all the ways they have brutalized us and our world. Calculating people would not enter this fight, because we have so little hope of winning. The cold, calculating ones are those who become politicians. We continue fighting, because we hate all authority, and love freedom, which cannot be given, but must be taken.

— the conspiracy to incite a riot  
July 2010

government is afraid of us. Because we will never be powerless. We have the power, the responsibility, to fight back. The war waged against all of society can become a social war as we join together to fight against those who have stolen our lives, broken up our communities, poisoned our world. By declaring war, society, community, humanity, can rise from its grave. Because for too long, we have been fleeing the catastrophe of our original defeat, through the wreckage of generations piling high enough to block out the sun; exiled into a future grown nightmarish with the lack of possibility.

A state of affairs that pretends to be something complete, a perfected civilization, which we can only sit back and accept, actually demands that we make a choice: fight against it, or surrender to it.

Many people are already fighting, all over the world. We are fighting in whatever ways are available to us. Destroying the system bit by bit, whether by burning a bank or sabotaging an oil pipeline. Overcoming the alienation that constitutes our invisible prison bars, by taking to the streets in protest or talking with our fellow workers and organizing a collective force against the power of the bosses. Deserting and disobeying all the rules written against us, by squatting and stealing for our survival, refusing military service, rejecting the roles we're assigned, as good mother, good student, good citizen. Rewriting the usual endings, by supporting prisoners rather than letting them disappear in isolation, by beating up rapists and homophobes rather than suffering their violence, by creating forms of love that only strengthen us rather than containing and limiting us. Taking control over our surroundings, by painting graffiti on the walls or occupying space and planting gardens. By arming ourselves with the ability to create a new world and destroy the one that has been imposed on us.

We don't expect you'll join us, not right away, because to be honest about your place in the world and take action means to declare war against your life support system, to attack the

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because in their heart they know they have surrendered, and because—maybe, just maybe—they never really hated the system. Among people who have not been bought, who did not take the pills they were offered, because they preferred to struggle with their feeling of pathologized anxiety than to live in the dead zone. People who don't pretend to be struggling when it is obvious that what they are doing is turning a battlefield into a garden. I want to be in a place where the war is admissible.”  
— Anonymous Spanish poet

## **The Social War ...is what we call the reality we were born into.**

Its existence is the greatest kept secret of our civilization. Naming it is the first act of rebellion, the first step towards claiming control over our own lives.

We thought it was a one-sided war, waged by Authority, against us. We thought we had no hope but to ignore it, to turn this battlefield into a garden. We hoped it would pass us by. But it's only encircling us, tighter and tighter, watching our every move while offering us a million more ways to buy into the system, to participate in our own domination.

And most do participate, first of all by shying away from admitting the war. They'll talk about change, about politics, about reform, about corruption, but they will never talk about war unless they mean something happening far away. Because to admit the existence of the war waged against us is to admit that we are combatants, and if we see that we are not fighting back, then we would have to admit that we have surrendered. That we have already been defeated.

But just because we're not free does not mean we are powerless. In fact, all this surveillance sends an obvious message: the

It's the people vs. the United States.

The State is just a protection racket. Millions more people are killed every year by radiation from the nuclear/ defense industry, lack of healthcare, bullshit wars, police violence, toxic dumping, and workplace "accidents" or occupational diseases than have ever been killed in terrorist attacks, and we only became a target for those attacks because of the international policies of our government.

Terrorism is nothing but a TV reality show, a fancy bit of theater, to hide these facts. It's a way to distract you from your real enemies.

So the celebrity terrorists get all the attention. They are people who are as ruthless as politicians, but they have no state to command. If they were generals, they would get medals for bold strategies.

But who are the real terrorists, the tens of thousands of people under surveillance, on government lists? We are the terrorists. And we want you to know us. We are your neighbors and children. We are those who refuse to play by rules we know are stacked against us. We are those who will not become snitches. We are those who fight back against police violence. We are those who speak out against totalitarianism. We are those who defend our countries against occupying armies. We are those who would set fire to a bulldozer or a new luxury home rather than let a forest be cut down. Those who would rather hear the sound of shattering glass than a politician's speech.

The real terrorists are those who care.

And the greatest crime is to sympathize with us. The greatest patriotism is to pretend we are monsters.

"I want to live among people who are conscious that we live in a war. A war against life, against the spirit. I want to live among people who don't look down at their feet, or won't look you in the eyes when you speak of struggle or insurrection,

"I had to do something." — Marinus Van der Lubbe, who acted alone to burn down the Nazi parliament in 1933. He was denounced by both the Nazis and the Communists, the authorities and the opposition, as an insane, dangerous homosexual.

## **Something is Wrong ...and the signs of it are everywhere.**

Somebody flies a plane into an IRS tax office in Texas, and millions of people around the country cheer, while the media speak of a "senseless attack."

In a black neighborhood in the slums of Hartford, someone opens fire on a SWAT team that has busted down their door, and people in the gathered crowd of neighbors whisper, "If only they had killed one of them pigs." The media say nothing.

Women around the country pass around a book that has gotten terrible reviews, about a wife who kills her abusive husband.

A depressed youth goes into a shopping mall and opens fire, convinced he is in The Matrix and is desperate to get out. A psychologist assures the public he was psychotic, but tens of thousands of losers, rejects, and depressives from coast to coast nod silently; they understand him perfectly.

Millions of people drive to the theaters to see Avatar, to dream of a world that can still be saved, and their hearts leap when the forest fights back against the machines, when the wild animals stomp the Marines to death. Film critics talk about "captivating special effects."

As a greenwashed oil company destroys the Gulf of Mexico with a predictable accident resulting from efficient business practices, the entire population is sedated, in their individual cages of helpless depression, by assurances that oil spills of this magnitude happen every few years, that in fact this act of mur-

der and contempt for our world is normal. We are saved by our numbness. This might not be the end of the world. It could keep going on like this forever.

After police in Seattle are caught viciously beating a 15 year-old girl, a law student takes up arms, firebombs four cop cars, and ambushes a police patrol, killing one officer. The local progressive newspaper erases all the comments from their blog that call the man a hero, leaving only the ones that say he should be sent to the electric chair.

All of these things can be explained away. There are hundreds of thousands of people in this country who are paid to explain these daily catastrophes—reporters, sociologists, psychiatrists, police spokespersons, trend analysts, public relations hacks. Shooting back at the cops or attacking federal buildings is not an appropriate response to police violence or governmental abusiveness, because we live in a civilized society in which we debate the problem, propose solutions, and participate in the political process.

But we've been talking about these problems for decades, on their terms, following the rules of the politicians, the judges, the economists, the bankers, and the problems are only getting worse. We've submitted so many petitions, so many reports, environmental impact statements, grievance forms, held so many peaceful protests.

This time, we are not entering into the same old arguments. The acts of violent resistance against the system are facts. They are happening every day. They will not be argued away.

Our economy devotes more resources to entertaining us, to making us feel happy, than any other economy in history, yet millions of us feel more empty and desperate than ever before. This is a fact. And increasingly, many are rejecting the official reasons, and the Prozac and miracle diets that come with them.

This time, we are not going to bring out our set of statistics and argue about who is right. These illegal and angry re-

ting to open fire in a shopping mall or blow up Mount Rushmore, and they would use their paid informants to corroborate the story. Threatened with life imprisonment, the accused would be pressured to plead guilty to lesser charges.

Why all this attention? The main military theorist of Fourth Generation Warfare describes immigrants as an invading army. All those who do not identify with their oppressors are a security threat.

In 2001 and 2002, the FBI said the greatest domestic terrorism threat was a loose group of environmental activists who used property destruction and politically motivated arson, but had never harmed anyone.

The biggest domestic anti-terror investigation in the US in 2003 was against an animal rights group. The animal rights group operated a website with information about protests and sabotage directed against a company that tortured and killed animals. A couple years earlier, this had been legal. The government just changed the law. Terrorism.

In 2008, anarchists around the country organized major protests against the conventions of both political parties. The government decided that anarchists should now be treated as terrorists. There is a long tradition of anarchists in this country, going back to Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons, and Henry David Thoreau, but no one remembers that anymore, because the government schools and capitalist media just don't talk about it. Eight of the most active anarchists organizing protests against the Republicans were arrested and charged with terrorism.

The War on Terror is the new excuse for the military to spy on anti-war groups. They're only doing their job, which is to protect US interests, and war is good business. "US interests" justify spying on us, cutting our wages, moving the factories overseas, making money for the super wealthy by exploiting people and destroying the environment. US interests are contrary to our interests.

sabotaged the colonial economy, while refusing to come to the negotiating table and seek some compromise.

When the US government speaks of terrorism, they do not refer to the million Iraqis killed by the bombing and sanctions after the first Gulf War. They do not refer to the thousands of Palestinians killed by Israeli drones and armored bulldozers, paid for by the US, or the system of militarized checkpoints that have turned Palestine into the world's largest open air prison. They do not refer to their support for military dictatorships in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Indonesia.

They pretend that something began in September, 2001. They pretended to be surprised.

The night the Twin Towers fell, President Bush said in a National Security Council meeting, "This is an opportunity. We have to look at this as an opportunity." In the opportunistic wars that followed, Al Qaeda was not the target; in fact it only grew larger. The Pentagon itself admitted to bolstering the importance of Al Qaeda in Iraq, as part of its counterinsurgency strategy. Because every government needs its terrorists.

On the home front, the War on Terror meant more police powers, more surveillance, tighter borders, greater persecution of anyone who didn't wave the flag, who didn't fit in.

Since 2001, nearly every Muslim and Arab or South Asian immigrant in the country has been interviewed by the FBI, and everyone else looked the other way. Countless people were arrested or deported, though in nearly every case it was for minor infractions or outright fabrications. What the FBI was looking for was not terrorist plots, but loyalty. They pressured thousands to become paid informants, and it was those who refused, those who were politically active, those who organized charity or maintained their cultural ties with the countries they came from, who were most likely to be framed as terrorists.

Again and again, it happened like this: the FBI would make an arrest, inviting the media and creating a huge spectacle. They would "leak" the information that the accused was plot-

actions to the system could be as wrong as possible, and still they would keep on happening.

Our existence is a fact. This time, we will not try to justify ourselves, but to explain why we exist, to illuminate the lines of a civil war that may be approaching. As much as the media want us to believe otherwise, lines of this civil war do not run between red states and blue states, but between above and below, between the governors and the governed.

Up until now we have been slandered and dismissed as the terrorists, the crazies, the criminals, the confused. We want you to know who we really are, why we exist, so that when the time comes, you can choose sides.

"The minority of the opulent [the wealthy minority] must be protected from the majority." — James Madison, Father of the Constitution.

## **Democracy Hides a War ...a war against all of us.**

How can we make sense of a system that asks us to vote for our leaders, and then puts surveillance cameras on street corners to watch our movements, uses cell phones to track us, scans all our emails and phone conversations?

The common sense answer fed to us by the media is that the system is trying to protect us. We are constantly threatened by criminals and terrorists, and the most basic purpose of government is to keep us safe. But the FBI is staking out shopping malls, asking frightened mothers to submit their children's fingerprints and DNA to add to the database, just in case. NSA super computers are reading everyone's emails and listening to everyone's phone calls. It is apparent that the government sees all of us as the potential criminal, the potential terrorist. They are treating us increasingly like the civilian population

during the war in Vietnam: as the breeding ground for the subversives. In the eyes of the government, we are the enemy. Military advisers explaining “fourth generation warfare” confirm this fact:

“the distinction between war and peace will be blurred to the vanishing point. It will be nonlinear, possibly to the point of having no definable battlefields or fronts. The distinction between ‘civilian’ and ‘military’ may disappear. Targets may be more in the civilian than the military sector.”

The fact that today’s enemies are not opponent states but populations means that the military has to restructure itself to engage in greater surveillance and constant warfare. Victory is no longer won on a battlefield, but politically and morally.

The democracy that the US military is installing in Iraq teaches us something very important about democracy. A major goal of the invasion was to restructure Iraqi society, to create a foundation of rules that affect the operation of the free market, foreign investments, production, intellectual property, and so on. This policy objective has not changed, even as power in Iraq shifts from Pentagon directives to political parties and election campaigns. This shows that democracy is not an instrument that allows people to change the foundations of their society. Or, as a US Supreme Court Justice said almost 200 years ago, “Conquest gives a title the Courts of the conqueror cannot deny.” He was referring to the lands stolen from the Native Americans, and how Native Americans cannot use the law to win their lands back. “[Conquest] becomes the law of the land and cannot be questioned.” The same applies to the unpaid labor of African slaves, the poorly paid labor of European immigrants, or the restructuring of Iraqi society. These too “cannot be questioned.”

universities. Now they’re designing bombs or biological weapons systems for the military. Now they’re lawyers and public relations specialists for oil companies. Now they’ve got kids of their own.

In this psychotic world, the well adjusted ones are the most frightening of all.

“People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people.” —  
V, terrorist/freedom fighter

## **The War on Terror ...made you look the other way.**

It is a sleight of hand. A clever magic trick.

If we were allowed to define that word, “terrorists” would be those who set off bombs in crowds of random people. But governments do this all the time, and it’s called warfare. Only the government has the right to define terrorism, because terrorism is a tool for governments. The media make celebrities out of terrorists, because they are useful. They generate fear. They make us cry out for the government to protect us, and the government responds with more surveillance, more restrictions.

In the African colonies, “civilization” meant cutting people’s hands off if they did not deliver their quota of gold and diamonds. It meant forced conversion to Christianity. It meant kicking people off their land, ending traditional agriculture that allowed communities to feed themselves without destroying the environment, and imposing cash crop production to grow coffee, tropical fruits, chocolate, and flowers for Europe. It meant massacring those who resisted, shooting them from airplanes, gassing them.

When the British first spoke of terrorism in Kenya, they referred to those who attacked colonizers, killed soldiers, and



opt out of, the echo off the street of police sirens and gunshots in the night. The eldest child will never escape this noise. Targeted and profiled, he'll just replace it with the howls and cat-calls, the jangle of keys, the muffled thump and cries of fights, that echo down the corridor outside his jail cell. The youngest will do everything—study hard, apply for grants, endure insults without getting strong and getting even, work any shit job that would look good on a resumé, choose prescription painkillers and sedatives over illegal drugs—to be able to move out of here and have just one night of silence, a year of nights of silence, a lifetime of nights of silence.

In the last house lives the perfect family. Sometimes they watch movies together, but just as often they go canoeing. They never yell; arguments always remain civilized. They eat dinner together, and take turns cooking and doing dishes. The meal is always a healthy one, but they're not above indulging in a sinful dessert. The children play sports, do their homework, and get top grades. The parents are advancing in their careers, but they still have time to take tango lessons to keep those romantic fires burning. Each evening, they talk about how their days were.

They have banished the silence with a practiced perfection. But they can only do this by staying on top. They are trapped in a play, and their happiness is based on following the rules and winning the game, on living the myth and making it work for them. But we know how cruel this game can be, how suddenly the rules can change. We have seen these families tear each other to shreds when a parent gets laid off, when a child is born with a disability or comes out as queer. We have seen those who grew up in such families fall to pieces when they go off to college and lose that heavy-handed parental guidance.

And we have also seen these families continue to win the game, and become the most perfect of monsters. Kids we played with on the playground, who had big hearts once, gone on to be valedictorians, magna cum laude at prestigious

Another interesting thing about democratization in Iraq is that from the beginning it has been part of a plan to defeat the Iraqi resistance. Installing democracy equals stealing support from the insurgents. A successful insurrection would allow the Iraqis to question the law of the land, to change the foundations of their society, to deny the title of conquest. By accepting democracy, they give up this possibility. What do they get in return? The leaders of various demographics would get a piece of the pie. They would get to enter into the government, exchanging the power to determine their lives for privilege, benefits, influence in the system. All they have to do is control their followers. Thus, democracy defeats the insurrection by dividing it, a nation into distinct demographics with competing interests, and each demographic into leaders and followers, representatives and voters. Democracy creates foxes to rule the henhouse.

Democratic rights, the privilege of voting for politicians, don't seem to conflict at all with a steady increase in State power, with an increasing militarization of police and a frightening use of new technologies to spy on all of us. Democracy is becoming ever more Orwellian. Just recently, the US government gave even more money to Israel, this time to develop brain scanners that could essentially read people's minds, measuring their biological reactions to seeing images of terrorists or disorders on a TV screen to see whether they were frightened or sympathetic. In other words, people walking through public space are already being bombarded by the old-fashioned form of mind control, television, and now the government will be able to remotely scan their brainwaves to make sure they are responding the way they are supposed to—by sympathizing with the authorities and being afraid of those of us who are at war with the system. Those guilty of thoughtcrime will be singled out for greater surveillance. Once tested in Israel, the device would be brought to the US,

just as the US imported sound guns that can deafen an entire crowd to control protestors in Pittsburgh.

Warfare is so compatible with the present system, the US government is able to wage two major wars simultaneously without any major disruptions. If the news media stopped talking about Iraq and Afghanistan one day, everyone would forget about these wars except for those who have family members overseas. World War II was a major interruption to society, as the entire population had to be mobilized to support the war efforts. The two simultaneous wars today are hardly noticeable: we were already mobilized to support warfare when they began. If this process is so invisible, what other wars might be escaping our notice?

The US government devotes as much money to surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as to a war overseas. Does this machinery of social control constitute a war on the homefront? And if the media are constantly talking about every new case of police violence or torture within prison walls as isolated incidents, would we be able to connect the dots and understand that the problem is systemic, that there's a war going on?

NATO, which was supposed to protect us from the Soviet Union but which has only been growing since the end of the Cold War, has agreed that all member states (including, of course, the US), should regularize the domestic use of the military by 2020, for disaster response, emergency management, and crowd control. The "state of exception" is giving way to democracy as permanent occupation. In Chicago, some politicians are talking about bringing the National Guard into the streets this summer. They talk about protecting the citizens from crime, but in reality it's an experiment. To see if we submit to being occupied.

The United States was founded on genocide, on stolen land. Democracy doesn't change the fact that the present system has to preserve the original crime, regardless of the results of any elections. For surviving Native peoples, participating in

The 16-year-old across the street despises love. Her parents have taught her well what people do to those they love. She only fantasizes about disappearing.

The boy in the next house still has fantasies without limit. He has cast himself in a story; he is a wanderer from some place far off emerging out of a dreamscape from the night before. He notices the colors outside of a changing season, the way the setting sun tells direction, he escapes again and again into his imagination. He has drawn a blue line on the walls of the room, the horizon of a sea without a map. His parents punish him by taking the crayons away and putting him in front of the television. Its murmur and its glow disrupt his dreaming leaving him with a calm, gaping-mouthed concentration.

In the new subdivision a television blares. Husband and wife sit on a couch, watching a sitcom. Right next to each other, but they might as well be alone. Upstairs, in his room, one child plays video games. In the next room, another child listens to her iPod and sends text messages to a friend who lives on the next block.

They have nothing to say to each other. They only know how to be spoken to. They are desperate for the loud devices that drown out the silence, and that electronic noise is the only thing really at home here; the people are all strangers. For them, family is a conspiracy of deception, a temporary resting ground from their lives, dominated by the institutions of school or work, lives they are simply passing through as though it were the scenery outside a car window. They provide one another company to ignore that they are totally alone.

In the tiny apartment on the other side of town, the minutes are weighted down with noise—yelling and crying, the beatings of frustration or love or good parenting – preparation for the real world, boasting and joking, tough laughter, moans of pleasure, hysteric shrieks on a rare day of good fortune, the bustle of movement between two different full time jobs and the seething anger against a debt one never had the chance to

without complications or demands. The only demand is that everyone play their part in this tragic comedy. Unsure why, they participate simply because it is an age-old practice; no one is listening, but the motions are familiar.

The people in the house with the well kept lawn are on the phone with the police. Grandfather has run away again. He has lost his memory and is trying to get back to the place where he spent his youth, where the residue of childhood lingers, back when he believed magic was real. His mind is drying up, leaving him only the scent of water and the mirage of a distant oasis. Grandfather is walking down the railroad tracks, sure they lead to Montana. He knows every house is a prison when he can't remember what has gone missing, what the air once held for him.

An old woman will die in her chair with FOX News blaring—from the TV in the bedroom and the one in the den. Her partner is dead, but she still hides all her old love letters in a box with her smothered desire. She goes on sitting on the edge of her chair thinking one day she will come back to life from emotional deadness.

The roommates in the apartment on the next block overcome the silence with sedation. Without a beer in their hands or joint at their lips, they don't know how to share the long hours between classes. Their drugs of choice don't even offer an excuse for wildness.

Their neighbor wakes up every morning to the shrill call of the alarm. He rises easily, drinking his coffee, preparing for the daily slavery. When the time comes he goes to work willingly, without the threat of the whip. The new master is money. It has bought his obedience, and he in turn can buy anything else. Yes, even love. His sex doll is the perfect woman—doesn't speak, not even when spoken to. He says he wants to be buried in her arms.

the democratic system means submitting to the conquest. For the descendants of African slaves, participating in democracy means agreeing to the rules of the system that kidnapped them. For people of European ancestry, following the rules means submitting to a system that colonized them so long ago even the memory of it has been lost. There's a reason why so many Europeans didn't have land or money or freedom and could be tricked by the myth of an empty continent, just waiting for colonization. That reason went across the ocean with them. It built the new marbled monuments, modeled on the Greek slave-democracy and the Roman Empire.

We're fooled into thinking we're all the same, or alternately that we're divided by our allegiance to the rightwing or the leftwing, or divided by our skin color, when the real force that divides us is that which exploits, which alienates, which imprisons, all to defend the 1% who own everything.

The most important question of democracy, the question the media never ask, has to do with minorities. How is it that this top 1%, who have so little in common with the rest of us, who never have to work, who own all the social wealth that all of us have created and that all of us rely on for survival, who own the institutions that educate and inform us, always end up in the majority every time it comes down to a vote?

The answer is simple: if the elite can determine what questions are asked, the answers are irrelevant. After a protest in which police and demonstrators clash, the media, encouraging free speech, pose a poll: did the police do their job well? There is no way to answer this question that communicates total opposition to the police themselves. One can only pat them on the back, or demand they receive better training.

The elite will never ask a question whose possible answers do not reaffirm their power.

“If work wereso pleasant, the rich would keepit for themselves.” — Mark Twain

## Property is Theft ...work is blackmail.

And they know it. The masters of this society know that the current social order, in which they wield power, is imposed by maintaining a conspiracy of hypocrisy. Millionaire radio jockeys presume to teach us the value of hard work, and we stay in line filling out applications for McDonalds or Target.

The history of the economy is the history of theft. Look at the piece of land you're standing on. It used to be worked by people who knew how to provide for themselves and their communities without destroying the environment. The possibility of dignified life and work was killed by the companies that organized colonizing armies and brought over labor gangs of indebted European immigrants or kidnapped African slaves.

In both cases, we see the pattern of forced dependence. People who are actually working in a dignified way, which is to say, for themselves, for their communities, at their own pace, are prevented from doing so through organized violence. Land that had belonged to everyone is divided up and usurped by the elite, the forebears of many of those who are still wealthy today. African communities that are self-sufficient are invaded and destroyed. Later, China is brought into the global economy by addicting its population to opium.

Even after colonization, labor was little more than a tax. Give up a certain amount, more if you were black and less if you were white, and keep the rest to feed yourself.

You could still see the product of your labor, and nourish yourself with it.

But then something happened. Slavery gradually ended—not in a sudden moment of liberation, as the history books tell it, but through decades of sharecropping and chain gangs (and the chain gangs still haven't ended). But no one was liberated. Rather, black and white were transformed into machines.

Where's the use in outright slavery when the bank can own your house, the boss can own your time, the credit card com-

ago, interconnected families were broken up into nuclear units: a factory worker, the future factory workers, and a wife and mother to take care of them all. She is less a caretaker and more a mechanic, for our bodies have become machines. In a consumer economy, even this shadow of the family has become obsolete, and nothing remains but a range of survival strategies in a desert of misery. We can talk about residing, surviving, passing through, but not about life. We are sure no one has ever *lived* here.

Walking any given street in any given city, the scene is familiar: one might assume all the life has been swept away by a great broom and quarantined in the individual houses. But there is no life in these houses. And the silence is obvious: it is not so much heard as felt.

Don't hurry by like you're supposed to. Stop with us for a moment to look in these windows. There, the house with the red shutters. A thirty-something putting dishes in the dishwasher, waiting for his television show to come on. He still lives with his parents; they've had years of practice avoiding each other. They no longer bother with familiar greetings and, instead, acknowledge only their shared indifference. His parents dedicated forty years of their lives to a mortgage, to his education, to a comfort that numbed the flesh and hid behind the appearance of happiness. It has hollowed them out. He has inherited their emptiness, their denial of full existence. They forgot how to imagine full lives and started, instead, to imagine long lives. Their dreams turned to anchors in failure's deep river.

Next door they raise their glasses; a toast to damp out the burning in their chests, that last reminder of life. How nice it is to sit around the same table again, they say, but in reality they are miles apart. Years of stock answers and false questions stand between them. The family teaches self-sacrifice. They have thrown their possible selves on the fire for the convenience of sitting in the company of predicatable characters

sands of people every year in this country, through easily preventable work accidents, occupational diseases, the release of poison into the air and water, especially in poor areas, and we are taught to fear those weaker than us, and cling closer to our leaders for protection.

The good citizen doesn't notice anything suspicious when politicians and CEOs take credit for "creating jobs" and blame immigrants for "stealing jobs."

The good citizen may complain when the banks steal millions, but she will agree that it is terrorism if someone burns the bank down, and she will be afraid of the person who robs a bank.

The good citizen goes to war for the ambitions of politicians and the profits of corporations.

The good citizen forgets where he came from.

The good citizen identifies with her owners. The good citizen follows the rules that are stacked against him.

The good citizen has nothing to hide, and is willing to be strip-searched to prove it.

The good citizen is a snitch, a follower, a sell-out. She will betray those who rebel. Most of all, she betrays herself, because the system she protects offers nothing to inspire loyalty other than lies.

"How the hell can a person go to work in the morning, come home in the evening and have nothing to say?" — John Prine, "Angel from Montgomery"

## **What We Come Home To ...is a silence there's no escaping.**

Conservatives talk on TV about radicals wanting to destroy the family, but those who can actually look the present situation in the face must admit the family is long since dead. Decades

pany or collection agency contracted by the university or the hospital can own your future, fashion companies can own your insecurities, Hollywood producers can own your heart, and the newspapers can own your mind? Each tiny little person today represents a colossal celebration: the unification of the entire owning class. They all own a piece of you, and what you think of as your life is little more than you scrambling around to appease their needs.

The factory system makes workers a part of the process. The rhythm of their life is made to shape the needs of the machine. The service sector jobs of today go even further, making demands of our very moods. No longer do we owe our bosses merely a certain amount of product, or even a certain amount of time, but a measured quantity of enthusiasm. Service with a smile.

We can't imagine a more intimate form of violence. We're not even allowed to be depressed by our total lack of power over our own lives. Already by the age of 5, the sullen and the impatient ones are screened out for Prozac and Ritalin. All of the kids diagnosed with disorders are suddenly "cured" when they are allowed to organize their own lives, or determine their own rhythms. But once the needs of the economy send them back to work, back to school, suddenly they relapse and have to go back on the pills.

The disorder is the society that sends bodies through a meat grinder, that demands we become interchangeable parts. The blackmail is the society that demands from us everything—not just our time and our obedience and our energies but also our friendliness and good faith—and gives us nothing in return but the means to participate in it more fully, on its own terms, spending our meager wages on the right wardrobe, the right diet, the right music collection. In fact, this careful assemblage of mass-produced goods is the only legal way we have to express our individuality.

At the base, those who extol the virtues of work are the same old blackmailers: work for us, or starve in the gutters. But once we began negotiating with these terrorists who call themselves leaders, they only started making more demands of us. The terms of the contract are getting more and more detailed, and we are increasingly powerless to back out.

It is exactly what the system gives us in order to survive that makes living impossible. The lunatic who goes into work with a semi-automatic rifle and kills eleven coworkers before blowing out his own brains makes perfect sense to us. His coworkers are just replicates of himself, and killing himself only once couldn't possibly make up for the insults he has endured.

That other common figure, the mother who drives her babies into a lake, is even more lucid. After all, what could be more disgusting, in this society, than the future?

“Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals [...] The true war is a celebration of markets.” —Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

## **The Good Citizen ...is trained at betrayal.**

When a cop is shot we are surrounded with images of grief—people with hands over their hearts, shedding tears for the departed social servant—paired with reassurance: “he was a good citizen, a family man.” The media display images of good citizens with a newfound urgency. Nothing is ever articulated in the media about the growing antipolice sentiment or the violence committed by the police every day, only a brief description: lone domestic terrorist.

The media use images in lieu of dialogue all the time, and by avoiding words these images can speak without being challenged. They create a virtual reality that is more convincing

than our lived reality because it is broader, more exciting, more authoritative, more multitudinous than our narrow, routine, depopulated little lives.

In this montage, the good citizen is seldom described, but a definition can be found in the image of its opposite: the terrorist. The national unity, which is a dominant message of the media's virtual reality, can only be opposed by fearful images that are presented as though they are irrational and impossible to understand. Thus, the good citizen is presented as both rational and sympathetic because unlike the terrorist, she does not pose a threat. The mobilization of monstrosity always involves the normalizing of power as well. The good citizen, the heterosexual patriot, is created in a narrative designed to aid the goal of the US government as a provider of security.

In other words, the good citizen collaborates with authority, she reports suspicious activity, she follows the rules and works hard, to make it easier for the government to protect her from shadowy threats that she cannot, must not, understand.

Those who threaten, be they terrorists or cop-killers, are always described as cowards in the media. The good citizen, on the other hand, is portrayed with his chest puffed bravely out. He refuses to be intimidated, which in practice means he cowers obediently behind a government that will protect him from a threat he is not allowed to know. His power, his strength, flows only from his blind identification with the powerful, always against the underdog.

*But who benefits from this proclamation of power? We know that equality before the law is a myth constructed by the powerful in order to disguise the inequality to which these laws apply. As Anatole France said, “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”*

In the eyes of the powerful we are a domestication project. What better way to prove that we are well trained than to make us bow down to absurdity? Our bosses kill hundreds of thou-