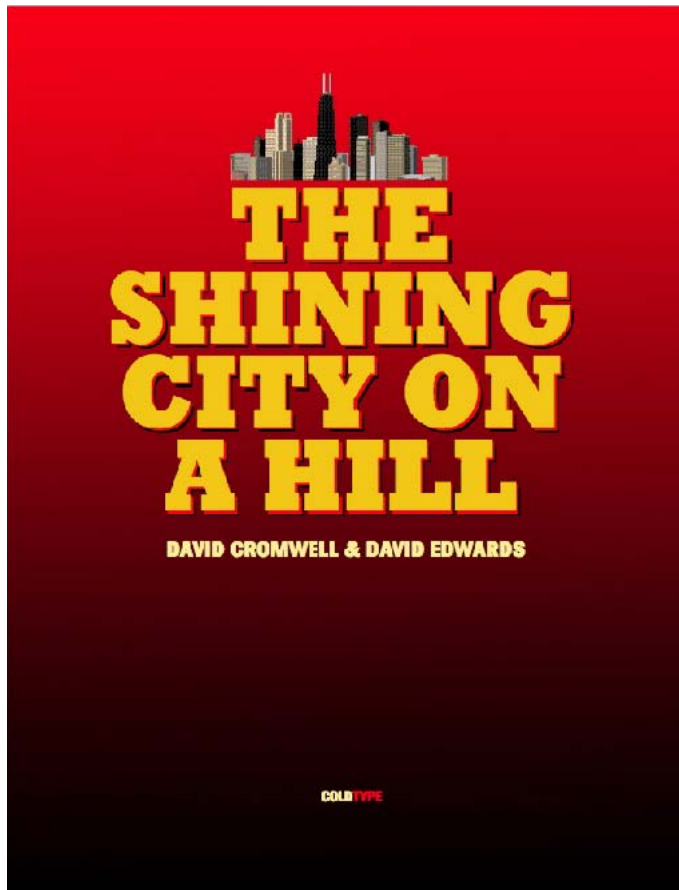




THE SHINING CITY ON A HILL

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COLDTYPE



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PART 1

The BBC's Justin Webb on 'Anti-Americanism'

“THE shining city upon a hill” was how John Winthrop, one of the early Pilgrims, described America, his new homeland. Winthrop was making reference to the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus had addressed a large crowd: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14-16)

This vision of the United States as a God-ordained shining example has attained truly mythic proportions. John F. Kennedy sampled the same biblical metaphor in a speech just days before his inauguration in 1963. Ronald Reagan made it a focus of his farewell speech in 1989. ('Farewell address to the nation,' January 11, 1989; www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan/speeches/farewell.asp)

The “city on a hill” was also repeatedly invoked by Justin Webb, senior BBC Washington correspondent, during his recent three-part BBC Radio 4 series, 'Death to America'. (Broadcast on April 16, 23 and 30, 2007; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/deathamerica>)

The series was billed as an examination of “anti-Americanism” – an interesting phrase to which we will return – in which Webb would question “the common perception of the United States as an international bully and a modern imperial power”.

Webb began emotively, describing how his own recently departed mother had been a

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protester, an "energetic duffle-coated figure who wanted to ban the bomb, stop wars of all kinds and suffering anywhere". ('Death to America,' BBC Radio 4, April 16, 2007; see also Webb's article, 'Anti-Americanism examined,' BBC news online, April 12, 2007; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/6547881.stm>)

But as a youth, Webb began to notice a curious bias: "The protests against nuclear weapons, for instance, concentrated on American weapons. The anti-war rallies were against American-led wars. The anti-death penalty campaign focused on Texas.

"A pattern was emerging and has never seriously been altered. A pattern of willingness to condemn America for the tiniest indiscretion – or to magnify those indiscretions – while leaving the murderers, dictators, and thieves who run other nations oddly untouched."

In his quest to understand "anti-Americanism", Webb journeyed variously to France – "where", we were informed, "it all began" – and to Venezuela and Egypt. Webb noted of Venezuela that "the nation's leader Hugo Chavez compares George W Bush to Hitler". Unmentioned was the fact that Chavez had been responding in kind to then US secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld, who had himself likened *Chavez* to Hitler. ('Julia Buxton responds to Times article,' www.vicuk.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=85&Itemid=29)

In setting the scene, Webb described a strain of French thought that regards the upstart American nation with disdain: "The kind of anti-Americanism fostered by French intellectuals down the centuries revolves around intense dislike of what America **is** – not what it **does**."

Webb was then ready to base his task on the following assumption: "It is time that we understood that this attitude, this contempt for what democracy can do, is at the heart of at least some of the anti-Americanism we see in the world today."

A Smokescreen of Ignorance

Turning to the United States' neighbours to the South, Webb observed: "Latin American dislike of the United States and its leaders is a grittier substance than the smooth and heady French cocktail... This is not metaphysical hoity-toityness. Latin America's brew contains real sweat, real tears. Tears from a past where the southerners were the servants; the northerners, the masters. This is, after all, Washington's backyard."

Note the familiar cliché of Latin America as "Washington's backyard". This homely description nestles comfortably into the establishment presumption that the region is

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rightfully part of the US sphere of influence: an ideology that extends back to the imperialist Monroe Doctrine of 1823. And while Webb was careful to mention "real sweat, real tears", no mention was made of the real *blood* spilled under US-sponsored wars, tyranny and oppression. (For details see our Media Alert, 'Vision of the Damned,' June 10 and 15, 2004: www.medialens.org/alerts/04/040610_Reagan_Visions_1.HTM and www.medialens.org/alerts/04/040615_Reagan_Visions_2.HTM)

Webb continued: "You've got to wonder if there is any end to the capacity of the rest of the world to blame the United States for its problems. Nowhere is that more the case than in Latin America, where out of roughly 500 million people, 200 million live on less than \$2 a day.

"Is it all the fault of the imperialists from the north? Or is just a little of it the result of local attitudes to poverty, local attitudes to honesty in government, and local attitudes to the rule of law?"

"In other words, in Latin America as elsewhere in the world, is anti-Americanism a smoke screen, a very convenient smoke screen, whose noxious fumes hide the reality of local failure?" (Webb, 'Anti-Americanism in Venezuela,' BBC news online, April 20, 2007; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/6572615.stm>)

In an email to one of our readers, Webb emphasised the same point: namely that the "failure of Latin economies cannot just be the result of US intervention". (Email from Justin Webb to Neil Laurenson, April 25, 2007)

There has certainly been a "failure of Latin economies" for the bulk of the population, but not for the US-based corporations that have long exploited the region for private profit – an issue we examine in detail in Part Two of this report.

Webb bulldozed through decades of horror and misery in stating glibly: "The US has behaved badly" in the past, but it is still "a shining city on the hill" and "in their heart of hearts, everyone here knows that."

In contrast to this remarkable comment, consider the testimony of John Pilger who has also recently visited Venezuela: "Chavez and the rise of popular social movements, from Colombia down to Argentina, represent bloodless, radical change across the continent, inspired by the great independence struggles that began with Simon Bolivar, born in 1783 in Venezuela." (Pilger, 'America's new enemy,' *New Statesman*, November 14, 2005)

Bolivar understood the nature and intentions of the new colonial master to the north who had kicked out the Spanish: "The USA," Bolivar said in 1819, "appears destined by fate to plague America with misery in the name of liberty." (Ibid.)

The plague rampaged for the next two centuries with popular, reforming governments stamped out and replaced with US client states – torture regimes – in Chile, Argentina

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and elsewhere in the region. By the end of Ronald Reagan's two terms of office there were 300,000 corpses in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala as a result of US-sponsored wars and oppression. In a recent interview about the making of his new film, 'The War on Democracy', set in Latin America, Pilger said: "Our filming was concentrated in the barrios where the continent's 'invisible people' live in hillside shanties that defy gravity. It tells, above all, a very positive story: that of the rise of popular social movements that have brought to power governments promising to stand up to those who control national wealth and to the imperial master. Venezuela has taken the lead... This is not to suggest that complete independence has been won. Venezuela's economy, for example, is still very much a 'neo-liberal' economy that continues to reward those with capital. The changes made under Chavez are extraordinary – in grassroots democracy, health care, education and the sheer uplifting of people's lives – but true equity and social justice and freedom from corruption remain distant goals." ('The U.S.' War on Democracy,' interview with John Pilger, Pablo Navarette, May 1, 2007; www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=2028)

The BBC correspondent next travelled to the Middle East. This is a region that has long been coveted by US power. In 1945, State Department officials described Saudi Arabian energy resources as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history", with the Gulf Region considered "probably the richest economic prize in the world in the field of foreign investment". (Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, Hamish Hamilton, 2003, p.150)

In the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, a war fought to maintain control of this "prize", a United Nations team visited Iraq and reported that "the recent conflict has wrought near-apocalyptic results upon the infrastructure... Most means of modern life support have been destroyed or rendered tenuous..." (Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, HarperCollins, p.599)

Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Adviser for Jimmy Carter, declared that the "benefits" of the war were "undeniably impressive":

"First, a blatant act of aggression [by Saddam Hussein invading Kuwait] was rebuffed and punished... Second, U.S. military power is henceforth likely to be taken more seriously... Third, the Middle East and Persian Gulf region is now clearly an American sphere of preponderance." (Ibid., p.599)

In the 1990s, Iraq was further brutalised by a cruel regime of US-UK-led sanctions that led to the deaths of over one million Iraqis, half a million of them children under five. Denis Halliday, the senior UN diplomat in Baghdad, resigned in disgust in 1998, describing the impact of the sanctions as "genocidal". His successor, Hans von Sponeck, similarly resigned 18 months later.

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For Justin Webb, none of this merited a mention. As Harold Pinter put it in his Nobel acceptance speech: "It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis." (Pinter, 'Art, truth and politics,' *The Guardian*, December 8, 2005; <http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,6109,1661516,00.html>)

Instead, Webb began his final radio programme from the Middle East thus: "June 2005. US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice flies to Cairo and at the American University makes a speech that will go down in history: "For sixty years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region, here in the Middle East; and we achieved neither. Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people."

Webb then told his listeners in all seriousness: "I believe the Bush administration genuinely wanted that speech to be a turning point; a new start."

One simply has to ask: On the basis of what evidence, exactly? That Webb could simply take at face value – with no evidence required – Rice's claims of a massive, unprecedented U-turn in US foreign policy; that Washington would now engage in "supporting the democratic aspirations of all people" when the whole drive of American policy has been precisely in the opposite direction since the end of the Second World War, is truly breathtaking. And that he could blithely pass over what US-supported "stability" in the Middle East has actually entailed – such as the suffering of the Iraqis, and the appalling treatment of the Palestinians under an Israeli state massively supported by the US – tells us precisely where Webb stands.

In truth, Webb is the latest in a long line of journalists who periodically announce the great 'change of course'. No matter the consistent depredations of state power, no matter the essentially unchanging structures of power and privilege dominating foreign policy, mainstream commissars are only too happy to declare a revolutionary and humanitarian change in direction based on nothing more than the words of the current Dear Leader.

Birth of a Myth

Webb continued with his superficial analysis and loaded questions: "So who are the Middle East anti-Americans?", he asked. The tone was measured, reassuring, almost

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magisterial; echoing the style of John Simpson, the BBC's veteran world affairs editor, perhaps deliberately so.

He answered his own question: "They do exist, of course, and some of them, particularly those motivated by religion, are potential mass murderers. Most Americans would put them at the top of the list of threats to their nation and to them as individuals. Yet, in many ways, it's the others, those who've not said goodbye to reason and humanity, who pose the bigger long-term threat [sic]. The bombers, after all, are a tiny minority and they can be arrested or suppressed or killed. These men and women, the peaceful haters you could call them, deny American legitimacy and deny too the fundamental decency of the American ideal; and they carry those thoughts on into future generations. They do so with a vehemence that takes the breath away."

What followed was an Egyptian academic's critical but articulate observations about US history and that country's role in world affairs. But, for Webb, such radical views constituted "vehemence": a familiar, pejorative framing whereby incisive critics such as Noam Chomsky, Howard Pinter and others are dismissed as angry, self-hating, or otherwise lacking in reason and relevance. (See our Media Alert, Brilliant Fools, December 19, 2005; www.medialens.org/alerts/05/051219_brilliant_fools.php)

Webb spoke glowingly of America's "core values", about how it represents "a set of ideas about human conduct", and of how "the heart of America's unique status as a great power whose legitimacy, at least in theory, rests on the freely-given support of its own citizens and of those it assists."

It has long been a standard convention in the mainstream to assert that the United States was forged as a nation dedicated to the democratic ideals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all. US political leaders have long made reference to this ideology.

Consider, for example, a high-level internal document written in 1950, National Security Council 68, which grandly proclaimed the "system of values which animates our society" and which includes "the principles of freedom, tolerance, the importance of the individual and the supremacy of reason over will." ... "The essential tolerance of our world outlook, our generous and constructive impulses, and the absence of covetousness in our international relations are assets of potentially enormous influence." (Quoted in Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, pp.10-11)

Academics have also played a useful role in preaching this doctrine of US benevolence and grand ideals. According to Michael Howard, then Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford: "For 200 years the United States has preserved almost unsullied the original ideals of the Enlightenment: the belief in the God-given rights of the individual, the inherent rights of free assembly and free speech, the blessings of free enterprise, the

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perfectibility of man, and, above all, the universality of these values." (Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, Vintage, 1992, p.16).

Respected media commentators have also done their bit. James Reston of the *New York Times*, for example: "I don't think there's anything in the history of the world to compare with the commitments this country has taken in defense of freedom." (*Ibid.*, p.18)

And Matt Frei – like Justin Webb, a senior BBC correspondent based in the US: "America encapsulated the principles of the Enlightenment – Liberty, Equality, Fraternity – wrapped them in the pursuit of happiness, underpinned them with an inalienable right and turned an IDEA into a country. It took the missteps of the French and the English revolutions and it made them work." (Matt Frei, 'Washington diary: Land of ideas,' BBC news online, May 2, 2007; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/6613861.stm>)

This was the ideological framework into which Webb's radio series snugly fitted. But the assumption of a benevolent state historically founded on a deep commitment to equality and freedom collapses under scrutiny. Consider, for example, what actually happened when the United States gained its independence from Britain. Historian Edmund Morgan summed it up: "The fact that the lower ranks were involved in the contest should not obscure the fact that the contest itself was generally a struggle for office and power between members of an upper class: the new against the established." (Zinn, *op. cit.*, .84)

And to what extent did the revolution, and the founding of this new nation, respect the equality and freedom of the original inhabitants, the native American Indians? Howard Zinn answers: "They had been ignored by the fine words of the Declaration, had not been considered equal, certainly not in choosing those who would govern the American territories in which they lived, nor in being able to pursue happiness as they had pursued it for centuries before the white Americans arrived. Now, with the British out of the way, the Americans could begin the inexorable process of pushing the Indians off their lands, killing them if they resisted." (*Ibid.*, p.86)

Indeed, Alexis de Tocqueville observed bluntly that the United States was able "to exterminate the Indian race... without violating a single great principle of morality in the eyes of the world". (Noam Chomsky, *Failed States*, Hamish Hamilton, 2006, p.4)

As for the much-vaunted US Constitution itself, Zinn observes: "When economic interest is seen behind the political clauses of the Constitution, then the document becomes not simply the work of wise men trying to establish a decent and orderly society, but the work of certain groups trying to maintain their privileges, while giving just enough rights and liberties to enough of the people to ensure popular support." (Zinn, *op. cit.*, p.97)

All this, recall, is the "shining city upon a hill".



PART 2

The Lexicon of Totalitarianism

IT is worth considering Webb's premise that "anti-Americanism" is a meaningful concept that merits 'balanced' analysis. In fact the term must be adjudged essentially meaningless, or at least hopelessly misapplied. Few serious critics of US government policy seek to diminish the many accomplishments of American people in, for example, science, music, art and literature. After all, these achievements include an inspiring tradition of social activism that has led to real improvements in people's lives, very often won in the face of bitter opposition from business and political elites.

But the deeper point about "anti-Americanism" has been expressed well by Noam Chomsky: "The notion 'anti-Americanism' is a revealing one. It is drawn from the lexicon of totalitarianism. Thus people who think that the US is the greatest country in the world are 'anti-American' if they criticize the acts of the Holy State, or join the vast majority of the population in believing that the corporate sector has far too much influence over government policy, or regard private corporate institutions created by state power and granted extraordinary rights as 'a return to feudalism' (to quote old-fashioned conservatives, a category that now scarcely exists). And so on." (Interview with Noam Chomsky, Media Bite, May 5, 2007; www.mediabite.org/article_On-the-Media—Anti-Americanism-and-Disparity_393277505.html <http://www.mediabite.org/article_On-the-Media—Anti-Americanism-and-Disparity_393277505.html>)

In totalitarian societies, such terms are reflexively used to condemn dissidents as 'anti-Soviet' or 'anti-Russian.' Chomsky comments: "If people who criticize Irish government policies were condemned as 'anti-Irish,' I suppose people would collapse in ridicule in

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the streets of Dublin. At least they should." (Ibid)

Putting the absurdity of his premise to one side, Webb's willingness to smooth over the brutal realities of US policy was compounded by his dismissive assertion that "anti-Americans" dwell on the "stains" of the past. Webb told one member of the public who emailed him: "Even in conditions where there have been wrongs committed in the past (obviously Latin America is a case in point) there can be a temptation to wallow in the sins of the past rather than accept the good things about a nation which has plainly been successful." (Email from Justin Webb to Neil Laurenson, April 25, 2007)

He continued: "I am talking about the limited but important fact that US companies are successful because they exist within a set of rules and have to pay less attention to dealing with fickle and demanding governments and corrupt individuals... the basic fact to me remains the same — that this nation is bound by rules. The failure of Latin economies cannot just be the result of US intervention. And in the US something after all must be responsible for its incredible economic success and I suspect that is what it is; a culture that respects law." (Ibid.)

The Latin American 'Failure'

Consider Webb's two central claims concerning the "failure of Latin economies" and the merits of "a [US] culture that respects law".

It would be wrong to deny that there are local, intrinsic problems in Latin America. But it is even more foolish to suggest that US oppression has not been a prime factor in all but crushing that region's hopes for self-determination.

The so-called 'Washington consensus' – a range of policies demanded by US corporate-dominated institutions, especially the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation – has wrought havoc on countries around the world. Structural Adjustment Programmes and 'free trade' treaties have forced many developing countries to orient their economies to the benefit of transnational corporations (TNCs) and investors.

For instance, a rapid increase in poverty across Latin America in the 1990s coincided with TNCs gaining control of 4000 publicly owned companies. (Stuart Munkton, 'Venezuela's revolution – giving power to the poor,' February 16, 2007; <http://www.venezuelasolidarity.org/?q=node/104>)

Under pressure from imposed 'austerity measures', and the forced opening up of Third World economies, governments have slashed education, public health programmes, social welfare safety nets and environmental measures.

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So why have Third World countries increasingly been targeted by big business in this way? Latin American analyst James Petras points to the "increasing dependence of US corporations on earnings and profits from overseas subsidiaries". These corporations have benefited from a "predatory foreign policy that pillaged wealth overseas through corrupt privatization programs particularly in the ex-Communist countries, Latin America, and Asia".

Latin America has become "one of the central areas for Washington's imperial expansion and exploitation," Petras adds. (Petras, 'Neo Mercantilist Empire in Latin America, Part 1,' Z Magazine, July/August 2001; <http://www.zmag.org/ZMag/articles/jul01petras.htm>)

All of this is consistent with the testimony of John Perkins, who worked as an "economic hitman" for US corporate power. ('Ridiculing Chavez – the Media Hit Their Stride,' Part 2, May 18, 2006; www.medialens.org/alerts/06/060518_ridiculing_chavez_the.php)

Perkins was first hired by American big business in 1971 to forecast economic growth in Third World countries, including Latin America. It was understood that he would deliberately exaggerate growth forecasts. These bloated forecasts were then used to justify massive international loans to fund giant engineering and construction projects in poor countries – dams, power plants, transport networks, even military bases. Huge profits flowed to US corporations and a small group of controlling elites in Third World countries.

A fundamental aim of US policy was for these countries to *fail* to achieve their inflated targets, so ensuring they were unable to repay their loans. Third World leaders then "become ensnared in a web of debt that ensures their loyalty". As Perkins writes, this enables powerful US interests to "draw on them whenever we desire – to satisfy our political, economic, or military needs. In turn, they bolster their political positions by bringing industrial parks, power plants, and airports to their people. The owners of US engineering and construction companies become fabulously wealthy". (Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*, Ebury Press, London, 2006, p.xi)

Ecuador, for example, is required to devote nearly 50 per cent of its national budget to servicing debts with international banks dominated by Washington. This leaves close to nothing for millions of citizens classified as "dangerously impoverished". Out of every \$100 worth of oil pumped from the Amazon, less than \$3 goes to Ecuadorian people dying from lack of food and potable water.

This is but a tiny sample from the stark reality underlying Webb's platitudinous comments on "the failure of Latin economies". The "failure" was expressly designed in Washington to the benefit of US corporate and political elites.

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Democracy and the Rule of Law

Next, consider Webb's point that the US is a stickler for "the rule of law". As has often been observed of great power politics, respect for the rule of law at home tells us nothing about respect for the rule of law in the wider world.

Webb's claim is simply unsustainable, transparently so in light of the vast crime that is the Iraq war. The invasion of that country, bringing with it the deaths of approaching one million people, is the supreme war crime: a war of aggression, denounced as "illegal" by Kofi Annan, then secretary-general of the UN.

Historical examples abound of the US bending, or ignoring, international law. Following the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the respected liberal elder statesman Dean Acheson told the American Society of International Law that no "legal issue" arises when the US responds to a challenge to its "power, position, and prestige". (Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, Routledge, 2003, p.14)

The pattern continues to the present era, and is not restricted to Bush I and II. As Madeleine Albright, Clinton's Secretary of State, once declared: "We will act multilaterally when we can, and unilaterally when we must." (Robert Jensen, *Writing Dissent*, Peter Lang Publishing, 2001, p.56)

The rhetoric of 'freedom' and 'democracy' is of course forever deployed, with much bandying around of phrases such as "new world order". Thus, one US official said in September 1991: "If you're going to build any kind of credibility for a new world order, you've got to make people accountable to legal procedures, and Saddam's flouted every one."

Around the same time, the US upheld the "new world order" by cancelling Nicaragua's \$260 million debt to Washington. This was a "reward" to the country for caving in to intense US pressure to drop its \$17 billion legal claim, sanctioned by the International Court of Justice, as recompense for US sponsorship of the Contra attacks of the 1980s.

Bear in mind, too, that the US has repeatedly blocked UN efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. In 2002, for example, Washington boycotted a conference in Geneva of the High Contracting Parties of the Geneva Conventions called to review the situation in the occupied territories. Chomsky observed: "The boycott yielded the usual 'double veto': the decisions are blocked, and the events are barely reported and erased from history. The conference reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories, so that many US-Israeli actions there are war crimes under US law." (Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, op. cit, p.177)

Webb, who claims the strict US observance of the "rule of law", had nothing to say on any of this.

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And what are we to make of Webb's grandiose assertion in closing his BBC radio series, that the United States "has done more than any other on the face of the Earth to democratise life on this planet"?

The claim was characteristic of the series as a whole: big claims of benevolent intent based on wishful thinking, with a blind eye turned to a mountain of factual counter-evidence.

The most obvious point to make in response is that the United States has done a poor job of democratising life in the United States! On the eve of the 2000 presidential elections, a large majority of the electorate dismissed them as an extravaganza run by rich contributors, party managers, and the PR industry. More than 60 per cent of regular voters – that is, the people who even bother to vote – felt that "politics in America is generally pretty disgusting". The director of Harvard's Vanishing Voter Project reported that "Americans' feeling of powerlessness has reached an alarming high". (Chomsky, *Failed States*, Hamish Hamilton, 2006, p.223)

In their February 2005 analysis of the sources of US foreign policy, Lawrence Jacob and Benjamin Page found that the major influence was "internationally oriented business corporations," with a secondary effect of "experts (who, however, may themselves be influenced by business)". (Ibid., p.235)

Public opinion, by contrast, had "little or no significant effect on government officials". (Ibid)

Turning abroad, Thomas Carothers, director of the Democracy and Rule of Law Project at the Carnegie Endowment, has found a "strong line of continuity" running through US government policy in Latin America in the post-Cold War era; namely: "Where democracy appears to fit in well with US security and economic interests, the United States promotes democracy. Where democracy clashes with other significant interests, it is downplayed or even ignored." (Quoted, Chomsky, *Failed States*, Hamish Hamilton, 2006, p.149)

Another establishment figure – Robert Pastor, director of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs on the National Security Council through the Carter years – said of the US government: "It wanted Nicaraguans to act independently, *except* when doing so would affect US interests adversely." (Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1992, p.261, original emphasis)

In reality, a limited form of 'democracy' at home or abroad is just about acceptable to US elites; as long as it does not lead to a 'virus' of independence and self-development that might infect other nations, and thus interfere with US strategic interests and private profit.

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Anti-American = Anti-Human

In light of all that we have discussed in this report, it is perhaps worth quoting at length from Webb's emotive conclusion, spoken from the heart of Washington DC:

"A journey that began in France and took us to Venezuela and Egypt, ends here in a city many Americans refer to without blushing as the 'capital of the free world'. I'm standing underneath the Washington Monument, the pointy one across from the White House, where huge Stars and Stripes flags [are] blowing in the breeze – you can probably hear them flapping – there are tourists from America, and from around the world, queuing to get to the top and get a bird's-eye view of the city.

"Is this the capital of a nation that deserves to be despised? Is this the heart of an evil empire seeking global domination? There are those who've told us – eloquently, passionately – that that is precisely what it is.

"But it seems to me the empire complaint only has real justification if the world is given no say in the project, no choice about whether or not to be on board. Those questions are debatable. And here I am anyway, talking about having a say, proposing the idea of limits on power. Well, where do those ideas come from, if not this place? Even if you don't buy the argument that modern democracy was really born here, you have to accept that this nation has done more than any other on the face of the Earth to democratise life on this planet; to sell the idea to itself and to foreigners.

"You can argue, I suppose, as some have done in these programmes, that individual freedom is anyway a mirage; that Americans are actually enslaved by commercial interests or by the media. Well, I live here and I don't think they are. None of us is truly free, of course. But Americans have real access to information about the world and a real freedom to know and speak their minds – men and women."

With music from Aaron Copeland's 'Fanfare for the Common Man' beginning to swell in the background, Webb revealed the open mind with which he had approached his task: "I've always felt that to be truly anti-American, to hate the essence of America, is to be anti-human. America represents the best and the worst of us all. Hating the place doesn't get us anywhere."

When challenged about the deep bias in Webb's series, Helen Boaden, head of BBC news, answered blithely: "The purpose of the article and the series is make people consider their own views; Justin is trying to examine anti-Americanism – as opposed to anti-Bushism – and in doing so he doesn't promote his own point of view but looks at all shades of opinion. For example, in Venezuela he talked to Chavez supporters who were anti-American – not in a racist sense but in the sense that they had little respect for the essence of what the US is or purports to be. And he also talked to local anti-Chavez people who made the point that the whole of South America has a history of being badly and

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cruelly run by South Americans. The series is internally balanced.” (Email from Helen Boaden, Media Lens message board, May 4, 2007)

The idea that the series was “internally balanced” is chucklesome indeed. True, Webb did interview both pro- and anti-Chavez supporters in Venezuela. But this 'balance' was presented within a framework asserting that the United States “has done more than any other on the face of the Earth to democratise life on this planet”.

On the basis of the evidence we have presented here, and in numerous other media alerts, we can justifiably conclude that Justin Webb, Helen Boaden and other senior media professionals at the BBC are doctrinal managers whose task – unwittingly or not – is to protect the powerful from scrutiny; and to deflect analysis from the interests and goals of power that therefore remain hidden.



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