

Journalism and pornography

Real crime is always organised

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The CIA As Organised Crime
How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World
Douglas Valentine
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When I began reading the work of Douglas Valentine about six years ago, I had not read his books, only the articles that the US online journal *Counterpunch* had published. In fact I only began reading *Counterpunch* because of the accident of having been introduced to the two original editors of what was then only a printed newsletter. Later I was even able to publish a few pieces in that journal before its more famous founding editor's demise. Why do I preface a book review with such personal observations? To that question I will return later .

After reading numerous articles I went to Douglas Valentine's website and asked him questions about things he had written. This began a conversation that has continued. Of course I could not hope to conduct a serious conversation with someone about their ideas without having read what they had already committed to paper. Hence I began with his *The Phoenix Program* (1990). I then read both of his books on the US government's drug organisations, *The Strength of the Wolf* (2006) about the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, and *The Strength of the Pack* (2010) about the Drug Enforcement Agency, and was pleased to review them online. When Open Road Media, under the direction of Mark Crispin Miller, republished *The Phoenix Program* as the first in its e-book series 'Forbidden Bookshelf',¹ I had the opportunity to review it as well. In other words although I have only known Douglas Valentine for a few years, I believe I am very well acquainted not only with his writing but I also know what makes it unique in the landscape.

His latest book, *The CIA As Organised Crime*, is not new. Nor is it intended to be. This book attempts something very difficult: compressing the essentials of nearly 30 years of intensive research, insight and implicit social theory into a volume accessible to readers with rapidly deteriorating attention spans who

¹ See <<http://markcrispinmiller.com/2014/06/forbidden-bookshelf/>>.

have been conditioned to what I would call 'journalism as pornography'. (I will return to that, too.) Before I explain what I mean, permit me to briefly explain the structure of the book.

After introducing the reader to the 'luck' he had in gaining access to the sources which made the book possible, Valentine presents revised interviews that explain the core information in *The Phoenix Program* (part 1) and the two-volume study of US drug law enforcement (part 2).² Then in part 3 he uses previous interviews and articles to explain the interrelationships between the CIA business and the DEA business and how they led to the Homeland Security business. Part 4 is devoted to the various ways in which everything known from parts 1–3 are ignored, trivialised, distorted or censored so that such knowledge has virtually no impact in public consciousness. Here there might be a certain detectable irony, since Valentine writes a book that concludes by saying that the means for acting on the information presented is already precluded — preempted rather than prohibited.

The book's principal subject is the Central Intelligence Agency. It may be useful to recall that the Central Intelligence Agency is an organisation of the US regime created by the National Security Act of 1947. Most history books will tell an average US citizen (or someone schooled with US curricular materials) that the act adopted by the US Congress on 29 July of that year was designed to consolidate the several branches of the military under a Department of Defence, for budgetary reasons, to restrain historic inter-service rivalries, and to create a more modern and efficient armed forces. What is not said is that in 1945 the US government had demobilised its military and, having emerged from the Second World War unscathed, was trying to determine how to save its economy from a return to the pre-war depression. The intellectual elite of the US regime has already begun to warn that both domestic stability and US dominance in the world would be jeopardised if the regime did not maintain at least the level of armaments expenditure required during the war that had just ended. However there was no publicly defensible reason for permanent wartime footing. There were no more Native Americans to annihilate; despite the abolition of slavery, Negroes were still well under control. The only country even approaching the US in military strength – the USSR – had been so devastated by the war that it would be decades before it could pose a genuine competitive threat. In other words, having pacified the world with atomic weapons and the blood of 30 million Soviet citizens, the US

² *The Strength of the Wolf* (2006), *The Strength of the Pack* (2010). Reviews of Valentine's books: <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2010/03/12/drug-war-without-end/>>; *The Phoenix Program* <<http://dissidentvoice.org/2014/08/the-phoenix-program-americas-use-of-terror-in-vietnam/>>

elite had no honest justification for the policy they were about to undertake.

Creating the system

The National Security Act of 1947 created the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and what was first called the 'National Military Establishment', later renamed the Department of Defence. As the international criminal court constituted to try war crimes in Nuremberg proclaimed the commencement of a war of aggression to be the ultimate war crime under international law, the permanent state of war thus created in and of itself was an act of aggression in the very form condemned at Nuremberg. That 1947 legislation was tantamount to the establishment of a permanently organised war crimes establishment in the United States of America.

It is within this legislatively mandated criminal enterprise that one has to understand the origins, purpose and function of the Central Intelligence Agency. The 1947 legislation chartered the CIA as an instrument of the National Security Council. On the tacit assumption that the US regime is in a permanent state of war – despite occasional suggestions to the contrary – the National Security Council constitutes something like a permanent war cabinet. The war cabinet has its weapons of mass destruction (the armed forces) but because this 'cabinet' is composed of bureaucrats, academics, professional politicians, businessmen and assorted charlatans in the train of the reigning president, there is need for an espionage organisation which in theory tells these ministers when, where and how to wage war most advantageously. That is the official reason why the criminal cabinet needs spies. According to the Act:³

'(d) For the purpose of coordinating [subordinating⁴] the intelligence activities [spying] of the several Government departments and agencies in the interest of national security [waging war], it shall be the duty of the Agency, under the direction of the National Security Council [permanent war cabinet] –

(1) To advise the National Security Council in matters concerning such intelligence activities [spying] of the Government departments and agencies as relate to national security [waging war];

(2) To make recommendations to the National Security Council for the coordination [subordination] of such intelligence activities [spying] of the departments and agencies of the Government as relate to the national security [waging war];'

³ National Security Act of 1947, Section 102 (d) 1-2 (26 July 1947)

⁴ In parentheses are this author's translations of the legislative jargon.

The ostensible function described is that of a consultancy, an almost academic organisation. However there are some other duties specified in the Act.

'(3) To correlate and evaluate intelligence relating to the national security [waging war], and provide for the appropriate dissemination [helping other government spies] of such intelligence within the Government using where appropriate existing agencies and facilities: PROVIDED, That the Agency shall have no police, subpoena, law-enforcement powers, or internal-security functions:⁵ PROVIDED FURTHER, That the departments and other agencies of the Government shall continue to collect, evaluate, correlate, and disseminate departmental intelligence [no spying monopoly]: AND PROVIDED FURTHER, That the Director of Central Intelligence shall be responsible for protecting intelligence sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure [preventing the public or victims of spying from defending themselves];

(4) To perform, for the benefit of the existing intelligence agencies [all the military spies, police spies, and implicitly sanctioned corporate spying organisations], such additional services of common concern as the National Security Council determines can be more efficiently accomplished centrally [any other criminal activity for which the Agency is better equipped or has more benefit];

(5) To perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence [covert action] affecting the national security [waging of war] as the National Security Council may from time to time direct.'

The conspicuous crime for which the Central Intelligence Agency was created was spying, an offence punishable under Title 18 of the United States Code which incorporates the provisions of the 1917 Espionage Act. Of course one could argue that it is not a crime to spy on the enemy when at war. However, officially at least the US has not been at war since 1945 – at least not within the conventional interpretation of the war powers in the US Constitution; i.e. a resolution adopted by the US Congress declaring a state of war between the US and another country. But even allowing executive liberty with the definition of a 'state of war', the Espionage Act also makes it a crime to spy on the 'friends' of the United States – which of course has been the CIA's standard

⁵ This would be called a non-competition clause in commercial law. It was adopted to protect the right of the FBI and other domestic instruments of state terror from encroachments by the federal agency.

operating procedure since it was founded.⁶

The CIA's other history

However the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency has another history, its genealogy. The CIA claims two inspirational heroes: Nathan Hale and William 'Wild Bill' Donovan. Nathan Hale is heralded as the first or at least most famous colonial spy to be hanged by the British Army during the American War of Independence.⁷ Surely a bit of folklore, he was to have said before the noose did its work that he only regretted 'that I have but one life to give for my country'. William Donovan was a white shoe lawyer who persuaded US President Franklin Roosevelt to authorise the founding of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) from whose ranks many of the most renowned CIA executive management came. Nathan Hale's place in the CIA pantheon is certainly no more than the vanity of its white elite founders. William Donovan is far closer to the true tradition from which the CIA arose. CIA cadres make repeated reference to the OSS as if it were the core of its 'regimental history'. The mythintended is that the Office of Strategic Services was created in wartime (the last time the US was officially at war) and all those boys who joined the OSS were heroic soldiers fighting more or less covertly in the 'good war'. Thus the CIA is the descendant of that band of heroic elite soldiers and patriots who quietly served their country under conditions that at least theoretically could lead them to share the fate of Nathan Hale.

The truth however is quite different. William Donovan's qualifications for the OSS were not his Medal of Honor awarded in the Great War but his political

⁶ Former CIA officers Philip Agee (*CIA Diary*, 1975) and John Stockwell (*In Search of Enemies*, 1978) provided copious information to prove this. Allan Frankovich produced a film (*On Company Business*, 1980) largely based on the information Agee and Stockwell provided. He also produced a film for the BBC about the CIA 'stay-behind' fascist networks in Europe, *Gladio* (1992). In 1997 Frankovich died of a heart attack while clearing US Customs at Houston's George Bush International Airport, returning from London. He was 56 and released a very controversial film debunking the US regime's Lockerbie story. However even the official media is full of reports about espionage against ostensible friends and allies of the US regime.

There has been no end of debate as to whether the Security Council Resolution which the US delegation forced through the UN to authorise its war in Korea, or the so-called Gulf of Tonkin Resolution used to authorise invasion of Vietnam, were congressional declarations of war in terms of the US Constitution's reservation of war powers to the Congress. This author argues that these debates are moot since the essential legislative mandate for the so-called Cold War – i.e. the permanent war of the USA against the rest of the world – was adopted in 1947. Several campaigns in that Cold War were formally concluded with the treaties leading to the abolition of the German Democratic Republic and subsequently the demise of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union. However the legal framework for permanent war was neither repealed nor rendered obsolete.

⁷ Nathan Hale (1755–1776)

connections in New York. Such connections and his success as a lawyer enabled him to overcome the WASP barriers, which an Irish Catholic would generally face until one John Kennedy was elected to the White House. Donovan was not only a lawyer and politician in Roosevelt's home state, he was part of that community of corporate law firms whose specialities included organising covert action to defend US corporations abroad.

Probably the most notorious in this league of private mercenary law firms was Sullivan & Cromwell, the firm in which John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles were partners.⁸ Prior to the creation of the CIA, there were law firms like Sullivan & Cromwell and the US Marines. After 1945, gentlemen like the Dulles brothers agreed that while it was not always opportune or good marketing to send the Marines, it was also very risky for US corporations and their law firms to intervene in foreign countries as they had done routinely prior to the Second World War. There was a need to protect corporations from the very real risks of decolonisation and economic nationalism, which unfortunately had been given new impetus by colonised peoples who took the UN Charter seriously.

Not only was it recognised by this segment of the US elite that a permanent war economy was essential for continued wealth accumulation and domestic peace, but lip service had to be paid to the ideals of the UN Charter and the United Nations organisations (especially since the admission of non-whites was inevitable). The inspiration for the CIA came from precisely this class of white – mainly Protestant – descendants of the New England theocrats and Yankee slave traders whose entire identity was based on white supremacy and capitalism, both as a religious ideal and an enrichment strategy.

It is one of the legacies of the US Civil War that overt violence, i.e. the armed forces, is dominated by the elites of the South while covert violence, i.e. finance and the secret police, is primarily managed by the elites of the North. So while 1945 brought the defeat of Ford's, Bush's and Dulles' friends in Berlin and the disappointment of Soviet victory, there was still potential to exploit racism and domestic fears to create the illusions needed for a permanent war economy with all the trappings of a wartime police state. This could not be done overtly because it could jeopardise markets in countries where US corporations hoped to replace European colonial competitors.

There was also a domestic threat to be suppressed. After four years of telling US citizens that they were defending democracy and self-determination (opposing racism was not a part of the WWII myth in the US until the 1970s), it was necessary to teach US corporate vassals (dictators) to at least walk and talk like US politicians. There had to be alternatives to the tried and true

⁸ *In A Law Unto Itself* (1988) Nancy Lisagor provides some interesting details about Sullivan & Cromwell and the Dulles brothers.

method of sending the Marines when the leaders in a foreign capital misbehaved. The people of 'Wild Bill' Donovan's class knew the methodology and understood the problem; but what they now needed was 'official cover'. Nobody would believe – either in the UN General Assembly or any other public forum – that United Fruit supported or opposed governments based on democratic convictions. On the other hand, no one could (or would dare) challenge the actions of the US government abroad to assist a government it declared to be democratic. Moreover if United Fruit broke the law, the local government could punish it, even by expropriation. But no local government would dare take such action against the United States itself: that could mean even war.

A criminal organisation

Hence the CIA was invented in the National Security Act not simply as an advisory and coordinating instrument for spying but as a criminal organisation to act as cover for the fundamental criminal activity of US corporations and those who own them. It was invented by those whose primary qualification for 'government service' was their experience as mercenaries or mercenary managers for the corporations and wealthy families that own the United States government. Its leadership and cadre were and are drawn from the 'families' who historically either own or defend the wealth concentrated in the US upper class. They are the essence of 'organised crime'.

That brings me back to Valentine's book, *The CIA As Organised Crime*. The subtitle of the book is *How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World*. The title is fashioned like those of many typical exposés or what some might call 'muckraking' journalism. If this title gets more readers, then the means justifies the end. Yet I think the title is in fact a juxtaposition of two contrary perspectives of his subject. For Valentine's book to be an exposé it would have to reveal something previously hidden. In fact Valentine concludes his book with the entirely justifiable assertion that what he has described is in fact in plain sight, not hidden at all. A 'muckraking' story would take an otherwise tidy state of affairs and show that 'beneath it all' it is really very ugly and dirty. However, no later than the Church and Pike Committee investigations of the mid-1970s and the Iran-Contra hearings of the late 1980s, it has been a matter of official record that the Central Intelligence Agency organises and perpetrates crimes as a matter of policy and that it does so with virtual impunity – in the interests of 'national security' (waging war).

So is Valentine's book a revelation about the CIA? No. Nor do I believe that he intended it to be. The most important part of the book is part 4: 'Manufacturing Complicity: Shaping the American Worldview'. I see it as an act

of self-defence that this part is not overtly the central part of the book. With respect for that I would like to point out why this self-defence is by no means trivial and at the same time I would like to take the risk or the liberty of elaborating why I believe self-defence is appropriate.

Valentine's most important observations about the nature and structure of CIA action are:

- 1 The CIA is a class-based organisation. Its membership and its mission are dedicated to defending the dominance of the predominantly US corporate elite, based on the ideology of capitalism and white supremacy.
- 2 The CIA limits its scope of action to the extent that such action may be plausibly denied and is of benefit to its clients.⁹
- 3 The CIA does not recognise any barriers to action except those imposed by its clients or by the force of its opponents: i.e. it is beyond what most of us call the law. This does not mean that it is omnipotent.
- 4 The CIA relies for much if not all of its tacit support upon the willing collaboration of the Establishment and the Counter-Establishment in all its forms and factions. The means for maintaining this collaboration are mastery of language and propaganda and an enormous capacity to reward support (witting or unwitting) and punish opposition.
- 5 All of the above are attainable because of the degree of organisation and organisational discipline: class-based, bureaucratic and military in nature.

The CIA As Organised Crime is a compilation of examples drawn from his detailed case studies. It should motivate the reader to go back and read *The Phoenix Program*, *The Strength of the Wolf* and *The Strength of the Pack*. If this happens then the book will have been a success. If the reader is waiting for a daring revelation, he may be disappointed. Valentine does not trade in sensationalism. He is not a muckraker, either. That is apparent from careful reading of the first two introductory chapters. On the contrary Douglas Valentine has written books which prove that there are no real secrets for people who bother to ask the right questions and who listen to or read carefully the answers. *The CIA As Organized Crime* is another such book.

Here the reader of this review might object that of course there were secrets: the Phoenix Program was a secret. Without Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) searches and a lucky access to high-ranking CIA officials Valentine would never have discovered the truth, which was hidden from us all. Of

⁹ William Colby gave a revealing but deceptive explanation of 'plausible deniability' in his public testimony to the Church Committee at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EirlpZkAIA>. At first he attributes it to an obsolete diplomatic posture but at the end of his reply admits, in an aside, that it continues to have application.

course there are secrets. And of course it is the free press and journalists like Seymour Hersh or Glen Greenwald and whistle-blowers like Daniel Ellsberg and Edward Snowden that ensure that no matter how dreadful the people in Langley are, the truth will be discovered.

I think here it is important to distinguish between critical research published by a writer in periodical literature (journals) and journalistic pornography. The exposé is not accidentally connotative of striptease. The point of striptease is not the final nudity but the gradual and redundant suggestion of nudity. The original meaning of the word pornography was not the graphic depiction of sexual acts but the graphic depiction of the activity of prostitutes. In this sense while it is conventional to identify prostitutes as those engaged in sex for remuneration, the reluctance to call people whose marriages result in monetary gain prostitutes has shifted the emphasis away from mere sex for money. This has given rise to such neologisms as 'presstitute', a journalist who prostitutes him or herself in his profession. The term 'yellow journalism' was given to types of writing in the last century considered egregiously biased and aggressive. The tendency is to identify this kind of journalism with the 'tabloids' or 'boulevard press'.

The US journalist I. F. Stone, beatified in the US by many who call themselves 'liberal' or 'left', knew that propaganda and 'yellow journalism' was not a market cornered by the tabloids. His *Hidden History of the Korean War* is full of examples to show how the war in Korea was not reported, ill reported, or falsely reported by the so-called 'quality press'.¹⁰ Douglas McArthur was just as successful at manipulating the press as the generals and admirals that came after him. The collaboration of the media during the war against Korea was so effective that even forty years later a documentary film about the war produced in the UK was censored in the US as a precondition to its being aired at all.¹¹

Those of us old enough to remember Morley Safer reporting from Vietnam on CBS might wonder at the story he told a select gathering of journalist

¹⁰ I. F. Stone, *Hidden History of the Korean War* (1952, 1970), reviewed by this author at <<http://dissidentvoice.org/2014/09/hidden-history-purloined-present/>>.

¹¹ 'Korea: The Unknown War' (1990) at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3c_vwqKxPneoViQPwTVcP8RkKXuuKsi>. For the *New York Times* review see <<http://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/12/arts/review-television-the-unknown-war-on-the-korean-conflict.html>>. The *Times* does not draw attention to one of the most important facts about the war the US role in occupying Korea – its Phoenix-like operations against the Korean peasantry and nationalists. It is not simply the carnage that made Korea a staging ground for Vietnam. Dean Rusk, a major player in the US war against Vietnam and Cuba, was an intelligence officer (spy) in Korea. He even claims credit for fixing the line dividing Korea against itself and for the benefit of the US regime.

veterans in 2010 about a confidential tour of all the CIA stations in Vietnam that he made with William Colby. He got to see things he agreed never to report and so a major news anchor and bureau chief in Saigon was co-opted by the CIA very early.¹² Seymour Hersh is regularly trotted out by S. I. Newhouse's *New Yorker* magazine as a critical journalist – also a Vietnam 'veteran'. Hersh is given credit for bringing the My Lai massacre to the attention of the US public – an event Colin Powell did his best to help conceal while he was stationed in Vietnam. But Hersh did not make a name for reporting about the Phoenix Program (just as Morley Safer did not). The Vietnamese knew about Phoenix and they knew what kind of operation Lt. Calley was leading. Yet at no time during the trial of Calley was there ever any mention of the CIA or the campaign against the VCI of which Calley was just one tiny part. Instead we were all fed with nightly stories about how bad the war was and under what duress a young lieutenant was serving his country; that regrettable and even condemnable his acts may be, they were mere incidents of war. In fact Calley was acting in compliance with standard operating procedures and official policy of the CIA whose war Vietnam was.

The role of the press

The purpose of our press corps was and is to serve as part of the combined weapons deployed against the civilian population, especially those in the 'homeland' who have to be persuaded of the morality violated every day. On the one hand the population must be constantly reassured that that old disgusting Puritan morality remains the foundation of US society. On the other hand the prurient interest in breaches of that morality must be satisfied. Hence while US Americans relish the hymns of praise for their press that come from invidious comparisons with the media in the rest of the world (especially the Soviet Union/Russia), they need the titillation that comes from being told occasionally that elected officials patronise brothels, judges receive bribes and non-whites in foreign lands are tortured and assassinated. Even the most obscene acts perpetrated by CIA officers or their comrades in other branches of the state apparatus become delectable if served by those whose reporting respects the aesthetic dogma.

Bernardo Bertolucci directed a film, *Last Tango in Paris*, with Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider. A number of recent articles about the film focus on the non-consensual use of butter as a lubricant for the illusion of an anal

¹² 'American Experience' 2010, cited in part by Valentine, p. 337. To read/hear the entire discussion see <<https://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/media-roundtable>>.

sex rape scene.¹³ The film was rated as practically pornographic when it was released in the 1972. When I saw the film I was surprised that so much was written about the explicit sex. For me there was only one serious message in the film and it was very clearly articulated, regardless of whatever artistic pretensions Bertolucci may have intended. For the greater part of the film the characters played by Brando and Schneider meet and have unrestricted sex in an otherwise vacant Paris flat. The only rule throughout is that no names are to be asked or given. As the film draws to a close this rule is breached and Schneider's character is given a name for the man with whom she has had sex for such a long period. Shortly thereafter she borrows a pistol, meets the man in the flat and kills him. The moral of the story is simple: as long as we cannot name something that is bothering us, we have an enormous if not insurmountable impediment to action. The capacity for titillation, for erotic stimulation even with simultaneous pain, is enhanced by suspension of belief or cognition. This is what pornography does and it is also the function of compatible journalism.

The compatible left¹⁴ enjoys journalistic pornography. Like sex pornography there are also different classes or grades of journalistic pornography: sensationalism, voyeurism, exposés, and so-called 'inside reports'. The quality usually depends on who is funding it and what audience is targeted. The main thing is that it is either exciting or something good for fund-raising, although sometimes it is enough to be good gossip. In other words, plot and character development or accurate dialogue are unimportant in comparison to that orgasm-inducing 'revelation' – an erection out of context. 'Did you see that?' or 'Did you hear that?' ejaculates from the stimulated consumer. To go beyond ejaculations – or even to dispense with them – one has to be willing to concentrate on the whole story, not just what appeared in today's broadcasts or papers but what happened before that? Where did all that happen? Who are the people involved and with whom are they involved? These are the details of chronology, geography and genealogy.

¹³ Last Tango in Paris (1972) <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/dec/04/actors-disgust-last-tango-paris-rape-sceneconfession-bertolucci>>. At the time of the film's release, probably more attention was given by intellectuals and journalists to Maria Schneider's complaint that the film scene was non-consensual and traumatic for her than to the innumerable real rape scenes perpetrated as a matter of US policy in Vietnam and elsewhere in the empire. Bertolucci's admission decades later captivates more readers than the current Phoenix policies of sexual abuse both at home and abroad.

¹⁴ 'Compatible left' is a term Valentine uses in the book. It means the same as what I call 'faux gauche' – the people who are the 'Counter Establishment' rather than really Left in terms of changing the system. I discussed this in essay in *Lobster* 72 at <<http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster72/lob72-intentional-fallacy.pdf>>.

History occurs in a context not of minutes but years, decades, even centuries. When the US embassy in Iran was seized after the overthrow of the Shah, none of the respectable media explained that the Shah had been installed by the CIA after having overthrown the elected Iranian government. Even a media outlet generally assigned to the US Left produced a report on the anniversary of the Iranian revolution that omitted information it had reported at the time of the embassy seizure.¹⁵ It is important to follow the timeline in its entirety, not just the segment served in the news bulletin.

When people in the US who do not know where the state of West Virginia is located are called 'geographically challenged', then it is all the more apparent that checking a map is a good thing to do before believing anything reported about a foreign place (meaning, also, any place one has never visited). The Phoenix Program was developed by people who came from very specific professional backgrounds and biographies. When the program was up and running, the US Foreign Service was training whole classes of its employees to become Phoenix advisers in Vietnam. People like Richard Holbrooke and John Negroponte were working in rural pacification in Vietnam as 20-year-olds.¹⁶ Even if the Phoenix Program was 'terminated' when the US withdrew from Vietnam, there is an entire generation of cadre in the Foreign Service and military who began their careers learning how to manage the kidnapping, torture and assassination of unarmed civilians. Are these the people you would expect to run a proper democracy? Given that untold numbers of ex-servicemen join the police forces, one should not be surprised at how comfortable they feel in Ferguson, Los Angeles, Oakland, New York, Chicago, and New Orleans when they get to use military grade equipment.

There is nothing titillating about the routines of Homeland Security or the organisation of the US gulag. People like Jeremy Scahill do not need to masturbate in Iraq to find assassinations.¹⁷ They are the bread and butter business of the police and drug enforcement offices in every major US city. And torture – well, that is celebrated in the endless hours of cop shows that even people beyond the US borders have to endure as standard TV and cinema fare.

¹⁵ Democracy Now! has become a well-funded 'gatekeeper' in the compatible Left media, moderated by celebrity Amy Goodman. See, for example, the comments on it at <<https://consortiumnews.com/2017/01/01/the-war-against-alternative-information/>>.

¹⁶ Richard Holbrooke was assigned to USAID in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. John Negroponte was also assigned as a junior Foreign Service officer in Vietnam. Both became prominent advisers/ executive managers of US counterinsurgency campaigns throughout the world. Although this information is available from their official biographies, it is never mentioned in connection with their post-Vietnam assignments.

¹⁷ Jeremy Scahill produced a film purporting to be a documentary about the covert action of the US military in Iraq and based on his book *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield* (2013).

Beyond parody

I began this review with some personal observations: how I came to read and later to review the work of Douglas Valentine. Over the course of the past six years I have observed what I consider to be a steadily diminishing willingness to see the obvious and draw at least more obvious conclusions from those observations. Instead there has been an unceasing proliferation of opinion and chatter pretending to be debate. The US comedian Stephen Colbert used to parody this condition by portraying a person who always said in essence 'truth for me is what I feel is true without any regard for the facts, or even despite them'. Unfortunately by the time the last editions of the Colbert Report were aired on Comedy Central, it was impossible to see the parody any more. There are innumerable examples of distortion in the public sphere: the substitution of spectacle for substance. Colbert never claimed to be a journalist but there are innumerable journalists who are in fact indistinguishable from their comedian imitators. A page from my grade school speller contained the aphorism 'It is easier to be critical than correct'. It is easier to be a celebrity than a person with conviction.

The CIA As Organized Crime is not a book of opinion. Although there are interviews, these were not for talk shows. The interview format – even with critical and informed interviewers – is problematic because of the need to make a dialogue out of material that requires individual intensity and focussed attention. Since Valentine is an experienced interviewer (as anyone can establish by listening to his Phoenix tapes), he makes the best out of a restrictive format.¹⁸ In doing so he does not tell us so much about asking questions as how we must learn to work with answers. Valentine's book is also an exercise in giving critical questions, especially from those who are less knowledgeable or experienced, the serious answers they deserve. That is one very important approach in teaching history, to restoring substance. Valentine is an excellent history teacher and there are simply not enough like him.

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¹⁸ Not only an invaluable resource, this site posts some of the most incisive interview product available today: <<http://www.cryptocomb.org/Phoenix%20Tapes.html>>