



★ FORTRESS ON A HILL

Ep 61 transcript

Wed, 4/15 1:31PM • 2:39:17

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

trump, freedom, fact, virus, reagan, people, point, great, bob, danny, china, question, interview, thought, vietnam, good, book, wrote, war, cuba

SPEAKERS

Robert "Bob" Scheer, Danny Sjursen, Chris 'Henri' Henrikson, Keagan Miller

Danny Sjursen

All right, well, hey, listeners, we have another really solid interview today. And I guess we're kind of running the old TruthDig circuit right now. We had Chris Hedges last week, who some of you have probably already listened to that episode, which was was really solid. And now we've got the boss. Although he probably wouldn't like the term, Robert 'Bob' Scheer, who, you know, is senior editor over there, you know, founder, you know, co founder just really started up the whole TruthDig scene. And, and the thing that's interesting about Bob is, you know, we have more than a little of a personal relationship these days, but I'm constantly learning about him. And, you know, I'll mention it, but we just all watched the documentary on bob above the fold. And, you know, I thought I knew everything about him. And I was just totally blown away by some of the aspects of his career. So let me just throw in You know, a relatively, you know, circumscribed bio, because there's so much to say. But you know, first off, you know, Bob and I share that peculiar New York City insider lingo, you know, whereby unlike me, who hails from what Matt of Bob's time in place would call the backwater of Staten Island. Bob was born and raised in an ironic twist on Sarah Palin sentiment and, you know, the real New York up in the Bronx. And I think it's fair to say that his his immigrant, family upbringing, working class, garment worker, mother and family, you know, bred in political activism and education in New York City public schools all influenced what really was a remarkable career that that followed and continues to, to roll on. So, you know, on the merits, let's just say that Bob has been in the journalism writing and activism

game for, I think over 60 years and one could argue really, that he's been in it since his days as you know what they call a red diaper, baby. In the 1940s Bronx, his columns appear in newspapers across the country. He's done in depth interviews that have made the headlines famously the Playboy magazine interview in which Jimmy Carter confessed to the sin Reagan planting and he has a whole book about his interviews with the presidents, as well as other prominent political and cultural figures. So, from 64 to 69, he was a Vietnam correspondent, managing editor and editor, editor in chief of ramparts magazine, which I learned a lot about in the documentary The influence it had on figures like Jane Fonda and Martin Luther King, and we'll get to all that. Then from 76 to 93. Bob was a national correspondent for the LA times in 93. He then launched a nationally syndicated column based at the LA Times and that ran for 12 years and is now running at the San Francisco Chronicle. Bob is the former co host of the political radio program left right center on kcrw W. He now hosts sheer intelligence. I wish I think I've been on three or four times a half hour kcrw w podcast again, where he interviews you know, a variety of social, political and cultural thinkers. Bob has written eight books, I'm not going to list them all, but notably in sort of relevant for our listeners and our topics, the pornography of power, how defense hawks hijack 911 and weakened America, and then most recently, and I just finished. They know everything about you how data collecting corporations and snooping government agencies are destroying our democracy. Bob is the clinical professor in communications at USC. I've been in his class and number of times, it's really an experience and the editor of the Webby Award winning political website TruthDig where I've, you know, written for many years, so to kind of quickly frame our relationship with Bob. Bob started picking up my Tom dispatch pieces at TruthDig. I want to say back in 2017 and 18 when I really first started getting into the game, I was still on active duty that eventually turned into him asking for some originals. which became a bi weekly and then for at least almost two years weekly columns. The thing about Bob is that he's willing to step outside what is typical or what people think is gonna sell and and he had enough trust and faith in me probably against this better judgment to really put together with me this profoundly rare I mean for the business TruthDig or s3, you know, there was a 38 part series, I was writing eight to 12,000 words sometimes and you know, he didn't bat an eyelash and it was really something else that you don't see all over the web. So, like I said, Bob is the subject of an incredible documentary above the fold. I thought I knew him, especially after countless hours chatting and philosophizing together in his downtown LA apartment for a full week actually, right before the pandemic outbreak so I'm either lucky or unlucky that I didn't get stuck there because I'd probably still be in the apartment. But anyway, finally, a bob was senior mainly from watching the documentary and getting to know him at the center or at least significantly evolved in just about every fight for peace, freedom or justice since the Second World War. He was born in 1936. He has seen a lot sorry to date him. just turned 84 he is there. I say for me, a solid boss, good friend, great mentor and really a treasure to free thinkers. Everywhere. So with that long typically Danny verbose introduction. Thanks for taking the time, Bob.

Robert "Bob" Scheer

Thank you. By the way, if people are interested in that documentary, they can watch it for nothing on an outfit called canopy comm canopy with a K. And all you got to have is some kind of library card, any kind of library card and you can get and that's just one of thousands of really great documentaries that you could watch cannabis very good above the fold.

Danny Sjursen

So absolutely, please check it out. So you know, okay, so last week, like I said, miraculously we managed to stay on time with Chris, you've got a little more time today. So here, here's what I'm thinking. We're going to kind of kick this off with me with a broad kind of half past half present question that I think's relevant to the moment. And then after that, we're gonna back up a little bit. Each ask you a few sequential questions related to, you know, sort of discrete periods in your career. And then, of course, how they relate, you know, to today before coming back to the present.

Robert "Bob" Scheer

Can I ask you all, could I please just chop in there for a minute. You mentioned the one of my stories or interviews that got a lot of publicity, you know, the 1976 presidential election, Jimmy Carter was first an unknown governor from Georgia didn't even have a full time legislature. And he gained the nomination. And I spent a lot of time interviewing him and the reason they gave A lot of time there's an old saying devil, hustler, hustler. And I was trying to get time with him. I was doing some interviews with playboy that was after ramparts. And they wanted to do the interview because he was considered the ultimate square, uptight, born again, Baptist Christian. And he was trying to reach a broader Democratic Party audience. He gave me a lot of time. It's a good interview. But what was interesting is the last in the heart part that got all the publicity was really a not a controversial statement. I mean, anybody who's gone through any kind of Christian education knows, it begins with concession that you're a sinner or a potential sinner, and then you have to struggle with it. So that's all he was saying. The controversial thing for the purpose of this interview, is I was really concerned about Jimmy Carter being a hawk and getting us into more wars because actually The Democrats got us into more wars than the Republicans. And the Vietnam War was very much a democrat swore Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter when I pushed him and pushed him on this, because he was after all out of the military, you know, Navy and so forth, and seemed quite, you know, the Democratic Party DNC types. And I pushed him and at one point, he sort of exploded an anchor. And I said, Well, why wouldn't we expect that you might take us into another Vietnam? And he said, I wouldn't take us into another Vietnam because I would never lie to the American people the way Lyndon Johnson did. Now, when that interview came out, I happen to be on Air Force One. Well, whatever the plane was that he was flying wouldn't be Air Force One, but the one he was flying, coming back from the Democratic Convention. We were landing in Dallas and Lady Bird Johnson was going to be waiting for him while she was waiting at the airport to greet him. He was now the official Democratic nominee. And that interview came out. And while the lust, quote got all the attention, subsequently the first controversy, because sam donaldson Who is this famous ABC interview was waiting at the tarmac with his equipment. And the first thing he asked me what I got off the plane. Did Jimmy Carter really say he would never he wouldn't get us into another Vietnam because he wouldn't lie to the American people the way Lyndon Johnson did I say, yes, that's that was in the interview. And interestingly enough, that faded from controversy, that very explosive, honest statement on a statement. Now, as you know, Jimmy Carter is President goddess into beginning of the Afghan war that you've experienced and everything else, but the fact is, it was a very strong statement, Lady Bird Johnson left the airport. She didn't greet him. And that should have been the subject of controversy and debate. But the media, the fake news. We think fake news just started with Trump's Avenger, we've had plenty of fake news, and the media really wasn't interested in Vietnam anymore. And now they were lust was the issue.

Danny Sjursen

That's so interesting. And it ties into the first thing I want to talk about, actually, you know, and that's just saying that it does demonstrate, doesn't it? Like you said that issues of, you know, militarism and lying about getting us into wars? I mean, none of that was as controversial, like you said as the sort of like personal sexual innuendo which really shouldn't have been a big thing. And and and you've seen and that's my first question, you know, and a big surprise I want to talk history a bit but you know, you you've seen so much So many different phases of like American Empire, American War making and the politics surrounding it. So what I want to ask you is, as you look at American imperialism and militarism in 2020, what commonalities and differences do you see from earlier errors that you both lived in covered? And I'm thinking specifically of you know, and you can go anywhere with this but early Cold War, the Vietnam era, the Reagan years or or Carter, you know, what have you seen and how does it connect?

Robert "Bob" Scheer

Well, it's an interesting moment, because we, you know, if you take Orwell's 1984 we really don't have any serious military enemies. The Cold War, you know, was built on the fiction that the Soviets has the massive power of what they had was atomic weapons and that could hold us in check. But you know, I was we all knew and anyone I spent a lot of time covering a Soviet Union and different at different times, including for the L times that one critical point when Gorbachev came in, and it was very clear that it was a crumbling economy, and that it was a defensive posture they were and they just didn't want to give up their piece of Empire, their empire, but they really were not in a position to be very aggressive. And the reality was that the Cold War was based on a fiction, of a unified communism, International Communism, and that had fallen apart, you know, the sino Soviet dispute actually preceded the Chinese revolution. Mao was more simple. I'm sorry, the Stalin was more sympathetic to Chiang Kai Shek than he was to Mao. And they saw a Mao is some kind of a wild, you know, rural Trotskyist or something, you know, and so there was no international communist movement that the Vietnamese were fiercely independent. When we lost in Vietnam, they went to war with China with Communist China. The whole idea of the Vietnam War was to stop Chinese communism, we lose the war. And the Vietnamese instead of invading San Diego, go have a big battle with China on their border. And they're still fighting over islands and meaningless islands and everything else. So the whole idea of this unified, powerful, ideologically driven enemy was a lie from the beginning. And everybody knew it. And certainly the wartime agreements that Roosevelt and Churchill and Stalin has signed off on, accepted this area, a buffer zone between Germany and Russia of Eastern Europe. That's not democratic, and it's not self determination. But that's what they did agree to that Tehran at Yalta, positive and everything else. And so it was an invented fiction. The problem with imperialism Is it doesn't pay for most people. people like yourself and your colleagues, there are the first line of victims, people will actually have to fight these wars, the civilians in these countries, there's a major group of victims. But even the average American who may not go to war, when we don't have a draft still has to pay for these things. So you don't have a war on poverty because you have a Vietnam War, no matter whatever. LBJ, his intentions were, and I think the Imperial model has run out of steam. We have a perfect example in the Chinese communists deciding a military imperialism doesn't pay and they are pursuing a capitalist road. You know, they're making better products and you know, we accuse them of

stealing pot. Well, what's new, I mean, that's what capitalism was all about seizing some idea and exploiting it. So the fact is, you know, Russia is crumbling. Soviet Union and and so the only man You mean you really have is China and China doesn't want to play that game. They want to beat you in the marketplace, you know, 5g and everything. So this virus came along at a very important moment. Now Trump has his invisible enemy. And instead of dealing with it as a medical problem, which of course, means you know, having a unified world stands behind science and reason and providing health care and caring about everybody because the virus knows no language, the virus can travel across borders, and everything. Trump is polite, tried to play the jingoism card of you know, Chinese virus and invisible enemy and so forth. But the fact is the the traditional imperialist model, where you seize markets and you seize resources, and so forth, was a loser. When for French colonialism? You know this You're a great historian, for the Spanish for the English is what Washington, George Washington warned us against the people who did our Constitution, believed in an internal North American imperialism, and then toys Mexico, they didn't believe in that European world market, you know, conquer India, conquer Turkey and all that. And what so by the time you know, even I know I'm being long winded, but I'm just sort of giving you my overview. By the time the first president bush comes in. He knows that the Cold War is over and there can't be a new Cold War. And even Rumsfeld, I wrote a book about that, called the pornography of power. And I have this speech in there that Donald Rumsfeld gave the day before 911. And in that, he talks about this big, new enemy. He's now Secretary of Defense he talks about the big new enemy we have. And he describes it in Orwellian terms as omnipresent and powerful and corrupt, and within endless money and wasting lives. And then to the point of it, he says the enemy is not Russia, China is not outside. It's here at the Pentagon. It's one of the most important speeches, any politician, or certainly any leader of the Pentagon has ever given, and has been all but ignored. And it was the day before 911. And basically, he was saying, and the first President Bush was saying, we got to cut the military by quick 30 40%. The game is over, we have to learn to compete in other ways. And so when 911 comes along, and it's like now, the virus, you know, oh, we can have a coal workers we can find a new enemy, and that new enemy first became terrorism and so then you have this idea. justify the attack on iraq which had nothing to do with 911. Or you know all about that. And that runs out of steam. People don't want these wars anymore. Even Donald Trump has said, Look how much blood resources were wasted on the middies. So now you got the virus. And that's the current will become the current excuse for ramping up the surveillance state, every state in the world. The Chinese have provided the model. Now you can write, you could check out everybody's personal habits, their friends, their reading, where they ate everything. Well, our government excels in that. And you really have now a kind of medical justification for the Orwellian state. So it's a frightening moment, but it's also a positive moment because the limits of that approach have been demonstrated the jingoism has been exposed. Fortunately, this virus didn't come from Mexico, or we'd have a pogrom here. You know, Bush would have gone I haven't pushed Trump would have gone nuts. You know, imagine if the virus had come from Mexico, we would have had a 50 foot wall. You know, I well, so but the fact that matter is, I think the internet is both the worst and best of all worlds. And and and I think, you know, and you're a very good example, major Danny, you've been able to use the internet to to get out a totally different narrative than the establishment wanted. And I think most of the American public is really in a quite skeptical mood about the need for ever more a military operation. Certainly even Trump has given the back of the hand to that. Hello.

Danny Sjursen

Oh, absolutely. You know, go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Keagan Miller

Thank you, Bob. I'm Kagan. I was in the NSA or in the Navy. Sorry, I worked in the Navy with NSA and During Obama's first term and the beginning of the second term, and doing elect intelligence operations in the Middle East, in Yemen, and Syria and Somalia, and you kind of touched on this a little bit, but I wanted to bring up the point about how do you think you kind of brought this up just about militarism. But like, how do you think it is going to change in light of the virus and the fact that we can't, like we physically can't be doing the operations that we're doing now? without, you know, putting our service members at risk, like so how do you think that will change? as well as Oh, sorry. And on top of that, given your like the experience with the tactics of activism, how do we fight militarism with the social distance and practices in place

Robert "Bob" Scheer

well, Okay, this is gonna get me in trouble with all of my knee jerk Democratic Party friends. But I think so far, Trump has not used the surveillance state argument and the militarist argument to access. He's used it, he's always flirting with it. But he, he knows at this stage of our history, and particularly because he's such a much criticized, we have one good thing going for us these days, that the news organizations, the establishment news organizations hate this guy so much, because he attacks them. He plays the bully and he does what he did on TV only dares to attack the mainstream media, and they don't like them. And they see this as a matter of their own service. Bible and their legitimacy. He's not the most effective liar is president. In fact, in many ways, he's the least effective because he's so observed. He's so challenged. You can't watch his press conference every day without CNN or MSNBC, you know, having this scrolling thing to build up by how realize they didn't have that when, when Lyndon Johnson was giving a press conference, when he announced the need to bomb North Vietnam because of the second Gulf of Tonkin attack. There was nothing scrolling below saying the evidence shows there was no attack, which there was even at that moment. The admirals Captain on the ship, and even Apple sharp down in San Diego and navy since you're from the Navy, they were all saying wait a minute, there's no evidence that this is the second Gulf of Tonkin. There's no evidence of attack. Well, you didn't see a scroll ever. When then the Johnson was lying. about Vietnam, staying over, the President has just distorted this for light about this or what you get now. So you have a president who's very much observed, you know, maybe in a second term if he wins, he'll have more chutzpah and more arrogance, even for him. But the fact of the matter is, we live in now in an environment which our executive branch is subjected to quite a bit of criticism. And maybe that's the reason Trump really hasn't played. He is he's invoked the invisible enemy. He's played Chinese jingoism, which is, you know, really quite dangerous. But basically, the military so far is being used in a constructive way. The Army Corps of Engineers building hospitals, we don't have martial law. We don't have troops out here in the street in Los Angeles and forcing a curfew. You know, now, if we get more plagues, and we get because of climate change, we get flooding and we can mayhem, then you're in the situation Germany was in between the wars. You know, so far the economy is being floated with all this borrowed money. And you know, the stock market actually, last week or so, is that a good week? What? Before we record this, you know, and so Trump is actually using the military in a constructive

way. And even including the military, medical people are being treated with respect and asking to treat people who are not veterans who are not in the military, which is a good thing. And so but, but the whole world is right now following the Chinese model. And, and nobody wants to give the Chinese credit. But they in fact, you know, this is one point, almost 1.4 billion people, and they're now down the list of fatalities, whatever you think about the figures, maybe they cook the figures But the fact of the matter is, it's they restricted it to one province. They kept the depth down and they do it by using the surveillance techniques of the internet that are available to every governments, you know, they're cheap, they're easy to do. And that's really quite alarming. Because people want security. People are scared and and they're quite willing in every society to sacrifice individual freedom, if they think their security depends upon that that's why George Washington won this about the imposters have pretended patriotism because in the name of national security, patriotism, get the enemy whether the enemy's a virus or he's a Chinese communist. People will readily give up their freedom in every society, and and what the founders of this country for all their imperfections were painfully aware of, was how easy you can squander individual freedom and that's why We have the restraints of our Constitution.

Chris 'Henri' Henrikson

Hey, Bob, I'm Henry, I

Robert "Bob" Scheer

should I say is going to be on the test? That's what I do when I go on too long with my students.

Chris 'Henri' Henrikson

I certainly hope not any likes lots of essay questions, so he won't, he won't give us multiple choice anymore, you know? So I just say and I'm Henry, I'm a former US Army MP, I deployed to Iraq twice. I've helped trained Iraqi police and other missions like that. You've spoken with many powerful leaders in the US over the years, I was particularly struck by your interaction with Ronald Reagan, and his comments about the laughable feasibility of the United States surviving a nuclear war. My question is about some of the interviews you didn't get. If you were given the chance to interview say George W. Bush today. In April 2020, what would you ask him? Are there any other leaders you specifically wished you'd have been given the opportunity to interview? And how do you think we as Americans can work to escape the cult of personality regarding our leaders? You know, Trump Trump supporters has some very odd ideas about their alleged favorite president, but being caught up in a cult of personality happens to anybody. We've often talked on the podcast about how Barack Obama was going to be the savior of the left or so most of his supporters believed at the time only to have him become one of the most neoliberal imperialist war mongering crap tested presidents of all time.

Robert "Bob" Scheer

Yeah, and also it intimidating whistleblowers and critics of that Yeah, I'm despite being a constitutional law professor. Look, I call my book that's a different book, my collection of interviews. With these people, almost all of whom I interviewed as they were about to become president, they were running. And they were front runners. And the most of them were done for the Los Angeles Times, which had a lot of clout in those days. And they were going to needed to win or do well in the California primary and West Coast. And I was the designated interviewer for the LA Times, so I had access to them. For

instance, the first President Bush was after he won the Iowa primary. And then we were flying up to New Hampshire with Ronald Reagan. I interviewed him before I was ever at the LA Times when I was at ramparts when he was running for governor the first time and I think I developed a good connection with him because I felt people were making a mistake about Reagan is the same mistake they've made about Trump. They were making them cartoon figures. And Reagan's case he was just a movie actor, lightweight and everything. And I knew that was not true. I and I spent time with him when he was running for governor. I disagree with them. I was one of the students said he tear gas and I got arrested by the county Alameda County Sheriff's and I had a horrendous experience in jail where a lot of people were beaten and everything. So I was not ready to give Reagan a free pass. But I knew he was not dumb. I don't think actors are dumb. And I knew that he had an agenda. And his agenda really was that of GE of the large corporations. And the tension in the man was betraying his own origins. He come from a working class background. His family has suffered terribly and the depression I myself was born in 1936 at The height of the depression. My parents were garment workers. My father lost his job the day I was at. Well, Reagan had a very similar experience. His father went to work for the New Deal in order to keep the family going. And they loved Roosevelt, they believe the government had an obligation to take care of people. And remember that Roosevelt was the guy who wanted to avoid war at first, you know, and was very reluctant to get into to the Second World War was denounced for that. But so Ronald Reagan was really torn by the gap between his own early life experience and what his new sponsors whether they were the Warner Brothers or they were GE where he became a propagandists, and he drank the kool aid for them. So but in my just to complete the reagan thing, which I do discuss in that movie, he Was disillusioned with GE, because of the savings alone scandal when he was president. And he had visited GE when it was still a pretty good company. He went to every plant he was, you know, their advertising spokesperson. And they had a very strong leftist Union, the United Electrical Workers and then the i UIW, international, united, electrical, whatever they were. After that they had strong union great benefits, good working conditions. They made good products, they made good lightbulbs and refrigerators and so forth. And then when he was president, you had the savings and loan scandal. And he was shocked to discover that GE was up to its eyeballs and bad practices, including GE Capital later, which was involved with the whole banking meltdown, but it was also the savings and loans, guys that he knew. And he believed in that deregulation and he saw that didn't work very well. So we ended up being on economic matters a bit more conservative, quite a bit more conservative than then Bill Clinton later. And also he, what were the big wars of Reagan, there was Grenada, Grenada. You know, he really, you know, talked a big game about militarism. But at the end of the day, the shock, I think about Ronald Reagan, and a lot of his most vicious critics blame it on Alzheimers or something, which I don't think was the case. And I discussed that with Nancy Reagan. I knew them because I interviewed him when he was running for president and I got along with Reagan, despite our disagreements, but Reagan opened the door to Gorbachev. And he really believed that we could get rid of those nuclear weapons and he believed that he could do business with Gorbachev, and that really shocked the neoconservatives. But that's a long winded answer to your question about who I would like to interview because my View is and Nicole the book playing President and I had a chance to talk to these guys while they were still trying out for the parts. And and I used the theater analogy. You're you're playing at leadership. You know we don't have serious adults watching the store. When you get to that level of politics, you know where you really you are the leader and you really wonder what's going to happen to this person I draft or I send off to war or the people I'm going to bomb or the

people I'm going to ignore because I don't care about the Apollo video. So foot. So you have a journey in which the successful politicians thanks to the role of money to mass media are basically trying out for a part. And by the time they get to be president, they don't know which end is up. They don't know what they believe anymore. And there are moments where they get a glimpse of it. You know, but the fact is they've been on the stage, they've been throwing out the one liners. And so there's almost no use in interviewing these people once they're president or a leader. The exception I would make is when they are no longer leaders. And I think I had a, I wrote a profile of Richard Nixon 10 years after he was forced out of office. And then he liked it so much. He's the only one who liked my profile, which was not flattering. I didn't think about he invited me to come talk to him while he was pretty lonely and desperate at that point. And, you know, so we had a good conversation. But to answer your question, I think there isn't any magic to an interview. It is an act, go back to that devil, hustle, hustler. Usually the interesting things that I was told, or because they wanted somebody in their organization felt it was important. To present themselves in a different way, a different kind of propaganda, a different kind of posture, and that I had done my homework. So when they started down that road, I knew the contradictions. I knew. I'll give you a very good example. Take it away from American politics. I did a long interview. I mean, long 1011 o'clock at night it started ended about seven in the morning with Fidel Castro in a very intimidating circumstance. I had been told I could have an interview I went down to Havana it was c night that Russia invaded the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. And I believe 68 and I think that had me at a hotel for a month and then these guys came with guns and such come with us. And I had already packed my bags. I was planning to leave the next day and then took me from one safe house to another. Finally. I said, Look, I gotta go to the bathroom. I'm pissing in the bathroom and this guy walks in tall bearded guy, it's Fidel Castro. And you know, I lost my temper with them. I said, God, damn, I've been here a month and my whole family's fall apart. My magazine is falling apart Rambo. And you you've been playing it was obviously I just come from playing basketball. And so, you know, we had a very honest discussion, but it was an he wouldn't let me take any notes. Because it was the night the Russians had Soviet invaded Czechoslovakia. So he hadn't really figured out his position. He first was very critical. And then he apologized. He lined up with the people paying him money, which was so obvious and justified it somehow But that night, I had a good discussion with him because I knew I knew some of the stuff that was going on, for instance, rounding up homosexuals, and the You map camps. I knew the contradictions in the Cuban Revolution, the promises and the reality. I knew something about what Battista had done, what United States had done. So it made for an interesting interview, it could have just been a waste of time, if I hadn't had that background. So my you know, my own view is I've had very good interviews with major Danny. Right. Very good. But I think in part was because I knew what I was asking about, you know, and I don't think people have to be famous to give you the insight. So let me take it back. Can I just go on to finish with George W. Bush?

Danny Sjursen

Of course, of course. Yeah.

Robert "Bob" Scheer

Okay. So what happened with George W. Bush as I did know him? I you know, I covered his father I covered other campaigns. And so I observed the guy when no one thought he was going to run for president. They thought it was going to be Jeb Bush. And he was a you know what you all know a good

time Charlie and kind of a lightweight And, you know, I mean, the rap on him is accurate, you know, short attention span and glib. And however, the interesting thing was it goes back to the point I mentioned before, I knew also because I knew I had encountered Cheney and Rumsfeld and all these people. And I knew that because of Baker's influence, and he was a real moderate, and the father had gotten to a pretty moderate position, ah, Walker, Bush, and so forth that the people around George W. Bush, including, ironically, Cheney, and Rumsfeld at that point, fought the Cold War was a loser, and that there was an opportunity to spread American imperial power through just being more effective economically. Better propaganda, soft power, and so forth, and that the American people were not really inclined to go off to any more wars they were just gusted. So if 911 hadn't happened, and we could discuss all the theories about why it was not prepared for better or how it happened, but it was a great gift to cold warriors. You had a traumatized nation of fear. You could blame somehow, you know, an enemy, a unified Muslim enemy, which was absurd, because Iraq was the one place al Qaeda couldn't operate couldn't function, but you could lie about it with impunity. And by the way, the mass media led by the New York Times, engaged in the line, right? And Trudy Miller and all those people sent out this garbage about Saddam Hussein being somehow connected with 911 when in fact if al Qaeda showed up in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, they would be tortured and arrested and gone. You know. So what happened was, it suddenly became the gift that wouldn't stop giving 911. And that's why you guys got swept up into these ridiculous invasions, you know, painful, disruptive of human life, costly. Change the whole nature of our culture and our politics and disastrous ways. It goes back to my slogan, you don't have adults watching a store. You have opportunists. You have people out for short term gain. They're paid by campaign contributors who want Boeing to do well. They want business to do well and they want to have leverage in the world. So you, they then do these things, and they think they're convinced they can get away with it on the cheap. They never can. And that's the dialectic of it, the public rebels and then they try to find the Other way and that's what Trump is right now. He's been this floundering figure. He believes in trade, he believes in business, he doesn't want to get off in any stupid wars that you can't win. He's pretty clear about that. But he also knows you need an enemy to blame all your problems on and so now China and the Chinese virus that will be the enemy, but it won't work, because the virus won't speak Mandarin.

Danny Sjursen

You know, so much of that is that there's just so much to unpack there and you're, I think you're dead on you know, just even from the recent historical point of view, I'm going to come back to Castro because that was my next question. But before that, I'm gonna you know, let's upset you know, Norton K in your house and then all our liberal friends a little more. And I want to press on one one more question. You know, you mentioned Reagan anyway,

Robert "Bob" Scheer

but wait a minute, where my wife is a tough cookie had a great journalists and was the associate editor of the LA Times and just Because she disagrees with me about Trump all the time, doesn't mean she's wrong. And there's no there's a lot to hate about Trump. You know, I understand it. But you can't be. You also have to be objective for God's sake. I mean, scientific and and Trump, I think, you know, they've what they're doing is the biggest favor they can do for Trump. The Democrats, they, they paint them with such a dark image that the average person knows, Hey, wait a minute, you know, he's doing

a pretty good job now. I maybe he responded late, but come on. Didn't the governor and Mayor of New York and the governor, why were people using the subway, come on, Danny, you and I grew up with that subway. They used to pack us in there, like sardines. You got a virus going around. I don't care if it was a simple flu. Maybe you don't use the subways. You got a pandemic emerging. When did the subway stop? Right? That's all Yeah. Well, you know that way to transmit that's why New York became the hottest spot in the world. Tragically, because what you insisted on keeping with a model of work and communication and, and transportation, that was a disaster to anybody who even knew one word about what was happening in China.

Danny Sjursen

Well, you know that, uh, well, I agree with that. You know that I love Norton. And sometimes I, you know, sometimes I agree with her when you guys discuss Trump. So, obviously, I was kidding. But, you know, I do think that there's something here with with Reagan and Trump that you brought up, and this connection is not made very often, but maybe it should be how quickly we forgotten what they used to say about Reagan. I think that people have failed to hold to ideas in their head at the same time. So that goes for Reagan that goes for Trump. So, you know, to caveat I mean, I've made a living saying a lot of awful things about Trump. And the same goes for Reagan. I mean, when it came to Latin America and the contract When it came to apartheid in South Africa, I mean, his policies were horrific. But you do bring up the point that for the most part, the over use of American military force was relatively rare. And something I'm getting ready to write about that really no one ever talks about is Reagan and Lebanon, you know, which was a tragedy and a mistake early in his first administration. And yet, you know, Reagan, the tough guy Reagan, the the posturing evil empire guy didn't really Blanche about pulling us out of Lebanon when it didn't make sense anymore, after those Marines had gotten blown up after a few other attacks on the French and so, you know, the same can go for Trump, who I think has not followed through on a lot of his speeches and a lot of his campaign rhetoric. What I want to ask is do you think that sometimes, you know, the whole Nixon only Nixon can go to China you think Does, does a republican does it does a cold warrior or a tough guy, posturing Reagan or Trump actually ends Having more, you know, space and leeway and ability to end some, you know, nonsense, whether it's Lebanon or some of the things that we see is the potential more there with an overt sort of tough guy Republican.

Robert "Bob" Scheer

Well, but that's a cop out in a way because it gives the democrats an out, you know, as was said earlier, about Barack Obama embracing a hard line on the, you know, going after whistleblowers and what they did in Syria with Hillary Clinton and and Libya. I mean, it's just terrible. But I want to cut to the chase you you are three veterans of war combat. I'm a chicken shit. Journalists, okay. And I'm not, you know, I'll fess up. You know, my encounter with war has been a scattershot. Yes, I went to Vietnam, but I could get out anytime I wanted. I went to Cambodia I went quite a few times to Vietnam. I was actually in the north, but it was always under relatively controlled space. There were some moments where it wasn't. So I was, I, I'm just bringing this up. I mean, I've encountered the carnage of war, I saw what the bombing of North Vietnam did, because I was in North Vietnam. At that time, I saw the Six Day War at the end, I was in both Egypt and Israel. I had been in other situations where, you know, spinning the night in jail in Algeria, I know as a journalist, I've encountered totalitarian power. I actually spent the

night and this away in a communist jail. You know, so but it's not the same as somebody who's in the military, and is expected to follow orders and has no choice. And that's your story of you three guys. And so I'm not going to speak for you. However, what you have brought to the table and I'm speaking now more about major Danny because you've been in my class is the reality check. That is not a fucking game that is not moving pieces on a chessboard, that people get hurt, they get killed. Buildings get blown up children die. Okay. Now as a journalist, I could witness some of that. Okay, I witnessed it, but I didn't pull the trigger, you know, and I didn't face the Nuremberg implication my uncle, who is I'm half Jewish, half German Protestants. I've spent a lot of conversations with my German relatives about why I can't have conversations with my Lithuanian Jewish relatives because my German relatives killed them all, you know. So I been in the middle of this kind of thing, but not the way you three guys have. And the real question is not why don't rob publicans to go to China? democrats don't. You know, the question is, why does anybody not do the right thing when they have power? I mean, the whole point of Nixon going to China was that we could get along with China and there was never a reason not to get a lower China. Okay, never. It was not our business whether they threw out Shankar Shek or wanted to be communists, they were nationalists. They wanted their people to live better, they might have had a lousy idea or a good idea. But the fact about it is, China was never the threat to American Security or European security. That was always a lie from the first hour. And the Korean War was fought over that lie, because we didn't give a shit what happened in Korea. It was an excuse to cross the Yellow River and go after Chinese people. communism, which has succeeded just a year before, what have you. And so war has always been used as a gimmick. Okay. And and you can't justify, you know, say, Oh, you know, Nixon did it because he was Republican. Why didn't Lyndon Johnson do the right thing? If you go to the Johnson library or you can even get it online, you can get the tape of the conversation. Lyndon Johnson is having with Senator Russell from Georgia, who was head of the Foreign Relations Committee, I saw on the tape, and he's running against Goldwater. And he says, This is Lyndon Johnson before the Gulf of Tonkin before bombing you if you had the whole thing, he says, you know, he said, I have a young man guarding me now who's in the military. And what if I have to send him to Vietnam? He says to Senator Russell, he says what if I have to send him to Vietnam again, Kill What do I say to his wife and children? I know this word makes no sense. I know there's no argument. He said, What do I say? And then he says to Senator Russell, do you know of any reason that we should be in Vietnam? He saying it to the leading democratic foreign policy, Southern Dixiecrat somewhat from Georgia. He say, I'm Senator ressa. No, I don't. So here's the present United States, the key foreign policy guy in the Senate and Fulbright felt the same way. Soon after, or by that time, and and yet, you have to escalate this war. And you got Ron Kovac, my good friend down there, you know, here in California, right near the airport, and he's been paralyzed all these years. You know, he also speaks at my class. He was saying after Johnson said that, so what we're really talking about his cynicism, and it's disgusting. And anybody tries to say, Oh, you You couldn't do this or you could do the bullshit. You had the right to extend the war in which the conservative estimate is what McNamara said. Three, 4 million people die. But then after his tenure, millions more, you got what five, 6 million. endo Chinese people died in 59,000 Americans over a war that the president united states and the leading Democrat in the senate could have stopped in a minute. And they said they know of no reason for justification. That's really all you have to know about the whole Vietnam War is that conversation and it applies to going into Libya and knocking out qaddafi it goes all of it, it's mischief making. It's done for Craven political, superficial reasons that has nothing to do with patriotism has nothing to do with national

security and time after time. They do it wrong, and they do it as wrong as these overtly totalitarian regimes you look at the whole history The Cold War. Russia, Soviet Russia crazy totalitarian Soviet Russia was probably on the right side as often as we were, you know, on the wrong side. No more often than we were maybe even had a better record. You know, they didn't killed Patrice Lumumba and the Congo, you know, the way we did, they didn't overthrow I led de Chile.

Danny Sjursen

Well, well, that's well, that's a sit by like, I completely agree with you. I mean, my question isn't so much, or my point had nothing to do with thinking, Oh, the republicans are good. Trump is good. I mean, that what I'm saying is, this is the sickness that you're identifying that folks who know better, you know, because they often did, like you mentioned with Johnson, they don't do the right thing. And so we're left in a situation where, you know, mass media or even that some of the history books will praise the Nixon's for going to China or in the you know, in my case, giving some credit to Reagan for eventually pulling out 11. But he shouldn't have been there in the first place. And all of this, and yet the disease it seems, of the American cult of personality of the American imperial presidency that, you know, Henry brought up earlier seems to be that they will only take any risk and pull out of something or or not escalate something if they feel that they've got enough political top cover, whether that's from their tough guy personality or, or any of this and so if they, if they think they can get away with it, maybe against you know, after trying everything else, they'll do the right thing. So that's certainly not a positive on Reagan or Trump. But I think that you answered the question actually better than I could have asked it because what you're showing I think, is, look, we can't give a pass to anybody. Right. And I think that's been sort of the story of your you know, of your journalism and your writing is We don't give a pass to an Obama we don't give a no pass to Reagan or, or to anybody. There. There are so many times and you mentioned the Soviets. I mean, I'm working on a piece on un voting right now. And it's it's a nightmare. You know, I thought I knew this stuff. And then you look and you say, you know, I'm doing the statistics on thousands of votes that we vetoed and abstained on in the Soviets, they don't have a perfect record by any means. But goddamn, if they weren't on the right side of history more often than we were, like you mentioned. So I think that's key. And so I'm gonna ask a question that goes back to Cuba, but only in the sense that I think it gets at your point. To some extent, you know, you met Castro, you're in Cuba before that right before you met Castro, I believe

Robert "Bob" Scheer

I well, By the summer of 16. The Cuban Revolution was January 59. And I was teaching. I was teaching assistant at Calvin and I went back to teach at City College in New York, where you should should have gone instead of West Point to get a good education. And I'm just kidding. And you're probably right about that. No, no, you got a great education, though I'll never take anything away from that. But anyway, I did teach there in the summer and I saw a little poster on the wall, saying you can go to Cuba for 25 bucks a week if you can get there and cut sugarcane or something. And so I had my wife at the time, great woman, Serena. And we got in our little Volkswagen, and took the long way back to California. We went by way of Key West and got on a little plane with a bunch of drunken American Legion guys, who was still thinking was the old Cuba. They were going to party and used, you know, get involved with prostitutes or whatever they had in mind. Or maybe they were going to go to a Catholic Cathedral and pray. I don't know what maybe both. But anyway, they were drunk by the time

we arrived. And then we spent quite a bit of time and I was there. When we just when the US put down the economic blockade on Cuba, and why because Castro was a nationalist, it wasn't a communist the communist party at oppose them till six months before he won. They actually had been more sympathetic to petition. But, you know, Castro was definitely a nationalist, wild nationalist and not like Che Guevara. He wasn't bent on exploiting the revolution. That was the whole split between Castro and Che Guevara. Castro wanted to make Cuba into this paradise. See, he believed that anyone believed the fruit and everything the weather and the women and the whole thing the music of Cuba was the best in the whole world. So he was like a Tito type nationalist. And, you know, we read it wrong. And mate decided to have a whole Cold War going with Cuba and then To bring the Russians in, and that's that's the history. But I was there at a time. It's in that movie above the fold, where the irony was that the Cuban communists paper was then became the commies paper revolution was the paper of the of Castro's movement, had this literary supplement on Mondays, Lunesta revolution, which featured the American beats Kerouac and Ginsberg and furling Edie. And their whole thing was this revolution was supposed to free up young people and so forth. And then because they got dragged into the Cold War, it went off to a different model.

Danny Sjursen

Well, you know, that's, I think that we're seeing Cuba suddenly jump into the news a little bit or especially right before the pandemic, you know, because he had Bernie mentioned the education and, and then there was the whole kind of apartheid connection which most people don't know where, you know, Biden was telling those lies about meeting Mandela and you're getting arrested on the way. And so, you know, I love the Castro stories as well. I knew he had to bring them up, but I'm glad you did. But you know, you look at Cuba today, you mentioned how there's like a misunderstanding of monolithic communism that you mentioned earlier. With the Cold War. You know, there's really not a lot left of that, you know, communist world and even Cuba doesn't fit it completely. But, you know, how do you look at Cuba today? I mean, and what are we What do Americans continue to get wrong in this time of Corona? Right. Cuba's jumping back in

Robert "Bob" Scheer

major Danny, I know you've been a professor of history, toy history at West Point. And normally, I think you're you I think you would have shot this historian we have writing right now. Okay. However, I just think you made a big error. Did I lose you already?

Danny Sjursen

No, no, please go ahead. Please.

Robert "Bob" Scheer

It's interesting, Chris when you said the communism bow, but the fact is, communism of the caricature has just about disappeared from history. But communism of the caricature was a denial of everything Marx had ever written, or Communist Manifesto. Because member Communist Manifesto, a thin little pamphlet, I have to point this out to people and the old Soviet Union, when I wrote a review for Moscow news of Gorbachev's book on perestroika and I quoted from the Communist Manifesto, where Marx paid tribute to capitalism, for ending the idiocy of rural life, building the great cities. So Marx did not

challenge the achievements of capitalism. He challenged that it was built on the sweat and blood of ordinary workers, and that didn't share the wealth and therefore created the contradictions that would lead to class struggle. And this socialism that they were talking about would come after the success of capitalism, right? And the imperialist model would explode. Now, ironically, that's what's happened with China. China was this misplace as was Russia. Use of Marxism because the revolution was supposed to come and advanced countries like Germany, or England or the United States, not in a rural countries like Russia and China with all their problems. So Marxism got perverted by people like solid and Mao, to be justification for what they were going to do, which was basically avoid capitalism, avoid its growth, invest in everything else, and develop what became dictatorships of not the proletariat but of the party and became a character mature of the whole thing and oppressive, vicious caricature. However, the odd thing is that somehow the most the richest, population wise country, poor by virtue of its population, poor by virtue of his lack of resources, particularly oil, exhausted farm land. I'm speaking of some experience having been a fellow in the center for Chinese Studies at the University of California in 1963. I believe I got the year right, when we thought China could never develop, well, somehow or other, this communist thing, and the same communist party with the same method of organization, democratic centralism, top down in the villages in the factories, and so forth. Turns out to be a system of government. That first of all was able to cut you can troll this video. Iris once it got going more effectively than evidently any other country, because they have the organization, they have the surveillance, they can get pushed people around. Yes, it's a terrible model in terms of freedom and democracy. But in terms of containing a pandemic, it turns out to be the one that everybody's following. Everybody's saying you have to stay in your house, and you have to follow our rules and so forth. And this communist label, same Communist Party, is still quoting the same ideologies still talking about Marx and Lenin and Mao Zedong. And everything has actually built what may turn out to be the most successful from an economic point of view capitalist model. Nobody ever wants to examine that. Not only was the Cold War fraudulent, about Chinese militarism or Russian military ism, being inevitable and conquest and building an empire, but it was fundamentally About the capacity of those societies, particularly China to change, Vietnam is another example. Vietnam is one of the emerging Tigers of, of what was once the third world, right? People who talk about taking their business from China, where they take into Vietnam, you know, another communist run country. So the reason I was criticizing you ever so in a friendly way, as a historian, why only use the communist label? Since they still use it, they're still run by a Communist Party, they still claim adherence to some kind of ideology of communism. Why use that label, when it fits the overtly totalitarian and militaristic, economically incompetent model, which is what China was chaotic. You know, what a heavy dose of anarchy and madness why not use it now? What in the name of the same ideology they're actually pretty producing a very successful capitalist model, you know, which, by the way, probably is moving more rapidly to developing the middle class that the Tocqueville talked about this, they probably got about three 400 million people who are actually in or close to a middle class now out of their 1.4 billion, but also one that has absorbed the main idea of freedom in the in the advanced West, which is consumer sovereignty. You know, the main idea we have now or being free is to spend your money on all the toys and contraptions and property and business that you want, you know, and that and towards that end, that's what my book about you know, they know everything about you and the surveillance state is about will willing to give up personal freedom. We're willing to say okay, the FBI can know everything about me what I've read what movies I watch, who I meet with, I'll trust them. Why because Let me shop and

there'll be more effective. I can Yelp, I can get reviews, I can get advertising targeted advertising. So in fact, communism has emerged as actually maybe the main model for organizing society. It's not a model I like I'm still with the founders, the Merck constitution, not with them on slavery and not with them why male chauvinism but nonetheless with the idea of individualism, but, you know, the Chinese communists with the same label, same party organization, same claim on ideology, are actually quite effective on being capitalists and maybe economic imperialist. They're not going to do it with the military, but they're going to have the Silk Route, you know, road and they're gonna invest in other countries including Australia as well as throughout Africa. And maybe they are the new economically oriented imperialism, that maybe it's a more effective model from that point of view of profit and wealth aggregation than the one we're hanging on to, which is this weird mixture of militarism and salesmen, which is what Trump and bodies. Trump is, first of all, a salesman, wants people to move into his hotels wants to make investment. On the other hand, he's a bully and a cop and a militarists and wants to beat people over the head, whether they're because they're undocumented, or this or so forth. So he embodies this contradiction of where freedom and capitalism are in America right now. Much more perfectly than the democrats you were mentioning.

Danny Sjursen

Well, yeah, I mean, I, I don't think we disagree all that much. I mean, I think we're gonna have to grapple with a couple of facts that are uncomfortable someday, you know, those stories are. Lino for example, China brought more people out of poverty probably more quickly than at any time in history. Right. And they're certainly, you know, showing that there's an adaptability in the model that people didn't expect, although we probably do have to differentiate between the economic communism system and then the more totalitarian governmental one, because while they have an ideology, that's, you know, communist Communist Party, they've certainly stepped away from a lot of what was in Marx, although they stepped away from that long before. But, uh, you know, so but when we say, so let's take Cuba then which, you know, I think has adhered a little more closely to the original, you know, economic model. And yet what we're seeing with Corona, whether it's taking in cruise ships or sending its doctors overseas, once again, is that this evil enemy, you know, whatever they have, you know, 10 million people in this tiny little country that we've made into a monster, you know, it is showing itself once again, to be arguably for all its flaws, more humanitarian. More forward on certain things like education and and medical care, then we are so it's it's fascinating and what you know, so having been accused, but what do you make of that as you watch it happening again in 2020? If you see it that way?

Robert "Bob" Scheer

Well, I mean, you're really talking about a basic truth of the human experience, which I dare say, is acknowledged in a lot of the, even in the mega churches in the Christian tradition that sin is, does not have a country label. Send us not even present itself as sin all the time. You have to struggle with it within people who present is very virtuous. You know, I'm not saying this is the only way to think about it. But certainly, since we always do, our leaders always invoke basically a Christian notion of morality. The fact of the matter is it contains a warning that labels that presentation that appearance, that PR should not be confused. Don't confuse the thing being sold with the thing itself. Okay? And those Southern Democrats that I mentioned before, we're blatant racist. You hardly ever hear anybody in a democratic party mention. They are the ones who did the lynching. They, you know, they're the ones

you know, who oppress black people so viciously, they will call democrats we don't mention that, because the label is now inconvenient. We want to label play also. You know, Eisenhower, we haven't talked about him much but you know, arguably more peace oriented than any democratic president and yet, came out of the military and was a war hero and so forth. So this contradictions are always there. And I think the absurdity of the book that I wrote with Maria Zeitlin, who was she has been a professor at UCLA. And before that was at Princeton at Berkeley, a brilliant, brilliant scholar and Latin American specialists, among other things. We wrote a book and the American version roll press was called Cuba, an American tragedy, and the penguin edition International. No, the American version was Cuba, tragedy in our hemisphere, and the penguin edition was Cuba, an American tragedy. And it's a book that we wrote, just the first edition came out before the missile crisis, and then the Revised Edition. The Penguin edition came out after it. And our whole argument was that American policy created what was happening in Cuba that we thought was tragic. That this was actually our unwillingness to have experiments in the world that we couldn't control and how to do life and I'll give you before I get back to Cuba, India, China was one such example. We had an idea that democratic India, Communist China, this was the two things freedom what totalitarianism? You look at the situation now, you could make the argument that China is maybe freer than India, India right now is being run by a trumpian figure who's playing the religious card of intolerance and much more coercive in a way China's seems more given to the market and to what the market demands and, and so forth. And you know, the contradictions of the internet so hard to block ideas, but no one any longer talks about Indian China's this clear contrast Even though that was for much of the Cold War, one was clearly democratic one was clearly totalitarian. We don't think of it quite that way. Well, Cuba never fit that model. Cuba, as I said before, was an expression of nationalism against a mafia run dictator, who was in the Catholic Church look the other way, the only institution that otherwise mattered there, it was deeply corrupt. Castro himself had been a serious Catholic, he was offended by the moral corruption, you know, the prostitution, the drugs, the mafia, and the Cuban Revolution was really fought against decadence, if you like. And the notion of a pure Cuban which your women are not exploited, in which your young people are not driven by drugs and crime, and so forth, and he certainly was, of course, it is again de Chile. There are many others. You know, you just had it now in Bolivia, where anytime somebody emerged anywhere in the world Tito is another example where they had some genuine nationalist urge to do it their way. Castro wanted to do it Cuban way okay. You know Tito one he invented Yugoslavia. And it was going to be here Yugoslavia way uniting the Croatians and Serbs and so forth. And we were always at war, with self determination for any other people. The only self determination that we accepted was the self determination of white, Christian America. That's what we made Noble. We said this is the center of virtue. We'll cut some immigrants in we'll cut people who are not white will cut women in under pressure under pressure. But, you know, we're the center of the dawning of the city on the hill, the New Age And that's been embrace and anybody else. So therefore, we are not asking for self determination, we are actually championing universal values, you know, freedom, democracy, so forth, and anybody else, they're only championing narrow nationalists, even when the French there to object to the US involvement originally in Iraq, we attacked french fries, right? We denigrated the French, so anytime anybody in the world has dare to do their own self determination in a way that corresponds to some notion of their own national needs. And certainly China's incredible example I mean, Chinese are driven by a notion of China, you know, China's the john wall, the Middle Kingdom, the middle of the world, and their, their notion is China's time is gone, and China was divided and a century before the last One we

all know about that Shanghai and everything. And then it was divided by corruption and tribalism. And yes, there's a great national pride of finding a Chinese way, you know, and we derived it every time it happens in the world. You know, we are threatened by any notion of other people making their own history, let alone trying to make world history. That's the disease that we have live with. And this movie that you're involved in that you describe in one of your emails, what is it called the meat grinder?

Danny Sjursen

That's right. Yeah, the meat

Robert "Bob" Scheer

grinder documentary. That's, well, that description that was in your email this morning, when I read it struck me as a defining image of the American Empire. We are a meat grinder. We think we can go anywhere in the world and destroy everything on our way. And it's liberating for these people. I was in Vietnam, Vietnam after the bombing, I saw the people with their arms blown off in the hospital. And the madness and what was done to that society and and other people who went you mentioned Jane Fonda before, and they come back to call traders, for daring, daring to suggest that the carpet bombing of Vietnam is genocidal, you know, daring to suggest that, but that's really been the issue. We have. It's torture. You know, we torture it in Vietnam. Nobody ever even talks about that. You know, Tony Rosa, who was with Daniel Ellsberg, and releasing the Pentagon Papers, what he was doing at the RAND Corporation was reading the reports of torture, the witness interrogation of captured Vietcong, and so forth. That's what turned him against the war. You know, but do we ever hear anybody talk about Vietnam is a time of torture, which was systematic, and we were intimately involved with the Michigan State project, everything from the creation of the GM administration, from the very beginning. You don't hear anything about it. So I think the real illness at the heart of the American soul is the notion of American exceptionalism. It gives you a get out of jail free card for anything, you do anything dropping the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, torture, whatever, whatever you overthrowing governments creating mayhem, being what martin luther king called the major purveyor of violence in the world today. That's what Martin Luther King said shortly before he died. He had to condemn his own government on Vietnam because it is and his words, the mate was the major purveyor of violence in the world today. Well, you three guys were involved in that violence intimately. Right. And what was the justification for that violence? Even when it's considered unneeded wrong? Right. What did they say we made a mistake. My Lai was a mistake. Right? You know, Abu Gharib was a mistake, right? That's the great cop out.

Danny Sjursen

Absolutely. It's always an anomaly, according to the public narrative, when in reality, all of this has been just a piece with America's empire in general.