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From My Lai to WMD Lie

In dominant capitalist-imperialist media, America's imperial crimes are airbrushed out of historical memory, like they never took place. Thus it is that CNN can without the slightest hint of irony show a clip of the late Colin Powell [saying this last year](#): "the one word I have to use with respect to what [Donald Trump] has been doing for the last several years is a word I never would have used before, I never would have used for any of the four presidents I have worked for: He lies. He lies about things. And he gets away with it."

MSNBC approvingly reported the following judgement [from Richard Haass](#), president of the US Council on Foreign Relations: Powell was "one of the most intellectually honest people I ever met."

These were fascinating reflections on an imperial policymaker who was sent to the United Nations in 2003 as then US president George W. Bush's Secretary of State [to sell](#) the biggest (or perhaps now the [second biggest](#)

) American lie of the century: the transparently false and Orwellian claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that posed a great danger to global peace and security. Powell spent 76 minutes carefully weaving this epic fabrication.

Ultimately deprived of real-world evidence for the non-existent menace, Bush went on to falsely claim that the US was invading and occupying Iraq to advance democracy – another striking deceit in which Powell participated.

More than a million Iraqis unnecessarily and prematurely died in the wake of Bush, Dick

Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Colin Powell's WMD lie (and the related US fraud absurdly linking Iraq's regime to al Qaeda and 9/11). Behind the invention lay an imperial motive: [boosting waning US global hegemony](#) by putting a military boot on the Middle Eastern oil spigot.

Scenes of misery, terror bombings, and sectarian strife from post-invasion Iraq were regularly reported in the US as if they had nothing to do with the American superpower invading, maiming, and torturing Iraq's citizens and removing its government. Uncle Sam's [near murder of Iraq](#) was airbrushed from the mainstream reporting and commentary.

Powell's death last week was treated in mainstream US media as something akin to the demise of a great spiritual and civil rights leader. Just two days ago (on Sunday, October 24th), I saw Andrew Young tell Jonathan Capehart on MSNBC that Powell was the embodiment caring and democratic "soul of America" at its very best and as proof that Black people can rise to the top in the United States. CNN [approvingly quoted Bill Clinton](#) as follows: "He lived the promise of America, and spent a lifetime working to help our country, especially our young people, *live up to its own ideals and noblest aspirations at home and around the world* ." MSNBC brought on the ruling class presidential historian and imperialist [running dog lackey John Meacham](#) to proclaim that Powell "represents *the best of what the country can be* ."

There was no mention of how Powell helped [whitewash the My Lai massacre](#) as an Army Major serving as an assistant chief of staff of operations for the Americal Division in 1969. There was no reference to the monumentally criminal nature of two one-sided and mass-murderous "wars" (

[Orwellian imperial slaughters](#)

) Powell oversaw for George H.W. Bush as Chairman of the Joints of Staff: the US attack on Panama in 1989 and the sadistic 1990

["turkey shoot" massacre](#)

that was labelled "the Gulf War."

As with [Barack Obama](#) and Lloyd Austin, Powell's path of Black entrance to the power elite was predicated on respectful service to the nation's racist and lethal empire and on helping the preponderantly white American ruling class [colorize and thereby rebrand its empire](#) to some

degree in a majority nonwhite world.

“Nothing Ever Happened”

It's nice that Powell was famously polite on a personal level and once even stopped his limousine to help a [wounded veteran change a car tire](#). But many slaveowners and quite a few Nazi camp guards were also outwardly polite and caring in their personal dealings. Pulling over for an army amputee's flat tire and speaking respectfully to reporters does not make up for a life of well-mannered participation in gargantuan and grotesque imperial criminality.

But of course, such criminality does not exist when it comes to inherently wholesome and benevolent America in the minds of those who own, control, and staff the dominant US media. As [Madeline Albright once explained](#) and the [consent-manufacturing](#) corporate media regularly reports, “The United States is good. We try to do our best everywhere.”

Just based on the US media reporting from Afghanistan during and since Joe Biden's botched military withdrawal from Kabul, you'd think the United States had been in Afghanistan on a humanitarian mission to protect Afghan women, girls, and journalists against the extremist Islamic fundamentalism of the Taliban. There was little if any serious reporting and commentary on [how the US](#) sponsored and equipped the rise of Islamo-fundamentalist terrorism in Afghanistan as part of its late Cold War with the Soviet Union. Also missing was any reference to the illegality and savage violence of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan or of how that imperial violence had recruited masses of Afghan villagers to the Taliban cause. It was down the memory hole with incidents like [the US bombing of Bola Boluk](#), a village in western Afghanistan where dozens of children were blown to bits by American bombs in May of 2009. ([Drone war master assassin](#))
Barack Obama refused to apologize, absurdly blaming the child-vivisectioning carnage on “Taliban grenades.”).

In US media, this and numerous other comparable US crimes in Afghanistan never really happened. This is something new. As the great British playwright [Harold Pinter explained](#) in his 2005 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, the reigning Western media-politics culture sends US crimes down the recall chute even as they are being committed:

'The United States supported and in many cases engendered every right wing military dictatorship in the world after the end of the Second World War. I refer to Indonesia, Greece, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, and, of course, Chile. The horror the United States inflicted upon Chile in 1973 can never be purged and can never be forgiven. Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn't know it. It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.'

Made in the USA but Nothing to Do with Us

Like the Central American migrant crisis at the southern US border, the endless "made in the USA" misery of Haiti is reported by dominant US media in the standard imperial and historical vacuum, as if it has nothing to do with U.S. policy. "My goodness, look at those poor Black people trying to get into our wonderful country. Sorry, we're full up and it's NOT our fault!" Based on US media reporting alone, US-American news consumers would think that Uncle Sam had nothing to do with chaos and terror in the Caribbean and Central America. It's down the memory hole with [how the United States](#) turned Haiti into one of the world's poorest and most dangerous nations by: refusing to recognize Haiti (as punishment for its successful anti-slavery Black revolution) for six decades; imposing discriminatory trade policies on the poor island nation; repeatedly invading the country to strip its financial assets and impose neo-slavery on its majority population; backing murderous Haitian dictators like Francois ("Papa Doc") and Jean Clade ("Baby Doc") Duvalier; removing the popular left president Haitian Jean Bertrand Aristide. With all this history and its relevance to the horrifying chaos underway in Haiti since its recent earthquake and the assassination of its president left out of the story, few Americans have any historical or moral context within which to gauge the cold sadism of the Biden administration's decision to forcibly [fly thousands of desperate Haitian refugees](#) back into the dreadfully poor and violence-torn Hell on Earth that is their long US-tortured homeland.

In a similar vein, media deletion of Washington's [long history](#) of funding, training, and equipping mass repression and authoritarian regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras while imposing discriminatory trade and investment policies on Central America means that few US-American news consumers have any historical or moral compass within

which to assess what Aviva Chomsky has rightly called the “cruel joke” that is Joe Biden’s southern border policy. The Biden border plan,

[professor Chomsky notes](#)

, “enlist[s] Central American governments, in particular their militaries, to prevent migration through the use of repression” – this while advancing a “free market” neoliberal policy model that worsens the economic misery and violence, compelling more Central American families to flee northward. Dropping any serious effort at the comprehensive immigration reform he campaigned on, Biden has, writes, “intercept[ed] 1.5 million at the border, expel[led] 700,000, and place[d] tens of thousands, including families with children, in what under Trump had been called concentration camps” (emphasis added). Further:

“With reform dead in the water, Biden abandoned his promise to impose a moratorium on deportations when it was blocked in the courts and started to repatriate people. He deputized his Vice President, Kamala Harris, herself a child of Jamaican and Indian immigrants, the new ‘Immigration Czar’ to carry out all this border enforcement. On her junket to Washington’s vassals in the Northern Triangle and Mexico, Harris told migrants, ‘Do not come. Do not come.’ The United States will continue to enforce our laws and secure our borders. If you come to our border, you will be turned back.”

Translation of Harris’s message: “Stay in the infernal plots of the world capitalist periphery to which you have been consigned by the hegemonic power. You have no business here, nonwhite peons!” The media helps guarantee that only a tiny percentage of the US populace knows the slightest thing about the extensive and ongoing record of Washington and Wall Street making life miserable for most Central Americans – a history that now [includes US climate policy](#).

As a result, there is little popular US outrage about the US government’s heartless treatment of Caribbean and Central American migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers under Biden as under Trump.

Meanwhile the US-generated “crisis at the border” continues to provide fodder for the nativist and neofascist Amerikaner right, which absurdly claims that Biden is advancing an “open borders” policy meant to “replace” supposedly virtuous and hard-working white Americans by supposedly criminal and indolent, brown-skinned immigrants. This preposterous claim is likely accepted by most of the Republican base. This is America, after all, the [world’s most heavily propagandized nation](#)

, where two plus equals five for millions of its citizens. It’s a corporate-crafted open-air asylum where

[76% of Republicans](#)

absurdly think Democrats are socialists and where likely comparable numbers of Trumpenvolk think US first-graders are being taught (supposedly Marxist) Critical Race Theory, that Donald

Trump won the 2020 presidential election, and that Biden is flooding the nation with nonwhite migrants.

Sadly, most Democrats who think about such things likely now believe along with "left" MSNBC that the longtime Republican and leading imperial front man Colin Powell was a good person instead of what he really was: an outwardly polite agent of the world's greatest killing machine.

Paul Street's new book is [The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement](#)