

# Psychohistory News

**Newsletter of the International Psychohistorical Association**

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## **Understanding the Republican Group Fantasy**

**by Brian D'Agostino**

I watched the January 14 debate of the seven leading Republican presidential candidates with great interest. A week later, I read the transcript of the debate—a treasure trove of data on the Republican group fantasy—and made a list of what I found to be the most emotionally charged statements. In this article I will summarize some of these statements, place the group fantasy evoked by them in historical context, and provide a psychohistorical analysis including possible social practices for ameliorating what appears to be the underlying traumas.



The two most frequently occurring themes in the debate were humiliation and restoration of power

through guns and militarism. By coincidence, a naval incident with Iran two days beforehand provided ample fodder for the humiliation narrative. Two small American naval boats apparently strayed by mistake into Iranian territorial waters and were boarded by Revolutionary Guards, the Iranian regime's hardline elite corps. The Guards arrested the crew and immediately exploited

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**CALL FOR PAPERS, p. 2**  
**IPA 2016 Conference, June 1-3, NYU**

## **In the Wake of Terrorist Attacks: a Call for Introspection**

**by Marc-André Cotton**

*Terrorism brings back deep memories of childhood abuse. Awareness of this phenomenon can help reduce unconscious sources of popular support for repressive and militaristic government policies in the wake of terrorist attacks. These reflections by the IPA's International Vice President were composed in the weeks after the November 13 Paris attacks.*

In the aftermath of the November 13 mass shootings, many in France felt relieved when President Hollande declared a state of emergency and sent planes to bomb ISIL in Syria. A reflexive response to the attacks was to rally behind the tri-color flag and the values of the Republic, to draw closer to

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**PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY OF MAHATMA GANDHI, p. 8**

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### REPUBLICAN FANTASY

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the propaganda value of the incident by releasing a photo of US sailors kneeling with their hands clasped behind their heads and Iranian personnel holding them at gunpoint. They also released a short video-clip of an American sailor apologizing for the crew’s mistake.

Secretary of State John Kerry quickly contacted his Iranian counterpart and the sailors were released unharmed in a matter of hours. The president touted this speedy resolution of the incident as a diplomatic success based on his administration’s improved relations with Iran. It should also be noted that any country facing unauthorized entry into its territory by foreign nationals has the right under international law to arrest and detain them. Republican politicians and conservative pundits, however, homed in on the images of American sailors kneeling and apologizing and framed them as a devastating humiliation of the United States.

### Making America Great Again

During the debate, Texas Senator Ted Cruz said, “If I am elected president, no service man or service woman will be forced to be on their

knees, and any nation that captures our fighting men will feel the full force and fury of the United States of America.” New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said that President Obama had let our military “diminish to a point where tinpot dictators like the mullahs in Iran are taking our Navy ships;” he called it “disgraceful” and said that as president he would rebuild the US military and avert any such humiliations. Donald Trump concluded his remarks at the debate by saying that the previous day he had stood with 75 construction workers who were “tough” and “strong” but nevertheless “had tears pouring down their faces” at the sight of American sailors on their knees with “Iranian wise guys having guns to their heads.” Repeating his now familiar mantra, Trump said, “If I’m president, we will make America great again.”

The humiliation theme came up again and again. Christie said that “this country is not respected around the world anymore.” Florida Senator Marco Rubio said, “Barack Obama believes that America is an arrogant global power that needs to be cut down to size. And that’s how you get a foreign policy where we cut deals with our enemies like Iran and we betray our allies like Israel and we gut our military and we go around the world

like he has done on ten separate occasions and apologized for America.” This president, he said, “is weakening America on the global stage.”

According to Trump, Americans are “laughed at all over the world.” He said that the Chinese laugh at us and “can’t believe how stupid the American leadership is,” and that “we don’t need a weak person being president of the United States.” Agreeing with Trump, Cruz said “China is running over President Obama like he is a child,” a choice of words to which I will return.

The needed response to this humiliation, all the candidates agreed, was “to rebuild our military.” Florida Governor Jeb Bush made the highly misleading claim that the US Navy is “now half the size of what it was prior to Operation Desert Storm,” and the patently absurd claim that “every weapon system has been gutted.” He said the US needs a more belligerent foreign policy, that “our friends no longer think we have their back and our enemies no longer fear us,” and that “the rest of the world is moving away from us towards other alliances because we are weak.” Retired neurosurgeon

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## **Terrorism: an Overview**

**David Lotto** is a psychohistorian and psychoanalyst in private practice in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the author of numerous peer reviewed articles in psychoanalysis and psychohistory, and Editor of *The Journal of Psychohistory*.

## **Rage and its Meanings in an Age of Terrorism, War, and Genocide**

**Charles B. Strozier** is a Professor of History at CUNY and Founding Director of its Center on Terrorism. He is a Training and Supervising Psychoanalyst at the Training and Research Institute in Self Psychology and author of numerous psychohistorical works including *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence, and History*.

## **KEYNOTE – THE WORM AT THE CORE: THE ROLE OF DEATH IN LIFE**

**Sheldon Solomon** is Professor of Social Psychology and Ross Professor for Interdisciplinary Studies at Skidmore College. He is a co-creator of Terror Management Theory, a research paradigm in social psychology informed by the work of Ernest Becker, and coauthor of *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life*.



IPA Keynote Speaker Sheldon Solomon

## **Neuro-hermeneutics and Psychohistory: Allies or Strange Bedfellows?**

**Inna Rozentsvit** is a psychoanalytically trained neurologist specializing in brain trauma and neuropsychiatry. She is a founder of Neuro-recovery Solutions, an educator who works with special needs children, and a scientific faculty member and an administrator of the Object Relations Institute, NYC.

## **Psychohistory's Next Agenda and the History of Our Field**

**Paul Elovitz** is Associate Professor of History, Psychohistory and Interdisciplinary Studies at Ramapo College, New Jersey, Editor of *Psychohistory for the Twenty-First Century*, Founder and Editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Clio's Psyche*, author of numerous articles in psychohistory, and founder of Psychohistory Forum.

## **The False Memory "Debate" Revisited: The Continued Suppression of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

**S. Faye Snyder** is Founder and Clinical Director of the Parenting and Relationship Counseling Foundation, Granada Hills, CA. Her book *The Politics of Memory: When One is Requested to Shut the Eyes* examines the repression, retrieval, and reality of traumatic memories and the legal war surrounding sexual abuse cases.

## **The Intergenerational Trauma of Slavery**

**Eddie Taylor** is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Highland, Indiana, a leader in the field of Black psychological empowerment, and the author of *Restoring the Mind of Black America*. **Gilda Graff** is Vice-President of the International Psychohistorical Association and a psychoanalyst in private practice.

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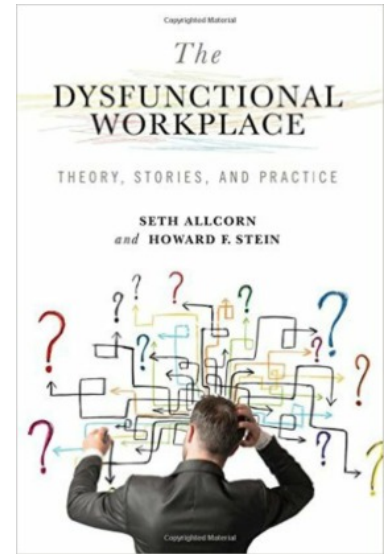
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## BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

### **The Dysfunctional Workplace: Theory, Stories, and Practice** by Seth Allcorn and Howard F. Stein (University of Missouri Press, 2016)

This book explores an aspect of organizational life that is at times difficult to acknowledge and often painful to recall. Stories invite reflection and the development of greater understanding of organizational dynamics. This fresh scholarship provides a theoretical framework for discussion. Throughout this book, Allcorn and Stein utilize a psychoanalytically informed perspective to help readers understand why a leader, colleague or friend behaves in ways that are destructive of others and the organization and provides a basis for organizations to survive and thrive in a dysfunctional workplace.



### **REPUBLICAN FANTASY** *continued from page two*

Ben Carson said that President Obama has “done everything he can to diminish [the US military].”

Three candidates proposed a policy of using force without limits, though in terms more subtle than Ted Cruz’s proposal in the wake of the San Bernadino shooting to “carpet bomb” ISIS. Referring to the military, Carson said “we [shouldn’t] tie their hands behind their back,” while Bush said “We need the lawyers off the back of the war fighters.” Rubio promised that “if we capture any [members of ISIS] alive, they are getting a one-way ticket to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and we are going to find out everything they know.” Seeing and hearing the aggressive way he spoke these words left no doubt in my mind that he was promising to bring back “enhanced interrogation techniques,” that is, torture.

Related to this militaristic discourse, the candidates were also unanimous in calling for fewer restrictions on the acquisition of guns in the United States. Rubio linked Barack Obama’s alleged undermining of the military with his support for gun control and noted sarcastically that

ISIS does not purchase their weapons at gun shows, a reference to a gun control initiative supported by the president. He also taunted Christie for being lax on gun rights and the governor responded that he vetoed a 50-caliber rifle ban, a reduction in clip size, and a statewide I.D. system for gun owners. Christie fiercely attacked Barack Obama’s use of executive orders to enact gun control measures, saying about the President of the United States, “This guy is a petulant child” and promising Obama that “we are going to kick your rear end out of the White House come this fall.” Kick the rear end of a petulant child. Hmmm.

### **Macro-historical Realities**

Over the course of the two and a half hour debate, the words “military” or “guns” were used a total of 156 times, all in the context of overcoming humiliation or weakness. Since politicians are experts at reading the public mood, it would appear that many Americans, especially the Republican primary voters to whom these candidates were mainly speaking, are feeling humiliated. To understand why will take a multi-leveled analysis. I will begin by examining the macro-historical contexts in which the humiliation and militarism group fantasy is unfolding.

The 1950s and 60s were the heyday of the American middle class, based on unionized jobs, white collar employment, and small businesses, many of which were passed down from father to son. It was mainly non-Hispanic whites who had access to this prosperity, and it was common to see households headed by male bread-winners with full time female home-makers. Beginning in the 1970s, corporations began to move factories to low wage regions, decimating unions and the blue collar economy. At the same time, big chain stores cut into the small business sector. Middle class white women began to enter the paid work force, both out of economic necessity and due to changing gender roles, putting further downward pressure on wages. Women and minorities gained increased access to white collar jobs (both because of affirmative action and because employers could pay them less than they paid white males), as well as increased access to higher education.

These developments, combined with the women’s and minority empowerment movements, posed major challenges to the social status of white males. As Harriet Fraad has pointed out in the pages of this newsletter, this segment of the US population in recent decades has faced eroding

economic security, loss of dominance in the family, and the ascendancy of women, Blacks and Hispanics in society and politics, all at the same time. Fraad has noted how the US gun industry exploited the humiliation and frustration experienced by these men, how the cult of guns flourished as a way of restoring masculinity and potency, and how the boiling frustrations and cult of guns combined to create an ever worsening epidemic of mass shootings beginning in the 1980s.

During this same period, the limits of American power on the global scene became increasingly evident, beginning with the humiliating defeat of the US in Vietnam and culminating in the attacks of 9/11 and the disastrous Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Ignoring the geopolitical reasons for this decline, the Republican candidates attribute it to neglect of US military capabilities. Defense spending during the Obama years did, in fact, decline from about \$750 billion in 2010 to \$600 billion in 2015 (in constant dollars). However, this was due mainly to winding down of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, which tells us nothing about long term trends. To put the current level of military spending in context, it is about 60% more in constant dollars than it was on average during the Cold War; it is more than the military spending of the next seven biggest military powers in the world combined, and more than four times the military budget of China.

The real reasons for the relative decline of American power are structural changes in the global political-economic system since World War II. In *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, historian Paul Kennedy provides the long term geopolitical

context for these changes. Since the 15th century, a succession of hegemonic powers—Spain, France, Britain, and now the United States—carved out political or economic empires and then, economically burdened by the costs of empire, lost their hegemony to the next great power. While the US economy grew faster than the country's military spending during the Cold War, the costs of empire remained a drag on civilian investment, allowing a number of industrialized European and Asian countries to overtake the US in manufacturing productivity, while the country's transportation, energy, and other infrastructure deteriorated in the last 30 years.

If the pattern that Kennedy described continues into the future, America in the coming decades will be displaced by China as the world's hegemonic power. In my view, this is unlikely to occur because the forces of globalization are transforming the great power system itself, with elites and masses alike organizing themselves across national boundaries. Whether the emerging planetary civilization will be humane and egalitarian or violent and autocratic remains to be seen, but in any case we should not assume that the current international system based on sovereign states will continue indefinitely.

### **The Psychology of Humiliation**

The 1950s and 60s were the heyday of both the US empire and the American middle class. During this time, most white males enjoyed privilege and prosperity at home and could bask in the glory of American global hegemony. All of this began to unravel in the 1970s, due to trends indicated above that have continued ever since. These systemic factors are the context

of the Republican group fantasy, but do not adequately explain it. What, we must ask, can account for the stark differences in the way Republicans and Democrats are responding to the same economic and geopolitical challenges?

Given the salience of the non-Hispanic white male demographic in the above analysis, the answer to this question is partly the multi-racial and multi-cultural composition of the Democratic electorate. The other main factor, I would argue, is that Republicans and Democrats draw from different psychoclasses, that is, groups of people with common personality profiles resulting from distinctive parenting subcultures. If Republican white males are more inclined than their Democratic counterparts to feel humiliated and to find the remedy in guns and militarism, this probably reflects a different distribution of personality types in the two parties.



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The abovementioned comments by Cruz and Christie that President Obama is a “child,” and the contempt and fury with which they attacked him, may be clues about a major psychoclass associated with the Republican Party. Consistent with the punitive tone that dominated the entire debate, Christie threatened to “kick the rear end” of the “petulant child.” I would argue that Repub-

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## REPUBLICAN FANTASY

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lican males in the United States at the present time are typically people who were subjected to punitive parenting. Evidence for such a nexus between punishment in childhood and political conservatism includes survey findings by Milburn et al. involving punishment, political attitudes, and participation in psychotherapy (Childhood Punishment, Denial, and Political Attitudes, *Political Psychology*, vol. 16, no. 3). Males who reported being disciplined in a punitive manner in childhood and had no psychotherapy were significantly more conservative than males who were not punished, as well as more conservative than punished males who had therapy. The authors interpret these data, correctly in my view, that punitive parenting produces unconscious rage that is displaced onto political scapegoats. This is not the case, however, for males who participated in psychotherapy. By becoming conscious of their rage and its sources in childhood, these males have less need to displace it. Women in the survey did not exhibit a significant relationship between punishment and conservatism, perhaps because it is not socially acceptable for females raised according to traditional gender norms to direct anger towards others.

More can be said about the possible psychodynamics of right-wing ideology and the way unconscious complexes are displaced onto symbolic political objects. Identification with the aggressor may be a relevant mechanism here, with the traumatized child identifying with and idealizing the punitive parent. To the extent such identification occurs, it may be the source of many conservatives' contempt for weakness and dependency, which is associated with the parental contempt they experienced as weak and dependent children.

I hypothesize that idealized punitive introjects are typically displaced onto the violent arm of the state—the military and police—while the internalized contempt is displaced onto the “nanny state,” that is, the social welfare and regulatory aspects of government. It is the latter to which American conservatives generally refer when they castigate “government”—even as they treat the military and police as sacred cows. By contrast, someone who becomes conscious of the punitive introjects as the source of their rage (e.g. through psychotherapy) is likely to become politically progressive, rebelling against the violent side of the state and embracing the nurturing side. People raised in a nurturing manner may end up in the same place politically by a different developmental route.

### Creating a Humane Future

Interconnected institutional, political, and psychological problems demand multi-leveled responses. In this presidential election year in the United States, political education is sorely needed about the real sources of economic insecurity and terrorism, and a policy agenda for achieving sustainable prosperity and a humane future. I have written about these matters in some detail in my book, *The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America* (Praeger, 2012).

Core elements of this agenda, I argue, include a Green New Deal paid for by carbon taxes and increased taxes on the rich; demilitarization and a new foreign policy based on collaboration with Russia and China to ameliorate global environmental, economic, and security challenges; and policy initiatives to promote worker ownership and control of enterprises. This is a practical policy agenda that can actually achieve the peace and

prosperity that millions of ordinary people want from their political system. Moreover, the widespread appeal of Bernie Sanders' populist campaign suggests that the time has come to interject such ideas, dismissed as too radical in the past, into mainstream political discourse.



In my book's appendix on the psychology of the radical right, I also call on the progressive movement to intervene in the cultural politics of child rearing. One initiative along these lines, Dr. Margaret Kind's high school parenting curriculum, was outlined in the Summer 2014 issue of this newsletter. By teaching humane parenting in our middle and high schools, society can finally break the vicious cycle of punitive parenting and right-wing authoritarianism. Further, by making such a curriculum mandatory for boys and girls, we can simultaneously dismantle the gender caste system that continues to reproduce inequality between women and men. Promoting such programs is a major way that psychohistorians can help create a humane and peaceful future.

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## TERRORIST ATTACKS

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our leaders in search of reassurance. As criticism arose over unlawful security measures in the wake of the tragedy, I thought about an unconscious process that may be at play in such painful moments.

### Responding to Political Violence

When we face an event that temporarily overwhelms the response capacity of our reflective consciousness, a splitting mechanism operates. Our brain cannot integrate the disturbing information and the emotional trauma associated with it. This was frequently described as a “state of stupor” on the evening of the November 13 Paris attacks. A constructive way of processing such events is to share one’s experience with others and to show support through social networks. In this case, for example, #PrayForParis broke hashtag records on Twitter.

This spontaneous reaction may have stemmed from an overwhelming anxiety rekindled by the peculiar ferocity shown by the attackers, urging those affected to find consolation and a sense of togetherness in a few powerful symbols. Identification of the French people with the victims seemed even stronger than occurred after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015, which were directed towards specific targets. This latest shooting was indiscriminate. I and those I know liked the music played at the Bataclan concert hall and could easily imagine ourselves on the terrace of Rue de Charonne.

Such responses are natural, but I see two reasons to go deeper. First, only through introspection can we avert popular support for abuses of power that are often perpetrated “in our name,” ostensibly in the service of national security. France in fact has opted out of some aspects of the European Human Rights Convention in order to fight terrorism, and French authorities have raided mosques and the homes of environmental protesters. Unexamined fears enable such excesses. The second reason for deeper reflection has to do with personal integrity and the need to free ourselves from our inner limitations.

### Confronting the Terrors of Childhood

Perhaps the most terrifying experiences of childhood are those associated with parental violence. It is common for such terrors to be repressed and then triggered in adulthood by dramatically violent events such as the mass shootings in Paris or San Bernadino. To the extent we remain unconscious of such childhood traumas, it is easy to displace our fears onto scapegoats and find false reassurance in irrational and dysfunctional security policies. But there is an alternative. When political violence evokes childhood terrors, tragedy can become an occasion for personal growth through introspection.

The key to introspection in this context is to recognize how our adult responses to horrific political violence are shaped by our traumatic memories of parental violence. In both cases, there is a sense of disbelief before reality sets in. How can this be possible? There was a relative confidence and, suddenly, everything seems to be turned upside down. We are shock-

ed and puzzled by terrorist attacks just as we were shocked and puzzled as children in the wake of parental violence. Terror becomes real through our bodily sensations: our heart is now racing and apprehension takes over.

Emotions in the wake of a terrorist attack are overwhelming. We must understand what has happened, but how can we possibly make sense of such unbounded hatred? Feelings of helplessness at the hands of indiscriminate violence soon give way to anger seeking compensation for our loss. Any sense of the assailants’ humanity is overwhelmed by the urge to strike back, to harm or kill to put an end to such evil. But just as we once hit the wall of our own intractable parents, now too, a truly effective response eludes us, and a sense of numbness sets in.

In the weeks following the attacks, we experience a train of emotions, undoubtedly intensified by alarming press statements and untiring reminders of the crimes. We feel powerless and enraged, just as we did as children, and at other times feel unfathomable sorrow. Our efforts to make wise political judgments about the current terrorist threat are held hostage to an inner turmoil having its roots in the terror we experienced as children. We survived that terror through repression, but now the old psychic wounds resurface. Only by reflecting on the sources of those wounds can we achieve personal healing and political sanity.

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Psychobiography**FATHERING A NATION, HE SACRIFICED HIS SONS**

by  
Souvik Raychaudhuri

Nicknamed ‘Bapu’ (‘father’ in Gujarati), Mahatma Gandhi is fittingly celebrated as the father of modern India and a pioneer in the theory and practice of non-violent social change. Psychobiographies of Gandhi and his sons by Parikh (2001), Dalal and Suhrud’s (2007), and Joshi (2007) demonstrate that he achieved this stature at terrible personal cost, and wreaked great psychological violence, ironically, on his own sons. All four of them--Harilal (1888-1948), Manilal (1892-1956), Ramdas (1897-1969) and Devdas (1900-1957)—harbored deep-seated, repressed grievances against their father.

In his personal life, Gandhi was reputed to be “uncaring, obstinate, abstemious, and self-denying” (Nandy, 1998). None of his sons were permitted formal schooling, greatly impeding their capacities for professional accomplishment. When his son Harilal wanted to marry, the Mahatma’s verdict was, “How can I, who have always advocated renunciation of sex, encourage you to gratify it?”

Harilal, Gandhi’s most defiant and vivacious son, bore the brunt of his father’s displeasure. Gandhi once said that his greatest regret was that he couldn’t persuade two individuals — Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his son Harilal. Eldest of the four brothers, Harilal eventually turned out to be an exemplar of deliberate self-harm,

an alcoholic arrested on several occasions for public drunkenness and caught in a number of petty crimes including embezzlement. Rather than reflect on his own failures as a father, Gandhi snapped and eventually banished Harilal from the family.



Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Mahatma

For his many hagiographers, “the Mahatma” was ‘the Man who became One with the Universal Being’ (Rolland, 2002). But Harilal personally witnessed features of Gandhi’s life that would shock his admirers, from the spiritual pretensions of his acolytes to the climate of neurosis surrounding his negation of sexuality. Dalal and Suhrud’s empathetic and unbiased biography of Harilal documents these disagreeable truths.

One falls short in comprehending the father of India, who has inspired hundreds of millions of people worldwide to this day,

without understanding his son Harilal Mohandas Gandhi—left behind, neglected, abandoned, and indeed fatherless throughout life. While dying in a Mumbai (then Bombay) hospital in 1948, Harilal had no idea that future psychobiographers would validate his perceptions of the Mahatma’s shadow side.

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