

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2015

ASIAN AMERICAN WRITERS' WORKSHOP

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ESSAYS INTERVIEWS COLUMNS BLOG AFTER 1989 SUBMIT ABOUT

AFTER 1989

Timothy McVeigh and our “Buried History”

On the domestic terror of the 1990s, and avoiding cultural amnesia.



Jay Koester

By MANAN AHMED

JUNE 27, 2012 | AF-PAK, FALLUJAH, MIKE ROYKO, OKLAHOMA CITY, TIMOTHY MCVEIGH, UNABOMBER

“So I would have no objection if we picked out a country that is a likely suspect and bombed some oil fields, refineries, bridges, highways, industrial complexes, airports, military bases, and anything else that is of great value but doesn’t shelter innocent civilians. If it happens to be the wrong country, well, too bad, but it’s likely it did something to deserve it anyway. Or would in the future.

MEDIA GALLERY

CURATION

February 3, 7:00 PM
ON NOT BREAKING YOUR HEART DURING THE APOCALYPSE
Sure, the end of the world is nigh, but then what? Two award-winning...



MORE AAWW EVENTS

NOW ON TWITTER

AAWW The AAWW: Anzhe Zhang (@an2h3zzz) time travels and rots his teeth with a childhood drink found in Chinatown: <http://t.co/vzT86ZuStS> #OpenCity about 23 hours ago

AAWW The AAWW: One our favorite novelists @rabihalameddine tonight at @SymphonySpace! <http://t.co/VsuoMsa6fA> about 1 day ago

AAWW The AAWW: RT @LakshmiGandhi: The egg tarts. (The fabulous @aaww sent out the recipe with their year end appeal this year.) <http://t.co/RwnGYoRE4J> about 2 days ago

OPEN CITY

Childhood In A Can
Time traveling with a drink find in Chinatown

Harmonium Soul
Harmoniums are all over South Asian music. But they also connect Guyana and Punjab spiritually

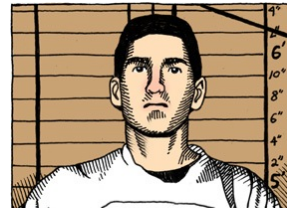
Little Pakistan’s Mission Man
Community organizing can be lonely work when you’re battling ghosts from a violent past

Poll Position

And its leaders, as well as other troublemakers, would get the message: Terrorism is too costly a game.

President Clinton says we should be cautious about placing blame or taking action. OK. But when the time comes for punishment, it wouldn't be an eye for eye. That's just a swap. We should take both eyes, ears, nose, the entire anatomy. That's how to make a lasting impression.”

–Mike Royko, April 21, 1995, *Chicago Tribune*



I remember that morning. I was ironing my clothes for my night shift at the Olive Garden. I remember Connie Chung breathlessly telling me through the television that men of a “Middle Eastern hue” had been seen fleeing the scene. Between the lines she spoke was the clear message: The war in the Middle East has finally come to the United States. The coverage that day was relentless—they told me about Beirut, they told me about Islamic Jihad, they told me that clusters of Arabs lived in Oklahoma, they told me how to spot suspicious Arabs in my neighborhood. Soon after began the talk of retribution. Later, in September 2002, they would tell me that Timothy McVeigh had met with Iraqis, of course, and that Saddam's own army—clearly—had planned it all. Chung and Royko were gone, but their colleagues had the same message: We should seek that retribution, now. Afghanistan had already paid with its eyes, ears, and noses—its entire anatomy—for NYC; now, Iraq must pay for Oklahoma City.

If the retribution counter started in April 1995, it reached the Royko-specified end in April 2004, when the city of Fallujah was erased under Operation Vigilant Resolve—“the OKC decade,” if you will.

Some may remember April of 1995 as a particularly terrifying time. The Unabomber was terrorizing *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and the U.S. Postal Service, demanding that the news outlets publish his manifesto. Waco was still smoldering in the nation's unkempt backyard. This was the heyday of ethnically white “domestic” terrorism. By the end of that decade—by 2001—we collectively forgot all “domestic” terrors, and all colors bled into one: brown.

If McVeigh is remembered now, he is recalled as a counter-example to the perniciousness of Islamophobia—the white Christian terrorist. This account—the liberal equivalent of balancing ledgers—sits uneasily with me, as it keeps the terror of the mid-1990s out of our lives, shunted to the edges of political and social awareness. Even as a Christian terrorist, a veteran of the Gulf War, McVeigh remains an outsider, an anomaly. And this is why: to make McVeigh one of “us” is to make Nidal Malik Hasan into one of us, as well. This is not a step that comes easily for any of us. Hence, in our recollection of the 1990s, we would rather forget McVeigh. This cultural amnesia “helps” us in other ways—the war is never *here*, the colony is always *at the edge*, and the drones that kill civilians there do not need to be made accountable. Historian Bruce Cumings has called this type of amnesia “buried history,” wherein a “hegemony of forgetting” determines which particular aspects of the present recall specific pasts. Awash as we are in a celebration of all things “retro,” the politics of remembering nevertheless remains out of our view.

The '90s in America were a decade of terror inside—from race riots to postal bombs to mass murders. But it was also a decade full of terror on the outside—the Gulf War, the rapid abandonment of Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban, the conversion of Pakistan into a political pariah state at the mercy of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (to note only

In neighborhoods where Asian American voters lack English fluency, poll workers are the overlooked links to electoral participation.

The Talented Master Khan

Grammy-nominated producer The Twilite Tone on moving to New York, working with Kanye and the South Asian namesake he shares...

CULTURE STR / KE

On Hellish Seas, A Migrant Nativity

A miracle on a merciless journey.

Liberty For All

Liberty is preparing for the happiest day of her life! Why doesn't it feel that way...?

Black Lives Matter Everywhere

Struggling to Get Free, Wherever You Are

THE MOSTS

MOST READ

Our Complicity With Excess

To succeed in America means that at some level you've made peace with its rather ugly past. Vijay Iyer's speech to Yale's Asian.

Refusal=Intervention

“Asian American Poetry” is not a manageable category—it is not a list.

Fu Manchu and Lao She

Where the “Yellow Peril incarnate” meets one novelist's depictions of China and its diaspora in the early 20th century

An Invitation: Calling All Literary Baghdads

From Ibn al-Nadim's *Kitāb al-Fihrist* to Al-Mutanabbi Street

Liao Yiwu: Four Years a Prisoner

An interview with the exiled Chinese poet on writing from prison, false patriotism, and the responsibility of intellectuals

MOST COMMENTED

What I Have Learned About the World from Books, and What the World Could Stand to Learn from the Shooting at the Sikh Temple (11)

“Where is your ‘White literature’ section?” (8)

Sea Salty: The Man and the Crab (4)

Excerpt: Qiu Miaojin's *Notes of a Crocodile* (4)

Asian Chic (3)

the world of the Middle East and South Asia). To remember the 1990s is to fully comprehend the geo-political territoriality named “Af-Pak” (Afghanistan-Pakistan) by the Obama Administration in 2009. To argue that the decade following 2001 was a break is our own particular amnesia.



MANAN AHMED is a historian of Islam in South Asia. In 1995, he was living in Oxford, Ohio.

Tags: Af-Pak, Fallujah, Mike Royko, Oklahoma City, Timothy McVeigh, Unabomber



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COMMENTS



non-embedded media

Posted 2 years ago Mike Royko sounds much like his fellow

Chicagoan Al Capone-or is that Barack “Predator Drone” Obama?

Royko pretends not to realize that his American Empire has routinely bombed not only “oil fields, refineries, bridges, highways, industrial complexes, airports, military bases” but also civilians of other nations throughout its history—slaughtering millions of non-Americans as a result.

Since WWII alone, the American Empire has attacked or bombed North Korea, North Vietnam, Grenada, El Salvador, Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Iraq, Serbia, Afghanistan, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen—to name but a few examples. And surely, there will be many other nations to come in America’s crosshairs.

That’s called American state terrorism.

Or in US NewSpeak, “defending freedom and democracy.”

Here’s one more chilling example:

“The moment a U.S. helicopter strike blasts an Afghan man to pieces... as the pilot sings ‘Bye, bye Miss American Pie’” <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2169418/US-helicopter-strike-blasts-Afghan-man-pilot-sings-Bye-bye-Miss-American-Pie.html>

<http://killinghope.org/>

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