

No, Nazis were Not Leftists: Or, How to Debunk Right-Wing Propaganda

It is generally considered good practice not to “feed the trolls”—that is, not to engage in commentary with strangers on the internet who thrive on aggressive verbal hate and cruelty. But when the president himself is little more than a troll and the entire right-wing media apparatus increasingly relies on weaponized trolling (as well as the overwhelming spread of misinformation) as a primary means of producing propaganda, it becomes necessary to occasionally step up and defend ideas and history from the perversion of alternate realities.

That brings us to the inspiration for this piece: a [recent article](#) in the right-wing website The Federalist titled “Read a Pile of Top Nazis Talking about How they Love Leftist Marxism” by Paul Jossey. The subtitle is “From the moment they enter the political fray, young right-wingers are told, ‘You own the Nazis.’ Much of the historical record says exactly the opposite.” The article begins with this in-your-face provocation: “The Nazis were leftists.” I hope that most of our readers will instantly recognize the absurdity of the article from those few lines, but it warrants examining in closer detail to understand exactly what the author is trying to do and why.

First of all, what is The Federalist? It is clearly a [right-wing website](#) whose main driving force is to oppose gay marriage and whose main contributors are connected to those ubiquitous right-wing plutocrats, The Koch Brothers. The website itself strangely provides no information or mission statement in the form of an “About” page, but they do use this uncredited line as a footer: “Be lovers of freedom and anxious

for the fray," a quote that apparently comes from a 1918 speech by Calvin Coolidge, of all people. The Nazi article in question is categorized as "History," and the author's past publications all seem to be revolve around fake free speech grievances.

The introduction concludes by stating "But evidence Adolf Hitler's gang were men of the left, while debatable, is compelling." It is interesting to note that the author does not go so far as to apologize directly for the Nazis, or to explain why they "weren't really so bad." Let's stop for a moment and at least recognize and praise this author for not supporting or praising the Nazis. The fact that this has to be emphasized says something revealing about the toxic state of political discourse in this country.

Everything else the author does in his article, however, is part of a cynical ploy to rewrite history by cherry-picking isolated facts and fitting them into a false context. The author claims that his thesis, that the Nazis were actually Leftists, is debatable, but compelling. *It is actually neither.* No actual historian or political scientist maintains has gone on the record to claim that Nazis were Leftists. Accordingly, there is no citation given of any such person in the article because they don't exist. This means that the author's thesis is not actually debatable. It is settled history. I am not personally an academic specialist in the Nazi party, but I am an amateur historian with two history degrees who has read and thought much about World War Two over the course of my life. A very quick bit of research has led me to conclude with a high degree of certainty that there is basically universal consensus by scholars that the Nazis occupied territory on the far-right of the political spectrum. The few skeptics to the "far-right-wing Nazi consensus" seem to place more emphasis on the *sui generis* nature of the Nazi political beast by characterizing it as neither right nor left, but a unique populist syncretic movement. Even such a rare

opinion does not go so far as to characterize the Nazis as unequivocal members of "the Left". That is because it is by definition an absurd and offensive statement. That is like saying that Nazis were secretly communists because of a short-lived and cynical peace treaty with Josef Stalin (Actually, the author does make that ridiculous point in the article). There is no new history to be written on the main, big picture history of World War Two and the Nazi party. There is no hitherto secret knowledge or conspiracy that the author has just revealed despite decades of settled history determining what everyone knew at the time and until now: the Nazis were a far-right party—as far right as a party could conceivably be on the political spectrum. Everything else in the article is merely lies and propaganda (which are usually the same thing) to further his own right-wing views.

It is not hard to imagine why one wouldn't want to share ideological real estate with the Nazis, and once again I do in fact applaud the author for not wanting to admit such. The fact remains though, that they were a hyper-right-wing party, and he is an ideologue in the far-right-wing American conservative movement. That is why he attempts to portray the Nazis as a *Leftist* party—to make himself and his likeminded peers feel better about themselves while simultaneously making the other guys look bad. He might as well just wave his arms and shout at the top of his lungs "I'm not a Nazi! You're the Nazi!" This playground tactic is actually a well-known and useful tool of propaganda called "transference" or "projection." It is one of the many techniques of propaganda I mentioned in my article of the same name ([The Techniques of Propaganda](#)). The current president famously does it nearly everytime he speaks, most famously in a debate with Hillary Clinton when he screamed "No Puppet! No Puppet! You're the puppet!" The fact that he is, in fact, a puppet is secondary to the strategy of constantly maintaining a consistently aggressive and mendacious stance towards political foes in an attempt to smear *them* with *your* own crimes and faults. This is

also a type of “whataboutism” which has long been used by Trump’s mentor, Putin. It’s like saying “Yeah, the Nazis were bad, but *what about* Stalin and Mao?! (or Native American genocide or slavery?!)” It shouldn’t be too hard to understand that such statements are intentionally intellectually dishonest distractions from the point, but the fact remains that for a lot of people, especially ones primed to follow right-wing talking points and emotionally based arguments, such propaganda is often quite effective.

The second paragraph of the article continues by citing the infamous right-wing polemicist and fake historian [Dinesh D’Souza](#) as one of the sources of recent alternative histories. The author then claims that “the vitriol and lack of candor [such “alternative histories] produces from supposedly fact-driven academics and media is disturbing, if unsurprising. They stifle dissent on touchy subjects to maintain their narrative and enforce cultural hegemony.” Lots of big words and academic-sounding language here, all in an effort to say “why do experts call us out when we make shit up?” D’Souza is a convicted felon, provocateur, and far-right hack who is popular with theocratic crowds for writing a ton of “history” books that completely make shit up and basically blame “liberals” for everything from slavery to 9/11. The fact that D’Souza is the only person cited in the article regarding such “alternative histories” is telling. He even appears to have written a trashy “history” book in 2017 called *The Big Lie* claiming contrary to all evidence that Hitler and his coterie were “secret leftists,” a dog-eared copy of which is no doubt on the author’s shelf. For real historians, fact-checking D’Souza is like playing Super Mario Brothers with the cheat codes on, and luckily for us there is a tireless history professor named [Kevin Kruse](#) who has taken up this challenge.

The author continues by saying that “alternative views of the Third Reich exist and were written by the finest minds of their time,” and claims that such opinions “perhaps carry more

weight because they are unburdened by the aftermath of the uniquely heinous Nazi crimes.” Once again, props to the author for having the courage to admit that Nazi crimes were heinous, something becoming more difficult by the day for many of his fellow travelers. Even the president, famously even-minded and hesitant to draw hasty conclusions, wouldn’t want to go so far because there were probably many “good people” on the Nazi side. Anyway, the only “finest mind” that the author cites in the entire article is a certain Austrian economist, F.A. Hayek. Hayek does have the benefit of having actually rejected and fled the Nazi regime in real-time, which not every German-speaking intellectual could claim (looking at you, [Martin Heidegger](#)). He was also a life-long friend of liberal philosopher Karl Popper despite their many political differences, which reflects well on Hayek in my book (Popper’s *The Open Society and its Enemies* was written in 1944, the same year as Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* was published. Here is my [article](#) on Popper explaining why I find him more convincing than Hayek). He has also been basically the main, and the only, inspiration for that always dubious and now-extinct animal known as the “reasonable, principled right-wing intellectual.”

If we are to be generous and fair to Hayek, we must admit that he was apparently a relatively honorable person with some nuanced and well-considered positions on politics and economics. For the purposes of right-wing politicians, it has long been enough to cite him as the simplified intellectual basis for their dogma that free markets must always be unfettered and wealth must never be distributed by the government (by which they mean of course that it should never be distributed *downwards*; they have always been happy to distribute it *upwards*). This was the dogma of the Thatcher-Reagan axis, but it could have just as easily been Ayn Rand rather than Hayek providing the “philosophy.” In any case, the author here has used a few throwaway, out-of-context phrases from early Hayek to make his entire case that the Nazis were

leftists. In addition, Hayek loved dictators and somehow made the case that authoritarianism (which he supported!) was different than totalitarianism (which he was against). He personally supported and sometimes collaborated and befriended right-wing dictators and war criminals like Pinochet (he claimed that Allende was totalitarian!) and Salazar (maybe let's reconsider that thing I said about his being "honorable"). So that is a summary of the most intellectually important right-wing thinker of the century.

The official name of the Nazis was the National Socialist German Workers' Party. They didn't like to be called Nazis. If you look carefully, you will even find the word "Socialist" (not to mention "Workers") in the name of party. This must mean they were Socialist, and, *tout court*, Leftist. Case closed. I guess all this actually proves is that political parties choose names that do not always signify their actual ideology. This is more common outside of America, with the Polish Law and Justice party, the Brazilian Social Liberal Party, the French Socialist party, and the Australian Liberal party coming immediately to mind (not to mention the Russian United Russia party). The author goes on to give example after cherry-picked example of actual Nazis making quotes that make them appear friendly to what we think of as Socialism, or of denigrating the "western capitalists" of the time. He says, for example, "Hayek describes Nazism as a 'genuine socialist movement' and thus left-wing by modern American standards." That's a pretty big red herring, oversimplification, and non sequitur all in one short phrase (three techniques of propaganda! Go read my previous [essay](#) and learn them all by name). He goes on to say, "British elites regarded Nazism as a virulent capitalist reaction against enlightened socialism—a view that persists today." Yeah, it persists because it's the historical truth. By the way, that's actually being far too gentle with Nazism—calling it a "virulent capitalist reaction" is probably the most unsuperlative thing you could truthfully say about it—and "British elites" (many of whom actually

supported Hitler up to and, in some cases, during the war).

As the article continues, the author gives some ad hoc definitions of “right” and “left”, and their sloppiness illuminates the ways he probably thinks his is a logically sound argument. He says the “right” consists of “free-market capitalists, who think the individual is the primary political unit, believes in property rights, and are generally distrustful of government by unaccountable agencies and government solutions to social problems. They view family and civil institutions, such as church, as needed checks on state power.” He says the “left” consists of people who “distrust the excesses and inequality capitalism produces. They give primacy to group rights and identity. They believe factors like race, ethnicity, and sex compose the primary political unit. They don’t believe in strong property rights...They believe the free market has failed to solve issues like campaign finance, income inequality, minimum wage, access to health care, and righting past injustices. These people talk about ‘democracy’—the method of collective decisions.” He then claims that these definitions prove somehow that the Nazis were Leftists.

The only thing he didn’t say about the “left” is that they have a penchant for human sacrifice and cannibalism. If you think there is something just a bit made up, just a bit Fox-Newsy about his definitions, you are not wrong. Obviously it is not easy to portray all the nuance of the variagated “right-left” political spectrum with such facile definitions, especially considering the disconnect between economic and cultural perspectives. There is a convincing case to be made that from the “right” perspective, everything that they think is wrong with the world is de facto part of the “left.” If you define everything not you as bad, and everything bad as “left,” Nazis will by necessity become leftists. Much of today’s “right” also thinks of the “left” exclusively in terms of identity, as opposed to other political ideology. Thus,

anything in history that used identity in bad, or deviant ways was therefore part of a leftist plot or conspiracy. It would be easier to list the key words and ideas generally associated with each camp. In political science, it is generally accepted that the “left” tends to emphasize ideas like freedom (!), equality, fraternity, rights, progress, reform, and internationalism, while the “right” tends to emphasize ideas like authority (!), hierarchy, order, duty, tradition, reaction, and nationalism. Any disputes here? I didn’t think so.

You might have noticed those key words of freedom, and authority. Despite the American right-wing appropriation of the word, they misunderstand and detest real freedom and always tend towards authority over liberty. Usually what they mean when they talk about freedom is that they support the freedom to think and act just like they do, which is obviously no kind of freedom at all. The centrality of sexual and religious politics in American right-wing ideology is enough to illustrate their primacy of authority over freedom. Some theorists maintain that there is a natural authoritarianism and oppression of the lower orders in conservatism in general; [Corey Robin](#) in *The Reactionary Mind* says that “Though it is often claimed that the left stands for equality while the right stands for freedom, this notion misstates the actual disagreement between right and left. Historically, the conservative has favored liberty for the higher orders and constraint for the lower orders. What the conservative sees and dislikes in equality, in other words, is not a threat to freedom but its extension. For in that extension, he sees a loss of his own freedom.” Authority is the main hallmark of not only authoritarian (obviously) and totalitarian systems, but also conservatism writ large. Jeffrey Herf in his book *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, argues that the Nazis mixed enthusiasm for technology with a total rejection of Enlightenment values as a radical alternative to liberal and

socialist visions of modernity. Umberto Eco's tour de force essay "[Ur-Fascism](#)" gives 14 characteristics of Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" that can be found in all forms of fascism. Nowhere in this exhaustive list can you find anything remotely "leftist." Basically, the Nazi regime was reptilian, terroristic, totalitarian, and extremely right-wing.

For those who shout "What about Stalin?!", the answer is that the Soviet Union, especially under Stalin, was also a right-wing terroristic totalitarian regime, despite the supposed "leftism" of Communist ideology that could be traced back to said Enlightenment values. The Soviet Union was never really Communist in anything but name, but from the beginning governed as just another kleptocratic oligarchy much more authoritarian than any Tsar ever dreamed of. Vladimir Nabokov, in his memoirs, calls the Bolsheviks (who assassinated his father, by the way) "fascists." So the answer is that the Nazis weren't "leftist," but that the Soviet Union was actually "rightist." You might ask if I'm being serious here or just engaging in my own propagandistic sophistry, a la the author of that hideous article. Reader, do your own research and make up your own mind. Don't believe anything you read on the internet. Especially on websites like The Federalist. Read history.

New Fiction from Andria Williams: "Polecat"

Camp TUT0, Greenland
1960

When Paul, a nuclear operator, had arrived in Greenland, the

reactor at Camp Century was still not fully assembled, so he and a dozen other men were being held temporarily at another camp a hundred miles south. Everything he could see on the edge of the polar ice cap was white and brown like some kind of visual trick: dirt, and snow, and snowy dirt, and snowy air, and sometimes blowing dirt. The snow and dirt were constantly changing places.

He was in the mess hall when Master Sergeant Whitmore appeared at his elbow. Paul hopped to his feet, and Whitmore asked, with no preamble, "You ever drive a D8 Cat?" Whitmore had buggy, vein-scraggled blue eyes that seemed to intensify anything he said, giving any question he asked an oddly moral implication.

Paul hesitated. "Not yet."

"Well, you're gonna have to fill in," Whitmore said. "It's just like driving a tractor, except it's a giant one. You've driven a tractor, right?"

Paul had not.

Whitmore forged on. "You'll be towing a fuel canister. All you got to do is stay behind me and follow the bamboo markers. Do not fall asleep and drive into a crevasse. We drive six hours on, six hours off. It'll take about a week."

Paul was relieved enough to simply get on the road, so he nodded, and when Whitmore left, his friend Mayberry appeared beside him.

"King of the road!" Mayberry said, grinning at Paul. Mayberry was the camp geologist, and this was his fifth tour in Greenland. Tall and thin, with a scientist's buzzing mind, he worked in an underground lab below the base, surrounded by rows of ice samples stored in what looked like oversized poster tubes. Because he spent his working hours alone, he seemed perpetually delighted to encounter other people. He

said that Camp Century was a dream compared to his first base in Greenland, which had been called Fistclench.

“How bad will it be?” Paul asked.

But Mayberry was watching Whitmore, who stood across the room talking to the camp cook. Cookie, as they called him, had been in Greenland for who knew how long. He was as thin as a Confederate zealot, and while the men ate he stood smoking in his stained apron, watching them as if it gave him either grim pleasure or unabated pain.

“Good!” Mayberry said. “We get to bring Cookie.”

“Should make for great conversation,” said Paul.

“Oh, he talks,” Mayberry promised. “You’ll see.”

The Polecat was idling next to several others just outside the camp’s garage. They rumbled in concert, swathed in plumes of steam and exhaust. Paul identified his by the orange fuel canister attached to the rear and mounted on skis. The Polecats were Swiss innovations, specially adapted vehicles with huge track frames – Paul guessed twenty feet – and wide track pads that could traverse uneven ice without tipping or breaking through.

There would be three other Polecats like his, carrying various types of freight in the middle of the caravan. Whitmore’s D9 led the line, with a blade attached, to help clear a path. Then there was the Command Train, a huge tractor that pulled the cook shack, radio shack, and three refurbished old boxcars on skis called wanigans, where the soldiers relaxed or slept. Finally, there was the last boxcar on the whole train: the latrine, that foul caboose, following them like a bad thought. What an absurdly human predicament, Paul thought, having to cross the polar ice cap lugging literal shit behind you.

Whitmore strode up and slapped Paul on the back. "Good luck," he said. "Don't drive into a crevasse." This was becoming a common theme with the master sergeant, and Paul was beginning to suspect he wasn't kidding. To Mayberry, Whitmore said, "Quit smoking by the fuel rig. Here're your keys."

Everyone climbed into their tractors. Slowly, Whitmore pulled his D9 out into the lead. At this rate, Paul thought, we will never get anywhere. Then he pulled his own tractor in line and found it moved even slower than the boss's.

It seemed unbelievable they'd travel at this snail's pace for an entire week. Paul tried not to think about it. He wondered when he would break down and allow himself a cigarette. He wondered what his wife, Nat, back in Idaho was doing. He thought quite a lot about what they would do if they were together. Meanwhile he squinted to keep track of the pointed tops of the bamboo poles they followed, many almost buried beneath the moving glacier. Sometimes the poles would be so hard to see that an impossibly-bundled man would have to walk ahead, locate them, and then wave in the direction the trucks should go. Paul's Army career had started in petroleum supply, and stunts like this were one reason he'd left that field. Lugging massive canisters and a shitter across the ice felt like some Neanderthal gig, the work of people without bright ideas.



photo by Ray Hansen

Between their shifts, the drivers sat in the rocking but well-heated wanigan, paging through month-old newspapers someone had brought from Fort Andrews. There they were joined by Cookie, who had never stopped smoking, his legs crossed and one foot jittering up and down. Cookie would wait until the men around him began to engage in any kind of interesting conversation—about sports back home, their previous tours of duty, anything—and then he'd suddenly interject his own litany of complaints against the Army and life in general, as if that had been the topic of discussion in the first place. "I wasn't meant to be here," he'd say, sucking on one cheek, his small eyes blazing. "I'm from Mississippi. No way was I meant to be here." He alternated this thought with its close cousin, "I wasn't meant to be in the Army" (he had initially attempted to get into the Navy) and also, "I was never meant to be a cook" (he had hoped to be a machinist, but failed some critical aptitude test). Cookie and his quibble with destiny had rapidly become tiresome, and it was impossible for the other men not to occasionally respond with wiseacre remarks.

"I was meant to be here," Mayberry said as he flipped the pages of the classifieds. It was the only section everyone had

not yet read multiple times. "This, here, is the point in life I was born for." The wanigan gave a lurch and someone in a bunk cursed.

Cookie ignored him and continued, "I was a runner in high school. I ran cross-country. I wasn't meant to stand in one place, flippin' burgers."

Mayberry was reading the classifieds aloud. "Here's an ad for a home dental care system. It says, 'Polish Your Teeth on Your Own Time.'"

"That's what I've always wanted to do with my own time," said Benson from a folding chair across the room.

"We could let Cookie drill our cavities," said Mayberry. "Maybe he was meant for that."

"I had three ladies back in Mississippi," said Cookie. "Three of 'em, who loved me. They cooked for *me*."

"Hmm," said Mayberry, in a placating way.

"I had five women," said Benson. "They polished my teeth for me."

Cookie snapped to attention. "You did not," he said. "That's stupid." Then he lapsed back into thought.

The wanigan hit a deep groove, and the men steadied themselves. "Jesus," said Benson. "And people think they get seasick in the Navy."

"I was meant to be in the Navy!" Cookie said, with sudden interest. Then he stood from his chair and looked at the boxcar door with a focused expression, his hands on his hips, knobby elbows sticking out from white shirtsleeves. "Forget this shit," he said. "I'm going home."

Mayberry rattled his newspaper so it wouldn't slump. "Great,"

he said, without looking up. "Tell your three ladies we said hi."

"Forget you," said Cookie, very loudly, leaning over Mayberry who looked over the top of the paper in surprise. "Forget you, all you stupid food-eaters, who just sit around eating my food. Complainin' and complainin'. I am a man! I was not meant for this shit job!" He stepped back and glanced around with flashing eyes, muttering, "Maybe you should cook for your damn selves is what."

"Geez, I'm sorry," Mayberry began, but Cookie strode to the boxcar door, unlatched it, and heaved it open. The air that entered the room felt as cold as rubbing alcohol.

"Whoa," said Mayberry, getting to his feet also. And then the cook, in only his short-sleeved white uniform, jumped right out.

For a moment everyone stood and the room was silent. Paul looked around, as if this had just been some optical illusion, and Cookie would actually be sitting back in his chair where he'd been a moment before. But the chair was empty. The wanigan door creaked slowly toward closing.

"Holy shit," Mayberry cried, and he and Paul scrambled. They reached the door at the same time and yanked it open. Mayberry leaped out first, and Paul followed. The force of the cold nearly spun him around, and it took him a second to gather his wits and begin running. He heard Benson hit the ground a few beats behind him. Cookie had taken off across the ice, surprisingly fast, heading for the white horizon.

"He's a runner," called Mayberry as they sprinted after the cook. "He ran cross-country."

"He's gonna die," Paul cried. Any second he expected Cookie to slip from sight into the narrow cradle of an unseen crevasse.

The ice was hard and slick, and their feet slipped every few steps. Cookie, on the other hand, appeared to have magic shoes. He was loping ahead at a steady pace, his body a slim, efficient machine.

"Go back, Benson," Mayberry said over his shoulder.

Paul could hear Benson's heavy breath like a zipper being yanked up and down. "Someone will radio the boss," he shouted encouragingly.

"That someone should be you!" Mayberry said.

This is ridiculous, Paul thought. He knew he had to give the chase all he could. He focused on pumping his arms and legs as fast as possible. He narrowed his vision on Cookie and raced all-out, his lungs burning with an intense pain.



photo by Ray Hansen

Cookie might have actually gotten away, run off to the top of

the world, if he hadn't hit a ripple on the ice and stumbled. He caught himself and straightened, limping slightly, and Paul, feeling delirious and oxygen-deprived, gave his last burst of speed. The gap between himself and the cook narrowed. Paul took several long strides and flung himself against the cook's lower back, pulling the two of them down onto the ice with a painful slap.

The second Cookie hit the ice he began yowling. He fought like a wildcat. He kneed Paul in the gut and smashed the flat of his hand against Paul's nose. Paul realized that his only advantage was his greater size, so he fell forward onto Cookie and clung to the wiry man for dear life. It was like wrestling a greased snake. All he could see was Cookie's white-shirted abdomen, into which his face was pressed, the muscles twisting and bucking against his cheek. He gritted his teeth and waited desperately for Mayberry to reach them.

A moment later Mayberry sprinted up and fell on top of them both, and from a distance it must have looked like some ecstatic reunion, or the winning touchdown in a football game. "Sit on his arms," Mayberry grunted, and Paul, dazedly obedient, tried to find one to sit on. He crawled up Cookie's body and fought to pin down the cook's skinny, flopping limb, which jumped over and over again just out of Paul's reach like a fish on land. Finally, Paul pegged the arm and sat on it, and Mayberry sat on the other, and then there they were, gasping for breath, the cook writhing and screaming on his back beneath them.

Benson finally jogged up, looking ill, and in the distance they could see Whitmore's D9 turn slowly, slowly, to come and get them. This seemed absurd; they could walk faster than it drove.

"I'm sorry, Cookie," Mayberry was saying. "We'll show you we care. We'll bake you a cake."

"We need to stand up," Paul said. "We'll freeze." He was concerned about Cookie's bare elbows on the ice.

They waited for Benson to catch his breath, and then they all grabbed onto an available part of the cook and lifted him to his feet. Cookie screamed; Paul winced to see the two lines of blood on the ice where his arms had begun to freeze to the ground. "Sorry," Paul said to the cook, and "Start walking," to the others. With mincing, difficult steps they made their way toward the line of tractors.

Sergeant Whitmore leaped down from his idling vehicle, waving his arms and shouting, "What the hay, Cookie?" for he was a man who did not curse. "What did you think you were doing?" Cookie stared at him defiantly, and Whitmore made a sound of disgust. "Tie him up," he said, "tie him to a bunk til we get to Century. We'll decide what to do with him there."

On the count of three, Paul, Mayberry, and Benson heaved the slender cook up into the wanigan and over to a bunk. Whitmore fetched a coil of rope. "Don't you tie me," Cookie began to shout, "don't you dare tie me!," but they did anyway, binding him to the bunk in a seated position with his arms behind his back. From there, he yelled half-sensible platitudes at them for hours. "You can't keep a man where he don't want to be," he said, and "This is my life, not yours, you rat bastards," and, cryptically, "You're just like all them, you know what." He hollered until he wore himself out, and then he stared at them despondently from where he sat.

That night, after a dinner of cream of wheat and tinned milk, Paul tried to sleep, but every time he opened his eyes he could see Cookie's own, glittering back at him. Paul rolled onto his side to face the wall. Cookie's gaze crawled up his back. He yanked his wool blanket to his shoulders. "Cut it out, Cookie," he said.

Cookie's voice came across the room, plaintive, almost

mewling. "I ain't doing nothin'," he said. "I'm just sittin' here like a good boy." A moment later he hissed, "Come on, untie me. I won't go nowhere. I'll sit just like this."

"Can't do that," Paul muttered.

Cookie's voice was hoarse. "My Leroy's itchin'."

"Sorry."

"Untie me, please," Cookie begged. "Come on now, you're the only nice one of them in here. You're the nice guy. The best one." A minute later he said, "Never mind, you're the worst one. You a priss is what you is. You prissy!"

Paul had never been called this before and felt actually startled.

"A man's body is his own," Cookie said. "It's the only thing he really got. You know, someday the rules are gonna be here for you when you don't want them, either."

Paul screwed shut his eyes. The wanigan lurched and groaned, and a coffee cup slid off a table, hit the ground with a thud, and rolled hollowly across the floor. Outside, the pitch of the wind rose and fell, a sound both strange and familiar: a waning alarm, distant machinery, blood roaring in the ear.

*

photos by [Ray Hansen](#)

New Poetry from Randy Brown

victory conditions

My father taught me
to say *I love you*
every time
you stood in the door

left for school
went to work
flew off to war

it became a habit
a good one
like checking the tires
or clicking your seat belt

but now
every conversation feels
like a movement to contact

we took the same vows
we swore the same oaths
we wore the same uniform
we see the same news

I raise my kids
like he did his
and have the same hopes for them

How is it that we now live
in two countries?

three more tanka from Des Moines, Iowa

1.

The leafblower drone
buzzes into consciousness—
fast cicada hum.
I wave to the new police,
before I close the window.

2.

Yellow Little Bird
hovers near high-voltage lines
conducting repairs
outside my bedroom window,
but I am miles away.

3.

Thunder and popcorn;
a remembered joke about
the “sound of freedom.”
In rain, I stand listening
as rifles prepare for war.

a future space force marine writes haiku

1.

This drop won't kill you—
terminal velocity
varies by planet.

2.

We spiral dirt-ward,
samaras in early fall,
sowing destruction.

3.

Reconnaissance drones
orbit our squad's position:
Expanding beachhead.

4.

"Almost" only counts
in horseshoes and hand grenades.
Go toss them a nuke.

5.

If war is still hell,
at least my bounding mech suit
is air-conditioned.



"An American pineapple, of the kind the Axis finds hard to

digest, is ready to leave the hand of an infantryman in training at Fort Belvoir, Va, 1944. American soldiers make good grenade throwers."

This is just to Say All Again After ...

after William Carlos Williams' "This is Just to Say"

I have expended
the "pineapples"
that were in
the ammo box

and which
you were probably
saving
for final protective fires

Forgive me
they were explosive
so frag
and so bold

Most Likely / Most Dangerous Enemy Courses of Action

what most
threatens my children

social media /
unending war

the rat race /
the daily grind

half-baked policies /
global warming

a lack of hope /
a lack of justice

my constant distraction /
my constant distraction

the stand

if you can't stand injustice
take a knee

if you pray for others
take a knee

if you believe in freedom, not fabric
let others see

you practice
what you preach

New Nonfiction from Kiley Bense: Tell Me About My Boy

Here's an empty grave, where a body that had been a boy became bones beneath a wooden cross. They buried him with one set of dog tags hanging against his bloodied chest.

He bled in a field hospital bed not far from here, shrapnel buried in his skin. Is that what killed him—hot metal melting flesh, an unseen severing? Or was his body tossed limply from a jeep seat as it crossed the desert, the crush of cargo

snapping ribs, a crackle of tinder at dusk? "Morale is very high," the morning reports said, on the day the boy disappeared into the horizon. The next day he'd be dreaming under several feet of sand. They couldn't have known. They couldn't have. They couldn't.

When he died, the boy was twenty-three and dark-haired, all shoulder and grin: my grandmother's little brother. It's one thing to consider his photograph on a mantelpiece, a charming kid wearing a tilted cap; another to imagine him becoming broken, hollows purpling beneath his eyes and a bloody bandage wrapped around one thumb where a cactus thorn was entombed in the soft pad of his finger. One thing to read "artillery fire" on a typewritten government medical form (death requires paperwork); another to watch a German gun spitting shells, coughing up sounds that rattle across time and sky. How fragile is a human body in the path of such certainty.

Here is that body: one-hundred-sixty-two-pounds, down from one-hundred-and-seventy since he'd filled out his draft card in an office in Philadelphia one year before. Seventy-five inches tall. Gray-blue eyes, like his father's. Freckles across the top of his nose blotted out by five months of sunburn and grime. One thumb now scarred. One uniform crusted with sweat, salt, blood and smoke, one rosary and an American flag stuffed in the pockets. Feet stiff, callused and blistered. Lean jaw and face, angles cut sharper by sleeplessness and fear. Shrapnel lacerations unfurled like tattered red-black lace over his left arm and chest. This is the body they buried in Tebessa with a gunshot salute and a chaplain's murmured blessing.

Bury him at Gettysburg, his father said, when the government wanted to know where to leave his son's bones for good. There's no room in Gettysburg, came the reply, that meadow's already crammed with dead American boys. Choose another tomb.



Here is a letter about nothing: "Dear Sir," it begins. "Will you kindly change my address on your records? My son, Private Richard H. Halvey, 331356641, Headquarters Co. 18th Infantry, 1st Division, was killed in action in North Africa, March 21st, 1943, and I am anxious to have your records correct so that I may receive future correspondence regarding the returning of his body. Thanking you for your attention, I am, Very truly yours." Signed, Brendan H. Halvey, my great-grandfather. Here is pain, laid out on one creased sheet of paper.

He bled for us. But he will not rise. Here in Algeria the air is still, the night is silent. There is no weeping. The only cross at his grave was the slatted thing they stuck in the dirt above his head, one set of dog tags looped around its arms. He hated those dog tags. The cord bit at his neck, a reminder that the Army was trying, every day, to convert him from a person into a number. It took all of one day for him to

die. Then he was inked into a serial code in some forgotten notebook. 331356641. 331356641. 331356641. Repeated till it stays.

Across the ocean from the skeleton his son had become, his father wondered where to bury what was left. Here is what the government said: We can't tell you much about your boy, other than that he isn't coming back. They took his blood and his body, and all that's left is bone.

Maybe Brendan asked for Gettysburg because the government was bold enough to parrot Lincoln in the pamphlet it mailed to stricken fathers. "Tell Me About My Boy," the pamphlet was titled, though really it told nothing. The dead were valiant and heroic, said the pamphlet, they "gave the last full measure of devotion." There was no mention of Lincoln's next line: "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

Arlington, Brendan decided, finally, in 1947. So they shipped Dick Halvey's body (which was jumbled bones and dog tags) to Virginia, where the Army shrouded him in stripes and etched a cross on marble above his name. Not blood-soaked Gettysburg but Arlington, everything green and white except the roses laid on headstones. Here, across the river from the capital, we buried our boys in neat rows. "Our boys," they said back then, pleading with o-mouhths at news reels for a glimmer of truth. Our boys aren't coming back the same.

Note: Tebessa, Algeria was the site of a temporary American cemetery during World War II. Starting in 1947, soldiers' remains were moved from Tebessa either to the American cemetery in [Tunisia](#) or brought back to the United States, according to the family's wishes.