

SPARTACUS 40 JUNE 2020



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It's an old fight, but it's ongoing, and what was written to settle it did not finish the battle, but merely stated the issue, an issue being fought out now, today, early June, in the streets. A Facebook post:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

"It would be refreshing to live in a country that means what it says. On June 2 I watched video of brutal, undisciplined thugs -- hiding behind badges -- assaulting a foreign news team, in the midst of citizens peaceably protesting a societal issue. The country is disgraced, and our embarrassment and humiliation grows with every second that we permit such things to happen. I've seen it before: cops hiding their badges or badge numbers, spreading the violence they're sworn to restrain, obeying a monster whose only consideration is his own insecurity and ego and the mollification of his witless supporters. We Americans never learn our lessons, and this will be our doom."

I wrote that the day after Donald Trump, ostensibly the President of the United States, had D.C. cops clear the park across from the White House of peaceable demonstrators ... with tear gas and flashbang bombs ... so he could get his picture taken in front of a church he doesn't attend, brandishing a Bible he does not follow, in violation of a law – the First Amendment – he doesn't understand, or care about. Even Nixon had the sensibility to be horrified by Kent State. The orange orc cares only for his own demented ego. More humiliation for America. More disgrace. I keep thinking it impossible for this situation to get any worse. But it gets worse.



I think what Trump is doing is preparing for the future. He thinks – as I hope and pray – that Joe Biden will defeat him in November. He wants to set himself up as the leader of the radical right-wing in this country, perhaps found a TV network to out-Fox Fox, in short, to fulfill the idea behind his 2016 run, which was interrupted by his unexpected and thoroughly tragic presidency. Relegating him to the corner, where he belongs, sounds better to me than having him in power, but alas, it will still mean that he's around. We'll never be rid of him.

As a veteran of various days of rage back at Berkeley and at least one massive peace march, I'm attuned to the old dictatorial schtick of using *agents provocateur* to gin up civic damage and terrify the populace. The most infamous example is the Reichstag Fire, but I saw obvious Reagan plants and hoodlums at Berkeley and San Francisco all the time. The clowns who leapt in front of a SanFran march with Viet Cong flags were only the most obvious.

Besmirching the Black Lives Matter demonstrators with the crimes of looters is an obvious trick, and Trump has tried it. White supremacist thugs have taken their cue from their morbid master and pitched in with hooligans to destroy businesses and scare middle Americans into submission to Trump's weird idea of law and order. Don't try to shit a shitter, Donald. No one with brain cells numbering in double digits would identify looters and thieves with Americans outraged by injustice.

The worst thing Trump has done in this fiasco is propose the use of American military to control American civilians in the free exercise of their rights. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs flatly refused to do it. He recognized, even if Trump did not, that such an action violates the vital constitutional precept against *posse comitatus*. To quote the web on the subject: "The Posse Comitatus Act outlaws the willful use of any part of the Army or Air Force to execute the law unless expressly authorized by the Constitution or an act of Congress."

It's a relief that the Chairman, a balls-to-the-wall Marine, would have no truck with such horror. He, at least, isn't a toady to the troll-in-chief. So I'll bet he doesn't last long in the job. Another reason to vote blue: with four more years of lawless authority, Trump will be able to root out *everyone* in the "deep state" who doesn't dance to his perverse tune. Result: an arbitrary dictatorship.

Against which we can pit the simple decency and raw courage of a man like Rahal Dubey. When D.C. cops attacked peaceful demonstrators on his street, driving them out with tear gas and flashbangs, Dubey opened his front door and allowed 70 to enter and take sanctuary.

Those of you fortunate enough never to have been tear-gassed would not know what that hellfog does to you. You are immediately blinded by acidic pain. Your throat closes to keep out the harsh hacking burn. Your impulse is to run, to flee, to get out of there, to escape. You can't help it. Gas reduces you to simple flight. Back at Cal we used to soak kerchiefs in vinegar in a comic attempt to counteract the effects. We smelled like salads but it helped, a little.

Better than vinegar, a fellow citizen with compassion and nerve. Let's hope there are many more like him. Take a bow, Rahal. Next time I'm in town, I'll buy you a 7-Up.

Solutions have been urged which involve reimagining police – restructuring and retraining police forces, which makes sense, or abolishing them altogether, a reckless utopian insanity. Anyone who doesn't recognize the need for law and enforcement of that law is desperately naïve, and ignores the example from not just south of the border but other anarchies, like pre-Caesarian Rome. Without civic police, *cartels* would run America's streets. No, the same standard always exists: cops, yes, but disciplined, smart, able cops, strongly connected to their communities, dedicated to the motto we libtards find so easy to mock, *to serve and protect*, and willing to cull their ranks of the unworthy.

But the fundamental effort called for goes beyond police, to the society itself. We've seen, in these early weeks, some social changes, some overdue, others driven by hysteria.

The National Football League commissioner, always quick to follow the latest trend, now acknowledges that the league was mistaken when it equated Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem with disrespect for our flag and military. Drew Brees, a genuine hero of the people, mirrored that reversal, perhaps *too* quickly, but with the wonders he's done for New Orleans, he should be forgiven a momentary spot of naivete. Drew compensated for his initial

thickness with a strong reply, directly to Trump, acknowledging the seriousness of Kaepernick's gesture, after admitting he'd misunderstood it. He showed his courage and heart.

That was solid. Some actions have been nothing but gas. One wonders what sort of commentary Hulu will add to *Gone with the Wind* to make it acceptable in this new era of Black Lives Matter. *GWTW* is romantic view of the Old South, but it has its virtues. The film's casual acceptance of slavery fits the tenor of antebellum times, as does the relationship of petulant Scarlet with stabilizing Mammy, angry Scarlett with dim Prissy, grateful Scarlet with protective Big Sam, who busts a white would-be rapist like a ripe watermelon when he tries to molest her. True, the establishing shots of happy slaves singing in the fields, the idiocy of Butterfly McQueen's character – although she does have two great lines – and Ashley's silly defense of slavery are nauseating to today's viewer. But the movie remains a revolutionary masterwork – at least the terrific first half. The second half is one long talking-heads who-dies-next snore.

Excesses and missteps aside, it's clear that a national mental revelation and spiritual revolution is required. This can't mean excusing any real crime or forgiving any offense. Reprehensible character, not racism, motivated Antoinette Frank, Len Davis and O. J. Simpson. But it's not real crime that's the problem. It's a mindset. The revolution needed is one of generosity and understanding, of hard social effort, concerted and sincere. Everyone needs to be involved. Everyone needs to give. We all need to recognize central, common values – simple ones, like the value of life, the necessity of effort, the commonality of human worth. White privilege and the self-destructiveness of crime and drug use are the same horror, viewed from different points, and they need to be erased from our nature.

Reconciliation is the first order of business. That will not be easy. Of course, Trump is irredeemable and has to go. That's first. But his supporters aren't going anywhere; they must be won over. A social consensus needs to be recognized and never abandoned in the heat of any moment. It's the simple truth at the heart of the slogan and movement, Black Lives Matter. They matter because All Lives Matter. All men are created equal. We are all mortal.



My beloved Elizabeth Warren has been promoting a number of laws and actions in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, and most, unsurprisingly, meet with my okay. I supported Liz during the Democratic nomination fight and I very much hope she turns out to be Joe Biden's vice presidential choice, *veep de jure*, and eventually President. But on one thing we part company: she wants to remove all Confederate statues from the Capitol and all Confederate names from US military bases.

If you've ever visited the Capitol Building, you may have seen its Hall of statues, where each state places likenesses of its heroes. Virginia's is of a man who needs but one word affixed to his pedestal: **LEE**. This statue will now have to go. In addition, the Virginia governor has tried, this spring, to remove a statue of General Lee from public land, citing Black Lives Matter. You can guess what I thought of all this. The actions are hypocritical, unfair and false to history. Lee fought for the South not because he was devoted to slavery but because he was devoted to Virginia, more than to the as-yet-semi-formed cluster to which it belonged. His decision to fight for what he considered his native land, his Home, was considered noble at the time, and his work at reconciliation and *re-unification* after the War even more so. America became one country after Appomattox. Lee understood that, and he said so, in fact spent the rest of his life promoting the new reality – the one in which we live. Yet now he is reviled.

- Shall we now disinter Washington? Bulldoze Monticello? Rip up the peaked tombstones at Arlington? Both Washington and Jefferson were Virginians who propounded liberty, yet owned slaves. Does it make sense to despise people for being born in the 18th Century instead of the 21st? Do we renounce their quality because of their adherence to

their times? I say leave well enough alone. A society gets nowhere by denying its sins and besides, the monuments brouhaha was, is, shall always be a worthless distraction. We need to deal with the here and now, not pointless symbolism.

• Even more foolishly, Virginia removed from public view a 300-year-old slave block, a painful reminder of the terror of slavery and the struggles of black people in this country. In place, it could be a splendid and unforgettable teaching tool. *Stand on it, kids, and Imagine ...*



Since I'm already in trouble, I might as well touch on the shooting of Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta. He falls asleep in his car at a Wendy's. Two cops awake him, talk to him quite sensibly, run a standard sobriety test, find that he's soused, try to bust him peacefully, he goes nuts, grabs a police taser, attacks the cops, runs off firing it back at them, catches two.

I'm afraid I'm close to backing the police. The incident was a dreadful thing, but – in this situation, what's the officer supposed to do? Let an out-of-control, armed man run off? He's shown he's cracked and willing to do harm. What about other citizens he runs into?

I weep for Brooks and his family, but his case fails the "but-for" test I apply to all crimes when assessing responsibility. *But for* his own panic and his own violence, the shooting and his death would not have occurred. As a defense lawyer, I think I could walk the cop.



VIRUS. I borrowed a copy of his book on the 1918 flu pandemic from Fred van Hartesveldt, a friend and historian – and what a surprise, the pattern of a century ago is being repeated now. A first wave of illness → social shutdown → economic and personal frustration → vast relief after the disease slackens → a reckless return to "normal" public life → more exposure → more infections → a crippling second wave. Thank you, no. I'll continue to mask up.

But! It's looking more likely that we'll get our trip to Edinburgh, London and Paris this September, freeing up 2021 for the D.C. Worldcon. Rosy's pricing wardrobes – including masks. Her friend and travel honcho is arranging rail prices, hotels, reservations for the sites and sights we want to see. It's beyond exciting. It's terrifying.



Superb television: Ricky Gervais' *After Life*, 12 half hours of raunchy humor, anguished drama, bizarre characters, humane hope. See it on Netflix, but try not to binge. This is a treat you should savor and extend – for once those 12 episodes are done, you'll go crazy waiting for season #3.



LETTERS, words, sentences, paragraphs, pages ...

Rich Lynch <rw_lynch@yahoo.com>

[On *Spartacus no. 38*] You're publishing these faster than I can comment on them. [Yup – the cascade of news and nonsense this spring has made me move up to a **monthly** schedule for now.] Concerning your thoughts on the pandemic that "we've seen this before, in science fiction," I'll add to the list of examples you provide by pointing toward both the film and TV series versions of *12 Monkeys*. Both of which are above average for that kind of trope. As to your intention of making the next issue of *Challenger* themed on the person and career of Theodore Sturgeon and to answer your question: Yes, there has been a previous fanzine which had a Sturgeon-centric issue – *Lan's Lantern*, from sometime in the early 1990s. But I don't have a copy (and it's not yet online at fanac.org), so I

don't know what the editor, George "Lan" Laskowski, did for that issue. [*It's all right. I found it on eBay and bought it. Who do I ask for reprint rights?*]

[*On Spartacus no. 39*] To repeat, you're publishing these faster than I can comment on them. Concerning your very fine opening essay about the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, you write that: "A second wave of infection is inevitable." You're right, of course, and it took less than a month after you wrote that for it to all start to happen. Maryland has one of the more reluctant states to life lockdown restrictions and just this evening, while we're still in the preliminary Phase 1 stage, I observed lots of people supping in an open air room of a nearby restaurant. They're braver than I am.

I've had my own thoughts about the pandemic, as you know, and I've included the essay in the new issue of my personal time capsule *My Back Pages* (viewable at both efanzines.com and fanac.org). [*And well worth reading at any time.*]

Jeff Copeland copeland@alumni.caltech.edu

[*On Spartacus no. 37*] Nice tribute to Kirk Douglas, and his contribution of the title for this zine, without noting that part of what made that movie heroic was that Douglas explicitly and openly hired Dalton Trumbo to write the script. That, in turn, forced Otto Preminger to admit that Trumbo was writing the script for *Exodus*. And thus was the Hollywood blacklist broken. (But of course, quoth Trumbo about the Blacklist, :It will do no good to search for villains or heroes or saints or devils because there were none; there were only victims."



A launch before sunrise is one of Cape Canaveral's most spectacular offerings, as the rocket's flame burns bright against the night as it rises, and the contrail catches the morning sun as it nears its height. 13 at the marrow, I was up at 5-and-change to see the Falcon 9 loft carrying the latest batch of communications satellites, see the clouds glow, watch the reusable first stage descend – 100 miles out to sea. It left a pillar of light in the few nimbus clouds between here and *Of Course I Still Love You*, the puckishly-named recovery barge. I heard no sonic boom.

I remembered the several times as a teen I watched the tinfoil balloon Echo slide across the sky, and that magnificent night when my dad and I saw Sputnik I, the first artificial moon, pass over the eastern US. A Gemini. The ISS from a "Star Party" outside of Shreveport. And here in Florida, my first launches, a NASA rocket with my brother on my wedding day, two of the final shuttle flights, and since I've been here, dozens.

But *it never grows old*. Late in May Gary and Corlis Robe drove down to stand with Rosy and me and watch a *manned* mission go into space. I have an app which tells me when the Space Station will be visible again. Another alerts us to the days, hours, minutes, seconds till the next launch. *It never grows old*. We'll be watching.



W.O.O.F. NEWS

Following an exchange with Murray Moore, chief of Exhibits with the New Zealand Worldcon, I can announce that I'll be running a virtual **WOOF** mailing for CoNZealand.

Much like Kees van Toorn's excellent efforts with Dublin's Worldcon Order of Fan-Editors, this will be a virtual disty, so online contributions should be sent to GHLIII@yahoo.com in PDF form. Since I'd like to include convention "reports" in the disty, I'm setting the deadline for *after* CoNZealand – 8/6/2020. John Hertz is seeking a regional liaison to receive and transmit paper publications; we'll have word on that directly.

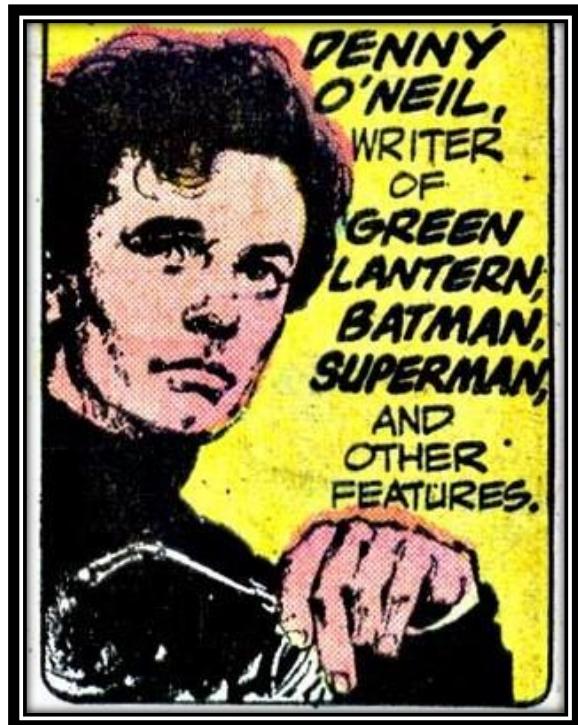
Contribute! Big fun!

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DENNY O'NEIL was a friendly presence during my year at DC Comics, and much more: the light of the industry, a revolutionary writer whose work with Neal Adams on *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* introduced "relevance" to the field and changed the medium forever. Thanks to the generosity and courage of his editor, Julie Schwartz, he brought adulthood, reality, and our generation's sensibility to comics, and a sense of truth that it had lacked for many years.

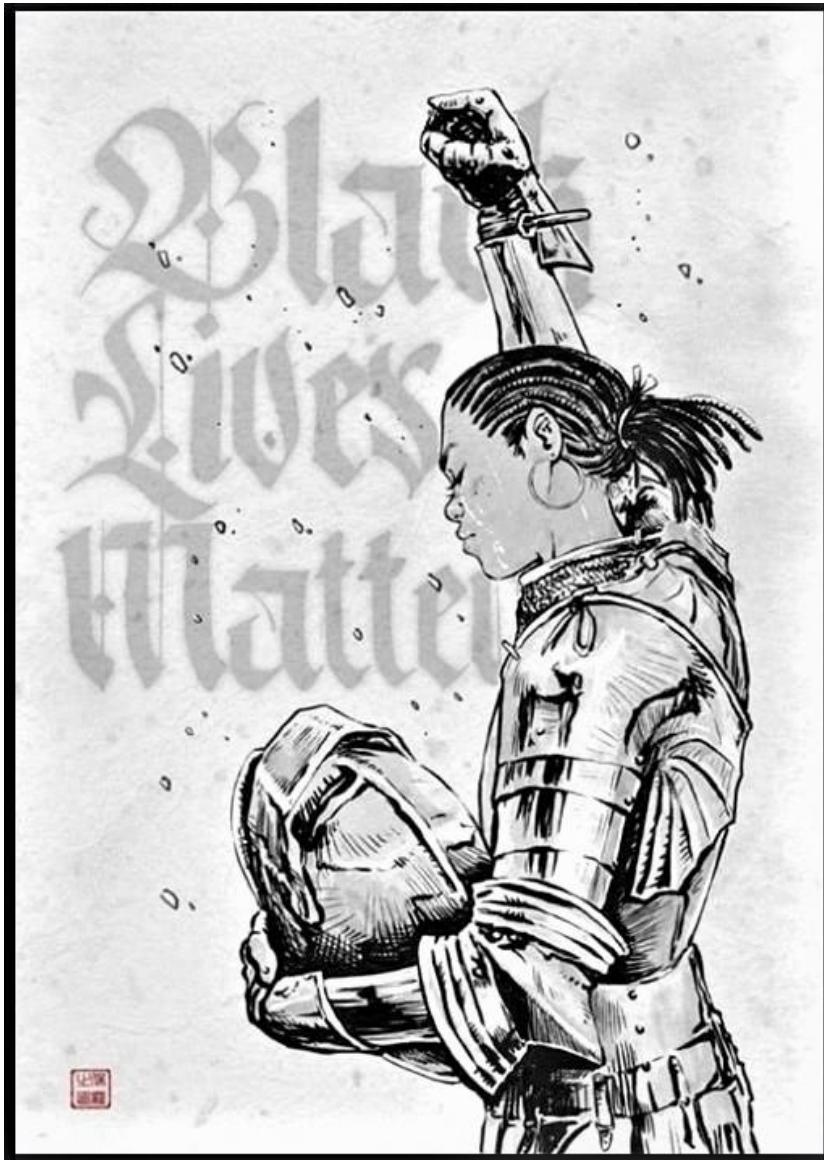
He was also a very fine guy. I wrote a rather shallow interview with him for *Amazing World of DC Comics*, but my main memory of him was our subway trip to Greenwich Village and Baird Searles' Forbidden Planet Book Store, where we met Harlan. I met many great talents during my DC year, and he was among the tops.

Denny passed away in the second week of June, 2020, aged 81. Among the many eulogies for him on Facebook was this one, reprinted with the author's kind permission.



Michael Uslan

Denny O'Neil, the comic book writer I idolized as a teen-ager and college student during the Silver and Bronze Ages of Comics, was the first pro to get on a plane and fly to Indiana University to be the first ever guest speaker at my new, and the world's first, college accredited course on comic books. He stayed at my house for a few days and we became fast friends. From his earliest work at Charlton Comics where he created one of the greatest out-of-the-box, unique and off-beat characters, "Wander," and the classic black and white science fiction opus, "Children of Doom," to his historic and extraordinary work at DC Comics under the tutelage of editor Julius Schwartz, which culminated in both the important return of The Batman to his darker roots in comics and the combining of Green Lantern and Green Arrow into an era-defining run that ushered in "The Age of Relevancy," Denny inspired a new generation of comic book readers through comic books that were now maturing and speaking to college age and older audiences with a new level of graphic storytelling. In both cases, Denny's partner was the legendary artist, Neal Adams. It was Denny who gave me my first professional comic book writing job on "The Shadow," the scripts for which would directly lead to my writing Batman comics, which had been my dream since I was eight years old. And it was Denny who not only taught me comic book writing, but who backed me in getting my own title to create and write for DC, "Beowulf, Dragon Slayer," provided I approached it the way he had approached "Wander" –with bold, out-of-the-box creative thinking. Over the years, we served on many panels together at San Diego and New York Comic Cons and I was honored to be on stage with him in New York at a very wonderful celebration of his life and career. Denny's own real life super-villain was alcohol and he talked candidly with me as to its horrific impact on him for years. The story of how he stood up to it and learned to conquer it made him a real life super-hero in my book. So with a lifetime of thanks to the person who set me up on my career journey, Denny, and for all you taught me about life, writing, social injustice and humanity, and for propelling me forward with your dark and serious interpretation of Batman of the 1970's so I could devote my life bringing that vision to movie screens and new audiences world-wide, I say with a broken heart... farewell, Denny O'Neil...



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I wish I could close this *Spartacus* on a cheery note, but the world is the world and the truth is the truth. We're in a time of terrible trouble, and we have only our faith in ourselves and each other to hold. Our institutions are in shadow, our security in shambles, our mutual confidence non-existent. And here we are, science fiction fans, as essential to the suffering world as kazoos.

Here is an idea. It may seem contrary to science. *Faith*. We have endured crises before. We are capable of innovation and re-creation. *We want to do right*. And as SFers, we believe in the future. We can handle it, if we *believe it*.

It takes work to believe. It takes work to compromise. It takes work to believe that your work has meaning. If there is hope, it's like Starman says: we are at our best when things are at their worst.

Stay safe. Stay tough. And as always, stay tuned.