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A goodbye letter to my team:

It is traditional for someone who is leaving a position to write a goodbye letter to the people he has worked with. There is also a tradition of not discussing politics (too much) at work, for a number of reasons, including that it sometimes makes people uncomfortable. On the other hand, the world (sometimes) feels like it is falling apart all around us: the icecaps are melting, journalists and people who follow history are nervously studying the 1930's (and all the terrible events that happened in both Europe and East Asia during that period) and now a war has broken out in Eastern Europe that has created hardship and pain for millions--and which could easily expand. And many are also concerned that a larger war might eventually unfold in East Asia, where the fortunes of a rising China may be on a collision course with many of the international arrangements and alliances created by the United States following the end of the 2nd World War. So the world is becoming more scary, and this is likely to continue.

So, for these reasons, and also because I am an activist and a writer, I wanted to write a goodbye letter that will say a little about myself, and my plans for retirement--and also give a list of videos, books, cable shows and movies I recommend.

I started my first full-time job in 1975. I had a degree in Engineering from Caltech, but no real job experience, and Seattle was reeling from massive layoffs at Boeing, and tech jobs were hard to find. So I drove a taxi--which was good experience for me because I had come from a relatively comfortable and sheltered background, and taxi drivers see a

lot. I finally got a series of jobs related to programming minicomputers. When the first "personal computers" went on sale in a chain of electronic stores, I confidently told the other programmers that I worked with that "nobody will ever make any real money writing software for personal computers". Around that time, a slightly younger man named Bill Gates saw matters differently.

By this time, I was involved in left-wing politics, and got out of the software industry in order to have more contact with the working class. I worked in lumber mills, foundries and eventually became a pipefitter in the shipyards, a machinist, and a quality control inspector at Boeing. By the 1990's, it became clear to me that the revolution in communications (which I had always known was coming) was about to arrive, and that it would be useful to get back into software--so that it would be easier to understand what was going on. That is how I became a software tester.

I ended up as a blue badge test lead at Microsoft--until after 7 years Microsoft figured out that I was not really motivated or enthusiastic about either my job or career. Microsoft told me that they wanted me to train an "assistant" from Hyderabad--but I knew that they really meant replacement--so I figured that I might as well get a good trip out of it--and told them that they would need to send me to India for a month so I could train him there--and Microsoft agreed. Since then, I mostly worked contract test jobs until Wipro found me in 2017. I found the somewhat more hierarchical management style of an Indian company to be suitable because--my mind was never fully on my job--it was elsewhere--and in a hierarchy you do not need to think as hard.

I believe that one reason I postponed retirement as long as I have--was because I have made commitments to myself to undertake some challenging tasks once I was retired--and I have been somewhat nervous about this. I plan to write a book about the long-term future of social media and the impact it will have on political events, on both a national and international level. It is not hard to write a book. But it is not necessarily easy to write a book that is actually worth reading.

I have watched "social media" grow from back in the day when the internet connected a total of 6 computers. Many people today are

pessimistic about the future of social media because the algorithms (which are currently controlled by a small number of companies) have turned social media into an addictive toxic sewer. But the history of the development of this technology has left me with the unshakeable conviction that democratic social media, based on democratic algorithms, is inevitable and will change everything. There is a story that Benjamin Franklin witnessed one of the first exhibitions of a hot-air balloon in Paris, and was asked "but of what use will this be?" Franklin replied: "Of what use is a new-born baby?" Some things take time. Related to this, I also plan to write some software that would demonstrate how a small group of people could manage many forms of content (text, images, video, tables, etc) in a flexible, recursive, transparent and democratic way (see screenshot for "fractal thought processor" below).

YouTube videos that I have made:

- **Our Brains are divided because the Universe is divided**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6u_zqLeR8
 (my 2nd video, how brain lateralization works, 10 minutes, 2019)
- **Century of Information War - The tweet is mightier than the bone saw**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMIUEyFBcUU>
 (my first video, a little slow at 25 minutes, political topics, 2018)



Books I recommend:

Here are two books I highly recommend. I have a suggestion that I offer to anyone reading books like these that are saturated with interesting rivers of information. I never attempt to read books like these from beginning to end. Reading and learning is for pleasure--and reading from the beginning to the end has always felt, to me, like it requires too much patience and feels too much like work. Instead, I usually just open up books like these at random, and read a sentence or paragraph. If it looks interesting, I continue for a page or two, maybe making margin notes or underlining certain parts. If the book is really good, you can do this with it hundreds of times--and it may be more enjoyable, and you may learn more. And, if you get busy and find that you have not looked at the book for a month or more--you do not need to remember where you left off.

(book # 1) The voice of capital explains why our world is becoming crazy

- **Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order: Why Nations Succeed and Fail**
 by Ray Dalio, November 2021 (was # 2 on New York Times bestseller list)

Reviews:

- <https://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/principles-dealing-changing-world> -- (quote # 1) "A few years ago, Ray Dalio noticed a confluence of political and economic conditions he hadn't encountered before. They included huge debts and zero or near-zero interest rates that led to massive printing of money in the world's three major reserve currencies; big political and social conflicts within countries, especially the US, due to the largest wealth, political, and

values disparities in more than 100 years; and the rising of a world power (China) to challenge the existing world power (US) and the existing world order. The last time that this confluence occurred was between 1930 and 1945. This realization sent Dalio on a search for the repeating patterns and cause/effect relationships underlying all major changes in wealth and power over the last 500 years."

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/20/business/dealbook/ray-dalio.html> -- (quote # 2) "a sprawling, holistic study of how the world has worked over hundreds of years of history ... Dalio ... found ... that dominant countries -- inevitably rise and fall over long segments of time. Nothing is forever, including, as Dalio documents, America's position as the leading world power today ... Dalio focuses on three major historical transitions: the rise of the Netherlands and its replacement by the United Kingdom; the replacement of the United Kingdom by the United States; and the pending ... replacement of the United States by China. ... In his 'Archetypical Big Cycle,' Dalio lists the forces that drive an empire's rise: '(a) relatively low levels of indebtedness; (b) relatively small wealth, values, and political gaps between people; (c) people working effectively together to produce prosperity; (d) good education and infrastructure; (e) strong and capable leadership; and (f) a peaceful world order that is guided by one or more dominant world powers.' ... He also succinctly states that three forces might drive the American empire's decline. The first is a steadily increasing debt burden that financially weakens the empire. The second is a widening gap in household income and wealth that incites internal conflicts. The third is a rising external rival who is on course to topple the declining but-still-ruling empire. ... Dalio argues that the US has too much debt and writes 'what does that mean for the dollar (most importantly) and the other more minor reserve currencies? Will they decline and others replace them? Most probably they will decline analogously to past reserve currency declines: slowly for a long time and then very quickly.' "

Videos by Ray Dalio which summarize his book:

- Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order by Ray Dalio -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xguam0TKMw8>
- How The Economic Machine Works by Ray Dalio <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHeObXAIuk0>

Comment by Bruce:

If international capital had a voice that attempted to appear reasonable and reassuring, it would probably sound a lot like Ray Dalio, who is best known for founding the largest hedge fund in the world. People who manage millions and billions of dollars pay attention to his advice. I read a lot of articles by people who have agendas of various sorts. Dalio also has an agenda: he manages a big pile of money and wants to see it grow as much as possible. This book is definitely worth reading because it explains a lot about how our world got the way it is and where it is going. Dalio looks at the rise and decline of great empires over the last 500 years: the Dutch took over from the Spanish, the British took over from the Dutch, then the United States became the world's hegemonic power, and now we are witnessing the rise of China.

Underneath the surface of these big cycles, Dalio pays attention to the expansion of debt, especially as it applies to the powers which maintain the world's reserve currencies. Dalio (from within the perspective of capital) explains why things are getting crazy now. Increasing economic tensions lead to an increase in the intensity of the class struggle (a phrase Dalio is careful to avoid) and an increase in the polarization between left and right that draws its energy ultimately from the class struggle .

The pattern, he notes, is consistent across the centuries. When too much debt accumulates, a reckoning becomes inevitable because a lot of wealth is revealed to be fictitious--and some must pay the price for this more than others. In other words,

"people cannot continue to live in the old way" (as Lenin used to say) -- and some combination of the big four solutions (debt cancellation, inflation, austerity or wealth redistribution) will always be employed by our ruling class in order to try to maintain economic and political stability, lessen the intensity of the class struggle, and stave off violent revolution.

This explains a lot.

Why is a proto-fascist like Trump so popular now? Because as the working class begins to stir and threatens to awaken, our ruling class finds that populist divide-and-rule demagogues serve as a convenient club to smash the working class--and gives these demagogues a lot of publicity and other forms of institutional support. This is why Trump has not been thrown in jail for his failed coup attempt: our ruling class knows that it may need to use the club in the future--and needs to keep it around in good working order.

It is a similar story in other countries.

Dalio believes that capitalism can be (and must be) reformed, and many agree with him. Dalio also believes there is a good chance that, in the decades ahead, countries like the U.S. may experience either civil war or large-scale unrest, and/or blunder into a war with China, which it would likely lose, possibly in a catastrophic way. But Dalio backs up his arguments with a lot of facts, numbers and charts as well as an easygoing tone that can make you forget that he is talking about events, later in this century, that may take the lives of millions. Dalio talks frankly, as one capitalist may talk to others of his kind. Explaining why U.S. imperialism should refrain from becoming entangled in a potentially catastrophic war with China--Dalio simply says: "Peace is profitable and war is expensive". That might make it appear likely that the bags of capital which rule our world will opt for peace; but when they are desperate, they will do anything.

(book # 2)

The Peloponnesian War, Donald Kagan (2004)

- <https://www.amazon.com/Peloponnesian-War-Donald-Kagan/dp/0142004375> -- For three decades in the fifth century B.C. the ancient world was torn apart by a conflict that was as dramatic, divisive, and destructive as the world wars of the twentieth century: the Peloponnesian War. Donald Kagan, one of the world's most respected classical, political, and military historians, presents a new account of this vicious war of Greek against Greek, Athenian against Spartan.

Comment by Bruce:

This book, on the "world war" fought between ancient Sparta and Athens 2400 years ago, is largely based on the original book, which was written by a failed Athenian general named Thucydides, who disgraced himself in the war by getting distracted from his mission and failing to defend the strategic port city that he had been sent to defend. Thucydides concluded that if he could not be a good general, he would be a good historian of the war, and today few remember his failure as a general. Kagan quotes extensively from Thucydides in describing the political and military environment that led both Sparta and Athens into a mutually destructive war that neither wanted and neither could end. It is difficult to read this book without noticing how "modern" everything feels. All the politicians on both the Spartan and Athenian sides (and both sides had hawks as well as doves) appear to modern readers to be every bit as stupid, cowardly and opportunist as their modern counterparts. Reading this, it often felt like nothing has changed except the technology and the scale of the fuckery. I started reading this book when it first came out--and I could not stop. I had to ask my girlfriend to hide it somewhere so that I would not be able to find it and I could get some sleep so that I would be able to go to work and keep my job. The bottom line is that this war led to the downfall of both Sparta and Athens which never again played a major role in history. In modern times, the phrase "Thucydides trap" (based

on his observation that "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable") has been popularized to refer to the danger of war that exists when a rising power (such as China) threatens to displace a declining power (such as the U.S.).

HBO cable shows I recommend:

- **Rome** (HBO) (2005 - 2007) --
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome_(TV_series))
- **Deadwood** (HBO) (2004 - 2006) --
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deadwood_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deadwood_(TV_series))

Comment by Bruce:

What does it say about our society and culture that you can learn more about history from HBO cables shows than what is taught in school?

When I first heard about "Deadwood", I assumed that a bunch of screenwriters had collected lurid stories from 50 years of Western history and (to put this series together) pretended that they all happened in the same small town in a 3 year period. I was wrong. Much or most of what takes place in this series really happened as depicted. Most of the characters are based on real people, and their real personalities. The real, historical Deadwood started out as an illegal mining camp in Native American territory, after gold was discovered. Soon, the town was populated by about ten thousand miners and a thousand prostitutes. There was an average of one or two murders a day. The "Western", as a genre of movie-making, started with the good guys in white hats winning against bad guys in black hats. Not this. This show is about reality. The main character in the series, Al Swearengen, is a literal cutthroat who owns a saloon/brothel/gambling hall. In many of the episodes, he takes someone upstairs to his office and opens his safe, as if he is about to give them some money as part of a bribe or in exchange for some criminal deed. Quite often, instead, he whips out his big knife and slices open their throat. Then he has to scrub the blood off of his

office floor. Swearengen spends a lot of his time scrubbing the floor. And, in this series, Swearengen emerges as one of the "good guys", because many others are much worse. This series became quite popular because of the writing, which was so good that the series was often referred to as "Shakespeare in the Mud" (there is a lot of dust and mud in each episode).

The series "Rome" was also quite popular, but was cancelled after two seasons because of high production costs. It covers only the most well-known part of Roman history: Caesar, Cleopatra, Mark Anthony and Octavian as, in a series of civil wars, the Roman Republic was replaced by the Roman Empire. Everything about this series is brilliant: the writing, the characters, the sets, and the atmosphere as ambitious and powerful people scheme to outsmart and undermine one another. Many of the expensive production methods (and some of the actors) were transferred to the next big HBO series: "Game of Thrones", but "Rome" in my opinion is far better. From the perspective of real history, the events shown in "Rome" were superficial. The Roman Republic would have been doomed, for example, even if Caesar had never been born, because, by this time, the entire basis of landed property had changed, and nearly all farmland (ie: most of the economy) was owned by big landowners (and worked by slaves) rather than small farmers (and this changes everything). So, if the events which take place here represent a "dumbed down" version of history, so do most other renditions of this story. What is done better in this series--is that it is more entertaining.



14 good movies that focus on the class struggle or national liberation

These are all movies that I have seen and highly recommend. They are available for free via torrents, and I have some of them on my hard drive.

- (1) **The Young Karl Marx** (2017) Raoul Peck
- (2) **Spartacus** (1960) Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Peter Ustinov, Jean Simmons,
- (3) **Trumbo** (2015) Bryan Cranston, Diane Lane, Helen Mirren, Louis C.K., Elle Fanning, John Goodman
- (4) **Reds** (1981) Warren Beatty, Diane Keaton, Jack Nicholson
- (5) **1900** (1976) Robert De Niro, Gerard Depardieu, Bernardo Bertolucci
- (6) **Matewan** (1987) John Sayles, Chris Cooper, James Earl Jones
- (7) **Salt of the Earth** (1954)

Below are movies that give context to the struggle for national liberation (Ireland, India, Pakistan, Congo, Vietnam) and the fight against fascism (Spain, Lebanon):

- (8) **Lumumba** (2000) Raoul Peck (Congo)
- (9) **Waltz with Bashir** (2008) Ari Folman (Israel, Lebanon)
- (10) **Michael Collins** (1996) Liam Neeson (Ireland)
- (11) **Earth** (1998) - (released in India as "1947: Earth")
- Deepa Mehta (India, Pakistan)
- (12) **Land and Freedom** (1995) Ken Loach (Spain)
- (13) **The Wind That Shakes the Barley** (2006)
Ken Loach, Cillian Murphy (Ireland)
- (14) **Indochine** (1992) Catherine Deneuve (Vietnam)

(1) The Young Karl Marx (2017)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Young_Karl_Marx -- A 2017 historical drama about Karl Marx, directed by Haitian filmmaker and political activist Raoul Peck. The film ends with Marx and Engels publishing, in a simple language for anyone to understand, "The Communist Manifesto" in the year of the 1848 revolutions.

Comment by Bruce:

More than 200 years after his birth, nearly everyone in the world has some idea who Karl Marx was. However, this is the first and only movie I have seen which gives viewers a solid and reliable picture of the man and his ideas--and how they developed. The film is structured around a series of sharp theoretical confrontations between Marx and other progressive political figures who were well-known in their time, and helps viewers understand the central and decisive role, in the struggle of the working class, of the struggle for correct ideas.

Haitian director Peck (also known for "I Am Not Your Negro", and "Lumumba") does not condescend to his audience. His movies are for people who are not afraid to use their minds. The ideas fought over in the movie are the same ideas that Marx fought over at the time--and it is all here (in concentrated form). You can watch this movie more than once, I have, and it becomes deeper each time, layer after layer. This movie shows us the world through the eyes of the Bauer brothers, Proudhon, Bakunin, Weitling, and others, who are brought to life in a way that words on paper never did for me. In the real world of working class politics, life is not all sugar and sunshine. Disagreements, arguments, bitter disputes and betrayal are as common as the rain here in Seattle. A lot of this appears in this film.

The relationship between Marx and Engels is presented in a realistic way (other than a short episode of comic relief, in which they are chased by Parisian police). In other movies,

such as the ones in this list, viewers can see class battles on a scale from large to small. But this is the only movie I have seen which shows the fundamental relationship between these battles--and the economic and political ideas that shine a light on how everything works and make it possible for us to actually understand our world. The movie ends as Marx, Engels, and their wives sit around a table, reading to one another the final draft of the Communist Manifesto. This was the moment when all the hopes and dreams of humanity, going all the way back to pre-history, were for the first time placed on a solid and reliable scientific foundation.

Today, social media is revealing to millions how, in one way or another, we are surrounded by superficial or fake news: obsessions with celebrities and trivia while, in the background, the ice caps melt, the echoes of 1930's fascism ring in our ears, and the outlines of a terrible future war gradually emerge from a fog. When we are surrounded by so much that is shallow and false--this raises the question of what is real and fundamental.

Answering this question was the job of Karl Marx, who goes beneath the surface of class society and class exploitation and shows us how commodity production (ie: creating things for the purpose of exchanging them for other things) leads to the formation of money and the accumulation of capital, and how this capital (which makes use of a ruling class of humans as its thinking instruments) has shaped nearly all institutions in the modern world: our political networks and hierarchies, the courts, police and education systems, our culture, the gatekeepers at every level, and the dominant beliefs in every field and on every topic. Commodity production, in short, has created our world, but is now destroying it. The working class can and will awaken itself from its slumber and throw off the rule of capital like Shelley's lions shaking off the morning dew. And humanity will learn how to abundantly provide for the real needs of everyone who breathes--without making use of commodity production. And this paragraph is my summary of the communist manifesto in 173 words.

(2) Spartacus (1960)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartacus_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartacus_(film)) -- Written by Dalton Trumbo (who was blacklisted at the time) it stars Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier, Peter Ustinov, Jean Simmons, Charles Laughton and Tony Curtis. Stanley Kubrick directed. The film won four Academy Awards.

Comment by Bruce:

Watching this movie, when it first came out, changed my life forever. As a child, I had seen many movies with the theme of "good vs. bad". This was the first time that I had seen this theme in a larger context, applied to large groups of people, and in class terms. The contradiction between the slaves, and their Roman masters, I realized, was still visible, all around me, once I learned to recognize it, and knew where to look. This contradiction was reflected everywhere and from everything. From the day I saw this movie, everything I saw looked different, every thought I had was deeper. Looking back, it was this movie, as well as the war in Vietnam and the associated turmoil of the late 1960's, that made me a communist.

Spartacus was based on a novel by Howard Fast, who faced down the House Un-American Affairs Committee (HUAC) and refused to "name names" (ie: inform on his fellow communists) and started to explain why. A distinguished Congressman interrupted Fast, and told Fast, sarcastically, that if he had something to say, he should "write a book". Then all these fine gentlemen threw Fast in jail--where he did write that book. He wrote "Spartacus". This background, where both Fast and Trumbo were blacklisted and imprisoned for refusing to bow down before their masters--shapes every scene like a chisel shapes stone.

The movie includes three unforgettable scenes which show what solidarity looks like, including, most famously, the "I am Spartacus" scene (which probably should have been the end of

the movie, as what follows is mawkishly sentimental). Closer to the beginning of the movie, a black slave, Draba, rather than kill Spartacus in the gladiatorial ring, suddenly and shockingly sacrifices himself and attacks the Roman Senator Crassus (whose name, incidentally, is the origin of our modern word "crass"). This act of solidarity from a black slave had an electric effect on movie audiences at the time, when segregation was widespread in the US and the fight against racial discrimination and violent repression was beginning to gain steam. And, finally, the "I am not an animal" scene, where Spartacus refuses to rape a fellow slave for the amusement of his masters represents what, in my humble opinion, is the most powerful scene ever filmed between a man and a woman. This simple act of defiance and solidarity creates a human bond that proves stronger than Roman steel and, in Trumbo's hands, sets in motion the events of the most well-known slave uprising in history.

There have been many adaptations, in literature, stage and screen, of the Spartacus revolt. In more recent times, there was even a fancy cable soap opera, with big stars, porn scenes full of beautiful naked bodies, and 3D special effects in slow motion--but it might be another hundred years before the life of Spartacus is told better than the 1960 reply to HUAC given by Fast and Trumbo.



(3) Trumbo (2015)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trumbo_\(2015_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trumbo_(2015_film)) -- The film stars Bryan Cranston, Diane Lane, Helen Mirren, Louis C.K., Elle Fanning, John Goodman .. The film follows the life of Hollywood screenwriter Dalton Trumbo .. Bryan Cranston was nominated for Best Actor.

Comment by Bruce:

Bryan Cranston plays Trumbo, the man who wrote the screenplay for Spartacus (and a bunch of other acclaimed movies) even while blacklisted. The film is about how the blacklist was broken as much as it is about Trumbo himself. Unlike many movies, this film gives realistic portrayals of how people's actions and beliefs are shaped by their class backgrounds and position in society. Some of my favorite scenes are those with the actor playing Kirk Douglas. In one, he shows up, out of the blue, at Trumbo's house, and the front door is opened by Trumbo's daughter, played by Elle Fanning. Kirk introduces himself. Fanning, in awe, just stares at him.

And then there is the priceless "I make garbage" scene, with John Goodman:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apJLTO5T430>

(4) Reds (1981)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reds_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reds_(film)) -- (Warren Beatty, Diane Keaton, Jack Nicholson) about the life and career of John Reed, the journalist and writer who chronicled the October Revolution in Russia in his 1919 book "Ten Days That Shook the World". Beatty was awarded the Academy Award for Best Director. The film was nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor and Best Supporting Actress.

Comment by Bruce:

This movie brings John Reed, and the atmosphere of the time, to life. After writing his book, John Reed moved from being someone who records history, to someone who shapes it, and devoted himself to creating the independent party of the working class here in the U.S. A hundred years later, this task remains unfulfilled.

(5) 1900 (1976) Robert De Niro, Gerard Depardieu, Bernardo Bertolucci

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1900_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1900_(film)) -- This movie covers the lives of two men born on the same day in 1900 on an Italian estate--the grandson of the wealthy landowner (De Niro) and the son of a peasant (Depardieu, before he became a bloated, Putin-loving rapist pig) -- as they are drawn into the antagonism between fascism and communism. As boys, they are childhood friends, but this cannot continue when they grow up and one sides with Mussolini while the other becomes a communist organizer. The movie opens and ends in April 1945, as Italy is liberated from the fascists. The original version had a runtime of more than 5 hours, and was released in two parts in many countries, and in a single edited-down version for the U.S. Since then, versions of different lengths have been released.

Comment by Bruce:

The next film De Niro made after this was "Taxi Driver". It is amazing to me that a movie like "Taxi Driver" has achieved so much recognition while a vastly better and more important movie like "1900" is less known. Burt Lancaster and Sterling Hayden both have memorable scenes. Donald Sutherland plays a fascist in this movie and, in one scene, straps a cat to his forehead with a belt and then smashes his forehead against a heavy wooden beam, killing the cat, as he demonstrates to his fellow fascists the joy of being a psychopath. This might seem over the top, but then so was Mussolini.



(6) Matewan (1987) John Sayles, Chris Cooper, James Earl Jones

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matewan> -- The film dramatizes the events of the Battle of Matewan, a coal miners' strike in 1920 in Matewan, a small town in the hills of West Virginia. The film was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Cinematography.

Comment by Bruce:

The movie is about the 1920 strike and the battle of Matewan. There is also quite the cameo by the director, who gives a memorable performance as a hard shell preacher: for one fleeting moment, you have a window into a man's soul. James Earl Jones gives a powerful performance. Much of this movie will have you on the edge of your seat. After watching it, you will understand the real-life events that followed.

In real life, in 1921 (the year following the events shown in this movie) ten thousand coal-miners fought against three thousand

members of the US national guard, in the battle of Blair Mountain (see link below). It was the largest, and most violent, labor uprising in the US since the civil war. A million rounds were fired. A hundred people were killed, and the miners were bombed from airplanes, which also dropped on them poison gas left over from the first world war. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Blair_Mountain

(7) Salt of the Earth (1954)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_of_the_Earth_\(1954_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_of_the_Earth_(1954_film)) -- The writer and director of this movie were blacklisted. The plot centers on a long and difficult strike, based on the 1951 strike against the Empire Zinc Company in Grant County, New Mexico. The film shows how the miners, the company, and the police react during the strike. In neorealist style, the producers and director used actual miners and their families as actors in the film.

Comment by Bruce:

This is as much a documentary as it is a drama. This movie was denounced as subversive and investigated by the FBI. One of the main actors was deported. Shots were fired at the set to intimidate the cast. But nothing was going to stop either the strike, or the movie which told its story to the world.

(8) Lumumba (2000) Raoul Peck

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lumumba_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lumumba_(film)) -- This film depicts the rise and fall of Patrice Lumumba, and is set in the months before and after the Congo achieved independence from Belgium in June 1960. Lumumba started as a beer salesman, and ended up getting elected Prime Minister because of his honesty and outspokenness.

Comment by Bruce:

Raoul Peck made a documentary about Lumumba ten years earlier, in 1990, but had more to say, and in this historical drama, these complex events unfold in a way that is easy for ordinary people to understand. We see how the world worked in 1960--and how it still works today. The CIA had Lumumba, who had been democratically elected, assassinated and replaced by their corrupt puppet Mobutu. More than 5 million people in the Congo were killed in the chaos and civil wars unleashed in the decades that followed.

(9) Waltz with Bashir (2008)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waltz_with_Bashir -- Waltz with Bashir is a 2008 Israeli animated war documentary film written and directed by Ari Folman. It depicts Folman in search of his lost memories of his experience as a soldier in the 1982 Lebanon War.

Comment by Bruce:

If you see this movie, you are not likely to forget it. This is an absolutely haunting film, based on the life experience of the director, who every night had the same terrible recurring nightmare. He knew the nightmares were connected to his service with the Israeli army in Lebanon--but he could not remember anything at all about what had happened. Everything was a total blank. He eventually connected with other members of his unit--but they--also--could not remember anything. Step-by-step, the director investigated what happened, as we watch the pieces of this puzzle slowly and gradually come together in the dreamlike rotoscope of this movie--until the last thirty seconds--when we suddenly wake up and are unable to breathe.

(10) Michael Collins (1996) Liam Neeson

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Collins_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Collins_(film)) -- Liam Neeson stars as the Irish revolutionary, soldier, and politician Michael Collins, who was a leading figure in the early-20th-century Irish struggle for independence from Britain. The story starts in 1916, at the end of the Easter Rising, as besieged Irish rebels surrender to the British Army at the Irish Republican headquarters in Dublin. Several key figures of the Rising (including James Connolly) are executed. Michael Collins and other less important figures are imprisoned. They are eventually released and organize a successful guerilla campaign which eventually forces the British government to negotiate with them. But the British peace terms divide the movement, just as they divided Ireland, and Collins is assassinated.

Comment by Bruce:

Collins was something of a pioneer in modern, asymmetrical war, and was studied and admired by Mao Tse-tung. Passions about him still run high. Some argued that Collins had gotten the best deal from the British that he could under the circumstances, but others believe he had sold out. Even today, a hundred years later, talking about Michael Collins can probably start a fight in many Irish bars. Movies like this help us understand history that is real. (See also, below, "The Wind that Shakes the Barley")

(11) Earth (1998) -- Deepa Mehta

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth_\(1998_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth_(1998_film)) -- Set in Lahore, during the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, the story is narrated by the adult self of the young girl, Shanta, who is the central character. Shanta is from a wealthy Parsi family, who hope to remain neutral to the rising tensions between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in the area. Two young men in Shanta's group of friends are in love with her. One is Hindu

and the other is Muslim. With partition, this once unified group of friends becomes divided and tragedy ensues.

Comment by Bruce:

The partition of India and Pakistan forced between 10 and 20 million people, on the basis of religion, to migrate to new territories. There was widespread "ethnic cleansing" (ie: murder and genocide) often organized by the local ruling officials, and realistic estimates are that about a million died. Like other movies of this type, a big story is told by following the events that happen to a small group of people. When Shanta's voice describes events--we feel that her voice is the voice of all of us. The Canadian-based director, Deepa Mehta, has often been the target of right-wing Hindu nationalists.

(12) Land and Freedom (1995) Ken Loach

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_and_Freedom -- Land and Freedom (or Tierra y Libertad) is a 1995 film directed by Ken Loach, which narrates the story of David Carr, an unemployed worker and member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, who decides to fight for the republican side in the Spanish Civil War, an anti-rebel coalition of Socialists, Communists and Anarchists. The film won the FIPRESCI International Critics Prize and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival. The film was also nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

Comment by Bruce:

I have seen two films by Ken Loach. Each has a section, midway through, where groups of people argue with one another concerning what needs to be done. There are social, political and economic forces involved--and things are complicated. People make their choices--and then events play out--as they must and as they did. There are probably people who don't like these sections (which can be boring for anyone

who is afraid to think) but it should be clear that Loach made these movies to bring these "dry" discussions to life.

(13) The Wind That Shakes the Barley (2006)
Ken Loach, Cillian Murphy

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wind_That_Shakes_the_Barley_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wind_That_Shakes_the_Barley_(film)) -- directed by Ken Loach, set during the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921) and the Irish Civil War (1922–1923). Written by long-time Loach collaborator Paul Laverty, this drama tells the fictional story of two County Cork brothers, Damien O'Donovan (Cillian Murphy) and Teddy O'Donovan (Pádraic Delaney), who join the Irish Republican Army to fight for Irish independence from the United Kingdom. The film takes its title from Robert Dwyer Joyce's "The Wind That Shakes the Barley", a song set during the 1798 rebellion in Ireland and featured early in the film. The film is heavily influenced by Walter Macken's 1964 novel "The Scorching Wind". Widely praised, the film won the Palme d'Or at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. Loach's biggest box office success to date, the film did well around the world and set a record in Ireland as the highest-grossing Irish-made independent film.

Comment by Bruce:

Cillian Murphy is a household name today because of "Peaky Blinders". Here he plays another man with an Irish background, as two brothers put the cause of Irish independence above their own lives. Unfortunately, a split in the cause of Irish independence cannot be avoided, and now one brother must kill the other. And how do we understand this today? This is a knot yet to be fully unraveled, along a border that has seen blood. This movie can be watched side-by-side with "Michael Collins" (see above) which tells the story of a cherished leader who fought for the treaty with the British, while this movie tells the story of a brave foot-soldier who fought against that same treaty.

(14) Indochine (1992) Catherine Deneuve

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indochine_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indochine_(film)) -- This French period drama is set in colonial French Indochina during the 1930s to 1950s, against the backdrop of the rising Vietnamese nationalist movement. It won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Comment by Bruce:

This is as much a French movie as a political one. It combines lush scenery saturated with colonial social relations to tell the story of the radicalization of a young woman. My quite bourgeois mother selected this outstanding movie for us to watch when I visited her near Palm Springs. I had told her that all the videos available in the local area were unwatchable pablum. She proved me wrong. My favorite scene involves the arrogant "confession" of a young, upper class, pampered Vietnamese man who had initially been attracted to the radical nationalist cause--but then folded completely and revealed himself to be a gutless coward the moment that the French colonial authorities arrested and interrogated him. The scene fooled me completely--because (we learn later) he was actually a hardened communist intelligence officer who was only pretending to be a callow, self-centered child of privilege in order to successfully fool the French police.