

Shrink Rap Radio #247, September 25, 2010, The Myth of American Innocence with Barry Spector

(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Cecily Wells)

Excerpt: *Well first of all, I want to give a fairly short definition of what I really mean by the myth of American innocence; and as best as I could, condense it into a couple of sentences. It is a 400 year series of narratives, novels, songs, children's stories, political rhetoric, sermons, films, advertisements and so on, that justify American capitalism, racism, imperialism and environmental destruction by blaming its victims and removing all guilt and responsibility from both its perpetrators and its beneficiaries.*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Barry Spector, discussing the myth of American innocence. This episode is a little different in as much as it's not an interview, but rather a presentation given to a small group of Sonoma County residents in the home of Larry Robinson. My guest on Shrink Rap Radio, number six on Psychology and Politics. Larry, periodically hosts literary and poetry salons in his home and this particular event was to honor Barry Spector's new book. I had planned to interview Barry, but it turned out to be more convenient to attend the salon and record his remarks. I've edited out some of the comments and questions from the other attendees and have also for reasons of time, edited out a large introductory portion about the myth of Dionysus which is a guiding metaphor throughout Barry's remarkable book. Now, Barry Spector is a Harvard graduate who writes about American history and politics from the perspectives of

myth, indigenous traditions and archetypal psychology. He's published three articles in the Jung journal: Culture and Psyche, and is the author of the 2010 book, *Madness At The Gates Of The City: The Myth Of American Innocence*. Barry, and his wife Maya, have performed in The Great Night of Rumi, Rumi's Caravan and The Great Night of Soul Poetry, here in the bay area. A regular celebrations of recited poetry and music, and they've done this for many years. These events held in the San Francisco Bay area attracted audiences in the hundreds. Although not a poet himself, he feels that the revival of spoken poetry and storytelling is a key to cultural renewal. He and Maya also present Oral Traditions Poetry Salons at their home, and conduct an annual Day of the Dead grief ritual in early November. Bay area residents are encouraged to email him to get on his mailing list for these events. Barry runs a furniture moving company, but he would rather move your soul. Now, here's the presentation.

Barry Spector: In my imagination, indigenous people all across the world in every culture and every location in the world, and in a very few places, still have been living in something that I like to call, the creative imagination. Or, I'll think of it as the pagan imagination, animist imagination. Where people are still held in great mythic containers that live in myths that really give their lives meaning and connect them to the greater mysteries and also to the cycles in life, whereby they initiate their young people. There are still a few places in the world, where we'd like to imagine at least, that there's still remnants of this kind of imagination. What I think is that gradually, over immense periods of time, with the onset of patriarchy, what happened was in most places the creative imagination was lost. And what replaced it was what I call two things. One, the paranoid imagination, which pretty much speaks for itself. It's simply characterized by fear. And its opposite, the predatory

imagination, which is constantly looking, perceiving the world in terms of what it can take from the world, and both are kind of narcissistic in the sense that they objectify others. They objectify the world, they objectify nature, they, especially, objectify Woman, with a capital “W” and women, with a small “w”. In my mind, that’s what we have as modern people. We have all kinds of mythologies, and I’ll get into that later on; but most of them are not living myths. They’re dead end stories that take us either toward fear or toward an infinite hunger to constantly consume. I’ve studied so many writers who seem to think there’re speaking about Dionysus, and there is no scholarly consensus. I would say that more than any other divinity, at least in Greek myth, he’s a projection screen for our obsessions. He’s been called the god of madness, of spiritual intoxication, of illusion and change, of transformation, of homicidal fury. He’s been called the god of gay men. He’s been called the god of indestructible life. Others say he symbolizes the revenge of instinct over order. Nietzsche called him the suffering god, upon whom all tragic heroes are based, an allegory for the human condition, and they go on and on and on. To me, he is all this and more. To me he represents the archetype of the *other*. To me, the *other* is an aspect of nature and human nature; that is both, outside the boundaries of the known, the familiar and acceptable, but also within at its very core. To me, he symbolizes the mystery behind the reconciliation of opposites, and because of that our rational minds can only define him by what he isn’t. So Dionysus as the “other” is my primary image for understanding American myth and history. But back to Greeks, he’s called Xenos (spells the name) in Greek myth, which translate as stranger or foreigner. But here's the interesting thing, it also translates as guest. So it’s the root of our word, xenophobia, of course, but if you go to Greece, you’ll see hotels that are called Filos Xenos, love of the stranger. So it seems to me that in the ancient Greek thought and language and very likely and many other indigenous languages there’s still remnants of language that express that the profound truth that the

soul needs the other for its completion. So I've given a lot of thought to this idea of the *other*. Some of it comes from psychology. Some of it, who knows where it came from. I'm just gonna some of this stuff because to me it's really critical in understanding how we as Americans and I will acknowledge that, in this room and then when I'm speaking of Americans in general, I'm primarily speaking of white Americans. Innocence defines itself in terms of the *other*. Splitting off aspects of ourselves inconsistent with our self-image. We know who we are, because we are not them. Because they dress and speak differently. And because they engage in violence, which do not. They exist on the far side of the line that determines who we are. Just as the world exists on the other side of the skin that determines who I am. *Othering* occurs at the foundation of our Judeo Christian tradition. The Old Testament encodes western culture's central myth of collective identity. Large sections of it are essentially narratives, but forge Hebrew identity by distinguishing them from their neighbors. Ironically, the *other* threatens our sense of who we are. Even though, we've invented him. The *other's* characteristics live in our shadows. So he is always lesser. Major categories of *otherness* are race, class and gender. Crises or periods of social anxiety can force communities to redefine us. Boundaries shift and so does the image of the *other*. Americans in particular, due to our Puritan heritage, which I feel is absolutely critical to understand; Americans in particular, have always defined the *other* as those, like Dionysus who cannot control their impulses. *Otherness* inspires fear pollution but *others* fascinate us. What disgusts us reveals what we unconsciously desire. Racists and homophobes are deeply and irrationally dependent upon the objects of their prejudice. Their hatred implies its opposite, an inability to rid the mind of obsessions with the *other*. Intense and detailed fantasies about the *other*, reveal a soul or a nation attempting to know itself. Power elites deliberately determine who is *other*, to justify the social order. Eventually, we believe that the other deserves low status, so we can minimize those occasions when the

other might be remind us of who we actually are. However, our innate wholeness always threatens to return. This is, perhaps, one of the essential ideas of archetypal all Jungian psychologies. That the soul has this innate urge to know itself. And how do we know ourselves? Especially in a culture where the myths have collapsed long ago. One of the few ways that we get the opportunity to know who we are, is by understanding who we hate, or who we are obsessed with, or sometimes who we love, but it's always who we're projecting parts of ourselves upon. Our innate wholeness always threatens to return. Psychologically speaking, what is repressed never disappears. Mythologically speaking, all residents of the underworld, those have been banished to the underworld by the gods of the light, whether we are speaking of Greek myth or the Norse gods. Those images, those characters who've been banished to the underworld are always threatening to return. To me, *othering* takes primary mode. The first is exclusionary. Making the *other* as unlike us as possible. The second is incorporative. Colonizing and assimilating him. Denying him or her, their own voice. Together they create good and bad opposites like noble savage/barbarian. Or Madonna/whore. Here's an interesting aspect of all this. *Othering* is completely inconsistent. For example, Europeans for centuries projected opposing images upon Jews. Sometimes it was the Id figure out of Freud. Figures who would sexually pollute Christian blood. Other times, it was stingy super ego bankers who are unwilling to assimilate. Bigots in our culture see black people, this is interesting to me, black people as both lazy and threatening. Think about that for a second, lazy and threatening. Richard Nixon warned of both, "The forces of totalitarianism and anarchy." Any demonizing narrative will do. This is something I think I've come with it, I haven't read anywhere, I think I've come up with this one. We unconsciously split the *other* into inner and outer. It's a little tricky speaking it. I'll say it slowly, the inner *other* and the outer *other*. The more we define self or community by impermeable boundaries, the more we are obsessed with the *other*, both

without and within the walls. We fear barbarism without, decadence within. Indeed, raising fear of the outer *other* for the last 10 or 15 years, it's been terrorism. Specifically, terrorists with dark skins from the Middle East. Raising fear of the outer *other*, inevitably invokes or constellates the inner *other*. I'll give you an example. We had 5 or 6 years after 9/11 of constant evoking of these images of the terrorist *other*. Meanwhile, fast forwarding, it seems like people have been barking about immigration for some quite some time. I discovered that in the year 2000, American states introduced 1400 immigration measures. That number exceeded the total of the previous 10 years. So what does that tell us? In my mind, it tells us that we had had several years of obsession with this terrorist, *other*. And after awhile, inevitably, we began to evoke someone who was kind of inside the boundaries. These illegal aliens. By the way, Americans as far as I know are the only people to use the same words to describe people who come from other nations, extraterrestrial beings. As far as I know, no one else calls people visiting them, alien. But that's gonna be telling us something about our myths. Both the paranoid and the predatory imaginations depend upon *othering*. As fear of infection, or as desire to manipulate. But I want to remind us again what I call the creative, or I've also called it the polytheistic imagination. Xenos, that Greek word as guest. At some deep, deep level, which we are all trying to connect back to because we know it's there. I call it the indigenous soul. We all have this indigenous soul and in our bones. We have memory of it, and it knows that it needs the *other* for completion. Understood as a dynamic balance between what we conventionally call good and evil. Not the victory of good over evil. Both are longing and our prejudices represent the unconscious search for the *other*, who is our own deepest nature. Genuine communities, even if they rarely exist in the world anymore, except momentarily, would perceive the *other*, not as a threat, but as someone who may have something to contribute. Denying the *other*, we deny ourselves. So, Joseph Campbell wrote that we've been

living in a demon-theologized world since the 12th century. Now if you think of what happened in the 12th century, on the one hand, they were building hundreds of great cathedrals to the Virgin Mary all across Europe. At the same time, time after time after time they were invading the Middle East and slaughtering hundreds of thousands of people. The original *other*, *other*. They had the inner *other*, the Jew and they had the outer *other*, the Moslem. So, here we are in 2010. So in my mind, the breakdown of myth in Europe began far earlier. I think The Bacchae, itself, written approximately 400 BC, is actually speaking about that, among many other themes. There's a lot of themes, I'm just gonna mention a couple of them here just so they get into the room. I may or may not be able to give them anything like their due. In my book, and coming out of thinking about The Bacchae, three great big themes, one I've already referred to, the return of the repressed. The second one is initiation. In the story of The Bacchae, Pentheus is killed. And depending on which texts you read that have survived from ancient times, as I alluded to, his head is returned to its body. And, that could be an image of initiation. And I have a whole chapter on initiation in the book. It's connected to this theme of the demon-theologized world because, I'm convinced that everywhere in the indigenous world there were, as I said earlier, a myth that held us all together. And rituals connected to those myths that celebrated all of our transitions in life. There's still just a few places where their remnants of initiation. In America, we have all kinds of pseudo initiations. The third theme, I call it the killing of the children. And it connects the other themes. I'll just say a word or two about that. In my thinking, over the course of hundreds and hundreds of years, even thousands of years, what began as true initiation of the young men in every culture and young women had their initiations too, but I don't have time to go there. But what began and lived, perhaps thousands of years as true initiations of the young men, which meant the symbolic death of the youth, into what I call the literal killing of the children. So now and for many centuries we've sent

young men off to war with the kind of ill concealed hatred that comes out as we're sending a young man, we're sending a boy and we're gonna get a man when he comes back. In my mind, we've been sending the youth off, not just off to war, but in all of our practices of raising youth, and all of the horrible things that we've done to children over the centuries, that this began as an initiation and it degenerated into literal hatred and literal death of the youth. And the youth that survive become the elders who continue the story. So, those are the three big themes in the book that I pull out of The Bacchae story. But here I am, and I haven't even mentioned the American innocence yet, and you're probably waiting for me to say something about that. I had to make a little diversion just to bring in those other themes. Well first of all, I want to give a fairly short definition of what really made by the myth of American innocence, and as best as I could, condense it into a couple of sentences. It is a 400 year series of narratives, novels, songs, children's stories, political rhetoric, sermons, films, advertisements and so on, that justify American capitalism, racism, imperialism and environmental destruction by blaming its victims and removing all guilt and responsibility from both its perpetrators and its beneficiaries. It's a tough amount of stuff to get into one sentence. And if anybody needs, I'll do it again.

(Please. Do it.)

A 400 year series of narratives, novels, songs, children's stories, political rhetoric, sermons, films, advertisements etc., that justify American capitalism, racism, imperialism and environmental destruction by blaming its victims and removing all guilt and responsibility from both its perpetrators and its beneficiaries. It is subscribed to in deep unconscious ways by almost all Americans. Liberals, no less than conservatives, and I would say, especially liberals. I'm gonna push the

edge of that, I hope it provokes you, I would say especially liberal. It is subscribed to in deep unconscious ways by almost all Americans; liberals no less than conservatives although empires always fabricate ideologies to rationalize conquest. Only Americans justify invasion and genocide with stories of idealism, good intentions and manifest destiny. In other words, this is one of the essential things that separates us from all of the other empires in history. We have covered up our history and the griefs of our history with stories of opportunity and freedom and new beginnings. I also want to say, before I forget, Joseph Campbell spoke of four characteristics of myth. One of which was the mystical. The mystical is what connects us to the great mysteries of life. And at the other end is the sociological level of myth, which of the non-universal stories told by an individual culture and more or less promulgated by the elites of that culture for obvious reasons. The Myth of American Innocence is essentially a myth on that level. It's not a living myth in the sense that comes out of the ground of this earth. The only real living myths that come out of this earth are Native American myths. And at the same time, my imagination is that myths don't hold us as intensely and unconsciously as they do simply on a sociological level that justifies our narrow interpretations of history. My imagination is that a myth as strong as the myth of American innocence if we eventually are able to know enough stories and enough poems, and enough art, that eventually we'll be able to cook this story down to its essence. And that really is about the new start. I mean, despite what people everywhere across the Earth know about our history, and they know it far better than we do. Because they see it played out on their own grounds. Despite all that, tens of millions of people continue to want to come here. And it's not just because they perceive, you know, pop-culture and money. They

perceive the essence of the thing, which is the new start. And that's clearly what the first waves of English, whether they were Puritans in the North or outright capitalist opportunists in the South, that's what they came with. How are we that different from other people? And that's why I say we overlay our real story with the stories of opportunity and new start. But at the same time I don't want to say that those are lies, because at the essence, at the real core of this is imagery and the story is the potential for the new myth. Which is new start. New beginnings. So, the origins of American innocence, what an ambiguous and conflicted mix of crusading moralism, anxious consumerism, cut throat competition, aggressive practicality, racist brutality, apocalyptic fear, arrogant optimism, cheerful naïveté, willful ignorance, celebrity worship, generous goodwill and rollicking bad taste constitutes our public life. The myth of innocence holds it all together. To understand the sociological power of myth, consider some questions. Why do millions of Americans who support unions, environmental protection, progressive taxation, women's equality and universal healthcare, continue to vote Republican? Or still believe Saddam Hussein caused 9/11? Why with 12,000 nuclear warheads, do we demonize nations that develop their own? Why do most of us assume, wrongly, that well educated Americans are more anti-war than less educated people? Why does the American flag appear in front, of every public school, at every university commencement speech, at the New York Stock exchange, auto dealerships, mortuaries and churches? Why do both civil rights activists and the Ku Klux Klan carry it? Why do we sing the National Anthem before ball games? In totalitarian societies, the dictator's version of reality must be obeyed. Americans, however, believe the myths underlying our fascination with innocence. Where nearly

everyone shares the common mythical language of Americanism, vigorous argument is encouraged. But only within the limits imposed by unstated doctrinal orthodoxy. In reality, the corporate owned media carefully frame all controversies to minimize real debate. But why did New York Times writers believe that impoverished Sandinistas threatened us? Why do federally subsidized academics believe their odes to free markets? If intellectuals are absolutely convinced of benign American intentions, what can we expect from the rest of us? A mythic framework holds it all altogether. A new myth. Americans populated their political, religious and commercial narratives with ancestry, Columbus, the Pilgrims, the founding fathers, amplifying their historical experiences into literature until it assumed mythic proportions. Myth and art exerted reciprocal pressure on each other until they shaped our sense of reality. Some use the phrase civic religion or simply Americanism to describe this thing we've created. Hearing these metaphors of national myth through popular culture, we gloss over our troubled history with illusory solutions. We have been telling ourselves these stories about ourselves, all our lives. They glide through our dreams so smoothly, that even liberals rarely notice how deeply they hold us. Many, for example, lament America's "mistakes" in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet continue to praise our good intentions. And speaking this way, we may easily, and this is critical, substitute Vietnam, Nicaragua, Cuba, the Philippines, Haiti, Mexico, Chile, Iran, Guatemala on and on. This is America's creation myth. It sings of people who came seeking freedom, charged with a holy mission to destroy evil, save souls, carve civilization out of darkness and get rich. Think about it, all those elements are in there. In fact, as I was telling someone yesterday, de Tocqueville, who wrote his famous book about America in the mid

1820's, already by then, he was observing that the spirit of self-improvement in American Protestantism, and the spirit of self improvement in American capitalism, were so close, that he had trouble distinguishing the ministers for the businessman. And, that was a young republic at the time, but it was already deeply ingrained in our thinking, and it goes way back. Biblical myth justified the entire adventure. Columbus called his voyages, the enterprise of Jerusalem. And the Pilgrim saw themselves as Israelites. Leaving Egypt/ England for the new Jerusalem. Unfortunately, however, the Exodus story is intertwined with the original invasion of Palestine. Since God saved us, they reasoned, we have the sacred responsibility, or you could say, have license, to seize land, their land. From the start, stories of domination came packaged in the language of liberation. Everyone had a role to play. Whites were the chosen people, America was the Promised Land, and Indians were the Philistines. This story was built up over three centuries of preaching oratory fiction, poetry, textbooks, films, television, advertisements. It's essence, if you can cook it down to one single phrase. By the way the American Dream, the phrase American dream, appears in over seven-hundred book titles. But one person who researched them said almost none of them actually define what it means. The reason being, he figured, is that we all assume it already. The American Dream, it's an image. Nobody ever thinks of defining it, because it is so deeply ingrained in our thinking if not, our blood. This particular person came up with just a succinct, three-word phrase; anything is possible. Another writer wrote America was the future, not to be born anything at all. It was an idea formed by unique philosophical ideals. Anything was possible, let's go back to that for a second. In initiation, as I've come to understand it, the elders, in their

wisdom, searched the soul of a young person and pull something out, educate. The word, education, means to pull out, as opposed to instruct, which means to push in. They pull out something absolutely essential in that young person, and they essentially help that person become the one thing he or she was meant to be. In America, we kind of reverse that. We have told the world that you can be anything you want to be. But indigenous cultures don't do that. They see the one thing you're supposed to be. So that's part of our story. Anything is possible, you can be anything you want to be. Plus the shadow side of that story, and this comes out of our Puritan heritage, the shadow side of that story is that if you fail at what you try to be, it is your own fault. In fact, there is a place in the book where I quote Jerry Falwell, he says, "If you fail, it's your own fault, this is America." Jerry Falwell, at the time, our best known minister. But this is absolutely ingrained in Puritan thinking, which is, itself, grounded in predestination. I think that writers about America have glossed over our Puritan heritage and have not acknowledged, I think it ought to be acknowledged, how deeply Puritanism really still has a strong hold on our thinking. And, when we all, more or less at some level, agree that failure is not caused by social systems, by social circumstances, but that it's the fault of the individual, it ties in very easily into our willingness to tolerate the exploitations of other people. In fact, I saw a poll result that even I can't believe. Something like six, out of seven, Americans believe that-that failure is your own fault. That was a diversion from a diversion from a distraction, but this is exactly the way Dionysus would talk about this stuff. He doesn't go in a straight line. Dionysus doesn't throw fastballs, he throws curveballs, maybe even knuckleballs. Screwballs. Screwballs, there you go. Okay. So this idea of, even now, TV commercials for the

military encourage us to be all you can be. Remember that one a few years ago? Be all you can be? The cliché is effective because it hints at purpose, this idea of purpose, which I haven't spoken about, but I alluded to a minute ago. In indigenous cultures, I think the notion that, they're not so much concerned with enlightenment or escaping this earth. They're concerned with purpose. With the specific purpose that each individual was born to, and which, depending on which mythology you read, forgot between the time he or she left the other world, and arrived in this world. The cliché is effective because it hints of purpose. Assuming unlimited opportunity, we could believe anything we want to be. I would suggest that this is a characteristically inflated American misinterpretation of the old teaching that we were born to be one thing. That the task of soul making is to discover it. So, I've spoken just a little bit about the predatory imagination, and the paranoid imagination. As I see it, the Puritans brought the paranoid imagination to the New World, and those who settled the southern states, the English aristocrats, who very shortly got quite rich with their plantations, they brought the predatory imagination. And over time, they came together to some extent. Cooperation between Northerners and Southerners birthed the paradoxical myth of extreme religious and modern enlightenment values. Man was fallen and sinful, yet he could become whatever he wanted. Indeed, in 1776, for the first time in history, a nation proclaimed the pursuit of happiness as its prime value. Eventually religion and business merged as they did nowhere else. Without the support of a centralized Catholicism, and with Protestant churches constantly splitting in schisms, each individual preacher was forced to become an entrepreneur of souls, a salesman, in order to distinguish his church from other churches, and increase its membership.

Consequently, as I've said, a business growth mentality grew within American Protestantism. How about the idea of freedom? Just an essential word when we conjure up the American myth, opportunity, freedom, new start. Freedom became a holy term that meant all things to all people. Liberty implies release, it also implies the return of the repressed, and liberation in both its Marxist and Buddhist meanings. Americans struggled for awhile between the difference of what they call positive liberty, the power and resource to act to fulfill one's own potential, and negative liberty, freedom from restraint, what one didn't have to do. Eventually, the two forms of liberty birthed a monster. Freedom became entitlement, to do what one wants, regardless of the needs of the community. To liberate is military slang for looting. But, when extremes of wealth and poverty did appear, the rich felt little obligation. Belief in predestination survived long after formal Puritanism had declined. The myth taught that poverty was one's own fault. The object, then as now, was to get ahead. Let's stop for a second. What the hell does that mean, to get ahead? To get ahead implies somebody else, that needs to be got ahead of. It's one of the essential images of this American Dream business. And when I think about this phrase, "to get ahead", it brings up a notion that was coined quite early, the self-made man. Each man was free to succeed, or fall on his own. By the early 19th century, the first self-help manuals appeared, often written by clergymen, extolling these Protestant virtues of hard work and perseverance necessary for success. If individuals, and let's go to another level here, if individuals were blank slates, despite this sort of vestigial predestination thinking, if Americans insisted that individuals were blank slates, the nation had a purpose unique in history. God had chosen it to spread freedom and opportunity. America

extrapolated this idea onto world affairs. The nation of individualists became an individual among nations, bringing the good news to others. Generally without asking permission, and back to our conversation before. Although empires always fabricate these ideologies, only Americans justify what we do with our stories of idealism and good intentions. As I see our history and the mythologies that we intertwine with our history, very early on the Puritans, in particular, but all of the English settlers began to see the Native Americans as the *other*. And they quickly projected elements that we associate with Dionysus, especially a free willing, even communal sexuality, connection of the body, the dance, the drum. They projected these characteristics of their own souls that they would not allow into their own consciousness. They have projected it onto the Native Americans, and within a few generations, had begun to elaborate these stories, which we all carry with us. Back to Joseph Campbell for just a second, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he elaborated this theme that he saw in cultures everywhere. The hero myth, which is very similar, in its structure, to initiation. It's three parts. A hero hears a call, he leaves his community, and yes, it is a he most of the time. He endures the trials in the other world. He defeats monsters. He may, in many stories, find, liberate and marry the sacred woman, and this is critically important, he returns to his community. That's the third part of it. And gives his gift to the community. In a bigger sense, the very purpose of his going out on this heroic quest is not for him, individually, it's for the community. What I think happened, and here I am arrogantly amending Joseph Campbell with respect and apologies, I think the hero myth is found absolutely everywhere except in America. In America we evolved something different. It's familiar enough to be superficially like the hero myth but

it's fundamentally different. What happened as early as the beginning, well the middle of the 17th century and by the middle of the 18th century it was absolutely permanently ensconced in our psyche, was what I call or what other writers have called the American mono-myth as opposed to the mono-myth of Campbell. We call it the American mono-myth. And the story's very simple, although it's been repeated thousands upon thousands of times. A community, which is absolutely innocent, and let's face it at the bunch a white people. 'Cause this is important - Absolutely innocent is shocked by the appearance of evil from the outside. This innocent community is unable to defend itself through democratic means. And often this dilemma is symbolized by the capture of a young beautiful woman. As happened in many cases, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the community is powerless to defeat this *other*, which is dark and specifically defined by its racial component and by the violence that it's willing to do against the community. The community is saved by the appearance of another outsider. This enigmatic stranger, who rides in from the wilderness, who knows the wilderness because he's lived in the wilderness and he is willing to sacrifice himself although oddly enough, he really does is sacrifice himself. He defeats the racial *other*, external *other* and saves the community and restores innocence to Eden. So in other words, he doesn't start in community, experience the world and return to community with what he has learned as a gift to the community. He begins outside the community, he restores innocence, and then he leaves. The classic theme, the classic image is Shane riding off into the sunset, 1953, I think. Literally, riding off the sunset. That theme was repeated many - many times. I want to emphasize this business of how this theme is so different from the classic hero myths. The theme, in 1682 the first

of a long series of what are called captivity narratives was published. In which, a woman who had been captured by the natives and then had lived among them and then escaped and come back to society and told about her stories. For the next 50 years all, but one, of the best-selling books in America were captivity narratives. So, they were deeply ensconced in our psyche after four or five generations. Those narratives continue to be told right up to the present day. Thousands upon thousands of cowboy, and detective stories, and superhero stories, and science fiction stories, including Star Wars, and they've been enacted, or I should say utilized, to get us into war after war after war. You remember Jessica Lynch, the story of Jessica Lynch justified the invasion of Iraq. These stories of unprovoked violence, violent capture, or invasion, or threat of invasion, even, by the *other*, the dark *other*, are absolutely essential to this myth of American innocence, and it's allowed us to justify, I would say, every war we've ever been in, with the exception of World War II. And we're there right now, with Afghanistan because one of the themes that we utilize when we go to war, it begins with unprovoked attack by the *other*, and follows with the heroic crusade to save those that the *other* has attacked. It quickly will morph into stories of bringing democracy to that place. But, it's a sequential drama. I mean, Afghanistan, it's being played on Afghanistan, very clearly. And, it was in Iraq. I mean, we just allegedly ended the war in Iraq because we've brought them democracy. I think what is obvious, is that our leadership enacts our myths for us. And we let them do so, because we are so desperate to believe those. Still, ever since the 60's, cracks in the myth have periodically appeared. And whenever those cracks in the myth appear, intellectuals, their job is literally, I think, to shore up those cracks in the myth. And, I think, just

prior to 9/11, there were serious cracks in the myth. I not gonna open up that can of worms right now, but we all know what happened, we all know what those guys were writing prior to 9/11. The myth continues to solidify, because it is so deeply ingrained in us. We have our specific American myths. We also have inherited all kinds of broken myths through our European heritage. Most powerful of which, is the killing of the children, which we've justified everything that we've done to the rest of the world, and sending off all of our young men for that reason. At a simple psychodynamic level, those who suffer trauma are very likely to either enact it out as adults, or inflict it on their own young. The essential thing here is that trauma is part of our heritage, going back as far as we want to take it. I think in indigenous worlds, and certainly people who've experienced trauma, they experience tragedy, they're much closer to it in many respects, and they understand death in ways that we, as Americans, don't want to go to look at. One way in which Americans, in particular, deny the reality of death, and trauma, and suffering, is because we're so willing to inflict it on other people. In fact, there's a mythic image in there. Hillman talks about Dionysus's half-brother, Apollo, who in a sense, is almost the exact opposite, as most of you know, he's the god of light, of music of rationality, of clear thinking and so on. But among the Greeks themselves, the story is told that Apollo gave up his shrine of Delphi to Dionysus for three months of the year. And what that tells me is that the Greeks understood, in the most rational culture that evolved on the earth, they still understood that had to carefully, ritually accept chaos and irrationality into their worlds. And they had great big communal rituals to do exactly that. On the one hand, as I said, we're all inheritors of this tradition going back millennia, of the killing of the children, and the violent socialization of children.

So, we share that with all modern cultures. I think what complicates it for us, is our specific history of inflicting trauma on, first of all, the Native Americans. We have not even begun, we all know, to even begun to begin to begin, to deal with our heritage of having inflicted genocide on the native people here, and upon the black people, that we brought here. And the consequences of that refusal to acknowledge our history as perpetrators, is in our bones. Most of you know, Melidoma, I would imagine, the shaman from West Africa. He tells the story, when he first came to America, and he walked around New York City, he saw thousands upon thousands ghosts, which were the un-grieved dead of our culture. Every November, we put on our Day of the Dead ritual, and we figure it's our small way of beginning to invite this imagination of willingness to grieve, not just for our personal losses, but for communal losses in our communal heritage, of trauma, of being perpetrators. Again, all empires have done that, but some people say that 50 million black people were dislocated from Africa, only a third of them actually arrived here as survivors, and we just haven't even begun.