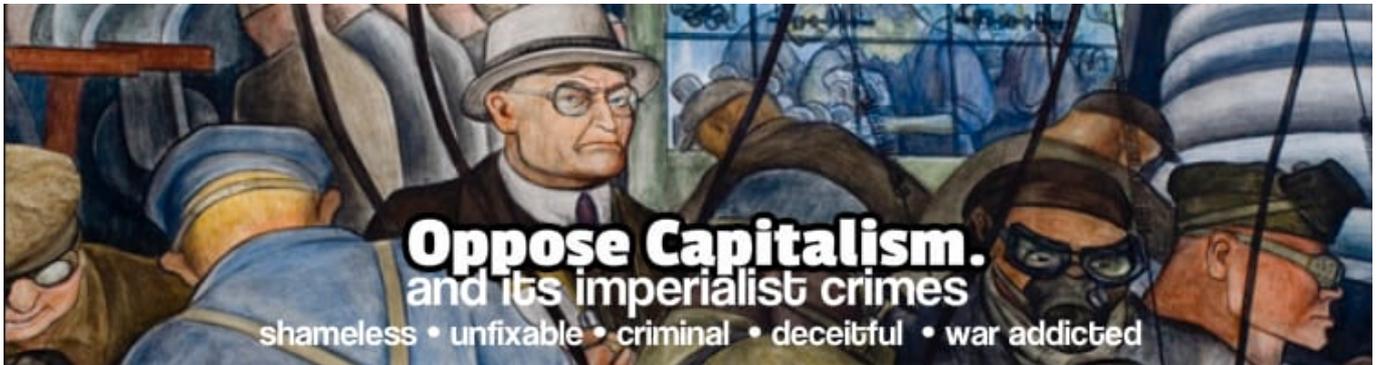
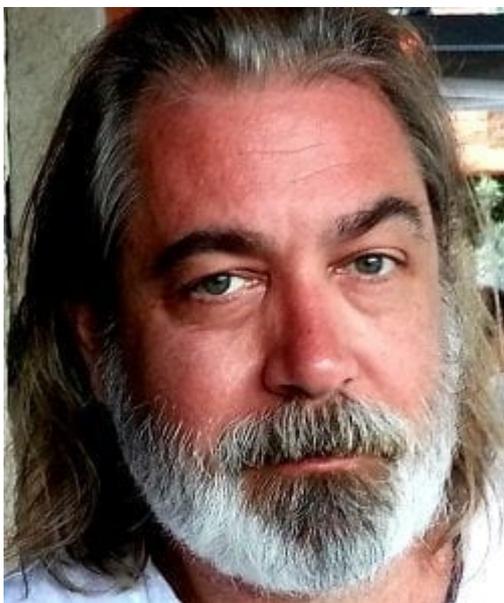


How to Maliciously Smear Your Critics (and Not Get Away with It)



By [CJ Hopkins](#)



[dropcap]T[/dropcap>he life of a professional political satirist is many things, but it is certainly never boring. Last week, for example, was particularly not boring. OK, I wasn't called before a Senate committee to testify against a rapey nominee to the highest court in the United States, or smeared by the right-wing media for doing so, nothing that dramatic or consequential. No, while most Americans were parsing every "he said" and "she said" of the Kavanaugh hearings, I was embroiled in my own little sordid drama involving "going public," and smears, and my colleagues attempting to assassinate my character, and so on.

What happened was, I got the kiss-off from [CounterPunch](#) (where I had been a contributor for over two years) by CounterPunch's Red-Brown Putin-Nazi hunting squad. That, or the editors just overlooked my submissions, or they decided not to run them, or they were going to run them, after having

overlooked them, but then decided not to run them, because I'd already run them, after they didn't run them ... or something. I can't keep all their stories straight.

This kiss-off (or confusion, depending on who you believe) happened after I submitted a piece, [Putin-Nazi Paranoia](#), responding to [a featured essay in CounterPunch](#) smearing a number of leftist writers (and me by extension) as "far-right shills." Smearing leftist writers they do not approve of has become a standard feature of CounterPunch. As far as I recall, it began in earnest in the Summer of 2017, when they accused [Caitlin Johnstone](#) of Red-Brown activities, i.e, promoting an unholy union of ultra-far-right and ultra-far-left movements (or "neo-Strasserism," for you Putin-Nazi scholars).

I Did NOT Call For An Alliance With White Nationalists, You Fucking Idiots



Caitlin Johnstone: Counter-punched.

This was an extremely ignominious episode, as [Johnstone documented at the time](#), and [followed up on about a year later](#). Featured essays in CounterPunch by [Yoav Litvin](#) and CounterPunch editors [Joshua Frank](#) and [Jeffrey St. Clair](#) either openly claimed or insinuated that Johnstone was a Red-Brown infiltrator who was calling for an alliance with white supremacists, which, of course, was a load of paranoid nonsense. Diana Johnstone (no relation to Caitlin) also covered this brouhaha in her [essay about the CounterPunch Red-](#)

[Brown hunter squad](#) (which, in addition to Litvin, St. Clair, and Frank, include other characters like [Anthony DiMaggio](#), author of the above-mentioned “far right shill” piece, [Eric Draitser](#), the official team cheerleader, and [Alexander Reid Ross](#), who is a bull goose loony. Sadly, Diana left out [Louis Proyect, the notorious “unrepentant Marxist” creep](#), who, although not technically a CounterPunch editor, appears to have quite a lot of influence at the magazine ... I have never really understood why that is.

In any event, after I announced that CounterPunch had stopped running my pieces, and asked for help spreading them around on the Internet, [they promptly began smearing me as an anti-Semite](#) (or continued smearing me as an anti-Semite, because [Louis Proyect had already been trying his best to smear me as an anti-Semite](#)). They base their smears on the fact that my essays have been re-posted by [The Unz Review](#), which the CounterPunch Red-Brown hunting squad have become increasingly obsessed with lately. (For the record, my essays have also been re-posted by outlets like [ColdType](#), [The Greenville Post](#), [OffGuardian](#), [Entelekheia](#), [Le Grand Soir](#), [ZeroHedge](#), [Dissident Voice](#), [Black Agenda Report](#), and other such outlets, and people’s personal blogs. I do not work for any of these outlets. They have simply been kind enough to re-post my essays, each of which originally appeared in CounterPunch, until the last two essays in question. Weirdly, the CounterPunch editors do not appear to be concerned about these other outlets, nor even, consistently, about The Unz Review, as [they just featured this essay by Michael Hudson](#), which had been [featured two days earlier by The Unz Review](#), where [Hudson is listed as a columnist](#).)

But I’m not going to defend The Unz Review, or Michael Hudson, or any of the many other writers, whether left or right, that are posted, or re-posted, on that site. Nor am I going to defend myself against the smears leveled at me by the CounterPunch editors. Why, you probably want to know, am I not going to do that?

OK, I’ll tell you.

Because that is precisely how the smear game works. The way it works is, the smearers bait the smearee into defending himself against the defamatory content of the smears. Once the smearee has done that, the smearers have him. From then on, *the focus of the debate becomes whether or not the smears are accurate, rather than why he’s being smeared, how he’s being smeared, and who*

is smearing him. This is the smearers' primary objective, i.e., to establish the boundaries of the debate, and to trap the target of the smears within them. If you've followed the fake "Labour Anti-Semitism" scandal, you've witnessed [this tactic deployed against Corbyn, who unfortunately fell right into the trap](#) and gave the smearers the upper hand. No, the only way to effectively counter a smear campaign (whether large-scale or small-scale), is to resist the temptation to profess your innocence, and, instead, *focus as much attention on the tactics and the motives of the smearers as possible.* It is difficult to resist this temptation, especially when the people smearing you have significantly more power and influence than you do, and are calling you a racist and an anti-Semite, but, trust me, the moment you start defending yourself, the game is over, and the smearers have won.



counterpunch
Tells the Facts, Names the Names

With that in mind, and for those readers who are tempted to just take the word of an established leftist magazine like CounterPunch over that of minor author who they may not have ever even heard of, I am posting the following email exchange between Jeffrey St. Clair, Joshua Frank, and myself (and a journalist and a colleague, whose names I've redacted, who wrote to St. Clair for clarification after reading conflicting reports on the Internet), for the purposes of criticism and review. CounterPunch readers, my readers, and others who swim these rather rarefied waters can judge the facts, and the quality of everyone's character (and our motives) for themselves.

I hope that readers will also take the time to peruse the links I've provided for reference, in particular [my collegial exchange with Joshua Frank and Louis Proyect on the Facebook](#), and [Diana Johnstone's Consortium News piece](#).

Smearing one's critics is an ugly business, but it's a widespread and often very effective business. [It is not going out of style anytime soon](#). So it's essential to understand how it works, and to maintain an attitude of healthy skepticism toward anything defamatory you hear about anyone ... and to know how to respond if it happens to you.

Oh, and please feel free to share, tweet, re-post, re-blog, or otherwise disseminate this essay, regardless of your politics.

The following email exchanges took place on September 21, and 24 and 25, 2018. The emphasis (underlined) is mine. Otherwise, they are reproduced verbatim.

1.

Colleague: *[sends St. Clair an image of [my tweet](#) to ask, "what's going on?"]*

Jeffrey St Clair: *No idea. We didn't stop running him. We missed one column, because I'd been out for most of the week attending to the new grandkid. God forbid, I take a week off in 5 years before some shithead begins slandering me online. In any event, he does publish his stuff on a site which just try to claim Alex as a "Holocaust denier," so it's not as if he's going without an audience.*

2.

Journalist: *Has [CJ] really been kicked off CP? That's what he seems to be saying.*

Jeffrey St Clair: *No. I know that's what he's saying, but it's a lie and he knows it's a lie. I told him as much and I had his piece for last week edited, loaded and scheduled to run when someone sent me his drama queen tweet. We didn't publish a single piece, out of the dozens we've published, because it slipped past me while I was trying to take a little time off to enjoy the arrival of our first grandkid. It's a simple as that.*

John Ross used to get royally pissed at me for sometimes delaying running his pieces. He'd call Saul Landau from Mexico City and gripe and send me furious emails. But Ross never went public libeling CP editors for having overlooked one his essays. He'd never even consider it. But that's because Ross was a real journalist, who'd been in the trenches for decades as Alex and I had, and was also on our side politically. The old notions of solidarity are, of course, withering away, while the state remains.

Alex used to say that we should reject every fourth or fifth submission from a writer just to keep them in their toes. I've never taken that position. It was an indulgence on my part to run Hopkins at all, since we'd had a fairly iron-clad rule against running satire since it always confuses the credulous readers of the site.

Even so, I think Hopkins' public assault on us reveals something rather acidic about his character, almost as much as his preference to have his columns published by Ron Unz, the guy who funded the anti-immigrant and English-only ballot initiatives in California and who lately libeled Alex as a Holocaust denier—though, the coward that he is, Unz waited five years after Alex was in the ground to do so.

I don't know what Hopkins' real politics are and I don't want to speculate. But I do know Unz's politics and the circle that has coalesced around him, like Israel Shamir who publicly denounced me a couple of weeks ago for caring "more about blacks and Jews than white Christians." I'll cop to that smear, but not to CJ's.

CJ Hopkins: Hi [REDACTED], and Jeff. [REDACTED], I'm not sure whether you're inquiring personally or professionally, so with that in mind, here are the facts ... and some of my thoughts.

I sent Jeff my recent Putin-Nazi Paranoia piece, waited for it to run. It didn't. For the first time in over two years. So I wrote Jeff asking about it, specifically asking whether I had gone too far in my response to DiMaggio's piece, in which DiMaggio had smeared a bunch of writers as "far right shills," and supported his smear with a blog piece by Louis Proyect along the same lines, but crazier.

As both DiMaggio's and Proyect's smear pieces were focused on writers who write for Unz, or allow Unz to cross-post their essays (as I have for two years), and as Proyect had written me a nasty email fishing for comments for his piece, I considered myself part of the smeared group, though I was not named in either piece.

In any event, Jeff wrote me back, said he hadn't seen my submission, that it had been a busy week, and that he would rummage around for it. I re-sent it to him immediately in order to spare him the rummaging. I waited for it to run. It didn't. No follow-up from Jeff.

A week later, I sent my most recent piece, Down with the Working Classes! Waited for it to run. It didn't. In the meantime, no word from Jeff or anyone at CP about the earlier piece.

So I posted the Working Classes piece on my blog, tweeted that CP had apparently stopped running my work and returning my emails, which is true. I did not claim that I was banned.

The background to this, on my side, is that I have watched as key CP writers, namely Litvin, Frank, Draitser, and then DiMaggio (and Proyect on his blog and elsewhere) have posted a series of paranoid pieces accusing people of being "Red-Brown" agents, or whatever. (You probably recall the "Caitlin Johnstone-is-a-Nazi" episode.) Long story short, the DiMaggio piece was the last straw for me. I wrote my Putin-Nazi Paranoia piece as a response. It was tough. I was angry. Which shouldn't have surprised anyone.

If CP had run that piece (i.e., my response), that would have sufficed. I think I was entitled to that, after two years of contributing to CP, and otherwise supporting it, and after having been smeared in CP's pages, in a lead essay, as a "far right shill." Or, if Jeff or Joshua or anyone at CP had simply returned my emails and informed me why they had stopped running my essays, or accusing me of being a crypto-Nazi because I have let Unz re-post my pieces, or just telling me directly to go fuck myself, that would have also sufficed. But nothing.

This email is long enough, so I'll spare you the details of my exchanges with Joshua and Louis on Facebook, and Jeff via email, other than to say they all seem to be obsessed with the Unz thing (which is surprising, since

Unz has been reposting my stuff for two years) and suddenly very concerned about my “character.”

I think my character is pretty clear from my writing. I don't appreciate the guilt-by-association game, or being smeared as a “far right shill,” and I simply don't have any respect for folks who engage in that sort of thing. It appears to have become a standard tactic at CP, as you can see from Jeff's reference to my “real politics” in his email.

As for my “public assaults” on CP, again, that could have been prevented with a simple email, which, where I come from, is just professional courtesy.

Anyway, [REDACTED], those are the facts and my thoughts. If you have further questions about what happened, or my “character” or my “real politics,” just ask. Despite the CP folks' insinuations and smears, I'm really not a very sneaky guy.

Jeffrey St Clair: A favor: stop attacking Nat in your online self-promotions—“Read the article that Nat refused to run, blah blah blah.” He doesn't make any editorial decisions. Train your pop-gun on me, instead. It will probably increase your hits with the Holocaust deniers and Pizzagaters you like to hang with, even as you demure that you ain't one of them. The reason the “Unz thing” has become an issue is that he just smeared Cockburn as a Holocaust Denier—not so much “smeared,” I guess, as adopted & celebrated as one of the gang. Alex was my partner and best friend for 25 years. Maybe you think it's funny. I don't.

PS—For the sake of accuracy, even though I realize that's not the domain of satirists, Litvin hasn't written for CounterPunch in more than year because he doesn't like our politics or the fact that we regularly run writers whose point of view he disagrees with.

CJ Hopkins: Sure, Jeff. Send me an official Twitter handle for CounterPunch that isn't Nat and I'll switch to that one. Until then, I'll use the official CounterPunch handle that exists.

Thanks for making my point by insinuating that I'm anti-Semite, again, and

that I share the politics of every outlet that re-posts my essays and am responsible for their behavior. My essays have been reposted by numerous outlets, left and right, which I assume you know. There's a list of them on my website. I don't work for or represent any of them.

I don't think any of this is funny, in case you didn't get that. If you want to purge CP of writers you suddenly decide are "far right shills" and publish smears of them, that's your prerogative. If you thought I was going to go quietly, you're probably not as good a judge of "character" as you think.

Jeffrey St Clair: Why would I know who you write for, CJ? And how would I know this? Am I supposed to have tracked you across the web? I know you advertise yourself as "America's greatest satirist," but, even though I think I'm a fairly well-read person, I'd never heard of you before one of your submissions showed up in my inbox, which I gladly ran and continued to do so for many, many months, whether I agreed with your pieces or not. Do you admit that is true or are you going concoct some contorted fabrication about that as well? If I had known that you'd been posting the same pieces we'd run on CP on Unz for two years (or other sites), we wouldn't have run you on CounterPunch to begin with. Why the fuck would we? Putting aside the rancid nature of Unz's site, we have too many writers—right, libertarian, left, green and anarchist—who want to write for us to run writers who are broadcasting the same piece across multiple venues. I've been libeled as an anti-Semite for 20 years at least and have been on the ADL and SPLC hit lists for nearly as long, so you'll have to do better than that to get anyone who really knows the score to believe that we somehow gagged you because of your views on the Israel lobby or evicted you as part of some alleged purge of "rightwing" writers. Who are these poor victims? What are their names? Where can we send flowers? Josh and I both grew up among conservatives and we've always run conservatives on CounterPunch and published many essay by them in our books, from *Imperial Crusades* to *Red State Rebels*. I do draw the line at publishing racists. You don't draw the line—apparently— about being published by them. I'll be honest, if I knew that you'd continued publishing on Unz's after he wrote his defense of Holocaust denialism that libeled Alex (and me, since one of the pieces he cited as "evidence" we co-wrote), I'd've asked you to quit publishing with

him out of solidarity. But I didn't realize that until after you'd thrown your public tantrum. I don't know you at all, so I can make no assessment of your character, other than from the public lie you told about us having stopped running your writing. You can continue to project whatever bile you want about us, I just asked you politely to direct them and not my son, who makes none of the editorial decisions here—not that we even made one your case. You've declined to do that. I'm no dramatist, but I think that says something about your "character".

CJ Hopkins: *Dear Jeff, please show us all where I have once advertised myself as "America's greatest satirist." When you can't, admit that you're just making shit up because you're angry.*

You knew that other outlets re-posted my stuff. I asked you about that a long time ago, and you said it was no problem, as long as they credited CP. I've specifically mentioned at least two of them to you at different times, ColdType and Greenville Post. I have tweeted many of those other outlets' reposts, regularly. All of my essays ran on CounterPunch first.

I don't "draw the line" at being re-posted by anyone. If I did, I'd spend half my time trying to force people to remove my essays from their sites and blogs. I realize you are trying to draw me into a debate about Unz. That's how the smear game works. I'm not going to bite. I have nothing to do with Unz, except that they re-post my pieces, as do many other sites, which I also have nothing to do with.

Regarding the Twitter handle, please be honest. You are referring to CounterPunch's official Twitter handle, not Nat's personal Twitter handle, which I have never used. I'm not going to stop tagging CounterPunch's official (and, as far as I know, only) Twitter handle just because you chose to put Nat's name on it.

I understand that you are angry and want to insult and belittle me. If you could just insult and belittle me without making shit up that I have to refute, that would save us both a lot of time.

Josh Frank: *CJ, nobody is shedding a tear for you here, we take this shit*

personal when writers go public with their petty shit. And yes your whining that we didn't run your piece was petty. Personally I am happy to see you go. It had nothing to do with your grievance about some link in an article to another article that didn't even name you – which of course is petty. It's more to do with the obvious thin skin you have. You can't be a left writer and have thin skin, you won't last long. But I guess you are proving the point.

Don't let the door...

Jeffrey St Clair: *"In house satirist", excuse me, my mistake. All apologies.*

If you told me you were running your stuff on other sites, I've long forgotten it. It's certainly not something I've ever encouraged in the 20 years we've been online.

I'm not trying to draw you into a debate about anything. What's to debate?

The only thing I'm angry about is the lie you continue to tell for your own self-promotion, I guess, that we abruptly stopped running your pieces for some reason of political correctness.

As for Nat, I see that he just retweeted, as he usually does, your ad for Consent Factory. (As I have also done many times. As I did your book, even advertising it on CP, as I recall.) So I guess you can spit invective ("the latest smear by Nat@counterpunch) in his direction, but it will be hitting the wrong mark. I'm sure there'll be no acknowledgment of this generosity from you, because it wouldn't fit your narrative of victimization.

As for you having "nothing to do with Unz," [cites [my tweet](#)] "Here's my latest leftist heresy, in the [@UnzReview](#), which posts both far-left and far-right views. Unz has been reposting my [@NatCounterPunch](#) essays for years, but according to CP, I'm suddenly a fascist "shill" because I let them do so. Am I? You decide."

It's a quaintly neutral way to describe [Unz](#), but [he's your publisher](#). Enjoy the ride.

CJ Hopkins: *Dear Jeff, I'm happy to acknowledge everything you and CP have done for me. You ran everything I sent you for over two years, plugged my book, and me, often featured my pieces, at least early on. You more or less put me on the map in this gig, and I have been proud to be included in CP's pages.*

What you characterize as a "lie" is indeed my interpretation of events. I've detailed those events, and my interpretation of them, so I won't waste our time doing it again.

The tweet you cited was sent after these events, and after Joshua and Proyect started smearing me on Facebook. I'm not going to sit idly by while CP's Red-Brown hunters (or you for that matter) smear me, and insinuate that Unz is my publisher, or that I am somehow in cahoots with fascists and Holocaust deniers. Again, as I have stated several times already, I have nothing to do with Unz, nothing more than I do with ColdType, Greenville Post, Black Agenda Report, OffGuardian, ZeroHedge, Entelekheia, or any other outlet that has re-posted my stuff. The tweet was meant to spur readers to look at the facts and decide for themselves.

I am honestly sorry that you set up your official CP account with Nat's name on the front of it. I have no wish to involve Nat in this. Unfortunately, that is CP's official handle. So if I want to make reference to CP, that's the one I have to use, until you change it.

I sense we're coming to the end of this email exchange. I hope so. I won't bother to reply to Joshua's email, which was just spewing more bile, nothing substantive that requires a reply.

All best wishes for the future ...

-CJ Hopkins
September 29, 2018

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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