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Alamo

Issue 23
November/December 2003

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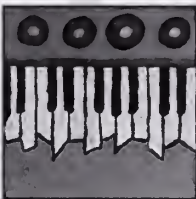
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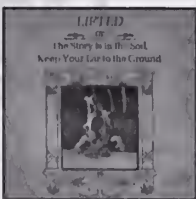


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from your editors

It seems like this issue has been even longer in the making than other issues, but hopefully that just means it's that much better than previous installments. We've found faith to be simultaneously elusive and ever-present. Some folks find faith in a deity, while others hold their stock in the lack of any omniscient string-puller. Regardless, it feels a little overwhelming that a 3 1/2 year-old magazine is tackling issues that have been around for millennia. Suffice to say that we approached the issue as we have other themes — we deferred to our contributors to tell us what's important to them and their communities.

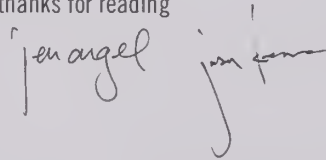
You may notice that there is not a Jewish perspective in this issue. Well, there really isn't a Christian one or a Hindu one either. What you will find is stories of how people interact with religions and how religions interact and influence the world we live in. Priya Lal and Pranjali Tiwari (p. 42) bring us information on the rise of Hindu Nationalism in India — the use of religion to justify genocide. Mark Eades (p. 45) talks about how American Christian Zionism weighs in on peace in the Middle East on the side of Israel. Or what about how mediums such as John Edward and James van Praagh who capitalize on people's faith and loss to popularize their TV shows and sell their books (p. 15)?

In a way, we're talking a lot about how religion negatively impacts the world. However, we did not set out to bash religions, and we found people who wanted to talk about how faith, spirituality, and religion are positive influences in their lives and in the struggle for justice. The portrait of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Liberation Theology movement (p. 25) is one of inspiration and sadness for a life cut too short. Or how even a made up religion ("Worshiping Mr. Loh" p 66) can help bring peace to your life. Or how faith is what gets you out of bed in the morning (Elevated Cypha, p 22) and what inspires you to fight against the seemingly damned state of the world (Saul Williams, p. 12).

We, as a collective group of people who pull Clamor together every month (editors and contributors and readers alike), have faith — faith in justice and faith that we can contribute to a better world. We don't pull it out of the air, though. Our faith is cultivated by being surrounded by thousands of amazing people who are tireless in their efforts to work toward a world where people have what they need to survive and feel actualized and productive individuals.

We hope you enjoy this issue and that during this holiday season you think about what faith means to you outside of the temple doors. We'll be spending the holidays with family and friends, and of course working hard.

thanks for reading



PS: Are you a teacher? Use Clamor in your classroom! This fall we embarked on a pilot program with Brian Bergen-Aurand to provide Clamor subscriptions for his students' required reading for the semester at the University of Illinois — Chicago. We'd love to help you implement a similar program in your class this spring. Please call us at 419.243.4688 for more information.

CLAMOR's mission is to provide a media outlet that reflects the reality of alternative politics and culture in a format that is accessible to people from a variety of backgrounds. CLAMOR exists to fill the voids left by mainstream media. We recognize and celebrate the fact that each of us can and should participate in media, politics, and culture. We publish writing and art that exemplify the value we place on autonomy, creativity, exploration, and cooperation. CLAMOR is an advocate of progressive social change through active creation of political and cultural alternatives.



CLAMOR: A Loud and Continued Uproar of Many Human Voices • Number 23 • November/December 2003

CULTURE

- 9 For God So Loved This World ...
Neal Ungerleider
- 12 Born of Beats and Blood: Revolutionary Poet Saul Williams
interview by Sunfrog
- 15 Medium-At-Large: John Edward is a Ouija Board
Rebecca Rush
- 17 Aesop Rock
interview by Cara Soronen

PEOPLE

- 22 Elevated Cypha: A Conversation about Faith Among Friends
j—love
- 25 Operation 7: Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a Martyr/Blasphemer
Antonino D'Ambrosio
- 27 Finding Colours of Resistance: Pauline Hwang and Helen Luu
interview by Chris Crass
- 31 From Emptiness to Emptiness
James Mumm

ECONOMICS

- 34 Blessed are the Organized: Interfaith Activists
Kari Lydersen
- 37 Using the Universal Life Church
Darren Welter
- 38 If You Want to Smash Imperialism, Start in Your Own Community
Brady McGarry

ON THE COVER:

Shia muslims praying in a mosque in the holy city of Najaf, located in southern Iraq. Shia muslims were among the most persecuted groups under the previous Baathist regime. I went to Iraq to work with a group of Iraqi students who started Al—Muajaha, Iraq's only independent newspaper, and also to work on my own documentation of the so called "post—war" Iraq. I was lucky enough to be invited by a Shia friend of mine to accompany him to this prayer ceremony and photograph it, an unusual honor for a non—muslim.

—Andrew Stern

POLITICS

- 42 Then: Nonviolence, Now: Genocide ... Hindu Nationalism
Priya Lal
- 45 Carrying on the Crusade: Christian Right, Islam, and U.S. Policy
Mark C. Eades
- 47 ... One Nation Under Gods: Progressive Argument for School Prayer
Matthew Williams
- 49 My Face — My Story: A Photo Essay
Lina Pallotta

SEX & GENDER

- 52 Goddess Bless: "Confessions" of a Pagan Parent
Juleigh Howard—Hobson
- 54 Sleeping Sickness
Julia Serano

MEDIA

- 56 God's Chosen Heathens: Punks and Christians
Brian James Schill
- 61 Who's Stealing From Whom? Indie Record Labels and the Internet
Casey Boland

LAST PAGE

- 66 Worshipping Mr. Loh
Steve Willson

REVIEWS

- 14 Beats Unlimited
- 16 Eclectic Sounds
- 19 Bombs and Benders
- 26 Peops
- 30 Must-Read Zines
- 36 New World Gone Mad
- 44 Thinking Past Terror
- 46 Weapons of Mass Deception
- 54 Sex Texts
- 59 Sound Bites and Spotlights
- 64 Speaking Truth

letters etc...

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or write us at PO Box 20128 Toledo, OH 43610
Letters may be edited for length.
Not all letters received will be printed.

Patriarchy deserves more explanation

I liked "Can Men take Feminism to Bed?" (September/October 2003), but identifying the underlying problem as "patriarchal" is a little too vague, too easy. For anyone interested in the utter pervasiveness of Patriarchy (sexism), which enters into every facet of our lives every day of our lives, I suggest they read *Eve's Seed: Biology, the Sexes, and the Course of History* by Robert McElvaine. When men continue to define themselves, not by what they are (they don't have a clue), but by what they are not ("not-a-girl"), you know that we have a problem. And if that's not enough, consider the current shape of the world, made in our image, Male, through and through.

Jerry Schaefer
Long Beach, CA

Presentation skews intent

I was a little disappointed in the article ("Lost at Sea" September/October 2003) because of the title, subtitle, and featured quote.

My disappointment is because I think it gave the interview a tilt of showing Greg to be more incompetent than he is. I am sure this wasn't the intent. I wanted to interview Greg because I am so impressed with the project he has undertaken and how he has approached it. The title, subtitle, featured quote made me feel like the printed version underplayed this. I understand this was done to highlight the do-it-yourself and quirky aspects of the project, but I would have liked to balance them out with some of the positive aspects of the DIY ethic.

I recognize that much of the fault is my own. Unfortunately in writing my intro, editing the interview, and having others (who know Greg) read it — I didn't consider something that should have been obvious: Greg is one of the most under-spoken and modest people I know. And, for that matter — amongst dozens of people I know who build houses, welders out of microwaves, and various other big or odd projects — Greg is one of the most skilled builders and creators I know.

To avoid a similar problem in the future, it would be a good idea to at least run titles/subtitles by contributors. This is meant as constructive criticism, and as always I'm impressed with *Clamor* and the all the work you put in to it.

Matthew Turissini
Bloomington, IN

ed. note: We're sorry that the presentation of the piece gave such a skewed perception of Greg. We wanted the piece to highlight him as a quirky fellow who didn't give a damn about the rules for how someone goes about building a boat and putting it to test — especially noting that he was more than aware of and willing to deal with repercussions of his approach. We certainly meant no disrespect, and we hope his sailing is going smoothly!

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Calling all Love and Rage women! Write about your experiences and your work in a vital 1990s revolutionary anarchist project (including Mayday & other pre-LnR formations). What lessons can we share with today's movements and organizations? Contact Suzy Subways at lasuzy@earthlink.com about submitting essays, memoirs, poems, theoretical criticism and/or being interviewed. Transgender women and men are encouraged to respond.

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Clamor is built from everyday folks like you. Please take some time to contact us if you have any ideas that you would like to see in your magazine.

Clamor accepts submissions of printed work and artwork on an ongoing basis. On our website, www.clamormagazine.org, under the heading "participate," there are deadlines and topic suggestions which may help you determine when, and what, to contribute. However, many works are accepted regardless of whether they fit with the cover story, or theme, of an issue.

Drafts should be submitted to info@clamormagazine.org (preferred) or to *Clamor*, PO Box 20128, Toledo, OH 43610. Written works should be less than 2,500 words.



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Cancún: a victory for the globalization of hope

"There is dissent over the projects of globalization all over the world. Those above, who globalize conformism, cynicism, stupidity, war, destruction and death. And those below who globalize rebellion, hope, creativity, intelligence, imagination, life, memory and the construction of a world that we can all fit in, a world with democracy, liberty and justice."

—Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, from a transcript of a message delivered to the anti-globalization conference taking place alongside the WTO global trade negotiations in Cancún.

The recent protests against the WTO in Cancún kicked off with the suicide of Lee Kyung-Hae, a Korean farmer who traveled halfway across the world to climb atop the security fence and plunge a knife into his heart, while wearing a sign that said "WTO Kills Farmers." However tragic that may seem, his death was not in vain. The WTO talks completely collapsed after the Kenyan representative of the Group of 22 (the developing-world alliance of 22 nations, led by Brazil, India and China, which represent more than half the world's people and about 80% of its farmers) said, "The meeting is over. This is another Seattle," and walked out on the last day of the conference.

The crowds went wild with joy, both on the outside of the conference and on the inside. For the first time, while a broad coalition of rebels from all over the world tore at the fence keeping the public out of the meetings, another group of rebels was tearing at the walls on the inside. The talks in Cancún failed so spectacularly because of a groundbreaking new solidarity between the activists on the streets, the NGO's, and the delegates from developing countries on the inside. While indigenous women from around the world hacked at the fence with bolt-cutters and Korean farmers used huge coiled lengths of rope to completely demolish the fence, people on the inside staged their own protests from within to help derail the talks. All of this work wove together throughout the week of meetings to climax with the fence crumbling and the talks collapsing almost simultaneously.

This was not only a victory in the ongoing struggle of "us vs. them", but also in the ongoing struggle against the difficulties of coming together. While they continue to globalize their culture of neoliberalism and death, we continue in our learning of how to come together to globalize liberation.

Next stop: Massive protests against the FTAA, Miami, Florida. November 17–21 2003. For more info go to: www.stoptheftaa.org

For a comprehensive collection of multi-media reports on events surrounding the WTO ministerial in Cancún, visit www.cancun.indymedia.org.



text and photos Andrew Stern

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Unless noted, all contributors can be reached care of
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Brandon Bauer (p. 31) is an artist living and working in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In June of 2003 Brandon was included in the exhibition "Art Against War" a poster and multimedia exhibition held in NYC. His work has been shown in Paris, New York, and Chicago. His poetry and artwork have recently been featured in the book "All The Days After," a collection of artists' and poets' responses to September 11 compiled by the Detroit based Upside Down Culture Collective. A DVD of Brandon's experimental video titled *Signal Drift: A Day Under the City* was released by the French independent video company Lowave in May of 2003.

Tim Beatty (p. 45) is an illustrator from North Carolina who has created bold, colorful illustrations for a wide range of clients. If you would like to see more visit www.beattyart.com.

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Chris Crass (p. 27) is a white, middle class, male organizer and writer who works with the Challenging White Supremacy Workshops and the Heads Up collective in the Bay Area. He is part of the Against Patriarchy discussion group, the Childcare Collective and the anarchist soccer team Kronstadt. His writings are available at www.colours.mahost.org. He can be reached at chriscrass@mutualaid.org.

The lovechild of Cheetara from the Thundercats and Murdock from the A-team, **Melly Curphy** (p. 15) (also known as Miss Monster) spends all of her time teaching illustration, drawing and sculpting monsters, playing video games, and reading. See her web site at www.missmonster.com.

Antonino D'Ambrosio (p. 25) is the founder/director of La Lutta New Media Collective (www.lalutta.org). He is a writer, filmmaker, and photographer living in Brooklyn. Look for La Lutta NMC's recent co-production, *Machetero*, in a city near you.

Mark C. Eades (p. 45) is a writer and educator currently based in the San Francisco Bay Area. His previous works of poetry, fiction, essays, and letters have been widely published in both the U.S. and Europe. E-mail: meades@dvc.edu.

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Kari Lydersen (p. 34) is a journalist based in Chicago, writing for The Washington Post, LiP magazine and other publications and an instructor for the Urban Youth International Journalism Program. Karilyde@aol.com

Brady McGarry (p. 38) hopes that the white anarchist movement will align themselves with the struggles of people of color, and be accountable in building a militant multi-racial movement against Capitalism and the State under the leadership of people of color. For lots more radical anti-racist information, check out the Colours of Resistance web site located at <http://colours.mahost.org>.

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Julia Serano (p. 54) is the singer-guitarist-lyricist for the Bay Area-based indie-pop band Bitesize, a poetry slam champion, a trans-activist, and an occasional contributor to queer, feminist, and pop culture zines. For more information about her various creative endeavors, check out Julia's web site at www.juliaserano.com.

Cara Soronen (p. 17) can't swim or whistle, but she knows her hip hop. Reach her at Clamor.

Andrew Stern (cover, p. 7) is a media activist and documentary photographer who works with the Indymedia network and various publications around the world. His main desire is to create a fusion of art and politics potent enough to make revolution irresistible. He is part of the editorial collective "Notes from Nowhere" that just produced the new book *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism*. Its available in bookshops, through their web page, www.WeAreEverywhere.org, or www.versobooks.com. You can contact him at expectresistance@yahoo.com.

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JT Yost (p. 56) and his ladyfriend Karen joined forces covering your favorite soft rock songs about three years ago. acclaimed by both the punk rock and christian rock community, their music has provided a bridge between the two feuding camps. you can do your part by ordering at www.jtyost.com.

**FOR GOD SO LOVED THIS WORLD
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Neal Ungerleider packs his King James
and takes a pilgrimage to Holy Land USA

photos by James Saul





Perched above I-84 in the never-ending green hills of western Connecticut, there is an odd sight. Passing drivers see, high above the city of Waterbury, a 56-foot-tall steel cross, lit up at night, with a Hollywood style sign below: Holy Land USA.

Closed since 1984, the 18-acre theme park once was one of Connecticut's largest tourist attractions. Over 200,000 visitors a year came during the park's peak to see miniature recreations of Calvary and the Roman Catacombs. Although the park shows signs of neglect and damage from nineteen years of disuse, enough remains to inspire a sort of slack-jawed awe from the visitors to Holy Land USA who brave poison sumac and broken crack pipes to explore the park.

Holy Land USA originated in one man's nearly 30-year-long quest. John Baptist Greco, a Waterbury lawyer and evangelist knighted by Pope Pius XII in 1957 for his missionary work during the Depression, first began work on the site in 1957 with the planting of a 32-foot tall cross on the summit of the town's Pine Hill. Previous to Holy Land USA, Greco was already known regionally as host of several religious-themed radio shows on local station WWCO and as the head of the evangelistic Catholic Campaigners for Christ. Eventually, the Catholic Campaigners became legal owners of Holy Land's site.

The cross was followed quickly by Bethlehem Village, a miniature recreation of biblical Bethlehem built into the steep hillside. Like most of Holy Land USA's miniatures, Bethlehem Village was built primarily out of plaster, aluminum cans, and tin foil. Opening as "Bibleland" just in time for Christmas of 1958, the park expanded (and changed names) quickly.

A Judeo-Christian Cultural Center was added in 1964 and the name was changed to Holy Land USA. Two years later Greco traveled to Israel and Rome, bringing new artifacts and statues that were integrated into the park. But the park's coup de grace was soon to come: walk-through catacombs created mostly out of cinder blocks and a miniature Jerusalem in 1967, then a 56-foot-tall steel cross, weighing nine tons to top Pine Hill, visible for miles, in 1968. Even then, the original wooden cross had fallen victim to vandalism.

The new cross overlooked I-84, and by extension, all of Waterbury. Through this park, the blue-collar, ethnically divided city of Waterbury finally found a way to put itself on the tourist map. The dollars these tourists brought did not hurt either, especially to a Connecticut factory town already suffering from the closings of the 1960s. Publicity from both the state tourism agency and the United States Information Agency helped Holy Land USA to attract an average of 1200 visitors per weekend by 1968.

Meanwhile, the park was enjoying its glory days.

In 1971, Holy Land USA faced its first serious threat. A highway widening project for I-84 cost Holy Land its catacombs and a convent on the site built for the Filippini nuns who assisted Greco in maintaining the property. Although both

were later rebuilt, the actual demolition proved to be the first nail in Holy Land's grave.

By 1979, the park was in decline, a victim both of vandalism and growing hostility from a post-Vatican II diocese in Connecticut that viewed the park as an embarrassment. Holy Land, easily accessible to bored neighborhood kids as well as thrill-seekers from out of town, saw its nativity statues smashed, its saints' dioramas beheaded, and gift shops ransacked. The Garden of Eden had been burned to the ground, the Peace Through Love lending library had been looted, and declining park attendance meant no funds to refurbish.

Already 85 years old, John Greco passed control of the park and the Catholic Campaigners of Christ to the convent of Filippini nuns who lived on the site in 1980. Although Greco worked on the park until the end of his life, continually adding new dioramas and statues built with everything from chicken wire to automotive parts, the game was up by 1984.

Today, the site is looked after by the Filippini nuns and an area Eagle Scout troop that maintains Holy Land's sign and giant cross. Visible from miles around, the cross guarantees the long-closed park a steady stream of visitors. Whether they heard about the park through word of mouth on far away college campuses, from an older parishioner at their church, or were merely curious about that giant sign on the hill, they keep on coming.

Holy Land exists a stone's throw from the highway. There, an exit, a right turn, and a two minute pot-hole-strewn ride through streets filled with bodegas and tiny Holy Land USA signs is the actual park. A dead end street is anchored on one end by a graffiti-filled gate with firmly shut chain-link doors and by two trailers on the other end, home to the nuns who live on the site to this day.

The gate is only 30 feet long and easily walked around. The park's entrance is 50 feet. About the same distance down lies Bethlehem Village, a sprawling plaster-of-Paris and chicken wire-based recreation of

the biblical city. Bethlehem Village is built into the sides of a gently rolling face of the hill, made out of tiny, hand-sized white buildings that have aged remarkably well after 20 years of neglect. Staircases along the side of the Village, now covered in weeds and poison sumac, allowed tourists to climb up to Bethlehem's heights and view the dioramas and displays above. Seeing those dioramas now requires a climb uphill past collapsing papier-mâché buildings and empty beer bottles for 15 feet, something that may or may not be on the plans of most guests. However, dioramas of Barnabas and of Jonah and the Whale, among others, wait above in relatively decent condition.

A miniature Sphinx lies at the edge of Bethlehem Village. Like all of Holy Land USA's recreations, it is labeled. Sometimes, as in the Sphinx's case, the labeling is redundant, while other portions of the park (where in the aforementioned Bethlehem Village, a lone stone is marked "Jesus Falls a Third Time") need the context of a label. But even the Sphinx, with its lion back missing, has a pyramid off to its side to put everything together.

Up the road, the Last Supper takes place in a ceramic grotto. Time has taken its toll on the painted plaster figures that make up the diorama. The faces and bodies of the participants are missing and both Jesus and Judas are smashed to bits. In its time, it was a near exact



replica of Leonardo Da Vinci's famous painting, but now the figures are only recognizable by the colors of their robes. The paint appears to be tempera.

Nearby there is a plaster David watching his flock. Beyond, signs proclaim that "Every Day Is Christmas" and announce the marriages of biblical characters that even a seminary student would be hard pressed to remember. But the statues are gone, with only broken pedestals and the occasional arm or decapitated head remaining.

Beyond the Sphinx, a replica of the Temple in Jerusalem stands proudly. Its roof consists primarily of cinder blocks, the mortar between the bricks is falling to the ground in huge clumps, and the door appears to have been half kicked-in. The words "The Temple in Jerusalem" appear above pseudo-Corinthian arches, and in case there is any doubt, a small star of David is painted below.

For all this, the oddest surprise of Holy Land is that hints of what originally attracted people to the park in the first place are still around.

Salvatore Scalora, director of the William Benton Museum of Art at the University of Connecticut, told the *Waterbury Republican-American* in an interview about Holy Land's heyday: "The idea of a pilgrimage appealed to John [Greco], and busloads of people spending the day there, having a little tea and going to the gift shop. People marveled that one individual did this. He had his faith, he moved forward and was sustained by this, and that by making it a vision up the hill, Greco created a site that became a site of devotion for many."

The summit of Holy Land USA can only be reached after a steep walk among oak trees, more poison sumac, and assorted weeds. The giant cross on the hill has a base covered in graffiti from local crews,

couples, and metalheads. But it is obvious that the spray paint wielding Christians of Connecticut have made this one their own. Jesus' name tagged up in several spots, John 3:16's words in red spray paint on the concrete, "GOD ROX."

About five minute's walk downhill on a paved road then cutting through some weeds is the Holy Land USA sign. Freshly painted, your first thought is roughly "Yes, it really does look like the Hollywood sign."

Although closed for nearly 20 years, Holy Land still attracts visitors. In four hours visiting the park, two separate vans of college students came through as well as a traveling preacher from Ohio who had never heard of Holy Land, but had spotted the giant cross off the highway.

When asked if he found the displays and crudely made churches and temples to be sacrilegious, his answer was simple: anything to bring people to the lord. Since nearly 1200 people per weekend came by to see the park during its sixties prime, odds are that the preacher was probably right. After all, while the students came by to gape and laugh at the headless Last Supper, area church groups still pray at the gates of Holy Land nearly every week.

The Future Holy Land USA

Visitors who come to the park for religious reasons seem to outnumber thrill tourists by a small margin, according to a very rough poll of local residents.

Most recently, the Religious Teachers Filippini who control the park were accused of racism after turning down a Good Friday procession through the site by Saint Cecilia's, a Hispanic Catholic parish located in Waterbury. Although the procession and accompanying service at Holy Land's chapel had been taking place for decades, a new group of nuns at the convent suddenly cut off use of the park, according to the Rev. Kevin Gray.

Gray and his parishioners said they were accused by the nuns of clogging the park's toilets and leaving empty cases of beer in the park, which they claim is untrue. The nuns claimed through secondary sources that they were refusing use of the park based on Saint Cecilia's lack of insurance coverage. However, Gray has obtained a certificate of insurance for each year that his congregation has used Holy Land.

With area residents claiming the beer and insurance allegations are a smoke screen for racism, fundraising efforts for the site have come into difficulties.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Augustine Giusani, the Holy Land site's spiritual director and a supporter of the annual Saint Cecilia's procession, has been engaging in his own, more modest effort to refurbish the park. His efforts to build a new fence around the park and stall the decay of the biggest buildings (such as Herod's Palace and the Sepulchre) have found some success. Giusani claims that he doesn't care whether donations come from a love of kitsch, childhood memories, or a simple need of a place for reflection and prayer. "I'll talk to anybody" were Rev. Giusani's words about helping out the park.

Waterbury's Convention and Visitors Bureau still receives multiple calls a week from visitors wishing to see Holy Land as well as frequent requests from southern church groups to take bus pilgrimages to Holy Land. The park could be a gold mine to this struggling Connecticut town.

Greco's labor of love, although kitschy and at times stridently ultra-Catholic, has nonetheless become a landmark for the town. Whether viewed as an epic piece of folk art or as one man's valiant attempt to recreate the Holy Land of the Bible, the park usually generates strong feelings one way or the other. If the people of Waterbury manage to resurrect Holy Land, chances are the town will become a center for religious tourism in the Northeast. Time will tell. ★

BORN OF BEATS



Only believers in death will die
We rise with the tides towards divinity

—Saul Williams

AND BLOOD

Revolutionary Poet Saul Williams on Spirituality and Struggle

Summer 2002: Driving through Knoxville where the free radio station shares bandwidth with some fundamentalist preachin' self-hate propaganda, imagine a cross-fade from damnation to the rap "September 12th": "You built your empire with natives and slaves / Like the truth don't resurrect, waging war from its grave."

In the face of pessimistic do-nothing-ism, Saul Williams takes the slogans of the antiwar movement and mixes them with brutal beats, raw passion, crucial compassion. "R.I.P. to the powers that be / Overcome by the powers of being."

Summer 2003: I heard Williams reciting rhymes in Detroit's St. Andrews Hall; the place always reminded me of church. The night I connected with Saul Williams, he was the preacher and headliners Mars Volta were the choir. Sweaty white kids from the suburbs approached the MC to thank him for making poems from their secret revolutionary yearnings.

Saul Williams takes us on a political and spiritual journey from hardcore to the heart's core. An "Om Nia Merican ... born of beats and blood," Saul Williams opposes repression without the cynicism, guilt, and separatism that sabotage so many otherwise subversive endeavors. Against the hopelessness and hate mongering of imperial hell — on earth, he freestyles analogies and metaphors for prophetic anthologies. Like an eternal Malcolm after his visit to Mecca channeling a feminist Chuck D, Williams is hip-hop's Ginsberg chanting oracles to dissolve the demons of war, machismo, and greed.

First noticed by many in the late '90s for his role in the award-winning movie *Slam*, Williams re-defined rap with his 2001 release *Amethyst Rock Star*, an album that brings political hip-hop full circle to its roots in the late '80s when revolutionaries first discovered Boogie Down Productions and *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*.

In a family of popular rants and jams that includes Ani DiFranco's "Self-Evident" and Michael Franti's "Bomb the World," Williams's work on the *Not In My Name* EP has provided yet another soundtrack for our direct actions against the Bush administration, against the invasion and occupation of Iraq. But DiFranco, Franti, and Williams are not alone in the movement to end war and de-throne Bubba Bush; even old schoolers as diverse as Crass, REM, the Beastie Boys, and Midnight Oil have joined the international chorus of rockers and rappers against the new imperialism. Yet few artists combine conscious activism with the poetic, free-associating divinations that Williams does.

For sure, we find humility and solidarity — not arrogance or ignorance — as he invokes his own family of mentors, deities, and saints in "Coded Language." In that fierce declaration of revolutionary cultural intention, his list of teachers includes Robeson, Whitman, Coltrane, Hendrix, King, Guevara, Kali, Medusa, Biko, and Baldwin.

Indeed, in learning to become ourselves, we are who we emulate.

And a new generation has added a name to that litany of radical role models: Saul Williams. Sunfrog interviewed Saul Williams for *Clamor* in Detroit in July 2003

interview Sunfrog

illustration Dustin Amery Hostetler

Clamor: Tell me about the Not In Our Name project and maybe in particular what it was like to be in New York City on February 15 and get to speak at an event of that magnitude.

Saul Williams: That was crazy because we almost didn't get to speak. I flew there for that, and the police had so many streets barricaded that we just made it to the stage on time. I was escorted to the stage after I told a cop at a barricade that I was scheduled to speak. He said, "I'll walk you to the stage. But if your name's not on that list, you're under arrest."

The past year, the focus has been on countering the energy that America's been putting out there, countering with strong resistance, brave feelings of love, and informing people as much as we can. It has been a very powerful and strategically planned year. We didn't stop the war, but we informed a lot of people. Now, we're informing troops; they don't have to follow those orders. They're allowed to think for themselves.

There's an archetypal theme through all your work, invoking gods, goddesses, mythology. How does that arrive in your work?

I believe that modern or contemporary society is subject to all those mythologies. We're laden with them. It's on our currency. It's in all the numerology that took place in the building of Washington: the thirteen arrows, the thirteen feathers. There's strong numerology and astrology and all this stuff that's deeply embedded in the undercurrent of America and of the West. What we are experiencing in contemporary society is not only the result of materialism, it is also the result of Christianity. It's the result of the crusades. It's all connected. Slavery. It's all connected. The Salem witch trials. All of that is connected to this time and this era. There's no coincidence that we have a fundamental Christian perspective here and a fundamental Islamic perspective there.

But you're invoking entities outside of that...

Because we need to look outside of it for the answers.

What led you to refer to the divine as a goddess?

We have to shift our perspective. ... In Christianity, Jesus was Jesus because he invested in his feminine side. He was a good listener.

continued next page

He was Dionysian or something?

That's what made him special. Everyone else was like, "I'll chop off his ear." He was like, "No, no, no. Give love, compassion, nurturing." But why get that from a man when it comes so readily from a woman? That's not to say that divinity is truly engendered. But perhaps we need to shift our mentality.

There's such a warmth and humanity there. Have you received hostile reactions from other people in the political community or the hip-hop community?

I have not gotten any responses that go that route. I don't think of myself as the creator of these ideas. These ideas are out there. When I speak, I notice that people recognize them and people often say, "Thank you for saying what I've been trying to say. I've been thinking that there must be more to reality and religion than what's been given to me." But it's funny, a lot of times when Christian fundamentalists approach me, there's almost like this cloud over my writing: a lot of Christian fundamentalists think of me as a Christian fundamentalist in some weird way. I have no idea why. They're like, "Praise the lord." Then, there are Islamic five-percenters that are like, "You're a five-percenter." Then, there are Buddhists: "Wow, you're a Buddhist."

And here I thought you were a Pagan!

I've studied all of these things. And I am all of these things just as I am not any of these things.

What's up with the ecumenical approach? Here's a debate I'm very privy to in the white political community: what's appropriate and what's inappropriate when we are trying to learn from other cultures? An example would be white people doing a sweat lodge or praying to a Hindu deity. What do you think of that whole question?

I've been in a sweat lodge. I've prayed to a Hindu deity. I've been in a synagogue. I've been in all of these places. If we are going to think as Americans, sweat lodges are important because of this land. Perhaps we all need to do that. We all need to investigate. We all need to embody the Native American culture that we annihilated. It's our responsibility to embody that. As far as the Native American culture, it's up to us to bring it back to life.

Would you embrace a more multi-cultural approach or are we only allowed what our ancestors did?

Sometimes we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors, but oftentimes, we stand on their necks. The only way society is going to survive is by looking at what feeds you. *Find what feeds you.* A lot of times, we get upset as African-Americans when we see white people emulating that which is "black." But on the other hand, I'm like, "Shit, you better investigate that." How else are you going to respect it if you don't immerse yourself in it in some way? Investigation is deeper than imitation. But there is a power in imitation just as there is in imagination.

While we're on the question of mythology, you've got a new book, said the shotgun to the head, and it sounds like it's very invested in building its own mythology. How are you working in that mode?

It doesn't really create its own mythology. More, it's a deconstruction of the mythology that's been handed to us. Its purpose is primarily to look at the current state of American society in particular and western society at large and say, "We're facing these problems. Warfare and all of this stuff. Perhaps it's connected to our view of religion and women. Perhaps it's connected to that. And love. Marriage. Proprietorship. Let's evaluate our view of things." In an abstract way, this book deconstructs these entities.

When we started the conversation, we focused on the last year and our efforts to stop the war and now the occupation. What do you think is going to happen? What's your gut feeling about where we're going? How are we going to get out of the imperial moment?

I'm going to pray and meditate. I'm in love right now, and I'm going to stay in love and surround myself with it and be very mindful of the energy I put out and see how much of that energy I can put out so that it affects others. Aside from that, I know how manipulative the government is. I've been thinking recently, "He [Bush] probably has Osama and is waiting until right before election time to say 'Look what I've got.'" ★

REVIEW BEATS UNLIMITED

Soul Position

Unlimited EP & 8,000,000 Stories (debut full-length album)

Rhymesayers Entertainment

www.rhymesayers.com

Soul Position is the collaborative efforts of Ohio's dynamic hip-hop duo, RJD2 (musical production) and Blueprint (lyrical production). The apocalyptic anthem "Final Frontier," featured on RJD2's debut solo full-length *Deadringer* (Def Jux '02), was a glimpse into the Soul Position realm. Upon the release of the *Unlimited EP* (Rhymesayers & Fat Beats '03), I found myself hooked by RJD2's rock-steady consistent production and Blueprint's honest lyricism and powerful flows. At six tracks, the EP is well-balanced. Highlights for me include the "Intro" (short but sweet), "Mic Control" (mega-legit lyrical content paired with haunting music), "Take Your Time" (this track alone makes the EP in content and form), and "Oxford You Really Owe Me" (the down-tempo dance instrumental!). The only things bugging me about this EP release are a few post-production scratch-censored moments of profanity, which really aren't too obvious or distracting (why not just leave them in?), and the lame sexism of "Night to Remember," which is thankfully redeemed by RJD2's skills in the outro.



Enter the recently released *8,000,000 Stories* (Rhymesayers & Fat Beats '03) full-length album by Soul Position; with the EP as tasty impromptu outtakes, this is the full-flavored original. Sixteen tracks (+ bonus track!) of grassroots Midwest hip-hop at its finest. Blueprint has the space and opportunity on this album to showcase his lyrical talents as storyteller extraordinaire. Shifting from lighthearted memory lane interludes to harsh inner city realism and shattered dreams, each track relays the message clearly and truthfully. Backed up by an album's worth of excellent production by RJD2, this release holds its own for real. Highlights for me are the seamless blends, like "Intro" into "Printmatic" (which set the tone for what's in store) or "Just Think" (a metaphor about vision) into "Fuckajob" (classic worker dissent theme). Also "Survival" (featuring the Greenhouse Effect crew), "Share This," and "Run" are mega-tight solid tracks. With few inconsistencies, this release should stay elevated and respected by the masses.

I'm definitely looking forward to the 12" single releases from this album (ouch, that's hot!) and will continue to support Soul Position as the true innovators that they are.

-SmIPxx

Medium-at-Large

John Edward is America's Human Ouija Board

When I was in junior high, one of the most popular slumber party activities was the Ouija board. My mom never let me have one (she thought they were an instrument of the occult), so I looked forward to those late night sessions in the dark when my friends and I would sit in a circle in our pajamas asking questions and talking to ghosts. Of course, as I got older I discovered that what I had hoped was an encounter with the other side was in reality the result of a slippery surface, half a dozen eager hands, and the suspension of judgment in favor of naive belief. On a much broader scale, this lack of critical examination and the desire for spiritual experience explains the presence, and acceptance, of contemporary television psychics like John Edward. For some, John Edward's feats are simply entertainment and offer an opportunity to marvel over how he does it (or to heckle the obviousness of the deception). However, for others his ability to communicate with the dead is accepted without question and these acts are viewed as proof of the afterlife and an undeniable connection with the spiritual world.

Although John Edward doesn't claim to "see dead people," as Haley Joel Osmond did in *The Sixth Sense*, he does maintain the ability to communicate with the deceased. Edward refers to what he does as "indirect mediumship," whereby the spirits send him energy which he receives like a radio signal and then transmits to others. He has been performing this act five days a week on his own television show, *Crossing Over with John Edward*, on the SciFi Channel since 2000. In addition, Edward makes live appearances around the country, relaying messages from deceased family members of those who come to see him, and come to see him they do. Most of Edward's appearances are sold out weeks in advance and, according to the SciFi Channel web site, individual clients have been known to make appointments a year in advance for the opportunity of a private session with him.

However, what John Edward does is not new. Psychics have been attempting to channel the dead for decades, and modern spiritualism can be traced back to 1848 when Maggie and Katie Fox summoned the ghost of a murdered peddler. While the Fox sisters later confessed that the tapping noises alleged to have come from the deceased were their own fabrication, their hoax paved the way for today's most famous mediums, including James Van Praagh (*Beyond & The Other Side*), Rosemary Altea (appearances on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*), and now John Edward. No longer content with mere feats of noise, these mediums have moved into the realm of delivering personalized messages from beyond the grave, relying heavily on a technique known as cold reading to achieve their results. Cold reading is not a psychic power, but it is a talent which requires the skills of observation, deduction, and an amount of showmanship. It usually involves starting with vague statements, then gleaning information from the subject through a series of subtle questions, and, finally, taking credit for "hits," or correct answers.

For example, during a personal reading on *Crossing Over*, John Edward questioned a woman about her deceased son, asking "Does he have a daughter?" The woman answered in

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the affirmative, and Edward followed up "Living?" Again she answered "Yes," leading Edward to conclude "He's acknowledging his daughter." Rather than begin with a specific statement, Edward instead asked questions which the subject confirmed. The details were then translated into a message and Edward was credited with a hit. Part of Edward's success has to do with his delivery. Not unlike the Ouija board, John Edward, too, has a well-polished façade. He's a former ballroom dance instructor and entertainer who knows what people want to hear. He also works in a studio filled with receptive audience members ready to provide unquestioning acceptance of his abilities and validation of his performance.

The SciFi Channel web site warns prospective audience members, that "By entering the stage area, you're agreeing to be 'read' by John ... (he) cannot control who 'comes through.' So there are no 'passive audience members.' ... If you feel you'll be too embarrassed, too frazzled, or just not interested, we ask that you give up your seat to someone who's anxious for a reading." These rules encourage the members of John Edward's audience to leave their skepticism at the door and even to assist in the deception by providing Edward with plentiful information. As the guidelines state, "Validation is important! Since John does not know your friends and relatives, it's very important you give feedback."

According to a 2001 Gallup poll, 28 percent of Americans believe it is possible to communicate with the dead. Even though Edward and his colleagues have been repeatedly debunked based upon a lack of both scientific proof (James Randi, columnist for *Skeptic*, calculated an accuracy rate of 13 percent, in one instance asking 23 questions in less than a minute and receiving only three hits) and common sense (Why would a loved one choose to communicate through a stranger, in a public forum, using such cryptic messages?), people continue to set aside logic and reason in exchange for one last chance to connect with those they have lost.

So why is John Edward's communication with the dead accepted by so many? In most cases, the attendees of John Edward's tapings and seminars have experienced a loss and are searching for answers and a brief glimmer of hope to ease their suffering. Additionally, they are trying to relieve their own fears about death and what lies ahead. Where religion leaves off, psychics like John Edward tempt us by claiming insight into the afterlife and offering the assurance that our loved ones are indeed at peace and still with us, if not physically, then spiritually. Furthermore, professor Theodore Schick, Jr. explains, "The problem is that most people never learn the difference between a good explanation and a bad one. Consequently they come to believe all sorts of weird things for no good reason." This leads some individuals to trust mediums out of a desire for spiritual experiences coupled with an inability to distinguish between scientific truth and spiritual hokum. However, like a Ouija board at a sleepover, what John Edward provides us with is not a real encounter with those who have crossed over, but instead the opportunity to imagine that it is possible. ★

For more information:

www.csicop.org
www.skeptic.com
www.scifi.com/johndeward

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Alias
Muted
Anticon, 2003
www.anticon.com

Alias isn't generally well known, which is a shame, because his new record is a succinct conclusion which, while not reached by every listener, is worth consideration by all. It contains mostly songs without words, which attempt to communicate the same feelings as might be present if words were. *Muted* describes loneliness by minimal beats which repeat in spirit, if not in actual sound, throughout the record. By keeping his music free of clutter, Alias does himself a service: his last record had none of the calm conviction that characterizes this one.

It isn't really conventional hip-hop at all, but then again, nothing Anticon does is. Alias, once a rapper as much as a producer, must have decided that words can be overestimated, and admired without any thought. He doesn't seem to want to be flashy; he only has two collaborations, both remarkably withdrawn. I particularly liked "unseen sights" with Markus Acher, which defied its silly title with an indie-rock feel and a catchy backdrop. None of these songs really makes you want to dance, but most of them make you feel something, for better or worse. Few seem as predictably whiny as their titles ("am I cool now?", "lost friend advice," "again for the first time," etc.) would seem to indicate.

-Jacob Dreyer

Flattbush
Smash the Octopus
Kool Arrow Records, 2003
www.koolarrow.com

I'll confess; though I take pride in having a very broad musical background, and will listen to nearly anything once, I've never heard anything like this. It's hard to hang a label on. Political thrash? Agit-punk? Filipino Communist splatter-core? Given the recent commercialization of punk, I hesitate to call this that, but Flattbush's roots are in protest and social activism. Their web site says members of the first protest band to bear the name, 25 years ago, ended up in ditches. I can't tell you what the Tagalog songs are about, but their English songs have clear strong messages: "Looking from above / Money transforms your personality / You turn into stone / Following today, it's all in your head / The situation changes / Class contradiction is intense! / Question authority!"

Their sound is overwhelming, unbelievably forceful at times. It's encouraging to hear the brutal, articulate intensity in Flattbush's music; gives me hope that the global megacorp hegemony won't be allowed to take over the world. Not if Flattbush have anything to say about it. Question authority! Act, lets change society!

-Bruce Bullis

Rocky Votolato
Light and Sound EP
Second Nature Recordings, 2003
www.secondnaturerecordings.com

The *Light and Sound EP* is four concise, mostly acoustic pop songs from Waxwing leader Rocky Votolato. The title song is taken from the forthcoming full-length, but the other three are just as worthy of single status. While none are immediate standouts, none are without hooks, glossy and inviting production (thanks to Death Cab for Cutie guitarist Chris Walla, who also plays guitar and bass here), or evocative lyrics. Votolato's ability to elicit sympathy for a narrator who tunelessly proclaims things like "I wanna hit somebody / with a baseball bat. / Break his fucking knees/ and feel good about it" could recall Elliott Smith or Jim O'Rourke's *Halfway to a Threeway*. However, Votolato's lyrics and somewhat raspy vocals carve out a space of their own after a few listens. This is a dark, but not melodramatic, EP which achieves an impressive creative range from roughly the same musical approach for each song. At times the immediacy of Votolato's voice and words shows him flirting with the breaking point of sincerity, but he always avoids self-indulgence. Overall, this release is surprisingly substantial for non-full-length material.

-Luke Bradley



Aesop Rock

You never heard of him? He's never heard of you, either.

Allow Clamor to introduce you
to Ian Bavitz

a.k.a. Aesop Rock

a.k.a. the unassuming
future of hip hop

a.k.a.
BAZOOKA TOOTH, baby!

Aesop Rock is a lyricist who rhymes about life as it is actually lived, in all its twisted complexity. His lyrics are packed full with metaphors and intellect. Although you may not hear Aesop on Hot 97 anytime soon, his last album, *Labor Days*, combined melodic head-bopping tracks with a personal-is-political message and earned him a strong fan base and credibility as one of hip hop's top current MCs. He is now one of the leading artists on the ever-growing and never-dissappointing Def Jux roster.

As hip hop's most successful independent label, Definitive Jux, started by former Company Flow artist El-P, continues to release album after album filled with the most intelligent lyrics and appealing beats around today. The Def Jux family includes underground monumentals Cannibal Ox, RJD2, Mr. Lif, C-Rayz Walz and a slew of other MC's who put music before money.

Bazooka Tooth, Aesop's second release on the label, was released in late September, and in October he launched a three-month tour. Before the madness began he and I sat down to talk a little bit about Def Jux, the new album, his new life as a full-time "rapper" and his passion for video games and bad reality TV.

Clamor: When writing "9-5," (on the Labor Days LP which could be considered your anthem, what was your job at the time, and what frustrations led to the writing of the song?)

Aesop Rock: It's pretty simple. What nine-to-five I was working is somewhat irrelevant. But, you know, just the everyday being somewhere and doing something you don't wanna do for long periods of time, knowing that you should be doing something else, it's sort of a frustration and a problem that pretty much anyone can identify with, and that's basically where it came from. It's just being cooped-up behind a desk.

So now that you're not working that nine-to-five anymore do you feel it's going to be difficult to still relate to that group of people you initially appealed to with that song?

No, I don't think so. I mean I think I kind of consistently stay on some relatively down-to-earth, feet-on-the-ground subject matter. And another thing I realize is, I still have a job. Granted, I wake up late and hang out with my friends probably more than most people, but now there's a whole new set of stresses and bullshit that comes along with it, you know?

But you know, I did that whole thing, I went to school, I did the college thing, I did the work thing, and that's always and forever embedded in me. Especially how artistic things in general are run, like the whole art gallery world, which I'm relatively familiar with now, is very similar to the record industry. The difference between the people that buy the product and the people that make the product, the artist versus the consumer, they're so vastly different. So there's so many similarities that can be drawn and every now and then I'd be like "This is exactly like the music world."

It's not getting to your head at all?

No, it actually like steers away from my head, I won't let it. I mean, if I ever get to the point where I can't go out, like can't walk to the store and buy some cigarettes by myself —

You're getting there though, what was it, you're the most downloaded, right? On the Internet?

[Makes yuck face] But, uh, nah . . . well, I mean the thing is over the last year. Basically, I think that a major good thing is that the masses are the people who buy the music and the people that watch MTV, and they're starting to get a little bored, you know what I mean? Like with the fact that they only have ten choices of who they can buy.

How did the Style Wars thing come up? They came to you and asked you to do that?*

They basically came to me, and it was like, fucking one of the most honoring experiences I've ever had, 'cause that movie was in my junior high school library and we used to rent it everyday and watch it at school and it was like, the shit.

You did the soundtrack for the bonus footage right?

Basically they did a DVD, it was the 20-year anniversary. Yeah, it came out in '82 so finally they're gonna release a DVD of the movie. And they decided to release a second disk with all this bonus footage blah, blah, blah, and they asked Def Jux to kind of supply some music, so they licensed songs from us. But on top of that, I got a call from the people that were editing the DVD down and they were like look, we have more footage, like bonus footage from like fuckin' '79 and '80, this like, fuckin' priceless graffiti footage that like nobody has except Henry Chalfant, who is the guy who documented Style Wars in the first place. They said if you want it you can have it all, and I was just like "Okay." So basically for next to no money we threw the video together 'cause I had a song on my album that kind of

fit the concept, it was kind of like a real urban, graffiti-based song. I played it for Henry Chalfant, we're sitting in the room and he's like "I really like it" and I was just like, this is really weird, you know? I was more just like, I can't believe I ever got to meet you in my life, that movie's my shit. So, it ended up we made a music video with all this *Style Wars* footage that no one's ever seen before.

Do you write, or did you?

Graffiti? Not really any more. I fucked around when I was young, but I'm a massive fan and I did my kind of like, photos — used to go and take flicks and shit and fuck around in books, but I would never consider myself, like —

What name did you write?

Just my name, Ian. Ian I on Long Island, I grew up on Long Island. Like Long Island Rail Road, and all that shit.

Northport, is that what it is? I have a friend from there and when I told him I was doing this interview, he was like "Oh Ian, I remember him from the rail in Northport. He couldn't do a kickflip"

That's great. Well, put that in my article . . . I couldn't do a kickflip.

I know, Ok, all in fun. Where'd you go to college?

Uh, Boston University, School for the Arts.

For?

Painting.

You don't anymore? Why not?

Not really. I did for a while after I graduated and like, I have a degree, but I moved back to New York after college and had a really tiny apartment and I was making really big paintings, and we had like, a two bedroom apartment with five people and a dog. I had a full time job and was doing music and painting, and something had to give basically. I just had more doors opening for me musically and so I just kind of, unwillingly phased out the painting. But, I mean, like I still fuck around in books and shit. But I used to spend hours a day on that shit, and that was like, what I had planned to do with my life. It just didn't quite pan out like that. But it was just a lot more like, people knocking on my door for music and I felt like I had a firmer grip on what I wanted to do with music.

What do you listen to, what are you listening to now?

Well, it's hard, 'cause when your part of a collective you like, and honestly think is some of the best shit out today, you don't really need to go out that much to get shit. But I mean, I listen to my friends' stuff and then I watch MTV a lot, so like —

You watch TV a lot, huh?

Yeah, my other true love.

You watch all those reality shows and shit?

Some of 'em. And like, *Blind Date* and that stuff too, I really like that. I don't like the news though. I can't really stomach any of the overly serious shit. Obviously, some of those reality shows are like, at this point, I'm kind of over it, you know? The whole reason those got famous is 'cause it's like "Look! These aren't special people, these are just real people!" I was talking to this kid Nasa the other day that works for Def Jux, and it was just like, I'd rather see special people. I don't wanna see normal people anymore 'cause I'm just a normal person. But at the same time I'm not gonna deny that a lot of that shit is like, the funniest shit I've ever seen in my life. But um, I just get real drunk off like, bad TV and like, sci-fi movies and video games basically. And that's where like, everything I write is me smoking weed, watching movies basically. That's like, where I find the most comfort and relaxation. I mean, I tried to watch the war, but that was like, the worst reality TV show ever.

What's that?

The War? Oh, we're at war, didn't you know? [Everyone starts laughing.]

No, when the war popped off we had like, cameras inside of tanks and shit, and for a week I was like, this is really interesting, and then a week later I was like, this is not really what I wanna see. It's like those are real people being dragged out of their homes.

But they do make it look like it's a TV show from what I've seen, it's fucked-up.

Yeah! It looks like *Blind Date* or one of those reality shows 'cause it's like, CNN and then they have like, shit, like letters flying by, like actions. I feel like they're gonna start shooting guns off and it's gonna be like "BLAMMO!" and they'll have cartoon words on the screen. So after a couple weeks of that shit I was like, Nah, I cannot watch this. Like, to tell you the truth I don't fuckin care.

So you didn't run out and buy duct tape and plastic for your windows?

I didn't. You know, 'cause it's like, if we're gonna die, we're gonna die. Once you accept

*Editors' note: *Style Wars* is a classic documentary of the early-'80s hip hop scene, recently re-released on DVD by Plexifilm. See Greg Keller's interview with the filmmakers in September/October 2003.

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place. It's like, my whole life I tried to not be like those people I was just like, that doesn't really seem like it in the world.



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the inevitable apocalypse, then you can just stop worrying about it. Cause it's like, alright, I'm gonna die, I might as well try and make some beats in the meantime, you know what I mean? And that's the thing, it's not what everyone's thinking, so everyone is like "Did you hear about this?! Blah, blah, blah ...political blah, blah, blah." That's like, all I hear and I'm just like, honestly man, I don't care.

Feel bad not knowing about it, don't you?

For a second, but not really. 'Cause it's like, I know the basics. I know we have a dip-shit for a President, I know we have a new enemy everyday.

You vote for 'em?

No, I didn't vote. But I wouldn't have — [laughs], for whatever that's worth. But you know, he didn't exactly *win* the election either, you know. America's a fucked-up place. It's like, my whole life I tried to not think about politics, 'cause I just didn't want to and it didn't interest me and it didn't affect me directly. When I was growing up all I cared about was like, you know, I went to school, hung out with friends, couldn't do a kickflip and fucking made music, you know what I mean? And basically nothing in politics, regardless of who the president was, or the senator or the mayor, ever directly affected me and my life. Until Sept. 11. You know, when I was actually sitting at home and my city was blowing up. You know what I mean? That was the first time where I was like, Okay, now like, war's in my front yard. This is officially the first time I was concerned for the country, the globe, and my position. It was the first time I felt it had personally affected me. It was just kind of a stunning experience 'cause you know there's people — like I grew up listening to Public Enemy and I mean, I wouldn't do, I never did political rap because I just didn't know enough. I left it to people that are good at it, people like Chuck D and Mr. Lif. People that can actually do it well, you know?

People who know what they're talking about.

Yeah, basically, you know? And I have like very dumb views on shit, 'cause I just never cared. And maybe that's being ignorant, but like, who cares really? You know what I mean? So then once the city blew up your just like "Oh Shit." You're watching TV everyday, then after a month of that your like "Alright, so like, bottom line is we're all dying within a few years" and like, the details kind of just don't really matter. You know? I don't really

care to know how many people we kill this day, 'cause it's all the same. You feel like you'll turn on any of the fuckin' news with the war and you literally just don't know what the fuck they're talking about at all, you know? I just wanna be like "Guys! It doesn't matter we're all gonna die! I don't need to know the details, just rerun *Blind Date* again! It'll be funnier." So, I don't know, maybe that just makes me fuckin' arrogant, but, Oh well — [laughs] You're like "Yup it does!"

No, no [laughing] ... I don't disagree. Do you drink?

No, never.

Why not?

Um ... I don't know. Like, you grow up and you kind of like, watch people around you and you decide which drugs seem like they would be interesting to do, and when I saw drunk people I was just like, that doesn't really seem like it's for me. So I just never bothered to try it.

So then what's for you?

Drugwise? I mean, I smoke weed. I smoke weed and I used to eat acid a lot, 'shrooms, I've tried like, a handful of other things, but I don't know, alcohol just always stood out as something that wasn't for me. Just like coke wasn't for me,

being drunk very well, you know?

But do you still go out with people, like out to bars ever?

Yeah, of course, I mean I'm the only one I know ever in life that doesn't drink, you know? So it's not like I'm against it to that much of a degree.

It's just, when you don't drink though, it's just kind of obnoxious to sit around and watch drunk people, you know?

It can be, it can be. But like, I was always the kid who didn't drink, but it's not like I didn't grow up around drugs and alcohol my whole life. People I knew were doing all that and everyone was smoking weed, snorting coke and selling it, and this and that and it was just like, that was my decision. But I recognize that everyone drinks, you know? That's just the bottom line, it's strange to not drink, like I'm the weirdo in the situation. And I don't go to clubs or bars normally, less because of the



**I know the basics.
I know we have a dip-shit for a President.
I know we have a new enemy everyday ... America's a fucked-up place.**

like heroin wasn't for me. It's kind of funny 'cause I'm not like, ultra-preachy 'cause like I smoke weed every fuckin' day. I definitely during a point in my life ate a lot of acid, but um ... So I can't really be that much of a critic or a preacher, but like alcohol killed more people than any of that other shit, you know what I mean? It's more dangerous that any of that shit, and it turns people into assholes when they're drunk and you end up fighting your friends basically. Granted, I guess it has its perks, 'cause there's reasons people do it. But it was just never for me. Knowing my personality and just stepping back I was like, I'd be a really bad drunk, I just wouldn't pull off

alcohol and more because I'm just not all that social of a person really. The times I'm like "Fine man, I'll go out with you man, *yeah*, let's go out, let's *do* this man, we'll go to the *bar!*" Then I get there and I'm like, I'd honestly rather be home trying to beat *Zelda*. I'd rather be stoned, making a beat, trying to beat *Zelda* and calling ex-girlfriends begging them to come over.

So you're really a big fan of video games, huh?

Yes. I was a big fan of the whole *Zelda* series. There's a game on PS2 called *Ico*, which was

continued next page

pretty slept on. It's probably like, one of the greatest games I've ever played. I don't know, I wanna do that shit I think. I think that making video games has a lot of potential to be intensely creative, and intensely dope. And like, a lot of people fuck it up. There was a time when I would just buy a game, beat it in like three days, and then go out and buy another one and beat it, like, just play them constantly. Now, it's like, so much shit is boring me. It's just like, I feel ... this sounds so stupid when I say it out loud, but in my head this is what goes on. Every now and then there'll be a video game where I feel like, wow, that was like a life altering experience. That shit was sick, and like you can tell there was a lot of creativity and a lot of honest to god art put into that. As opposed to just like, muscle guy #1 shooting up the country, which can be fun, that obviously has its place. I feel like a good video game is like, the best thing you could possibly experience. Aside from like, sex and weed.

You gotta get out of here or no?

Oh, um I don't know. What time is it? Yeah, I guess someone else is coming. I mean, I know you really seem to be really enthralled, I can tell.

Oli, yeah, I really am, really interested.

Is there a reason you came in here with such a hostile attitude?

No, I'm sorry, I just have a lot of things on my mind. I apologize.

No, are you...[laughing at me], I'm just wondering.

I'm not much of a "people-person" either.

Me either, but, you know —

I'm trying, I'm smiling, we had fun... So are

these annoying, these interviews?

This one's not! I mean, I wish you were being a little nicer to me —

I'm being nice!

Ha! But yeah, they can be really the worst thing in my life. At best, they're like, okay, they're tolerable. That was good; but you gotta understand, most people are like, it's just the same questions, and when you do like eight interviews in one day, it's like, they walk in and you just wanna be like, "Ok. I like Run DMC and BDP, that's why I started rapping." You just wanna give them all the answers that they're already gonna ask you anyway, cause people just ask the same bullshit. I'd rather like, let the albums speak for themselves and then like ... talk about video games. ☆

check out Aesop Rock and the rest of the Def Jux crew online at www.definitivejux.net

REVIEWS BOMBS AND BENDERS

Boomerang

Mark Zepezauer
Common Courage Press,
2003
www.commoncouragepress.com



In the wake of September 11, 2001, many Americans have pondered that burning question: why do they hate us? To some, it seemed altogether beyond belief that anyone would not adore the U.S. of A. American politicians were quick to insert their response: "they" hate "our" way of life; our devotion to freedom; our example of democracy. Now I do not assume that most reading this believe such political mendacity. Yet it is unfortunate that more people who do will never read *Boomerang*.

As the sub-heading on the cover announces, Zepezauer demonstrates "how our covert wars have created enemies across the Middle East and brought terror to America." Provocative indeed. It takes thorough analysis and careful research to back up such a claim and Zepezauer proves himself more than capable. The examination is especially illuminating in light of current events and crises rocking the Middle East.

Anyone who imbibed Zepezauer's *The CIA's Greatest Hits* and *Take the Rich off Welfare* will feel at home with his concise, sharp writing style. The book is easy to read, a veritable bite-sized introduction to examples of disturbing, shocking and enraging episodes. And it also goes without saying that such a book paints a grim portrait of U.S. government meddling in foreign affairs. The question for the reader is: do you choose to learn from these actions, or ignore them?

Reoccurring themes form the backbone of the book: the U.S. government routinely supports undemocratic regimes, through its support of such regimes the U.S. has engendered the wrath of

most of the world against it, the U.S. has stoked the radical Islamic groups deemed terrorists through past support of such groups and the war on terror is linked tightly with the conquest for oil.

For the most part, Zepezauer is effective in tackling a hefty load of information and history and arguing the insidious role played by the U.S. in nations such as Sudan, Lebanon, Turkey, Palestine and the Caspian Region. In many instances, especially when looking at the former Soviet republics (the "Stans"), Zepezauer shines in relaying information often not covered in the media, including alternative and progressive media. For example, he contends that Uzbekistan is the key to controlling Central Asia and it is this the U.S. has in mind with a heavy military presence in the region.

What warrants particular attention in *Boomerang* is the conclusion. Zepezauer offers solutions to the problems examined in the book. And in a time when the U.S. seems on "high terror alert," small countries are constantly in the cross hairs of the U.S. military, and the U.S. populace accept with a straight face the U.S. government demanding exemption from war crimes trials for its adventures in Iraq, the book and its inspiring finale make it well worth the read.

-Casey Boland

God Save My Queen

Daniel Nester
Soft Skull Press, 2003
www.softskull.com



Daniel Nester's years of obsessive Queen-following have paid off in a major way. In his debut book of poetry *God Save My Queen* he critiques each Queen song within the poem delegated, chronologically and in order of album and track. He has managed to reassign musical structure

to language, so that his poems are Brian May's guitar riffs, Roger Taylor's thick drum lines and the punctuated trills of Freddie Mercury. In "Another One Bites the Dust" Mercury wails "took me for everything I had / and kicked me out on my own" Nester echoes Mercury's masculine desperation in his poem, "every man runs the same line, tries real hard to see how it would have all crashed down ... another defeated genre." Queen's power lies in its gender and genre bending which is as relevant today as it was in the seventies as music continues to take on increasingly subversive forms, like the current claim to flame gay hip-hop scene rampant in south west Manhattan. "We Will Rock You" is one of the greatest heterosexual anthems of all time, written by one of the most sexually revolutionary bands of all time. The heart-palpatating rhythm of "We Will Rock You" is conveyed jarringly in the phrases of Nester's tributary poem "the first kung swathed in feminine aahh." In his literary version of the epileptic "Bohemian Rhapsody" Nester finds that in his "sheer accumulation and arrangement of these objects [album covers]" he has "some part in creating them." He takes full responsibility for his arrogant assertion in detailed footnotes which reveal that the beat in "We Will Rock You" was powered by feet, that Freddie Mercury habitually beer-guzzled at the moment of performance, and Sid Vicious once painfully accused him of "bringing the ballet to the masses." In a time when many bands seem to be emulations of their late seventies forefathers, this book offers up some reasons that warrant their allegiance. Nester claims that Freddie Mercury manufactured "a new wave arena, a gay ready-made." The alternatively tranvestite-clad Freddie Mercury gave us an escape, Nester gives us something similar to hold on to, only in paper-back.

-Janine Arman



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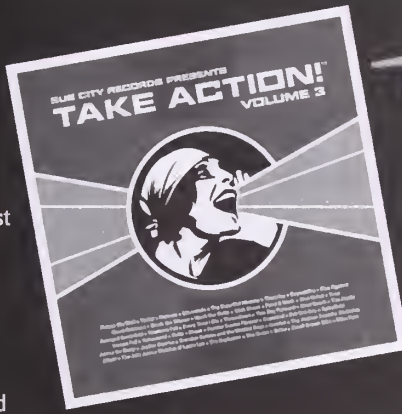


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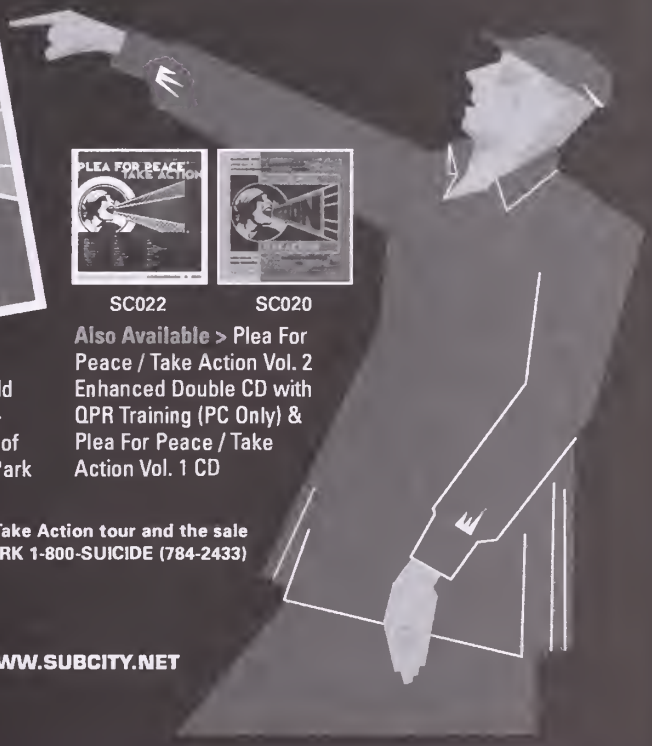
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VANIA

A Conversation about Faith among Friends



ASIA-ONE



LALANIA

ELEVATED CYPHA



by j-love

Although it has been said that faith is the evidence of things not seen, in my conversation with three of my closest homies, it was clear how faith manifests itself in their daily lives. From creating life to taking life and everything in between, we let it all flow in a crowded Cuban bar in downtown Denver. What came out brought tears to our eyes, a stab at our hearts, but left me, ultimately, at peace with my own questions and feelings about faith.

Introducing legendary b-girl Asia-One; fashion designer and spiritual artist Lalanía Carrillo; and Vania Gallegos, an artist and single mother, strugglin' to make ends meet. Take a peek into their personal lives and hear their thoughts on sex and God, faith-altering experiences, and how spirituality shows up in the everyday.

How would you describe your faith?

Lalanía: I'm just gonna jump on it. My faith is in myself, my spirits, my earths, my ancestors, my peoples. I wouldn't be alive if it weren't for my faith, because it's the faith I have for my people, for ya'll — at that point when I feel like I'm just gonna fuckin' die from depression, or it's just too much, my faith is in humanity and the people around me who love me.

Asia: Faith is the smile on your child's face, faith is the reason to be alive, it's because you love each day. Faith is what gets you to sleep at night and up in the morning. I'm not gonna say you have to believe in the Quran or the Bible, faith and spirituality to me is not the same thing. Faith is strictly about you and your person, and what light you see in your life.

Vania: Faith, for me is having trust within myself to make the right choices, trust in the natural processes of that we have no control of, and when things don't go as planned, trust in knowing that the reasons will manifest and come to light in the future.

How do you feel like your faith has evolved?

How have you come to believe in what you believe today?

Lalanía: My faith began with Catholicism, where I was told to have faith in Jesus and God and all that shit. I'm Chicana, it like comes with the territory. My faith changed when I moved to California with you guys and I realized that Jesus was just one cat in the mix of a whole bunch of other cats talking about this and that. Then my faith started to become more universal, dealing with earth and stars and things like that.

Asia: Ultimately you know that the whole idea of faith is what allows us to keep going — sometimes when I'm feeling low, I'm like how much more of this do I have to go through? I got on this real negative trip for a while, when you see poverty, despair, homelessness, disease, racism, at that point you don't wonder anymore where hell is, you know that hell is on earth. But in the end, I think faith can be self-liberating man.

Vania: I would have to agree with Lalanía, moving to Cali was definitely a shift in my mental. Experiencing another city and being independent from family pushes you take risks by expanding and testing your beliefs. I guess by looking back on past experience and being here today evolving everyday regardless of pace is evidence. I think faith is an everyday blessing.

How do you practice your faith?

Lalanía: I'll tell you mine. I know I'm always first but, [giggles all

around] sometimes I leave my house and I'm so caught up in my life and my world and my work and my highness...

Asia: in your bluntedness, in your high-ness.

Lalanía: No for real. I'll be walking down the street and this tree will be like, "hey" and I'll be like "hey" and I get all excited, because I speak to nature everyday. I speak to the leaves and touch their trunks, and give greetings and thanks. I ask the trees for energy, I breathe in their auras, I greet my spirits, I greet my will, my guardian angels, my ancestors. This is how my faith shows itself. Every tree I pass, I'm gonna touch it, or it's gonna touch me; if a branch is hanging down, I don't go around it, I walk under the branch so I can be blessed by the leaves touching my face, my hair — that's how I make sure I'm connected everyday.

Vania: It's not like I have a regimen about it. Faith is an undercurrent for me. Once you already know it, it is something you carry with you everyday. I feel like I'm blessed by the way I vibe through life, I feel like I'm taken care of, and I think that I'm just blessed. As far as practicing faith, I do it with my daughter everyday, whatever comes down, I look at her and know that I've got to push forward, and that anything is possible. She represents faith to me.

Asia: I feel blessed because I remember how I used to be and I know how I am now. I remember feeling insecure, like I didn't know my place, what I was or who I was. I used to wonder if it's because I was of mixed races. But at some point I became this accepting loving being, and I let go of feelings of bitterness, of ego, of pride and jealousy. I mean, we Aquariuses, we can be extremely jealous beings. I just became inspired by life, by the youth, of giving love and receiving

You live righteously, and treat your body like a temple. And you do right by others and you bring that peace and joy and harmony, because that's the way it is — and that's the way it should be.

love, giving respect and getting it back. When you really love yourself then you can accept who you are, the good and the bad; maybe that's faith, I don't know. How I practice it is through my dancing. Once I left that hate and blame and jealousy, my dancing flourished and I flourished.

People can fuck me over, bad shit can happen to me and I take it in stride. And may be that's what faith is, its moving, its like a constant flow, your moving with the current of the wave and nobody is gonna like. intercept it — you're on its course.

Vania: I think it does for a minute but then you remember...

Asia: Yeah, we are gonna go through bad moments and times of despair but, yo, its amazing how you can go through some crazy shit. I mean, I've been to jail, I've been victimized, taken advantage of, like molested — fucked up shit — and I'm not even embarrassed to say that shit on tape. I know what I've been through and I don't hate nobody for it, I don't blame nobody for it, I just keep going. Is that karma? You live righteously, and treat your body like a temple. And you do right by others and you bring that peace and joy and harmony, because that's the way it is — and that's the way it should be. When you go against that, when you take advantage of people and lie and steal you go the other direction, that shadow direction, that's the shit that fucking turns your life into a downward spiral.

Lalanía: True that... The universe conspires to do the utmost highest will of yours at every moment, but our thought process is highly negative because of our society, because of our upbringing, our experiences. But to me one of the ways that I show my faith is that I surrender to the universe. I speak to my spirits and I say okay universe I surrender. I don't know exactly what you got planned, I don't know

what I'm supposed to be doing, especially with this man thing I'm going through. That means when I'm loving someone it's a higher calling, and if all of us had enough faith in the universe, in a higher power, then we would all be okay.

Vania: I think we all do that on some level...

Lalania: But if we do that consciously, we would take our lives to a different level. But to be totally on track with the universe, we have to let go of our ego. Surrendering is one of the hardest things to do in life, because your ego runs your life.

Tell me your views on sex and God/Goddess

Asia: I'm celibate. I think I'll go to the bathroom now.. (laughs all around)

Lalania: Sexual energy is the purest form of energy (more laughter). When you're having sex your inhibitions are lost, and your body is at a higher point, and you can use that energy to transform your life because it's so pure and it's so strong, so once you understand that your sexual energy can be a spiritual energy then you're un-fucking stoppable.

Asia: What about you, Vania, you've always been a sexual being.

Vania: I just know I need more right now (laugh). I think that sex plays a role in your person, totally, it's a form of surrender, you have to be okay with your body to really let go during sex, and the person that you're with, you can't be obsessed with like "I need to do this or that." It needs to be on a higher plane or it's just like, "Let's fuck," like an act. So I think sex is good for you, it's like eating. You have to do it, it keeps your blood flowing, it needs to be there, daily...

Asia: Daily?

Vania: It's part of who we are so we have to cultivate that, along with everything else, but that's everybody's journey, going through finding the right partner, you know.

Describe an experience where you felt at one with your creator, or the universe of whatever you consider your higher power.

Lalania: I took acid one day with four other people, and I had a freaked out experience. But the next day, when we were supposed to already be off the shit, we were in some mountain community, we were driving to like a little mountain store or something, so were driving down a mountain road, and all of a sudden I look up and all the mountains were curved in toward me as if we were in a sphere, and the mountain were up against the side of the sphere, and at that point I realized I was at the center of the universe; I felt completely at one; completely terrified, cause I had lost my ego, and I didn't know who I was, who Lalania was, what this body was, I was at one with the universe but my ego was completely terrified because it didn't know itself. And I had to calm myself down, cause the body and personality is totally mixed up in the ego and once I lost my ego, it was like going a little crazy.

Vania: It was a drug-induced experience.

Lalania: Definitely, it was drug-induced.

j-Love: But does that matter?

Lalania: Not necessarily, I think why people become addicted to drugs is because they have these experiences where they feel really in touch with things, and so they continue to take drugs to feel that way, they don't know how to do it any other way.

Vania: For me, it was the time I escaped death. There was a time in my life that I decided I didn't want to be here anymore, and I tried to commit suicide. I remember being half way in the tub, blood all over, and realizing, as the blood is trickling down, that I can let it keep trickling down and that it would soon be over. But realizing that that was not what I ultimately wanted; it was all this emotion that just needed to get out. And then after that, after I decided that I did want to live, then the man, the love of my life at that point came in, and then the ambulance came. I knew I could have prolonged it, I had the power to prolong it, but I decided I wanted to be here, no matter who loved me, no matter what happened,

I still wanted to be here.

Asia: As an adolescent I went through a lot of bad shit. I remember not feeling anything, I didn't feel love, I didn't feel acceptance, I didn't feel anything, I felt dead, like a walking zombie, I didn't even think I was gonna live much longer. I was sure I was gonna die, I tried to kill myself too, I took a bunch of aspirin. For me there's been things when I've been touched by the Creator, like when I had my baby, the way I had her and when she came out, damn, nothing in my life can compare to that, I don't care B, nothing can touch that. The first time I saw her face, and was like, this is what she looks like, this is who she is, the feeling of walking around my apartment and looking in my room and seeing the little bundle on the bed and being like oh my god she's in the world! Nothing will ever match that. That experience led me to believe that there is a Creator, and that he is loving and giving...I mean, that's it.

Musical and drink re-ordering interlude ...

Asia: Back in the day, I was on the brink, I coulda lived or I coulda died, and I lived, by the grace of the Creator, and I just don't want any other little star to fall through the cracks.

Vania: It's a lot of self healing, man, that's what it is, it involves a lot.

Lalania: Whenever something happens that is life threatening, or soul threatening, that causes havoc in your aura, clouds, tears, hurts...

Asia: It brings up scary shit.

Lalania: We need to understand we have the ability to heal our auras very simply. If you leave negative experiences in your aura then they will stay with you forever.

All good things must come to an end, and as our cell phones started ringing — pulling us in other directions — our money also ran out, so we bounced to Lalania's house. Further thoughts and philosophies were touched upon, stories exchanged, and more joy and love was given all around. What stood out to me the most was the perseverance and collective strength of these women around me, and how faith speaks to each of us in different languages, symbols and actions — whether it's the smile on our daughter's face, the branch of a tree caressing us, or flowin' in the cypha of life. ☆



OPERATION 7

A martyr to some, a blasphemer to others, Dietrich Bonhoeffer continues to liberate theology.

by Antonino D'Ambrosio

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed on April 9, 1945, after a brutal prison sentence in the concentration camp at Flossenburg. He was 39 years old. The charge came directly from the man Bonhoeffer had hoped to bring down, Adolf Hitler. One of the last orders from the former *Time* magazine Man of the Year, Hitler hated Bonhoeffer so much that even while the Third Reich was collapsing all around him, he wanted to ensure that Bonhoeffer was executed. Not long after, Hitler committed suicide and seven days later Germany surrendered.

Bonhoeffer was condemned to death for his involvement in *Operation 7*, a rescue mission that smuggled Jews over the German border into Switzerland. As a member of the resistance group Admiral Canaris, he had also been involved in an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler. A devout pacifist, Bonhoeffer's participation in the murder plot offers a glimpse into what lengths he would go to in order to actively resist. His sister-in-law, Emmi Bonhoeffer, described her brother-in-law's reasoning by recounting what Bonhoeffer himself told her: "If I see a madman driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe and then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver."

While Hitler may have succeeded in assassinating Bonhoeffer, he could not kill what Bonhoeffer had started – the beginning of a new movement in theology that mixed direct action with a radical interpretation of Christianity. The movement is now referred to as liberation theology and currently has many advocates, primarily in Latin America.

For Bonhoeffer, the true Christian is identified not by his beliefs and adherence to strict rhetoric but by his full participation in the liberation of those suffering in the world.

A neo-orthodox German theologian greatly influenced by Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer attended the University of Berlin from 1924-1927 where his dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, distinguished him in both Europe and the U.S. He went on to study at the Union Theological Seminary in New York after which he received a post of lecturer at the University of Berlin.

In 1933, Hitler came to power. Bonhoeffer, a student chaplain at the University of Berlin, joined the anti-Nazi pastors in the German "church struggle." This was a critical time in Bonhoeffer's life. In 1935, he was appointed the head of the Finkenwalde Confessing Church Seminary which was shut down by the German government in 1937. The students were imprisoned, at which time Bonhoeffer published *The Cost of Discipleship*. Not long after, he made contact with the political resistance against Hitler before leaving for New York on June 2, 1939. Bonhoeffer had safely escaped the troubles in Europe by teaching in New York City. He abruptly returned less than a month later saying:

I have had time to think and to pray about my situation, and that of my nation, and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of the Christian life in Germany after the war if I did not share in the trials of this time with my people. Christians in Germany face the terrible alternative of willing the defeat of their

nation in order that civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose. But I cannot make that choice in security.

Bonhoeffer believed that we could never know or understand the true nature and essence of Christ; therefore it is our moral imperative to lay our faith and hope in the people. It is only then, as sentient, responsible human beings working collectively, that tyranny and fascism could be overthrown. By placing his resolute faith in humanity and not strictly in God's salvation, Bonhoeffer asserted that we no longer need religion to shape present day morals, politics, and science. The basis for Bonhoeffer's liberation theology rests with his proposal for the necessity for a "religionless Christianity."

Moreover, Bonhoeffer believed that the true Christian was the confessing believer who totally immersed his or her life in the secular world, rejecting the objective unalterable moral standards of the Bible. Situational ethics is what Bonhoeffer professed or, more importantly, that right and wrong are determined by the "loving obligations of the moment" – not by blindly following ineffectual Christian canons.

I first learned of Bonhoeffer through Dr. Geoffrey B. Kelly, a professor at La Salle University in Philadelphia. Dr. Kelly is one of the world's experts on Bonhoeffer and liberation theology. He holds the view that Bonhoeffer has served as a symbol of opposition and a spiritual guide to the ever-growing number of liberation theologians throughout Central and South America. Dr. Kelly notes that without

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liberation theologians agitating for justice, there is often no one strong voice of resistance, allowing for the predatory corporate interests of opportunistic organized religions to manipulate and further suppress those most vulnerable.

In fact, Bonhoeffer described the Church and Christ in his work *Testimony to Freedom* "as not a real person" but a "corporate presence." Bonhoeffer's use of the term "corporate" refers to the exploitation of Christ by dictatorial regimes as a tool to help carry out the most terrible atrocities. Here Bonhoeffer recognizes that no one view of Christ or Christianity is definitive or an absolute interpretation. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, he argued that all persons are identical with Christ. This pantheistic interpretation is still radical and controversial.

Building on this, Bonhoeffer strongly believed that Christianity is not exclusive and that following Christ is not the only way to God and salvation. As a result of his flexibility and openness to accept divergent views, the resistance movement welcomed Bonhoeffer with open arms. On the other hand, the German government feared his ability to reach across varying religious communities. They believed that Bonhoeffer's effort to form a united Christian resistance was a serious threat to their power. For Bonhoeffer's part, his unique vision allowed him to form important and unlikely alliances in the early ecumenical movement including partnerships with the progressive Christian groups like World Alliance for International Friendship and Union Theological Seminary. His efforts to work with Roman Catholics would greatly influence the ecumenism that followed Vatican II in the mid-1960s.

Unfortunately, as is the case with many revolutionary thinkers, Bonhoeffer had few allies among the Christian establishment and religious elite. Capturing the dominant attitude toward Bonhoeffer during his day are these words written some years later by Dr. G. Archer Weniger. Dr. Weniger stated:

If there is wholesome food in a garbage can, then one can find some good things in Bonhoeffer, but it is if be dangerous to expect to find nourishment in a garbage can, then Bonhoeffer must be totally rejected and repudiated as blasphemy.

Of course Bonhoeffer's writings, which discredited most of the sacrosanct ideas of the Church, did little to sway the religious oligarchy. By demystifying the pillars of Christianity through fearless and intelligent critiques, Bonhoeffer was pushing theology from a restrictive and exclusive ideology to a liberatory and inclusive practice. He wrote that the Old Testament had no value in salvation, that the Bible must not be taken literally and "not used as a book of wisdom, a teaching book,

a book of eternal truth," and that the physical resurrection of Christ is a "mythological conception."

Bonhoeffer, even while in prison, maintained his pastoral role. Those who were with him spoke of the guidance and spiritual inspiration he gave not only to fellow inmates but to prison guards as well. In a letter smuggled out of prison, Bonhoeffer showed no bitterness but rather explained how, "we in the resistance have learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the excluded, the ill treated, the powerless, the oppressed and the despised ... so that personal suffering has become a more useful key for understanding the world than personal happiness."

This letter is one of hundreds that compose the gripping book *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's former student and friend, worked hard to publish these letters. In one of many powerful passages, Bonhoeffer offers us an explanation of his actions:

Man is challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world. He must therefore plunge himself into the life of a godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness with a veneer of religion or trying to transfigure it. He must live a "worldly" life and so participate in the suffering of God. He may live a worldly life as one emancipated from all false religions and obligations. To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some particular form of asceticism (as a sinner, a penitent, or a saint), but to be a man. It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world.

Sadly, the struggles of liberation theologians like Bonhoeffer have not been able to stem the tide of violence and genocide waged against millions around the world. In what Jose Marti called the "hour of the furnaces," the 20th Century was the bloodiest century in history. Still, people like the martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador and Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, look to liberation theology as a means to rally the oppressed in fighting for their independence. Bonhoeffer's legacy lives on in these and all people who hope that the 21st Century is the century that peace will prevail. ★

Author's Note: The feature length documentary *Bonhoeffer*, directed by Martin Doblmeier, is currently showing in several cities around the country and is worth checking out. For more information on Dietrich Bonhoeffer see Geoffrey B. Kelly's *Liberating Spirituality: Bonhoeffer's Message for Today* and of course any and all of Bonhoeffer's own work including *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

REVIEW PEOPS

Peops:

Portraits & Stories of People by Fly
Soft Skull Press, 2003
www.softskull.com

I was blown away the first time I saw a "peops" portrait, on the walls of the Umbrella House on Avenue C over two years ago. In contrast to much of the art at this Lower East Side benefit exhibition, the work drew me in, made me want to know more people like the ones presented in these images and stories. Fly has since done hundreds of these portraits, and we owe a great debt to her for this documentary effort, and to Soft Skull Press for collecting them into a beautiful paperback book.

Peops: Portraits & Stories of People by Fly is a most unassuming name for an absolutely stunning collection of human beings and their tales. Almost two-hundred drawings of people, straightforward and unadorned (except for their own tattoos), with each subject's words, as transcribed by Fly, coming down around them like a curtain backdrop. It's an amazing effort that presents a world of lovers, fighters, freaks, artists, parents, and passers-by Fly's world, and yours.

Especially if you've spent any time in a squat, particularly in New York or San Francisco, you've probably met some of the folks featured in the book. But even if you haven't, you will instantly feel at home around them. The words turn the cartoon-like drawings into honest, almost multimedia depictions — as if you were looking at a photo album while someone told you the story behind each image. Most of the portraits include email addresses or websites, too, if you want to continue the discussion.

The book's glossy pages (46 in color) do the artwork justice. It costs \$18, which seems pretty cheap for 180 works of art. You should check out Fly's other work — zines, books, cartoons — on the web at: www.bway.net/~fly.

—Joshua Breitbart



finding Colours of Resistance



An interview with Pauline Hwang and Helen Luu

by Chris Crass

What lessons have we learned since the anti-WTO actions in Seattle? Can those lessons be applied to anti-war organizing? Can local struggles challenge global capitalism? How do we build movement for global justice that is anti-racist, multiracial and feminist? Pauline Hwang and Helen Luu have not only been asking these hard questions, they have worked to open up movement-wide discussions about these issues in Canada and the United States. Pauline and Helen's activist work, writing and ability to connect people through the Colours of Resistance network have all helped to keep the hard issues on the table. And, as they argue, these are issues we must face if we're serious about collective liberation.

Clamor: What is the history of your political development?

Pauline: From early on, I remember even small injustices making me very angry. I saw them in my home, school, church, and jobs, but felt pretty powerless for a long time. "Political development" to me means becoming conscious of unjust patterns, their roots, and what we can *do* about them. When I was 15, I was invited to join Youth Action Network (YAN) by Karen Dang, who was five years ahead of me at school.

YAN has changed a lot over the years, but at the time it was a young group dominated by urban middle-class queer Asian Canadians. I stayed with YAN for four years, and learned lots, mostly about how organizations grow, shrink, challenge, and sustain us as members.

Then when I was 18, I heard Maude Barlow talk about the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. I'd known something was wrong with The System, but understood a lot more of what was wrong when anti-corporate politics hit my life. I moved from Toronto to Montreal, joined Corpwatch, and helped organize a successful campaign to defeat a Coca-Cola monopoly agreement at our university. Around that time, I went to a conference that introduced me to an anti-capitalist critique, but only from an ecological perspective. Some other young folks there organized to go to Seattle for the anti-WTO protests, and I went along. Seattle was inspiring, launching me (totally prematurely) into the "anti-globalization movement."

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I became critical of this movement after a few major turning points, including lots of mistakes in my own organizing (for example putting together a national environmental camp that didn't take environmental racism, colonialism, oppression, and rural/urban issues into account). Farrah Byckalo-Khan, one of the other camp organizers, was a long-time feminist and environmentalist organizer. My talks with her were the first challenges and space I had to challenge my internalized racism and sexism, at times a painful, confusing, but amazing process. I also went to an amazing local event on "Women and Globalization," which was the first time I'd seen mostly women of colour as speakers at a progressive political event. I cried at some point, thinking about my mom and her relationship to feminism, and was subsequently attacked by a white woman who felt that "whiteness has been a bad word all day"; I bring this up to remind myself that many political passions can't be separated from personal pains.

Helen: I didn't overtly or consciously think of myself as "political" until I left high school. I always had a heart that felt deeply for other people since I was little, but until I became more conscious of politics, I thought that charity was the way to go.

In university, I started engaging in more political work in groups such as Food Not Bombs and Students Against Sweatshops. I think FNB may have been my first conscious exposure to politics.

As the years passed and I became increasingly more engaged in politics, I started to trace things back even further and began to see how my politics are very much shaped by my history of growing up in a poor immigrant family after coming to Canada as a refugee from Vietnam, and my identity as a woman of colour living in a white supremacist and patriarchal society. Increasingly, I am learning what it means to be in a position of marginality in this society as well as in my various positions of privilege and what this means in terms of my activism.

It's always been, and continues to be a learning process for me. These days, I'm interested in challenging what constitutes activism since we don't get anywhere with such narrow definitions that are often defined by straight, white, middle-class males. I now like to avoid white-dominated activist scenes/bubbles.

Can you say more about what understanding your position as both oppressed and privileged has concretely meant to your political work?

Helen: Well, I think it's important to place yourself in everything you do. I think that identity is very tied to politics, and life itself. I think it's important to constantly recognize your positions and constantly evaluate what that means in terms of the work that you are doing. I am a woman of colour who came to Canada from a "third world" country as a refugee. I grew up poor and working class in a family that will always be seen in this country as an immigrant. These days, I have very little money and am currently underemployed. From these positions, I have learned a helluva lot about what oppression means. However, I must also recognize where I have power and privilege, and how I act upon these privileged positions in my life and in my activ-

ism, resulting in the marginalization of others. I have a lot of formal education behind me. My family is no longer poor and my parents now run their own small business. I live in a first world country. I have a roof over my head. I now have Canadian citizenship. I am living on First Nations land. I do not have a marginalized disability. I am not transgendered and so on.

I believe that recognizing your many positions of marginalization, privilege, and power is one of the most important steps in engaging in activism that uses an anti-oppression framework at its core. However, it should not be a debilitating step. I believe that guilt is a useless emotion. To me, recognizing where you have power over others means that you recognize that you have a *responsibility* to work towards changing things and engaging in work to help tear down the structures that keep you in that position of power while keeping others down. It means acting as an ally and in solidarity with others. It means recognizing that no one is free until everyone is free.

You both played major roles in starting Colours of Resistance (COR). What is COR?



Helen: I'm going to steal the first 2 paragraphs of COR's statement:

"Colours of Resistance (COR) is a grassroots network of people who consciously work to develop anti-racist, multiracial politics in the movement against global capitalism. We are committed to helping build an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, multiracial, feminist, queer and trans liberationist, anti-authoritarian movement against global capitalism. We are committed to integrating an anti-oppression framework and analysis into all of our work.

Colours of Resistance is both a thinktank and an actiontank, linking the issues of global capitalism with their local impacts. For us, this means working locally on issues such as anti-war, police brutality, prison abolition, indigenous solidarity, affordable housing, healthcare and public transportation, environmental justice, racist immigration policies, and many more. Colours of Resistance acts as a network for us to share support, ideas, and strategies with one another across our diverse communities."

More info can be found on our website: <http://colours.mahost.org>

What role do you see COR playing?

Helen: I see it as a good way to network people interested in engaging in this work within an explicitly anti-oppression framework. So far, it has been excellent resource in terms of sharing information, articles, events, support, etc. as well as in connecting people together who might not otherwise have found each other. It was through COR that I met so many amazing people with whom I now do political work after September 11th happened, as well as amazing people in other cities/towns that we continue to network with. I have a deep respect for all of these people.

That said, COR as a network itself shaped up to be very internet-centric as Pauline was saying, which was something we were wary

of from the beginning since the internet excludes many people from participating. It's something that continues to be the case. However, people who are part of COR all engage in real life work in their own communities and just use COR as a way to network with others from different geographical places.

Pauline: I think COR has been useful for a bunch of reasons (though I can only really speak from what I've seen locally). First, for radicals of colour and anti-racist allies to share our analyses and strategies to fight global capitalism. Second, as a place from which we can have a joint presence in 'higher profile' movements (e.g. anti-globalization, anti-war movements). Third (and these are all related) as a resource for each other on anti-oppression and anti-racist work within social movements. Fourth, from what I've seen COR has been an important resource for white anti-racist allies (sometimes it seems this is one of its biggest roles).

Pauline, I know you were involved with the Immigrant Workers Centre, and it was a powerful experience. Can you talk about that?

Pauline: Working with people at the IWC has been the single biggest influence on my approach to political work. Though it's far from perfect, I haven't worked with any other community-based organization that tries to meet immediate needs (through case work, referrals), focus on politicizing through education and mobilization, and still be run more or less by revolutionaries. It was a big contrast to the anti-globalization scene to see how experienced activists, communities of colour, women of colour, people who have families, etc. organized. People are in it for the long haul and want something sustainable and that builds toward a long-term vision. It really made me look at 'organizing' in a different way and made me critical of 'radicaler than thou' burnout politic activism, where activists assume to know the needs of the communities they are so-called representing and organizing. Although folks in and around IWC circles aren't necessarily anti-authoritarian, they did introduce me to classic Marxist theory, and I saw how it shaped their analysis and day-to-day work. It really helped me stay grounded, while seeing myself within a history of radical organizing and international solidarity. Finally, organizing with them made me really conscious of my class privilege, and forced me to think hard about what roles student and middle class radicals can play.

How to be a useful, principled and non-annoying ally is something I'm still figuring out. I've noticed how easy it is for middle-class people to take over leadership roles, both 'cause of privilege like access to resources, information, etc. and 'cause of attitudes of self-importance. In SWS, I saw our role as supporting and following the lead of immigrant workers at the IWC, i.e. strategies and approaches, campaigns/activities, etc. It's about those who are directly affected

leading the struggle. We weren't always the best at this, but solidarity work is always challenging and I've found it's important to listen and ask questions.

Helen, in your essay "Discovering a Different Space of Resistance: Personal Reflections on Anti-Racist Organizing" you talk about being part of Heads Up, a majority women of color anti-war group. You write about challenges and struggles you faced when trying to do solidarity work with Muslim immigrant communities. Can you talk about that organizing work and lessons from it?

Helen: The Heads Up collective is a group that formed after September 11th and is the collective through which I do most of my political work at the moment. We began by doing 'outreach' to communities that were most directly affected by the overt racism that surfaced

Colours of Resistance is both a thinktank and an actiontank, linking the issues of global capitalism with their local impacts.



following September 11th. We wanted to 'help' them but learned very quickly that what they wanted was our help in ways that we had not considered. They didn't need help in organizing — they were already doing that just fine — but what they wanted was support in other ways such as just being publicly vocal about our opposition to war and racism. From that experience, we learned a lot and were challenged about what solidarity work and being an ally means. Even the word 'outreach' weirds me out now.

These days, we mainly do workaround refugee rights, including support for women who are held in detention centres. We work under the core principle of those who are affected taking the lead in decision-making and involving these people as leaders in any campaign. This is something I don't see happening with a lot of the mostly white-dominated groups in this city who have been doing work around refugee rights.

What openings and possibilities do you see for building a multiracial, anti-oppression, grounded movement for global justice?

Pauline: This is a question for visionaries, and I can't claim to be one of them. I think the organizing I've been doing shows where I think the openings are — at least for my own work — better than my words could. I just want to tell two short stories.

The first happened this past International Women's Day. For months the IWC women's committee and other women of colour groups had been organizing a joint event and march. Despite being told by more powerful/mainstream women's groups that "war is not

a women's issue; we need to talk about women's rights being human rights," they stood their ground and planned a whole day around the themes of fighting war at home and abroad. In the end, the big women's groups decided if you can't beat 'em join 'em and they came too. My favorite moment of the day was when a Filipina activist ended her impassioned speech, fist in the air, shouting "we need an anti-imperialist women's movement!" and — to my shock — the room packed of hundreds of people cheered loud and long. Maybe the war made talking about imperialism OK and maybe the big women's groups finally noticed the extent of anti-imperialist sentiment among feminists of colour. So that was exciting.

The second story is from a couple months back. I'd been at a major low point because of an emotionally abusive and manipulative relationship. The months of unweeding my mind from the internalized shit this experience brought up, talking to many who have gone through similar shit, and finally getting together to confront him, made me realize more the intimate connections between global systems of injustice and personal histories of abuse or violence that mostly get swept under the rug — whether of families, activists, or other communities. I really believe the internal repression and silence around these "personal" experiences is a major boost to capitalist and oppressive systems. So possibilities for the movement? To take "the personal is political" more seriously (not that "serious" means not writing, singing, dancing, shouting, painting about it of course).

If you could go back in time to when you first started doing activism, what advice would you give yourself?

Helen: Oh, I would give myself so much advice! I look back and would completely disagree with many of the ways that I went about

my activism back in the day. But I guess we all start somewhere on our paths of political consciousness. And this journey never ends. Just when I think I have something figured out, I learn more and have my beliefs challenged in major ways!

That said, I guess the main piece of advice I would give myself is the importance of self-determination in any struggle. People who are directly affected by the issues you are working around must be the ones who lead the struggle. I would advise myself to think long and hard about what being an ally means and what solidarity work means, and how important it is to build real relationships with other people/communities/groups.

What does being an ally and doing solidarity work mean to you?

Helen: To me, these two mean a lot of things but some key related issues include: always thinking about what being an ally and solidarity actually mean, respect, knowing when to step up and when to step back, opening up spaces for people in positions of marginality to organize and take leadership, following the leadership of those people we purport to be allies to, recognizing and respecting people's agency rather than always seeing them as 'helpless victims,' recognizing that people engage in resistance in different ways, etc...

Doing this kind of work means learning how to have a lot of humility, something a lot of privileged activists don't seem to get! Acting as if you are an activist superhero who knows everything will get us nowhere so take off that cape! We are always learning and we can always learn from others. ☆

Essays by Helen and Pauline are on the Colours of Resistance website www.colours.mahost.org.

REVIEW MUST-READ ZINES

Art Attack!

by Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

South Chicago ABC Zine Distro, March 2003

ABC Zine Distro :: PO Box 721 :: Homewood, IL 60430

Indeed, Bob Marley was right when he claimed that only the individual can mentally emancipate him or herself, a truism Kevin "Rashid" Johnson realizes through his zine *Art Attack*. In the diatribe/manifesto, incarcerated Johnson, a self-described prisoner-of-war, makes a call to arms against the present economic and political international order so that what emerges is a New World Order where the prison system is abolished, economics stop dictating our relations with other countries and each other, and wars cease. Johnson's writing, always bold and never apologetic, is complemented by skillful and often harrowing original drawings that together produce an effect that neither could do alone. Johnson's Marxist critique of a society of have and have-nots leads him to argue that American capitalism supports the necessary evils of war and prisons in order to maintain a system in which the few profit from the overworked and persecuted masses. Johnson backs his claim with a thorough review of the sordid side of American history. In this Howard Zinn-esque revisionism, the author gives criticism of the most scathing kind about the hypocrisy inherent in a supposedly "democratic" nation's ruthless efforts to prevent other countries' political self-determination. Using the fictitious threat of communist takeover to justify the desire to control raw materials in Vietnam to Latin America, Johnson makes it abundantly clear that the far more dangerous enemy has come from an American economic dictatorship. If Johnson's biting accusations are not enough to pierce through your complacency, his 24 illustrations may raise your consciousness level up a few notches. Ranging from a caricature of President Bush to slain civil rights leaders to a portrait of a young woman, it is immediately clear that Johnson's artistic talent and biting cynicism are a winning combination. Many have multiple focal points and most are punctuated by quotations from leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. to Che Guevara so that Johnson's messages never give the slightest sense of ambiguity. However, reactions to Johnson's ideas and his solution to the problems he views as endemic in American society will hardly be as clear-cut. Even liberal thinkers will not resist a visceral shock when they read Johnson's conjecture that our own government could have masterminded the September 11 attacks in order to prevent the military-industrial machine from getting rusty. Just as controversial is Johnson's belief that a successful revolution can only occur with combat. Discrediting pacifism as useless intellectual banter, Johnson outlines the requirements of a True Soldier, a person

"motivated by a complete love (for the people) and pure hatred [for the enemy]." The True Soldier is prepared to fight to his or her death to save humanity, and to accompany these words is an image of a young boy armed with a massive gun. While Johnson's militant stance will be hard for many to swallow, it should not overpower the issues he raises. Johnson quotes Hitler's statement that "What great fortune for those in power that people do not think." Whether in agreement with Johnson or not, you cannot deny the thought-provoking quality of *Art Attack*, and for that he should be thanked.

-Amanda Prischak

Slave Magazine #8

www.slavemagazine.com :: PO Box 10093 :: Greensboro, NC 27404

This issue of *Slave* is a well-written, polished presentation of everything you can expect from a well-produced publication: well-versed editorials, DIY articles, tons of reviews, interviews, photography, and compelling fiction.

The editors kick things off with each of their own introductions and it proves to be a great way to start. The writing is concise and intelligent, and the topics are thought provoking, a formula which remains consistent throughout the entire publication. Editor Dave Coker discusses the current impact of the Bush Regime, Zachary Mull sadly cites the shrinking numbers in the straight-edge scene with great sentiment, and John Rash educates readers with an incredible report on the lengths the United States will take to recruit young people into the Marines. These personal accounts are a wonderful example of the content one will find within the pages of *Slave*.

The bands featured in this issue are Between the Buried and Me, Uwharria (a Uwharria CD is also included), and Most Precious Blood. The interviews run a decent length and the questions posed are informed and well thought out. What is refreshing, though, is that not all the interviews in this issue are directed towards bands. There is also an inspiring interview with NYC photographer Boogie, as well as an interview with Mark Wienand, which is an enlightening read about using vegetable oil as car fuel.

The true gem here is the 15 pages of music reviews, all written by people who seem to have a strong understanding and appreciation of the music scene. Full of titles well out of the mainstream, this is a great source on finding new music.

Slave is the kind of publication that other underground rags only dream of being. With editors who come across as highly intelligent people who are in touch with current issues, it's hard not to agree that *Slave* is a damn fine reading experience.

-Liz Worth

From Emptiness to ... Emptiness

"I was really afraid of what I would find in the quiet moments."
- Noah Levine

Sound familiar? It does to me. I spent more than 15 years of intense immersion in the narcotic world of hardcore punk rock, wasted for quite a few of those years before becoming a productive DIYC (do-it-with-your-collective) punk citizen.

But I never left much time for quiet moments. Why should I? The world was so messed up. We had to tear it down.

It all started when I suddenly awoke as a pre-teen. On the day I became aware of my independence, I also realized I had nothing to believe in. No direction. No future.

Then I got drunk in eighth grade. That felt good. I forgot about my tortured hyper self-awareness. My best friend at the time and I would sneak his parents' hard liquor and mix it with Diet Rite until we were jumping on his bed watching Friday Night Videos.

"It was so strange to just lie there listening to the destruction of my mind. It was all worth it, the pain, the hangover, and all the dead brain cells. I had found my place in this fucked-up world."

One year later, I slid into the street punk world. Nothing mattered except creating an identity to protect me against a hostile school and family life. We scraped money together for bottles of the cheapest vodka, chugged before stumbling onto the dance floor at Medusa's all ages dance club. We were not alone; there were thousands of us in the club and on the street. I had found my place.

"My whole life had become a quest to escape from reality."

It was a heroic quest. Cheap wine, stealing, getting harassed by the cops, numbing my mind until I couldn't feel anymore. I wanted to know if there was an actual boundary to myself besides death.

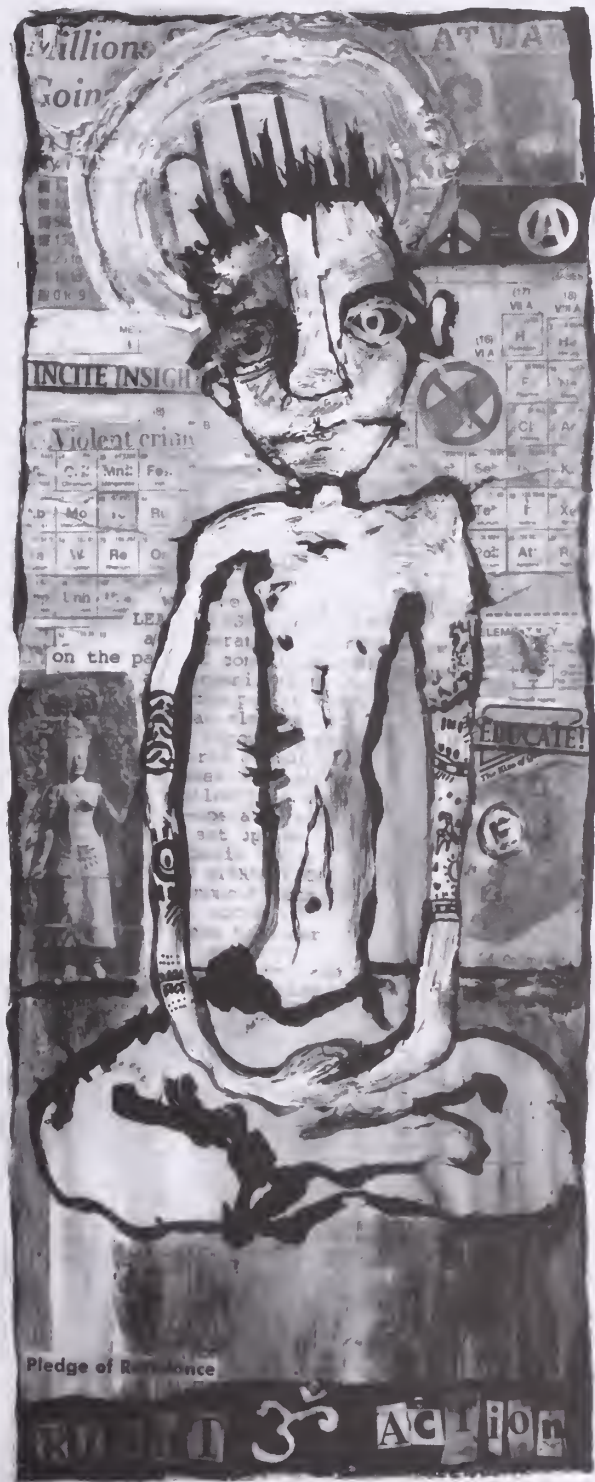
That boundary was crossed when Josh, a friend from high school and one of the most well loved of our crowd, died tragically trying to avoid paying the elevated train fare. He touched the third rail and was electrocuted. The scary part was that we all used to climb up those steel girders to save our dollar for drugs and alcohol.

I made absolutely sure there were no more quiet moments. That got me a one-way ticket out of Chicago to the cow pastures of New York State.

"In the end all of my problems seemed to come down to being powerless."

The first Gulf War protests gave me an outlet for my simmering anger when I returned to Chicago, but the swift conclusion of the war left me feeling even more powerless. Tired of getting high, still frustrated with the world, I turned to activism.

I joined the Baklava Autonomist Collective at the tail end of the first Gulf War. We almost killed ourselves kicking out nine issues of Wind Chill Factor zine, running a mail-order literature distro, putting out a couple of 7-inch records (what? you mean you missed the Dogfight and Prophets of Rage limited releases by Collective Chaos Records??), running all ages shows for 20 people twice a month, opening the Autonomous Zone Infoshop (10 years/10 locations and going strong!), years of anarchist gatherings that led up to the water-



A Reflection Noah Levine's *Dharma Punx: A Memoir*

by James Mumm
illustrations Brandon Bauer

shed Active Resistance Counter-Convention (the training center for Seattle '99!). This immersion in the self-contained world of punk-infused anarchist politics mirrored the maturation of punk culture into a much more constructive multiverse of zines, conferences, record labels, and, of course, endless shows.

I explored anything that promised relief from this frustrating sense of powerlessness.

"I knew that this spiritual practice shit was the last hope for me."

I was driven, consumed by my powerlessness, raging without a moment of quiet for more than a decade. I hurt plenty of people in intimate relationships, I walked away from friendships when I deemed their commitment to the struggle as less than ideal, and I didn't see the purpose of love or life as important questions. The lack of silence was deafening.

In 1997, I made a tough choice to follow my gut and make a strong commitment to becoming a successful community organizer. I had worked full-time since 1990 in social justice organizations, parallel to my creative opening in punk and anarchism. I found the world of direct action organizing, with a firm emphasis on the leadership development of oppressed and resisting people, to fulfill me a hell of a lot more than the self-contained world of anarchist politics and punk culture. Organizing offered a concrete way out of powerlessness.

So I drove myself through years of 60-70 hour weeks until I learned how power worked in our society and how to build organizations and leadership that could challenge and rearrange power relations. Overcoming powerlessness left me naked in the knowledge that I still did not understand myself.

"...an inner rebellion that would bring me to liberation."

I was tired of the noise. Friends of mine practiced meditation, tai chi, yoga, and other contemplative arts. I asked for help in learning to meditate. I needed to quiet my mind so that I could figure myself out. So, I began sitting.

"I knew that the path led upstream, against the current, and was the most rebellious thing I had ever done."

Noah Levine's stark memoir *Dharma Punk* opened a window into my tumultuous past. As an orthodox anarchist punk, I adhered to a strict atheism that insulated me against questions of meaning. But exploring those questions is not giving in to the system; on the contrary, it is the only way I have found to explain and sustain my social justice work.

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

(ATTHANSIKA-MAGGA)

- 1.) RIGHT KNOWLEDGE
- 2.) RIGHT INTENTION
- 3.) RIGHT ACTION
- 4.) RIGHT SPEECH
- 5.) RIGHT MEANS OF LIVELYHOOD
- 6.) RIGHT EFFORT
- 7.) RIGHT MINDFULNESS
- 8.) RIGHT CONCENTRATION

Noah's punk Buddhist convergence gives voice to a generation of punks for whom spiritual practice complements the work of revolution.

Punks recognize the first of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths – that suffering exists. We had awoken only to find families, schools, and elected officials pushing us to conform to their deadening lifestyles. It was treachery. We screamed our suffering right back in their faces.

Most punks also see the Second Noble Truth – there is a cause of suffering. We blamed authorities. We saw through the veneer of American democracy to its abusively authoritarian roots. We hated capitalist corporations for manipulating our desires.

Sustained rage, frustration, and powerlessness inspired many of us to search for a way out of suffering. The Third Noble Truth is that suffering can be extinguished. Our solutions led to the many-colored punk sub-cultural Diaspora. Straight edge, crusty off-the-grid drop outs, Krishna core, anarchist activism, anti-oppression self-improvement, creative music and art, and, of course, more addiction and oblivion. We all wanted this suffering to end.

Punk was my way out of a bland future, but it could not lead me to personal or political liberation. The Fourth Noble Truth, that there is a path out of suffering, was closed to me and so many others who saw religion as the antithesis of our rebellion. We demanded a different way, a way that I never managed to find within punk culture.

"Waking up had become the only thing that I found fulfilling; the exploration of the many levels of self and my relationship to God or the Universal Truth were my passions."

I had not found a boundary in the bottomless pit of drug addiction. I found exhaustion, but no real boundary, in my driven social justice organizing.

There was nowhere to look for liberation but inside. Meditation as a way to quiet the mind led to meditation as a way to pay attention to self and the world. As my practice grows, I find inspired purpose and meaning in the boundless energy that comes from relationships rooted in the present. I'm not looking for solidity and boundary anymore.

"Having had a glimpse of the freedom that was possible I knew that my life's work was to awaken from this confused dream I had been living and to help others to also awaken, to see clearly our life's potential and the true nature of existence."

Perhaps the most critical lesson I've learned is that the work of personal and political transformation requires the radical clarity that can only be gained through changing our relationship to suffering. We gain clarity through paying attention to the workings of our ego-identities. We see how our attachment and aversion to suffering has produced a conditioned response to reality. Personal and political transformation requires us to break from our conditioned selves and act with the spirit of freedom in our hearts. In relationships, our firm attention to the present allows others the opportunity to take a break from distraction and see themselves with greater clarity. This radical perspective on self is a catalyzing force for many people. We gain clarity about our conditioning and, as we remove these barriers, we generate the space for unconditional love to erupt. Mind to mind, heart to heart, this revolutionary process can only happen experientially. Unconditional love compels us to act compassionately on our values. This is radical social change.

"All of this is to say: wake up! Look at your own life and see what is true about yourself. Freedom is available, the trick is to stop looking out there for it and to sit down, shut up, and see for yourself that your truest nature, however deeply buried or obscured, is closer to love than anything else."

I have realized that the certainty of truth is a pale substitute for the immediacy of mystery.

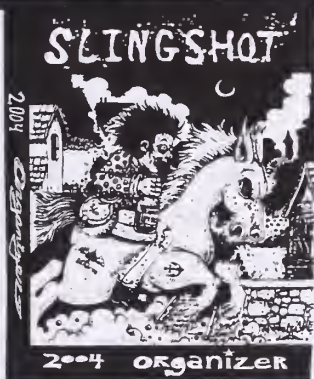
The Mahayana Buddhist tradition, which includes zen, holds the Bodhisattva as an ideal archetype. Bodhisattvas seek Buddhahood through the systematic practice of Buddhist virtues, but renounce complete entry into nirvana (living in the present without being driven by suffering) until all beings are saved.

Now, what's more punk than refusing nirvana? ☆

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Gaining better conditions

for the extremely low-paid workers who grow and slaughter chickens as independent contractors for huge companies like Tyson Foods.

Unionizing workers at Catholic hospitals who, despite the supposed charitable missions of the institutions, are often working for low wages and without health insurance themselves.

Mobilizing thousands of janitors to march through the downtown streets of cities throughout the country in a campaign that ends up winning better wages and benefits for the janitors and energizing the labor movement as a whole.

These are just a few of the many campaigns in which interfaith workers committees for justice have played key roles.

There are now over 60 of these committees around the country, a movement which quickly grew out of the first Interfaith Committee in Chicago, started in 1991. In 1996 that local center developed into a National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, which shares an office with the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues.

While many activists, especially of the younger generation, consider themselves atheists or disdain any organized religion, interfaith labor and justice organizations have shown they can play a crucial role in gaining results from employers in labor disputes and in protecting individual workers' rights.

The fact is, despite the supposed separation of church and state, in a country as traditionally steeped in faith as the United States, religious leaders enjoy a level of credibility and respect that an average labor organizer or community activist might never be able to command from the mainstream press, the general public and representatives of big business. The interfaith committees use this clout to aid workers in unionizing their workplace; to inform workers of their rights and advocate for the rights of individual workers who have been mistreated; and to support already unionized workforces during contract negotiations or strikes.

BLESSED ARE THE ORGANIZED,



And perhaps even more significant than the influence religious leaders can have on the targets of a unionizing campaign, a faith-based approach is often more comfortable for workers, especially immigrant workers whose experiences in their home countries make them wary of union officials and other types of authorities or organizers.

"Most workers from Mexico, Central America or Poland don't trust government agencies, and they certainly don't trust labor unions, but they do trust their faith organizations," said Jose Oliva, an organizer at the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues.

Despite the image some might have of organized religion as conservative, many faith-based delegations and leaders aren't afraid to take radical direct action.

They will frequently do sit-ins at corporate headquarters, nonviolent direct actions in the streets, or picket the houses of corporate board members or CEOs to bring their message home.

They also don't shy away from the guilt trip approach, for example they will often visit

workers worship? What communities do they belong to?" said Jennifer Barger, the Chicago committee's religious outreach coordinator. "We train workers to involve their own religious community in the struggle."

Most interfaith committees also have a symbiotic relationship with their city's labor unions, wherein the committee staff help in campaigns to unionize a workplace and unions offer support in the form of publicity, people on the picket line and other resources. "We initiate the relationships -- between workers and clergy, clergy and employers, clergy and unions -- and provide the tools necessary for people to put their faith into action," said Barger. "The tools being information, experience, guidance, organization."

Ideally, the Interfaith movement represents religious institutions moving away from the more common charitable approach and actually taking an activist role in changing the system that permits inequality and injustice -- as the Bible says, teaching a man to fish rather than giving him a fish.

Kim Bobo, founder of the National Interfaith Committee, notes that while many

The Chicago committee now has three key areas: the Faith-Labor Solidarity project, the Workers' Rights Center and the Building Bridges project. The solidarity project continues the committee's original strategy of providing support to workers in labor disputes. The Worker's Rights Center is a place where workers can go for advice and assistance in starting a union-organizing drive, filing complaints with the EEOC, Department of Labor or other government entities or generally learning about their workplace rights.

And the Building Bridges project prepares workers to take the test to enter the building trades apprenticeship program, a four-year commitment which will help them land high-paying jobs as union electricians and carpenters.

Among the workplace successes the Interfaith committee has had in Chicago, for example, are the unionizing of laundry workers at the Five Star Hotel Laundry company with UNITE!, victories in the Justice for Janitors campaign, and a partial victory at the V & V Supremo cheese factory, where mostly Mexican immigrant workers were involved

FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH

by Kari Lydersen

power brokers' homes on holidays like Christmas or Valentine's Day to beg the employer to get into the spirit of the season and treat their workers right.

Most interfaith groups have a variety of strategies that involve central clergy members with long involvement with social justice issues recruiting the clergy of specific workers and even the clergy of employers or corporate or nonprofit board members themselves.

For example at the Chicago committee, staff set up meetings with workers' clergy and enlist their support in publicizing campaigns and having face-to-face meetings with the employer in question. The committee will also often find out where the employer worships, if they do, and ask his or her clergy member to weigh in on the dispute.

If the employer isn't moved by their conscience alone, they may at least be influenced by the experience of being embarrassed in front of their fellow church members by a reference to the labor dispute they are involved in from the pulpit or a picket outside their church.

"When we organize support for a campaign, our first question is, 'Where do these

religious organizations used to focus on providing housing and food for their members, few had any involvement in workplace rights. Since most religious traditions emphasize the right to fair compensation for a hard day's work, not to mention universal human rights and dignity, she thought an interfaith labor group seemed a natural fit.

"Most religions are involved in some kind of charitable work," noted Katherine Bissell, director of the Chicago committee. "The work we're doing is so primary, because if people can provide for themselves and be economically self-sufficient, that gets to the root of the problem."

At the moment "interfaith" mainly refers to Christian, Jewish and a scattered few Muslim clergy, though ideally these alliances would include Buddhist, Hindu, Baha'i, various Native American and other spiritual leaders.

Since its inception, the Chicago committee has helped over 20,000 workers in winning union recognition and favorable contracts, while over 1,000 individual workers have had one-on-one training or assistance from the committee regarding their labor rights.

in a months-long, bitter contract battle. Father Brendan Curran, an Interfaith Committee board member and priest at the progressive St. Pius church in the mostly Mexican Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, was able to meet with V&V officials who, though hostile, eventually agreed to some of the workers' demands.

While Curran said the faith-based approach has had a lot of success in the city, especially in Latino neighborhoods, he noted that it is not a miracle cure.

"Some people give you more respect as a clergy member and some don't," he said. "It's a mixed bag. Some people won't listen to us at all. Some see us as radicals whether we're with the church or not."

Over the past decade or so, the labor force has undergone a major shift, with immigrant workers and increasing numbers of women now making up the bulk of low-paid service and manual labor employees.

Interfaith Committees are especially dedicated to meeting the needs of this population, as well as low-income African-American workers who traditionally were and still are often discriminated against by largely white

segments of organized labor. Churches also tend to play a large role in African-American communities, making a faith-based approach relevant and effective for many workers.

"People in immigrant communities and African-American communities don't think of unions as being the answer to their problems," said Bissell. "Unions haven't responded as well to the changing workforce as they could. We try to link immigrants and low wage workers with the unions that do want to work with them."

Recently, the Chicago Workers' Rights Center, like interfaith committees around the country, has been embroiled in trying to defend immigrant workers from fallout from the "no-match" letters, which the Social Security Administration (SSA) has been sending out to employers. While the letters are theoretically supposed to have no consequences other than to make sure a worker gets paid the social security due to him, in reality the letters act as a red flag that a worker may be undocumented. This causes many employers to either fire the workers or hold the letters over their heads as an intimidation tactic should they attempt to organize.

Clergy and organizers from the committee have been meeting with various employers to dispel rumors about the letters and ask them

to treat their immigrant employees with compassion and respect.

Oliva described how more than 400 workers accompanied by religious leaders held a meeting with the SSA regional commissioner explaining the devastating effects of the no-match letters.

"One woman talked about how she feared for her sick son's life after the family lost its health insurance when her husband was fired [after his employer received a no-match letter]," he said.

The Interfaith approach is especially fitting when the target of an organizing campaign is a faith-based institution, like a hospital or college. Institutions with religious mandates often turn out to be some of the worst union-busters and exploiters of labor around. Several years ago the National Interfaith Committee and various local committees carried out campaigns to unionize Catholic healthcare institutions in California, Wisconsin and other states. In almost every case they met with bitter resistance from the hospitals' boards, made up of both clergy and lay business people.

"For 200 years, nuns came mostly from Europe to help low-income immigrants," said Barbara Pfarr, a School Sisters of Notre Dame nun who worked extensively with the National Interfaith Committee on organizing union

drives at hospitals in the Milwaukee area. "They felt total ownership, generation after generation. They feel that, 'We've run this institution for 200 years, and we don't want a third party to come in and tell us how to run it.'"

Meanwhile Catholic teachings going back to at least the late 1800s clearly support workers' rights to organize. The *Rerum Novarum*, an encyclical written in 1891 by Pope Leo the 13th, deals with workers' rights. Pope John Paul II issued a statement in 1991, the 100th anniversary of the document, reiterating the teachings.

"I think the church is very consistent in its belief that workers have a right to organize," said Sister Mary Ann Walsh, spokesperson for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Unions are a part of the fabric of Catholic social teachings."

Sister Regina Williams, a Racine Dominican nun who also lives in Milwaukee and is involved with the Interfaith Committee, calls the contradiction between teachings and practice "cafeteria Catholicism."

"They pick and choose what teachings they want to uphold," said Williams. "The mission of unions and of the church is basically the same, to take care of the poor and vulnerable." ☆

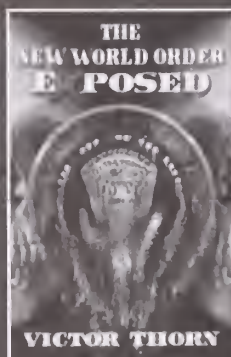
REVIEW NEW WORLD GONE MAD

The New World Order Exposed

Victor Thorn
Sisyphus Press, 2003
P.O. Box 10495
State College, PA 16805-0495
www.babelmagazine.com

It won't be long before a small cartel of bankers implants the human race with artificial intelligence technology, transforming us into slaves programmed to serve our masters, "the Controllers." So argues Victor Thorn in *The New World Order Exposed*. At 570 pages divided into a staggering 69 chapters, Thorn's book is vast in scope and self-assurance. Thorn peppers his detailed evaluation of the present and the not-so-distant future with an assortment of conspiracy theories, Hegelian dialectics, quotes, and (uncited) facts. His paranoid language and reductive tendencies, along with a strain of virulent libertarianism and extreme ethnocentrism that rears its ugly head throughout the book, make it easy to dismiss Thorn's work as a bible for delusional quacks. Despite Thorn's repeated denunciation of pacifism, illegal immigration into the United States, and universalism, one cannot deny that *The New World Order Exposed* contains some valuable material, at times offering strikingly percipient analysis of political, economic, and social realities.

Thorn's work effectively underscores the fallacies of the rhetoric of democracy sold in classrooms and on the news. Comparing TV news to a professional wrestling match — both are scripted with pre-determined outcomes, both are performed by paid "actors," and both rely on manufactured sensationalism — Thorn's analogy is surprisingly apt. *New World Order* attacks a host of political assumptions, particularly about American



motivations in military and diplomatic interventions, as he does with his early contention that "War=Profits: it's that simple." Reminiscent of Randolph Bourne's famous words, "War is the health of the state," Thorn's remark is backed up by an analysis of how war facilitates central control by the American government and reaps ever-increasing monetary benefits for what Thorn calls the world's four largest industries: usury (banking), energy, drugs, and war. This is Thorn at his best: exposing the incestuous relationships between the Bush's and oil, the cabinet and defense contractors such as the Carlyle Group, the CIA and international drug lords, to name a few. *New World Order* also contains a sophisticated exploration of the U.S. government and media's reliance on the construction of enemies — "others" — to bolster patriotism and support for power at home. This analysis deconstructs the instrumentalism behind everything from Samuel Huntington's ideological conception of clashing civilizations to post 9-11 scapegoating of Muslims. Thorn, admittedly, does get a bit carried away and ends up turning to the rather tired theory that the U.S. government was complicit in the September 11 attacks. This type of disconnect ultimately discredits *The New World Order Exposed*. Nonetheless, the book can provide considerable rewards to the discerning and patient reader. Perhaps the most compelling point Thorn offers stems from the theater analogy described above. With his Chomskian portrayal of the media as a network of conglomerates, Thorn convinces us that much of what we see and read might be a farcical drama, designed to distract the American people from substantial issues, the real stories affecting their lives. He accordingly calls for a turn to honest and independent media. Naturally, Thorn offers his own publication, *Babel Magazine*, and *The New World Order Exposed* as the political analysis that America needs today. However, readers will best be served by following Thorn's advice to engage with other, more responsible sources of alternative news. Even if it succeeds only at this, *The New World Order Exposed* will have accomplished no small task and, perhaps, compensated for its more maddening elements.

-Priya Lal

Using the Universal Life Church

Your friend can say your wedding.

by Darren Welter

But are you supporting a scam?

When Warren and Abby married in the fall of 1991, holding a small outdoor ceremony in Abby's hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, they had no idea they were on the cusp of a rising trend. They just wanted their long-time friend Kevin to say their wedding, and found a way to make it happen through the web site of the Universal Life Church. After spending less than five minutes online, Kevin became a minister of the ULC, legally licensed to officiate weddings. Best of all, it didn't cost a cent.

Point-and-click ordinations are nothing new; the ULC has been offering the service for over 40 years. But lately the practice of being married by a friend has become more common, even slipping easily into popular culture. From 2001-2003, newspapers across the country published articles on the subject. A January 2003 *New York Times* piece reported that ULC ordinations had increased by more than 50,000 in the past year, with about 80 percent of those ordained wanting to perform weddings. Maybe all those people watched the February 2001 episode of "Friends," NBC's most popular sitcom, when Joey became ordained online to marry Monica and Chandler.

But how much do the couples that use the ULC's service actually know about the church? The generation now getting married in its late 20s and 30s, like Warren and Abby, grew up with the concept of being "socially responsible consumers." In their college dorms, even ordering pizza led to social debate, since the owner of Domino's is a strident pro-lifer. Now they're just as likely to avoid Nike for exploiting cheap labor in China, or to curse the owners of gas-guzzling SUVs on the highway. When it comes to getting married, however, are they less discriminating about the church that provides their minister's credentials?

The ULC Headquarters is located in Modesto, California, but its only church is ulc.com. By delving into the web site, it's easy to see why the press wasn't always so kind to the ULC, and why the Internal Revenue Service has been hounding the church since the day it was formed. It's also easy to see why a profile of the church's founder, Kirby Hensley, was featured on a 1999 "60 Minutes" special called "The Best of Cons."

Critics of the church primarily focus on two issues. First, the church is spiritually meaningless. The ULC's central tenet is to "promote the freedom of religion and do that which is right." Since members of the ULC share no values or beliefs, the ULC cannot be deemed a religion. The church cannot be considered spiritual, either, because its online sermons never

address the soul and spirit apart from the bodily and physical. As the University of Virginia concludes in a profile of the church on its Religious Movements Web site, "Nothing about the ULC helps define itself as a credible, functioning religious organization."

A second criticism of the ULC is that its main purpose is profit. The ULC's main objective is to ordain members who will start their own churches, in whatever religion they choose, and then rely on the ULC to establish those churches as legal and tax-exempt. Based on this overarching goal, the Religious Movements Web page states, "There is little evidence that the ULC is interested in any more than playing games with the IRS."

Except for direct sales, that is. Much of the ULC web site is dedicated to selling products to budding ministers: from the ULC Credential Package, to Ministry Enhancement Products, 12 official certificates, 11 mail-order courses, and even 16 different religious titles, including Bishop, Monsignor, and Universal Philosopher of Absolute Reality.



Warren and Abby say they didn't know anything about the ULC when Kevin got ordained through the church's web site. They don't know any more about it now, either. "I just thought it would be nice if we had someone who was a friend of ours, who we loved and trusted, do our ceremony," says Warren. "We took advantage of an option they had that suited our needs. I've never been back to their web site."

Across the country, Jeff, 34, and Kim, 32, used the ULC service to have a friend say their wedding in Pasadena, California, in August 2002. The couple met while attending the PhD program in English Literature at The University of California, Riverside. Jeff and Kim also say they knew nothing about the ULC when they married.

Both couples give the same reason for the unconventional way they decided to wed: their relationships didn't fit the usual conventions. "We're not religious, so we didn't want a rabbi or priest, and a judge seemed really cold," says Kim. "We liked the idea of a good friend participating in the ceremony."

Jeff and Kim say they try to be socially responsible consumers. So do Warren and Abby. They can all name companies whose products they won't use for political or social reasons. But here's the seeming paradox: they all say they would use the ULC again, even if it turned out to be a money-making scam. Using a free service, they say, doesn't constitute support of the church.

"It didn't make any money on me. I didn't buy anything from them, and neither did my minister," Jeff says. "I would be bothered by a company's taking advantage of consumers, but we made no profession of faith to the ULC, no public thanks to the ULC, nor in anyway promoted the ULC through our marriage."

In the end, both couples were happy with their weddings. The ceremonies were just what they wanted: small, intimate, comfortable, and untouched by the influence of mass commerce or traditional religion. Warren and Abby roll their eyes recalling the weddings they've attended in churches where the ministers barely seem to know the couples at all. When a friend officiates your wedding, Abby says, "The ceremony is more personal. The person doing the ceremony knows the people getting married really well, understands their relationship, and can tailor the ceremony towards that."

Warren adds that going through the ULC was the only way of having this kind of wedding. For couples that are not religious and want a more personal ceremony than a judge can provide, what other options are there? The ULC itself meant nothing to them. Warren says, "We used them," he says. "We flat out used them."

Jeff and Kim agree. "I was and am pretty unconcerned about the Church," says Kim, a year after getting married. "As far as I'm concerned, they were a means to an end." ★

(The last names of the two couples in this story were withheld to protect their privacy.)

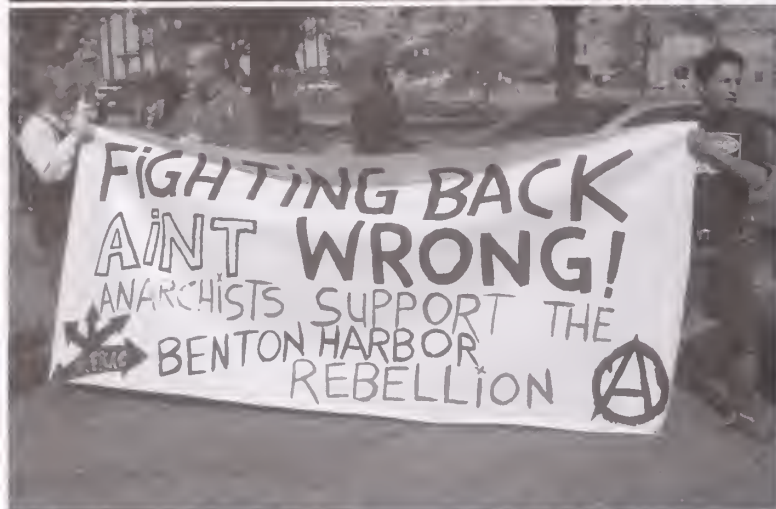
If you want to

In June 2003

two significant events happened in the United

States. One was a labor stoppage of a big city construction project in Seattle. The other involved urban insurrection, a small Michigan community in revolt. You didn't hear much about these events in most news sources, not even on left-oriented or activist-oriented web sites. Both events involved people of color and only people of color. These acts of resistance passed without much public support or outreach from white activist communities. The incidents are qualitatively different, but highlight the same principle of white supremacy and the lack of support (or even notice) given to communities of color from white communities. These two incidents are clear examples that white people, even working class white people, neglect the continuing struggles of people of color in America.

There was seldom mention of these two events on their respective city's Indymedia web site. During the riot in Benton Harbor, and until at least the next day, there was only one post on the Michigan web site. If we remember back to any riot or militant action that involved white people, internationally or in the United States, there was always a flurry of analysis praising the "insurrection," claiming that these isolated events were evidence that "the movement" was growing. There are dozens of armed conflicts between the Federal Government and Native Americans occurring right now on their land (like the struggle of the Shuswap Nation in British Columbia, Canada). But these issues are rarely (if ever) talked about in white activist circles. Most white activists tend to focus on International Trade Summits, and the international implications of them, instead of focusing on the local or domestic effects of Neo-Liberalism. An embarrassing yet ongoing example of this kind of ignorance is the pervasiveness of the "Black Bloc" debate in white circles. Certainly militant tactics and movement strategy are important to discuss, but when there are armed conflicts involving people of color, and the focus is on white kids who wear black and smash windows, the contrast is clear. White activists often inflate the importance of their own actions (or other white people's actions) even if they are strategically insignificant. These same white activists, who tirelessly analyze and write about exclusively white activism, ignore and thus make invisible the resistance of people of color — even when that resistance is in fact more important, more militant, more widespread, more community-oriented, and more rooted in concrete social struggle.



words Brady McGarry
 photos Michigan Independent Media Center
 (www.michigan.indymedia.org)

smash imperialism start in your own community!

Incident#1

Benton Harbor is a small town of 12,000 residents, 92 percent of whom are African American. It is also one of the poorest communities in Michigan and has a staggering 25 percent unemployment rate. Its white and upper class neighbor, the town of St. Joseph, has a miniscule two percent unemployment rate. Whirlpool and Bosch are the two largest employers in the area, maintaining a stranglehold on any community-driven economic development.

On June 18, 2003, a riot erupted in Benton Harbor after white police officers killed a black man. Terance Shurn, 28 years old, was allegedly speeding on a motorcycle, which was the officers' justification for the ensuing chase. The white policemen involved left their jurisdiction, the wealthier neighborhood of Benton Township, and continued their pursuit into Benton Harbor. Since the facts are disputed in this case, it is hard to tell what actually transpired. What is known for sure is that in their pursuit, the police officers did hit Terance's motorcycle from behind. Many residents of Benton Harbor say Terance was afraid to pull over, because he feared for his life. The chase finally ended with Terance losing control of his motorcycle, which ended his life. He crashed into a building and died on site.

The riot lasted two nights, prompting the Governor of Michigan to declare a State of Emergency, which allows the National Guard to be used if needed to maintain "law and order." During the riot, Benton Harbor residents looted businesses, burnt down several buildings, and even fired shots at riot police.

Reverend F. Russell Baker, pastor of Benton Harbor's First Congregational UCC, bluntly stated, "Riots have reasons." He pointed to abandoned and boarded-up housing, police brutality, adult illiteracy, and extreme economic segregation as the main causes of community unrest. "What we have witnessed in the recent riot was the rage, anger, and frustration of the victims of abuse in this poor African American community that goes far deeper than we may have ever imagined."

Incident #2

On June 3, 2003, a City of Seattle construction project was shut down to protest the lack of racial equity in the city's selection of construction contracts. The targeted project was road maintenance on Rainier Avenue South in a largely black neighborhood. When the construction crew that showed up was all white, it added insult to injury. President of the Seattle NAACP Carl Mack said, "We're seeing millions of dollars being awarded in contracts on a constant basis and now they get the audacity to bring one of those huge contracts down in the heart of our area [the south end of Seattle]. People are fed up and we needed to send a message."

Organizers of the event, the Black Contractors Coalition, highlighted that their struggle is for all African Americans, especially African American youth, to be employed in living wage jobs. The protest also exposed the inherent class component in this racial justice struggle. Of all Seattle construction contracts for 2003, which total about \$475 million, only \$400,000 goes to "minority" owned businesses. There was support given by other prominent African American community leaders, including numerous leaders from local Black Churches.

On the day of the protest, there was no mention of it on Seattle's Indymedia web site. Imagine if there had been a Wildcat strike involving a white dominated labor union. Envision workers shutting down a store or a factory for an entire day. It would be on every single labor-oriented email list, web site, newspaper, and magazine in existence — but the Black Contractors Coalition wasn't, because it was black workers. The entire spectrum of (white) labor-oriented groups were either unaware of or ignored the protest. Everyone from the hard-line dogmatic Marxist-Leninists all the way to the mainstream labor unions. Often, white groups will be silent to or worse even refuse support of groups led by people of color, because "that's a black issue" or "we are working on our issues." What these white groups don't understand is that unless sufficient unity can be achieved among white people and people of color, the

chances of cross-race solidarity are minimal, if non-existent. United class action across racial lines could help in the reconciliation between people of color and white people. As solidarity develops, the movement towards common goals could develop and escalate. When white workers fail to support the struggles of people of color, they are in fact siding with their own class enemy — by falling into the trappings of racism, and thus helping to perpetuate oppression for both parties respectively.

Our Job

The task at hand is to begin to link the broad anti-capitalist movement with grassroots organizing efforts focused on the local effects of capitalism. Neo-liberal economic policies are being implemented around the world, through institutions like the World Bank, IMF, and the WTO. But we have to remember that neo-liberalism isn't just something that happens around the world or in "Third World" countries. It also happens right here at home. It can be in the form of cutting social services, raising tuition, or privatizing public industries. These global institutions are guided by the United States, and the same policies we see being forced onto "developing countries" are being pushed onto working class people here in the United States. So why aren't more activists focusing on the local assault of neo-liberalism? Most white activists focus on justice struggles that are based outside of the United States — which is fine, but if that struggle is not linked inextricably to the struggle of poor people here, then an incredible opportunity is being missed. It might make sense to show people here how *they* are exploited by capitalism, and not just try to expose the injustices of U.S. International Imperialism. One idea would be to focus organizing efforts on people who are most clearly being exploited by capitalism, racism, and all other forms of institutional oppressions.

For the anti-capitalist movement to succeed, it's going to need more than guilt-ridden middle class "activists" or lifestyle white punk rockers to fundamentally change

**These global institutions are guided by the United States,
and the same policies we see being forced onto "developing countries"
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society. The anti-capitalist movement will need to strategize about who it is focusing its efforts on and probably abandon much of the generalized and idealized "educational work" that most activists focus on. If campaigns are conceived of only as education work, and not tied to community organizing, then true concessions and struggle will never be achieved. White people must take responsibility for the position in society we have been granted. That means acknowledging the job ahead, and committing ourselves to being allies with community organizations led by people of color. That means organizing in the white community against racism, that means pushing the issue in places where it has never been advanced. It's about creating humanistic relationships with people of color based on solidarity, community, and respect.

A Legacy

The struggle for self-determination of people of color has been an ongoing and unending fight since Columbus sailed the Ocean Blue — hell, it's as American as apple pie. The Civil Rights movement rocked the foundations of our society; by demanding that their

basic rights be recognized, people of color opened up new avenues of struggle and advanced the possibility for a truly equitable society. Historically, Seattle has been home to groundbreaking anti-racist labor organizing. Tyree Scott, an amazing man and organizer, is sadly a similar case to the events mentioned above. Tyree became a prominent organizer by bringing together electrical workers of color to demand equality in job accessibility — the same issue the Black Contractor's Coalition is currently engaging. He will never be fully recognized for his lifetime of struggle and he will never be on television. Tyree was at the forefront of labor organizing in Seattle in the late '60s, and at that time in America, not only were certain jobs off limits to people of color, but even most labor unions upheld racist values and excluded people of color from equal access to jobs.

Tyree Scott died June 19, 2003, one day after Terance Shum died in Benton Harbor. The date is ironic, yet fitting. It is symbolic of the continuing struggle of people of color which is completely foreign to white people. Across the board, in almost every imaginable arena of American society, people of color are treated worse than whites; they are per-

secuted and actively attacked. This is not a coincidence, but a direct result of institutional racism stemming from the very foundations of American society. It's not about individual cases of oppression, but across the board oppression. White people are therefore only dealing with part of the exploitation dealt out by capitalist society. This division is deeper than just ignorance or insensitivity on the part of white people; white people are *benefiting* from this separation. Most people of color know this and see it every day of their lives. Until this resentment can be healed, and historical injustices rectified, our collective struggle will not advance beyond infancy, and justice cannot be won. ★

Author's Note: This piece is written by a white person, for white people. The aim is to expose how white activists ignore and neglect the struggles of people of color, and thus only damage their own chances for liberation. The hope is that it helps develop ideas about how white people can try to be accountable to communities of color, and do their part in the struggle against colonialism... right here at home.



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then Nonviolence now Genocide

by Priya Lal

While George W. Bush sells

Americans a ubiquitous stream of careless denunciations of "evil" Muslims in the Middle East and the rest of the world is distracted by the United States' inept war-mongering, a deadly mixture of religious bigotry and ruthless political instrumentalism is brewing in another distant pocket of the world. This venomous brand of Hindu nationalism, a movement that relies on the all-purpose scapegoating of Muslim and other minorities' culture and even celebrates the literal extermination of Indian Muslims themselves, has been increasing in momentum in South Asia for over a decade now. While the hot, lethal winds of Hindu fundamentalism blow harder and faster across the subcontinent, the United States continues to celebrate India, the world's largest "democracy", as a stable base in a potentially turbulent region, and continues to ignore what is rapidly becoming a regime founded on the principles of faith-based fascism.

"The days of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence are gone." So spoke Praveen Togadia, head of India's Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), earlier this year, addressing a crowd on the one-year anniversary of the tragic immolation of the passenger train Sabarmati Express in the Western Indian city of Godhra. Togadia's

matter-of-fact renunciation of Gandhi's peaceful idealism echoes the aggressive, sinister, and vaguely apocalyptic rhetoric of India's increasingly powerful Hindu nationalist movement as a whole, and particularly reflects the escalation of communal tensions in the region over the past year.

The event that triggered India's recent downward spiral into the depths of religious violence was precisely the incident to which Togadia was alluding to — the burning of the Sabarmati Express in February of 2002. The train carriage carried a large contingent of the Hindu nationalist informal army (*kar-sevaks*) returning from a pilgrimage to Ayodhya. The carriage was set aflame in a Godhra railway station, killing some 58 people. Immediately, large-scale anti-Muslim pogroms erupted in the city of Godhra and throughout the larger state of Gujarat, fueled by official denunciations of the act of arson and the Muslims who had committed it. The carnage aboard the Sabarmati Express quickly paled in comparison to the virtual bloodbath that ensued. Within 72 hours, mobs of outraged Hindus took to the streets and slaughtered some 2000 Gujarati Muslims with knives, guns, clubs, even swords — and more fire.

A report issued by Human Rights Watch in the wake of the killings notes that "much of the violence was planned well in advance

of the Godhra attack and was carried out with state approval and orchestration" and that "state officials and the police were directly involved in the violence." Modi and his fellow members of the BJP (Bharati Janata Party, the Hindu nationalist, right-wing party currently leading India's parliamentary coalition) flatly denied their involvement in the pogroms. Rather, they chose to characterize the violence as a spontaneous people's movement, the latest manifestation of a sort of primordial hatred that has existed between Hindus and Muslims since time immemorial. Of course, all of this rhetoric came with the implicit assumption that Hindus were justified in hating Muslims — that Hindus were defending themselves against Muslim aggression and protecting their culture from pollution by India's immoral and evil Islamic elements.

This attitude, in short, sums up the platform of India's Hindu nationalist movement. The movement is not, in fact, new, and neither is the larger ideological struggle between defining the Indian nation in secular and religious terms. In the decades leading up to the independence of British India in 1947, the indigenous political leadership split into two camps — the secularists, whose philosophies were embodied in the kind of democratic, peaceful inclusiveness that Gandhi symbolized; and the proponents of a



state-sponsored violence in India is a far cry from Gandhi's nonviolent democracy of recent past.

divided subcontinent based on religious identity. The result was an awkward partition of the former colony into Muslim Pakistan and what was to be a predominantly Hindu India. The 1947 partition of the subcontinent was washed in blood — astronomical numbers of Hindus fleeing Pakistan and Muslims fleeing India were massacred by methods that bear too close resemblance to those employed by angry mobs in Gujarat last year.

Since the nightmares of Partition, religious tensions in India have occasionally broken out into isolated acts of violence, but a tenuous cease-fire has largely allowed Muslims (12 percent of the national population) and Hindus (81 percent of the population), as well as the country's many other smaller religious groups, to coexist in relative peace. That is, however, until the rise to power of the current government — led by BJP leaders — in the early 1990s. The BJP comprises merely the political arm of the larger network of organizations and individuals that make up the Sangh Parivar (Family of Societies), the vanguard of India's Hindu nationalist movement.

And now this. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of the recent events in Gujarat revealed itself in the aftermath of the violence. Not only did India's BJP Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, fail to condemn Modi and the Gujarati state government for their role in organizing the Muslim pogroms; not only was Modi not brought to any kind of justice in

front of a judge or jury — but Modi was *re-elected* this past December as State Minister in a BJP sweep of the Gujarati elections. During his campaign, Modi failed to offer even a single acknowledgement of regret or personal responsibility regarding the year's earlier violence. In fact, encouraged by other BJP leaders including Vajpayee and Advani, his rhetoric became increasingly inflammatory as he employed campaigning techniques that explicitly drew upon Muslim scapegoating and reactionary Hindu ethnocentrism.

The BJP's victory in Gujarat represents the party's most decisive electoral success for the party since its '90s rise to power at the center, but many voices in the Sangh Parivar view this win as merely the first step in a more ambitious process. Hard-liners such as Modi and Advani want to see the BJP adopt an openly communal (i.e. openly anti-Muslim) party line at the national level, and plan to start by staging Modi-style BJP sweeps of other state governments in upcoming elections. Our friend Praveen Togadia in the VHP has clearly confirmed such intentions, remarking that "the Gujarat election has showed the right direction to the BJP." All of this, of course, is taking place under the aegis of supposedly democratic, legitimately elected national leaders such as Prime Minister Vajpayee.

- 1923 - *Hindutva*, the seminal text of Hindu fascism, is written by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.
- 1925 - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) founded in the central Indian city of Nagpur by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar — its activities based around the notion of establishing a pure "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu country/ kingdom) on the subcontinent.
- 1939 - Second RSS head, "Guruji" Golwalkar, writes of Nazi Germany: "Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by."
- 1947 - Departure of British colonial regime, division of subcontinent into India and Pakistan, and widespread Hindu-Muslim violence and resettlement. The RSS' opinion of the independence movement, in which it had little involvement, is clear: "While efforts to hasten political independence were being pursued in various forms, there were few or no sustained efforts for restoration of the Hindu psyche to its pristine form. Indeed, it is the latter which should constitute the content or core of freedom."
- 1951 - Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS) formed as the political wing of the Hindutva movement, with Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee as its leader. Its founding is "blessed" by Guruji Golwalkar.
- 1975 - Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declares a state of emergency and begins a period of dictatorship and direct rule. The RSS, along with many other organizations, is banned. However, even Mrs. Gandhi is frightened by the group's growing power, claiming "even in places where the RSS was an unknown organization it has established a firm foothold."
- 1977 - Indira Gandhi's Congress Party is routed in national elections. The BJS forms part of a ruling coalition in the Central Government.
- 1980 - BJS morphs into the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).
- 1989 - The BJP claims that hundreds of years ago in the city of Ayodhya, a temple was destroyed at the supposed birthplace of the Hindu god Ram and replaced by a mosque. BJP and RSS leaders whip up communal tensions by demanding the mosque be destroyed and a temple built over it. Its popularity in state elections grows sharply.
- 1992-3 - Over 150,000 people, whipped into a frenzy by Hindutva leaders (including LK Advani, the current deputy Prime Minister of India), destroy the mosque at Ayodhya. Communal riots across north India follow; over 1,000 people die in Bombay, where the Hindu Nationalist Shiv Sena party is instrumental in organizing much of the violence.
- 1999 - BJP-led coalition forms a national government following Parliamentary elections.
- Feb 2002 - Massacre of over 2,000 people, mainly Muslims, in the state of Gujarat. National and international human rights groups note the organized nature of the violence, and condemn the BJP state and central governments for their complicity in the slaughter.
- Dec 2002 - Having swept Gujarat's state elections following the massacre, BJP head Venkaiah Naidu promises to "replicate the Gujarat experience everywhere."

compiled by Priya Lal and Pranjal Tiwari

As an Indian-American, I don't know who to be more ashamed of or angry with — the power-grabbing Indian politicians who commit unspeakable acts of violence in the name of my family's religion; or American leaders who ignore the obvious parroting of democratic norms and the disgusting sanctioning of ethnic cleansing by these officials. Indeed, in the context of the post September 11 U.S. bombing of Afghanistan and the current War on Terror, Bush has chosen to embrace Vajpayee's government as an ideological ally of sorts — painting India as a democratic paragon in opposition to the primitive theocracies of Muslim “fundamentalist” countries. In attempting to corral “fundamentalism” (also known as the appropriation of religious philosophy or rhetoric for power-seeking political purposes) into the same exclusive arena as Islam, Bush is both grossly distorting the public understanding of anti-democratic political movements that employ faith as a tool, as well as committing the unpardonable sin of eliding over equally insidious demonstrations of violent “fundamentalism” by non-Muslims, in countries such as India.

In reality, Hindu fundamentalism, Muslim fundamentalism in the Middle East, Zionist fundamentalism in Israel, and right-wing Christian Fundamentalism in our own country are all sides of the same coin. Once we choose to recognize the BJP's circus-like antics conducted in the ostensible name of a “pure” Hinduism as what they really constitute, it becomes clear that Hindu nationalism, when stripped to its core, is merely a case of naked political instrumentalism. Unfortunately, some romantic, false ideal of the Hindu religion has become just another rallying point for Machiavellian officials like Narendra Modi — a tactic to distract the Indian public from the government's true failings to address the chronic problems of poverty and corruption plaguing the country.

But there is a particular urgency to the Indian case. Hindu-Muslim violence in the region, whether during Partition, in Kashmir, or more recently in Godhra, has always been characterized by what I'll call the “reprisal effect” — one act of violence begets another act of revenge begets another, and so on. As access to more lethal weapons increases, as religious hatred becomes a more blatant element of official national rhetoric, and as the latter continues to deafen domestic dissent about massacres such as last year's Gujarat killings, the “reprisal effect” gradually approaches all-out warfare. Gandhi's famous proclamation that “an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind” has never rung truer than now, as we witness the dangerous effects of individuals like Togadia blatantly placing the concept of revenge at the center of their demagoguery.

As Americans, we need to look beyond the simplistic Manichean rhetoric our leaders shell out regarding the domestic politics of our national enemies and allies, and remember that fascism and “fundamentalism” are not so far away from what our government celebrates as their alternatives. And we can do more. The Sangh Parivar has effectively globalized its appalling movement by mobilizing many of the funds necessary to fuel communal activities in India from international networks of rich Hindus in the diaspora — from the U.S. and Canada to Mauritius and Malaysia. Against this globalization of hate we can work towards a globalization of awareness of the atrocities committed in the name of Hindu nationalism, and thus enrich the efforts of domestic Indian dissenters to overcome such hateful political instrumentalism. For, in fact, our acceptance of the gross distortions of “democracy” that we are witnessing in India today threatens the futures of more meaningful, socially just visions of the world for the entire rest of the world. And it is these collective visions of possible alternatives, better futures — and our dedication to working for them — that will ultimately sustain the fight against faith-based bigotry in India. ★

**Thinking Past Terror:
Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left**
Susan Buck-Morss
Verso
2003



'How to write for a global public that does not yet exist that cannot yet reach each other across the excluding boundaries of language, beneath the power distortions of global media; against the muffling exclusions of poverty and the disparities in information?'

With this, Susan Buck-Morss outlines the project facing critical theory in a global economy. *Thinking Past Terror* begins a discussion of how to address these challenges and create an inventory of tools available to build a global public sphere.

Buck-Morss's diagnosis of the difficulties critical theory faces in confronting Islam (the most potent intellectual tradition outside of the West) is tellingly stated. Islam faces a hegemonic symbolic order in Western liberal capitalism. This hegemony ('global immanence') excludes all other dialogue by forcing it to the margins. The marginalization of Islam began at the dawn of East-West interaction, but changed significantly with the rise of the Western Age of Reason. From the beginning of liberal modernity's engagement, the Muslim experience of modernity has been, unlike the West with its sense of technological potency, one of submission. To illustrate this, Buck-Morss explores one experience of intellectual colonization: *Kemalism*.

Kemalism, named after the father of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), was an experiment in forced modernization. Kemal isolated Islam politically and culturally and indulged in adventures in cultural colonialism like the creation of a Western-styled national opera repertoire. This very marginalization, however, created within the ubiquitous language of Islam a home for '...articulations of political resistance to the post-colonial order.' This, internal 'otherness' of Islam continued through *Kemalism*, and pan-Arab nationalism through to secular modern states as Egypt and Syria as well as the totalitarian monarchies of today's Persian Gulf.

Post-*Kemalist* modernisms, however, have been surpassed as a political and intellectual force by Islamism. Since Iran's revolution in 1979, a new sense of 'freedom' has arisen within Islam. This sense of freedom has less to do with a Western conception of liberty and than with Western influence. 'What is involved here is not freedom, but dignity. And, in a political context, dignity matters...(d)ignity is freedom ... from Western hegemony,' according to Buck-Morss.

From this stalemate follows. How, then do we transcend what Buck-Morss describes 'common paranoid vision of violence'? Buck-Morss prescribes critical theory or and would have us '...make use of critical tools of thought wherever we find them.' Her primary tactical choices are utilizing critical theory with Adorno's negative dialectics informed by the 'otherness' of post-*Kemalist*, anti-Western Islamic thought. Hisham Sharabi, under whom Buck-Morss studied, posited that Islamic scholars should use these tools in forming their critiques.' From such critiques, global scholars can examine the libertine materialism of the West without the totalizing tendency present in both Market and Muslim fundamentalisms. Further, Sharabi and Buck-Morss foresee a time when Islamist scholars could liberalize, through critical theory, fundamentalist Islamic societies. As Martin Luther King showed the ways in which America was unamerican, as Ghandi proved British civilization in the Raj uncivilized, as negative dialectics diagnosed the unmooring of the Age of Reason from reason, so too can a political Islam recast Jihad's struggle.

However, one can hear a faint echo in Buck-Morss's observation that '(m)odernization has been for the Muslim world a task of cultural submission.' Where Buck-Morss exemplifies this with *Kemalism*, one wonders if Buck-Morss's critical theory doesn't have an element that colonizes and recasts Islamic intellectual life again, this time not as a *Kemalist* submissive experience of modernity, but rather a submission to the post-modern.

This disquieting echo recurs. Buck-Morss's idea of a 'global left' sometimes seems uncomfortably close to a less brutal capitalism. For example, Buck-Morss wishes to reclaim '...a broken tradition of politics...broken on the hope that our technological and scientific knowledge can actually make the world better — and not just for the wealthy few.' Further, she maintains, troublingly, that global capitalism 'is the very foundation of a global public sphere.' Buck-Morss wants to use the technological infrastructure of mercenary liberal capitalism against its worst tendencies. A laudable goal, but one fraught with peril. Killing capitalism with kindness seems an unlikely strategy for success.

Susan Buck-Morss's outline of a project building an internationally open public sphere is compelling and suggestive, and her creative uses of visual imagery are powerful. She never overstates her conclusions, and a sense of modesty pervades her call to 'think globally' in critical theory. While some element of Buck-Morss's admittedly nascent method are unsettling, *Thinking Past Theory* is an insightful and important new addition to critical theory for our century.

-Keith McCrea

Carrying on the Crusade

The Christian Right, Islam, and US Policy in the Middle East

The Reverend Jerry Vines of Jacksonville, Florida, is a man who never quite made it out of the Middle Ages. In spirit, at least, he remains somewhere in the mists of the 11th Century, carrying on the Crusade against the heathen hordes of Islam. For Vines and many other Christian conservatives in America, the only "road map to peace" in the Middle East is a biblical one that does not include a Palestinian state on so much as a square inch of land the Bible holds to be Israel's.

Speaking in June at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Vines created a stir when he argued that "Islam is not just as good as Christianity" and referred to Islam's founding prophet Muhammed as "a demon-possessed pedophile." While on that particular occasion Vines was speaking against religious plurality in the United States, like-minded members of the Christian right in America have come increasingly to extend such arguments to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and peace process in the Middle East.

Among religious conservatives are a growing number of Christian Zionist groups, generally fundamentalist and staunchly pro-Israel, often expressing views that even many Israelis consider extreme. Their activities include aggressive lobbying in Washington, where they are an important part of a broader pro-Israel lobby that has thus far persuaded Congress to send over 5.5 billion dollars a year to the Israeli government. Christian Zionists base their pro-Israeli politics on biblical doctrine which holds Israel as part of the fulfillment of prophecy preceding the Second Coming of Christ and end of time. Including the occupied West Bank in the biblical "Judea and Samaria," they are opposed to Israel giving up any of the territories it occupies for a future Palestinian state, and are the far-right's chief opponents of the "road map to peace" in the Middle East sponsored by the Bush Administration. Indeed, any reading of Christian Zionist material makes even President Bush seem positively liberal.

As one Christian Zionist website bluntly declares: "NO to a Palestinian state.... Not now ... Not ever."

In addition to its lobbying efforts in Washington, Christian Zionist activities also include direct financial aid to Israel, in particular through donor programs that advance Jewish resettlement in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Among these are "Adopt-a-Settlement" programs such as that of the Jerusalem Prayer Team, an evangelical Christian Zionist organization whose stated mission is "to guard, defend and protect the Jewish people, and the Eretz Yisrael until Israel is secure, and until the redeemer comes to Zion." With two million members and a board of directors that includes Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, the Jerusalem Prayer Team has invested millions of dollars in Israel since the group's founding in the mid-1990s, and is strongly opposed to any Middle East peace process that includes a Palestinian state. "We do not support the road map," said chairman Michael Evans in *Forward* magazine, "The Bible is our road map."

A major player in Washington for the religious right is the Christian Coalition, whose October 2002 "Road to Victory" conference in the capital included support for Israel as a major theme. The Christian Coalition's attitude toward the Israeli/Palestinian peace effort is effectively summed up in comments by its president, Roberta

words Mark C. Eades illustration Tim Beatty

Cooms: "Now or in the future, a Palestinian state would sound the death knell of Israel."

Among the Christian Coalition's strongest supporters in Washington — and a speaker at its 2002 conference — is US House of Representatives majority leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas). In recent statements to *The New York Times* that echo those of Roberta Cooms, DeLay said, "I can't imagine in the very near future that a Palestinian state could ever happen.... I can't imagine this president supporting a state of terrorists, a sovereign state of terrorists.... You'd have to change almost an entire generation's culture." In a visit to Israel shortly following these statements, DeLay called himself "an Israeli at heart," and told Israeli legislators that the burden for achieving peace in the Middle East rested with the Palestinians: "Israel is not the problem.... Israel is the solution."

At the core of Christian Zionism is a fundamentalist reading of the biblical promise to God's "chosen people" for an Israel stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, and an apocalyptic end-of-time theology whose ultimate "road map" is the one that leads to Armageddon. Frequently coupled with this, however, is an often caustically anti-Muslim attitude. In an NBC interview two months after the September 11 attacks, for example, the Reverend Franklin Graham called Islam "a very evil and wicked religion." In a statement the next year for which he later apologized, Jerry Falwell told "60 Minutes" that "Muhammed was a terrorist.... He was a violent man, a man of war."

Anti-Muslim sentiments such as these among Christians have a history almost as long as that of Islam itself. Within little more than a century of Islam's founding in 622 A.D., the Christian writer John of Damascus referred to the new religion as "heresy" and to Muhammed himself as a "false prophet." Beginning at the close of the 11th Century, Christian Crusaders heeded the call from Rome to march on the Holy Land and vanquish the "enemies of God," frequently massacring Jews as well as Muslims in their successive marches on Jerusalem. When the devoutly Catholic Italian author Dante Alighieri wrote the *Inferno* in the 14th Century, among those he placed in Hell were Muhammed and his son-in-law Ali, whose punishment by cleaving is among the most gruesome in the entire book (not to mention one that, were he the literary type, Jerry Vines would doubtless find deeply inspiring). Throughout the centuries to come, as the forces of Christendom battled those of Islam throughout the Mediterranean area, the negative image of Muslims as heathen savages became an increasingly deeply-ingrained part of the European Christian worldview.

While people of all faiths in regions of the Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe under Muslim rule enjoyed considerable religious tolerance, the same cannot be

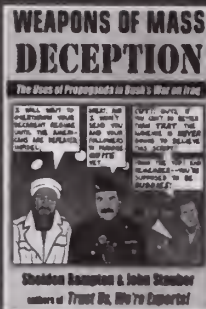
said of those same regions under Christian rule. In Spain, for example, Christian decrees against Jews were reversed under Moorish rule beginning in the 8th Century, and all religious groups were allowed full participation in what would grow to become one of the great cultures of the Middle Ages. Once Spain was returned to Christian rule in the late 15th Century, however, all such religious tolerance ceased; Jews and Muslims remaining in Spain were forced under the brutal Spanish Inquisition to convert to Christianity.

Christian Zionism and its links with a Jewish state in the Holy Land had its earliest beginnings in the 17th century, when a British member of Parliament first promoted Jewish settlement in Palestine in 1621, a call that was later echoed by personages as prominent as Oliver Cromwell. The movement in America began in the 19th Century with William Blackstone and his popular fundamentalist book, "Jesus Is Coming." In 1891, Blackstone led the first US lobbying effort for a Jewish state. Back in England, Lord Arthur Balfour, an evangelical raised on biblical fundamentalism, authored the famous 1917 Balfour Declaration, which helped set the stage for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Such efforts served the interests of British and French colonial plans for control over the Middle East — as well as anti-Semitic wishes for a place somewhere else for Jews — and culminated in the founding of Israel in 1948.

Today's close alliance between the Israeli right and Christian conservatives in America began when the Likud party first came to power in 1977, and then-prime minister Menachem Begin — known for once publicly referring to Arabs as "beasts walking on two legs" — found common ground with such leaders in the Christian right as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Like the Christian Zionists, Likud referred to the occupied West Bank as "Judea and Samaria," and justified the confiscation of Palestinian lands for Israeli settlements on religious grounds. In the years since, Christian Zionists in America have provided millions of dollars in financial support to Israel, including support for the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories that are in direct violation of international law.

Galvanized in the post-9/11 era both by the "War on Terror" and by the very real possibility of a Palestinian state, the Crusaders of today are once again marching on Jerusalem. While President Bush enjoyed the support of the religious conservatives in the 2000 election, even his rather soft pressure on Israel to comply with the "road map" is already costing him some of that support. Whether the administration can resist pressure from the right to return to a more "orthodox" position of unconditional support for a biblical Israel remains to be seen. ★

Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq
By Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber
Penguin, 2003



For all their talk of "weapons of mass destruction," President Bush's administration knew full well that it didn't really have much to worry about in terms of Saddam Hussein's arsenal.

What it did have to worry about was a more formidable enemy — public opinion — both in the U.S. and in Arab countries across the world.

The newly released book *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq*, by PR Watch editors and writers Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, copiously documents how Bush, Donald Rumsfeld and their cohorts knew Iraq did not pose a valid nuclear or terrorist threat, yet used these excuses to carry out a long-in-the-works plan to invade the country and gain control of its oil resources.

This objective was carried out handily, if messily, by U.S. troops this spring, and declared a "victory" despite the widespread destruction and loss of Iraqi (and U.S.) lives.

But as the book documents, the other war, the propaganda war, has had mixed results. Against U.S. citizens, for the most part, the administration has won the war "for hearts and minds," convincing much of the population that the war on Iraq was moral and necessary. But in the Arab world, the millions of dollars spent on corporate-style public relations campaigns have failed to win support for the war on Iraq and "the American way."

Among other things the book describes the debacle of the rise and fall of Charlotte Beers as the U.S.'s PR guru for the invasion of Iraq. She was hired as the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and launched into campaigns including a series of ads showing idyllic lives being led by Muslims in the U.S., called "Shared Values," and "Next Chapter," a supposedly hip, MTV-style T.V. program aimed at youth and broadcast by satellite into Iran. Beers had a budget of over half a billion dollars to launch these campaigns around the world and to conduct extensive polls and surveys to gauge Arab opinion of the U.S. But, the book notes, these polls were meant only as a measure of the ad campaign's success rather than a genuine effort to hear the opinions of Arabs.

These same polls showed Beers's efforts to be a miserable failure, and she eventually stepped down "for health reasons" amidst a cloud of disgrace. While many industry insiders apparently tried to pin the failure of the campaign on Beers's own lack of skill, the reality is that her initiatives failed to win hearts and minds because of the same overwhelming arrogance that has long plagued foreign policy and created anti-American sentiment around the globe. That is, Beers's campaigns focused on fluffy superficial aspects of life for Muslims in the U.S. or celebrations of U.S. culture while completely ignoring the issues that are deeply embedded in the psyches of Arabs around the world — the history of U.S. intervention in the Middle East, the situation in Palestine and the exploitation of other countries' resources by the U.S.

"Rather than changing the way we actually relate to the people of the Middle East," the book says, "they still dream of fixing their image through some new marketing campaign dreamed up in Hollywood or Madison Avenue."

-Kari Lydersen

... one nation under gods



a progressive argument for prayer in school

Doubtless, the title of this article is causing some of you to scratch your heads. Prayer in school is usually thought of as a conservative cause, an attempt to impose (an often fundamentalist version of) Christianity on a population that is increasingly diverse. Progressives have usually opposed it on the grounds of defending pluralism, freedom of conscience, and the separation of church and state. I support all these things, yet I think that there is an important place for prayer — and other forms of religious practice — in school. Where I deviate from the conservative approach to prayer in school is that I don't think it should simply be the Christian Lord's Prayer that is recited. I believe that children should be exposed to the full range of religious beliefs (Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Paganism, etc.) and practices (not just prayer, but sitting meditation, chanting, ritual, etc.) and have a chance to explore them all — and that this is something that should be publicly promoted.

In an age of increasing religious diversity, it is important to encourage not just tolerance but respect for a wide range of faiths. The best way to do that is to not only explain different religions to people, but give them a taste of what it's like to practice them. If more people were familiar with Muslim beliefs and practices — if they knew that the primary meaning of "jihad" is not holy war, but the struggle against evil within oneself, if they had some taste of Muslim prayer — would we have seen such widespread scapegoating of Muslims after 9-11? The one place we can be sure, as a society, of reaching a significant chunk of the population is through the public school system. Thus, it seems like a good place to start in the quest of cultivating greater respect for all religions.

Many narrow-minded parents, fundamentalists of both the religious and the atheist variety, will howl in outrage at this idea. Such people tend to see any attempt to expose their children to a different conception of the cosmos than their own as a diabolical plot to convert their children. The point is not conversion, however, but exploration, to give children a taste of the different spiritual pathways that are out there and to find the one that best suits them while learning respect for others. This approach rests on an understanding of religion that will likely give fundamentalists more cause to howl — that the sacred (call it God, the Goddess, the Tao, Brahman, Nirvana or whatever) is beyond words and beyond conceptions, probably beyond full human understanding. This being so, no religion should be taken as the literal truth. All the major ethically oriented religions are guides to help us explore the sacred, and all should be understood (in Buddhist theologian Rita Gross' words) as poetic, working metaphors that can never capture the fullness of the sacred.¹ As we say in Zen Buddhism, you should not confuse the moon (the sacred) with the finger pointing at the moon (religious teachings).

If children are exposed to a wide range of religions instead of having one (or a rejection of all religions) imposed on them by their parents, they will have a far easier time finding one that suits them when they grow up. Too many parents

words **Matthew Williams** illustration **Todd Julie**

harm their children by imposing a narrow conception of the world on them. Sometimes, their children grow up embracing this extremely rigid belief system, other times they are so burned that they reject all religion. It should be a public responsibility to counter this sort of spiritual abuse as well as we can. With the opportunity to explore the many paths to the sacred out there, children (and the adults they become) are far more likely to find one that resonates with them and allows them to grow into their fullest potential.

Some will object that my proposal violates the separation of church and state and that, precisely because we live in a society that (at least in principle, if often not in practice) is pluralist, religion should be an entirely private matter, certainly not something for public schools to deal with. The original principle behind separation of church and state, however, was that the state should not set up one religion as official above all others — not that religion should be banished from public life altogether. Indeed, the idea that religion can be reduced to a set of private beliefs displays a fundamental misunderstanding of religion. I think few people would call someone religious who believed in God, but never attended church, never prayed, and never acted on their beliefs in any way. Religion is also about leading an ethical life, cultivating virtue, and creating community — in other words, it is a way of life, not just an abstract belief system.

The centrality of ethics and community to religion is what makes religion something essentially public, for these concerns imply that you are not really religious unless you are willing to try to make the world around you a better place. Sometimes this has taken unpleasant forms — i.e. the varieties of religious fundamentalism with which we are too familiar and attract the lion's share of media coverage. But public religious action has often been positive as well — liberation theology in Latin America, the civil rights movement, the sanctuary movement (in which churches in the US sheltered Central American refugees fleeing the Reagan administration's proxy wars), the nonviolent independence movement in British-occupied India (which included both Hindu and Muslim currents). Unlike fundamentalists, these progressive movements have been open to those of other (or no) religions, seeing their own faith as one path to the sacred, not as the absolute truth.

A close examination of these movements will show how misguided are the claims, made by some dogmatically atheist social justice activists, that the churches were just convenient organizations to mobilize within, but that religion had no important role other than that. Religious beliefs were essential in helping activists understand the justice

of what they were doing, their religious communities helped them build solidarity, and their religious practices connected them to something greater that helped them stand up against the oppression they faced. There were times, for instance, when civil rights demonstrators were able to withstand brutal police attacks because they were "intoxicated" by the Holy Spirit. In my own life as an activist, meditation has many times helped me overcome burnout and despair.

Of more concern to me than the argument that religion has no place in public life is the argument that mixing government and religion could result in the co-optation of religion by the state, keeping it from challenging the powers-that-be.² Certainly, the social justice aspect of religion would often be omitted from a school curriculum. The fact that US history, as usually taught in school, is butchered so that the record of both oppression and popular resistance is often omitted is no argument for not teaching history in schools though. And sometimes students get history teachers who do raise issues of social justice. Similarly, that social justice would usually be omitted from the way religion is taught is not an argument for not teaching religion. Students can still benefit from it in other ways — and there will be some teachers who will raise issues of social justice.

As I envision a program of pluralist religious exploration in school, it would be an entire class period that students attend a few times a week. Teachers would be people well versed in the various religious traditions, able to explain the basics of them, pointing to where they overlap and where they diverge.³ They would also be able to lead students through the basic practices, such as prayer or meditation, of the religion. They should be trained as counselors as well, for sometimes religious practice can call up heavy things (repressed grief, anger, etc.) out of the depths of people's minds (though this is unlikely to happen with a first, tentative exploration of a particular practice). In order to ensure the independence of religious communities from the government, these teachers probably ought to be lay people. Such programs should, however, have ties to local churches, synagogues, mosques, sanghas, covens, ashrams, etc. so that clergy or teachers of these religions could come in and make presentations as well, giving the depth of explanation that only someone who has dedicated his or her life to a particular path can provide. If these ties are built strictly at the local level and a proper balance is struck, it seems unlikely that the government could use such classes to co-opt religion.

More than likely, there will be other problems in trying to implement a pluralist, progressive approach to prayer in school. There would be much resistance from both

fundamentalist conservatives and atheist liberals. There is also certainly the possibility for abuse. Programs of religious exploration would have to be clearly structured so that any child who truly does not want to explore a particular tradition (or any at all) does not have to. In predominantly fundamentalist districts, it could be used as an opportunity to promote a narrow interpretation of Christianity and mock other religions. Nor would pluralist prayer in school be a cure-all for intolerance even if properly taught, for there would still be many close-minded adults, and parents often have more control of their children's lives than schools. Any such program would have to be part of a wider social and cultural transformation, emphasizing tolerance over bigotry, personal exploration and growth over consumerism, and community over egoism and alienation. That will involve a massive uphill battle against all the forces of capitalism — but a program of pluralist prayer in school provides one concrete step among many that should be taken in this quest. ★

Footnotes

¹ "Theologian" is Gross's preferred term, even though Buddhism has no conception of God resembling that found in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). On religion as a working metaphor, see pages 16-17 of *Soaring and Settling*.

² This is why many are suspicious of the Bush administration's "faith-based" initiatives program — it seems to be less about creating innovative approaches to social problems than a ploy to co-opt and depoliticize traditionally activist churches in the African-American community.

³ It would not even be inappropriate to spend some time on atheism and agnosticism and why some people reject religion altogether. The point, after all, is exploration, not indoctrination.

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My Face — My Story

a photo essay by Lina Pallotta



The project "My face — My story" came out from my desire to understand Muslim women, after the 9/11 attack, and attempt to see their reality beyond the rhetoric and prejudices that have been attached to their representation. My aim is to show the present lack of reciprocal cultural understanding between Afghan women and the American society they live in. The individuals in my photographs in fact while connected to the country they came from and shaped by its culture and religion, are also aware of, and profoundly affected by the American culture. On the other end there is little or no appreciation for their culture by Americans. By trying to adjust this imbalance through pictures, I hope that a reciprocal appreciation will emerge. Ultimately, by increasing awareness and bringing to light important mutual interests, I hope to create an environment that will allow collaboration and sharing of ideas. I deeply believe that through images we can find an emotional language that can help us overcome the differences and prejudices linked to our culture and increase the consciousness of the social and cultural dynamics of the world at large.

photos continued next page



Arise Oh Women

translated from a song sung by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

Take up your flags
 As a flood of wrath and hatred
 We must go to war
 Breaking the chains of slavery
 Kindle your shining struggle
 Do not delay
 Call on the land of blood
 In this era
 Arise Oh women as a flood
 Against the enemies
 The flag of our freedom
 With democracy as its emblem
 Is shining like a burning sun
 In this burnt land
 Let us, Oh sister and mother

Arise
 To heal the injured heart of the motherland
 And uproot the enemy.
 Hurry,
 You must know who the enemy is.
 If there is conscience and honor
 It is unworthy to live in silence.
 Nobody comes to help us
 Unless we all arise.
 The sapling of Women's struggle
 Will surely be watered.
 In the name of Afghan dignity
 Arise Oh women
 As a rock of faith
 As Meena.



Goddess Bless!

"Confessions" of a Pagan Parent



by Juleigh Howard Hobson

"Mom, that man just said 'God bless you.'" My daughter, Mallory, whispered to me, when she sneezed at our natural food co-op.

"Well, he's pobubbly a hiss-gen," four-year-old Andrew lisped, considering the offending personage with little kids' looks of pity.

"Yeah, probably," agreed my daughter.

And that was that. "Probably a Christian." We could dismiss the exclusively patriarchal monotheistic blessing. What did Christians know about deities?

Another day, another moment, another incident — there are times when I think the kids get a kick out of it, really. Nothing boosts your self esteem as knowing more than a grown up does. And let's face it; not many grown ups are in the know about the history of humanity. The fact that both Goddess and God (indeed, goddess and gods) were well represented in the distant times before the origins of patriarchal religions is barely acknowledged, even in the face of archeological evidence. But, acknowledgement is growing. Archeological evidence grows and more and more women professors are re-examining the early conclusions of what was a formerly male only area of science.

What were once sloughed off as merely "fertility figures" (ostensibly made to create male offspring!) are now being reinterpreted. They are, one and all, symbols of humanity's earliest attempt to put a face and figure to the creator. And she is lovely.

My children understand this. They were conceived within the framework of Goddess spirituality. As a member of a Goddess circle, it was to her that I prayed for a baby.

That was the easiest part of having non-patriarchal faith — being viewed as just another one of those women who wore a funky "goddess" necklace and had weird feminist views on religion. I didn't think it was so easy at the time. It infuriated me that the world still had coins that stated "in GOD we trust" and that people still had little problem with the idea of one male creator, no matter how enlightened they attempted to be. And it drove me out of my mind to be summarily dismissed as "one of those" fringe/waeko people. However, looking back, it was much much easier than it is now.

Now that I have children, it has become an infinitely more complex dance. For example, take the "God bless you" incident. At face value, it is nothing. A human being reacted with

societal appropriate words to a sneeze made by my child. By normal standards, my daughter ought to have said "thank you," and we would have continued on our merry way.

However, my kids have to do a balancing act. Even at the tender ages of two, four, and six, they understand the duality of what occurred. A person was being polite. A person assumed they were patriarchally-leaning monotheists. Their initial reaction told them to correct this person: "You mean, 'God and Goddess bless you,' don't you?". Their upbringing told them to merely give a friendly nod and discuss the situation with me later. Which they did.

Still, it bugs me. Should I have let the kids correct the man? No, says my inner rational self. It would not be worth the aggravation right now. It would take my three on a continual uphill battle. They are far too young.

Like Earth Firsters facing off to Georgia Pacific, or conscientious objectors back in WWI, there is such mighty passion, power, tradition, and historical "fact" embedded in the psyche of 98 percent of the world we would be trying to connect with, we wouldn't stand a chance of a fair hearing. Not even in a one on one dialogue in a grocery store.

Heck, we can't even sway our own families. When my first baby arrived, the relations from California to New York (lifetime Catholics for the most part) requested the christening date. When they were told we would not be christening any of our babies, the reactions filtered in. "Gee, I didn't know that Dave was Jewish" topped the list, with silence as a close second. To this day, my mother keeps telling me that we ought to "christen the children... just in case."

Sigh.

It is hard to co-exist with a very dominant culture as a backdrop.

There was a time when we attempted to co-exist with some pentacostal homeschoolers (we are pagan unschoolers; it's a vital distinction) and attend gymnastics classes during the day at "homeschooler discount rates." I should have known better when I saw all the mothers with long braids, long skirts, and numerous offspring, but I didn't. I figured that most of the attendees were Christians, but if it didn't bother me then our non-Christian selves wouldn't bother them.

And it didn't, I supposed, for a long time. They chatted with me. Their youngest children played with my youngest son as we waited for the older kids to do an hour of tumbling and balancing. It was okay. We talked of homebirths (I had had them). We talked of children's phases. We talked of classic literature. (I should have paid more attention. One

of them told me the Bible was a great source of classic thought. I figured she meant the Bible along with everything else humanity had produced around that time.)

Then one day, my daughter wore her navy blue "Gryffindor" t-shirt to class. Gryffindor is the house team in Hogwarts School that Harry Potter belongs to. Yes. *That* Harry Potter. My six-year-old is being read the books in chapters. It sparks her imagination. It draws out conversations. It is thrilling, moral, magical, and just plain good. So, we got her the t-shirt. It was the most tasteful one we could find. And she just adored it — wore it every day that first week, even to gymnastics.

There was my daughter, holding my hand, laughing, waiting for class to begin, wearing her new shirt. Those mothers took one look at her, then at me, and turned and talked to each other, excluding me. As the hour winded on, I noticed they took their youngsters' hands and led them away from my toddler. The gymnastics coach was not perky that day and barely acknowledged that my daughter was in class. It wasn't quite overt...no...not quite overt, but my daughter is six years old. She noticed.

(We have since gone over to a much more secular gymnastics program, albeit one without any other homeschoolers in it.)

As a mother, it pained me a great deal at the time. But as time passes, I re-

alize it was an inevitable. We live in a time dominated by the huge patriarchal religions. Like mega-corporations, they are always there, hovering in the background. Where we live, in a post war suburb of Northern California, we are not in the midst of any significant "other" faiths. There are no closeby mosques, no temples. Not that we consider Islam or Buddhism as alternatives to our own faith, it is just that, without them, nothing counters the huge influence of western patriarchal faith that washes up and over everything... pieces of which seep into our world, unbeckoned, a few times a year.

There are the Hanukkah and Christmas cards that come in the mail every December, when we are getting ready for Yule. There are the Christian carols piped over everything in the stores from November 1 onwards. There are the crèches on the lawns. There are the menorahs on the windowsills. Driedels, mangers, holy stars...the symbols of the Judeo-Christian based civilization that we live in surround us. And it is irritating when you stop and consider that the winter solstice was always a pagan affair. The tree, the father winter (Santa), the Yule logs, the wreaths... even the timing — it has nothing whatsoever to do with any faith but ours. Yet, ours is the

submerged one, the forgotten one, as people send cards to our kids that read, "Jesus is the reason for the season."

It gets old; truly it does.

The kids take it well. Like I said, sometimes they seem to really relish having arcane knowledge about the real roots of such things as Easter (Eoster), Yule, and Sam Hain (known to most people as Halloween).

Perhaps it is because our faith is based on such an old way — the original mother (and father — there is always a father, here and "there" — we don't accept mono-gendered-theism any more than we accept plain old monotheism) concept, that means we can be more expansive with variations in interpretation. All the current ways and theologies have come down from where we are, all descended from the original goddess worship of the earliest civilizations.

Sometimes, it's a strange place to be. We see the goddess and her son (archetypal of so much: parent/child, female/male, yin/yang, and the whole birth/death/rebirth cycle) in Isis and Osiris, in Parvati and Ganesha, in Mary and Jesus. (Just try explaining this to a devout member of any other faith. "Yes, yes, we worship your Mary and her son — no, no, we are pagan; we realize that you call the goddess "Mary" just like some people call koalas "bears" — it's a common misconception, but now you know...") Like I said, it's a strange place.)

So, is it fair of us to "put" our three kids in this position, to give them this knowledge of something that predates history (as modern humanity accounts it), when we know it is a path rarely walked anymore?

In a word, yes. Yes. A thousand times, yes. We have removed the blinders. We have opened the shutters. We have gone outside the box of typical society. Our children are growing without fear of any "evil" (a conceit invented to explain the non-faithful and "sin" (another conceit)). Our children are growing without the constrictions of any dogma. (Misogynistic, power-swollen, hypocritical intolerance is especially nice to see absent from their lives.) Our children are growing up seeing the world and all permutations within it. From Astarte to Odin, they can take stock of the whole picture, rather than being only permitted to view a corner, neatly labeled, and tightly hemmed in through tradition, fear, or dogma.

And I know that, as they go through their lives, when people say things like "God bless you," when people don't accept things we do or say, my kids will be able to see it for what it is worth (what ever it is worth) and be able to take it or leave it...with a nod to compassion and tolerance and a hefty dose of wisdom thrown in. They are free — mind, body, and spirit — to do so.

Thank Goddess. ☆

There was a time when we attempted to co-exist with some pentacostal homeschoolers ... I should have known better when I saw all the mothers with long braids, long skirts, and numerous offspring, but I didn't.

Sex & Guts 4

Gene Gregorits
and Lydia Lunch
www.sexandgutsmagazine.com



Gene Gregorits, the creator of *Sex & Guts*, claims that "the world needs a truly outrageous arts and entertainment magazine," and that's really the best description for *Sex & Guts 4*. It's bloody, violent, sick, perverted, anarchistic, and right on target. Gregorits and legendary underground icon Lydia Lunch talk with all sorts of figures such as Maragaret Cho, Jello Biafra, Lloyd Kaufman, Asia Argento, Jim Goad, Nico B, Lech Kowalski, and John Waters. *Sex & Guts* is definitely taking a different approach than most boring old "interview" magazines by trying to have lengthy and intelligent conversations with the profiled artists instead. Gregorits interviewing documentarian Larry Wessel is hilarious as it slowly becomes a loud discussion on underground filmmaking which gets them almost kicked out of a Damon's Steakhouse. Anyone even remotely interested in independent filmmaking, music, or performance art would enjoy this book, and there's enough articles in it that even your Aunt Mildred might find something she liked in it (you know if S/M is her thing).

-Jan Adcock

Swing Stories:

First Person Tales of Sexual Adventure

Jan & Bridget Abrams
Greenery Press, 2002
www.greenerypress.com



Jan and Bridget Abrams, have written this book in order to help inform those who are considering entering this lifestyle.

The authors' exposure to this unique culture makes this publication credible and coherent — after all, who could be better experts than those who have immersed themselves in their subject?

The first erotic chronicle is told by the authors, in which they recount (in great detail) their first visit to a swing club — explaining the hesitations they had and the scenes they witnessed in the club. The variety of stories that follow give the reader a wide-lense-view of this lifestyle, and clarify any concerns a potential swinger may have. Although some of the tales are upsetting (some even frightening), this is a crucial part of the book as it presents the darker side of this lifestyle. Each story told throughout each chapter is sexually explicit, with erotic scenes described in full detail, but it remains tasteful, making this volume an accessible, comfortable read.

Swing Stories is a useful guide for anyone seriously considering entering this lifestyle. The writing is unpretentious and the book reads fluidly. The scenarios that are presented here will definitely help break stereotypes and will certainly give a broad outlook for those who are curious as to what they can expect if they do decide to immerse themselves in the swing scene. Whether it will actually convince anyone in the end to make a decision is entirely up to the reader. As put by Jan and Bridget Adams, "For every yin, there is a yang. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. What's waiting for you, on the other side, after you decide to take the plunge into the swinging lifestyle? Will the memories remain as being the most beautiful experience you think you may ever have? Sorry, there just isn't any ready answer to this question."
-Liz Worth

Sleeping Sickness



words Julia Serano photo Mercedes Romero

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. That's how it begins. My nights are spent composing insomniac open letters to you, two hour long monologues that end in exhaustion. Sometimes, in the middle of my day, I'll remember that I fell asleep before ending my previous night's prayer with an proper Amen, and I'll wonder whether my channel to you is still open, my every word an invocation, the sounds of my Atari games, little league practice, and eighth grade history class becoming the annoying background noise of heaven.

Maybe forgetting to say Amen makes my life one long prayer. If so, you were there the day when I tucked my penis tightly between my legs to see what I'd look like without it. When I wrapped bedroom curtains around my body like a prom dress and turned tattered shoe-laces into necklaces and bracelets. And you were there later that same night when I began another prayer within a prayer to once again beg for your forgiveness.

Wanting to be a girl never came up in CCD or Sunday mass and it's not addressed in the Ten Commandments. But from everything the nuns and priests taught me about you, I know that you do not approve. And when I turn to your holy words to look for anything that might shed some light onto whatever this is that I'm going through, I find myself returning to the story. The one about Abraham and how you commanded him to sacrifice his son to you, stopping the blade only seconds before he actually went through with it. Forgive me father, for I can't help but think that that was a fucked up thing to do.

Perhaps I'm like Abraham and this is just another one of your tests. Maybe you put girl thoughts into the heads of 12-year-old boys just to see how they'll react. Maybe I'm an experiment and you're up in heaven looking down on me, taking notes as I tear myself apart in self-hatred, tossing and turning in bed as if acting out my inevitable burning in hell.

At first, my sins made me even more devout. I'd lie awake each night clutching the glow in the dark rosary beads my grandmother gave me, repeating the words I once heard her say: "Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe."

I want to believe, but more and more it just feels like you're torturing me. I'm doing the best I can to plug up all of the holes in this disintegrating dam, as my brain bleeds rivers of bad thoughts that pour out of my mouth and hands like wounds that won't clot. I can't understand why you won't help when I've asked you over and over again to please either turn me into a girl or make these thoughts stop.

The nuns say that you answer all prayers; it's just that sometimes the answer is no. Well, I am tired of praying to a god who only offers me "thou shalt not's." I'm tired from lack of sleep, from keeping secrets that burn so much they hollow me out. I am tired of hurting so much that sometimes I pray that I don't wake up. So, forgive me Father for I have sinned. I have dared to share all of myself with you, forcing you to watch one long sacrilegious prayer within a prayer within a prayer within a prayer like a serpent swallowing its own soul, like a serpent swallowing itself whole. And maybe tonight I'll finally be cured of this sleeping sickness, because the last few years of living in absolute shame and unbelievable pain has made me fearless enough to finally say Amen. ☆

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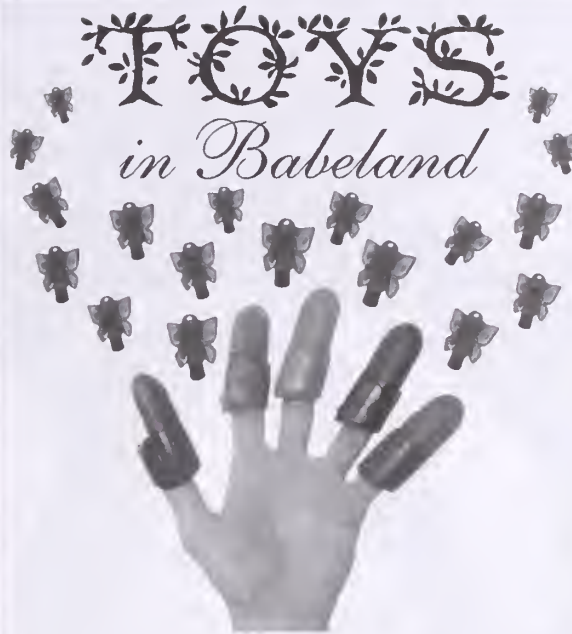
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-Jason Kucsma, Clamor Magozine



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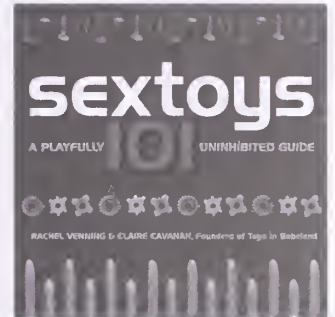
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God's Chosen Heathens

words Brian James Schill
illustrations jt yost

If a single year were to be designated counterculture year zero, that which tidily defined for everyone an official "before" and "after," it would be 1968. From Vietnam and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy to the Democratic National Convention riots in Chicago and landslide election of Richard Nixon, it must have felt like the whole nation had gone mad. However, in spite of, or maybe as a result of, the ostensible chaos, something far more calculated was well underway in the realm of American music culture by 1968, politics aside. Indeed, a veritable Cultural Revolution was in progress.

Beyond analyses of the civil rights and anti-war movements, away from discussion of hippies, yuppies, Black Panthers, and communists, apart even from the untimely deaths of rock icons Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin in 1970, we find the progenitors of two music-based groups still with us today that also have origins in the late sixties counterculture: punks and Christian rockers. And with the exception of the "positive punk" epitomized by MxPx, Good Charlotte, and other subtly Christian punks, never the twain shall meet.

And for good reason. Although the line is blurring, even today it is obvious that the two genres are complete opposites. Whereas today's contemporary Christian music (CCM) is largely understood by Christian musicians, their fans, and a secular audience as evangelical, chaste, promoting the love of self and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, generally pro-humanity, and otherwise morally exceeding the rest of our nation's "depraved" pop music, punk is viewed as, and often is/was, quite the reverse. For most punk bands, their fans, and the rest of mainstream America, "punk" (and its many sub-factions) is synonymous with rebellion, profane tastelessness, some degree of odious misanthropy, anarchy (or at the very least accelerated societal entropy), and often atheism/secularism.

But despite the obvious distinctions and the historical enmity between these groups, they share an astonishing number of traits and points of view, and have found themselves in the middle of very similar battles over the "meaning" of their movements, "selling out" to mainstream American culture, and their image as cultural outsiders or separatists. And both are, without question, hugely under-represented in the context of sixties cultural/countercultural analyses. Both retain similar origins, have followed nearly the same path to contemporary

mainstream acceptance, and can be seen as ultimately evolving into a single genre epitomized in the Christian punk and hard rock of gold and platinum selling artists MxPx, Creed, and many others, making their continued distance from each other especially curious.

A Bit of History

In April 1968, the Psychedelic Stooges (soon just the Stooges), the MC5 (Motor City Five, later blamed for essentially starting the DNC riot in Chicago), and the Mothers of Invention played a well-attended concert at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit, Michigan. The lead singer for the Stooges, a short, wiry Doors fan known as Iggy, was already notorious for his audience-baiting and performing in such non-traditional, non-sexy, and quintessentially non-rock star attire as white ankle-length nightgowns, aluminum foil afros, and peanut butter. His backing band, which had been playing their instruments for less than a year, was outstandingly loud, as were the rest of the bands playing that night. Indeed, with a less-than-subtle cry of "Kick out the jams, motherfuckers!" the MC5, managed by White Panther Party leader John Sinclair, likewise tore through their dazzling, frenetic set of blues-based acid rock; the Mothers of Invention simply stuck to taunting the United States military.

While not the first of its kind, this show, and especially its now legendary line-up of bands, signified the emergence of what had been brewing in the American underground since approximately the middle sixties and what was soon to come in full force: an amped-up, bizarre garage rock that initially defied classification. Whether the Doors and Mothers of Invention in Los Angeles, the Stooges and MC5 in Detroit, the Velvet Underground and the Fugs in New York, or countless lesser-known acts, a new variety of loud, raunchy, often acutely political, and blatantly offensive rock 'n' roll, soon dubbed "punk rock" by fans and critics, had emerged from coast to coast. Featuring prurient, profanity-laden songs about homosexuality, heroin addiction, violent revolution, and dozens of other heretofore taboo subjects in America, sung often by amateur "musicians" who were at times carelessly indifferent if not deliberately abusive toward their audience, this new music pushed the decency envelope farther than any style had dared, rock or otherwise. And it stood in stark contrast to the more widespread "peace and love" movement.

**Christian rock and punk rock
have forever been at odds.
But their hatred for each other may be
more self-directed than they realize.**

Simultaneously, as this “proto-punk” was emerging across the nation, the fathers (and mothers) of contemporary Christian music were slowly making their move into popular culture. Also in April 1968, the Bay Area band People released the single “I Love You (But The Words Won’t Come)” on Capitol Records. People’s frontman was a little-known born-again Christian songwriter named Larry Norman. “I Love You,” soon the fourteenth most requested song in the country, was to be included on the band’s forthcoming debut album, tentatively titled by Norman *We Need A Whole Lot More of Jesus and a Lot Less Rock and Roll*. Unsurprisingly, Capitol intervened and released the album simply as *I Love You*. Norman left the band the day the album was released.

Born into a religious Texas family in 1947, Larry Norman actually spent his formative years in Southern California. By his twentieth birthday he had taken an active role in a nascent “Jesus movement,” a nondenominational grass roots Christian revival of sorts consisting mostly of young people, especially former hippies, which also claimed San Francisco as its home. The Jesus movement was comprised of “Jesus People” or “Jesus Freaks” who were often, put simply, erstwhile hippies who had become disillusioned with their counterculture — the peace movement, “flower power,” and LSD. Characteristics of the Jesus movement included a very in-your-face style of evangelism, the belief that one must accept Jesus Christ as a personal savior to avoid spending eternity in hell, heavy apocalypticism or the expectation that the End Times were near, and, like the hippies, anti-materialism and criticism of mainstream American culture, including America’s involvement in Vietnam. After fermenting in the underground for a few years, the Jesus movement climaxed around 1971 when it was discovered by the mainstream press and covered everywhere from *Time* and *Newsweek* to *Rolling Stone* and multiple television news shows. Billy Graham even expressed a close affinity to the movement and a renewed hope for America’s religious future in his book *The Jesus Generation* (published in 1971). But as the hippie movement waned, so did the number of active Jesus People; by 1975 the Jesus movement was essentially over.

Notwithstanding, in fewer than ten years the Jesus movement had more than made its mark on American culture. And as sociologist Robert Ellwood observes in *One Way: The Jesus Movement and its Meaning* (1973), “The great vehicle of the Jesus movement is music. It is largely music that has made the movement a part of pop culture, and it is the Jesus movement as pop culture that distinguishes it from what is going on in the churches.” Add Christian music historians (and authors of *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*) Jay Howard and John Streck, “[This] tentative incorporation of new sounds into the gospel canon would give way to the formulation of a new genre of rock music: Jesus Rock....” And it is this Jesus Rock or “Jesus Music,” a rock-based style of pop music whose lyrics espoused a pro-Christian message, which would eventually come to be known as today’s contemporary Christian music.

The One’s Like us Will Never Belong.

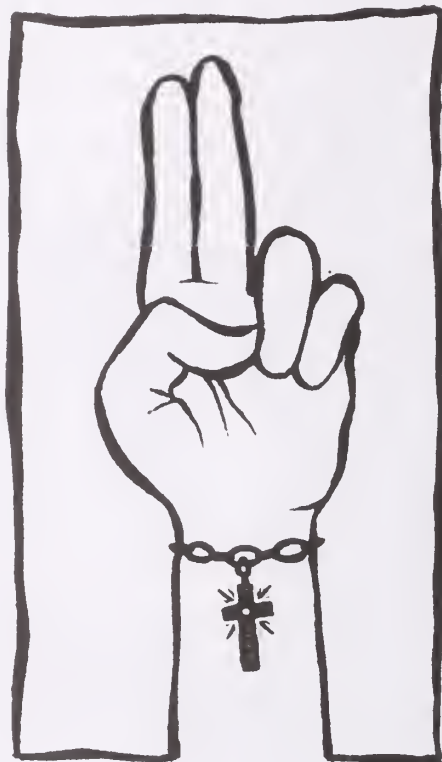
In spite of their opposing ideologies, the principal characteristic that linked Jesus Rock and proto-punk — and today links CCM and punk

— was their emphasis on “otherness.” While the first punks were doing their best to be “anti-rock stars” and act as outrageous and alienating as possible on stage and off (the counterculture taken to its extreme, offense for offense’s sake), Jesus rockers, and those within the Jesus movement as a whole, also defined themselves in opposition to their surrounding secular society. Both were truly striving for differentiation from their parent culture.

In the world of Christian music, this practice typified the “Christ against culture” idea described by H. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* (1951). For Christians who support this view, the physical world is irredeemably lost, the land of Satan. And as the secular and the Christian are forever in conflict, Christians must separate themselves from the world and turn only to Jesus — accepting one world meant the full rejection of the other. It was this worldview, continue Howard and Streck, which was taken by the original Jesus movement musicians and comprises the bulk of today’s contemporary Christian musicians.

Regarding the opposite end of the spectrum, in 1979 Dick Hebdige went into great detail describing the punk subculture and what he termed punks’ comparable “voluntarily assumed exile” from mainstream culture in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. As Hebdige and Howard and Streck note, both punk and CCM have for years gone to great lengths to show American culture just how different from the mainstream they are — how they don’t “fit” into the dominant culture. Equally, both have been criticized for this stance.

But the groups’ insistence on division is easy to understand; both have seen more than their fair share of criticism, by nature of their politics, peculiarity, or visibility, from the mainstream media. One result of a relentless assault by critics, media, and music fans, say Howard and Streck, can be the creation of a closer-knit subculture whose affiliates define themselves by their opposition to the dominant culture. “A common sense of persecution can be, and in the case of CCM [or punk] has been, the catalyst that both creates a sense of community and provides the determination to continue the struggle.”



It’s the End of the World as We Know It.

The connection of CCM and a belief in the end of the world is obvious and clear. The Jesus movement’s emphasis on the impending Second Coming of Christ, “the Rapture,” and/or apocalypticism is well documented: “Next to the simple Gospel, perhaps the most prominent idea of the Jesus People is that we are living in the last days,” explains Ronald Enroth, et al. in *The Jesus People: Old Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius*. “Without exception, the Jesus People ... believe that these are the last days and that Christ will return in their lifetimes.”

Christian lyrics past and present support this statement; the rapture, the end of the world, and the Biblical Book of Revelation all feature prominently in both CCM lyrics and song titles. Sings Larry Norman on “I Wish We’d All Been Ready” from the album *Upon This Rock* (1969):

*A man and wife sleep in bed.
She hears a noise and turns her head, he’s gone.*

*I wish we'd all been ready.
Two men walking up a hill.
One disappears and one's left standing still.
I wish we'd all been ready.
There's no time to change your mind.
The Son has come and you've been left behind.*

Rapture aside, the anti-abortion, creationist CCM quartet Bride stick to simple apocalyptic imagery in their music (and even provide Biblical citations or "proof-texts" for their songs in their albums' liner notes). Take their song "End of the World" from their 1998 album *Oddities*:

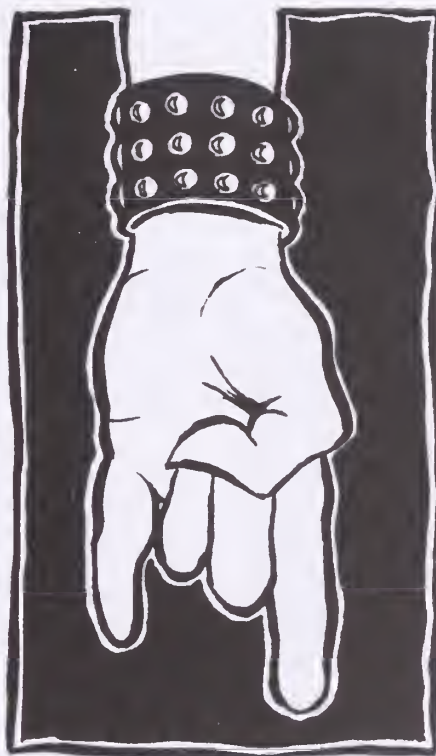
*Where do you think you're going now?
(II Timothy 3:7, Daniel 2:4)
Spinning on this little ball (Revelation 21:1)
If this footstool is your heaven (Isaiah 66:1, Acts 7:49)
Better hope this rock don't fall.
If I told you it was the end of the world
Would you change your ways?
(Matthew 4:14, I John 4:3)*

Far from anecdotal, these are but a few of the hundreds of Christian rock songs that for more than three decades have dealt with Jesus' anticipated return, millenarianism, apocalypticism, and other Jesus movement-inspired subject matter.

Likewise, as Hebdig, Daniel Wojcik, and others have observed, punk, too, has long shown strong apocalyptic expectations. Explains Wojcik in *The End of the World as We Know It*, "Apocalyptic ideas were not necessarily the defining characteristic of punk worldview; however, a sense of imminent doom was a dominant theme, consistently expressed in song lyrics, fanzines, newsletters, posters, manifestoes, beliefs, and behavior." The Sex Pistols' screams of "No future for you" notwithstanding, take for instance this small sampling of songs expressing concern over potential nuclear holocaust, the pointlessness of life, and/or simple pessimism that punks have been singing for three decades:

*I clambered over mounds and mounds of polystyrene
Foam then fell into a swimming pool filled with fairy snow
And watched the world turn day-glo
You know you know the world turned day-glo
You know I wrenched the nylon curtains back as far as they would go
Then peered through perspex window panes at the acrylic road
"The Day the World Turned Day-Glo" by X-Ray Spcx, 1978)*

*Better look out
You've got to move quick
They're coming to get you
Uncle Sam
This is it
This is the final war! (x5)
And there will be no one left
"Final War" by Agnostic Front, 1983*



Even by their very nature, it seems, punk bands are self-destructive and ephemeral. This is evidenced by the truncated careers of far too many bands, whose time together was cut short due to suicide, substance abuse, or inter-band tension/backbiting: the Germs, Stooges, Nirvana, New York Dolls, Velvet Underground, Sex Pistols, and more. Similarly, punk band names often lend themselves to this ubiquitous negativity and a belief in the futility of life: Addicts, Anti-Heroes, Conflict, Crass, The Damned, Dead Boys, Exploited, Liars, Sic Fucks, Social Suicide, Subhumans, Suicidal Tendencies, etc.

As Wojcik admits, although the Sex Pistols and their progeny in the late-1970s and 1980s are generally recognized as the epitome of punk negationism, the "no future" attitude, and nuclear expectation, the "pessimistic and apocalyptic roots of punk music and aesthetics can be traced to earlier influences of musicians such as Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground, Iggy Pop, Patti Smith, Richard Hell...."

Punk apocalypticism may also owe its feelings about the future, or the lack thereof, to its connection with reggae/dub music. Reggae, which to this day maintains strong relations to the millenarian Rastafarian religion, and punk have seen each other as allies since the 1970s when the United Kingdom experienced a surge in West Indian immigrants. "At one level, the punks openly acknowledged the significance of contact and exchange [with reggae culture], and on occasion even elevated the cultural connection into a political commitment," continues Hebdig. "Some punks wore Ethiopian colours and the Rasta rhetoric began to work its way into the repertoires of some punk groups." Evidence of this connection is presented in the music of the Clash, the Slits, and early Fugazi.

Cha-Ching

Due largely to their underground/outsider status and aforementioned philosophies, the punk and Christian rock communities have forever been mired in very similar internal debates regarding both authenticity — just which band is truly "punk" or authentically Christian — and how to respond to artists who achieve mainstream or "crossover" success. Magazines and web sites endlessly gossip about which artists have "sold out"

or compromised their punk/Christian ideals: acts that do achieve some sort of mainstream success quickly find themselves at the center of disputes over the very purpose and future of their respective subcultures. One of the better examples of the political baggage that accompanies the label "punk" is Green Day.

In 1989, Billie Joe Armstrong and longtime friend Mike Dirnt formed Green Day in Berkeley, California. Following the release of two hugely successful and influential records on independent label Lookout! Records, Green Day signed to Reprise Records, a Warner Bros. subsidiary. In 1994, Green Day released their major-label debut *Dookie*, which (thanks to the success of singles "Longview," "Basket Case," and "When I Come Around") went on to sell upwards of 12 million copies worldwide. Shortly thereafter, the walls of 924 Gilman Street, a legendary all-ages punk rock venue in Berkeley where Green Day honed their chops, read "Billie Joe Must Die." As a direct result of what was perceived as "selling out," the onetime darlings of underground punk rock had been all but forcibly cast out of the greater punk subculture, which felt both betrayed and let down by the band. Responds Dirnt to the charges:

continued next page

The fact was we got to a point that we were so big that tons of people were showing up at punk-rock clubs, and some clubs were even getting shut down because too many were showing up. We had to make a decision: either break-up or remove ourselves from that element. And I'll be damned if I was going to flip (expletive) burgers. I do what I do best. Selling out is compromising your musical intention and I don't even know how to do that. (Las Vegas Sun, July 20, 2001)

Nevertheless, Green Day's reputation, while soaring in popular culture, was forever tainted in their underground for the decision to go mainstream. And while they have since played dates at their old 924 Gilman stomping ground, Green Day will likely never recover their punk "cred."

No less brutal in its treatment of artists accused of selling out or compromising their faith for material success is the contemporary Christian music community. The best examples of Christian artists criticized as inauthentic or, more extreme, having embraced the secular world of Satan are Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith.

A veritable staple within gospel music (her 1982 album *Age to Age* was the first gospel record to go platinum), Amy Grant found mainstream success when her song "Baby, Baby" from the album *Heart in Motion* (Myrrh/A&M, 1991) reached number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart. While many Christians and Christian musicians saw Grant's popularity as the affirmation they were looking

for, others saw her success as anathema. "Turn back. You can still be saved if you renounce what you've done" one fan purportedly told Grant in a letter that accompanied a delivery of flowers.

Similarly, veteran Christian musician Michael W. Smith's *Go West Young Man* (Reunion Records, 1990) garnered him unexpected fame when the album's single "Place in This World" reached number six on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Unlike Grant, however, Smith was fully unapologetic about the triumph of his music, maintaining that it was his wish to be able to reach out to teenagers with his music and message. This claim was, say Howard and Streck, received with skepticism by many in the CCM community.

As far as the business of punk and CCM are concerned, both worlds have also dealt with similar issues regarding the buying/selling of their "art" and the ethics of those businesses (record labels or stores) that market their music.

Unfortunately, the full detailed semblance of the punk and CCM subcultures within American rock 'n' roll is beyond the scope of this article. Briefly, however, both also maintain underground touring networks, frequently (if not usually) are connected to independent record labels for the production and distribution of their music, and (mirroring mainstream rock culture) consist of mostly middle class, white men and women. Again, in spite of their distaste for one another, each are much closer (theology aside) than either know or might ever wish to admit. It's almost a shame they cannot treat each other as the close cousins they are; they might learn much about the other and themselves. ☆

REVIEWS SOUND BITES AND SPOTLIGHT

At any given time, the Clamor office is teeming with amazing music that I'll never get to listen to. We post these items online and wait for reviewers to claim the items for review (see www.clamormagazine.org/freestuff.html). Unfortunately, people tend to lean toward stuff that they are familiar with, leaving a whole pile of gems that will never get the recognition they deserve. Granted, the leftover pile is often full of garbage that wouldn't even get some pocket change if we sold it to the used CD store, but I live for the one CD that I throw in that just blows me away. And that's why I find myself putting CD after CD into the player with my mind open and my fingers crossed. Last month, the new *Offcell* CDEP from **Pinback** took me for a ride that I didn't expect to go on. The EP is the latest in the band's discography that goes back to 1999, and from what I've heard, it's a departure from their more ethereal, understated approach on previous releases. *Offcell* is wonderfully catchy and complex at the same time and will have you singing along (wondering what the lyrics mean) and drawing flattering comparisons to members' previous efforts **Three Mile Pilot** and **Heavy Vegetable**.

Also in the pile of underappreciated new releases are **Clann Zü's** *Rua* and **WarsawPack's** *Stocks and Bombs* from G-7 Welcoming Committee Records. Both bands are the future of G-7 as far as I'm concerned. It's no secret that the label is getting away from the punky-rocky projects and moving toward more diverse artists, and **Clann Zü's** brilliantly dark epic masterpieces mix folk, punk, electronic and classical influences to produce something that might be compared, albeit inadequately, to what might happen when a **Dead Can Dance** and **Godspeed You! Black Emperor** collaboration happens. **WarsawPack** has a formula that mixes hardcore, rock, funk and hip hop with acerbic political insight, and they stick to it on their latest with fortitude (see the January/February 2003 issue of *Clamor* for an interview we did with them).

Clann Zü is from Australia, and so is another overlooked gem in the review box — **Curseovdialect**. Their newest *Lost in the Real Sky* on Mush records is literally a revolution in hip hop mixing psychedelic sounds collages with beats that are impossible to dismiss. Comparisons to prog rock are NOT an insult in this case. I hear **Beastie Boys** and **Gong** when I listen to **Curseovdialect**, but I honestly hear something new every time I play it.

-Jason Kucsma

future sounds from the heartland: Action Driver

The sounds brought to you by **Action Driver** are all at once, angry, hilarious, electro-MAGNETIC, and horny. These are not roadblocks for the listener, but a lethal and addictive combination. **Action Driver** may be an indie-label based out of boring ol' Toledo, Ohio, but the orgiastic sounds are anything but boring.

Between **the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea**, or **BTDATDBS** for those who lack the hour and a half to actually say the group name, are a four piece out of Columbus, Ohio, and one of the first acts signed by **Action Driver**. Their debut LP, *North and South of Nothing* is a musical journey that at some points reaches dizzying heights and haunting lows. **BTDATDBS's** sound is a mix of psychedelia and open space, leaving the listener to fill in the gaps. Apparently, there is some sort of story line, but my dumb ass couldn't quite figure it out: something to do with expansion and growing. But it doesn't really matter, this six-song, 65 minute monster is a spacey, and yes, eclectic batch of musical wonderment.

Out of Richmond, Virginia are **The Set Up**, a heavy handed and heavy minded group that are extremely, extremely pissed off. They sing and play with a vengeance: "It's just so bitter/More like bittersweet/I won't start this pins and needles friendship again," John sings on the opener of *Tuned to Drop Dead*, "From Detroit To The West End." Although *Tuned* only has seven tracks, the mad-as-shit energy makes the album seem twice as long.

Thunderbirds Are Now! hail from the Detroit, and just like many of their peers from the Motor City, are a fucking wild bunch. Just check out some of the titles from *Doctor*, *Lawyer*, *Indian Chief*: "KGB phone sexxx," "Kitchen ORGY," "Who wants to fight" and "Babygirl, I got ten kids (let's not make it eleven)." Singer/guitarist Ryan Allen sounds like Jack White hopped up on amphetamines, and the rest of the band plays at such a frenzied and panicked pace, you lose your breath and your buzz while listening. But who really cares, it's fun and it's rock n' roll, dammit.

Probably the highlight of **Action Driver's** new releases so far though has got to be **Bowling Green, Ohio's** **Stylex** — with their new full-length *Auto Focus*. It's electro-pop, it's breezy, it's (swear to God) like a hyper-active soundtrack to every Nintendo game ever invented, but most importantly, at least for people around the Northwest Ohio area, it's local. The beeps, whistles and drones that so effortlessly sprouts out of **Stylex** sounds a bit like if **Radiohead** loosened up a bit and dropped some ecstasy. With **Brian Kantorski** leading the way with bass and synth, **Stylex** is Devo-revisted, only a little funkier and a little cockier.

Action Driver is the new face of music around the Midwest and beyond.
-Joe Bugbe





Who's Stealing From Whom?

If downloading music from the internet is destroying the music industry (as corporate execs would have you believe), why aren't independent record labels whining about fans sharing their music with each other?

Casey Boland goes online to find out.

Damn. This Cannibal Ox song won't download. I try to reconnect — the progress bar stays dead. I managed to snag the Jeff Buckley song and the Boards of Canada, but the sound quality is muddy, like both songs were recorded in a tin box at the bottom of a swamp. I sit back and revel in this, my first foray into the world of downloading MP3s. I do not realize at the time that what I am actually doing is file sharing. To me, it's just downloading free music.

Despite the storm of criticism raining down upon file sharing, few people have chosen to stop. If anything, they've battened down the hatches and prepared for the (admittedly uphill) legal battles. One organization in particular that vehemently espouses (in quite lofty language) the merits of free file sharing is the Electronic Frontier Foundation. They have met legal challenges with a stable of lawyers and a web site filled to the brim with advice and anecdotes. As the site proclaims, the EFF is "defending freedom in the digital world."

The EFF is a non-profit group consisting of "passionate people ... working to protect your digital rights." Reading their mission statement can be a heady experience: "Just as patriots fought for liberty and freedom, we fight measures that threaten basic human rights. Only the dominion we defend is the vast wealth of digital information, innovation and technology that resides online." Above all, the EFF conveys the libertarian, almost anarchist spirit of serious file sharers

(and it should be noted that all forms of entertainment media exist on the Internet — from CDs to DVDs to computer applications). They proclaim: "Imagine a world where technology can empower us all to share knowledge, ideas, thoughts, humor, music, words and art with friends, strangers and future generations." The enemy? "Governments and corporate interests are trying to prevent us from communicating freely through new technologies."

Even before its foolhardy attacks on file sharing folks, the music industry aroused contempt and scorn. How could it be otherwise for an industry that pays its CEOs more than its multi-million album selling clients? And then one must consider the bland selection this industry regularly submits to the music buying public. Though some major artists saw sizable profits in 2002 (Eminem for one), most needed to tighten their belts and pinch their purses. This could also be due in no small part to the mega-mergers that have left only five major music corporations to stalk the mainstream music landscape (AOL Time Warner, Universal, BMG, EMI and Sony). They boast about 75 percent of worldwide music sales. Major labels fall under the auspices of giant media empires, whose sole purpose is not necessarily releasing quality music. As Charles C. Mann put it in *Wired Magazine*, "All five major labels are either losing money or barely in the black, and the industry's decline is turning into a plunge."

While the major label music industry appears to waver on its last legs, independent music thrives. Labels such as Dischord (Fugazi), Righteous Babe (Ani DiFranco), Kill Rock Stars (Sleater-Kinney) and Saddle Creek (Bright Eyes, Cursive) have persisted and persevered. Though not much statistical information is available on the matter, it is clear from the press showered upon their releases that the indies enjoy ever-increasing popularity. Rare is a new issue of Spin or Rolling Stone that does not feature coverage of artists writing and performing comfortably in the world of independent music.

Clearly then, independent labels are not just a minor threat anymore. As always, they serve as fertile ground for music which is often too daring to appear on the roster of a major. From content to business strategy, the indies pose a potent alternative to the bloated behemoths that are corporate-owned music label empires.

But the question we need to answer is whether file sharing harms independent labels? Though it is far from clear whether file sharing negatively impacts major labels, there is no lack of controversy on the issue, yet not much has been said on the effects to indies. Let us hypothetically say that file sharing hinders record sales for major labels. Does it then follow that independent labels also feel the pinch?

Most agree that it is almost impossible to discern any truly quantifiable impact, but

most also believe that major labels suffer more than independent ones. Dirk Hemsath, of Lumberjack Distribution, who distributes the releases for scores of independent labels, states, "I believe that one of the main reasons majors are in the shitter right now (among a hundred other reasons) is because albums at the top end of the sales spectrum ... have a much larger potential for people to just go and download the couple of singles they like." Similar to other independents, Dirk feels much of what separates an indie from a major is the devotion of the audience to their bands and labels. He says, "At that level, people don't care about owning the record. I also believe in many cases, kids on our level understand that it is important to support bands by buying the album."

Darren Walters, co-owner of Jade Tree Records concurs. "It's obviously much more harmful for major corporations who churn out shit on a regular basis and whose fan bases may realize the songs are disposable and may then in turn, decide 'Why should I purchase this record when I can get it for free!'" He concedes that, "I'm much more apt to try and find a major label song for free than an indie one."

Jeff of Ninja Tune Records echoes similar sentiments of indie loyalty. He says, "I think we suffer less as an indie. I think people are far more willing to spend money on our releases knowing that we're putting out consistently interesting stuff and that money is being used to advance this." But he sees possible negative ramifications for indies as well. "There's a trickle-down effect where that's really damaging the budgets at record stores and it's affecting my ability to get large ship outs on our titles." He continues, "I also think it's devaluing the

concept of people paying for music and there are people that now think it's their constitutional right to be able to download music for free. That gets a bit annoying as, let's face it, no matter what way you paint it, or whether you think it's a good or a bad idea, it is, at the end of the day, by dictionary definition, stealing."

"To say it's all negative would be a farce, but so too would it be to say that it's all positive," claims Andy Low, owner and operator of Robotic Empire Records. He argues that given the smaller stature of independent labels, they suffer in regards to sales. A major label, with a pressing of an album in the hundreds of thousands to millions, can absorb minimal sales lost to downloaded albums (minimal sales numbering in the hundreds to thousands). An indie might be thoroughly hammered by such a loss. Low explains, "It seems logical that the indie labels are hit harder by those who download the album instead of buying it, considering indies usually sell their albums in the thousands or tens of thousands if they're somewhat large, whereas majors are selling their albums in the hundred thousands, usually with much higher profit margins." He concludes, "The ratio of people who download full major label albums instead of buying them vs. the indies, I'd imagine it's higher, but they still probably have less to lose."

A delineation can be made between downloading a song or two and an entire album. Most labels, indie or major, would likely not object to people downloading a song or two. But an entire album? Low states, "It definitely hits home when I search on Kazaa a week after a CD I've released has come out, only to see it already on there in its entirety." Most proponents of file sharing contend that if a user really wants the album, they will purchase it — even if they already downloaded it. Low, sounding the optimistic view of any label owner, says, "All you can really do is hope that most of the people out there will actually try to pursue the music for its packaging and lyrics instead of just burning CD-Rs of it for themselves and their friends."

It should be noted that MP3s do not necessarily possess the same quality of the original album recording. In my own feeble attempt to download music, some songs sounded fine and others were nearly inaudible due to inferior quality.



Jade Tree Records's **Strike Anywhere** (top) and **Paint It Black** (right) count on fan loyalty and the fact that their label doesn't crank out forgettable garbage records after record.
 www.jadetree.com



Saddle Creek's Azure Ray <www.saddle-creek.com>

Brent Eyestone of Magic Bullet Records and guitarist for Forensics explains, "You know as well as I do that as musicians, we spend quite a bit of effort and time and money and heart in going into special studios and working with certain engineers, etc., in order to craft something that sounds how we want it, or as close as possible. We leave the studio with something intended for CDs and vinyl and feel comfortable in these formats to render our music properly ... What happens is that once somebody tries to convert AIFF-format audio files into MP3, there is a loss of brilliance and tone that, while most people never notice it, drives me crazy."

The packaging of albums is also another factor. "At our level, most kids want to own the actual album and have the insert and credits," Dirk states. Brent agrees that, "All of the bands and artists involved put so much work into the recordings and then I encourage/facilitate the insane packaging that in some ways gives more incentive to pick up a physical copy versus just getting a burn."

Yet many people feel that if someone wants the album, they'll buy it. Andy Low comments, "If I'm really into a band I'll buy their album because I want to read the lyrics and see the artwork, but if I just want to jam the tunes a few times, I may just get [download] the whole album and delete it a few weeks later." But he clarifies, "It'd be foolish to think everyone was like this though, because I know just how easy it is to download full albums instead of buying them."

Considering the importance placed on sound quality and packaging, it still comes as no shock that budgets for independent releases are dwarfed by their major label counterparts. But while major labels inflate prices to rake in the most profit possible, independent labels take in less profit to maximize the quality of the end product and keep prices as low

as possible.

Dirk sees a major flaw of the major labels in how they price their releases. "Ultimately, I think it comes down to pricing physical product in a reasonable manner," he explains. "I still think that if the industry prices albums fairly that people will still want the finished album. I think the majors are killing

label peers. Compare the price of the new Black Eyes CD on Dischord Records with the cost of the latest Bjork CD (\$11.99 for the former, \$18.99 for the latter) as sold at Tower Records. When the numbers come under scrutiny, it makes more sense why kids aren't buying major label CDs as much as they are buying DVDs or video games. That doesn't solve the mystery of whether file sharing is to blame for the drop in CD sales and whether it has any discernible affect on independent releases, but it does offer other possibilities to explain why sales are sagging among the majors and booming among the indies.

What both ends of the spectrum are realizing is that MP3s and file sharing are a powerful promotional tool. Sure, sales may be lost in the process. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that people who download songs, perhaps even albums, can and do purchase albums based on this previewing.

themselves by introducing every developing artist at \$6.99 or whatever and then, if it takes off, eventually raising the prices to \$16.98. If the pricing were fair all the way through the process, like starting developing artists at like \$10.98 and going up to maybe \$12.98 for more established artists, people would probably buy more records." Brent adds, "My records are more representative of production costs (i.e. cheap) than the major labels and the major indies, so I give people credit for respecting and supporting that when given the choice because the truth is that certain Magic Bullet releases are killing their counterparts in a lot of retail situations, which is driving the majors crazy because they can't seem to figure out why."

Indeed, independent records are almost always cheaper at the store than their major

Independent labels recognize file sharing as a tool to boost sales and expose listeners to new artists. When asked whether they objected to people sharing their bands' songs, Johan of Reflections Records replied, "We don't really have a problem with it. We even see it as some sort of 'promotional' tool. It's easy to check out bands." Darren concurs, "If a person gets a hold of a Jade Tree band's song and decides to go and buy the record, then that is a positive thing. If they get the record for free and share it with a ton of other people that may, in turn, mean more potential fans who might come out to shows."

In regard to bands on his label, Brent explains, "In the case of Textbook Traitors, the newest band of the label, MP3s and file sharing made a huge impact on record sales and the 'arrival' of the band itself. Prior to working with the label, they were unknown ... but then I announced their involvement

Stylex on Action Driver, a Lumberjack exclusive record label based in Toledo, OH. <www.actiondriver.com>



with the label, put a link to their site (where the MP3s were) and it's been a whirlwind of activity since." He concluded, "At the very least, MP3s definitely have the potential to expedite the inevitable quite drastically."

Or consider a musician's standpoint. Josh Jakubowski explains that he began exposing people to his music (*Superstitions of the Sky*) via the Internet. "I wanted to get the songs out there so people could hear them, so I recorded the songs, downloaded infamous file sharing crusader Napster and put the files in my shared folder so that other users could download them from my hard drive," he says. "I used to get emails and people IMing me telling me they liked the song. Before I knew it, I had a following without having a release out so for me it worked in my favor and I didn't care that I wasn't selling records. I was just stoked people could hear my band and they were into it."

Although independent labels see the benefits of file sharing as promotional assistance, some still believe money is lost and some form of reimbursement to the artist is necessary. This isn't so out of line with what the music industry argues in general. The bottom line is the bottom line. Artists deserve compensation for their craft. Few consumers of music product will argue with that. The debate centers around the status of shared music on the Internet. Is it copyright infringement?

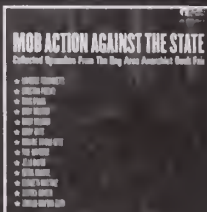
When queried about the issue of regulation, most indie labels contacted for this article feel government regulations are unnecessary. Chalk this up to the DIY anti-authoritarian classic punk stance. But most felt something needed to be done to prevent pervasive downloading of entire albums, such as a fee for downloads. "I think it [file sharing] will be naturally regulated as better systems come into play. As it stands right now, file sharing is the world's biggest, most unorganized record store in the world," Jeff from Ninja Tune says. "I think any serious music fan would be happy to pay a fee for something that was easier to use and was better laid out."

"Copyrights need to be protected," Dirk says. "I don't think it [file sharing] can ever be or should ever be prohibited, but it has to be regulated, otherwise the owners will never get paid. It isn't fair for songwriters and copyright owners not to get paid for their property. Songs aren't something created and available to the public domain, it is someone's work." Darren of Jade Tree agrees, "If there is regulation, it certainly would not hurt to have some sort of fee that might 'reimburse' bands or labels for the privilege of people being able to share those songs."

Whether file sharing will continue to be criminalized and whether it affects album sales, one thing remains clear: it will not stop. Some consider file sharing a new advance in technology, just like VCRs and tape recorders. Both were fought ferociously when they popped up in the 70s and 80s. When CDs were introduced, the music industry pronounced that they would bankrupt the music business. The fears have clearly not panned out. The music business, independent or otherwise, will need to face the changes in a constantly changing technology-driven world. ★

**Mob Action Against The State:
Collected Speeches From The Bay Area Anarchist Book Fair CD**

AK Press Audio/Alternative Tentacles Records, 2002
www.akpress.org www.alternativetentacles.com

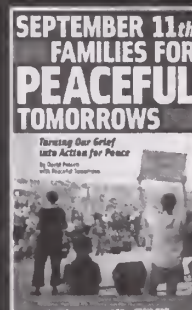


This two disc set collects the voices and thoughts of thirteen speakers from various backgrounds and interests. Jello Biafra sings "It's beginning to look a lot like 1984" while discussing war and terrorism. Lawrence Ferlinghetti reads two of his poems and talks about commodity culture. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz reads from her second autobiography *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years 1960-1975* then discusses anarchism and religion. Elizabeth Martinez relays information about historic anarchist Chicana women. Christian Parenti discusses capitalism's management of poverty and the necessity of poverty to the capitalist system. Cindy Milstein talks of direct democracy, Craig O'Hara discusses the punk movement and policing, and Barry Pateman recognizes four tensions in the anarchist movement that need to be addressed. Ruthie Gilmore speaks of prison abolition and grassroots organizing. Harry Britt talks about cultural colonialism. Stephen Dunifer discusses free speech and free radio. Lorenzo Kom'Boa Ervin talks about his *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* as well as the necessity for mobilization of our communities.

The beauty of this collection is that not only is it energetic, serious yet not without humor, passionate, and intelligent, it's also very well organized. Speakers and topics are set in an order so that these voices and ideas are accentuated within the collection. This is one great educational tool and a definite necessity in our current political climate.

-Shauna Osborn

**September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows:
Turning Our grief into Action for Peace**
By David Potori with Peaceful Tomorrows



In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there have been a wave of anthologies featuring personal essays from survivors, as well as those who lost family and loved ones as a result of the tragedy. *September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows: Turning Our Grief into Action For Peace* gives voice to a perspective not often heard in such accounts: those affected directly by the tragedy who have vocally opposed the Bush administration's so-called 'war on terrorism'. Written by David Potori and other founding members of the non-profit organization September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, the book documents the founding days of the nearly two-year-old organization, named for a quote by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. ("Wars are poor chisels for carving out Peaceful Tomorrows"), Peaceful Tomorrows began as a loosely-knit group of grieving family members organized in the days following the attacks to protest the U.S. eventual invasion of Afghanistan. As individuals affected by the attacks found one another to share their grief, many family members of 9/11 victims used the Internet and the media to speak passionately and publicly against an unjust war being fought in their loved ones names. Potori, a former journalist, deftly weaves together the individual stories of loss that eventually unite the members of Peaceful Tomorrows: Rita Lasar, whose brother Abe was lost in the North Tower, joined her voice in protest after her brother's heroism was mentioned in a speech by President Bush. "My country is going to use my brother's heroism as justification to kill innocent people in a place far away from here," said Lazar in an early chapter. Interspersed with essays, previously published letters to national publications, and e-mails sent to the Peaceful Tomorrows web site from both supporter and detractors, the book recounts the organization's two-year evolution into a national advocacy group — organizing demonstrations and eventually forming delegations of its members to visit families torn apart by the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. As the organization encountered increased media exposure, they found their stance challenged by a still grieving and frightened public and their views distorted by many mainstream media outlets. Potori describes an incident in which members of Peaceful Tomorrows were invited to appear on the Oprah show, but cautioned by producers not to refer to their organization's opposition of the Afghanistan campaign. "After being on several conservative talk shows, the Oprah show was the most restraining TV experience I ever had," said Peaceful Tomorrows member Eva Rupp. Peaceful Tomorrows's members write the personal essays with great clarity and insight, whether remembering their lost loved ones or recounting their delegations to Afghanistan and Iraq. It's become almost cliché to describe books such as Peaceful Tomorrows as "inspirational," however this collection of thoughtful, moving writing, does indeed inspire and ultimately empower. Peaceful Tomorrows demonstrates that the pain of losing a loved one to violence can be channeled into peaceful response; the book a testament to the collective power of everyday people who actively seek to end the cycle of violence perpetuated by military action.

-Keidra Chaney

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Worshipping Mr. Loh



Uninspired by what thousands of years of various religions have to offer, Steve Wilson and his wife opt for faith in their own personal deity.

Since religions no longer depend upon location and culture; since one can be a Lutheran-Buddhist, or a Shiite Mormon, or a Neo Pagan-Universalist; since my wife and I both rejected the religions we were brought up with; since faith is now a matter of convenience rather than calling; Cathy and I have decided to skip the existing organized religions altogether and worship our own personal deity. His name is Mr. Loh.

Regular listeners to the PRI radio show *This American Life* might recognize the name. In 1996, Sandra Tsing Loh recorded a portrait of her 76-year-old father and the Malibu rock band that adopted him as a mentor. The band, Boy Hits Car, wrote a song about Mr. Loh and his apparent freedom from conventional patterns of behavior. In it, Mr. Loh walked the beach naked, sang his wisdom, and swam with dolphins—an image of her father that Sandra Loh found absurd.

For a while this idea, that an eccentric Chinese man could serve as a spiritual figure for a group of X-generation slackers, was a shared joke in our relationship. While looking for a parking space, for example, we would comment that Mr. Loh wouldn't need a parking space; he was beyond the need for parking spaces. At the same time, we recognized that Mr. Loh's ambivalence towards parking spaces was precisely what would make them appear. And so, when an exceptional parking space appeared for us we began to thank Mr. Loh for loaning us his power.

When Cathy and I decided to move in together we felt the need to create some sort of ritual that might help our odds in a tight housing market. We belonged to no church, so in an ironic gesture, we decided to build a small altar for Mr. Loh. It had a Buddhist flavor. We lit candles and set out small gifts

of food and alcohol. Then we solidified our intent by asking Mr. Loh aloud for his help in finding a house.

A week later we jumped ahead of all the other applicants trying to get into a beautiful old Craftsman-style house in Portland's hip Hawthorne neighborhood. Mr. Loh had come through.

Subsequent ritual prayers had similar results. Mr. Loh helped me get into a very competitive graduate school, helped our friend Heather's newborn go through several surgeries, and helped us to conceive in a single go.

For two people with little religious belief other than the feeling that Something is Out There and We Are All Connected, this was a bit exciting. Because of our distrust of organized religions, we still didn't take Mr. Loh seriously, but at the same time he ceased to be a mockery. In moments of uncertainty, Mr. Loh provided a focus point for hope and decision, gave us a receptacle for anxieties, and, ultimately, got results.

Like all religions, ours has its rules. Offerings made to Mr. Loh must be somewhat in accordance with the request: for example, while asking Mr. Loh to help us find housing in a new town, we placed Monopoly houses, an old wasps' hive, a bird's nest, and several shells on his altar. Regardless of the request, alcohol must be present. Mr. Loh is a tippler.

Requests made to Mr. Loh must be serious but not ridiculous. For example, when Cathy won \$72 on the local lottery, she attributed that to Mr. Loh's influence. But we wouldn't ask his help to win the \$50 million Powerball. It would be presumptuous.

We recognize that Mr. Loh needs to be asked for help, or in other words, we need to know what we want. He is not a god who whimsically tampers with lives. He is reac-

tive. So, we light candles and stand in front of the altar and politely explain what problem we are trying to overcome. We make no demands and try our best to talk to him with an attitude of acceptance, knowing that what Mr. Loh decides to do may not be quite what we hoped for. We must be open to his actions.

Over the course of three years, our belief in Mr. Loh has moved from ironic to partly heartfelt. Belief in Mr. Loh gives us a place to focus anxieties about the future; in a way it is a method of removing responsibility towards what we cannot control. At the same time, interacting with a god engages an attitude that things will work out, and helps us to recognize the limits of what we can affect.

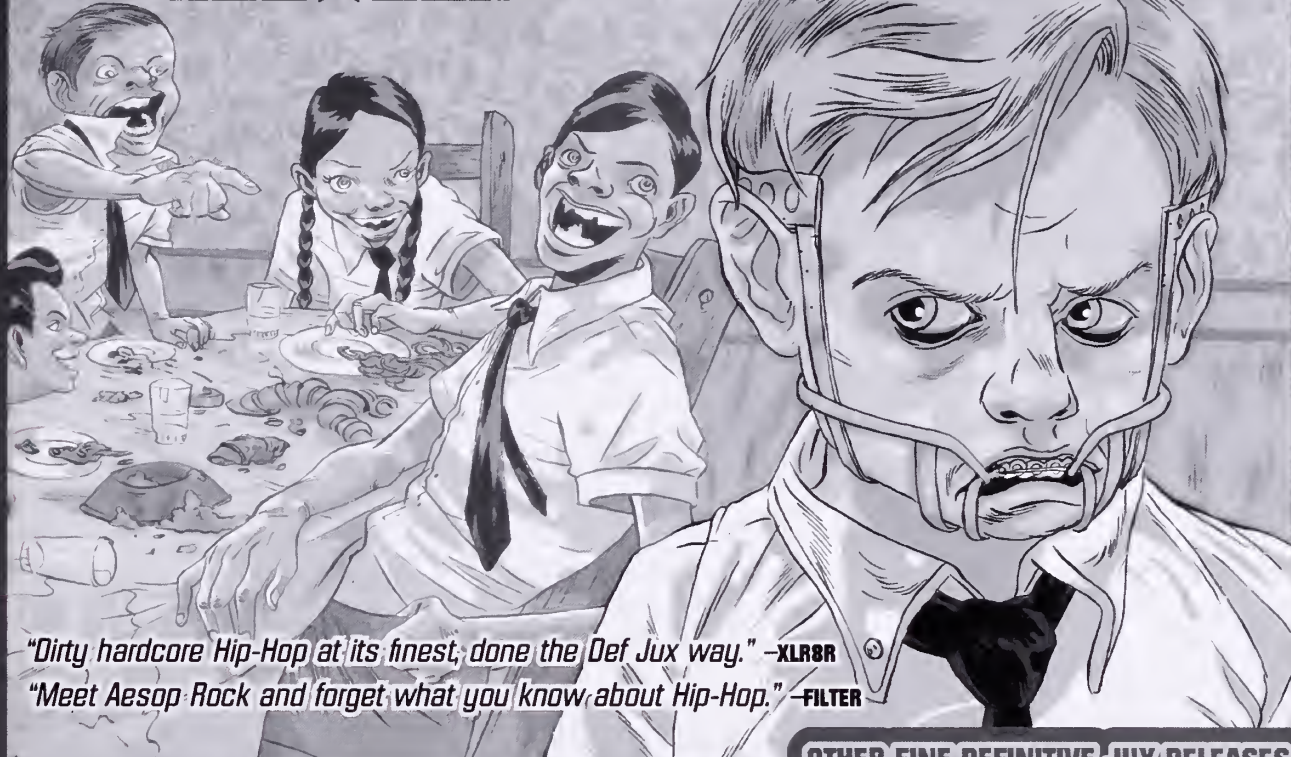
I can't say that I have felt any profound epiphanies around Mr. Loh or with our rituals, not like the sublime feelings I have sometimes have deep in the mountains, but Mr. Loh, the rituals, or the act of asking for help does provide some emotional balm. And I have begun to think of maintaining Mr. Loh's altar as an outward demonstration of the belief, hope, and willingness that I try to maintain within.

The Mr. Loh that we worship now has little connection to the elderly Chinese man we once heard about on a radio show. I'm not sure what he has become, or what it is that we name "Mr. Loh." A belief in something? A trust in the universe? A superstitious need for a god? Whatever he is, he serves our purpose and helps us through times of stress. I don't know whether the positive results we experience are caused by some astral entity or by our improved attitude or just good luck, and I don't care. What we've got works for us, and that is what counts. ★

illustration by Zanne DeJanvier

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