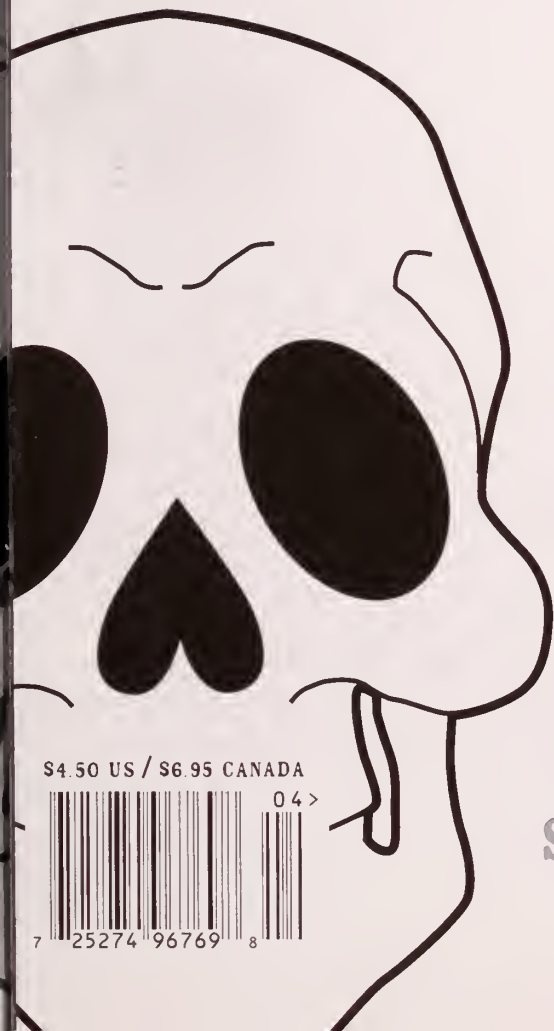


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clamor

ISSUE 25
MARCH/APRIL 2004

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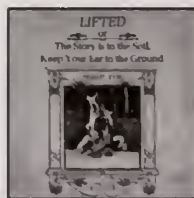
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ADVERTISING
Rates and deadlines available upon request.
Please call 419-243-4688 or visit
www.clamormagazine.org/advertising.pdf

PRINTING:
Westcan Printing Group,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
P: 866-669-9914

CLAMOR is a bi-monthly magazine.
Single copies are \$4.50 ppd and 6 issue
subscriptions are \$18 ppd in the US (Outside
of the US single issues are \$6 and a 6-issue
subscription is \$25 in US Funds). Checks may
be made payable to Become The Media

BACK ISSUES:
are available for the standard single copy rate
(\$4.50 ppd). Visit www.clamormagazine.org
for more info.

DISTRIBUTION:
CLAMOR is distributed to stores and
distributors by Big Top Newsstand Services,
2729 Mission Street Suite 201, San Francisco,
CA 94110-3131 info@bigtoppubbs.com

CLAMOR is also available through these fine
distribution outlets Active Distribution UK,
AK Press, Armadillo, Desert Moon, Doormouse,
Gordon & Gotch, Ingram, IPD, Kent News,
Last Gasp, Media Solutions, Milligan, One
Source, Small Changes, Stickfigure, Tower,
and Ubiquity

CLAMOR (ISSN 15-34-9489) is published six
times a year (Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, May/June, Jul/
Aug, Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec) ©2004 in the US by
Become The Media Incorporated, PO Box 20128,
Toledo, OH 43610, Telephone: 419 243 4688

Postmaster: Send address changes to Clamor
Magazine
PO Box 20128, Toledo, OH 43610

Periodicals postage paid at Toledo, OH

from your editors

We began this issue much in the same way we put all issues of Clamor together. We pick a general theme — something that is fairly universal to all people — and we begin to tackle the subject in ways that we typically don't see the subject treated. The death issue exemplifies that approach and then some. Not only is death a universal that everyone in the world deals with, it's also something that a lot of Americans have a hard time talking about.

Take, for example, the subject of suicide. We're taught to understand that it's a shameful act that is committed only by the insane who have no other way to deal with the world. Matthew Piantalo (p.33) urges us to consider the fact that suicide as an act, requires a certain amount of rationality, planning, and intention.

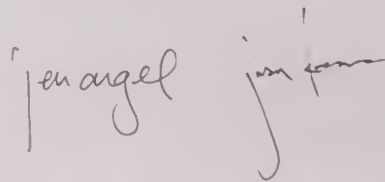
Of course there are a couple articles on the death industry (Scott Puckett talks about the fringe industry on p. 31 and Ed Beeson writes about green burials on p. 60) which you might find either entertaining (who wants to have their ashes shot into space?) or informative. We find the articles dealing with how people cope with death, such as Jennifer Solheim's profile of Madeleine Abo (whose husband, Algerian poet Nourredine Abo, died in 1996) particularly insightful (p.38). We've gone one step further by examining ways that death surrounds us — from a decaying shopping mall in small-town Pennsylvania (p. 62) to the effect of dams on Native American culture (p. 56).

You may have noticed the advertisement for **Radio Clamor** on the first page of this issue. Media editor Catherine Komp has helped us put together the debut episode of **Radio Clamor** — an idea that has long been on our to-do list, but only recently made possible through her expertise and enthusiasm. The show is a truly amazing hour of audio programming that takes Clamor's mission to the airwaves, and it sets the bar high for future episodes. But you'll have to pick up a copy and hear it for yourself. Subscribe or renew early using the enclosed card and we'll send you a copy for free.

This issue marks Clamor's fourth anniversary, and we want to thank each of you for your individual support over the last few years. Your contributions of writing and artwork have helped shape Clamor's content and have shown us the need for an accessible media outlet. Your subscriptions and donations have made Clamor successful. There's a long road ahead of us and we hope you will continue to support Clamor by renewing your subscription, giving a gift subscription to a friend or your local library, or by making a donation.

For our anniversary, we threw a big party that took a lot of help. Special thanks go to all of the participants in the **Clamor Music Festival**. At the time we went to press, the list of participating cities was still growing so we'll have to wait until next issue to thank everyone directly. But by the time you receive this over 5,000 people will have gotten down at shows and dance parties around the country to support Clamor and local independent media. Thank you to the amazing people that stepped up to organize these shows, all of the talented folks that volunteered to perform, and the generous people that attended. Check out the festival web site, www.clamormagazine.org/cmf, for a complete recap.

Thanks for reading,



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.

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McGarry's Mis-steps

I'd like to address the article "If you want to smash Imperialism start in your own community" by Brady McGarry (November/December 2003). McGarry identifies himself as a white person calling on other white people to act as allies. He claims that "These two acts of resistance passed without much public support or outreach from white activist communities." He continues by criticizing his white comrades in general, that this is a fine example of how white folks haven't done a good job at building bridges with communities of color. The problem with this assertion is that, in the Benton Harbor situation, there were several radical organizations that have a white majority that were told to do exactly the opposite, when they inquired as to how they can be allies in this particular struggle — to stay away from Benton Harbor. Even people of color in the FRAC (who are pictured in the article) who traveled there to show solidarity were questioned. I did however see the article about Benton Harbor in several anarchist and radical list serves, newspapers, and web sites, contradicting McGarry's assertion.

McGarry's article ... goes against everything that was told of white activists to do, which was, "this isn't your struggle, stay out of it." Therefore, I'd like to call McGarry out for acting in ways that are NOT accountable to the community in Benton Harbor, but based on very abstract rhetoric about what white activists "should do."

I think we need to ask the questions of what does that solidarity work look like? I believe we should be building a culture of ally work that must be structured in a way that is completely accountable to the needs and desires of the individual or groups of color that demand solidarity from white activists. ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS. Different people desire different actions. To assume that all people of color (And that is one VERY BIG group of people with MANY different experiences and desires) all expect white comrades to the same kind of ally work for our myriad communities is downright racist.

I'm sick of hearing, from white folks no less, that we as people of color have it worse off. I know countless middle class comrades of color that are exceptions to this rule and don't fit this analysis. I also know countless impoverished white comrades who never had a chance at all. More interestingly, I'm meeting more and more halfbreeds like myself (half euro/half person of color) who demand an end to the tyrannical binary analysis that has kept us in the dark for far too long. This absurd lack of practicality demands a vastly different approach to building a movement that bridges communities across racial lines One that doesn't trip over

the variables in the social equations put out by the abstract leftist analysis, but instead looks to organize different communities to battle common enemies around common practical struggles, so that different social groups find it in their interest to be real allies on a broader level.

For a practical anti-racist praxis,
Fruittidurruti
Underpaid and Angry, NEFAC supporter collective
Philadelphia, PA

McGarry's Mistakes

We are writing to correct a factual error made in Brady McGarry's article, "If You Want to Smash Imperialism, Start in Your Own Community" (November/December 2003). In the article, McGarry presents an "incident" in which "there was seldom mention" of the Benton Harbor uprising of June 2003 on the web site of the Michigan Independent Media Center. In reality, the Benton Harbor story generated more in-depth coverage and discussion on MichiganIMC.org than any prior event in the history of the site. Archives can be viewed at www.michiganIMC.org.

We support the aims of McGarry's article, but we feel that his argument was weakened by his two examples, both of which were limited to the analysis of internet-based projects and at least one of which was blatantly untrue. A more insightful and constructive argument could be made by using accurate examples of white supremacist behavior in white activist scenes and attacking the question of how to actually challenge and dismantle white supremacy within our organizations.

Furthermore, It is important to acknowledge situations where people of color-lead organizations are finding the kind of support from white activists that is meaningful, respectful and ultimately constructive towards global, local and inter-personal justice. McGarry writes, "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 society." The recent actions in Miami against the FTAA are an example of a broader, and perhaps more accurate, definition of the anti-capitalist movement than this caricature offered by McGarry. One could look to the Root Cause march that took place in Miami as a powerful moment of multiracial struggle.

We commend Clamor for publishing high-quality perspectives on anti-oppression work, such as the interview "Finding Colours of Resistance: Pauline Hwang and Helen Luu" by Chris Crass

(also in the November/December 2003 issue). We hope that Clamor will continue to give voice to articles such as this one and avoid those which are inaccurate and counter-productive.

Jenny Lee
Mike Medow
Max Sussman
(members of the Michigan IMC collective)
Ann Arbor, MI

Pagan Props

I wanted to address the article "Goddess Bless! 'Confessions' of a Pagan Parent" written by Juleigh Howard Hobson (November/December 2003). The way the article is written makes Pagans seem whiny. Every Pagan has to go through some confrontations with people who don't like our religion, but most take it in stride, and use it as a learning experience. And she made it seem like her children shouldn't have to go through what they have, or might, and granted no one should have to be shunned because of their religion, it's the way life is, and probably will always be. What people have to realize is that for one, children are stronger than they think, they can take more than they tend to let on. And they have to realize that dealing with other religions, because theirs is a minority, is that it makes them into a stronger person when they grow up, and it also helps them to be just that much more considerate of other religions. I've had to deal with it, and looking at other people my age, I am a lot more open minded about things that I don't understand.

Elizabeth Modrzyk
Berwyn, IL

Photo Feedback

I liked Issue #23, Have Faith (November/December 2003). I have found each issue I've read to be a reliable representation of no one agenda but coherent and generally fair to many sides of some current issues. The one recurring problem I have with all forms of media is the lack of dates to accompany photos, recordings and video. I would simply like to see dates included with photos to avoid the feeling of possibly being misled.

Sincerely,
B. Curtis Eller
Sparta, OH

Faith is for Suckers

I was quite disappointed with the Faith Issue (November/December 2003), in particular, "A Progressive Argument for Prayer in School." One can try and make the argument that religion fills the void/answers our questions of existence, purpose in life, how life began, etc., but the article fails to do so.

To want to bring religion to the curriculum, even if it tries to be all inclusive, is simply not very realistic and quite simplistic from an educator's point of view. Religion should be taught in its cultural, historical context, somewhat like a survey of world religion class, but no one should be encouraged or made to pray, meditate, or whatever in class.

The person writes, "Without religion one doesn't fulfill our humanity to the fullest potential" So does that mean that for those of us who do not believe in any of the rubbish we are half/human? So faith is going to bring understanding, cultural, historical and otherwise? And make us fully human? Ugh! What is the difference in the main points of this article and Britney Spears saying that "We should all have faith in Bush...if you need to believe in something, believe in love..." Yeah, just believe, just have faith, leave your thinking process at home, which is what this article is asking the reader. Well, now that you've had your issue on FAITH, why not have one on KNOWLEDGE?

Leticia Cortez
Editor, *Hasta Cuando?*
Chicago, IL

Surrealism Thrives, No Thanks to Blair

The recent article on surrealism by Craig Blair ("Surrealism Thrives," Jan/Feb 2004) presents a rather mainstream, hence distorted, view of the history of the surrealist movement. Blair blatantly ignores the fact that the Czech and Slovak group has been continuously active in Prague since the 1930s, and he completely overlooks the significance of the Chicago group whose endeavors, which began in 1966 and continue to this day, have been much more of an influence on breathing "new life" into surrealism than the Internet.

Today surrealism is definitely thriving — with groups in Paris, Chicago, Prague, Stockholm, Leeds, Wisconsin, Sao Paulo, Madrid, Portugal, and new groups in Minneapolis, Portland, Saint Louis, and London — but much of this growth has less to do with the digital art Blair champions, and more to do with the development of radical culture since the Seattle WTO protests of 1999. After all, surrealism is essential a movement of revolutionary dreamers, and has more in common with the present outposts of resistance than it will ever have with slideshows or art galleries.

Brandon Freels
Portland, Oregon

classifieds

The revolution won't be televised, but you can read about it. **Books for a better world**, by Mike Palacek, former federal prisoner, congressional candidate, newspaper reporter. Please visit: iowapeace.com.

Looking for young woman to help this songwriting dude with writing and poetry projects. Please write me quickly: Rickey Robbins, 6272375, 777 Stanton Blvd, Ontario, OR 97914-8335. Professional Relationship wanted. I play guitar. Graduated from Ball State. Blue-green eyes.

get involved!

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 our 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.

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

CORRECTIONS:

The vocalist from The Wage of Sin (reviewed in Clamor #24, p. 23) is Melissa Fornabaio, not Fornabale.

IN MEMORIAM

JORDAN MATTHEW FEDER
PRESENT!

February 11th, 1980 - November 26, 2003

On November 26, Jordan Feder — anti-fascist, street medic, humanitarian activist — died in North Carolina of meningitis while returning from a week of protesting the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Miami, Florida. Jordan wrote for *Clamor* under the pen name "Zach Morris" in the January/February 2004 issue.

Jordan was a dedicated member of Anti-Racist Action (ARA), having been involved for over 3 years since helping found a chapter at his university and becoming involved with New Jersey ARA after graduating. Jordan was highly involved with this chapter over the past few years, dedicating much of his time and energy to fighting hatred and racism.

Words cannot convey what a selfless, generous and loving person Jordan was. He is the kind of person most people wait a lifetime to meet and we are honored and grateful that we had the opportunity to build bonds of love and solidarity with him.

We pledge to continue fighting the injustices Jordan fought against and know that he will always be there, fighting alongside us:

"Your heart is a muscle the size of your fist, keep loving, keep fighting."

With much love and solidarity
New Jersey ARA

because sometimes life just happens too fast
for bimonthly magazines ...

→
communiques

Clamor Communiques are an inexpensive, twice-monthly supplement to the print edition of Clamor. Each installment is delivered to your email inbox along with a link to a PDF zine/pamphlet that you can download and pass on to friends.

For more information, visit www.clamormagazine.org/communiques.html

Laura Allen (p. 56) is an educator, living in Oakland CA.

Megha Bahree (p. 59) Megha is a freelance journalist who has been reporting on the Arab-Muslim community in New York City and immigration issues for the past 1.5 years. e-mail her at megha@bahree.com

Bob Banner (p. 21) is publisher of *HopeDance: Radical Solutions Inspiring Hope* and is the author (with Mark Phillips) of the recent ebook *Becoming the Media: How to Show Films in Your Local Community*. Go to www.hopedance.org or send \$10 to HopeDance Media, POB 15609, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406, or call 805 544-9663.

Aaron Barker (p. 28) is a Dallas, Texas based storyteller/journalist/father who is associate-editor of the Dallas Society of Visual Communications' *Rough* magazine. He also has freelanced for magazine such as *Tokion*, *Art Prostitute* and *D Magazine*. Barker can be contacted at aaronb27@hotmail.com. All statistical information presented in his article was from Nov./Dec. 2003. Some of the information may have changed because of executions carried out in the following months since.

Brandon Bauer (p. 50) is an artist living and working in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His work has been shown nationally and internationally, most recently as a part of the "Art Against War" poster exhibition held in conjunction with the World Social Form in Mumbai, India. Brandon's artwork and poetry were included in the book "All The Days After," a collection of artist's and poet's responses to the events of September 11th, compiled by the Upside Down Culture Collective. A DVD of Brandon's experimental video titled "Signaldrift: A Day Under The City" was recently released by the French independent video company LOWAVE. You can reach him care of Clamor.

Ed Beeson (p. 60) worries not about burial, for he has uncovered the secrets of eternal life. You too can be forever young with a daily dose of his patented life-extension tonic, sowed from the very springs that so eluded the adventurer Ponce de Leon. For more information, email him at edbeeson@yahoo.com.

Jeremy P. Bushnell (p. 9) lives and works in Chicago, IL. He is the author of *Imaginary Year* (www.imaginaryyear.com), a running work of serialized Web fiction which follows the lives of a set of Chicago malcontents.

Andy Cornell (p. 62) is a graduate student and activist who once lived in southwestern Pennsylvania or six months and has never been able to get it off his mind. Write him at: arc280@nyu.edu.

Melita Curphy AKA Missmonster Mel (p. 43) spends her time drawing, sculpting, teaching and going to ninja night school. Check out more art at missmonster.com.

Aaron Cynic (p. 43) lives in Chicago's south suburbs and sporadically publishes a zine called *Diatribes*. He would like it very much if you visited his web site at www.diatribemedia.com.

Amy DeVoogd (p. 12) recently quit her day job to work full-time for herself as an illustrator and designer. She's from Boston, Massachusetts and Richmond, Virginia and currently lives in Madison, Wisconsin. Check out her work at www.devoogd.com.

David Gibson (p. 50) can be reached care of Clamor.

Musician/journalist **Brian Hull** (p. 46) is currently living in Toulouse, France where he's learning to parlez-vous and taking a hiatus from all the Dubya hoopla. His band Meadowlark Jivin' just released their new cd *It's the Groove*. He can be reached at hullspeak@hotmail.com

Walida Sherman (p. 41) can be reached care of Clamor.

Willie Johnson (p. 33) is a student and an activist. See more of his work at www.mcdahmer.com.

Daniel Konecky (p. 23) is a freelance writer and educator based in Los Angeles. He welcomes your comments and your job offers. Send them to dlkonecky@yahoo.com

Dan O'Donnell (p. 52) is a labor union and community activist in Miami, Florida. He was born in Detroit, raised in Michigan's scenic Upper Peninsula, and has lived in Mexico. "Thanks to my Dad, for lending me his old Nikon FTN!"

Nicole Pezold (p. 63) is a graduate student in journalism and French studies at New York University.

Matthew Pianalto (p. 33) is a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. He is currently teaching logic and working on his master's thesis on suicide and its relation to the existential concepts of anxiety, freedom, and authenticity. You can visit his homepage at: <http://comp.uark.edu/~mpianal>

Mark Price's (p. 53) work has appeared in *Heartattack*, *WonkaVision*, *The Philadelphia Independent* and *Leapfrog Bikezine* as well as *Clamor*. He currently lives in West Philadelphia. Please visit www.paperstreetstudio.com/markprice or email killmarkprice@hotmail.com for more info.

Scott Puckett (p. 31) is a writer who has flirted with Death on several occasions, most of which ended with Thanatos polishing off a drink and saying, "I'll see you soon" as it left the bar. He does not keep track of how many lives he has left. Read more at www.punkrockacademy.com.

Leonie Sherman (p. 35) lives in Haines Alaska and after ten years of nomadic mischievous activities is finally putting her undergraduate degree in anthropology to good use.

One day, **Kelly Sobczak** (p. 66) asked her boss for vacation. He said, "No." She said, "I quit." She then traveled for 18 months to countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Burma and China. And she hasn't looked back since. She can be reached at kellysobczak@yahoo.com.

Jennifer Solheim (p. 38) is a writer, musician, translator and researcher living in Paris. She can be reached at jennifersolheim@yahoo.com.

Tank (p. 12) is Woman. Tank is mad sometimes. Tank is always insane. Tank lives in the South of France. Tank is warm and happy and alive. Tank recently said, "Sometimes I think you really only live when you're afraid. The rest is all reflection." Visit www.tankgreen.com.

Sharon Wachsler (p. 14) is a humor columnist, cartoonist, writing teacher, and disability rights activist. She is also the editor of the new journal of disability literature and culture, *Breath & Shadow* — www.abilitymaine.org/breath. Please visit Sharon's homepage at www.sharonwachsler.com.

Teresa Watson (p. 14) made paper dolls for fun as a child and never grew out of drawing. See more of her work at www.teresawatson.org

NI UNA MAS!



THE DEAD OF JUAREZ DEMAND JUSTICE

written by Jeremy P. Bushnell

edited by Lina Pallotta

Imagine a school bus, packed with kids. Picture it. That school bus that you're picturing, the common yellow kind, holds about 50 students. That's a lot of kids.

Now imagine someone going through that bus and methodically killing every kid on it. Just try for a second to imagine the horror of such a thing. Try to remember exactly how many 50 is. If you took all the shootings that have happened at high schools or elementary schools over the past decade, if you were to go through and tally up all the corpses, you'd have 37. Thirty-seven dead kids; just short of a busload.

Now imagine seven buses.

Those buses are full of girls, mostly around 16 years of age. Three hundred and fifty sixteen-year old girls.

That's how many have been murdered in Juárez, Mexico, over the past decade. Nearly 10 times the number of kids who have been killed in American school shootings have been killed in one city alone.



A black cross on a pink background is painted all over the town as reminder of the dead

And that staggering figure may actually be a low estimate. That's the official number offered by the government and the authorities — Juárez residents, in their open letter to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, put the number at 450. Really nobody knows. Even the Juárez newspapers don't have reliable figures — journalist Charles Bowden, who wrote a powerful piece on Juárez for Harper's in 1996, says that the list of dead girls he read in one of the Juárez dailies did not include the name of a girl whose death he had read about in the same paper only a short time beforehand.

Criminologists will tell you that numbers much lower than these signal the work of a serial killer. Sure, any big city will have its share of random homicides — and anywhere firearms are available, women will die in domestic violence episodes. But the women of Juárez aren't being shot. They're dying from multiple stab wounds or strangulation. Most of them show signs of having been tortured. Over a third of them were raped. The sheer sadism of the crimes suggests something at work that goes beyond just everyday urban violence. The most damning fact is that the victims fit a profile. The average age is 16, and almost all of them are slim and attractive, with long, dark hair.

If a serial killer is responsible for even a quarter of the total murders — and most people studying the murders think that the proportion is actually substantially higher — then we're talking about a killer who has killed more women than John Wayne Gacy, Ted Bundy, and Jeffrey Dahmer. Combined. He's been at work for 10 years now. The authorities have made a few perfunctory arrests and tried to declare the cases "resolved," but the evidence doesn't stand up to inspection, and, more importantly, the murders haven't stopped. A serial killer's been at work for 10 years now, and still the Mexican authorities have not taken up offers of assistance from the F.B.I., who first visited Juárez in 1999, believing the crimes to be of international importance, only to have their findings rejected by Chihuahua state authorities. A serial killer's been at work for 10 years now, and still investigators have no DNA evidence or fingerprints, according to Esther Chávez Cano, director of Casa Amiga, the city's only women's shelter. Which might lead one to ask: exactly what is going on down there, in Juárez?

Like many border cities, Juárez exists in no small part to service US citizens who don't want to have to travel very deep into Mexico but who wish to enjoy Mexico's economic depression and lax regulation. It first began to grow substantially as a settlement after World War I, its economy boosted substantially by soldiers stationed in El Paso who would venture over the border looking for sex and

drugs. Servicemen still cross the border into Juárez looking for these things today, but since 1992 this stuff has been small potatoes, economically-speaking: since 1992, Juárez has been the little city that NAFTA built.

NAFTA enabled U.S. corporations to set up factories just over the border to take advantage of the low-wage workers there. Companies such as Amway, TDK Honeywell, Delphi, RCA Thomson, 3M, Kenwood and Dupont seized upon this opportunity, and today there are over 350 foreign-owned factories in Juárez, the highest concentration to be found anywhere in Mexico, and they employ over 150,000 workers. Better known as maquiladoras, these sweatshops employ mostly women, who are paid from 50 cents to \$2.50 an hour — depending on whose figures you believe. (Even the higher figures, of course, are skimpy, especially when you consider that the cost of living in Juárez is only about 10 percent cheaper than of the cost of living in the U.S.)

Management jobs at the maquiladoras are largely held by U.S. citizens who commute in daily from El Paso, and union activity is rarely found. People work these jobs because little other legal employment is available. Fifty thousand Mexicans migrate to Juárez every year, desperate for work, having been driven out of southern Mexico by the droughts that have ravaged the agriculturally based economies there. Many of the new migrants end up lured to Juárez by unscrupulous entrepreneurs, who justify the exorbitant fees they charge for transporting families northward by promising that Juárez holds lucrative employment opportunities. These opportunities, naturally, are nonexistent. Even employment in the maquiladoras is getting harder to come by these days — some U.S. corporations have closed up their Mexican operations and moved to China, where they can pay an even lower wage.

Crowding more people into a culture of immense poverty inevitably causes an increase in violent crime, and Juárez is no exception. In a poll, nearly 20 percent of Juárez residents identified “violence” as the city’s “defining characteristic.” Violence commonly breaks out in the form of drug murders, between the 200 gangs in Juárez who vie for a share of the lucrative narcotics trade, or in real estate skirmishes between members of warring colonias populares, neighborhoods with little or no sanitation, running water, or electricity. In addition to the violence, and the high suicide rate, there is one other result of

a widespread culture of poverty: it gives birth to a corresponding culture of corruption. If local officials and police are badly paid, then bribery and graft becomes practically built into the justice process.

Is this part of the reason why the Juárez murders remain unsolved? Due to the fact that most of the victims are poor, and the killer or killers are rumored to be wealthy? (Diana Washington Valdez, an investigative reporter and author of *Harvest of Women*, a book about the Juárez murders to be published next year, claims that the women are being murdered by a group of “prominent men with important political connections — untouchables.”)

At best, the authorities involved in the case appear to be incompetent. Local activist group Voces sin Eco (Voices without Echo), who search the desert twice a month for the bodies of missing women, claim that members of the PGJE, the State Attorney General's Office, which is in charge of the

questioned the official version of events are instructive here. We have Mario Lee Lopez, a father whose daughter and granddaughter are among the missing. Dissatisfied with the official investigation, he began to conduct his own independent inquiry into the murders, and he claims that he was approached by a high-ranking government minister who threatened him with electric torture. We have the case of radio host Samira Izaguirre, who used her radio show to defend two bus drivers arrested in 2001 in conjunction with the murders (the drivers claim that they are scapegoats and that their confessions were extracted through police torture). Shortly thereafter, smear advertisements, which suggested that Izaguirre had been romantically involved with one of the drivers, began to appear in local newspapers. When questioned, the newspapers revealed that the smear ads were paid for by government officials. Finally, and most ominously, we have the case of Mario Escobedo Jr., the defense lawyer



Eight crosses mark an urban cotton field with trash-filled ditches at the intersection of Ejercito Nacional and Paseo de la Victoria where eight women's bodies were found on November 2001.

murder investigations, have failed to accompany them on their searches despite promises to do so. Mothers who have investigated the sites where their daughters' bodies have been found have come across pieces of evidence (undergarments, hair) that authorities have overlooked. Furthermore, both Amnesty International, Mexico's national Human Rights Commission, and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (an arm of the Organization of American States) have issued statements questioning the competence of the authorities (the scathing Amnesty report goes so far as to suggest that the sexual homicide department has undermined the credibility of the entire justice system).

But what if it's more than mere incompetence? There is no proven cover-up, but the experiences of some of the people who have

for one of those same bus drivers, who was killed by police in 2002: the police claimed that they mistook him for a fugitive.

Recently I visited www.politicalgraphics.com, where there is an archive of over 60 posters designed by graphic designers from Mexico. The posters, which were first displayed in a Mexico City metro station to raise awareness of the situation in Juárez, are powerfully designed. There is an enormous variety of approaches archived there, but most of them feature the same single line: Las Muertas de Juárez Demandan Justicia. The Dead of Juárez Demand Justice.

To this I would only amend that we must remember to demand justice for those in Juárez who remain alive, as well. ★



In The Dark

How much do you know about HPV, the most common sexually transmitted infection in the country?

words Tank illustration Amy DeVoogd

I am a 28-year-old woman who has been sexually active for 10 years, and up until last October, I ensured that I was engaging in protected or safe sex. Being an AIDS baby (meaning that I was 6 or 7 when the epidemic hit), protected and safe sex is something that has been drummed into my head long before the idea of the sexual act was even entertained as a reality in my life. As well as preventing unwanted pregnancies, condoms also stop me from getting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), right? Provided, of course, that I don't sleep with someone that has symptoms of an STI. That's why condoms make sex safe, right?

Wrong.

There is no such thing as safe sex, or at least, not in the sense that I understood it. Not in the sense of "use a condom and I am safe from getting an STI." Not in the sense of "use a condom and choose my partners carefully and wisely." There is only *safer* sex, and I believe that to be an important distinction. Ultimately we should all know what we are being protected from. Pregnancy, sure. HIV, sure. Chlamydia, Gonorrhea — sure. But what of the other STIs, the *incurable*, viral infections like HHSV (Herpes Simplex) and HPV (Human Papillomavirus)? Condoms are ineffective in preventing the transmission of those, you say? So what does that mean? And what on earth is HPV?

It means that back in October I received some extremely shocking and unwanted news. It means that I was diagnosed with HPV without ever having heard of it before. It means that as a woman who considered herself knowledgeable regarding the inner workings of her body, a woman who considered herself a feminist, I had a particularly

nasty wakeup call which informing me of my ignorance and also, that I was harboring certain judgmental opinions about women, sex, and disease.

HPV is the most common STI in this country: *75% of sexually active adults will transmit it at some point in their life*. However, only 30% of those infected will ever show symptoms, which is how something gets to reach epidemic status without the majority of us knowing it even exists.

There are around 100 strains of HPV, but only approximately 30 of those affect the genital region. The others affect other parts of the body like the hands and the feet and cause the common wart. Is HPV starting to sound familiar now? HPV has several symptoms: abnormal Pap smears, cervical dysplasia, cervical cancer, and genital warts. We have all heard of genital warts, haven't we? But who knew that a different strain (and you can have multiple infections of differing strains) of the very same virus caused cervical cancer? Not me, that's for sure.

In fact, whilst I dutifully had my annual Pap smear, I really wasn't sure why I was having it. I just knew that you got one to make sure that you didn't have cervical cancer. I don't believe I was ever told what caused cervical cancer because I certainly had no idea that it was caused by an STI that was not prevented by using condoms. I mean, if I had known, the information would have put a whole new slant on my attitude towards sex. Every new partner would have represented a 75% chance to catch the precursor to cervical cancer, and on most men, honestly, I think I would have passed.

HPV infects the skin and is therefore transmitted during skin-to-skin contact. A genital HPV infection can be located anywhere in the anogenital region, which is an area far larger than that covered by a condom. In addition, according to some sources, the virus is small enough to pass through a condom, so that leaves us with no surefire way of avoiding it save abstinence. And while many of us do practice abstinence at varying points in our lives, the idea of a life completely free of sex is not something of which the average person would relish.

As HPV is a virus, it means that, like all other viral infections, there is no cure and the best we can hope for, once infected, is to develop an immunity to it. Unfortunately though, because there are numerous strains, we can become reinfected with a new and different strain even if we have developed immunity to another. Since so little is known about HPV, the medical community is unsure as to whether or not we can transmit the virus once an immunity has been developed. They say "possibly," and so one must always communicate a prior or current HPV infection with a potential or current lover to allow them the choice of taking the risk. Always remember that someone else's health does not belong to you. The other interesting characteristic of HPV is that while the normal incubation period after infection is 1 to 3 months, it does have an ability to lie dormant in one's system for up to 10 years.

Up until the Pap smear was invented in the 1940s, cervical cancer was the number one killer of women, and in non-industrialized countries, cervical cancer is *still* the second most common cancer in women. I don't think I am exaggerating when I say that the invention of the Pap smear must be one of the most revolutionary acts in women's health care, as this single test reduced cervical cancer deaths by 75%. Having said that though, over 200,000 women still die each year from cervical cancer and over 450,000 new cases of it are diagnosed. Cervical cancer and HIV are a very real and very dangerous health issue for women. So why do we not know about it?

One of the major problems with this infection is that, for the most part, it is asymptomatic. It is also a misogynistic virus, in that it is primarily an issue for women, as penile and anal cancers that can result from it are far, far rarer than cervical cancer. For the most part, if men do show symptoms, it is from one of the low risk (meaning non-cancerous) strains that cause genital warts. For women though, the high risk (meaning cancer causing) strains can attack our cervix and lead to abnormal Paps, dysplasia, and cancer.

It is therefore vital that as soon as women become sexually active, we become regular in our Pap testing. Having a high-risk strain of HPV does not have to lead to cancer,

provided the virus is caught early on when any damage caused by it can be reversed. In addition, we need to be vigilant in keeping our general level of health as high as can be. Which means not smoking (don't moan, I just quit a 15-year addiction after receiving my diagnosis), eating a balanced diet, and keeping drug and alcohol consumption to a minimum.

Then, on top of the health risks accompanying HPV, you also have to deal with the emotional distortions of coming to terms with having an STI. After my initial diagnosis, I felt shattered by barbs of shame, dirtiness, guilt, and a sense of being unlovable. I looked at myself and wondered if this meant I was a whore, and I questioned my previous decisions and sexual encounters. I was buying into dogmatic belief structures that polarize women into the virgin / whore category. I was either clean, virginal, and good, or dirty, slutty, and bad. I am, of course, neither, but the shame of contracting an STI definitely permeated my initial experience after diagnosis, making everything feel a lot worse than it truly is. Once I realized that having HPV says no more about me than having asthma does, I was able to speed along my emotional healing to come to a place where HPV was a part of me but did not define me in any way at all.

Since coming out of the HPV closet, so to speak, I have found that I have numerous

friends with HPV or HSV. Without my speaking so freely about my condition, I never would have known. With the knowledge of being among others in similar situations comes a cleansing of sorts — you are not alone and this *is* a part of normal life for a lot of people. It is not bad luck or an attack of

bad karma; this is just a risk of engaging in sexual activities, protected or not. I believe that a lot of the trauma of experiencing an STI can and will be removed once people actually start talking about it. By keeping the silence we are, consciously or unconsciously, subscribing to the idea of sex as shameful and something to be hidden, and while these ideas have proved tenacious so far in our culture, they are ideas that need to be eradicated in order for us to grow as a whole.

Owing to the nature of HPV and its potential severity for women, I do have a very strong, import laden desire to inform as many women as possible about this virus. It is this notion which has primarily driven me to be so forthright with my communications regarding my diagnosis. Since it seems practically impossible, if we choose to be sexual beings, for us to avoid this virus, what we do need to do is raise awareness about it. So, when other women find themselves in my situation, they need not go through

the feelings of devastation that accompany the prognosis of an STI. They simply move forward in the direction of health. ☆

For more information:

<http://www.ashstd.org/hpvcrc/>
<http://www.cervicalcancercampaign.org>
Joel Palefsky, M.D., *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About HPV and Abnormal Pap Smears*





To All the Girls I've Loathed Before

Unfortunately, a vengeful death still won't solve the bully problem.

by Sharon Wachsler and Teresa Watson

Lately I have been very ill. I have a chronic illness, so in itself that's not too shocking. However, the devastating level of sickness I've experienced lately is akin to when I was first felled by illness and could only lie still for days on end, coming to grips with the challenge of not doing a thing, but simply being. Letting thoughts sift through my mind, my body so demonstrably fragile, has led me to think about death — not to wish for it, nor fear it, but just to feel its closeness. And then to think about its humor potential.

Some people might find it odd to choose the ultimate "See ya!" as a topic for mirth. But since I have a business called "Sick Humor" it can hardly be a surprise that I have a morbid streak.

In fact, I remember one of the earliest and most striking moments of humor I encountered. I was watching *M*A*S*H* Hawkeye gets sick and must undergo surgery. It is his odious bunkmate, Charles Emerson Winchester III, who performs the lifesaving operation. Hawkeye is so ticked off that Winchester now has bragging rights for saving his life that he wisecracks to Hunnicutt, "I should have died on the operating table! That would have shown him!"

I remember literally rolling with laughter on my parents' big bed, while my brothers looked on, astonished at my excessive delight in this morbid irony: taking joy in the thought of one's own death to spite a rival. Maybe I found this bit so hilarious because it was a grown-up version of what all kids surely think at one time or another: I'll die and then they (parents, schoolmates, siblings, fill-in-the-blank tormentors here) will be sorry. And we picture our funerals — everyone sobbing with grief and shame at how they mistreated and misunderstood us. And we feel tremendous vindication. The problem with this scenario of course is that (a) we

would actually have to die to achieve the desired result and (b) even death would probably not achieve the desired result.

I base this conclusion on a conversation I had with my friend Laurel, who is reading the book *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* by Rachel Simmons. *Odd Girl Out* discusses the terribly common problem of bullying of girls by other girls and the lasting emotional scars that this abuse causes. Immediately, as Laurel described the book, a slew of incidents clamored to the forefront of my consciousness: all the times that other girls picked on me, and the hurt and humiliation that went along with those experiences.

So, if you think this essay will be a bummer because it's about death, you're wrong. This essay will be a bummer because it's about bullying.

No, seriously, I think those of us who grew up in some way "different" from other kids can definitely relate. Those of us who were disabled or fat or skinny, or wore glasses or braces, or were of a minority race or religion, or were in any way physically or mentally "odd" — in other words, all of us, especially you, were easy prey on the play

would be like to have her own separate identity from Megan. (By the way, there were actually two Megans in high school who were mean to me. So, Megan, if you're out there reading this and you're wondering if I'm referring to you, I am.)

So, after that, Megan ignored me. And Adrienne seemed to make a point of being nice to me — especially when Megan was around — even going so far as to give me "cutsies" in the lunch line at the cafeteria!

Another instance of bullying can still bring up feelings of shame and hurt, anger and humiliation, over twenty years later. This was when Tracy (her real name), my former best friend, turned on me, in what was surely a carefully calculated — and extremely successful — move to improve her social status. She employed an all-out campaign to label me as a geek, nerd, and general weirdo, so that nobody in the sixth grade would talk to me or even come near me. In fact, the only person who was nice to me at all was Jessica (her real name), who had also been my (and Tracy's) best friend the previous year. But even Jessica would only talk to me, briefly, in hushed tones, when none of

I challenged Dori (her real name), the school bully, to a fight ... and she, Ms. Tough Girl — probably as surprised as I was by me, geekoid brainiac and full-time fashion catastrophe, standing up to her — backed down and left me alone. For good.

ground. (For those of you who didn't get picked on relentlessly, I am sorry to have to inform you that there is something terribly flawed in your personality and you should feel very guilty.)

Some of these memories contain a nugget of pride; these were the encounters that were mitigated in some way by my cleverness or toughness. For instance, there was the day I challenged Dori (her real name), the school bully, to a fight because I was so fed up with her constant belittling of my appearance (an obeisance to pop culture that blended the funky stylings — and excess hair and jewelry — of Michael Jackson, Cyndi Lauper, and Madonna). I fully expected to be pummeled, but I'd run out of other tactics and had reached the point where I was too angry to care what happened. And she, Ms. Tough Girl — probably as surprised as I was by me, geekoid brainiac and full-time fashion catastrophe, standing up to her — backed down and left me alone. For good.

There was also the time that, after almost a year of abuse, usually involving sitting or walking behind me and calling me names or whispering insults just loud enough that other kids could hear but quiet enough that the teachers didn't intervene, I whirled on Megan (her real name) and her sidekick, Adrienne (her real name), and accused, "What did I ever do to you?" And Adrienne — who seemed incapable of a thought or emotion that was not provided to her in a specially marked tube labeled "Megan says do this" — turned to Megan, waiting to hear a list of my grievous offenses. And Megan just stood there, not really saying anything, maybe stuttering something incomprehensible. And Adrienne, catching on that nothing of substance was forthcoming, turned on Megan, too. Arms crossed, Adrienne raised her eyebrows, "Yeah, what did she do?" And Megan stood there, her cheeks going splotchy pink. Apparently Adrienne had assumed that I'd done something to earn their nasty treatment. The fact that she'd been duped into bullying me *for no good reason* for an entire year seemed to really piss her off. Imagine the injustice she'd suffered! Wasting her obsequious bullying on an unworthy subject! And I like to think that, if only for that fleeting, golden moment, Adrienne enjoyed a glimmer of what it

our other classmates were around.

One particular instance of my junior high horror-show existence was when, as I wandered, lonely and bored on the soccer field, waiting for recess to be over, Tracy screamed at me, loudly enough that it reverberated around all the outdoor fields, that I was so happy about my new dog (true) because nobody else would go near me (also true) and that I was therefore some sicko freakazoid who was in love with my dog and wanted to have sex with and marry her. This was not true, although it's a fine example of just why I so strongly preferred the company of non-homo sapiens to my so-called peers at that time.

According to Simmons, the scene above is a textbook example of typical girl-on-girl bullying. (Why does that sound like a "Playboy Channel" special?) Simmons theorizes that in suburban, upper-to-middle-class environments "nice" girls are not allowed to express most forms of aggression, thus they take out their anger and frustration on their peers — often by using psychological information that was gleaned from a previously close relationship.

But really, you might think, isn't it silly, after all these years, to hold a grudge against former schoolmates? Especially since I now have a rich, rewarding life filled with dear, loyal friends, pursuing a writing career that is the fulfillment of my dreams — whereas they are all probably lonely, pathetic, guilt-ridden individuals, floundering in a pool of their own shame and self-loathing for having been such total #@*% heads to their less popular peers? OK, you make a good point. Except for that last part. Because, Simmons says, most former bullies, when confronted as adults with their youthful meanness, don't remember being the aggressor. Although they are likely to remember other situations, involving other kids, wherein *they* were the victims of such bullying.

I saw this phenomenon played out just the other day on a TV show called "Classmates" — and apparently, it's not limited to girls. "Classmates" reunites people with someone they went to high school with. (Further proof, as if any was needed, that some losers will do anything to get on TV. And additional proof that even bigger losers,

such as me, will watch it.) On one segment of this show, a woman is reunited with a man who used to bully and taunt her viciously. One of his antics was to pretend to try to run her down in his car, which was, of course, filled with his laughing, cheering, jeering friends. He would gun the engine and race after her as she walked home from school. But he stopped short of actually hitting her. He also called her some really horrifying names, which mostly indicated his opinion of her looks (ugly) in a variety of ways.

So, the woman sets up this meeting because she's been traumatized since high school and she's basically looking for some healing and an apology from him. But when they meet, the guy only vaguely remembers her, and to his recollection, they were friends! Of course, she recalls it all vividly. So she recounts, in a quiet, trembling voice, repeatedly saying "sorry"(!), some of the terrible things he did to her. And his response is that (1) he's actually a really nice guy and (2) of course he's matured now, but (3) she *misunderstood* his behavior toward her back in high school. To bolster his position that he's truly super-sweet, he tells her that he has a lot of friends. Seeing as how almost



every incident I've encountered of adolescent bullying is by a popular kid waging psychological warfare on a social outcast, using one's popularity as a character reference is hardly convincing. He might as well have said, "I don't pretend to run down people in my old Chevy convertible anymore. Now I drive a Lexus!"

Anyway, my point is that when I eventually do die, probably a lot of people who were really crummy to me will get a little misty and hearken back to the good old days of our (nonexistent) friendship, how we shared a special understanding, the good times we had, etc. So my childhood fantasy of getting even by dying — and having my former bullies repent their shabby treatment of me — will not come to pass, and thus my death will not be satisfying *at all!*

Thus I want to take this opportunity now, while I am still alive, to heal the past. So, to those of you who made my adolescence hellish, especially Tracy, who tried to shame me for reveling in the pure, unconditional love of my dog Lady, the only being at that time who made me feel that life was worth living, I want you to know: Lady died. It was after I'd graduated from college, but my point is, she's dead and I hope you're happy. If you'd like to e-mail me an apology, I'm at sickhumor2@aol.com.

P.S. If — God, I really hope this isn't true — there is anyone out there whom I bullied and tortured (aside from immediate family) please e-mail me and let me know. For what it's worth, I'm really, really sorry.

REVIEW PULP FRICTION

Urban Friction: A Modern Romance

Written, Produced, and Directed by Marianna Beck and Jack Hafferkamp

Libido Films

www.libidomag.com

Urban Friction is a sexy, smart, and funny romp you should share with one or two of your favorite friends. Nominated for a 2003 Erotic "Film of the Year" award, this latest creation from Libido is the long-awaited sequel to the first installment of the Mika and Poochie story from 2001, "Thank You, Mistress." It is also a welcome follow up to Libido's 2000 Erotic Oscar winning production "Ecstatic Moments." Filled with gorgeous colors, savvy editing, inviting lighting and camera work, an engaging story line, endearing acting, and characters worth caring about, this modern romance might just be the most delightful and stimulating (on every level) erotic fantasy to come along.

Set in Chicago, Urban Friction follows the adventures of Mika and her new boyfriend Poochie. Determined to strengthen their budding relationship by encouraging and fulfilling one another's fantasies the two journey into some areas that test their trust and comfort. In the end, they find an arrangement that might work to everyone's benefit. After Mika shares Poochie with Mistress Marilyn at the start of the film, Poochie asks how he can return the favor.

Mika hesitates, saying that Poochie might not be able to handle her deeper desires. After much cajoling, though, Poochie convinces Mika to share her fantasy with him. And when she tells him she wants to be in a threesome, he gladly offers that he knows "just the right girl." Mika stops him short, however, when she announces, that she knows "just the right guy." How far is Poochie willing to accompany Mika on her adventures? Wondering just how far will stop you from skipping through any of this film.

According to the folks at Libido, "Urban Friction: A Modern Romance" is all about the dynamics of sexual relationships and what happens when one partner wants something the other might not." Being together does not mean being exclusive for this young couple, and as they explore their limits and apprehensions, they might just learn to conquer the world together or even fall in love. With a wonderful sense of humor and playful mix of beauty and shyness, these filmmakers mix fantasy

with reality within the film through some precise cross-cutting between the color of the film's world and the black and white of the characters' desires. Alert to the fact that some fantasies are just fantasies, this deft border between the color and black and white is an essential element separating this film from many others.

The film does skirt the stereotypical in a couple of places in its treatment of infidelity, and it does fall flatly into the predictable with its portrayal of Mika and her friend Veronica. However, these are minor moments in a terrific movie. If there are any uncomfortable situations to the film, viewers might be put at ease in the closing moments, when Mika and Poochie spend "the morning after" discussing everything they have been through and what it bodes for the future.

Internationally celebrated adult films creator, historian, and multi-media artist Annie Sprinkle called "Urban Friction" "Intelligent, artistic, fresh and new. The best erotica I've seen in ages!" As sexy, witty, and smart as this movie is, there is little to rebut her verdict. This modern romance is certainly a movie for couples, triples, and many more to enjoy. If Sprinkle's *Herstory of Porn: Reel to Real* (1999) is the best look back at the good and bad of this genre, then, with luck, Urban Friction, is the best look ahead to what the future might offer.

-Brian Bergen-Aurand



REASON #115

"We believe Saddam has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons."

- Vice President Dick Cheney
March 16th 2003, on Meet The Press

"We never had any evidence that Hussein had acquired a nuclear weapon."

- Vice President Dick Cheney
September 14th 2003, on Meet The Press

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STUDS TERKEL



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eternal rebel

“Hold the fort! Hold the fort!” That’s the order Studs Terkel is shouting to the younger generation, telling them to get up and do something to halt the mounting string of assaults on this country. And if anyone can make that call, it’s Studs Terkel. Going on 92 years old, still teeming with punch and vitality, Terkel has spent the better part of his lifetime speaking out against injustices and fighting for a better world. Part of that world already exists, sometimes it’s just hard to see. Terkel shines a torch on this world, on a past filled with both trials and triumphs, trying to eradicate what he calls our national alzheimer’s disease. Just before the end of 2003, Studs Terkel welcomed Catherine Komp in to his Chicago home to talk about this past, and his new book, *Hope Dies Last*. The following is an excerpt from that talk.

Clamor: Why a book about hope?

Studs Terkel: As you know I’ve written a lot things called oral histories. The last dealt with reflections on death called *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*. But it’s not about death, it’s about life. See death doesn’t mean a thing unless there’s something to be celebrated, the life. So basically it’s about people who discuss it and how their lives came in to being, the events in their lives, the despair and the hope that came. It does have a point of view, very definitely. All of the books do. Finally we come to a certain time in our history. I’m always trying to hit a certain moment, you know.

There is such despair now, considering the Administration. With Bush, the nature of him, Cheney, Rumsfeld, of preemptive strikes, of utter disdain for the intelligence of people. So I feel there’s been an assault far more serious than September 11. September 11 was a wake-up call. We are part of the world. Do you realize that during World War II we were the only major participant who was neither bombed nor invaded? Every member of the allies, every member of the axis powers, one way or another. So war to us happens elsewhere, when we talk of war it’s always been elsewhere. And one of the people in this book *Hope Dies Last*, appeared in a previous book. Admiral Gene LaRoque, he’s one of the heroes of World War II, young commander of a ship. He also founded the Center for Defense Information that monitors the Pentagon. He says the United States, since the Cold War began, since the end of World War II, has engaged in more military adventures overseas than any empire in the history of the human species. He starts naming them, Guatemala, Panama, Granada! We never even heard of Granada until President Ronnie Reagan says it was a danger to us. We thought Granada was a place in Spain or a little variation of a folk song heard in supermarkets on the muzak. But no, it’s our enemy. Finally it’s come to the time, such disdain and contempt for the intelligence of the American people. So, hope dies last, a lot of people lost hope.

And so, now I’m addressing the young people and why I want to be in the *Clamor* magazine, that I know has young readers. In 1932, now I’m 91 going to be 92, I was unable to vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or it might have been the socialists or the communists for that matter (I would have voted for Roosevelt). But I was 20 years old. I was underage, because 21 was the minimum age. And then when the voting age became 18, I said there’s hope, my god it’s fantastic! And then I learned to discover that only 16 percent of young people voted in the last election. Sixteen, that’s one-six, percent voted which of course was Bush’s in. So, I want to say this as a preface, I want to say to young people who say “I’m not going to vote, it doesn’t matter,” you are voting! When you stay home and don’t vote, you are voting for Bush. Bush hopes for you to say, I will not vote. That’s a vote for him. And that’s why he won, because you didn’t vote. So, this is your time. And you’ve got to vote. The reason they didn’t vote is because of hopelessness, call it cynicism. And these are the two enemies we face.

What about apathy?

And apathy of course goes along with it, call it the unholy trinity. Apathy, hopelessness, and cynicism and that’s all Bush needs and that’s the point. And so, I got the idea for the book about 25 years ago, from a person I interviewed. Jessie de la Cruz is her name. And she’s a farm worker who helped Cesar Chavez organize the Farm Workers of America. She said, “In times that are bleak, bad times, bewildering times, we have a saying in Spanish, La esperanza muere última. Hope dies last.” And that phrase stuck with me. I did several books since I met her, and then it came, this one. I had to do it now, it had to be written.

I came across this phrase in the “Younglings” section of the book, from Bob Hemaner, he says “Hope comes in the struggle.” Do you think people need to be activists and struggling in order to find that

sense of hope?

Well, nothing comes over night, nothing is magic, it's work of course. The very fact that you are going out knocking on doors, that you write a letter to the editor, that you take part in a rally whether it be for environmental safety or for peace or for civil rights or liberties, the fact that you do it, means you count. People feel that they don't count, that's an old time word. You count! When you take part in something, and you partner with other people, even though the great many seem against, you suddenly realize you were doing something, even if that battle or moment may fail, you made an inroad! There's an old black spiritual, We're climbing Jacob's ladder, rung by rung, we're climbing higher and higher, every rung . . . But now and then you slip back, and we're in a slipped-back period. We've slipped a couple of rungs, so now it's two rungs upward and one rung back, three rungs up and two rungs back. It's a long haul, but that battle itself will also give other people hope. These people in this book that I celebrate give hope to the rest of us, always have.

In your experiences over the years, would you say there's less hope right now?

Right now there's bewilderment I'd say, there's cynicism and right now I'm speaking specifically of the young, because that to me is the vote that will most determine. You know how embarrassing imagining the disdain, cynicism, and that's what you have to buck 'cause that's easy, and it's cheap and worthless. Emily Dickinson wrote "I hope is a thing with feathers." And throughout you have that theme. But this isn't a pollyanna book. I don't mean everything is wonderful and sweet and sunshine, I don't mean have a nice day stuff. I'm talking about it's a battle, but it's there though. That's how the country came to be to begin with. And remember most of America, with the colonies that were here, were not for independence from the King. They didn't give a damn one way or another. These were the agitators, it was Tom Paine, it was Sam Adams you see. They were the minority. And the fight against abolition, the fight against slavery, and then during the 60s there were students and African-Americans fighting for civil rights but also against the Vietnam War. In the beginning it was just the young, the few, who were beaten up by the jocks. And then the jocks joined them later on. I call them, these people whose testimony you hear in the book, the prophetic minority. Prophetic is the word.

What does this prophetic minority look like?

I want to talk about the couple to whom I dedicated the book. Their names are Clifford and Virginia Durr, both long since dead. They were from the South, Montgomery, Alabama, the cradle of confederacy. A well-off white family, she was the daughter of a clergyman, not too well-off but she might have been a southern bell. Her husband, Clifford Durr, was a member of the Federal Communications Commission under Roosevelt. And he's the one who said the air belongs to the public -- just the opposite of the FCC today under Bush, with Powell's son as chairman, that says fewer and fewer people can own more and more things without regulation. And so there in Washington, during the days of the Great Depression and the Cold War is coming into being, and Clifford Durr was asked by Truman to sign a loyalty oath. And Clifford Durr says, "I don't believe in that." "Oh not you," Truman says, "Just your staff." And Clifford Durr says "I will not demean my staff." And he resigned and went back to Montgomery. Now here's Virginia Durr. She was in this battle for civil rights for years. But there were three ways she could have gone. I said she could have been a southern bell, as in *Gone With the Wind*, be kind to her "colored help" and joined a garden club. Or, if she had intelligence and sensitivity and did nothing, she could have gone crazy like her schoolmate, Zelda Fair Fitzgerald, F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife, who was brilliant and went crazy. But she took the third path, "Something's cockeyed here,

something's wrong here, and I'm going to fight!" So she became the rebel girl in that sense.

So they got into all kinds of trouble. And one time I remember her best, I first heard about her when she came one Sunday afternoon to Orchestra Hall in Chicago which seats 3600. She and Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, famous African-American educator who was a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. They came to speak out about the poll tax, the poll tax was aimed at black people and poor whites and made it difficult for them to vote. And Dr. Bethune was great, but Virginia Durr, this white woman was fantastic! So I went back stage to shake her hand and I put forth my hand she says, "Thank you dear," and she puts her hand in mine and in it are 100 leaflets. And she says "Now dear," without missing a beat, with the Southern accent I like to imitate, "You hurry outside and you stand near the curb and pass out the leaflets because Dr. Bethune and I are speaking at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in three hours on the South Side." So that's Virginia Durr.

Well, that's the kind of people to whom I dedicate the book. It comes to a key part, why I say hope dies last and why Virginia and Clifford are a part of a prophetic minority, those that follow them are in this book. It's because in 1965, this is years after they had been the 15, 20 people that used to march and get egged, tomatoed, and threatened. In 1965, two years after the Martin Luther King march in Washington, was the Selma Montgomery march. The march from Selma to Montgomery, to the mansion of Governor George Wallace. Two hundred thousand people showed up! It's a fantastic moment, two hundred thousand people suddenly everywhere showed up! And that night at the home of Clifford and Virginia Durr, I know the address, Two Felder Street, and I knew it so well. The home was always open to everybody, and these few people who were there in the beginning way back were there. And there was Governor George Wallace on TV, addressing the world saying "These damn communists came here!" excoriating some people, naming people in that room, among them Miles Horton of the Highlander Folk School. And Miles Horton made a toast and said "Isn't it wonderful, just a few years ago, do you remember, it was just 10, 12, 15 of us marching down the street. We knew each other by name. Now it's two-hundred thousand and I didn't know a single person there, they didn't know me from Adam. But wasn't it wonderful? Isn't it great?" And that's what I mean by a prophetic minority and that's why the book is dedicated to them. And from then on it becomes contemporary people doing it.

Do you think that's starting to happen now, after all of the demonstrations against the war on Iraq?

Well, I think it's there underneath. But people are afraid to speak out. Although more and more are! And letters to the editor. I read all kinds of stuff, a little item, a squib, can be of significance to me. And I asked the *Tribune* editor, (and that's a conservative paper) and he says its about 50/50, pro or anti-Bush. Which is interesting, you find this in the letters. But, in any case, it's the cynicism you see, especially among the young. I emphasize the young here. I have this hearing problem and make a joke about it, with my two hearing aids and the words don't come out clearly. And so, this is what I'm leading up to, why the cards are stacked, the dice is loaded, but despite that, there are people like Virginia and Clifford Durr today. Because when Bush triumphed . . . remember the attack on Iraq, the preemptive strike? Despite the United Nations, to hell with the United Nations! For three days it looked like a triumph. And we hear the word "embedded journalists." They were embedded and we hear how great this is. Well, to my ears it comes out "In bed with the journalists!" You see, so here we have the media, the establishment media, TV, radio, cable, Fox, newspapers by and large. So that's why the alternative media needs to come. The others are controlled by a few. We know that an Australian neanderthal named Rupert Murdoch is one of the most powerful media moguls in the country. So, that's what the battle is, the cards are stacked, the dice is loaded, but still we roll them. And somehow we still deal them out! And I think there's a hopeful minority, and I think it's going to more and more to the majority. Hopefully. ☆



What's the best way to see truly independent film in your community?

SCREEN-IT-YOURSELF!

a Clamor Magazine how-to resource

by Bob Banner and Sarah Palmer

My first encounter with a video projector and a political documentary happened in Seattle during the anti-WTO protests in November of 1999. After a long day at a conference sponsored by radical scholarly activists at the International Forum on Globalization, I was walking down the streets in Seattle. As I was sight-seeing (this was days before the cacophony/clash between protesters and the police) and browsing the numerous flyers posted on buildings, I came across a poster describing a film to be shown called *Zapatista!* It was happening that night in a short time right near where I was walking. I went over a few blocks and to my amazement there was a crowd trying to get into the basement of a bar called the Alibi Room. The line did not move. We waited and waited and talked and talked until the line started to move down the stairs. More than an hour later I found myself cramming into a dank and dark cellar with more than 100 people eager to see the film.

What struck me initially was a strange

box emitting a blue light shining on a white cotton bed sheet taped precariously to the wall of the basement. Suddenly the wall came to life with the beginnings of the film but not before a great introduction by one of the filmmakers who went to Chiapas in search of Marcos and the Zapatista rebellion. The dank dark cellar became a theater alive with passion, intellectual energy, courage and emotional potency. *Zapatista!* was not only a hit for the entire audience, but it started a whole new revolution in education, mobilization, activist campaigning and how to articulate one's cause to larger groups of people.

I bought the video from the director and promised that I would hold a screening in a small town in California and would call them as soon as I returned. Four years later we are still showing radical films. I wrote an ebook to tell people how to do it themselves so other people who don't yet know about this revolution can get turned onto it and begin extending the life of very cool and powerful documentaries.

Rebuild the System

With film festivals becoming more mainstream, according to some filmmakers I have spoken with, what happens to the really excellent political/cultural documentaries? Where do they go? If they are lucky they hit some film festivals throughout the world for a period of time and then what? You may watch them in the privacy of your own home on cable, PBS's "Point of View," or some satellite network channels like Free Speech TV or WorldLinkTV. Or, if you are lucky, you will wait a few years and purchase the video for \$25-\$50 through some distributor, if you are so inclined to buy videos. But most often they die!

So, how do good quality, potent, and politically effective documentaries get out to the public arena? Is there a niche where this feeble and weak distribution system can be challenged and changed? Also, can videos be used as a community activist tool to organize people around various causes and to trans-

above: Brooklyn's Rooftop Films (www.rooftopfilms.com), started in 1997, has grown to be the largest and longest-running rooftop film screening series in the world.

port them away from their isolated TV sets or computer monitors for a time to feel the passion and excitement when a room full of people are viewing the same powerful documentary?

Because of the revolutionary technology of the video projector and dropping prices, it is now possible to create a traveling theater. Pack the VCR, video projector, amplifier and speakers into a suitcase with wheels and away you go, onward to the venue where gatherings can come and watch on a large screen some excellent educational and politically potent documentaries.

How to Start

Locate the videos, DVDs or films. Buy them or rent them or get them for free. Get permission from the director, producers, or the distribution company. Show them at a favorite venue or move around to different cities or different venues in the same city. The possibilities are endless and you can make money for everyone involved. After you show them to the public, it is even possible to store them at a video store (with permission) and rent them out to even a larger audience,

lots, etc. Everyone has varied policies (prices, rental agreements, guidelines, insurance, etc.) so it would be best to write them all down so you don't have to reinvent the wheel each time you want to show a film.

The biggest challenge is getting the word out: advertising; making flyers; posting the PDF downloadable flyers on a web site so people can download them, print them, and post them at their favorite cafes, bars, restaurants, etc.; finding volunteers to post flyers throughout the county or city (or paying/bartering with them); creating an email media list; locating the fax numbers for the media, spending time using e-fax to fax the flyers; and creating and discovering local Internet progressive listservs to spread the word. And following up with the various media representatives to make sure they received the information on the event. Creating relationships with people in the media helps. Knowing the due dates for calendar announcements and how to write an effective press release are extremely necessary.

If you do not want to buy the video projector (going for about \$1800), then rent one (usually about \$250 for 3 hours without any assistance) or rent a local theater that

filmmaker who had traveled there (it even included footage of an interview with the head of the Northern Alliance shortly before his assassination). A particular percentage of our proceeds went to a fund to help set up educational centers in the rural areas of Afghanistan that she personally established.

Spread the Word

The endeavor to buy your own equipment and show films on a regular basis strengthens the progressive community by supporting various causes and educating the community about issues more and more people are becoming passionate about, whether it's anti-globalization, sustainability practices in family farming, GMO foods, racism, pesticides, permaculture designs, history, international affairs, or music video documentaries. We cannot depend on other people to show these important political films. To be in a room with 100+ folks watching the same film is electric. To have the audience speak afterwards like in the old days of the town hall meetings is inspiring. People have questions about what to do. People in the audience have answers. The organizers can facilitate a dis-



so there's more of a life for these excellent videos. So the education, passion, courage, and artistic expression have a continuity to them ... so they live on! So dissenting viewpoints can live on, so awakening and political gutsiness live on!!

Locating the videos is easy. Using search engines on the web and looking for something as obvious as "radical political documentaries" will lead you to numerous films and keep you busy for hours. You could also go to web sites of organizations like Free Speech TV, the Arab Film Distributing Company, Bullfrog films, the Video Project or First Run Films. Learn what's out there and learn how to negotiate with film directors or their distributors.

Finding venues is also easy. The local library is easiest since they are in the business of allowing community organizations to use their facilities. Or check out churches, basements in restaurants, walls near parking

is wired digitally to show videos or DVDs. See for yourself if it's a worthwhile proposition. That's what we did in the beginning. We rented a local theater at their downtime period, usually Monday through Wednesday. The theater got packed with films like "What I Learned About US Foreign Policy" and "Hidden Wars of Desert Storm." Sometimes films don't do so well, but we try to balance showing films that educate people about various causes and the ones that bring in some cash. To make some extra money, we showed "Crop Circles" twice and it brought in a packed audience. And what that also does is potentially bridge apolitical people with political people, and expand people's interests to include other facets of the broader progressive community

And the money raised can go to various causes. When the US started bombing Afghanistan, we showed a documentary about Afghanistan from a local professor

discussion or ask a person with expertise about this or that cause to speak after film screenings. We need to not only extend the life of some of these great documentaries but use them as community activist tools - especially in these dire times when solutions, inspiration, and supporting ourselves, emotionally as well as financially, is paramount.

For info on Bob Banner's ebook, *Becoming the Media: How to Show Films in Your Local Community*, go to www.hopedance.org.

Other Links:

- Rooftop Films: www.rooftopfilms.com
- Free Speech TV: www.freespeech.org,
- The Arab Film Distributing Company: <http://www.arabfilm.com>
- Bullfrog Films: www.bullfrogfilms.com
- The Video Project: <http://www.videoproject.net>
- First Run Films: www.frif.com



NOTHING LIKE THE MOVIES

a recent trip to Vietnam pleasantly defies Daniel Konecky's Hollywood-fueled expectations of the region

My wife and I just returned from a trip to Vietnam and Cambodia. Initially, when we decided to go to Asia, we had the beaches of southern Thailand in mind. Many of our friends had been to Thailand. "Lots of full-moon parties," they said. The more adventurous of the pack had briefly crossed into Cambodia and Vietnam. They came back with wonderful stories about the two countries. "Nothing like the movies," they said.

We booked our tickets and drove to the airport. In the end, we made good on our goal of sitting on a beach, drinking fresh coconuts and playing in the waves, however our three weeks in Vietnam and Cambodia were much more than just a seaside holiday.

It's a long flight from Los Angeles to Vietnam, lots of time to think. During that eternal night across the Pacific Ocean, my mind began spitting up all the images of Vietnam that it had stored somewhere deep down inside ever since I was old enough to watch M.A.S.H. on TV: Vietnam. 'Nam. Saigon. Tet Offensive. Napalm. Agent Orange. Charlie. GI. VC. DOA.

I was born three months after the fall of Saigon on a little farm in Pennsylvania, a million miles away from dodging the draft, serving my country, or wading through rice paddies. When I was a kid, my friends and I played "Vietnam" on the hillside behind my house. Despite the thrill of child's play, my American-ness equates Vietnam with fear. They're almost synonyms. Going for the first time, in some strange way, I felt like I was returning. My collective memory was seeing first hand the hills and rice paddies that provide the backdrop for every war movie I grew up watching. Every image of Vietnam I have ever seen is one of conflict.

Somewhere over the International Dateline, the "fasten seat belt" sign lit up above my head. I was wide-awake, watching the beacon

on the edge of the wing light up like a candle. I was thinking about ghosts; 58,183 American ghosts. The plane shook and rattled. Outside, the wing appeared and then disappeared back into the dark clouds that surrounded us. The sun rose as we descended into Hanoi.

I half expected ruined facades of buildings and shrapnel on the runway of Hanoi International. There was neither. The buildings were colorful and the terminal was modern. We walked out to a taxi. Lingering moisture from the last big rain made the air felt wet and steamy. I carried our baggage and the weight of everyone in my family looking at me blankly and wondering out loud "Why the hell are you going there? Why not Thailand, honey?"

The taxi driver was missing his pointer finger on his right hand. There was just a little stump. I watched him drive from the back seat. Too young to be a veteran I thought. Maybe it was just a naturally occurring birth defect. Or maybe worse.

We drove across the Long Bien Bridge: a favorite target of B-52s during the war, until the North Vietnamese began using American POW's to rebuild the vital supply line. Crossing the water, I caught myself thinking about John McCain and the five and a half years he spent as a POW. I look at the empty space where my taxi driver's finger should be. They say that after you lose an arm or a leg you can still feel its presence. I wonder, I think, the unthinkable.

The gash the war left behind is just below the surface. Squint and you can see it lying there, inert.

In Vietnam, the fog spills down from the hills and blankets the coast. It's just like the movies. Heading south on board the Reunification Express, one week after arriving in Hanoi, I watched the sunrise from the train. Light came slow through the fog, like the way my grandfather tells a story. As the darkness receded, I could make

out the shapes of people, bent over, working in the paddies. It was like they had been there all night long, I mean nobody was walking out to the rice paddies, they were just there. They had always been there.

That night we were in Hue, in central Vietnam. Hue is the ancient capital and the sight of the bloodiest fighting of the Tet offensive. There are bullet holes in the citadel. The once beautiful Purple City is rubble, an NGO's quixotic reconstruction project. Graves are here and there, strewn throughout the countryside. Some aren't marked, they are just mounds. Some of the graves are ancient; all of the mounds are not. In Hue, death is so close, we feel like we can see it.

It was the full moon. People were outside their homes, tending their family altars. Flames danced up into the air; stooped boogiemens rising from rice paddies in a war I was never a part of, but whose presence I felt strongly. There were tunnels leading North to the DMZ; there was incense burning in the pagodas, there were odd shapes dancing in my peripheral vision.

We continued south, aware of a war whose effects we could feel, but not necessarily see. There have been several more chapters of war for the Vietnamese people. After the Americans left, the Chinese invaded from the North. The Vietnamese beat them back while fighting in Cambodia at the same time. In Cambodia, the horror of the Khmer Rouge and year zero was just beginning as Saigon fell. Again, movies such as "Apocalypse Now" provided my cursory knowledge about the home of the ancient Khmer people. Kurtz and "the horror."

We spent three days in Siem Reap, Cambodia, exploring the ancient temple complex of Angkor Wat. Dating back as early as the eighth century, the temples stand as a testament to the greatness that mankind is capable of. In the temples of Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat, each stone is shaped to fit exactly in place. They are covered with reliefs depicting ancient battles and scenes from the Ramayana epic. Nothing is plain. The towers of Angkor Wat are sixty-five meters tall. No mortar. No cranes. Just perfect symmetry.

There was a melody played on a wooden flute that I heard over and over in Cambodia. It was haunting but it was also lovely. At night, in the hotel I would hear it coming up from the street below. If I forgot it, after I enclosed myself inside the mosquito netting and closed my eyes, the melody would return to me. In the morning it would be gone. It only came at dusk.

We spent our days in the ruins. The forest is simultaneously preserving and destroying Angkor. In Ta Prohm, banyan trees and fig trees have grown right through the temple walls, prying them apart while another tree's root system keeps the walls upright. The trees have become part of the temples, enter twined with the stone like lovers. All the foreigners marvel at the trees. The tour guides point them out. We loved looking at the trees.

Outside the temple there were beggars with no legs and no arms. Inside we looked at the trees.

I lay down on a huge stone pillar and closed my eyes. In my imagination I could see the torches burning throughout the halls. A king ascended the temple steps to perform sacred rites. Birds that don't exist anymore flew overhead on a wind blowing down from the Cardamom Mountains. I could hear it all. I could see it all. I could almost feel it.

Outside the temple there were beggars with no legs and no arms. Inside I closed my eyes.

Along the path between inside and outside, a group of men and women sat on a tapestry, playing traditional Khmer music. Each musician was horribly disfigured. The drummer had one arm. The singer's face was so scarred, the new skin made her look gaunt. They played lively, discordant music.

Buddhists believe the human body is a temple. What does a person say to a man with a destroyed body? In place of words, I gave him a few coins and then we left this place, en route to see more ruined temples.

That night I heard the phantom flute again, only louder this time. We were at a restaurant, near the street, enclosed from the traffic by a

natural wall of plants and flowers. Out from the darkness a man with one leg appeared. He stood in front of the restaurant. Leaning on his crutches, he took a wooden flute from under his arm and began to play the melody that I had heard every night since I had come to this country. Spellbound, I stared at him. I couldn't help myself.

The girl from the restaurant approached him with money in her outstretched hands. She offered the bills to him and then very deeply and very humbly, she bowed to him. The flute continued to sing for a moment longer. Then he turned, and moving in an awkward canter, he was absorbed back into the night. As he went, the song went with him. The next day, we flew to Ho Chi Minh City. I can't remember the melody now, only the presence of the song.

Asia made me feel powerless. It attacked my sense of right and wrong. It penetrated my defenses and left me destroyed inside. Then it picked me up from the rubble, took me on the back of a motorbike. Revealed itself to me. School children would wave. Old men smiled genuinely. The beaches of Mui Ne and Nha Trang satiated our longing for a tropical paradise. The South China Sea is warm and so are the Khmer and Vietnamese people. They were happy we were American. They were happy we were there. They were happy to make contact. It is late 2003 in Vietnam. It is not 1968. All the mounds, all the burned bridges; the child has grown up, and he's trying to make sense of it all.

Veterans are also trying to make sense of their experience. We had the pleasure of meeting Mick the Australian in Hanoi. He is a veteran. He's got tattoos all down his forearms. Mick wears John Lennon glasses and is not ever, for one moment, without a cigarette. Says he smokes five packs a day. He fought outside Saigon during the war. He prefers Hanoi, says there are too many memories down south for a bloke like him.

Mick's trying to make it right. He's pushing 60. He's going to marry Zhang, his Vietnamese girlfriend. She's half his age. Her father is a veteran. Once upon a time, her father also fought outside of Saigon. When Mick attacked in a helicopter, her father escaped through a tunnel.

Once upon a time, Zhang's father and her fiancée shot at each other. Once upon a time, her father spent two years in a hospital recovering from various waves of facial reconstruction surgery and grafting of skin that hadn't melted during a napalm attack. Mick tried to kill him. He tried to kill Mick. Now Mick will be his son in law. He will marry his Zhang. And when Mick dies, he will leave his Veteran pension to her and her father, who he once tried to kill. That is how Mick is making it right.

Mick told me the story over a course of four cigarettes. Between the third and the fourth, he asked me if I wanted one. Shaking, I smoked with Mick until it was time for me to catch the train. I told him "Good luck" as I started to walk down the road, and he said that he never had any.

Mick's probably there, on Tam Thuong Street, right now, smoking, reconciling his relationship to Vietnam.

The flight home was smooth. No turbulence. No ghosts. My skin is tan.

Recently, a US Navy Warship docked in Ho Chi Minh City for a three-day good will visit. It was the first US ship to dock in Vietnam since the war. The Captain laid a wreath at the feet of a Ho Chi Minh statue. The sailors shook hands with the people.

My wife and I sat by Hoan Kien Lake. A group of young men approached us, asking where we were from. "United States," we said. They asked how old we were. "Twenty-eight," I said. "Twenty-six," my wife said. They were twenty-two and twenty. We looked at each for a long time, looking for traces of characters in movies, in propaganda, in stories. It's 2003. It's not 1968. We were perfect strangers. We introduced ourselves for the first time, in a long time. America and Vietnam smiled and shook hands. ☆

Afropunk: The "Rock n Roll Nigger" Experience

www.afropunk.com

Being white in the United States means never having to think about what it means to be white. And most white folks don't. In fact, any frank discussion of race makes many liberal or left-leaning white people immediately nervous or defensive. America is supposed to be "colorblind," after all. And what better way to prove blindness than by intentionally ignoring something or someone?

Although some might claim to "erase racism" by simply refusing to acknowledge that white supremacy exists everywhere, the fact remains that racism and white privilege will never relinquish its power anywhere without a fight. And just like in the struggle for civil rights, it will take people of color organizing to create space for ourselves and challenging "whiteness" in order to move toward true equality. For a person of color in a white-dominated setting, success or acceptance often means having to pretend to be blind—adopting the norms and standards of the dominant white culture and denying the validity of our own experiences as people of color. This "colorblindness" is actually very selective — it only affirms whiteness.

Still, some of us pretend to be blind for so long that we forget how to take those blinders off. We may try to fit in with our white peers by downplaying all the parts of ourselves that separate us from white culture. We may try to excuse hurtful, racist remarks made by white people that we like. We may insist that we aren't being discriminated against as long as we aren't called by racial slurs or beat up by neo-Nazis. In short, we may try to pretend that racism doesn't exist, at least not in our little pockets of friends, at least as long as we don't think or talk too much about race.

James Spooner's documentary "Afropunk: The Rock and Roll Nigger Experience" rips the "colorblindness" blinders off mercilessly, but with an obvious love for the people, the music, and for parts of the punk scene such as the DIY ethic. The title "Rock and Roll Nigger" is a reference to a Patti Smith song of the same name in which she compares her struggle as a white feminist in the rock music scene to that of black people fighting against white oppression. Spooner reclaimed the title in an act of cultural re-appropriation. "Afropunk" follows the lives of four black people who are very involved in punk rock scene: Tamar Kali, a woman in New York City; Moe Mitchell, singer for the band Cipher from Long Island, New York; Matt Davis, from Iowa City, Iowa; and Mariko Jones, editor of the zine *Social Inflight* in Orange County, California. The film examines how various black punk rockers in a mostly white punk hardcore scene deal with issues ranging from how it feels to be the only black kid at a show, to interracial dating, to feeling unsupported by the black community because of being punk.

In many ways, "Afropunk" gives much needed recognition and validation to black punk rockers. One recurring theme in the documentary is chal-

lenging the idea that punk music isn't "Black music." Numerous black punks (separately) argued that rock and roll was actually African music first and pointed to groundbreakers like Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Jimi Hendrix to illustrate their point. Another insists that facial piercing too is African, going back to the bush long before it was punk.

Often, Spooner's questions — as well as the answers of those interviewed — hit too close to home for comfort. I cringed when I saw brown kids say things that showed how much self-hate or at least lack of self-respect they had internalized, and how their white friends seemed to make it worse. I squirmed because those kids were saying things I probably said at one time while trying to grapple with my own Chinese heritage and my identity as a scrappy anarchist kid. Spooner too commented, "I think a lot of black people in the scene feel resentful about being the only one in their group of friends who has to think about race. This shows them why it's important." It was uncanny how people interviewed hundreds of miles and many months apart, but who shared the common experience of being the only black punk kid in their community, echoed each other's sentiments repeatedly. One particularly painful and funny scene explored how people reacted to seeing another black person at a show. Several people responded that although they were quick to seek out fellow punks of color, they had experiences where the other person snubbed them:

"I want to go up to them, but I don't want to be like, 'I'm black, you're black; we should talk' and come across weird."

"Sometimes I'll get the dis — Like that person might be black, but they didn't come here to be black."

Another common experience for Afropunks was being told by their white friends "you're not really black." This "safe black" phenomenon — the idea that black people who don't act within the allowable parameters of white peoples' stereotypes of them weren't really black and were thus "safe" — was particularly insulting to black punks and exposed how deep white supremacist thinking permeates those who have

been socialized as white, even ones who are "open-minded." Luckily, the film is also rife with examples of Afropunks (mostly in their late 20s) who show that self-love, cultural knowledge, creativity, individuality, and dedication to the Black/ African struggle can transcend the isolation, alienation and stagnation of an unsupportive white punk scene. Tamar Kali continues to live and make music on her own terms and challenges the musical sensibilities of her perplexed neighbors. Moe Mitchell, a practitioner of ancient African traditions as well as a driving force in the New York hardcore scene, continues to push boundaries of what's punk and what's black.

Perhaps the best thing of all though that came from the film is the message board marked 'Community' on the Afropunk website. Spooner maintains the message board and he regularly participates in the discussions, but it's evident that it is the 305 registered users, assorted guests and other curious web surfers who spark the lively debates and find new ways to make punk and race relevant to each other. There is a section to talk about 'the scene,' another to discuss politics and a place to recommend books and zines. Afropunks in Chicago who met on the message board are now meeting for brunches and setting up shows. There is even talk of putting on an Afropunk festival sometime in the future.

But for Spooner, who left the punk scene years before making "Afropunk," the film was never just about punk. It is a film he made for black people primarily. Ultimately, "Afropunk" poses a deeper question to people of color who surround themselves primarily with white faces: Can any movement or scene that is dominated by white people serve the interests of people of color?

"I'm not trying to get kids to look to punk for salvation. I think it is good music and there are good things to take from it, but at the end of the day, we can't wait for white folks to liberate us. Just like the punk scene doesn't need nor want to be legitimized by corporate America, we don't need to be legitimized by white people. Blacks' constant search for white validation has put them in a position of power over us. That won't be reversed until we make music and create communities for each other. If the question is: Should we work towards an all black punk scene? Well, if that is your mission. I think we should take back everything that belongs to us."

-Puck



On the Justice of Roosting Chickens: Reflections on the Consequences of U.S. Imperial Arrogance and Criminality

by Ward Churchill
AK Press, 2003.
www.akpress.org

To the average reader, Ward Churchill's latest book, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens: Reflections on the Consequences of U.S. Imperial Arrogance and Criminality* may seem a bit discordant. The title implies a certain amount of glee in the 9-11 attacks, matched by the somewhat ominous picture on the back cover of the author holding a machine gun.



But readers would be remiss if they let these semantics deter them from picking up this highly informative book. The sheer weight of the events described within make this book worth the \$15.95 cover price. And the shockingly thorough timelines of U.S. imperialism will surely earn this book a place on the shelf next to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* as classics in the canon of radical history texts. Churchill's discussion of 9-11 is likely to be the most controversial aspect of the book. Indeed, his position on the events could be easily taken as a celebration, if not a rationalization of what happened that fateful day. But his point is less that the 9-11 attacks were correct and more that they were inevitable. Through meticulous research, he examines the role of the United States as a ruthless empire, domestically and abroad. As a result, Churchill arrives at the painful but no less poignant question, "How can they not hate us?" The United States has positioned itself as the world's judge, jury, and executioner. When pushed, Churchill says, some people push back. The book's strength comes in its historical depth and international scope. In the opening essay, "The Ghosts of 9-11: Reflections on History, Justice and Roosting Chickens," Churchill focuses particularly on the well-published genocidal sanctions against the people of Iraq as proof of both U.S. Imperial arrogance and the willful ignorance of the U.S. population. Like the "Good Germans" of the Nazi era, Churchill rails against the "Good Americans" of today who, he argues, knew about the murderous sanctions but chose to do nothing about them. If the people of this country do not do all that is humanly possible to stop U.S. hegemony (and bring the country's war criminals to justice), Churchill writes, then those "most egregiously victimized by American lawlessness will have no real alternative but to try and do the job themselves. And, in the collectivity of their civic default, Americans, no more than the Good Germans of 1945, can have little legitimate complaint as to how they may have to go about it."

With caustic wit and exacting documentation, Churchill takes the reader on a tour of U.S. imperialism from 1776 to 2003. Of the three chapters in the book, two are comprised mostly of extensive chronologies. Chapter two is entitled "That 'Most

Peace-Loving of Nations': A Record of U.S. Military Actions at Home and Abroad, 1776-2003." Whereas this chapter chronicles the United States forays in global conquest, the final chapter takes aim at U.S. disregard for international law. The bulk of the book comes in this third and final chapter, "A Government of Laws? U.S. Obstructions, Subversions, Violations and Refusals of International Legality Since World War II." This 200-page chapter is comprised almost entirely of a chronology of U.S. aggression in the post-War period. In this chapter, Churchill recites United Nations resolution after resolution in the post-World War II period that the United States was either the sole dissenting voice, or that the country refused to abide by. The implication is clear: the United States has never abided by any laws except its own, if even them. Indeed, there is no time in history when the United States was anything but an illegitimate empire built on and maintained by genocide.

Although it may not provide the exact blueprint from which to move forward, the book will, as ecopsychologist Chellis Glendinning notes in her introduction, "awaken you to the pure necessity to put an end to empire" by chronicling two centuries of consistent brutality. This is the book's greatest strength.

-Dan Berger

2/15 the day the world said NO to war

Connie Koch/Hello [NYC]
Hello [NYC]/AK Press
www.hellonyc.net/www.akpress.org

It feels really good to be on the right side of history and 2/15 dramatically captures this in the events that were held the world over on that day. More than 100 nations and close to 30 million people were mobilized around the world to not only loudly proclaim "NO!" to war, but to also globalize peace in a way that has never been done before. February 15, 2003 was the largest international peace demonstration in the history of political activism — a major achievement and we cannot forget what was accomplished on that day. February 15 didn't stop the impending war, and I don't think that many people thought it would, but it did dramatically bring all corners of the world together as one voice unparalleled in history.

2/15 presents this in the large and small. Photos from all over the world capture not only the mass of people in various cities throughout out the world, but also the small moments — the signs, the individual faces, and the atmosphere. The text that accompanies the photos gives a thorough cross section of feelings, beliefs and attitudes of those participating in events that day.

It is easy to forget what a major achievement 2.15.2003 was as the occupation continues and casualties mount in Iraq on a daily basis, but that is precisely why a book like this so important. The demonstrations around the world on 2/15 were not just against the illegal preemptive war the Bush administration set its sights on, it was also about a more compassionate vision of the world that people everywhere wish to see created.



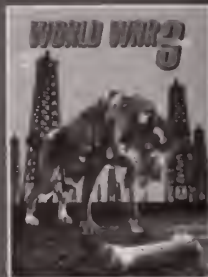
I sincerely hope that this book serves as an inspiration of what we can archive across the borders of the world when people come together. We have a whole world to win and it cannot be just about what we are against- it ultimately comes down to building a world based on what we are for — freedom, diversity, peace, and sustainability. In the short Afterword Noam Chomsky states: "If you go to one demonstration and then go home, that's something, but the people in power can live with that. What they can't live with is sustained pressure that keeps building, organizations that keep doing things, people that keep learning lessons from the last time and doing it better the next time." This is our challenge, the mobilization of 2/15 raised the bar, and we must keep building our movement — Remember 2/15, and keep working for a brighter future!

-Brandon Bauer

World War 3 Illustrated

#34 Taking Liberties
World War 3 Illustrated INC. 2003
www.topshelfcomix.com

With the illegal preemptive war and occupation that daily takes more lives and descends further into quagmire in Iraq it is easy to focus on this as a central issue. That said, I am happy to say that the current issue of WW3 Illustrated does not take this approach. There are so many issues in the world that all deserve our attention, so many things we need to arm ourselves with information about so we can confront the madness that has taken hold of our country. This current issue of WW3 Illustrated does just that through a mix of in-depth articles, stunning graphic work, and political satire. Some of the best currently active political artists and cartoonists are featured addressing a wide variety of topics in their own distinctive styles.



Nicole Schulman in her piece "The Quiet Occupation" addresses the issue of our military presence on the Korean peninsula. She focuses on the the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) of 1967 between the U.S. and South Korea. This highly informative piece in Schulman's stark yet beautifully modeled graphic style gives a profound example of how the U.S. Military shields itself from the prosecution of crimes committed in foreign countries where they operate.

Seth Tobacmān's "The Serpent State" takes on the issue of the wall currently being built in Israel to protect Israeli settlements that have encroached on Palestinian territories falling outside of the internationally recognized "Green Line". This is a very profound and powerful piece executed in Tobacmān's blunt graphic style.

It is highly informative, beautifully illustrated and contains stunning work from the likes of Sue Coe, Tom Tomorrow, Keith Knight, Art Spiegelman, and many more. World War 3 Illustrated has been in print for close to 25 years for good reason, so check it out!

-Brandon Bauer

PINE VALLEY COSMONAUTS 'Executioner's Last Songs: Vol. 2 & 3'

All-star band fronted by JON LANGFORD plays their death card again to raise a little more hell and more cash for anti-death penalty groups. Songs of murder and mayhem, sin and sorrow sung by a remarkable cast of willing allies. Contributors include: TIM RUTILI (Califone), DAVE ALVIN, SALLY TIMMS, KURT WAGNER (Lambchop), KELLY HOGAN, CHRIS MILLS, ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO, REBECCA GATES (Spinanes), REX HOBART, RHETT MILLER (Old 97's), GURF MORLIX, JON RAUHOUSE, MARK EITZEL, THE MEAT PURVEYORS, and many more. A budget-priced DOUBLE DISC. BS 095 \$15



DOLLAR STORE

Self-titled debut CD headed by sometime Waco Brother Deano. Rootsy chord progressions slathered with textures, volume and loose angular guitar racket to make a thick, greasy little platter. Budget-priced. BS 098 \$10

TRAILER BRIDE 'Hope is a Thing With Feathers'

North Carolina's swamp gothic story tellers are back with a record that sounds like the heat waves rising off the asphalt on a remote two-lane highway.

One listen and you sense that, while they might not have seen Robert Johnson make his bargain with the devil, they may have been around when the deal went bad and debts were collected. BS 101 \$12



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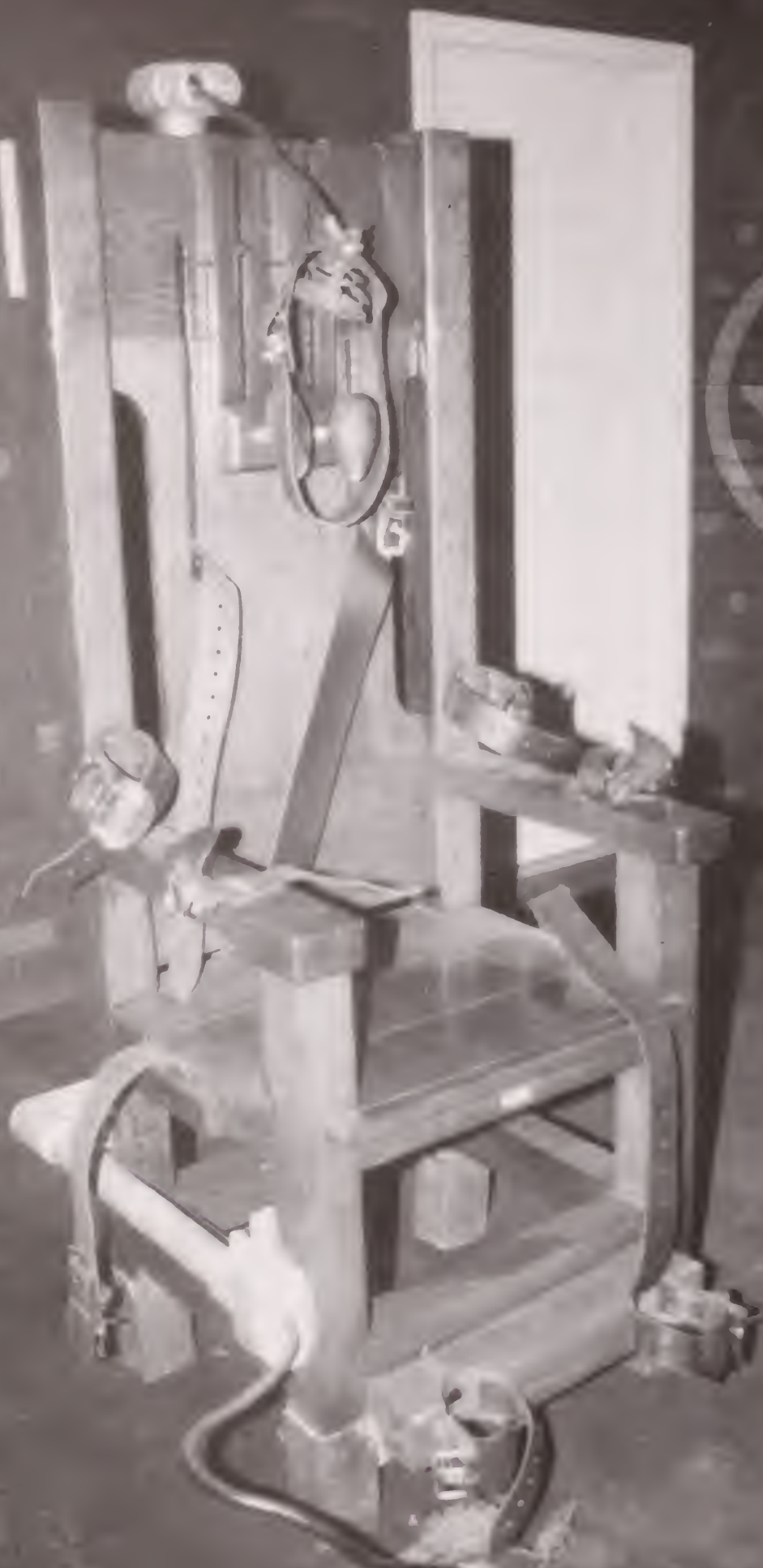
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In the Heart of Darkness

A Journey to the Texas Death Capitol

Heading south on Highway 45 just outside of Huntsville, the Death Capitol of Texas, one might see vultures circling the dark piney woods that surround the little Huntsville has to offer.

Huntsville is home to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Huntsville "Walls" Unit, the facility — one of seven prisons in the area — that houses Texas's infamous Death House. So far this year, the State of Texas has executed 25 people sentenced to death for violent crimes against humanity. Since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976 and reimplemented in 1982, there have been 313 people terminated by the State of Texas. Virginia is second on the capital punishment list, with a total of 89 executions. All of Texas's 313 human lives were taken inside the "heart of darkness," which is Huntsville.

The Walls Unit is not in the middle of the piney Huntsville State Park, just south of the town itself, or in some other remote place. Rather, it is in the middle of town, located just next to Sam Houston University and surrounded by homes in which Huntsville's citizens live and raise their children.

The Walls Unit, named after the 32-foot-high brick wall that surrounds the facility, was built in 1848 and houses 1,700 inmates and the "Death House," where executions take place.

Jeff McCarthy, a waiter at the Tejas Café, is from Houston, but moved to Huntsville to go to school, majoring in pre-law. At one time he lived across the street from the prison. McCarthy and his friends have a ritual: they have a burger and a beer across the street from the Walls Unit every time there is an execution, at a restaurant called Killer Burgers.

"I think that the executions do affect us to some degree, but the executions aren't really publicized," McCarthy said. "Unless, there is a 'big' person being executed and there are protesters, nobody ever talks about it. Also, the prison is the main industry. If you don't work for the prison or for the university, then you aren't working. [To understand Huntsville], you have to look at the economics; whenever the prison has layoffs the town really feels it."

McCarthy said the Walls Unit in the middle of town never really bothered him until he found himself looking over the prison walls from his apartment at night. "It is crazy that the prison is in the middle of the town," he said. "At night when you drive by, all the cells have cable television, and in every single room you can see the televisions flicker....It is weird to see all those lights flickering."

The general consensus around town is that the prison is a good thing because of the money and jobs it generates.

Chris Schmitt, receptionist/secretary for the Huntsville Chamber of Commerce, is pleased to give out any information visitors might need to enjoy Huntsville more effectively. She lives just outside of Huntsville, having moved from Houston after 19 years to get away from the traffic. "The prison executing people doesn't bother us one bit," Schmitt said. "In fact, that prison, the Walls Unit, is just down the street. Here is a map with the route highlighted."

As you enter Huntsville on 45, the first thing you see — besides the prison just off the highway — is the state Prison Museum, where Jessica Kunkel works as a cashier. "The Texas

"Huntsville... that place gives me the creeps... The penitentiary is the main employer down there and it always makes me wonder who should be behind those walls, the prisoners or the citizens."

-Dallas-based photographer Phil Hollenbeck on his visits to Huntsville, TX

words and photos Aaron Barker

Department of Criminal Justice (TDC) and then the university are the two largest employers," she said. "Huntsville would certainly not be the same city if the prison wasn't here. The college wouldn't be the college without the prison because our biggest program is the criminal justice program and it wouldn't be as extensive as it is without the neighboring prison system."

The Prison Museum was opened in 1989 and its purpose is to "preserve and display prison artifacts as well as educate the public on the history and culture of Texas prisons."

According to Kunkel, the Prison Museum's biggest attraction is "Old Sparky," the electric chair used from 1918 to 1964. "We have people on weekends who are visiting family members and friends in the prison units who come to the museum," Kunkel said. "We also have a lot of criminal justice majors from Sam Houston as well as correctional officers and other employees of the TDC. Also, we are located off of highway 45 and we get a lot of [tourists] who come in because they have seen our sign and stop."

Although the prison is Huntsville's biggest employer, most of the town's citizens are reluctant to talk about the ways the deaths within the Walls Unit affect them.

"We are probably a little more apathetic about the executions ...

We are less likely to be aware when an execution is happening than someone else, even though it happens in our town."



"We are probably a little more apathetic about the executions," Kunkel admitted. "I would say your average native Huntsvillian is less likely to be one of the protesters of an execution than someone from somewhere else. We are less likely to be aware when an execution is happening than someone else, even though it happens in our town."

James Willett, former Walls Unit warden and current Director of the Prison Museum, said he had seen his fair share of death within the walls. In fact, he had seen so much death he cannot recall exactly how much: "The media reported about 89 when I retired, but I don't know because I have never sat down and figured it up. Eighty-nine executions in the three years I was a warden there."

Willett said his job as warden was not a pleasant one, and witnessing executions affected him greatly. "It was very much a difficult job, just in watching somebody die," Willett said. "There is not anything enjoyable about that."

Willett moved to Huntsville in 1970 and has enjoyed living and prospering with the city and its people. "I think without the prison system you would probably be lucky to find a red light here in town," Willett said. "I don't think the people in Huntsville [are] affected the way most outsiders think so. I always get asked questions about the executions here in Huntsville, but most of the people don't pay any at-

ention to it. Typically, I like to say that if you went down to the local café on the square and asked them about the execution that was going to happen that evening, if there was one, you would be telling most of them something that they don't know....It is just something that goes on here...something that isn't necessarily drawn upon. They just try and keep it out of their lives. Whether you are for it or against it, it gets kind of old awful quick around here."

Current Governor Rick Perry, the Republican who followed George W. Bush into the Texas Governor's office, had nothing to say about the people of Huntsville or how the death row located there has touched their lives for good or ill. (Incidentally, Bush as Governor reviewed and approved 152 of the 313 executions since 1982 in Texas.) Perry did send a letter to me with these comments concerning what he and the "vast majority" of Texans feel about the death penalty:

"Like the vast majority of Texans, I believe that the death penalty is an appropriate response for the most violent crimes against our fellow human beings. In fact, I believe capital punishment affirms the high value we place on innocent life, because it tells those who would prey on our citizens that they will pay the ultimate price for unthinkable acts of violence.

"The power to make life and death decisions is the most sobering responsibility imaginable. I have always exercised this power with the gravity due such a decision, and I will continue to review each capital punishment case brought before me to ensure that due process is served."

The executions that occur with an ever-increasing frequency in Huntsville have produced a devastating apathy in the citizens of the town. The majority of the people of Huntsville have lost the will to worry, wonder, or care what happens inside the walls of the seven prisons located in the area — as long as what happens stays inside those walls. The Walls Unit was built to keep the prisoners in, but metaphorically it keeps the prisoners hidden, so the citizens who live and breathe because of the prison don't have to think about the reality of what is occurring inside the Walls Unit. And to themselves.

As Willett said, "When I left [the Walls Unit], I was glad that I didn't have to mess with those types of things anymore."

Vivica Defrancesco, a waitress at the TW's Steakhouse, located on the town square a mere block from the prison, said she couldn't remember why she moved from nearby Houston to Huntsville. "Personally," she said, "I think this is a dead little town." ☆

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee ...



Eternal Reefs mix cement and cremated remains to rebuild habitats for sea life.

and Scatter the Ashes of My Pitching Arm on the Mound at Fenway

Modern Funerals and Alternatives in America

by Scott Puckett

At the end of 1993 and the beginning of 1994, I was about as sick as any human could be without sprinting off the mortal coil and freefalling into...well, whatever. I was facing major surgery, and nurses who had apparently honed their bedside manner through years of used car sales and conservative talk radio told me they didn't expect to see me alive again. My mom, who died only a couple of years later¹, told them I couldn't die because I hadn't filled out the proper paperwork, wouldn't fit in a Hefty bag, and was too big to flush down the toilet. (Then again, she always expected to die overseas and left instructions with me to dispose of her body in the traditional method used wherever she might have been.)

However, that didn't stop me from plotting with a few friends to make sure I didn't have to be buried in a casket or cremated. The plan was simple — steal the body², drive into the local mountains, dig a hole, toss my carcass in with a six-pack, and let nature do the rest. The only thing I asked was that I face west.

This isn't too far from what happened to Gram Parsons' remains — which is where I got the original idea. The romance of the stolen body, the absence of remains, the mystery surrounding the whole thing — it wasn't until a few years ago that I bothered to do some research and find that there wasn't a mystery because Parsons' body wasn't hidden in Joshua Tree, never to be found. His road manager just took it out to the gusty desert and torched it, lending new meaning to "Hickory Wind."

These days, I'm more comfortable with cremation. It's cheap. It's fast. It doesn't burden my friends as much. And

they can have my urn (if my friends haven't watched "The Big Lebowski" lately) at the wake, until someone knocks it over during a stage-dive and the janitors mistake it for a spilled ashtray.

What all this is driving at is simple. Like many others, I want something different done with what is left of me when I die. I'd like it to be socially beneficial; I don't want to waste land, money, or other resources. The good bits of me will be gone. I could care less about what happens to what is left behind as long as it doesn't cost much and leaves as small a footprint on the planet as possible.

While other cultures have typically offered more options (funeral pyres, sky burials [see p. 66 in this issue for more on Tibetan Sky Burials], mummification, flaming boats, dismembering bodies and scattering the pieces for carrion feeders, etc.), Western cultures have been remarkably boring, providing widespread social acceptance for little else than a traditional burial. It's worth noting that the first cremation in modern America only occurred about 125 years ago³ and that some conservative faiths still object to the practice, although most religious objections have fallen by the wayside⁴.

continued next page

For the past several years, I've been loosely following changes in the death industry — shifts in the approach to what some funeral home directors call "death care." In an age of more choices than we can imagine, why then must we limit our options to burial or cremation at the hands of some faceless corporation (what I like to think of as "Big Death")? Thanks to activists, innovators, and entrepreneurs, we can customize those two options to our liking or select something entirely different, including DIY funerals which don't even require a funeral director. These options range from the absurd and ridiculous to ways of dealing with death (and celebrating life) which ensure our loved ones will never be put in a graveyard.⁵

Let's start with caskets. While a wide variety of caskets exist, Art Caskets are something unto themselves. To describe them simply, Art Caskets are laminated using a patented process to put a photomural on a coffin, much as city buses are now used to advertise movies and products (and I suspect it's only a matter of time until an aspiring young marketer begins subsidizing funeral costs if the family allows a casket to hawk beer or cigarettes throughout the viewing and services). At one point, designs imitating packages with "Return to Sender" stamped on them were available. Now the designs seem to be more limited, focusing largely on military service, religious themes, and NASCAR or golfing (indeed, it truly is the last hole).

The remaining practical options in the United States are variations on cremation. Scattering the ashes at sea is almost standard by now but several companies offer twists. As part of former Soviet states' efforts to privatize space (including selling trips into space), Celestis offers the opportunity to send the ashes of the deceased into low Earth orbit. Sure, the quantities are very small (one gram for \$995, seven grams for \$5,300), and it will still leave you with several pounds of ashes to dispose of, but for the next year, it would be possible to point at something twinkling in the night sky and wonder if it might be the deceased⁶.

LifeGems are another option for final disposition of ashes. To simplify the process, LifeGem will extract carbon from the deceased's ashes and process that carbon into a diamond in

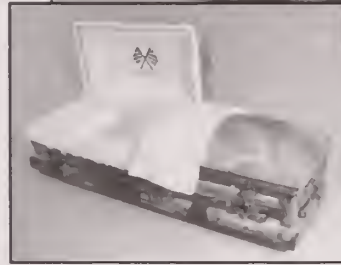
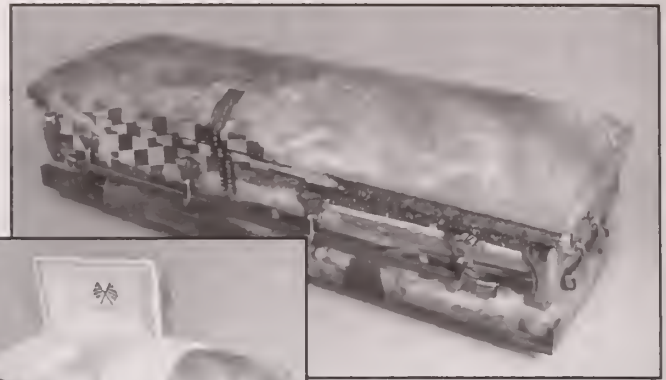
a few months for prices ranging from \$2,499 to \$13,999. As yet, no data on the long-term value of these manufactured diamonds is available, but you can't put a price on a keepsake or an heirloom of this sort...only on manufacturing one and determining profit margins.

Creative Remains (see above note about the usage of cremains) offers alternatives to the traditional urn. They can convert existing items to hold ashes or create entirely new ones. As they note, the only limits are your imagination and your wallet.

Eternal Reefs offer a new and ecologically beneficial twist — mixing ashes with reef balls to create habitats for sea life. Reef balls were developed several years ago as a response to worsening reef conditions. Since liquid concrete is used, it's a relatively simple matter to add ashes to the mixture. Creating an eternal reef does cost some money (beginning at \$995 to have one's ashes added to a community reef, a structure which includes remains from several people and is as large as two basketball courts) but also, unlike almost every other method of remains disposal, yields long-term benefits for the environment.

But the most compelling revolution of all in contemporary death care isn't a revolution in the slightest — rather, it seems like a return to traditionalism. It is, simply put, friends and family caring and grieving for their dead without the interference of governments, corporations, or profiteers⁷. Operating under the banner of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, a growing movement of people across the United States is beginning to take the responsibility of caring for the dead away from businesses and return it to people. The FCA's site provides information on everything from state regulations and legislation to consumer alerts, reference materials, mailing lists, and the like.

The primary reason this is so extraordinary is that it completely bypasses Big Death. People can make caskets for their dead (from scratch or kits⁸), bury them on their own land, and leave corporations entirely out of the picture. People can build their own crematoriums and dispose of the ashes as they see fit. And for the most part, despite funeral directors' protestations to the contrary, there is very little that can legally be done to stop this — which is a rarity in an age of regulation which seems designed to protect dwindling



The ArtCasket "Race" model declares "The Race is Over" when the lid is opened.

profit margins. Thus, activists can bury their own dead in ecologically sound ways which ensure that decomposition is rapid and that the impact to the surrounding environment is minimal.

In short, the elaborate plans I made for the theft and subsequent disposal of my body were, in all likelihood, perfectly legal and unnecessary. I had simply been operating under the assumption that, since our government seems so opposed to letting us do what we want with our bodies in life, we would be unable to dispose of our remains as we wished in death. It's refreshing to find that, at least for the moment, the opposite is true. ★

For more information:

- LifeGem (lifegem.com)
- Art Caskets (artcaskets.com)
- Celestis (celestis.com)
- Creative Remains: (creativecremains.com)
- Eternal Reefs: (eternalreefs.com)
- Funeral Consumers Alliance: (funerals.org)

Footnotes:

¹ Although this didn't really logically fit into the article, part of the reason I seek out alternative funerals is the debacle that my mom's service became. The minister showed up drunk, lost the Thoreau quote I wanted read, kept losing his place in what he was reading and almost knocked over the podium which held her ashes. If it hadn't been for three family friends who held me back the minister would not have left before receiving a sound beating. When his employer called a week later to inquire why they hadn't received payment for the service, I explained why in graphic, colorful detail. They didn't call back. Sadly, this sort of experience is not uncommon.

² Little did I know that they didn't have to steal it — but wouldn't planning the theft of a corpse from a hospital or boosting a hearse have been far more fun than civilly signing papers and transporting a body?

³ http://www.wbur.com/special/specialcoverage/book_prothero.asp
⁴ <http://www.baptiststandard.com/2001/1/22/pages/ashesquestions.html>
⁵ For the record, this article will not deal with cryonics or any related preservation technology. This is, much like spring cleaning, about getting rid of useless crap that we simply don't need anymore. It also doesn't involve donating your body for medical research or becoming an organ donor. Most of the disposition methods in this article are not eliminated by donating organs — except (possibly) an open casket funeral.

⁶ Sorry. It won't be. A one-gram capsule of ashes will not be visible, even as a twinkle. It's pretty to think so but, honestly, it won't even show up as a shooting star. Neither will the seven-gram option.

⁷ http://www.npr.org/programs/death/971208_death.html

⁸ <http://www.funerals.org/caskets.htm#own>



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CONTEMPLATING SUICIDE

what it takes, and what it gives back

"In all you do or say or think, recollect that at any time the power of withdrawal from life is in your own hands."

-Marcus Aurelius,
Meditations (II, 11)

"We fear the thought of suicide, and yet we need to think rationally about it, if we can, because one of the characteristics of our time is precisely that it is a suicidal age."

-Thomas Merton,
Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander

We ought to contemplate suicide. At some time or other, it occurs to each of us that we possess the means by which to take our own life. No other creature commits suicide; it is a distinctively human undertaking. As reflective beings we are able to step outside of ourselves, to survey the scope and the worth of our lives. We are concerned about how we live and are often anxious about this existence. Sometimes life seems unbearably absurd, to a point at which some have said, "No thanks, I've had enough."

In 2001, there were over 30,000 confirmed suicides in the United States (the 11th leading cause of death). Comparatively, there were about 20,000 homicides. Such numbers suggest that my concern here is no castle in the air; suicide isn't a mere possibility of our existing as we do, but is for some truly an option, or at least an out.

Let's consider the philosophical thrust of the problem: the person who commits suicide, who chooses nonexistence, stands in apparent contradiction to us living human beings. *One of us* has refused what we implicitly accept with every breath we take. By and large, our reaction is to condemn suicide as an affront on humanity, to treat the suicide as a victim of a horrible delusion. But that is a rather quick disposal of a complicated issue.

This is why we ought to contemplate suicide — not simply because we don't understand or approve of it, but because although it seems to be a possibility, it is not clear what suicide offers. We need to ask: what does it take to commit suicide? What does the world have to be like, and more specifically, what do *we* have to be like, for this action to be a possibility?

Simply asking such questions rails against the belief that suicide only happens to the insane. By insane, I mean a person who cannot properly be said to control his or her own actions. That only insane people kill themselves is simply unfounded. Granted, it is plausible that some suicides can be explained in terms of mental disorders, such that nothing but the disorder itself is necessary to explain the suicide. But it also must be true that we can't go check the psychological mindset of all the

persons who have committed suicide, or for lack of data, simply write them off as crazy. There is no reason to assume that all suicides can be explained purely in such terms.

Let me propose that committing suicide takes some kind of decision, intention, or rationality in a broad sense. If all suicides were explicable through insanity, then I would have no topic; a suicide resulting from insanity is no more philosophically charged than death from cancer. But when I say *suicide*, I mean the *intentional* killing of oneself. If by definition, insane people cannot do anything intentionally — that is, if insane people do not *own* their actions in the same conscious way that I own my action of, say, writing this essay — then they cannot commit suicide in this more exact sense. With that, we can stop talking about insane people for now. I would rather discuss how suicide concerns mostly sane people, like ourselves, because suicide is only a philosophical problem for us if it's possible for us to choose to do ourselves in. We have to be *free* in order to choose it, to *commit* it.

Suppose for a moment that we weren't free. The playwright Antonin Artaud essayed, "Certainly, it is abject to be created and to live and feel yourself in the darkest corners of your mind, down to the most *unthought* of ramifications of your irreducibly predetermined being. After all, we are only trees and it is probably written in some crook or other of my family tree that I shall kill myself on a given day."¹

From his fatalist viewpoint, he continues, "The very idea of the freedom of suicide falls down like a lopped tree. I create neither the time nor the place nor the circumstances of my suicide." If Artaud is correct, then not only is the "freedom of suicide" illusory, but so, too, is all of our supposed freedom. If you take full blown determinism (the view that free will is an illusion) to be true, then suicide won't be much of a problem for you; it will merely be an unfortunate result, something beyond your control, just like your life.

Determinism is fishy. There's something suspiciously free about the very act of supposing that we aren't free. Artaud despairs over the idea that he is conscious of everything going on in his mind and around him, but controls none of it, not even himself. If this were true, then life, or at least our consciousness of it, certainly would seem superfluous and absurd. But are we "only trees"? Or has Artaud cornered himself in a fit of anxiety, and presupposed an absence of the very freedom that permits him to think and write as he does? The latter possibility seems more likely. Skepticism about free will appears to be self-defeating.

At the same time, Artaud's despair should not go unnoted. Just because we are free does not mean that we are always completely aware or accepting of this fact. Certainly, life would be much simpler if we weren't free — if suicide weren't an option that throws back into our face the existence of this freedom. But suicide is only part of the story. Hamlet, for one, apprehended the problem of suicide, and its relation to the life which provokes such thoughts, as he inquired, "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them."

At what point is suffering no longer reasonable, tolerable? Does suicide then present not only a viable, but a *noble* option? I only raise the question, for I am altogether uncertain of the answer. Furthermore, I am somewhat skeptical of discovering any blanket response to such a question.

So far, I have focused on an awareness of freedom that arises from the contemplation of suicide, but a few other crucial details hide behind the suicidal thought. The first is that we are finite beings; even if we don't kill ourselves, we're eventually going to die. This is surely aggravating, insofar as it puts an endcap on everything we do, and for some, may imply that life, because it is fleeting, is meaningless. The second is that suicide isn't really an "option" in the

way we usually speak of options. As a goal, suicide is something of an absurdity itself, since succeeding means never knowing that you have succeeded. This is not the same kind of livable result as finding a way to cope with a romantic breakup, or attempting to escape a POW camp where if I don't get out, I will be tortured. Suicide seems instead to be a rejection of possibilities, a refusal to cope with the situation, or a declaration that coping is no longer possible.

I imagine that most of us, like Hamlet, sometimes think of life as an "outrageous fortune." Being stuck in our own skin can make us anxious. Maybe we worry that this freedom I've been parading about is just a hoax: our biological, flesh and blood circumstances often seem at odds with these existential notions of freedom and choice. Even if we are free, the range of our real life choices is severely limited, not only by our upbringing, social status, etc., but also by the very fact that we're going to die. It all comes to an end one way or another. So how, you ask, does it matter?

If we require that freedom be some unbound, unrestricted quality, then it becomes unclear what exactly we're asking for, and that in itself is a problem. What we choose to do with ourselves is not a contextless decision, but is limited and directed by an external world. That this freedom isn't "radical" enough to miraculously rid us of all the outside factors operating in our lives — our jobs, our friends and

intimates, our government — is not a sufficient reason to despair of freedom al-

together. Similarly, that we are mortal seems no more absurd a thing than the idea of living forever. If we were immortal, wouldn't our inability to die give us just as much grief?

Human action, while free, can be understood to spread over a range of *reasonable* possibilities. Such possibilities will, of course, differ somewhat from person to person. For example, I might choose to pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy or to become a welder, but I am not free in any obvious way to aspire to be the King of England. If I were to despair over my inability to become King, crying out, "Since I can't be King, I'm going to commit suicide," you would rightly judge me to be unstable and in need of help. I take it that our intuitions would be much the same if I aim to commit suicide because my girlfriend dumped me. But when it comes to harder cases (ethically speaking), such as that of the POW who will be tortured, probably killed, if he doesn't act first, I think it would be hasty to fault such a person for taking the possibility of suicide quite seriously.

The issue at stake when we contemplate suicide may not be so much the "meaning" as the *quality* of our lives. We have expectations about ourselves and our situation in the world, and when something happens that impinges on our expectations, we may grow antsy, angry, or despondent. Living ever in the present, with the past weighing on us in various ways and the outcome of the future always less than a certainty, our life as a free enterprise often presents itself as a dilemma. In each moment we either decide to keep going or we choose to end it. Most of the time, the dilemma is fairly easy to resolve. But all the same, if we understand ourselves as free, and own up to this fact, then life reveals itself to be a "life or death" struggle in the truest sense. An approach to the question of suicide should involve an evaluation of our expectations about what the world (our home, city, country, etc.) should be like, of our personal desires and goals, and of how we want to relate to others. Before jumping off the cliff, perhaps we should check to make sure that our expectations and desires are reasonable ones, and that the cramped corner in which we oftentimes find ourselves is really there, and not a product of an anxious imagination. ★

1. From "On Suicide" in *Artaud Anthology*, City Lights (1965), p. 57

(This paper was presented 11 November 2003 to The Socratic Society, University of Arkansas, Department of Philosophy. Thanks to Barry Ward for the opportunity to present, to Aleks Zarnitsyn, Heath Bradley, and others for their thoughtful comments, and to all those who attended.)



Into the Village of the Bones

Tommy Jimmy Joseph Discusses Tlingit Death Customs
interview by Leonie Sherman



Straddling a peninsula jutting into the longest fjord in North America is the tiny fishing village of Haines. Some claim that before white men's diseases decimated the population over 200 years ago, almost 20,000 Tlingits lived in the region. Now less than 3,000 people live in the Chilkat Valley, sandwiched between two mountain ranges rising 6,500 feet straight out of the ocean. The majority of those 3,000 people have some kind of European ancestry.

Thirty miles up the Chilkat Valley is one of the last strongholds of Tlingit culture, the village of Klukwan. To this day, if a visiting Tlingit sees smoke pouring out of the chimney of the Thunderbird House in Klukwan or the Raven House in Haines, it's an invitation to stay. Tommy Jimmy Joseph Junior passed a great deal of his childhood in these two houses, being raised by his grandfather who was the keeper of the Raven House.

Tommy Jimmy Joseph Junior has three grandfathers on his father's side and every one of them gave him a name — the oldest of the brothers was Frank Jimmy, Tommy Jimmy was his younger brother's name, and his father was Joseph Jimmy. He was born in Juneau but returned to his parents' village of Haines in 1959. He still lives Haines, where he works to promote wellness among his people, through reintroducing traditional crafts and telling the old stories.

I interviewed Jimmy about the topic of death, hoping to gain an understanding of how this event, common to all humans, is handled in a different culture. What follows is a transcription of his response to the single question "How did Tlingit people traditionally deal with the death of a community member?"

There's a story that some time ago one of our ancestors died, and entered the spirit world. While he was there he was really confused to discover that even in the spirit world there were people that were at various stages of health, some were really healthy and some were in really bad health. He finally asked some of the spirits there why this was the case. He was told that when those who are still living are not remembering their ancestors who have passed on, their health suffers in the spirit world. You can see that our actions and our behaviors have a big effect on those who have passed on into the spirit world.

With a death in the community, first you need to identify who was the person that died — well our people would very seldom say that, the euphemism that our people used was they've "taken their walk into the woods," that's how we would describe that. Probably the phrase "walk into the woods" has to do with where what you would call the cemetery, what we called the Village of the Bones, was located. The Village of Bones was behind our villages, so the place where we live might be right on the ocean and the cemetery would be back up the valley a little ways. Very literally when a person dies, they are walking back into the woods to the Village of the Bones.

We are a people and a nation that consists of two halves, I prefer that to saying we're divided into two halves because we're not divided. The intention behind the Raven and Eagle is encouraging the reciprocity between the two and encouraging unity and harmony.

continued next page

If it was an Eagle that died, then the Ravens would come over and they would take care of everything. They would of course talk to the Eagles to make sure they weren't overstepping any boundaries. The intention was to give the Eagles the freedom to grieve.

At a funeral, the people mourning the passage of a loved one would paint their faces with ash, crop their hair, and wear tattered old clothes. This was a sign of the grieving they're going through.

Historically our people were cremated. An opposite close relative was designated to tend to the funeral pyre, and they would make sure that the remains were burned as completely as possible. After cremation, the remains would be put into a box and placed typically behind the memorial pole where much of the remains of the family were placed. Whether you got your own pole or it was a pole for the whole family would depend on the wealth of the family. We kept all the remains in the Village of the Bones. The remains were handled by our opposites.

Nowadays we do graveside funerals, and the two sides, Eagle and Raven come together and console one another. The Ravens would say thank you to the Eagles for being there and the Eagles would stand up and they would start consoling the Ravens. Already the whole process of healing is encouraged during that time because they're getting everybody to talk about what they're feeling.

Historically we would make new moccasins and new gloves to assist in a person's journey. There are thorns in the devil's club and in the woods, and if you have new moccasins and gloves then it's an easier trail for you. When we sang our heavy songs, my grandfather used to say it was like paving the trail for them to walk. That relates directly back to the living, it's not just making the walks easier for those who have passed on, it's making our walks easier too, as we move through our lives.

That's just the first part, that's the funeral.

A year after the person takes their walk into the woods we have what's called a *kloo-wixh*. The *kloo-wixh* is an invitation to a feast, it's literally the last rites for a person, and it's the end of the grieving process. It's also a time for the Eagles to express their gratitude to the Ravens for taking care of them in their time of need. It's important to the families on both sides that they are able to maintain that balance because then they go on as a whole people and as a strong people.

Say-axh-toluixh is the word for smoke. Our people would be invited to smokes during the year between the funeral and the *kloo-wixh*. An invitation to smoke was also an invitation to get together and talk. They are getting together to chop away at any chain that might be causing someone in the family to hold on, not let their loved one go on in a good way. There was a great deal of emphasis

on making sure the person can go on in their walk. That's why we allowed so much grieving time.

Historically the *kloo-wixh* lasted four days or eight days, that depended on the wealth of the family. People came from long distances to attend these things, so it made sense that they wouldn't come here for just one day and then leave again. The *kloo-wixh* actually consists of a lot of different ceremonies, it goes on in a lot of different parts.

There was a very specific protocol of how things evolved at the *kloo-wixh*. Typically, at the start of the *kloo-wixh*, a person called the *na-kha-nay*, that's an in-law, a person on the opposite side, they would be playing the role of pretty much what in English you call an MC would introduce each stage of the *kloo-wixh*.

The first part of the *kloo-wixh* is singing the crying songs and those are usually very heavy songs. As the family in mourning is getting ready to sing their sorrow songs, they would again blacken their faces. Then the opposites, this would be the Ravens, the guests, they would respond with their songs. The host might bring out some of their *at-oo*, the objects that carry the history of their clan, maybe a robe or a headdress and they would sing more songs. Then their guests, the Ravens would bring out their *at-oo*, sing their songs. The whole idea was expressing and encouraging balance.

When we do our sorrow songs and we go through our rituals it's an invitation to our ancestors. For example, recently my mother passed away, so when we sing our sorrow songs, our ancestor songs, our clan songs, we were inviting all these ancestors here. So now my mother doesn't have to be alone, she's with all these other ancestors of ours. We don't want our ancestors to be alone; this ceremony brings them together and makes their journey easier for them.

Typically the first meal would be served after the sorrow songs were sung.

In English *gu-ka-suxh-hi* means a fire dish. One of the ways we remember our ancestors, we have this fire dish ceremony. At the *kloo-wixh* a plate is made up of all the food that is going to be served, my grandfather says it doesn't take much, just bits and pieces of everything that is going to be served. And then the closest opposite relative takes that food out and they burn it. We recite a list of all of our ancestors and relatives who have passed on and all of our houses and clans, all are named during this ceremony.

We pass on ancestral names during the *kloo-wixh*. During the year between the funeral and the *kloo-wixh*, the family is usually watching for a characteristic of that family member to return. Maybe an aspect of their personality is expressed in a little boy or girl and they'll name the boy or girl after the relative who passed away during the *kloo-wixh*.

We do this so that our ancestors will continue on.

After they completed their grieving they did the chant "*ya sha xhoo we*," four times. This signifies that they've let their grief go. Once they did that you'd hear one of the elders announce "Now we're gonna go over to the happy times." The people who were mourning, they would wash the ashes off of their face and replace it with red. The colors were an important indication of this whole process, black of course being a color of grieving those who have passed on and red being the color of renewal.

The *kloo-wixh* is very literally the last rites for this person. We need to make sure that no one in the family is holding on to anything, for example resentment. If we were holding on to resentment that would be a chain that's attached to the person and they would not be able to continue on their journey. Also we among the living would not be able to walk in this world in the way we need to.

While you're in grief you're out of balance and it was really important to go through all of these ceremonies so that balance can be restored. You never left the ceremony without jokes and songs of love to your fathers, people or to your children. So you had both sides represented, from sadness to happiness, so that balance was restored. *

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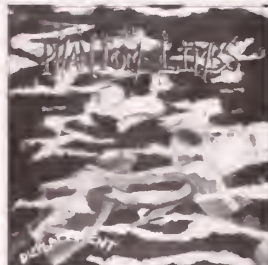
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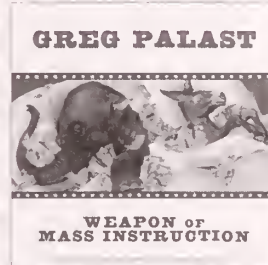
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Thanksgiving 2003 marked the first time I played holiday chef. I planned my menu carefully and spent most of the day preparing. I hadn't intended to celebrate this year, as I had just moved to Paris six weeks before. I had never been sentimental about Thanksgiving anyway, and had generally leaned more toward the cynical take on the holiday: the words "Native American genocide" had more than once escaped my lips around the fourth Thursday in November, so I was surprised to find myself excited and nervous to indoctrinate *une vraie Parisienne*, Madeleine Aba, into this day of reflection and gluttony. When I explained that my family celebrates Thanksgiving not for its jingoistic potential but to be thankful for those around us, she replied, "*Donc, il faut que j'amène du champagne!*" (I must bring champagne, then!)

Madeleine is the Parisian you expect to see populating the Latin Quarter or engaging in café discussion, but rarely do in this day and age. Her silver-and-ebony cigarette holder, perpetually balanced between Chanel-painted lips, grips an unfiltered Gauloise. Her honey-blond hair is braided and twirled into a perfect coil. Her wardrobe of wool and silk is classic and impeccably maintained. At five-foot-three in sneakers, I tower over the impossibly slender and petite Madeleine in black stacked heels. She can trace her roots back five generations

to the Place des Vosges (Victor Hugo's residence) in Paris, and her family has been ordering champagne from the same small Reims vineyard for the last 100-odd years.

However, these colorful details speak little to what has filled Madeleine's life. In 1947, at age 21, she married Algerian poet and playwright Nourredine Aba. Over the next half-century, she was his wife, muse, editor, and co-conspirator. Nourredine's work, most of which is currently out of print, was celebrated and castigated in France and North Africa. Madeleine and Nourredine were active participants in the Algerian liberation movement, and spoke at UNESCO on human rights violations. They were friends with Albert Camus; Madeleine once packed the bag that another friend, Frantz Fanon, carried with him as he fled death threats. This couple spent the second half of the 20th century realizing the intellectual, creative, romantic, and political stuff of dreams, so when Nourredine died in September 1996, the reverie ended in an abrupt awakening. And the helpmeet was left blinking in the moribund daylight.

It is difficult for me as a woman of the post-feminist generation to understand what Madeleine's life has been, and the depths of her misery without Nourredine. The question of the helpmeet has always fascinated me. As a student of and researcher on women writers,

Jennifer Solheim profiles the inimitable
Madeleine Aba

The Textual Life



I am constantly reminded that context is everything to a writer's success: without another to tend to everything from the secretarial and nutritional to promotional and emotional, it can be difficult to maintain the flow of work, nevermind the effort it takes to make sure that the work is recognized.

Fine enough; but I still feel indignant that, historically, women have played the muse and helpmeet to the male genius. In my own relationships, I demand the space I need to write music and prose. A sense of entitlement to this arose after reading Tillie Olsen's groundbreaking, elegant text on creative marginalization, *Silences*. This book examined writers from the 19th and 20th centuries who experienced periods of creative silence, throwing my own life and goals into stark relief: women with children, Olsen claims, are far less likely to get any meaningful creative work done. Women with husbands, similar story. Although this text was written in the 1960s, I thought about older women I knew and there was a marked difference in levels of success between those who had married and had children, and those who had neither — or only the



the Champs-Élysées, singing the French national anthem, wearing red, blue, and white in protest. She wore a yellow star on her breast daily, surrounded by other brooches (an elephant, a mouse, a British-style telephone booth, a heart), and when Nazi soldiers interrogated her about the star, she defiantly answered that it was simply another ornament. She and her friends would filch the German soldiers' pocketknives, then, gripping the gleaming blades in their small hands, scurry into a nearby Métro stop, but Madeleine will not be interviewed about her own life. She refuses to speak on record about anything but Nourredine; his life, but primarily his work, the published, the unpublished, the out-of-print, the private.

Madeleine and I have become chummy. Thanksgiving dinner was instigated when Madeleine called me earlier in the week to see if I wanted to join her at the theatre, the Paris debut of an Algerian play called "Un été de cendres" ("Summer of Ashes" [my translation]) by Abdelkader Djemaï. I told her that I would love to, on the condition that she celebrate holiday dinner with me first.

Thus, my explanation in Anglo-accented French that led to thoughts about friends, family, gratitude, and loss. Thus, the champagne from Reims. It was the first night that I had passed with Madeleine alone; our dinner was a delight. With the meal, I had attempted to embrace America, Algeria, and France in one fell swoop — between the endive salad and the free-range turkey

What Happens to the Helpmeet* When the Poet Dies?

husband. I knew, for myself, that these would have to be underlying considerations in my future.

So when I met Madeleine in January of 1999, I was both charmed and puzzled. This vivacious, eloquent, worldly woman, I was told by the professor who introduced me to Madeleine, was suffering greatly from Nourredine's recent death. This rendered traditional ideals of marriage and gender relations anachronistically beautiful, but to have laid claim to this sadness and loss as a fundamental part of one's identity illustrated the disquiet I felt in considering helpmeets. It is extreme abandonment after a life of devotion; one that is neither unfair, nor unjust, yet certainly cruel.

I saw Madeleine for the first time since 1999 this past summer when I was visiting our mutual friend, Evelyne. We had dinner on my second night in town with Madeleine and her son, Patrice, a jazz percussionist. My French, which had lain dormant for several months prior to this trip, was put to the test that night. Anecdotes and aphorisms flew, poetry and childhood rhymes were quoted, songs were sung. Madeleine, in a pink long-sleeved dress despite the summer heat, kept things rolling until 2 a.m.

We were careful, however, to avoid discussion of the recent earthquake in Algeria which destroyed the Aba home and most of their letters and photographs. Madeleine refers to this as "Nourredine's second death." To consider the ramifications of what was lost, it is a second passing: his living voice already silenced, now his intimate memories and thoughts are lost. Madeleine does not mourn the childhood photos of her four children, one of whom was killed in a car accident. Madeleine does not think about preserving her own memories, another aspect of the helpmeet-widow conundrum that frustrates me. One could write a biography about her life before Nourredine: as a 15-year-old Catholic girl living in Nazi-occupied Paris, Madeleine and her friends were among those marching down

tajine, the feast put us both in high spirits. We talked about the sensual balance between intellect and cuisine. We talked about our friend Evelyne and wished that she could share the evening with us. We talked about Patrice and my mother.

I realized after the fact that I had tried to maintain a constant flow between topics, because minutes after Madeleine's arrival, she had begun talking about Nourredine's death and tears sprung into her eyes. His birthday had passed the weekend before, the day before that was the anniversary of an award he had won, a week later would be the anniversary of another milestone in his career. I realized why Evelyne had instructed me to stay away from the Algerian earthquake this summer: Madeleine is inclined to drift into a melancholy reverie if she is given an outlet to do so.

I am still learning how to keep Madeleine with me in the present, rather than allowing the helpmeet to take over in sorrow, but this is difficult as well. Madeleine has presence; strangers are compelled to speak to her. After the theatre, we were walking down the Metro steps together late in the evening. A younger guy in blue jeans noticed us and said how wonderful it was that a *Mamie* would be out so late. I took offense but Madeleine laughed and we chatted with him through the Metro ride. He was Algerian and had read a fair amount of his country's literature: Camus, Katch Yacine, Assia Djebar. Madeleine's persona, which draws people of every age, race, and creed to her like flies to honey, is the vehicle she uses to invoke her husband whenever possible. Within 30 seconds of beginning a conversation, whether with the young man on the Metro or the lead actor in the play we had just seen, she mentions "Nourredine." And soon mentions again: "Nourredine." Eventually, of course, the question "Who is Nourredine?" arises.

This is one of the times when he seems to come back to life. Madeleine's eyes light up as she talks about his poetry, plays, political

*Helpmeet: one who is a companion and helper, especially: WIFE

activism. She has this promotional homage down to a science: within one minute, her audience knows the names of at least three of his most successful works, that he ran with the crème-de-la-crème intelligentsia, that he passed away in 1996, and that Madeleine has been fighting ever since to keep his work in circulation and the public eye.

Algerians of the 1960s generation tend to at least recognize the name, if they do not know his work. The lead actor in "Un été de cendres," Hamid Remas, a television actor in Algeria, kissed Madeleine's hand when he realized who she was.

But younger people and people of non-Mahgreb descent have never heard of Nourredine Aba. This is where Madeleine's genius shines; it is the chance to sow seeds. Within another minute or so of conversation, her audience will know the best bookstore in Paris in which to find Nourredine's still-extant work, "L'Harmattan." She repeats "Harmattan" two or three times before she bids adieu, and she walks away with a smile of satisfaction on her red lips, hunting for her packet of Gauloises. Madeleine, in these moments, is in the afterglow. As helpmeet, the romance in Madeleine's life has become her husband's body of work.

This played out dramatically when I accompanied Madeleine to Université de Paris VIII in the northern suburb of Saint Denis, where Madeleine had been invited to read one of Nourredine's works to a poetry class. The room was a small theatre with bleacher-style seats and a sunken stage of weathered hardwood. As students settled into the bleachers and Madeleine took a seat before us at a conference-style table, I thought about the fact that Université Saint-Denis had been established in the aftermath of the 1968 student riots and that most likely that floor was part of the original construction — it showed age and passion through its faded varnish and scar-like scratches. As Madeleine prepared to read from Nourredine's epic prose-poem "C'était hier Sabra et Chatila," about Palestinian oppression, I considered the tragedy of the floor's continued mute existence in relation to Madeleine's severe lack and pain with the death of her husband, and most of the world's obliviousness. Nourredine's

work, if one knows it, exists on a continuum. For so many others, it never existed and never will. For Madeleine, the one joy she can cling to is an attempt to preserve his work.

I am snapped out of my musing as she begins to read. The room falls into a seductive languor as the words pour from Madeleine — strong, articulated, lulling, contemplative. The words and the story they tell are wrenching, yet as the reading progresses — all said and done, she read for 43 minutes without pause for water or even, really, breath — it is as if she is at home with her husband again. You can see it in her eyes and in the way she cradles the text in her soft manicured hands: he is there with her.

And when she finished reading, in the brief hush before applause breaks out in the room, Madeleine swoons with grief, because he is gone again. As the applause subsides, she tries to begin speaking, but she has to collect herself.

Madeleine would never break down in testimonial before an audience. She does speak to the fact that it is a difficult text for her to read, how much it meant to Nourredine as he wrote it, sitting before a typewriter in the kitchen day after day, sometimes taking nothing but a coffee ... here, the helpmeet pantomimes, placing a coffee cup and saucer beside a typewriter, and leans in to smile upon the writer's furrowed brow ... he is back again, momentarily, but as Madeleine comes

back to the room and her narrative, her lips still living and moving, she places her hand over her heart. Her grief never ends.

Nourredine Aba was a great writer. He has been compared to Pablo Neruda in style, passion, and political relevance. His epic poem "Mouette, ma mouette," about the Algerian war, is a work I treasure. It is imperative that Madeleine continues to keep Nourredine's work in the public consciousness. Those of us who know will do what we can to preserve his memory and work, but what of the helpmeet, left with reams of paper, an apartment full of memories, photographs, and shelf upon shelf of books? The one for whom the genius' body of work has become his very body? For Madeleine, these questions continue to go unasked, unanswered. ☆



the author with Ms. Aba

REVIEW GREG PALAST

Greg Palast

Weapons of Mass Instruction

AK Press & Alternative Tentacles, 2004

www.alternativetentacles.com

www.akpress.org

What's the going rate for a used president? After reviewing the post-White House activities of George Bush the Greater and the pre-White House "opportunities" of Bush the Lesser, investigative journalist Greg Palast trenchantly asks what, exactly, are these guys get paid for?

Palast, a *Guardian/Observer* writer, does an effective job of reviewing our current petroleum-contaminated politics and foreign policy, taking time to single out the perfidies of the Bush family, former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, their

patron Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi, the Saudi and Kuwaiti royal families, and other members of the international oil elite. While none of this should be shocking to erudite souls like the average *Clamor* reader, Palast brings a sharp wit, a keen sense of irony, and effective comic timing to this work. He deserves (in this reviewer's estimation) bonus points for ridiculing "liberal" commentator



Christopher Hitchens — an intellectually lazy, pompous, reactionary blowhard — and reminding us of the importance of simply paying attention to what goes on. Palast's call

to everyone on the left to act as weapons of mass instruction will hopefully encourage many to give George Bush the Lesser a chance to learn, firsthand, the going rate for an ex-president. Soon.
-Keith McCrea



Austin (right) with Zack de la Rocha (former singer for Rage Against the Machine)

Sherman Austin

Black Anarchist faces PATRIOT Act Repression

words Walida Imarisha photos Jennifer Martin Ruggiero

What do *Spin Magazine*, *Hustler* (yep, as in Larry Flynt and naked women), and Zack de la Rocha (former lead singer for Rage Against the Machine) have in common? They are all helping to spread the word on a political case with far-reaching implications, a case other progressive organizations, such as the ACLU, have avoided. It centers around one 21-year-old black anarchist named Sherman Austin and one web site: Raisethefist.com.

Austin, a community organizer and activist originally from southern California, now resides in Tucson, Arizona. Not by choice: he is in a federal prison. His one-year sentence, \$2,000 fine, and three years of extremely strict probation (including not associating with groups or individuals who advocate social change and not using a computer for any type of political work or organizing) are all part of a plea bargain Austin took. He was charged with "distribution of material related to explosives with the intent that they be used to further a federal crime of violence, namely arson." Thanks to terrorist enhancement legislation over the past six years that have been pumped up by the USA PATRIOT Act, he was facing an additional 20-year sentence if convicted.

Austin's heinous crime that warranted the threat of more jail time than some convicted murderers or all Enron execs face? He hosted a web site.

Austin's site, Raisethefist.com, an open-publishing clearinghouse of radical information, gave free hosting space to other progressive organizations. Austin merely provided a link to them. One link to a site called the "Reclaim Guide" featured some rudimentary information about making explosives, information that could be easily obtained, Austin points out, on other sites such as white supremacist sites, which the government does not seem particularly interested in pursuing.

Austin was not the one who authored the information, nor posted it; he didn't even maintain the web site. He just had a link to it on his site. And this link was justification enough for 25 agents from the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, Los Angeles Police Department, and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department to surround Austin's house on Jan. 24, 2002, armed with machine guns, enter his home, destroy his room, confiscate his computers and file — but not arrest him.

Three days after the raid, Austin told journalist Merlin Chowkwanyun in an interview, he drove from LA to New York for the anti-World Bank/IMF protests. Before the march even began, he was surrounded by 20 police officers who Austin alleges were notified by the Secret Service that he was coming. He was jailed and interrogated for 30 hours without a lawyer.

continued next page

The truth is none of us can ever be free until we can walk these streets and this government can't ever touch us again.

The law enforcement gauntlet continued, because 30 minutes after Austin was released by the NYPD, he was arrested by the FBI. "They grabbed my neck and hurled me out of the courtroom, put me in this black SUV, and then drove me to a federal building, where they processed me," Austin told Chowkwanyun. He was held for 11 days before being shipped off to Oklahoma for two more days in federal jail.

In fact, Austin wasn't even charged with anything until six months after the initial raid and two arrests. Austin feels it was because of his web site, which after his initial arrest and a posting on it, received over 30,000 hits from across the globe. "Raisethefist.com was growing, and that's why they came back to me months later to charge me," Austin says.

At a San Diego fundraiser for the web site that took place three days before he turned himself in, Austin said his trial has sinister implications for progressive people. "Posting information on explosives is not illegal, but doing it with intent is, which is what I'm charged with. But how do you prove intent? It's almost like 'thought crime.'"

For anyone who has a doubt that Austin's case had political overtones, you can check the trial transcripts from June 30, 2003, where a judge said in court, "Isn't there another part to sentencing other than customizing a sentence to what is predictable about the future conduct of this defendant? Isn't there a deterrence? You think giving this sentence, this defendant, four months or a month is supposed to be a deterrence to some other revolutionary who wants to change the world according to his or her own views ... This is a case that has national, international overtones."

With all the blatant political overtones of Sherman's case, where are the ACLU and other liberal progressive organizations? Austin says they have not stepped up, and that most of his support has come from "ordinary people, those who really haven't affiliated themselves as anarchists or even activists." The ACLU declined to even write a public statement of support, he says. "Perhaps the 'anarchist bomb maker' character defamation painted by various mainstream newspapers automatically deemed me unsuitable. Maybe it's because I'm a person of color and therefore have less chances of winning such a battle, and liberal organizations are concerned about their reputations," he finishes.

But Austin says, despite their lack of support, he knows where the real power is. "Some liberal organizations have a lot of power; that's why we often turn to them for help. But what about the power within our own movement, what about the power within the anarchist movement, what about the power in the ghettos, what about the power in black communities, what about the power in Chicano communities?"

For Austin, his treatment at the hands of the state is intricately tied to race. "This kind of case is common in the state's play of routine ritualistic displays of re-establishing power, not justice, in the attempt to redistribute terror in people of color.

"Another young black felon added to the list is no coincidence, but the organized act of aggression in which this racist, brutal, and imperialist institution was founded on," he continues.

This is obvious, Austin says, by the fact that the person who actually authored the Reclaim Guide, and who is white, is not being targeted. While he is not interested in seeing anyone prosecuted by this government, Austin says the FBI knew of the author, and had even interviewed him. Regardless, they didn't pursue him. In fact, "prosecutors and the FBI knowingly lied about it and said I authored, implemented, and designed the Reclaim Guide website," Austin charges.

Austin told *Clamor*, "The case wasn't about someone distributing so-called 'bomb making instructions.' It was about an activist, a young black activist, who established more than a website, but a voice. A voice in which not only I could be heard, but many others as well."

Zack de la Rocha, who spoke at the San Diego fundraiser, says this case is an extremely important one. "It's an example of the vicious and repressive political climate set into motion by the Bush administration in the aftermath of September 11; a climate in which the right wing violence of the state, for example, the illegal bombing and occupation of Iraq, is sanctioned in the name of building democracy, while simultaneously they destroy it right here at home."

Austin adds that the kind of repression and disintegration of civil liberties going on under the Office of Homeland Security and the passage of the PATRIOT Act are nothing new. "This repression has been going on since the foundation of this country, thus I don't think the Office of Homeland Security is anything new. They've been practicing the repression of people of color for so long, they decided to slap a legitimate sounding name to it... it's the process of building a strong police state and climate of fascism."

Since his incarceration, Austin has spent a lot of time in the hole, for his own protection, according to the administration. Leading up to his trial, Austin received death threats from the Aryan Brotherhood and was even transferred to Oklahoma briefly. But he questions whether his time in solitary is really for his own good. "In Oklahoma, just like in Southern California, after a couple days in general population, I was snatched up by



the guards and taken upstairs to the hole in handcuffs... I kept asking the guards to see the lieutenant to get some sort of explanation why I was in the hole and to get a legal call. My request was ignored all three times I asked." Austin was in the hole two

weeks before being transferred to Tucson.

Austin says nowhere is the racist, classist, and exploitative nature of the political system more apparent than in prison. "A lot of times white activists/anarchists say that we shouldn't recognize race because we are all the same... But the reality is 75 percent of the prison population in this country is black, the majority of those gunned down by police are people of color... Race shouldn't matter, but in reality, in today's society, it does."

He has seen it just from his own experiences. "There's an INS here, a lot of inmates here were convicted of 'illegal entry,' serving three years for crossing some invisible line in the desert.

"There's also Unicor here, which is a major employer of prison labor. They're no different than giant sweatshops. They say it's a privilege for 'job training,' but it's really cheap labor so investors can make more money. I work in the food service and the pay there is 12 cents an hour."

Despite everything, Austin maintains his commitment to struggling for a better society and using his case as a vehicle for moving that struggle forward. "If it happened to me, it can definitely happen to you. But don't be scared, because that's what they want. Once they have you in a state of fear, they have you in control... People should look at not only my situation, but everyone's all together and be willing to struggle and fight twice as hard."

How can people support his work? "If people want to help, they should spread the word, organize demonstrations, shows, make flyers, posters, stickers, a web site," Austin says. "Will it get me out of prison? Most likely not. But it will increase awareness, and the more people know about it means the more people who can organize to build a movement of resistance to stop this from happening again. The truth is none of us can ever be free until we can walk these streets and this government can't ever touch us again." ★

SOLDIER

when war changes friendships

words Aaron Cynic illustration Melita Curphy

It's been a long while since I've heard from my friend in the Air Force. He disappeared months ago. No phone call or letter — his cell phone was disconnected and his e-mail returned saying "no such address." He was supposed to come home for his birthday — it never happened. His family didn't even receive a word, not mother and father or sister — not even his child. This soldier, who signed up because of his disillusionment with life, who I watched get suckered in by a recruiter some six years ago, simply vanished from our lives.

Until a few weeks ago.

According to his best friend, the call was hurried and he didn't sound too excited. I suppose I wouldn't be either, if I knew I was going to ship out sometime soon but wasn't sure when or where I was going. He wasn't sure if he was going to get any type of leave — even a day — before he boarded a plane to a far off land. He couldn't say much — only that he had been in Arizona for the past few months at some sort of training camp. What he was training for could not be revealed. His destination, according to him, was unknown. He probably couldn't tell us anyway.

"Johnny" (1) is already a veteran of the Afghanistan conflict. He ducked bullets and dodged landmines for a variety of reasons. Some days it was for the "defense of freedom," others it was to find Bin Laden, still other times it was the liberation of women. Two years later, and there's no Bin Laden, our freedoms are being stolen by people in our own country (and the number of terrorist recruiting camps has increased), and I would tell you to ask RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) (2) about how "liberated" Afghan women are.

Soon he'll be off again, perhaps to find another disappearing dictator, to "liberate" more people, and to "defend our freedoms" against other faceless enemies. A faceless and nationless enemy, hiding in every corner of every part of the world, poised to annihilate our entire existence unless an army made up of our friends and families straps on jackboots and a gun to kill "them." I wonder sometimes if my military friend will see their faces. I wonder if he'll notice that aside from the difference in color that they look noticeably the same — human.

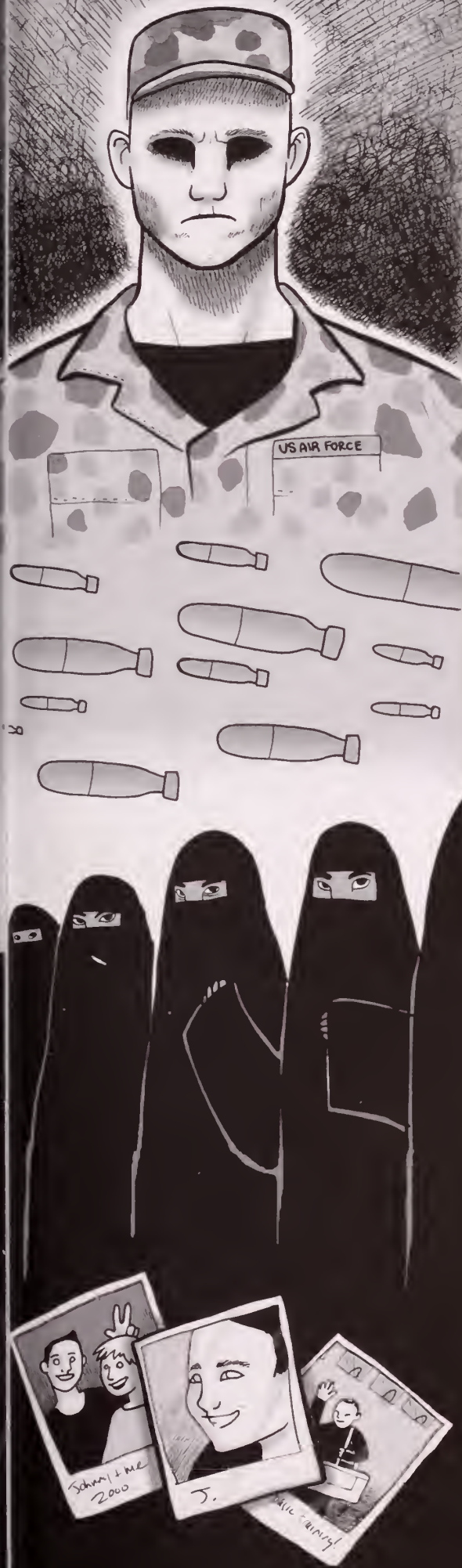
Years back, Johnny and I went to college together. We had the same philosophy class, and notably argued on the same side — peace. When politics came up, both of us could speak on U.S. atrocities in Latin America, how ridiculous the nuclear arms race was (not to mention how hilarious the idea of "duck and cover" was when we were children), or how the democracy we live in might not necessarily be so democratic. Even before that, we'd sing Propagandhi and Dead Kennedys songs — and tell the Right to fuck off. Our bands would play together and we'd sing songs about unity and changing the world — we were out to raise hell.

Unfortunately, three years into his service in the United States Air Force, hell came to us in the form of hijacked planes and burning buildings.

We've spoken of September 11 sporadically, as our views drift further apart. What I see as misguided foreign policy, he sees as justice. What I view as an offensive war on the world, he sees as a defensive posture, protecting our interests. Still, I go on and say what I feel, dissent where I must. He knows that and respects it — just as I respect his belief that he's doing what he's told and whether he agrees may be irrelevant, so (in his mind) he's "defending my freedom" to dissent.

But he's the one holding the gun.

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It is hard — close friends on opposite sides of the picket lines. When he re-upped for another four years, I understood his reasons. Divorced with a child, he needed to insure that child's future in a very unstable economic environment. Still, I protested: "You've got a lot of money saved now, he'll need you here more than he would somewhere else." "No," my soldier friend said, "I need to provide all I can for him — and besides, I'll be close, stationed only four hours away ... I'll be home on the weekends all the time." For a time, it was every weekend, then every other, then sporadically. The last time I saw him, my military friend, a very good friend, all he wanted to do was to hang out, to forget all the responsibilities of the military and fatherhood, and have a good time. We took him out on the town — drank a ton and laughed a hell of a lot. A buddy of his, another airman, came out with us. Old friends shared old stories with new friends and made new stories. But something was noticeably different. Johnny was angrier — much angrier.

He came back from Afghanistan naturally changed — but buried deep inside lay the same old Johnny. This time, however, things were different. The old Johnny was disappearing. While he always loved to stir up trouble like all old punk rockers do, he and his friend really did have the need for a fight. From the bar to the bathroom to the guy who was talking to my ex-girlfriend, John and his buddy wanted something to pound on. When politics came up, things became more heated and I thought I might even end up on the wrong side of a boot. That night ended like it always did when he came back to town — lots of hugs and laughs and "see you next times."

Now there may not be a next time. He may board a plane tomorrow or in a month; none of his friends or family know. All we can do is hope that he'll come back standing on two legs, instead of laying in a box. I feel for all those kids — and most of them are kids who got roped into fighting wars which have transparent justifications

given to us by self-appointed leaders and experts, most of whom will never have to load body bags onto a plane like my soldier friend did in Afghanistan. Kids corralled by sleek commercials and promises of college money. When Johnny and another friend (who luckily was not taken because of health issues) walked into the recruitment offices some six years ago, they wanted information on the Air National Guard. In ten minutes both of them signed a dotted line pledging four years of full time service in the Air Force. Not once did the recruiter mention death. Not once did he talk of blood and violence on foreign soil in his sales pitch. (3)

I hope that my friend, as well as all those who are put in harm's way over money and power, comes back safely. I hope that, somewhere, all people will begin to understand that those on either end of the gun are not the ones pulling the strings — those people are safe in palaces and skyscrapers far away from the fires and bloodshed. While men and women like Johnny kill and get killed, men and women at the top on both sides benefit from their sacrifices. I wonder how things might change if the rank and file on both sides knew what they were fighting over.

Notes:

- 1.) "Johnny" is not my friend's real name. I have changed it, as I'm sure he cannot have his identity released.
- 2.) According to RAWA (Revolutionary Women of Afghanistan), two years after the supposed "liberation" of Afghan women from the Taliban, atrocities still occur almost daily. The new government provides little or no protection for women from rape and sexual violence. Young girls in particular are forced into marriage and punished for running away. Even women in police or armed forces custody are repeatedly assaulted and abused. For more information visit www.rawa.org.
- 3.) Currently, the Army is enlisting hip-hop artists in its "Army of One" campaign. In addition to this, I have seen both Army and Marines recruiters at large festivals such as Lollapalooza, using free giveaways and tests of strength to garner kids as young as 16 into signing up for more information.

REVIEW BILLY BRAGG

Billy Bragg

Must I Paint You a Picture?: The Essential Billy Bragg
Outside Music 2003
www.outside-music.com

Last November, I had the opportunity to meet Billy Bragg. Maybe it's because he lives in the UK, or that I haven't seen a tour of his since probably 1992, but I never thought I would be in the same room with him. So when I saw him standing around before a panel at a conference, I went up to him and shook his hand and did the only thing I could do: Thank him for his music. I didn't know what else to say, and it's not often that that happens.

I grew up listening to Billy Bragg. One summer I met a boy who gave me *Worker's Playtime* and *Talking to the Taxman about Poetry*. I was hooked. I must have been 14 or so, and now it's 15 years later and Billy Bragg is still Billy Bragg. I have an unquantifiable amount of respect for him, and that's difficult for someone I've never had a conversation with. It's not that I put him on a pedestal or think that he is some god to be worshiped. I also grew up in punk rock which taught me a lot about not being nervous about going up to people in big-name bands and considering myself an equal. It's that I feel that Billy is a comrade in struggle, a kindred spirit, and given different circumstances we could be close allies. I respect his integrity — His message for freedom and social justice has been unwaivering and enduring. He has produced music for 20 years, put out records on big labels, and I'm sure made a lot of money — yet he has remained humble and has always acknowledged those who paved the way — musically and politically. From Phil Ochs and Woody Guthrie to Stephen Biko and Joe Hill, he not only pays respect he helps keep their messages alive.

To be so unassuming yet with lyrics that are so poignant — how does he do it? He's anti-war, pro-union, anti-imperialist — the list goes on. Why is

he not heralded as an icon by the progressive movement in the US? Well, after 20 years, he's still just a guy with a guitar in a T shirt and jeans. His records aren't diatribes, they're representations of what real people are like: politics mixed with relationships and love. Listeners take away the idea that passion and compassion can and should permeate every element of our lives.

While *Must I Paint You A Picture?: The Essential Billy Bragg* doesn't contain new material, and it's not every track he's ever recorded, it is a wonderful collection of old and new — and many favorites. It's not all the overtly political songs or all of the sappy love songs, it's a bit of everything. This 2 CD set showcases Billy's long career, and illustrates his evolution. The 40 tracks contain songs from each release from the first LP in 1983, *Life's a Riot*, to the last single in 2002, "Take Down the Union Jack." It's a nice CD sampler for those of us who have most every release — especially if you still have some on cassette and LP or if you've missed a few EPs here and there. For a beginner, it's a great introduction to his versatility, wit, and insight. This is one record you'll buy this year that won't get stale after a few listens and that you'll find yourself returning to again and again.

Here's to 20 more years.

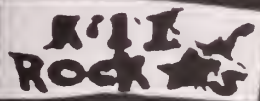
—Jen Angel



The Casual Dots



out 2/17/04

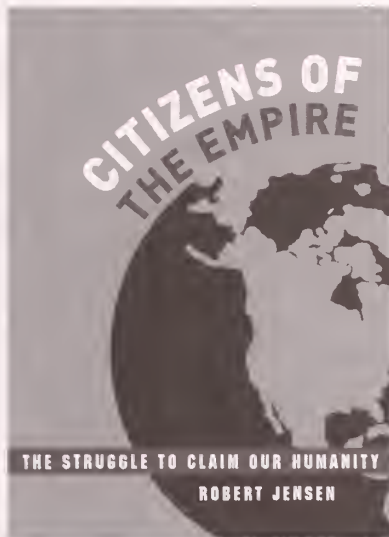


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"AMONG THOSE WHO WOULD MEET THE CHALLENGE FOR JUSTICE, THERE IS ANGER AND THERE IS HOPE. ROBERT JENSEN HAS MANAGED THE UNUSUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF DESCRIBING AND INVOKING BOTH."
—PHYLLIS BENNIS, AUTHOR OF BEFORE AND AFTER: U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND THE SEPTEMBER 11TH CRISIS AND CALLING THE SHOTS: HOW WASHINGTON DOMINATES TODAY'S UN

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ami diFranco



educated guess




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HAMBURGLAR

If you can overlook all the banners, flyers and stickers plastered onto the walls of the McDonald's at the crossroads of Strasbourg and Saint Denis in Paris, France, there's a seemingly ordinary restaurant underneath it all — seemingly, being the key word. Ever since its employees successfully carried out the longest strike in McDonald's history in 2002, the location has become a veritable thorn in the side of the world's largest fast food corporation. If such a thing as the "Happy Meal" still exists, I assure you, you won't be finding it here.

Had harmonious relations prevailed between the Strasbourg Saint Denis employees and its new management following the 2002 strike, perhaps the store's history would have quietly faded into obscurity. But instead, a clash of outlandish proportions has erupted,

eclipsing the previous strike's record for longevity and raising some unsavory questions about labor relations and Ronald McDonald.

However unsavory the strike is, Rose-Marie, a media relations receptionist at McDonald's-France, seems baffled by my interest in writing about the topic. Rose-Marie, who refuses to reveal her last name, while simultaneously denying me access to any official spokesperson for McDonald's-France, trivializes the story's importance.

"It's just one restaurant in a country with a lot of McDonald's restaurants," she assures me. In fact, France does have "a lot" of McDonald's. At the end of 2001, there were 913 restaurants in 660 different communities, employing 37,500 people. And a labor movement spreading to all of them would mean a lot of trouble for McDonald's.

by **Brian Hull**

photos and translation **Mélina Bernhardt**



IN PARIS

How far would McDonald's go to bust a union?

If the case of Strasbourg/Saint Denis was relevant only for this "one restaurant," then perhaps McDonald's would discuss it openly. But after three months of calls getting me no further than their reception desk, it's safe to say that openness with regards to the strike isn't their priority.

For McDonald's it's an open and shut case: The Strasbourg/Saint Denis employees acted beyond their legal means on private property. Echoing McDonald's spokesperson Etienne Aussedat, Rose-Marie says that when the franchisee of Strasbourg/Saint Denis was shut out of his own restaurant, the employees had gone too far.

The strikers, who had changed the locks on the restaurant's doors, say it was to put an end to a mysterious pattern of disappearing stock. They say the pattern threatened to sink the restaurant and that in the end, the responsibility would have been on their shoulders.

Nabil Kehila, Assistant Manager of the restaurant and an eight-year employee, is one of those strikers. Seated in the swivel chairs of the once-restaurant, now turned strike headquarters, Kehila rolls recollections off his tongue in rapid-fire succession. And the 25 year old of North African origins doesn't hesitate to add that it's going to take a while to tell the whole story.

Mystery of the Missing Fries

The debacle started in October of 2002, when an employee named Armand Gandji was fired and accused of embezzling funds. Partially protesting this action and partially seeking better working conditions, Kehila, Gandji and three other employees organized a strike and were swiftly accused themselves of embezzlement. Four months later, they listened as a judge delivered a verdict acknowledging their demands and declaring them all innocent of the franchisee's charges.

In February of 2003 a headline in Paris

read "115 Days of Strike for a Total Victory." Rémi Smolik, the franchisee who had accused Gandji, stepped down, and the strikers were ecstatic. At the invitation of a union comprised of Pizza Hut and Taco Bell employees in Florida, Kehila and a fellow striker even toured the U.S., telling their story and briefly blockading a McDonald's in Chicago. Upon returning, the employees were introduced to Hamid Triyeh, a new supervisor, later-turned franchisee, chosen to resuscitate the embattled restaurant.

"We were truly content," Kehila recalls. "This is the kind of thing that doesn't happen at McDonald's. It's true that we had suffered a lot but our cause had been won."

Or so they thought.

From the beginning, Hamid Triyeh came in complimenting the staff on their handling of the former franchisee and assuring them he was "one of their kind" and was with them "through thick and thin." For a restaurant predominantly staffed by employees of Arabic and African origin, Triyeh, himself of North African origin, seemed to capitalize on their common roots.

Despite the sweet talking, the veterans of the first strike were on the alert for anything out of the ordinary. Early on, Triyeh's hiring of a number of employees for previously unknown positions definitely raised the eyebrows of the store's managerial staff. A

friend of Triyeh's, Kais Laamari was hired on as Supervising Market Director, a curious position for a supervisor of merely two restaurants. When Triyeh hired his brother, Abdel Triyeh, to be the Technical Director, the new position seemed particularly baffling to Kehila.

"Where are we here?" Kehila asks. "Are we in a factory using machines or what? What kind of technical expertise is needed inside this restaurant?"

But, as strange as the new positions seemed, it was a pattern of consistently disappearing produce that really began to worry the staff. Kehila, who had personally directed stocking the restaurant, a position familiarizing him with the store's sales numbers, says purchases of produce are made in accordance with the store's daily sales figures.

"We used to order five to six tons per week of produce and merchandise. How can you explain to me why after Hamid and Kais took the helm, that they ordered nine tons of produce weekly?"

The huge jump in purchases sufficiently baffled veterans of the store like Kehila and Assisant Manager Tino Fortunat, but the fact that the restaurant was finding itself consistently short on stocks was beyond their comprehension. Even after these huge shipments arrived, in a matter of days the restaurant was emptied of stock.

At this point, Kehila decided it was time to personally retake authority over inventory, and refigure all the calculations. The results were bizarre. Boxes of pickles that usually lasted for three days would disappear in one. Filet of Fish, an item the store had never had a shortage of, would come up short for two weeks. A shortage of fries was particularly strange.

"It's really impossible to have a shortage of fries because we order huge quantities, in containers with 45 boxes each time. But they were gone!"

Kehila says that when he took Triyeh aside to describe the bizarre scenario that was unfolding, Triyeh was surprisingly unconcerned. Kehila was told that "things would be taken care of."

"This is a franchise owner who has invested money into his business, who has employees warning him that his product is disappearing. And he responds 'Don't worry'? That's really bizarre."

As rue Saint-Denis happens to be the equivalent to Paris' "red-light district," it was the prostitutes of the area that began witnessing the removal of stock. Several of them have firmly attested to the strikers that they regularly saw people leaving through the store's emergency exits at 2 and 3 in the morning loaded down with boxes.

Triyeh, as the franchisee of two locations, had access to produce through his other store. And since shipments of produce arriving at the restaurant allegedly arrived without transfer vouchers and proper documentation, the strikers stipulate that the source of the produce was Triyeh's other location. It's a scenario whose logic if carried out, leads to the strange conclusion that Triyeh was stealing from himself.

For suggesting this, Kehila says that some people have labeled the strikers paranoid or downright crazy. He isn't surprised by their skepticism.

"If someone had told me the same story and it was me that hadn't been there, I would also wonder why a boss would steal from himself," Kehila says. "But one has to live it to see something like this happen."

On the surface, a franchisee stealing from himself definitely seems bizarre. But

regarding the scenario from the broader context of the McDonald's corporation's bottom line reveals an entirely different perspective. After all, these loyal union members bristling with pride after a successful strike could obviously pose a significant challenge to business as usual. The strike had resulted in a protocol being signed to improve worker's conditions, raise salaries, and provide a '13th month' (a typical French tradition which provides a bonus month of pay). Expanding these improvements throughout its many restaurants is something McDonald's would understandably want to avoid.

The Power of a Strong Union

"Going back two years ago, this started with the unions," Kehila says. "When we wanted to hold union elections, the CGT (General Worker's Confederation) barged into the company headquarters, and McDonald's blew a fuse. They didn't want it to happen. The unions are at the heart of this story."

CGT, the original French union, has roots dating back to 1895, and an illustrious history of challenging corporations. As their ideas and tactics spread throughout the world, the terms 'sabotage' and 'syndicalism' became part of the revolutionary worker's vocabulary. It was CGT's organization of a blockage of McDonald's warehouse L/R Services for several nights that eventually brought McDonald's reluctant leadership to the strikers' negotiating table.

CGT representative Karl Ghazi says that his union doesn't have a bone to pick with McDonald's in particular. "The points of contention we have here are the same ones we have with all bosses," Ghazi says. "They aren't used to accepting unions that challenge their authority and demand accountability."

"We had been making trips to McDonald's corporate offices to explain our concerns before the strike," Kehila says. "We weren't interested in getting into a conflict when we could fix things first. But no one wanted to listen to us."

The notion that McDonald's has a strong aversion to organized labor is certainly nothing new. Ray Kroc, the mastermind behind McDonald's rise to fast food supremacy, was known to voice his fervent disdain for labor unions. And similar attempts to strike against the corporation in North America have frequently resulted in entire staffs being dismissed, restaurant closures and new ones sprouting up in their place.

Union-Busting Stoops to an Old Low?

Kehila believes Triyeh's actions have by no means been mere accident. His readings on the subject of fast food labor relations have familiarized him with the role of the 'cleaner.' While brought in un-



i'm NOT lovin' it!™

der the pretext of management, the cleaner's aim is to do everything in his power to sink a restaurant and re-open one where labor relations are more favorable. And in this location, where deep-rooted union affiliation is an embarrassment to the corporate office, retaliation isn't unimaginable.

As work conditions at the unionized franchise continued to decline the suspicion that Triyeh was a cleaner became very pronounced for the store's employees. So pronounced, in fact, that it led employees to call for an emergency meeting and to file a 'droit d'alert' (state of alert) in preparation for a potential new strike. The legal procedure engages the services of an independent expert to analyze the situation of a business. Through the process, the expert is given open access to all of the business' accounts. As it turned out, the state of alert brought financial incongruities into the light of day and would prove to be a strong card for the strikers to play as imminent legal wrangling began.

One of the more revealing statistics surfacing during the investigation, concerns contracts that Triyeh and Kaïs Laamari negotiated for the restaurant's services. According to Karl Ghazi, company records reveal Triyeh paying six times more for security and three times more for cleaning than his predecessor.

Kehila says that produce wasn't just disappearing, it was rotting. Refrigerators and freezers, in perfect working order, were regularly sabotaged, dialed into ridiculous extremes of cold or heat.

"Products were disappearing and it was unbearable in the store. A sewer like smell rose from the basement and was totally out of control."

A swift reduction in the store's staff from 55 employees to 25, found the store's crews overtaxed and run down. And the firing of Assistant Director, eleven-year employee and card carrying CGT member Tino Fortunat, was the straw that broke the camel's back. Under these conditions of duress, a strike was called for on March 11, 2003. The workers numerous demands include a respect for union rights, a wage increase of 10 percent, full payment for the days on strike, and new hires to stop the declining work conditions.

Challenges Ahead

Now nine months into the new strike, adversity has been the strikers' constant companion. Often volatile negotiations have tested their patience. Both Kehila and Karl Ghazi have confirmed an outburst that occurred during an October negotiation. Also in attendance were Triyeh, Laamari, a work inspector, the manager, and a female CGT delegate named Raja, amongst others.

The meeting, proceeding in a typically tedious fashion, found the strikers attempting to find some common ground. As they explained some points of agreement with McDonald's, Kehila recalls that Laamari became inexplicably agitated and began insulting Raja. According to Kehila, the scenario ended with Laamari hurling a ciga-



The notion that McDonald's has a strong aversion to organized labor is certainly nothing new ... similar attempts to strike against the corporation in North America have frequently resulted in entire staffs being dismissed, restaurant closures and new ones sprouting up in their place.

To hold out the strikers have relied primarily on t-shirt sales. The shirt's designs utilize McDonald's ubiquitous M logo with the words 'McMerde' (McShit) or 'McPrécarité' (McPrecarious) echoing their own sense of instability in the company. They also have a solidarity box on site at the Strasbourg/Saint Denis location, in which workers take donations. In May, when demonstrations against the war in Iraq flooded the streets of Paris, the workers found a lot of sympathy for their cause in the passersby.

The seemingly never ending case, which despite occurring only in "one restaurant" in France, obviously has larger ramifications. Before the Iraq war, as contemptuous terms like "freedom fries" filtered down from Washington D.C. into the American populace, people sensitive to labor relations between the two countries weren't particularly surprised at the sudden outburst of France-bashing.

After all, France wasn't just another European country, amongst many, protesting the war in Iraq. It's the home of unyielding farmers like José Bové who, in protesting bovine growth hormones, have raised the ire of the American beef industry, and the home of the CGT, a labor union whose strength threatens at any time to shut down the nation's railways. A verdict delivered in favor of the Strasbourg Saint Denis strikers could force one of the world's largest corporations to rethink its treatment of organized labor. And I, despite being just one journalist writing about "one restaurant" feel like my questions for them deserve to be answered. But alas, as my phone remains silent, I guess I'll have my "freedom fries" with a grain of salt and wait this one out. ☆

rette lighter at her and gesturing as if his chair was next. Both Laamari and Triyeh reportedly marched out of the meeting abruptly.

"Insults were flying from every side," Kehila recalls. "The lawyer took refuge under the table. The representative of France McDonald's didn't know what to do with himself anymore. It's the same scenario we've been up against except that as each day goes by the violence from their side escalates more and more."

Financial challenges have been formidable and not limited only to the strikers. Two workers who took part in the 2002 strike, Hanang Chaouti and Karima Sikidi, decided to bow out of this strike for financial reasons. Under French law, if an employee doesn't strike, they are entitled to their usual pay as long as the strike persists.

However, even though both Chaouti and Sikidi sent certified letters to Hamid confirming their non-participation in the strike, their paychecks didn't arrive for 8 months. In October, the two finally took the matter to court and a judge awarded them the overdue back pay in addition to damages sustained.

"During the first three months we were holding out with our savings," Kehila recalls. "Because we knew when we started witnessing bizarre things that we should start saving in case one day we had to go on strike. But we weren't aware that it was going to be nine months and still going."



Illustration by Brandon Bauer

KILLED

by

GLOBAL WARMING

Is weather a killer of mass proportions? To Americans born of most generations and classes, the very notion of the weather being seriously life-threatening seems foreign and alarmist. Take a look in any almanac and you will likely find heart disease, cancer, stroke, lung disease, auto accidents, household accidents, pneumonia, and diabetes listed among the leading causes of death in developed nations. Nonetheless, a number of recent studies conclude that weather is indeed a mass killer and may have to be added to the top 10 list. If global warming projections can be believed, this trend is about to get considerably worse.

Some industry-backed commentators have made a career out of questioning the scientific consensus that global warming exists and is the result of human activities. Despite their self-serving delay tactic calling for "more research," the world's leading climate experts have no problem drawing clear conclusions about global warming. Just this December, a study published in *Science* stated unequivocally that "climate change is dominated by human influences," primarily by the pollution caused by burning oil, coal, and other fossil fuels. The study's authors went on to conclude that global warming "is now likely to continue for many centuries" and that "its associated impacts could be quite disruptive."

The signs that global warming is already occurring are all around us:

- A study of tree rings and ice cores determined ten of the hottest years globally over the past 600 years have come since 1990 — the hottest in 1998.
- Arctic Sea ice has shrunk by 10 to 15 percent. Ice in the Antarctic has "gone south" by 2.8 degrees of latitude from the mid-1950s to the early '70s. Alaska's boreal forests are "going north" at an astonishing rate of around 100 kilometers per every one degree Celsius rise in temperature.
- Growing seasons worldwide are getting longer, spring is coming earlier, migratory birds arrive earlier and leave later, and a whole host of different kinds of insects are found far further North than have ever been recorded in history.
- Glaciers are retreating around the planet, coral reefs are dying, and peak stream flow is changing in Eastern Europe, European Russia, central Canada, and California because winter precipitation has recently shifted to falling more heavily as rain, rather than snow.
- Measurements in the levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere taken between 1959 and 2002 increased by a whopping 18%.





There is other damning evidence that global warming is more than a theory; it is a fact of life. And like most things associated with life, global warming is a fact of death also. In 2003, a study by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimated that 160,000 people worldwide are already dying each year from the side effects of global warming. These effects range from direct heat-related deaths to acute disease spread and malnutrition. Global warming may not cause tidal waves to sweep over Manhattan any time soon, but it is already causing changes in weather that influence disease spread, agricultural yields, and smog formation; these impacts are life and death issues in many of the world's communities. The WHO study went on to predict that, even taking improved health care into account, the "disease burden" caused by climate change will nearly double by 2020.

Environmental Injustice Writ Large

Dr. Laurence S. Kalkstein of the Center for Climate Research at the University of Delaware has written that people will need to adjust their behavior and lifestyles in order to avoid death and other health effects from global warming. For instance, Kalkstein claims that EPA has reported that the U.S. might expect a seven-fold increase in heat-related deaths by the mid-21st century. This would make heat-related death rates close to diseases like leukemia (putting it in the running for our top 10 death list in the Almanac). Individuals could take steps to avoid heat-related health problems including moving to more temperate regions or investing in mitigating technology like better air conditioning or house construction. These changes are considerably more of an option for well-to-do Americans than for the working poor; for people in developing nations, these steps may not be an option at all.

In the summer of 2003, a heat wave in Europe killed at least 20,000 people. The elderly were the most susceptible to heat-related illness and death, and the American media were quick to point out that air conditioning is much less common in Europe than in the United States. Writer Mike Davis explained that "the causative roles of poverty, unaffordable housing, and underfunded public services, as well as the collapse of inter-generational solidarity" were also to blame for the high number of deaths.

Davis compared the European heat wave with the one that struck Chicago in 1995, leaving more than 700 of its senior citizens dead. Seven hundred men and women died from heat in Chicago's poor communities

not because of cultural differences that made air conditioning unpopular, but because they could not afford air conditioning. Many may have even been unwilling or unable to open the windows in their apartments due to fear of crime. While these people baked to death in their homes, Mayor Daly complained, "It's hot, but let's not blow it out of proportion... Every day people die of natural causes." The lives of these poor, Black, elderly people were viewed as expendable by those in power, who refused to put more ambulance drivers on call or to institute door-to-door health checks. Davis called the deaths "the preventable consequences of poverty, racism, social isolation, and criminal civic negligence."

If one looks beyond heat-related deaths to impacts like hunger due to decreased agricultural yields or homelessness due to flooding, it becomes clear that the poor in developing nations have it even worse. Indeed, the WHO study indicates that developing nations bear the brunt of global warming deaths throughout the world.

Naming America's Destructive Behavior

Of great concern, if we want to develop a plan to address the root causes of this phenomenon, is the fact that around 75% of annual atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions come from burning fossil fuels. The other 25% results from changes in land use, like cutting down forests, converting rangelands into agriculture, and agricultural lands into parking lots and strip malls — a process known as sprawl.

So, scientists agree that global warming is real and that it has adverse effects on human society and ecosystems around the planet. In this light, it is tempting to label the behaviors that are exacerbating global warming as suicidal. Everyone knows that driving an SUV, wasting electricity, or building a home on previously undeveloped land adds to the problem. Are Americans killing themselves on purpose?

Even if the ultimate result of America's collective energy-use behavior may be devastation, it is hard to argue that death and destruction are the intended outcomes. America's energy usage is more akin to the kind of self-inflicted demise that often results from addictive behavior than out-and-out suicide.

As a whole, Americans seem addicted to consumption at any cost. A society driven by a perceived need to have a better lifestyle — where "better" is defined as more, bigger, faster — kills itself off in many ways. Just look at the Almanac: heart disease, lung cancer, auto accidents, diabetes — causes of death often associated with excessive con-

sumption. So goes it with global warming. It is only with the complete denial of an addict that we as a society can continue increasing our wasteful use of fossil fuels, with the full knowledge of the environmental cost that must be paid.

Like many addictions, of course, this one isn't just harming ourselves. It is hurting — yes, as described above, killing — hundreds of thousands of innocent people. One has to consider the idea that most of the greenhouse gases are produced in industrial nations, with the overall highest amount coming directly from the U.S. This production and the "benefits" of this excessive lifestyle are enjoyed first and foremost by the world's elite. It is hard to escape the notion that one class of people — the wealthy — and one class of nations — the wealthiest — are responsible for global warming deaths. But the privileged classes aren't the ones dying here.

Rich people can afford immunizations, food imports, disaster insurance, and other products and services that lessen the impact of global warming. Most human beings, however, cannot afford these things. As the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) reports:

"The poor and the vulnerable are at greatest risk. Projecting trends that could continue through the 21st century and beyond ... desertification is expected to worsen in response to reduced rainfall in parts of Africa, declines in agricultural productivity will diminish food security in many Asian countries, and floods and droughts will become more frequent in Latin America."

Forget describing global warming as suicidal. With hundreds of thousands killed each year, one could almost call the results of global warming genocidal, if not again for the question of intentions. If murder isn't an accurate description for most of the world's global warming deaths, manslaughter certainly is. So when we get back to our almanac ranking of causes of death, perhaps homicide (the killing of one human being by another, whether murder or manslaughter), which is usually at the bottom, deserves a more prominent place on the list.

Like any other addict, privileged Americans need help. Admitting we have a problem is the first step to our cure. Then laying out a plan to recovery has to follow. This can take many forms, too numerous for this writing, but found aplenty if one is willing to listen to all the advocates for a safe and clean environment that are out there. The United States requires national consensus in order to move forward with the rest of the world in addressing this issue. We, in the US, will also have to face our own share of the guilt. Till then, death is in the air. ☆

The people least responsible for global warming are already dying from it.



"Juan," age 12, appreciates the "flex time" that entrepreneurship allows him. Being a self-employed prostitute means taking a mid-day power snooze when he feels like it.

After cheap U.S. corn (heavily subsidized by the U.S. government) flooded the Mexican market, families like Juan's lost their small farms and moved to the city to look for employment.

Yes, in the big city of opportunities, some rural folk customs get left behind.

"But it's worth it," asserts HIV-positive Juan. "Life on the farm was hard."

NAFTA 10 YEARS AFTER

portraits of the mexican economic miracle



"Graciela" and "Ana," ages 14 and 11, left public school because their parents could not afford textbooks or the required uniforms.

"The street is the best school there is," insists Ana. "Since many graduate schools prefer applicants who have some real world work experience, I decided to skip the rest of grade school, junior high, and high school, and just go right into an M.B.A. program. Running my own business is the best preparation I could have for b-school."

What business school programs are these young entrepreneurs considering?

"Chicago," says Graciela, "or Michigan. Yale if I get in."

"If I don't get into Harvard, I'll wait a year and reapply," explains Ana. "President Salinas went to Harvard and I want to follow in his footsteps."



"Ricardo" is 6 years old but mature beyond his years. He's on the street everyday at 5 a.m. selling candy and cigarettes to the early risers. He sticks to it until 7, sometimes 9 p.m.

"I would like to thank the IMF for giving me the freedom and opportunity to go into business for myself. Before President Zedillo's leadership in carrying out IMF "structural adjustment" plans, like ending price controls and subsidies for basic food staples, I might have been forced to attend school. Now, with the Free Market, I have real freedom."

words and photos
Dan O'Donnell



Hunger Amidst Plenty

An Interview with Barry Mason

Barry Mason is author of "World Hunger Report," which first appeared on the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) in December 2003. Based on data from the United Nations, Mason's report found that an estimated 842 million people go hungry every day. *Clamor* interviewed Mason about his findings.

Clamor: In 1992, cutting world hunger in half by 2015 was one of the United Nation's big "Millennium Goals." What is the state of world hunger today, and how much progress has been made in achieving the UN's goal?

Mason: The Food and Agricultural Organization's recent report "The State of Food Insecurity in the World" sets out some pretty stark figures. An extra 4.5 million people are going hungry every year. Improvements in some countries have been more than offset by a worsening situation in others. Sudan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Indonesia, and India have all seen an increase in hunger. According to their own figures, the UN are way off target in achieving their millennium goals. Progress has been reversed. Unless there is a dramatic turnaround, the numbers of those going hungry will continue to increase.

With problems like drought and overpopulation, some might expect that a fair amount of hunger throughout the world is just inevitable. What are your thoughts on this?

No, hunger is not inevitable. Drought may be inevitable. But people starving is not. The effect drought has in a country like America is very different from the effect it has in Africa. Whether people starve depends on the infrastructure that is in place to deal with such climatic problems. As for overpopulation, I would question whether there is any overpopulation. There is no shortage of food worldwide. But an increasing number of people are too poor to buy it.

The world economy is dominated by the rich advanced capitalist countries. Following the debt crisis of the 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank imposed structural adjustment programs on poor countries forcing them to cut welfare services, privatize basic industries and water supplies, and cut subsidies to farmers. When drought strikes they are unable to respond in a coordinated way. The

interview Arthur Stamoulis
illustration Erik Rose

famine in Malawi last year, for example, was partly the result of IMF directives to deregulate its grain market. They were told to rely on unregulated private traders. Government stockpiles of grain were sold. When the famine struck they had nothing to fall back on.

Added to that is the problem of commodity prices. Many poor countries have been encouraged to produce cash crops rather than food. The companies that control the market often have a turnover greater than the income of many poor countries. Big companies are able to force down prices, reducing farmers to appalling poverty, so that they have no spare cash to pay for education or health care or to see them through bad times.

On top of that, many African countries have extremely high levels of HIV/AIDS infection. People are too sick to work. A downward spiral has developed in some countries. This could be prevented by the provision of drugs, health care, and education.

You've reported that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that 10 million people go hungry in rich industrialized countries. What accounts for hunger in Western Europe and the United States?

The growth of inequality in the advanced capitalist countries has accelerated over the last two decades. There has been an increasing social polarization. In the United States under Ronald Regan and in Britain under Margaret Thatcher an assault began on the welfare state provision that had been put in place following the Second World War. That growing inequality producing enormous wealth at one pole and growing poverty and financial insecurity at the other has continued unabated. Countries such as Germany have also set out to accelerate the attack on welfare provision with its Agenda 2010. Germany is trying to catch up with the U.S. and Britain. Globalization and the undermining of national economies drives the advanced countries to continually attack social provision to satisfy big business. The recent U.S. Census Bureau report showed a sharp rise in the numbers in poverty with a total of 34.6

million along with a fall in median income. Over three million jobs have been lost in the private sector since March 2001. President Bush's tax handout massively favoring the super-rich can only exacerbate the growing inequality. The recent Medicare reform bill in the U.S., with its long-term aim of bankrupting Medicare, shows the advanced and deep nature of the attack on social provision in the U.S. These attacks are undermining the social position of working people and leading to a situation where hunger is becoming a reality for millions in the rich industrialized nations.

What can an activist reading this do about this situation?

Hunger and the social inequality that produces it are deep-going, systemic problems. Addressing these problems requires a fundamental change in the political and economic system that has produced them. The present political parties whether in the USA, Europe, or elsewhere are incapable of reducing world hunger because they have all contributed to it. They have promoted social inequality in their own countries and the rest of the world because they represent the interests of the big corporations. The wealthy elite that control these companies want every obstacle removed that stands in the way of their profits. They are prepared to drive an ever growing section of the world's population into poverty. They are prepared to lie, cheat, and steal and above all they are prepared to go to war. Military spending in the USA currently amounts to \$2,000 for every man, woman, and child in the country.

The vast majority of people are effectively disenfranchised because there is no party that represents them. Working people need an independent political party that is committed to a program of social equality, that opposes militarism and recognizes the common interests of working people all over the world. The WWSW was set up five years ago to develop a socialist response to the attacks that working people are suffering on every continent. ★

Solidarity Not Charity

Partners In Health (www.pih.org) is a Boston-based nonprofit working to bring the benefits of modern medical science to areas of extreme poverty through sister organizations, such as the Clinique Bon Sauveur in Haiti. Its mission is based on solidarity, rather than charity. Founding Director Paul Farmer explains:

"The work at Partners In Health is pragmatic solidarity: the rapid deployment of tools and resources to improve the health and well-being of those who suffer the structural violence of human rights violations.

"Though we do not mean to overstate the case against charity, our approach differs from charity in important ways. We do not regard our patients as intrinsically inferior, but rather as powerless or impoverished because of historical processes and events such as slavery or unjust economic policies propped up by powerful parties. Also, charity medicine too frequently consists of second-hand, castoff services — leftover medicine — doled out in piecemeal fashion. Instead, we are providing a first world standard of care to a squatter settlement in poorest region of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

"US-based activists must make provision of services central to the agenda. We need to listen to the sick and abused and to those most likely to have their rights violated. Whether they are nearby or far away, we know, often enough, who they are. The abused offer, to those willing to listen, critiques far sharper than my own.

"Whether or not we continue to ignore them, the destitute sick are increasingly clear on one point: making social and economic rights a reality is the key goal for health and human rights in the twenty-first century."

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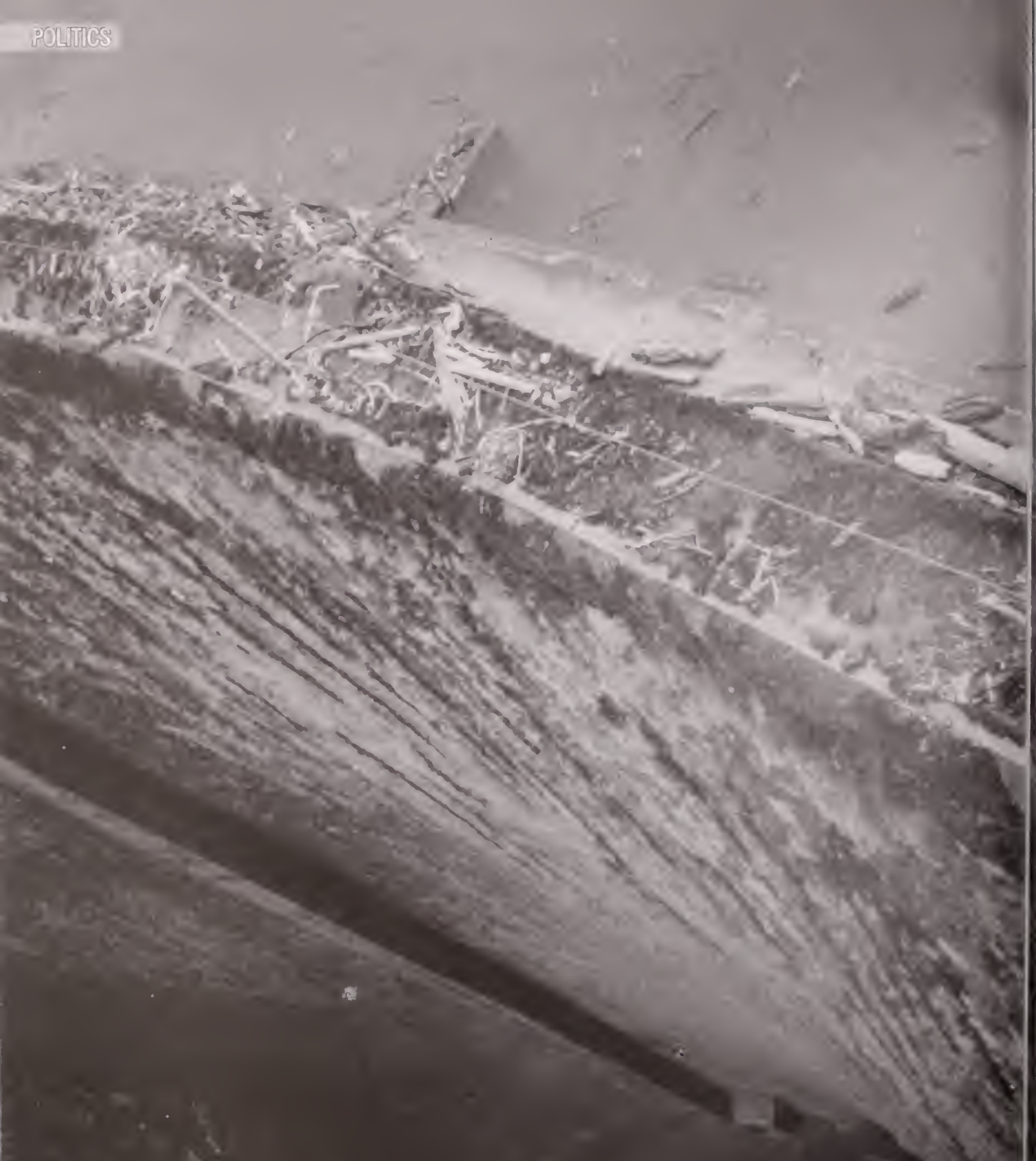
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Undamming the West

Standing under a drizzly gray sky and surrounded by green forest, Robert Elofson recalled the time the Elwha Dam blew out. Elofson, a Lower Klallam tribal member in Washington state, said, as the reservoir filled, the bottom of the dam gave way. Water rushed down onto the reservation and tribal members ran to high ground as their homes flooded. Neither the government nor the dam owner compensated them for their losses. Elofson, the coordinator of the tribe's River Restoration Project, has been working on this issue throughout his 20-year career and believes the dams will be removed and rivers restored by the time he retires.

The Lower Elwha Klallam tribe has lived along the banks of the Elwha River for thousands of years. The river and salmon are spiritually and culturally at the heart of the Klallam people. The Elwha River was one of Washington state's best salmon streams until two dams, Aldwell and Glines Canyon, were built without a fish passage in the early 1900s. The sockeye salmon have disappeared, the Chinook salmon and bull trout are listed under the Endangered Species Act, and the remaining fish are struggling for survival.

Today's tribal elders were children when the Olympic Power Company finished building Aldwell Dam on the Elwha River in 1915. They watched as Chinook salmon, unable to get upstream to spawn, died by the thousands in the shadow of the dam. The community protested, but nothing was done to restore the wild salmon runs until now, 70 years later. Deconstruction of the dam is scheduled to begin in 2007, a sign that change is on the way.

River Destroyers

For most of the 20th century, dam-builders moved mountains of earth and concrete to cork the river canyons of North America. Literally and symbolically, dams towered over the rivers they plugged. They were the ultimate symbol of the capacity of technology and engineering to subdue forces of nature. For the first 50 years, their conquest of the land and waters was limitless, as was most people's faith in the conquering power of technology. But while official history chronicled the endless bonanza of dams and agriculture projects, the rationale for their construction began to crumble. After the 1960s, the rising cost of building dams outweighed the economic benefits of irrigating new farms on agriculturally marginal land. Dam construction all but halted. Coal and nuclear power superseded dams as the main source of electricity. The ecological costs of dams — inconsequential to early dam builders — rose higher and higher as ecological systems dependant on healthy rivers began to collapse.

The dams on the Elwha were built to provide cheap hydroelectricity for pulp mills in Port Angeles, a town on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state, five miles from the Elwha River. Over time, logging and dams wreaked havoc on the ecology of rivers, especially on their salmon. The construction of both dams did not allow fish to pass through. Though their engineers knew they would destroy the native and commercial salmon fishery, they decided that constructing fish ladders on the high dams would be too expensive. The dominant worldview at the time was that of progress. Building dams and mills were the priority while salmon were expendable.

When salmon still spawned in the Elwha, two Klallam villages sat on either side of the river's mouth. A third village sat five

miles upstream, at the mouth of Indian Creek. This village site was drowned in 1915 when the Olympic Power Company closed the gates of Aldwell Dam. The Klallam tribe, like most tribes of the Columbia-Snake river basin, had most of their lands stolen through treaties with the U.S. government. But all these treaties preserved the tribe's right to fish at their "usual and accustomed places." Like dozens of other northwest tribes, the Klallam fought ceaselessly in the courts, in the legendary "fish wars" of the 1970s and in the halls of Congress to preserve their right to their traditional fishery. The removal of the two Elwha dams is a key victory in this long struggle. Of the 467 U.S. dams removed since 1912, these are the largest functioning hydroelectric dams to be decommissioned to date; some have hailed this project as a turning point in the fight to restore North American rivers.

How a Dam Comes Down

For decades, Klallam and non-indigenous fishers watched salmon runs decline, blocked by the two massive, impassable dams. Although the dams themselves were the ultimate symbol of permanence, the world in which they were built was changing. Also, dams, like all marvels of human ingenuity, have a specific life span after which they no longer perform as designed.

Hydroelectric dams have a political life span as well, in the form of 50-year licenses. At the dawn of the dam building era, a few policy-makers realized that their worldview might not last forever, among them, President Theodore Roosevelt. "The public must retain the control of the great waterways," he wrote in 1908. "It is essential that any permit to obstruct them for reasons and on conditions that seem good at the moment should be subject to revision when changed conditions demand." The hydroelectric licenses Roosevelt championed first came up for renewal in the 1970s. River advocates have used the re-licensing process as a way to force dam owners to build fish ladders, redesign dams and turbines for improved fish passage and public access, and, in some cases, remove dams altogether.

As the salmon continued their annual fight to swim past large dams, the nascent environmental movement, along with tribes and fishermen and women, began to use the Endangered Species Act to challenge the re-licensing of hydroelectric dams when the dams came before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The ESA — at least on paper — gives a fish's right to spawn a higher priority than a dam owner's right to generate electricity. The Elwha dams came up for re-licensing just before the passing of the ESA, at a time when the American Indian Movement was uniting tribes across the country in asserting their sovereignty and the fish wars were at their height.

When the Glines Canyon Dam came up for re-licensing, the tribe challenged it within two years, said Elofson. Because part of it was located on national park land, the FERC stepped in.

In many ways, the Elwha was a typical FERC case. Since the dams still provided both power and water to a small city the opposition would be fierce. The city of Port Angeles used the reservoirs as unnatural settling basins to remove sediment from their water supply. With the dams gone, they worried that they would have to pay to purify it themselves. At first, opposition came from many directions. Some community members didn't like the idea of such a drastic change. Some Port Angeles residents sought to preserve the lakes behind the

One River at a Time

The Elwha River Restoration Project

by Laura Allen & Cleo Woelfle-Erskine
photos Laura Allen

dams and argued that fish ladders could be built on the dams. Even the National Park Service raised questions early in the process.

"When we first started talking to the National Park Service about the removal of the dams they were not very enthusiastic about tackling such a hard project," said Elofson. The tribe's congressman helped them get funding to study the possibility of restoring the Elwha River. "As we gathered the information it became more and more obvious that removal of the dams was the only logical way to restore the Elwha River," he said. After studying it, the park service agreed.

Dam proponents also worried that removing two major dams on the Elwha would generate momentum for the removal of four defunct



dams on the Columbia-Snake River system and elsewhere in the West. For years, the governor of Washington refused to approve the removal of the Elwha dams without a guarantee that all of the Columbia dams would stay.

The tribe persevered. The companies, the National Park Service, the tribe and the environmental groups struck a mutually beneficial agreement with the local power grid, Bonneville Power Administration, to take over running what the dams once powered.

In 1992, Congress passed the legislation mandating the removal of Aldwell and Glines Canyon Dams. Brian Winter, Project Coordinator for the National Park Service, believes Congress removed the dams because most of the basin sits on park land, and because the tribe has well-established treaty rights to the Elwha salmon. The federal government is paying for the dam's removal and has already appropriated most of the \$178 million for the project. The actual deconstruction of the dams will start in 2007 and be completed by 2009.

Meanwhile, the tribe has been working to come up with solutions for the changes in the river's flow that dam removal will bring. After the dams are removed, silt will wash down the channel and deposit along the river's mouth, raising both the river bottom and the water table. The reservation will no longer be able to use septic systems, so the tribe is looking at a plan to pipe their sewage to the treatment plant in Port Angeles. They are also figuring out how to deliver high-quality water to Port Angeles and the tribe's fish hatcheries. The tribe is already preparing for the salmon's return, constructing fishery plants upstream from the hatcheries. With the electric turbines now turned off, Elofson said they hope to have fish coming downstream before the dams are even removed

The Elwha's Place in the Struggle for Dam Removal

In the century following the 1902 passage of the Reclamation Act, 75,000 dams were built on U.S. rivers. During the same period, the economy of the Northwest was based largely on extracting resources — timber, fish, and hydroelectricity — with no regard for their long-term sustainability. Thousands of towns in the region are now feeling the effects of this boom-and-bust economic strategy and many people are looking for ways to create a new regional economy based on non-timber forest products, recreation, and sustainable harvest of a restored salmon fishery. Even the Army Corps of Engineers acknowledges that removing dams will greatly boost the region's economy. A Corps study shows that the removal of four defunct dams on the Snake River will, if accomplished, likely result in an 80 to 100 percent recovery of the salmon runs. The region is expected to gain \$2.6 billion annually from fishing and recreation, provide thousands of jobs restoring the lands adjacent to the river and former reservoir, and restore the salmon tribes' treaty rights to 50 percent of harvestable salmon in the Columbia-Snake watershed.

The dam removal and the accompanying salmon project should also benefit Port Angeles, a town plagued by high unemployment. "The Rainier mill has shut down and logging has been cut back considerably," said Elofson. "The city's ability to take advantage of a new recreational attraction, salmon and kayaking on the river, should be a great help to the community."

With the restoration of Elwha salmon runs, the tribe will finally reap the benefits of the northwest tribes' victory in the fish wars.

According to Elofson, the tribe now has the right to harvest half of all harvestable salmon runs. "So with restored runs of Pink, Chum, Coho, Chinook, and Steelhead," he said, "the tribal fisheries and the harvest they take on the river should massively increase the income of tribal members." Although there are costs for the tribe, like 20 years without the tribal fishery and problems with septic and flood control, Elofson believes dam removal is worthy of support from the tribe. When challenged on these concerns by one tribal woman, Elofson said, "I would not want to tell my kids that we had a chance to do this and did not do it." That, according to Elofson, was the last time a tribal member raised concerns about the costs of dam removal.

Most importantly, the removal will preserve the web of life of these rivers, of which we are but one small part.

Resources:

Lower Klallam Tribe's River Restoration Program
www.elwha.org/river.htm

National Parks Service Elwha Restoration Project Office
www.nps.gov/olym/elwha/home.htm

American Rivers Network
www.amrivers.org

Unconquering the Last Frontier, a film by Robert Lundahl
www.evolutionfilm.org

This article is adapted from part of a forthcoming book on dams, water infrastructure and community water systems. For more information on the Greywater Guerrillas, please visit www.urbanwilds.org.



by Megha Bahree

Memorializing the Victims

The Rehumanize Quilt Project

The cloth is a deep midnight blue with clusters of sparkling stars running across the middle. In one corner is a large, white circular patch — a full moon. Winding its way diagonally across the square is a pale blue river. In the middle of the river is a baby in a woven basket, fast asleep with a peaceful smile on her face.

This is baby Hamza. On April 2 at 2 a.m., she was killed when bombs hit her village 25 miles south of Baghdad. The piece of cloth is one of many tributes made to the victims of this war organized by Rehumanize, a project launched this April by two graduate students of Columbia University's Teachers College.

"We were talking about what we could do and how to respond to the war," said co-founder Kristin Eno, 29. They came up with the idea of a memorial quilt, similar to the AIDS quilt, and decided to track the lives lost, both of soldiers and Iraqi civilians. A participant can choose one of these names and make a two square foot patch to memorialize

the victim. People can get the fabric from Rehumanize or use their own.

So far they have received around 30 squares. "People have taken away material for more than a hundred, but they haven't sent them in to us as yet," Eno said. Of these, only one is a tribute to a U.S. soldier, Jose Perez and the rest to the civilian casualties. The styles of the squares vary widely. For instance, the tribute to Perez uses the American flag colors while another to a four-year-old boy, Mohammad Ahmed, incorporates traditional Islamic art, with lots of white and silver.

The decision to launch the project coincided with an April anti-war rally in Washington, D.C. Eno and her co-founder Cyra Levenson printed out some t-shirts with "Collateral" written on the front and "Rehumanize" on the back and headed out to the rally.

"It was a weird time to start a project because there was this feeling of hopelessness,"

Eno said. "The war had already started. People were saying, 'What's the point? It's definitely not going to stop the war.'"

But that pessimism didn't hinder Suzy Cottrill. A resident of Ohio, she learned about Rehumanize through the Internet and created the tribute to baby Hamza. "This was really important to me because I felt terrible for the Iraqi people, for their families, especially before the war when they didn't know what to expect," Cottrill, 35, said. "I couldn't stand the thought of what those families must have been facing. I think about it today and still cry. So this was good because it was a physical way to grieve for the people there. Plus, they also need to know that they're worth honoring and worth paying attention to."

To find out more about the Rehumanize Project, go to: www.rehumanize.us.

Confronting Capitalism:

Dispatches from a Global Movement

edited by Eddie Yuen, Daniel Burton Rose, and George Katsiaficas

Soft Skull Press, 2003 (2nd ed.)

www.softskullpress.com

In the introduction, editor Eddie Yuen discourages a linear reading of *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches from a Global Movement*. In this spirit of active readership, let's "attend" the book as if it were a protest. Certainly this collection of essays, maps, diaries, and interviews functions the same way. It is a swirling mass of voices and ideas — complete with the familiar names and quotations. And, like at most protests, the most thought-provoking moments occur when isolating a particular dialogue from the din and studying it closely.

Lisa Featherstone, Doug Henwood, and Christian Parenti defend intellectualism within activism in the striking "Activism: Left Anti-Intellectualism and Its Discontents." Calling out the "activists" who operate with "the political illiteracy of hyper-mediated American culture with the moral zeal of a 19th century temperance crusade," the authors craft a lively and relevant

piece focusing on the lack of a well-reasoned, critical analysis of the larger protest issues. Today's activists, writes author Steve Duncombe, "think very little about capitalism outside of a moral discourse." However, lest we think they call for an intellectual vanguard, the authors maintain that "activists should themselves become intellectuals."

Later in the collection, Brian Holmes answers their call for intellectual activism with "The Revenge of the Concept: Artistic Exchanges, Networked Resistance." The essay outlines an ultra-modern mode of monetary exchanges, resulting in a more fluid state apparatus. We should recognize a frightening evolution in power but also new weaknesses within the less defined structure. To seize on this vulnerability is the task of the 21st century activists, whom Holmes celebrates and criticizes with vigor. Art, particularly conceptual, plays an important role in this process, and is a welcome feature of this protest.

In its sheer number of contributions, the collection brings the potential for discovery. One might enjoy an



in-depth comparison of the state of activism in other countries. Dispatches from Prague, Cancun, Genoa, Peru, and other sites of unrest offer a chance to study the global components of a movement focused on "globalization." To close the collection, Hakim Bey brings a historically aware piece of critical thought, complete with little jabs like "no one really cares about politics."

Like Bey's article, however, many in this collected works are 3 years old. While the book is meant to be an updated sequel to 2002's *The Battle of Seattle*, the age of some of the essays detracts from their urgency. While the issues raised by the protests in Seattle are still relevant and deserve the diverse accounts such as diary entries and maps of protest activity, the changing political landscape begs to be addressed. While some essays speak to this, interviews with Chomsky from 2000 seem less than essential. Then again, some may come for the Chomsky and stay for the dialogues and testimonials echoing down the side streets. And, for that, the efforts put forth by the organizers and participants will not go unnoticed.

-Justin Sullivan

REVIEW PROTEST PRINT

Out of the coffin



Green Funerals are on the Rise

by Ed Beeson

Dr. Billy Campbell thinks death these days is just plain weird.

"The whole putting the body in a box inside a box and pumping it full of chemicals to make it look like it's alive — I think that's kind of weird," he says.

But what Campbell, a physician, finds weird is the norm in today's funeral industry. When you die, you will likely be buried in a casket constructed from hard wood, steel, or fiberglass. Once lowered into the earth, a vault, or grave liner made from concrete or bronze will surround the casket to keep soil and worms from reaching your mortal remains. But before that happens, your body will likely be drained, then refilled with several gallons of embalming fluid, which contains the preservative formaldehyde. That's so you don't have to look like some pale, shriveled dead person at your funeral.

That's so others can forget that nature will soon turn you into soup.

But why go to that trouble, not to mention the expense of several thousand dollars, if the result is always the same? Soup. Crumbly bones. Stinky stuff. Why not bury people without the chemicals, vaults or non-biodegradable coffins? Why not place people in the earth so their remains might nourish a tree or feed a meadow?

That's what Campbell and his wife Kimberly thought when they opened Ramsey

Creek Nature Preserve in 1998. Here, on 33 acres of undeveloped land in Westminster, S.C., Campbell offers "green burials," which eschew chemicals and concrete in favor of what he calls a more traditional and environmentally positive way to handle the dead. Bodies are buried in biodegradable coffins or cloth shrouds. Graves are dug with hand tools. Plots are marked by unobtrusive flagstones that eventually fade into the landscape. An endangered species of coneflower is planted at each grave, while the entire site is managed for ecological restoration. Burials are far less concentrated, under 100 per acre, than a cemetery which places 1,000 to 2,000 per acre.

Campbell, who makes frequent references to conservationists like Aldo Leopold and Sierra Club founder John Muir, calls Ramsey Creek "a memorial preserve" because it's also an ambitious conservation tool. "For me, it goes way beyond the idea of green burial," he says. By burying the dead in a preserve, one can replenish devastated areas while keeping pristine ones from being hacked into development, he adds. "We want people to see the nature preserve first and, oh yeah, there's some people buried here."

More fundamentally, however, green burial is part of a small but growing movement to reacquaint people with death and dying. "A hundred to 150 years ago death

moved out of the house and into the hospital," says Joshua Slocum, executive director of the Funeral Consumer Alliance, an advocacy group. Since then, American culture denies death by hiding it from the public eye and speaking of it in hushed, euphemistic tones like "the dearly departed."

"Our culture is under the sway of what I call a 'mortuary mythology,'" Slocum says. There's a public notion that only a funeral director can legally or properly care for the dead, he says. Or that embalming is always necessary. Or that caskets are required by law. "A number of these myths are very good for the funeral industry," he adds.

These myths mean big profits for the funeral industry. The median, not average, price of an American funeral is about \$5,300, Slocum says, which includes body removal, embalming, a steel casket, private viewing, funeral service, hearse, and a gravesite. (The National Funeral Directors Association pegs the average at \$5,180.) "Cemetery costs," like a vault, can tack on an additional \$1,400 or more; a bronze vault alone can cost \$4,000 to \$5,000, he says. The Federal Trade Commission states that many funerals exceed \$10,000.

Burial at Ramsey Creek costs \$2,500 to \$3,000. Although pricey for a glorified hole in the ground, he says the money maintains the property and allows the preserve's parent

photos courtesy of the Ramsey Creek Nature Preserve

.. and into the trees

company, Memorial Ecosystems, to prepare for a future where places like Ramsey Creek sustain themselves. Memorial Ecosystems is a for-profit company chartered by the Campbells to help others who are interested in alternatives to the funeral industry open their own memorial preserves. "If you can make socially responsible ice cream, then you can make socially responsible funerals," he says.

Yet unlike the United Kingdom, where green burials came into vogue decades ago, the idea has yet to sink in here. As of December 2003, Campbell says 25 to 30 people's remains lie at Ramsey Creek, including cremated remains, and twice as many have plans to be buried there.

According to The Natural Death Centre in London, over 180 preserves offer green burials across the British Isles. In the United States, there may be as few as two. The other is the Glendale Memorial Nature Preserve along Highway 83 outside DcFuniak Springs, Fla. John and Bill Wilkerson decided to start the preserve in 2000 after stumbling upon Memorial Ecosystems' Web site. "It was like divine intervention," John says.

But the idea of green burials took seed with the brothers years before. Their parents had insisted that they be buried as simply as possible. "When they came back from somebody's funeral, they said, 'This is a circus. Don't let this happen to me,'" John says. "They said, 'My body should be growing a tree instead of grass with a fence around it that the cow can't even eat.'" And when their parents did die, the brothers built their coffins at the family sawmill and dug their graves at a neighboring church.

Mom and pop Wilkerson had a second request, too: Save the farm. "We tried to figure out how to honor their wishes of 'boys, don't let nothing happen to this,'" John says, referring to the 350-acre family farm that is now the Glendale preserve. The brothers contacted Campbell, who helped them design the preserve, 70 acres of which was designated burial grounds. They lobbied the state funeral and cemetery board to approve their project. Here they met blockades, in the form of a \$50,000 nonrefundable cemetery application fee with \$5,000 upfront. But John and his brother doubted the board would endorse Glendale anyhow because of the influence of traditional funeral directors and other industry interests. The Wilkersons opted for non-profit status instead, which allows them to give away burial plots, charge a \$1,000 fee

to open and close the grave, and bypass the regulatory board almost entirely.

No one is buried at Glendale as of late 2003, but John says 50 to 75 people have vowed to be. Meanwhile, he and his brother will continue to farm chufa, a tuber crop used as turkey bait and plant longleaf pines, the tree species that dominated the Southeast "before white man came here," John says. "Picture yourself a little Indian running naked through the woods. You can't do that now."

Others may follow the Wilkerson's tracks. Slocum, of the Funeral Consumer Alliance, says green burial groups are being organized in Colorado, Texas, and California. Mary Woodsen, vice president of the Pre-Posthumous Society, of Ithaca, N.Y. and a science writer at Cornell University, says she knows of half-dozen others who will announce plans to start memorial preserves. Woodsen is best known among environmentalists and funeral industry critics for data she compiled on the resources that the funeral industry consumes. According to her, over 827,000 gallons of embalming fluid, over 3 billion pounds of concrete, nearly 210 million pounds of steel, and 30 million board feet of hard wood for caskets were buried in 2002.

Woodsen says her data is "more metaphor than anything else."

"In terms of overall consumption, [the funeral industry] is just a drop in the bucket," she says. However, the metaphor contrasts strongly with the minimally invasive approach that Campbell advocates.

The biggest fight the American memorial preserve movement may face is for its own turf. "In our mobilized society today, I don't care how many acres you have, chances are you and your family are probably not going to own that property in 100 years," says David Benke, a mortuary standards supervisor with the Minnesota Department of Health who has spoken with a few people interested in handling their own dead.

Campbell says land trusts with durable institutions, like churches or universities, may be the answer. To court them, though, he has to compete with the modern burial practices institutionalized by the funeral industry. But that may not be impossible. Fifty years ago, Woodsen remembers reading in Life magazine about a "little wacky thing called cremation." Fifty years later, nearly 28 percent of American dead are cremated. By 2025, that number is expected to jump to over 43 percent, according to the Cremation

Association of North America.

More people choose cremation now because they believe it's environmentally friendly; it's cheaper; or they don't want to preserve their body, especially after old age or disease has taken its toll, says Jack Springer, executive director of CANA.

Green burial may attract a similar crowd. "It's very easy to poke fun and say it's just neo-hippies" who will choose green burials, says Slocum. "The reality is you can't stop the body from returning to the earth. You can interfere with it and you can make it cost a lot, but you can't stop it." ☆

Personalize Your Funeral!

The latest trend seen by the funeral biz is personalized memorial services, says David Walkenshaw, a funeral director in Arlington, Mass., and spokesman for the National Funeral Directors Association. Nowadays, he says, more funeral directors will help the bereaved design a memorial service than dictate "this generic religious service."

What better way to say "I shall miss thee, wife" than with consumer products?

Batesville Casket Company (www.meaningfulfunerals.com) sells "LifeSymbols," hand-painted wood, plastic, or bronze figurines that attach to the corners of a casket. The company offers 18 designs, including a golf putter, a wide-mouth bass, and a flower pot with a hand trowel.

Memorialproducts.net designs inserts and collages for your casket panel, the flip-up section at the head of the casket. Their catalog features a number of glossy, generic backgrounds that you can attach a photo and inscription to, like a picture of grandma in front of buttons, needles, and thread.

Suncrestonline.com claims it offers a million design options for your casket panel. Options include a POW/MIA banner, an apple core, and a 3-D head underscored by the logos "WHATEVER" or "YEAH RIGHT."

Even the crispy cremated have products waiting for them. Madelyn Keepsake Pendants (www.madelynpendants.com) designs gold, silver, brass or pewter necklaces, and jewelry to carry a pinch of ash or a lock of hair.

-Ed Beeson



Dead Malls Tell No Lies

The shopping mall in North Versailles, Pennsylvania has seen better days. In a small valley just over a long, steep hill crowned on either side by a pair of tired and worn-out bowling alleys, the mall's parking lot spreads out for obviously unnecessary distances. With the paint marking parking spots fading, the lot has been divided up in a much less Cartesian fashion by meandering trails of weeds making an appearance where they can.

This was coal country once. Working men and whole families, many having just stepped off boats from Eastern Europe, flocked to southwestern Pennsylvania to blow the tops off its wooded hills and scrape out the coke they found inside. After that, it was steel country — one of the most productive industrial areas in the United States for the first three-quarters of the 20th century. The Steel Valley surrounding the convergence of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers at Pittsburgh broiled and crashed day and night with blast furnaces churning out the massive plates and beams of steel used in bridges and buildings, tanks and train trestles the world around. Now, in large part, this is retirement country. Temping country. SSI country, salesclerk country, flea market country.

It's quite possible that steel from Duquesne, Homestead, or one of the other towns down the river, was used in erecting the North Versailles mall itself. Officially it's open for business, but visitors won't find much to buy. A Christian stationary store offers a variety of embossed birth and death announcements as well as some enamelled plaques decorated with proverbs about walking on the beach with God. Further down the mall it seems like the storefronts have been rented as warehouse rather than retail space. In one, dozens of Xerox machines stand idle covered many times around with wide sheets of plastic wrap. In another, bales of used clothing sit patiently, perhaps waiting to complete the circuitous journey back to Mexico or Central America, where, no doubt, many of them were originally assembled for export to the United States. On the other hand, they might just be headed down the street to the local Salvation Army.

The only other shop doing business in the entire echoing two-story edifice stands near the front doors. Surely attracting customers out of pure curiosity rather than brand recognition or extensive advertising, it is not readily apparent what The Glitter Shoppe specializes in. Art supplies, perhaps? Sequined leotards for little girls taking gymnastics or dance lessons? Neither, in fact, turns out to be the case.

The Glitter Shoppe sells only the screwed-up, misspelled, and otherwise imperfect cast-offs of custom engraving and embroidery shops. Lining the store's tables is a baffling assortment of initialed throw pillows, hand-towels, heart-shaped pendants, and brass ballpoint pens. There are whiskey flasks with names half engraved then scratched out. Whole tea services that never made it to the wedding shower for which they were intended jostle for space with personalized combination desk clock-paperweights, ruined by the engraver in her rush to have them completed by Father's Day.

Why people would want to buy clothing or housewares with other people's names — spelled wrong — forever marking them is open for debate. The trade in irony might explain some of the most egregious examples, such as a sweatshirt apparently intending to boast the declarative "Proud Dad" that was turned suddenly into a strange imperative when the embroiderer absent-mindedly forgot to stitch the "U." Overall, though, the rock bottom price tags on all the merchandise seem the most likely motivator.

The Glitter Shoppe has a discomfiting effect on shoppers. It could be that the store lacks ventilation and is warmed during the cooler months by a kerosene heater shaped like a jet engine that propels gassy-smelling waves of hot air from the back of the room. But it's also possible that something subtler is at play. In most stores it's easy to forget that people made all the items for sale. Thoughts about their lives get lost amongst the oversized displays and advertising jingles. At The Glitter Shoppe, though, one can't help but see the objects for sale as products of other people's labor. Someone had to screw them up! Someone lost control of his embroidery machine and made a line of thread dots on the back of an otherwise perfectly good custom t-shirt bearing the words, "98% Water, 2% Hedonist." Someone misspelled the word "forever" on the inside of a silver anniversary band.

Perhaps it makes sense that one can buy the rejected detritus of capitalism in a shopping mall abandoned like so much trash. Abandoned, that is, in a region of the country severely gashed and left to fend for itself as big capital moved on to new vistas. In a way, dead malls like the one in North Versailles are similar to the tainted mishaps piled haphazardly inside. Like "must have" items that suddenly look like a whole lot of junk, malls minus their designer jeans and lusty-eyed teens come to be seen in a less flattering light. Their aura — the fantasy that once surrounded them — dissipates, slinks away. In its place, an uncomfortable understanding: suburban sparkle quickly dies when there's nothing left for one to buy. ★



The Death of a Mall in Pennsylvania's Steel Valley

words and photos by Andy Cornell

PRESERVING LIFE



The American Natural History Museum's Obsession with Dead Things

by Nicole Pezold

Wolves bound through glowing snow under an indigo sky. Not far away, mountain beavers industriously gnaw wood for a dam, and two male Alaskan moose fiercely lock horns over a plaintive female. "Whoa, moose fight!" exclaims a boy, and then walks out of the dim Hall of North American Mammals with his family at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

The museum — four floors of stuffed, dried, or embalmed creatures — is an ironic monument to life largely constructed with the remains of the dead. The museum contains hundreds of dioramas, each fitted with taxidermied animals expressively positioned against hand-painted backdrops.

Each scene gives the illusion of life even if its actors are long dead. A jaguar pounces from a rock and squirrels frolic next door on a tree branch. A spotted skunk does a handstand to scare off a potential predator. "The animal rears up on its fore feet," reads the informational plaque, "and may even take some steps in this attitude."

If the dioramas seem like dated relics, they were considered state of the art a hundred years ago when curators revolutionized how museums represented nature. Before the 1880s, stuffed animals were locked away in curio cabinets like so many Victorian trinkets.

Then ornithological curator, Frank M. Chapman, began systematically collecting bird species in their nests, digging up the surrounding four feet of earth as well. He displayed the birds among elaborately wrought wax leaves. As this new "scientific" approach caught on, scientists, taxidermists, and artists collaborated closely to construct realistic natural habitats.

The apex of diorama art — the incredible Hall of North American Mammals — was the work of celebrated landscape painter, James Perry Wilson, who traveled with scientists to Wyoming in 1938 to sketch and photograph the open plains and gather rocks and other objects for the immense bison diorama. Wilson, who mastered painting on curved backdrops, used animals from over 25 expeditions for the North American hall alone. The National Park Service also helped trap animals like the musk ox and the Alaskan brown grizzly bear for display behind the museum's glass walls.

Changing Attitudes

However, as the museum develops new multi-media exhibition methods, curators must grapple with what to do with the aging dioramas. They are now confronting a crucial question: Is the ultimate mission of natural history museums to conserve a gallery as a memorial to a bygone aesthetic or to provide up-to-date technology and scientific exhibits?

Whether contemplated as works of art or scientific renditions of nature, dioramas still inform the public. Unlike zoos, where animals are often fast asleep or partially hidden, dioramas are dynamic and personal. Standing in front of a caribou or mountain goat, one realizes its actual size and the texture of its fur. "People forget about



the cultural setting in which dioramas were born. Done well, they give a very accurate impression of the animal and its habitat," says Dr. Christopher Raxworthy, a herpetologist, or biologist who studies reptiles and amphibians, and research curator at the museum. "We may now have more sophisticated ways of showing this, but the dioramas still capture the spirit."

The dioramas also recall how nature was viewed and portrayed in the recent past, when humans lorded over the land with lighter consciences. The stuffed specimens show the comfortable closeness between the living, visiting public and the displayed dead. "The move away from dioramas marks a change in our reaction to death and how it's portrayed," says Raxworthy.

Whereas the death of animals used to be seen as a part of the natural life cycle, today it conjures up images of extinction and environmental destruction. Many of the animals on display, like the bison and the musk ox, have seen their numbers decimated. And while the dioramas stand as historical relics from a time when humans believed in the never-ending, pristine quality of the natural world, today the dioramas take on new meaning. They are windows onto degraded habitats and endangered animals — a sobering consequence of that earlier era's unfettered, conquer-all notion of nature.

Upstairs, exotic animals fill the African and Asian Mammal Halls: hippos, lions, giraffes, zebras, gorillas and a herd of elephants trample down the center of one chamber. All are endangered. At the giant sable diorama the visitor learns that the blue antelope (the giant sable's cousin) was the first African mammal hunted to extinction by man. "None survived after the beginning of the 19th century," reports the plaque. (The museum has no example of this lost species.)

Juxtaposed against these virtual mammal morgues is the Hall of Biodiversity, a chamber dedicated to both contemporary aesthetic

and technology. In one corner, soothing flute music drifts from a spooling video on the cycle of life. "There are 10 million unique forms of life on Earth today," announces a serene male voice.

A few feet away, a sign introduces the hall's raison d'être: "They [the 10 million unique forms of life] are the actors in the game of life that is played out in the world's habitats — from the frozen poles to the highest mountain peaks to the depths of the sea. This spectacular riot of life is what we call 'biodiversity.'"

Dominating the hall is the 90 ft. long, 26 ft. wide and 18 ft. high interactive, multi-media Dzanga-Sangha tropical rain forest — a diorama "for the new millennium." To the side, a backlit wall of casts and taxidermied specimens — from butterflies to crustaceans—showcases the planet's immense diversity. Opposite this cornucopia is a glass case crowded with endangered species like the grey gibbon, Siberian tiger and Andean condor.

In contemplating the "riot of life," one must also discuss death. "Eventually all are destined to die," reasons the film's narrator. Everything returns to the earth and decays. Death, then, is not merely life's opposite, but part of the same integrated cycle.

The biodiversity hall deals with much more than mere death. It also focuses on a sort of super-death: extinction of whole populations. "Now the living world is in crisis" the film narrator warns to swelling violins. As everyone knows, the planet is in the midst of a massive, human-induced extinction: 30,000 species are lost each year, falling out of the cycle of life and disrupting the organic flow between the living and the dead.

Death's Continued Importance

Ironically, conserving the cycle of life, or preventing the "super-death," often requires some regular, run-of-the mill death. Biologists still routinely collect specimens in the field — even if they are no longer displayed like before — to learn where a species lives and the size of the population. Killing an animal and hauling it back to the lab allows them to identify it more accurately and describe new species, among other things. Some differences between species of fish, for example, are only apparent by counting scales under a microscope.

"We don't have a good understanding of biodiversity in Madagascar or many tropical countries, which is essential in making [wildlife] management decisions," says Raxworthy, who has worked in Madagascar for 20 years collecting information on where chameleons live and describing new species.

To aid traditional collecting, scientists use new technology like satellite mapping of habitats and DNA testing of specimen to "get a handle on where the gaps in information are." From there, governments and conservation agencies can make more informed decisions on where they should concentrate their efforts.

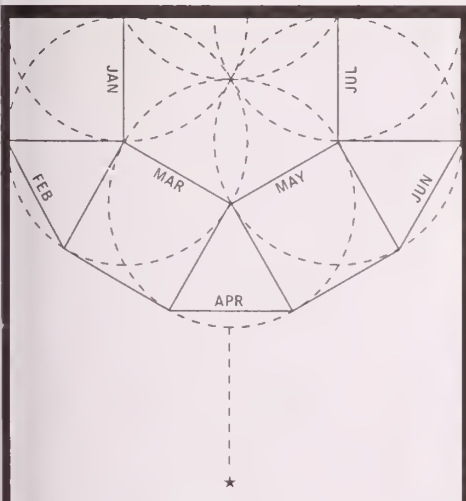
"It's like predicting where oil is — it can't be decided arbitrarily," says Dr. Raxworthy. "Some sites would yield oil, but there would be a lot of misses. You can't do it without some fundamental geological information on where oil is likely found."

In other words, we have to know what it is exactly that we are conserving. Rather than simply saving the forest for the trees, biodiversity stresses saving the forest for a certain type of tree, in which a particular creature resides. And so, the museum and the biological, or "life," sciences continue their strange relationship to death.

For all the technological innovations, dead animals continue to play a crucial role, Dr. Raxworthy said. "It's paradoxical, but death can actually conserve life." ★



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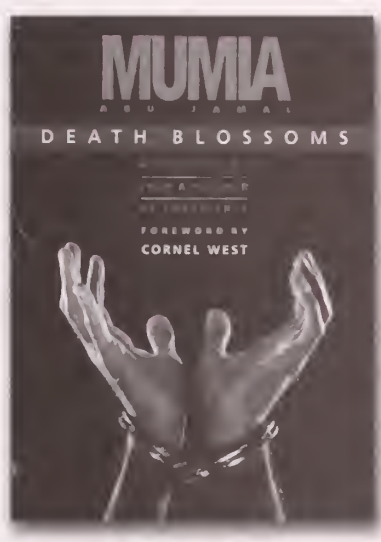
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Vultures and Voyeurs

a Tibetan Sky Burial

I don't know him, yet I feel affection for him. I wonder who loves him. A wife? His children? His skin is wrinkled, his naked frame emaciated. I wonder how old he is. An axe is lifted in the air, and I shut my eyes, but not before checking my watch. I wonder how long it will take to chop up the old man's body.

A blurb in a guidebook and morbid curiosity have led me to this hillside in China to witness a Tibetan sky burial. I have seen bodies burned along the Ganges River in India. I saw my grandmother's coffin lowered into the ground. Seeing a corpse cut up and fed to vultures will be a first.

Bodies — those of babies, children, adults, and the elderly, it doesn't matter — are brought from as far as 200 miles away to this sacred hill overlooking the Tibetan village of Langmusi in the mountains of central China. As I am told by a local villager while walking up the hill, "The spirit just borrows the body." Today's dead man will move on to another realm; which one depends on his karma. The spirit of the man is gone and only his shell remains. It is that shell that will soon be breakfast for birds.

Silently, I say a prayer. I hope he was a good man, who had a full life and lead an honorable existence. Then I watch as his skull is split open.

Tears well up in my eyes. I wonder who else is shedding a tear for this man. His loved ones are not present. Family and friends are forbidden from attending. Prayers were said prior at the house by a Buddhist monk, and now is merely the time to dispose of the corpse, a job shared by the village men. And so it is just me, a monk, two men with axes, one man fanning a fire, another calling for the vultures to come, a handful of Tibetans passing through, six Chinese tourists, and three fellow foreign backpackers.

Involuntarily, I reach for the hand of Emily, a Canadian tourist who has come along and who is disgusted by the scene. Frozen we stand, 30 feet from the chopping block, our eyes closed. But the whacking sounds slice through the crisp morning air, making it impossible to escape the fact that vultures will soon devour a dead man. I am saddened. I am scared. I am shaking. Yet, I open my eyes. Mesmerized and even energized, I need to watch. Emily turns her back and walks away.

A Chinese tourist dashes forward with his tripod-mounted camera, on which a monster lens sits that would make the paparazzi proud. The monk waves him away. Quietly, we stand and stare.

Dozens of vultures circle the sky above. One brazen bird swoops down for a bite of the body, but the men shoo it away. The chopping continues. The severed skull is gently put on a nearby fire. And then the two men drop their weary arms and step aside. I check my watch. Turns out it took 30 minutes to chop up the corpse.

Feathers fly as the vultures move in for their morning meal. I move in as well. The monk doesn't mind us approaching; he is too busy checking out the kick-ass camera of the Chinese tourist. Though by now there isn't too much to see, except for a few flashes of flesh and the remains of past sky burials.

At my feet lay a skull, a little girl's pink shoe, and a blue china cup with flowers. Colorful clothing, bits of bone, and more skulls are strewn about. It had been explained to me that the bones are ground with barley, so that the vultures consume every bit of the body. But clearly that isn't always the case, as a headless skeleton lies a few feet from the feasting vultures. No arms, but the spine, rib cage, legs, and feet are intact. An example of shoddy work, I am told.

Thirty minutes later the last vulture flies away. The monk silently moves down the hill, cameras are encased, and the remaining bit of burnt skull is packed away so one day the family can carry it to the holy city of Lhasa in Tibet.

I look up at the May morning sky and silently say thank you to the dead man. Giddily, I grin. I am happy. Not having eaten yet, I am also hungry, and so I rush down the hill. Breakfast awaits. China awaits. Life awaits. I am alive. ☆



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