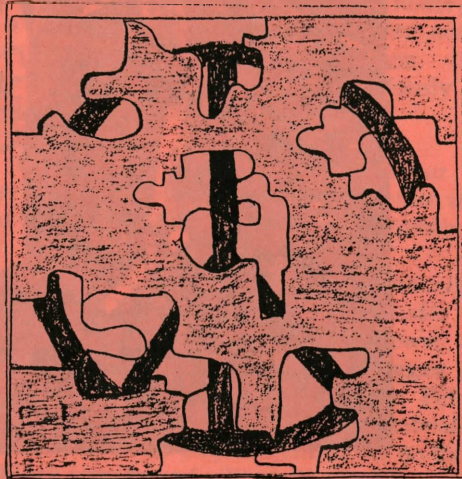


OFF-*Line*

A Cocco/
Romano
Publication

\$1 by mail

Year One:
The Best of
Issues
1-8



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Claire Cocco and Vincent Romano, 1999

OFF-Line is...

- Humor, Art, Poetry, Prose, You!
- defying authoritarianism and resisting convention
- truth, justice, and the un-American way
- sincere, diverse, thoughtful, and controversial
- avoiding alienating, bland, superficial on-line technology to fashion community and counterculture
- an intimate postmodern salon of intellectual discussion
- time well spent!

Comments, submissions, angry threats: Claire E. Cocco and Vincent J. Romano, 35 Barker Ave. #4G, White Plains, NY 10601.

"Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation" — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Welcome to the OFF-Line community!

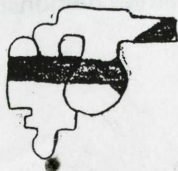
What's up? I'm Vincent Romano, a 25-year-old agitator who bounces between various "socially responsible" jobs and unemployment. My partner is Claire Cocco, 26, working for the past four years as the membership outreach coordinator of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an international pacifist organization, but preparing to become a subversive high school history teacher. We live in White Plains, NY, a burb 20 miles from New York City: not the best activist scene, but diverse and conveniently located near disgusting corporations, cool concert venues, some great parks, fabulously wealthy neighborhoods and plenty of poor and homeless as well.

Thanks for taking a look at this best-of collection. Check out our "mission statement" on the inside cover to understand why we're doing this zine. We hope you'll want to join us and become a regular subscriber and contributor.

With over 400 pages of articles from which to choose, we necessarily had to leave a lot of interesting stuff out. Our regular columns include: **Charged Feedback / Reel Critical** (music, concert, book and film reviews); **Foolplay** (original humor and cartoons with a radical edge); **Garden of Vegan** (recipes); **In-Verse Reaction** (poetry, including the epic "Revisioning the Future: The Vermont Walk for Nuclear Abolition"); **Life on the Loquator** (personal stories); **Media Rewind/Journal of the Absurd** (media criticism and notes on the state of the world); and **The Writer's Block** (essays and editorials). In this compilation we have featured our own work, but we also have a small pool of excellent writers contributing articles, plus a sometimes large and contentious (but respectful) letter column, the **Reader's Forum**.

If you would like to read any of the back issues, please send some money for postage to us. Below is a partial list of their contents. Hope you enjoy them!

- ▲ **OFF-Line #1** (32 pp.): Individual Choice and Responsibility, Top 33 Films
- ▲ **OFF-Line #2** (48 pp.): Anarchism Part I; Funny Concert Stories
- ▲ **OFF-Line #3** (64 pp.): Anarchism Part II; A Short Course in Nonviolence; Protesting Police Brutality; 21st Century 1984; Pangaea; Peace vs. Paychecks
- ▲ **OFF-Line #4** (48 pp.): Anarchism Part III; NATO's Nuclear Weapons; SOA
- ▲ **OFF-Line #5** (44 pp.): Is Sabotage Nonviolent?; Protesting Kosovo; Iraq
- ▲ **OFF-Line #6** (64 pp.): Women Around the World — Bosnia, Mexico, Nicaragua; "Enemy" of the State; Tolerable Ethnic Cleansing
- ▲ **OFF-Line #7** (64 pp.): On the Ground in East Timor; Human/Nature; Worlds Apart in Spain; Three Kings; Vigils Against Hate Violence
- ▲ **OFF-Line #8** (72 pp.): Spirituality — The God of Process, What Every Churchgoer Should Know, Dialogue; In Defense of the Seattle Rebels; SOA



"Ruining the Neighborhood"

Vincent

A Personal Example of Media Bias and Censorship: Elsewhere in OFF-Line #7, you have read personal accounts of the events that have transpired in East Timor before and since the fateful vote for independence on August 30. Unfortunately, we need to have a zine like O-L because you cannot find such perspectives in any of the mainstream media.

This is the story of WESPAC's most recent attempt to crack open the shell of media contempt for activists' vision of the truth, far different from the sanitized version the media presents in a unified front. Soon after Charlie and Jill returned to New York after being forcibly expelled from East Timor, a group of us met at WESPAC to discuss what we could do locally to press the U.S. to end its support of Indonesia while that country continued to burn homes, kill nuns, and throw civilians into concentration camps in East Timor.

Our idea was to walk into the media spotlight that had been cast recently over the Clinton family's decision to move into a house in nearby Chappaqua, NY. The local gossip and tabloid talk was titillated by the addition of the royal celebrity of the First Family to this extremely wealthy bedroom community. On the other hand, until this current crisis exploded into the popular consciousness, Indonesia's occupation of East Timor has received close to zero coverage in the media during the past 25 years, despite the dozens of ETAN protests nationally and in Washington, D.C. We hoped that the cause of peace and human rights might finally receive some recognition if we held a demonstration at the Clinton's soon-to-be home.

One problem: the Weisberg family that sold the house to the Clintons still occupied the house, since the President has not completed his mortgage arrangements. Nevertheless, we continued our organizing, knowing that our message needed to reach the White House and the American people, and that this action had the best chance of achieving those aims.

The following is from a letter to the residents of Chappaqua that I co-wrote, which was also distributed to the media. It is similar to ideas contained in the news release that I co-authored to alert the media. This explains WESPAC's motivation for this action, as well as the thinking that motivates activists generally to participate in street demonstrations:

"We come to you this evening with hearts full of sorrow for the suffering of the people of East Timor. We come to the future home of President Clinton to vigil, silently, peacefully and nonviolently, for a stronger United States response to the humanitarian crisis in East Timor. We are not merely 'demonstrators,' but citizens of Westchester and the United States who take the responsibilities of citizenship seriously.

"...We understand your concern about our 'invasion' of your neighborhood, and appreciate the uncomfortable position the Weisberg family is in because of their decision to sell their house to the Clintons. We hope that the Weisbergs and the Clintons will enjoy their new homes — but can't help noticing the destruction of hundreds of thousands of homes, and the involuntary relocation, forced upon their residents, by the Indonesian military and militias in East Timor.

"We mean no disrespect by our brief presence in Chappaqua this Wednesday. We hope that you would welcome us so that we can bear witness to our President. We approach with candles to shed light on a suffering which has long been ignored. We burn only with the memory of the ongoing tragedy in East Timor and the urgency of ending the violence that our government had allowed to take place.

"Many of us have called and written the White House, we have met with our Representatives, we have petitioned the government. But President Clinton's response has been too little, too late, and too halting to forestall the crisis in East Timor. We are bringing our message quietly to Chappaqua and Westchester, where we live, because we hope it will reach the President in a way he has not been reached by decades of killing in East Timor. Like four Presidents before him, he turned a deaf ear to the cries of the East Timorese people.

"Now that he has finally begun to listen, we hope that he will take our concerns and their pain to heart and make clear to the Indonesian military and government that their economic and military relationships with the United States depend on ending the violence in East Timor and allowing people there to enjoy a peaceful transition to the independent nation 78.5% of them voted for.

"Chappaqua neighbors, we apologize if you would rather not hear our cry. But if it reaches you, please join our call for justice in East Timor and around the world. Thank you."

We received an unprecedented media response to our announcement of the candlelight vigil: CBS, NBC, FOX, CNN, AP, *The New York Times*, *The New York Daily News*, *The New York Post*, and *The Journal News* all expressed interest. Assuredly, none of these media would have thought

about our event for two seconds if it was not taking place at the Clinton house.

While we achieved the level of attention we hoped to receive, it turned out that the content of our message (as usual) was paid no mind by these bastions of democracy. The media took great delight in depicting our group as fools, since it decided to almost exclusively focus on the location of the protest, rather than our motivations for going there. Great exaggerations were employed to round out the fiction that we were intrusive, like the *Daily News* writing that "several dozen cops kept the demonstrators away from the darkened home" (actually, there were less than half a dozen of them, and they lounged around because our rowdiest action was to sing "Courage, Brother").

The *Times* reporter, who was courteous with me on the phone, apparently decided that it was worth writing a small article (bottom of page B2, Metro section) on the day of the protest to criticize it, but not cover the action itself afterwards. "There goes the neighborhood," was the first sentence and recurring theme. Notice the tone taken in the second paragraph: "In a plan that has both bewildered and annoyed residents here, representatives from Westpac, a White Plains group that describes itself as 'an organization working for peace, social justice and the environment,' plans to hold a vigil in front of the Clintons' future home to protest mass killings in East Timor."

Three subtle points to demonstrate how the media could care less about what we were trying to accomplish: first, the name isn't Westpac — it's WESPAC, and it says so right there in large type in the header of the news release. Minor, yes, but it reveals how concerned the *Times* is with getting the facts straight. Second, WESPAC "describes itself as...?" WESPAC is an organization working for peace, social justice and the environment. The use of quotations here but not in other places reveals condescension to our mission. Third, we were not merely protesting mass killings in East Timor — the focus was more on protesting the U.S. role in allowing the killings to happen, and what the President should be doing to stop the killings now.

Placement is another tactic of the "objective" media that conveys how the writer and editor feel about the subject. Mark Jacobs, director of WESPAC, did have a good statement quoted: "'We have very intentionally chosen the most respectful and quiet form of protest. But we feel the importance of this message outweighs the inconvenience of the people of Chappaqua.'" However, it was sandwiched between the words of the Town Supervisor, which were rather ignorant: "...They're protesting about a condition that is now being addressed, with UN peacekeeping forces going into East Timor...If [they] want to send a message to the White House, I think Western Union might be more

appropriate." Since when is the Town Supervisor an expert on East Timor and political activism? Yet by giving him the first and last words, WESPAC comes out looking ridiculous, while our real purpose is obscured.

Many of the media who said they were interested, and did make the event into a circus of rolling tape and snapping photos, wound up not broadcasting any footage of the vigil. NBC, CBS and FOX had other things with which to fill their time, such as fortune tellers, dogs, a guy and his pet squirrel, and promotion for their own network's programming. We watched hours of mind-numbing "news" shows in vain. Perhaps they were hoping for more sensationalism, like maybe we would throw rocks at the house or camp out on the front lawn or something.

The Gannett chain *Journal News* tsk-tsked us for two days before the vigil. In a bottom front page article, the reporter characterized our idea of standing in a circle with candles as "an act of defiance." Then, a lead editorial headlined, "WESPAC's protest in Chappaqua is about 270 miles off the mark." "Last time we checked, and at least for the time being, Clinton lives in a huge domicile on Pennsylvania Avenue," although Gannett previously had never noted any ETAN/WESPAC protests at said address. "Protesting in a neighborhood because the president looked for a house there just isn't fair to the residents who lived there and simply doesn't make sense."

Well, apparently our idea was right on: Clinton did hear of the action. *The Daily News* concluded its negative piece with a unique paragraph (the last word, once again): "The White House was also perplexed by the protest...The President played an instrumental role in securing peacekeepers in East Timor and his leadership in East Timor is beyond question," said White House spokesman Jake Siewart." Aha, so the guilty party says he's innocent and the media lets him off like that? Our *point* was that the President knew the violence would occur — Indonesia threatened it for weeks beforehand — and let the violence occur for ten days until he intervened with peacekeepers. Before that, the president had never made a public statement on behalf of the East Timorese. Uh...can you believe the gall of this liar?!

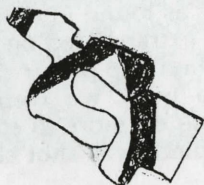
The focus on the impropriety of our action and the violation of polite decorum reveals the interests of the mainstream media as aligned with the country's elite, as found in this insanely wealthy town. The segment we saw on UPN9 extrapolated on this *ad nauseam*. The network station included a 1.5 second clip of our candlelight walk and mentioned, in his only reference to what we were doing, that we were "calling for President Clinton to do more to end massacres in East Timor." The rest of the 90 second piece was shot earlier in the day. The reporter didn't

stick around to interview any of us, but asked plenty of locals what they thought about us. "I hope there's no extra traffic," one said, echoing the sentiments of another that we might affect the parking situation in the town. We "protesters" coming to this "new tourist attraction...disturbed the quiet" of Chappaqua, the reporter summarized, but assured onlookers that "the mystique of the house will fade" in time. Not quickly enough, though, since it drew him and his crew out to mock us.

"It's a shame. It ruins the neighborhood," another said in the *Post* article. The *Journal News* checked with some local authorities as well: "Two teen-agers...said they were disgusted by all the activity." (I felt like I was walking through Mississippi or some part of the South as at least half a dozen cars of adolescent redneck wanna-be boys hooted and cursed us when they roared by: "Go home you fuckin' losers!")

Only CNN noted any of the positive things we had going for us. The entire town wasn't against us: when the owner of the local drugstore heard about our action, he joined us. CNN Correspondent Frank Buckley said, "At least a few people here think the protest is exactly what democracy is all about." Their broadcast showed a clip of store manager Jacques Saisselin saying, "Usually you don't have the opportunity to interface with someone with that much power that easily. So to have the president live down the street, you know, I think that's an advantage." In contrast, the *Daily News* said that "residents could only chuckle at" us.

It is just unfortunate that no one recorded any of Charlie Scheiner's brief closing words: "This vigil reminds me of a similar funeral procession that happened in East Timor in 1991. 271 East Timorese were killed by the Indonesian military after they nonviolently processed from a memorial Mass to the cemetery to remember an independence activist who was murdered two weeks before. We don't have the same worries that they did, though. We don't have to fear being shot at by M-16s; we don't have to risk punishment for expressing our views. Let us use this privilege that we have to keep the awareness of the suffering in East Timor alive." It seems that our message was just too powerful for the mainstream media to handle.



Creatures on the Top and Bottom: Some Thoughts on Privilege

Claire

"There are many persons ready to do what is right because in their hearts they know it is right. But they hesitate, waiting for the other fellow to make the first move — and he, in turn, waits for you. The minute a person whose word means a great deal dares to take the openhearted and courageous way, many others follow."

— Marion Anderson, 1956

How many of us can relate to this description of human interaction? I can, easily. Too many times I have known in my heart that something is wrong or unjust — observing a man harassing a girl on the street, watching a mother smack her child in a store, witnessing an employee slighted for no perceptible reason except for his ethnicity — yet I fail to speak up. Why is "speaking up" difficult for me and perhaps others? How important is it for people in comfortable positions to speak on behalf of others with less power? In this essay (which really is just an experiment in dealing with a few aspects of complex issues) I want to unpack privilege, explore what it means in our society, and suggest proactive ideas for privileged individuals on how to deal with everyday injustices.

I'm Privileged, So What?

There's a passage in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* that goes something like, "Some creatures live their lives sitting on top of other creatures. The creatures on top can live much of their life not having to think about those on which they sit. But those on the bottom do their utmost to get the other creatures off their back." As I am a visual learner, this image describes very well the dynamic of privilege for me.

If you are a wealthy stockbroker, you do not have to think too much about those people who have contributed to your wealth but do not benefit from it, like the workers who made the product in which you have invested. You are sitting pretty comfortably. However, the woman mopping your office floors everyday, or those workers in Flint, Michigan or Indonesia who made the product, might think quite a bit about income inequality when they are struggling to buy food. They might even organize.

How can that privileged person become willing to feel uncomfortable about "sitting on" another being, and then do something about it? Often, that person first needs to realize that s/he *has* privilege. The creature

"underneath" may scream and shout and try to force the dominating creature to take notice. A former dominant creature who now lives on equal terms with the "sat-upon" creatures may approach and reproach the one sitting on top. Or, the creature's conscience could be touched by the situation and willingly decide to get off the other's back, judging the positions to be unequal and therefore unfair.

I wouldn't be striving to be an ally to those I have "sat on" because of my birth and heritage as a white, straight, and middle-class person without previously forming ties with an African American man, a working class man, and several gay and lesbian friends. RACISM, CLASSISM, SEXISM, HETEROSEXISM, AGEISM are huge and impersonal words that, for me, fail to become real without associations with people who live, breathe, cry, hurt, laugh, kiss. You can think, I *ought* to be anti-racist (opposing racism actively), but if you are white and therefore do not face the fallout from racism everyday, it is a hard struggle to keep up because it appears inessential to your daily life.

Why Be an Active Ally?

It may be difficult at first for a man to feel that he should be an active advocate for women's rights, simply because he is not a woman. He may be sympathetic, but feminism may seem to have nothing to do with him. After all, feminists argue that men are the dominant gender and receive benefits that women do not just because they are men. If, however, he has an understanding that all people, no matter their differences, are connected, he realizes that feminist struggles do affect his life.

For instance, women have fought against the stereotype that depicts normal women as weak, pretty playthings that must be protected by men. The feminist effort to free gender roles frees men as well. Our society's general stance that "real men" are strong and therefore do not show emotions like crying denies a natural part of men's humanity. This simple example illustrates something I have come to believe — that the "creature" on top is limited by injustice just as much as the "creature" being sat upon.

Cultural Blocks to Becoming an Ally

I have been a victim of the part of this culture that is suburban and individualistic. Growing up, my extended family was an important part of my life, but I lived in a suburb where we did not speak to most of our neighbors, and usually everyone kept to themselves. There was no town square or other central meeting place to foster a sense of community. The exception was the apartment complex near my street where I played as a girl — university graduate housing for many international students and their children. There, I was exposed to different cultures, holidays, and smells emanating from people's homes. But once I started going to private school, in ninth grade, my ties to my neighborhood lessened even more.

The isolation of suburban living obscures the reality of all humanity's interconnectedness. Television greatly contributes to this warping of natural human interaction. The nuclear family can watch and passively experience the most intimate and dramatic events through television. TV provides the illusion that people are connected to others simply by sitting in their living rooms (or separately in their bedrooms) and watching people on their screens "live." Most people in our culture can recite the same jingles from ads, and know the storylines from the popular sitcoms of the moment, yet do not know their neighbors names or even, sometimes, what is happening within their family.

Now, I am as guilty as anyone for relying upon television as a way to escape my daily life. But shouldn't I try to make my life better if possible than lose myself in the false reality of TV? Shouldn't I try to interact with others, and thereby maybe discover something about myself?

When you couple suburban life (often synonymous with middle-class) with the "American" values of self-reliance and individual accomplishment, you have a potent cultural block against becoming an ally for people who are not as privileged as yourself.

Why Be a White Ally for People of Color?

For me, the connection between men and women in our culture is much easier to see than the connection between the lives of people of color and White people. Every man, after all, has a mother, and usually relate to women in many ways in their daily lives. The only relationships a White person may have with people of color, however, may be through services rendered to that person — by a busboy, a nanny, a bank teller, a landscaper, a cab driver.

It is possible never to have to think about some ethnic groups in our country — for example, Native Americans, who were shoved off to reservations after Whites stole their land and destroyed their culture. It is funny how images and references to Native Americans abound in the mainstream society (e.g. the Atlanta *Braves*, the Ford *Comanche*, the U.S. military's *Apache* helicopters), yet as people they are invisible. People of color, on the other hand, have to deal with White people all the time, given that fact that Whites in society overall are dominant economically and politically.

So what do White people have to gain from being active in struggles against racism and the effects of racism? It seem paradoxical that we have something to gain from giving up privilege.

People from a dominant group do not see everything identically, but they do tend to see things within the same parameters, like looking through a window. Various individuals can see different things out the window,

depending on where they are looking, but the general view is the same for all in that room. I think it is incredibly boring to look at the same view all the time. Being open to the viewpoints of people not of your gender, culture, or class provides the possibility to see more of the entire world, not just a narrow slice of it.

What is White Privilege?

"Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism does not affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity.

"In my class and place, I did not recognize myself as a racist because I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth."

— Peggy Macintosh, 1998

When I attended the Peacemaker Training Institute, FOR's training program for youth, a facilitator on racism had us all do an exercise in which we were to describe our background, and then write down aspects of our culture that we were proud of and aspects that we did not like. This was a very difficult exercise for me.

What *was* my culture? I had never thought about the question before. I knew I was part Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and Italian, but I could not say I felt very connected to those countries or their music or history. The only thing I could name was "pasta vasul" (*pasta e fagiole*) — an Italian dish my dad makes. I was Catholic (which set me apart slightly from my friends at private school who were generally Protestant) and celebrated Christmas, but didn't everyone? I could not think of one thing about my culture that made me proud, and I could name many that I did not like. (For example, some of my ancestors settled this country, and thus stole it from Native Americans.)

When we returned to the group, I shared my thoughts and concluded sadly that I did not have a culture. Through discussion, I learned that it may seem that I lack a unique culture, because my culture (more or less) is all around me — it is middle class white culture. It is the norm and the ideal for many — even if it is not the reality for many.

As a member of this culture I was privileged to fit in, to not have to even think about how I might be different, and to have others accept me, while people of different classes or ethnicities face extra assumptions about them that they must overcome to be seen as individuals. I, however, take it for granted that people will see me as an individual (at least when it comes to my race and class).

This was a revelation. But I was further shocked when, after I said I was not proud of anything in my cultural background, many students of color started naming things that *they* thought were admirable, such as democracy (even if flawed), medicine, and scientific discoveries.

I felt shaken by this whole experience, realizing that I *had* a culture and yet I was not too proud of it. Yet the student of color in my group did not trash me or my culture. I began to feel that there might be more to my heritage, especially before it was homogenized in the striving of my ancestors for the middle class life and cultural acceptance.

The dynamic of racism affects White people by disconnecting them from their roots. After all, the Irish were considered a different and lesser race by the English, and Italian immigrants faced systemic discrimination in the U.S. In struggling to identify as White, to receive social and material benefits, few traces remain to tell us White folks from where we came.

I am not calling for nationalism, an ideology that has dire effects, especially when taken to the extreme (e.g. Bosnia and Serbia). Ultimately, the goal of working for justice is a world without national or racial distinctions. Yet this world will acknowledge, celebrate, and revere all cultures, without implicitly ranking some as more legitimate than others.

In order to achieve this vision, White people must discover not only the rich, positive aspects of their heritage, but also understand how their history is inextricably linked to the history of people of color throughout the world. We must come to understand how that history affects people today.

Getting Over Denial

I was aware, going into the training described above, of many things White people have done, and still do, to people of color for their own economic and social benefit. Many people, however, do not see a connection between "past history" and their *individual* life today. Perhaps if White people knew more of their ethnic group's collective history, or saw themselves as members of a dominant race or culture, they would think differently. As it is, many White people see their personal history as discrete and individual from others, even other White people.

I often hear, "I was not around to kill any Indians, neither did any of my ancestors, so why don't we just celebrate Columbus Day and get on with it? Why harp on the past — slavery was two hundred years ago." This may all be true. Yet what the person expressing these feelings fails to see is that as a White person, s/he still benefits from an oppression from this nation's history.

Think White people in this country are not in denial about slavery and the Native American genocide? As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, imagine if Germans named their soccer teams and military helicopters "Jew" and "Gypsy." Should Jews and Gypsies forget about the Holocaust because, after all, it happened more than fifty years ago? Are they wrong to demand a homeland for themselves? Germans and the whole world (except a few highly publicized wackos) have accepted the reality and the responsibility of the Jewish Holocaust. You can visit Auschwitz, not as a tourist attraction, but as a reminder that this is what humans are capable of and must never do again.

In our country, you also can visit plantations in the South and gamble on Indian reservations or buy turquoise jewelry. I have visited a plantation in Charleston, South Carolina. We saw the slaves' quarters there, but the main attraction was the Big House, the mansion, and all of the fine furniture and antiques within. There was no talk about the lives of the slaves, about their work in the cotton fields building the wealth of the plantation owner. A White woman gave the tour while a Black woman, who spoke Gullah, came in to clean. Gullah is a dialect with African roots. It is likely that the Black woman's ancestors were slaves on the very plantation for which she now cleaned.

Today, White folks own the plantation and operate the tour, offering a version of history — as they perceived it, through their historical window. My sense that the plantation was a tourist site was confirmed when I saw the dolls in blackface for sale in the gift shop. Imagine if Germans sold dolls of Jews in black and white striped uniforms in a gift shop at Auschwitz. Culturally, the United States still has to own up to the fact that its foundations lie in the dehumanization and exploitation of human beings.

Getting Over Guilt

I was paralyzed, devastated, to realize that I am a racist. I was always well-intended, never used racist epithets, was "color-blind" — that is, I thought that I judged everyone as individual human beings. But I was blind in other ways — not giving credence to what people of color saw through their "window," not realizing that their perspective was not only different, but was determined by the fact that I was sitting on them. That is, I received benefits because I was White.

In a class at college, I failed to give any credence to another student's claim that something we were reading presented the reality of White women as the only reality. I said, let's just discuss this passage; we don't need to talk about women of color in order to understand this passage. Due to my emphatic stand that the "women of color issue" was not important, she called my comments racist. Humiliated and defensive (me racist?!), I resisted her viewpoint for awhile. Then I started to get over the feeling that

I might be a terrible person if I had racism in me, and gave her the benefit of the doubt.

I am so glad I had that experience. I am more open to accepting faults that I never knew I had. I struggle to consciously use my privilege for just causes, not simply passively benefit from it and remain an anonymous White person disconnected from a larger community. Now, I do not want to be White, for what meaning does "White" really have. I am still discovering my culture and identity.

Guilt is a stage that White people do not want to feel but will have to go through if there will ever be true equality in this country. To quote Jürgen Habermas, "Collective guilt does not exist. Whoever is guilty will have to answer individually. At the same time, there is such a thing as collective responsibility for a mental and cultural context that makes crimes against humanity possible." In resolving feelings of personal guilt, and moving to a willingness to see themselves as responsible for creating and participating in such a "mental and cultural context," White people can become active forces for justice.

What To Do Next

So, you are ready to become an active force for change. What do you do next? I suggest educating yourself, through reading, attending lectures or conferences on issues of justice, rather than making assumptions about people you know little about. Always remain open to new, challenging, and unexpected notions, and do not be afraid of taking risks and making mistakes. Listen first, without judgment, especially if your worldview is being challenged by someone in a different position of privilege. Try giving them the benefit of the doubt. Since being an ally can be difficult and lonely, join an organization or support group to keep at it.

Finally, examine yourself and think about the ways in which your life has benefited from the oppression of others. Can you use your privileges in ways that will subvert oppression? For example, if you hear a racist joke, as a White person, you can say that it offends *you*. You can look for ways to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves to (or will not be heard by) people in power. To take an example from my own recent experience, I felt it crucial for me to take part in the rallies against police brutality in New York City, to show that I, a White person, do not want protection from a police force that infringes on the civil rights of other people.

I have spoken with and read the words of numerous activists of color. They call upon White people to raise their voices in the struggles for justice, or else gains will always be limited and partial. To attain true justice, everyone needs to be involved, to see their connection with, and responsibility to, others. In the process, we will unearth surprising and fuller aspects of our humanity, and ensure a more secure world for all.

ANARCHISM

Vincent

[The original essay, spread over issues # 2-4, was well over 40 pages. Featured here are a few selections to whet your appetite. Other subtitles include Wage-Slavery, Consolidating Power and Profit, The Value of Work, The Alliance Between State Power and Capitalist Domination, The Anarchist Alternative, The State As Organized Violence, Nonviolence as Necessary to Anarchism, Model Anarchist Societies, and My Vision.

The work also spotlights very cool quotations by George Orwell, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell, Malcolm X, John Stuart Mill, Bread and Puppet Theater, Kurt Vonnegut, Leo Tolstoy, Unemployed Boston youth, Abraham Lincoln, Noam Chomsky, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Henry David Thoreau, Abbie Hoffman, Utah Phillips, Robert Bellah, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Thomas Merton, Barbara Deming, Mary Harris Jones, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mohandas Gandhi, A.J. Muste, Ira Sandperl, William Durland, Acts of the Apostles, Daniel Quinn, David Dellinger, Stan Erlich, Riocardo Levins Morales, Jacob Riis, Edwin Abbott, Ursula LeGuin, and Pink Floyd.

Write to me for the original issues if you are interested.]

It is more dignified to be homeless and free than a corporate slave.

In the United States of America, the status quo has decayed far beyond the point where there might remain any hope for redemption through mere reforms. Each passing year multiplies exponentially the numbers of persons who are forced from their homes and compelled to beg for their survival. The haunting fear of falling to this level has enticed working people to accommodate to the increasing demands that the masters of the purse-strings are placing upon them. Thus, their sufferings have swelled mightily, as the ruling class continue to remove, one by one, the few benefits that still accrue to their labor and squeeze them for every last drop of wealth they can extract.

The state government enforces this decrepit situation by trumpeting ideological slogans, promising vague improvements, and utilizing its vast influence over the media to convince the populace that the agents of its ministerial arms are hard at work developing policies for the general interest, all while it continues to dance at the beck and call of the socio-economic elite, the true rulers of this country.

What is being heralded as the triumph of global capitalism has provided us with the most opportune conditions for resistance. We can no longer tolerate the abomination of our daily compliance with systemic evil. The tyranny of self-selected, amoral power must be undermined by our willful withdrawal of support from all exploitative and oppressive structures. One individual's nonviolent condemnation of social institutions shall shine like a lamp in the darkness, encouraging others to see more clearly and join the historical movements to create a better world. It will light a bold path towards freedom and declare the beginning of a new day of hope for all humankind.

One cannot fail to observe the warning signs of the increasing decay of American society....

The people are divided in so many ways. Gated communities, the Internet, and religious conservatism all encourage us to turn in and focus on ourselves, in the comforts of our own suburbs, living room sofas, and churches. They are instruments that tell us to take comfort in who we by focusing our intentions on ourselves, and by measuring ourselves against a false standard that denounces those not like us, those who have been raised in different social conditions. Our complacency in our own individualist lifestyle choices becomes justified by demonizing other groups, creating the stigma that allows us to continue self-righteously on our own paths, which engenders the fear and suspicion that eventually crushes those groups in a self-fulfilling prophecy, while the insulated elite look on, pull the strings, and laugh.

The television, perhaps the most defining common element of modern society, is the most lethal instrument to the mind and spirit. Sports are meaningless, engendering values of competition and patriotism that bolster harmful habits in the workplace and views in the international arena. The news is merely sensationalist infotainment, a selective portrayal of the world that favors glitz and schlock over substance, and horror stories to make us feel afraid. Most programs are fantastic diversions from reality that hypnotize viewers into passivity. All serve primarily as vehicles for product-peddling, pushing an endless need for more stuff into our brains. We all strive to have more like the well-off people we see represented there, and meanwhile, if we acknowledge the real issues of the day with our compromised attention, it is only to cluck, frown, and pray that God or someone else will intervene and do something, while we sit in our easy chairs.

There is a solution to this Moloch-like malaise, a path to take to wake those tricked into believing they are powerless from their "corporate sleep." It is the possibility of anarchist revolution.

Anarchism is about power. It aims at reaffirming the inherent self-worth of every person, even in the midst of oppressive power structures; inviting people to subvert the rules of the game, but also to step outside of it and create the rules of the new society that we envision within the shell of the old.

As Catholic Worker Ammon Hennacy said, "An anarchist is anybody who doesn't need a cop to tell him what to do. What use are the laws when the good people don't need them and the bad people don't obey them?" Thus, anarchism is meant only for mature, responsible people of conscience who will not abuse the power that is invested into them as individuals, as the power-holders of society already have done.

However, because these characteristics are available to all people as potential, we must nourish the anarchy in each one of us, because more than anything else, perhaps, anarchism is about seeking community: the free individual searching for a society that is not alienating, but supportive; not atomizing, but cooperative; not full of drudgery, but work that becomes the fullest expression of ourselves.

Thus, in the end result, anarchism is about fun, because when these conditions are realized, then the life of the human being is transformed: home and work, culture and self are all habitats we equally desire to enjoy.

The Middle Class Sell-Out.

It is well-known in America today that a college education, while steadily devaluing in power in the ever more competitive job market, still is essential to relative security and financial well-being. Indeed, less than twenty percent of the populace attains an education beyond high school, and this is the only segment that truly matters for the operation of the corporate nation-state. In spite of affirmative action and other recruitment programs, the deeply racist meritocracy generally does not open real opportunities to many people outside of the traditional privileged sectors.

Market forces and earning potential dictate the types of careers to which most college graduates will aspire, and the elite occupations usually require still more advanced degrees, which are sold by the academy as a product like any other for as high a price as the market will bear. The massive indebtedness to lending institutions that is produced by this self-perpetuating system effectively locks the upwardly mobile into the service of the managerial class and the corporate interests, for which they will be rewarded with a small measure of pacifying comforts. Thus, an education is not an unalienable human right that is given to allow all people to realize their potential, but rather a method of suppressing broad sectors of the population in social inequality.

Sugarplums dance in the head of those enamored with the American dream of a house, a car, a white picket fence, a family with two children, a dog, and nice vacations. Believing that the more one has, the happier he or she will be, the upwardly mobile chase after this mirage in a desert of socioeconomic disparity, a fantasy that can only be reached by the select few of the privileged class willing to pay the price: those who make the self-interested, seemingly rational choice to strive after their own security instead of the betterment of all, whatever the costs may be.

In most cases, pursuing their chance at achieving the dream comes with the sacrifice of large parts of their humanity along the way; they offer unwavering fealty to the symbols and tangible power of the State, suppressing the damning facts and shaping their reality to serve the mythology. As Howard Lisinoff writes, "During Vietnam my father coined a saying that went far (and still does) to explain where middle America stands: 'They would rather give up their sons than their TV sets.' What's changed since then? The 'yellow ribbonization' of middle America in 1991 is a good example of where that social group's politics lie."

The capitalists have raised themselves up by eagerly leaping into the system that keeps most people on the level of dependency because of denied opportunities, yet they preach the doctrine that any person who should work hard enough can attain their status! This mythology blinds many into scurrying about, to the delight of their masters, in a hopeless trap in their attempt to become part of the oppressor class, participating in its institutions according to the rules and thereby further enriching and consolidating its power, instead of applying their energies more constructively to removing themselves from this greased slide toward spiritual death and seeking to create an alternative that would be sustainable for all. "Oh, there's no hope for change," they plaintively cry, revealing the massive success of the state campaign of indoctrination and incentive to passivity.

This is the story of the middle class, which continues to identify with the ruling class and aspires to rise to their level of domination in society. They turn away in righteous scorn and masked terror from the poor, their natural allies in the struggle against social control. Their incessant striving has alienated them from their true selves as well as from the masses of the people. As much as they contribute to systemic oppression, by forcibly keeping others down as they advance to one of the limited supply of loftier positions in the hierarchy, they are also oppressed themselves. They do not realize the real freedom that comes from the true liberty of all human beings, the freedom which allows one to reach out and explore deep human relations and genuine solidarity with all people.

Can we blame them for doing what seems only natural and good to them? We certainly can, although that is not our principal aim. All of us have been instilled with the values that fill a person with good character. Patiently waiting for one's turn, settling disputes without fighting, and generously sharing what one has with others are all taught to us as children. However, when we attain the wisdom of age we become so "practical" that we throw all of our ideals out the window, claiming that selfishness, violence, and greed are more realistic patterns of behavior. Indeed, society is constructed to offer incentives toward individualist striving after personal gain. One person going against the grain will surely suffer grave social penalties, so it is so much easier to take the path of least resistance, the well-trodden road, focused on a vague prize ahead to deliberately avoid seeing the waste and harm that clamors on all sides.

One Man's Experience.

In regards to entering the workforce, the familiar conundrum for all but the most well-connected youth (i.e., sons and daughters of ruling class members) in America has been that one needs experience to get a job, but needs a job to get experience. This usually places teenagers in the lowest rungs of the employment ladder, typically in unfulfilling service jobs that hardly respect their contribution by offering a fair compensation.

I had an endless litany of such jobs during my high school and college years. These included two cashier positions at The Great A&P Tea Company and CVS. In both companies my clerking contributed to the success of the business of selling foodstuffs and medicines. I handled thousands of dollars that passed through my cash register each week on their way to management bank accounts. I was required to know dozens of codes and procedures for various items, returns, exchanges, methods of payment, etc., and was responsible for the presentation of the stores (e.g., stocking, cleaning) as well as the courteous treatment of customers. In addition, I would often perform work that management itself would normally do. Of course, I never received appropriate compensation for any of these efforts, but received a level of pay that was barely above the minimum wage, fit for "unskilled" teenage workers. The current trend with these and many other employers has been to hire many temp or part-time workers, in order that they not be required to provide benefits of any kind.

Management informed me of the value of my service in many other ways. Schedule conflicts were frequent, even though I always followed the policy of writing a note to request certain hours or days off for personal reasons. The boss would often disregard the advance notice and schedule according to his convenience, leaving the responsibility for covering the hours upon my shoulders. Just complaints resulted in threats or punishments that would limit my hours. Management also discouraged

talking amongst the workers, so that employees would focus solely on work and not be able to form distracting relationships that might make the dull nature of the work more tolerable. In certain cases when I did extra work beyond my expected hours or worked in a different store as a favor to the company, I did not get paid for my time. And while management would never give credit for a job well done, it was quick to offer belittling blame that always found something wrong with your performance. On the other hand, management itself was untouchable by criticism. The boss was looking for personal advancement to move to bigger stores and reap a heftier personal income from the efforts of the regular workers.

Since I naturally did not desire to spend my entire life slaving in such degrading institutions, I enrolled in a prestigious college. However, the twenty-five thousand dollar-plus per year price tag for higher education at a top private college or university, the key to almost any socioeconomically rewarding occupation, is so steep that I have been chained into financial servitude to my creditors. This ensures that my range of possible career paths is limited to certain accepted fields that work within the social status quo. I cannot volunteer to serve human needs without accumulating more interest on my debt, requiring either up to twenty years of service in menial labor and meaningless work, a high-paying corporate job that will suck me in to executing the programs waged against civil society, or, at best, work in a low-paying, often ineffective non-profit organization that again rarely compensates young people for the true value of their work, if they are lucky enough to get one of these jobs at all. Certain occupations that seem to not be included in these categories, such as teaching and social service agencies, usually support the system in other ways: keeping ideas bound within accepted frameworks, reinforcing obedience to authority, and practicing charity without justice.

So with the onset of loan payments after graduation, I resorted to accepting a position within a nominally not-for-profit corporate office. I worked for the FSC/DISC Tax Association (FDTA), whose mission is to educate large multinational corporations in how they can take advantage of the most extensive corporate welfare program for U.S. exporters, the Foreign Sales Corporation (FSC). The FSC is a company that exists only on paper in order to serve as a tax shelter for up to thirty percent of a multinational's export profits. Methods like transfer-pricing allows companies to shift their profits to off-shore locations like Guam, Jamaica, Bermuda, and Barbados outside U.S. tax jurisdiction, so that the corporations' home offices do not appear to be making a profit. Outstanding clients such as Lockheed Martin, Philip Morris, International Paper, and Texaco (renowned for marketing mass and cancerous death, destroying the environment, and institutional racism, among other characteristics) send their legal and tax accounting experts to the association's seminars and conferences to learn

how to fill out and file the paperwork correctly, and the company profits handily from the business.

What would you expect proper compensation to be for such service to the great financial interests of the country? One would think that by expanding the association's market through tireless database research, doing the preparation groundwork for the conferences, and other activities, I might be entitled to a share in the FDTA's profit. Consistent with many other companies large and small, however, the FDTA offers its employees no health care plan, no paid vacation or other benefits. The salary is just enough to get by with just a little extra, certainly not sufficient to be able to rent my own apartment. If I was not living as a dependent of another corporate slave (my mother, whose tireless efforts as an executive secretary and administrator after thirty-five years barely earn her enough to cling to the bottom of the middle class), I would have been homeless, too.

The structure of higher education and the economy it is geared to serve is such today that students who hope to be successful internalize the values of the ruling class and select from among a limited range of possible educations. Thus, when many others at college were preparing for lucrative careers as lawyers, doctors, and accountants, I was immersing myself in the history of nonviolent direct action and the study of world religions as a basis for pacifist nonconformity. I refused to be trained for a managerial class that will take advantage of those who are weaker than myself. I allied myself with the lower classes by turning my back on privilege and sharing in their unsteady situation. Security is bought at the price of one's soul, by turning away from one's fellows and looking only after oneself, rendering all else secondary before the demands of the god of Mammon.

I reject seeking marketable skills that will single me out as more desirable to be employed by the ruling class. For instance, I was encouraged by employment agencies to learn a spreadsheet program. If I do this, I will be able to code numbers into various arrays that will organize a company's profits into a scheme that will only make it easier for it to exercise its control. The reward for my complicity with and assistance to the corporate interest will be just enough compensation to pacify me. I will be provided with an amount of money that I can barter for my needs and enough entertainment to distract me from the urgent task at hand, organizing for equality and justice in my occupation and in the nation. My allegiance becomes only to my employer and his goals of personal profit, and whatever connection to my fellows that may remain buried in my mind is severed. I become just another corporate tool, merely one more cog helping the system to smoothly continue to grind away at the essence of our humanity.

Planting Seeds of Imagination.

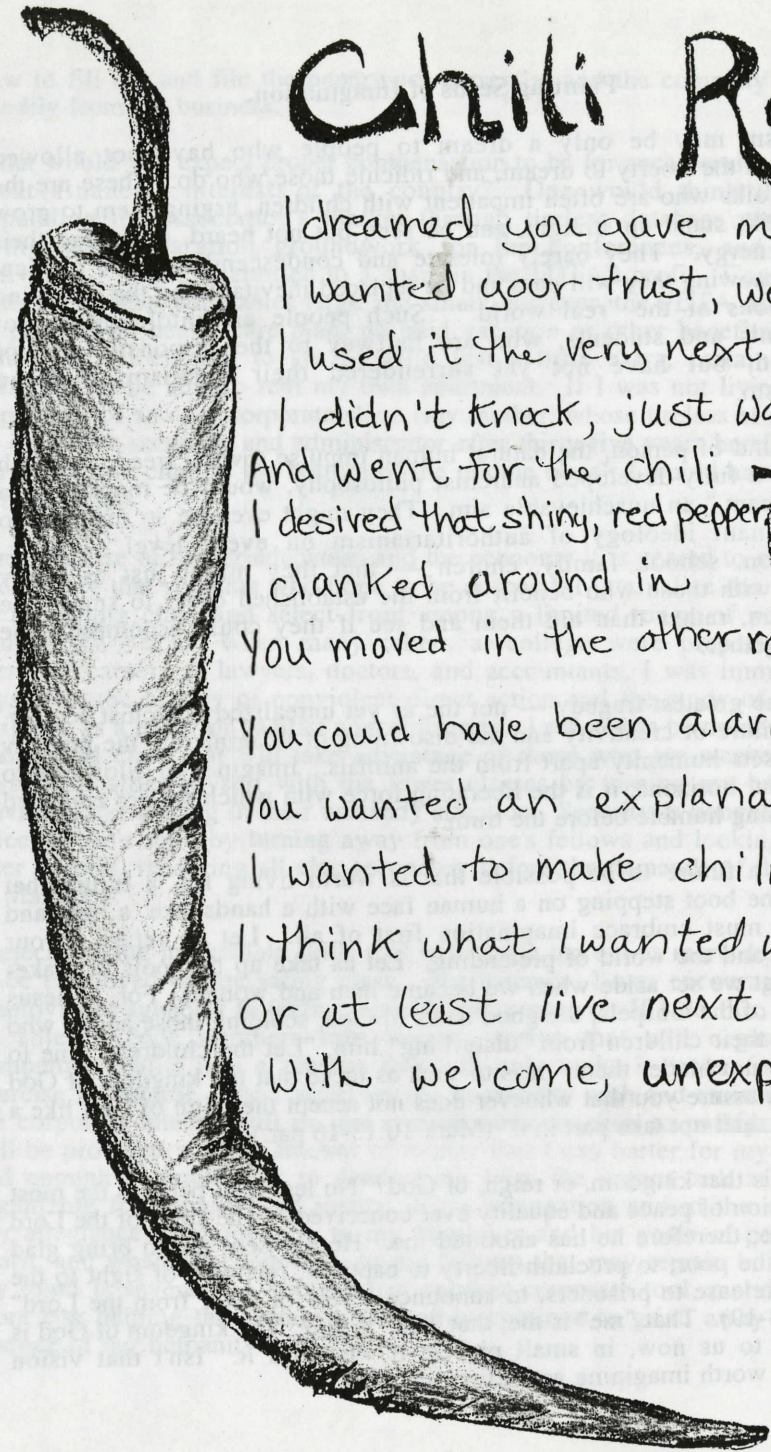
Anarchism may be only a dream to people who have not allowed themselves the liberty to dream, and ridicule those who do. These are the kind of folks who are often impatient with children, urging them to grow up, sit still, stand up straight, and be seen but not heard, corraling their natural energy. They barely tolerate and condescend to their magical worlds, knowing they will pass and be replaced inevitably by the confining expectations of the "real world." Such people are intolerant too of adolescents and students, who are halfway to the responsibilities of adulthood, but have not yet surrendered their idealism to bland pragmatism.

To this kind of person, the natural human impulse toward freedom, much less than a fully-developed anarchist philosophy, would be mocked as a "boy's dream," an unachievable aim. They might even be so resigned to the dominant ideology of authoritarianism on every level — state, corporation, school, family, church — that they might just as likely conspire with those who benefit from the established order to smash the challengers, rather than aid them and see if they could accomplish the dream together.

Here is the greatest tragedy — not the as yet unrealized anarchist society, but the failure of creativity and the disowning of imagination, the primary tool that sets humanity apart from the animals. Imagination allows us to broaden our horizons; it is the liberating force with which we are endowed for becoming humble before the truth.

Thus, for a future to be possible that is worth living for, a future that replaces the boot stepping on a human face with a handshake, a hug, and hope, we must embrace imagination first of all. Let us return to our childhood and the world of pretending. Let us take up the tools of make-believe that we set aside when we became men and women. For, as Jesus said in all of the Gospels, the good news of God, scolding those adults who prevented their children from "disturbing" him, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them. It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I assure you that whoever does not accept the reign of God like a little child shall not take part in it" (Mark 10:13-16 par.).

And what is that kingdom, or reign, of God? No less than perhaps the most stirring vision of peace and equality ever conceived. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). That "me" is me; that "me" is you. The kingdom of God is accessible to us now, in small pieces, if we build it. Isn't that vision something worth imagining and struggling for?



Chili Rellenos

by Cl

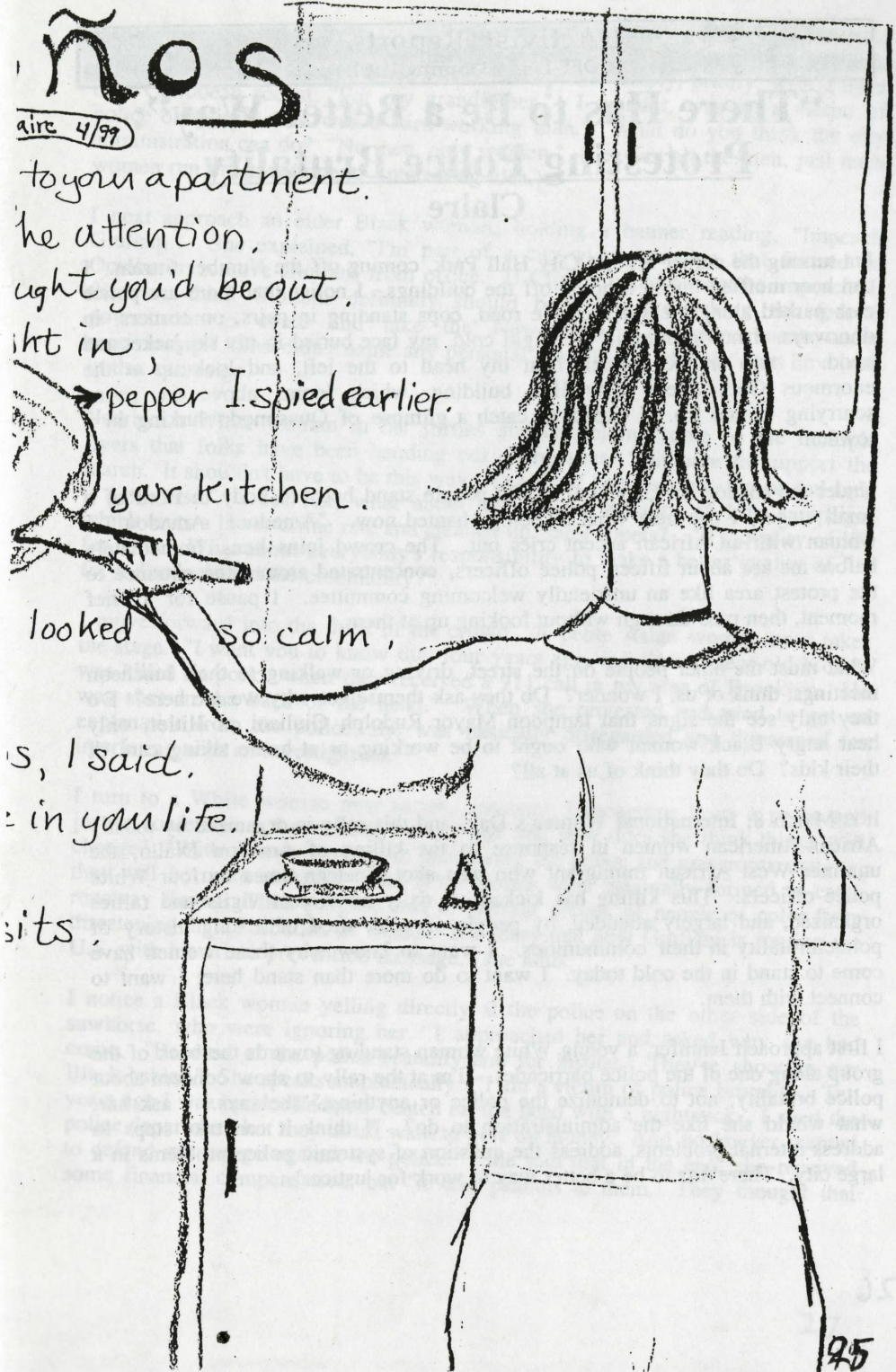
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“There Has to Be a Better Way”: Protesting Police Brutality Claire

I'm turning the corner around City Hall Park, coming off the Number 6 train. I can hear muffled music echoing off the buildings. I notice that there are police cars parked along the sides of the road, cops standing in pairs, on corners, in doorways. I hurry along in the frigid cold, my face buried in my ski jacket and hood. I turn another corner, turn my head to the left, and look up at the enormous Gothic/Deco City Hall building, which looms above the peons scurrying to and fro. I expect to catch a glimpse of Quasimodo lurking in a tower.

Under the shadow of City Hall, 1,500 people stand body to body in front of a small stage. I can hear what is being chanted now. "Amadou! Amadou!" a woman with an African accent cries out. The crowd joins her. Immediately before me are about fifteen police officers, concentrated around the entrance to the protest area like an unfriendly welcoming committee. I pause for a brief moment, then pass through without looking up at them.

What must the other people on the street, driving or walking to their luncheon meetings, think of us, I wonder? Do they ask themselves why we are here? Do they only see the signs that lampoon Mayor Rudolph Giuliani as Hitler, only hear angry Black women who ought to be working or at home taking care of their kids? Do they think of us at all?

It is March 8, International Women's Day, and this rally is organized by mostly African-American women in response to the killing of Amadou Diallo, the unarmed West African immigrant who was shot nineteen times by four White police officers. This killing has kicked off daily nonviolent vigils and rallies organized, and largely attended, by people of color tired of a long history of police brutality in their communities. I want to know why these women have come to stand in the cold today. I want to do more than stand here; I want to connect with them.

I first approach Jennifer, a young White woman standing towards the back of the group along one of the police barricades. "I'm at the rally to show concern about police brutality, not to demonize the police or anything," she says. I ask her, what would she like the administration to do? "I think it can take steps to address internal problems, address the question of systemic police problems in a large city. There *has* to be a better way to work for justice."

A middle-aged Black woman with dreds is standing alone, listening closely to the speakers. Why are you here? I ask. She speaks, simply, briefly, with a trace of a Caribbean accent: "For my grandfather." I wonder, was he a victim of police brutality? "He was a hard-working man." What do you think the city administration can do? "No men, only women." (I.e., fire all the men, just have women run the government. Interesting idea.)

I next approach an elder Black woman, holding a banner reading, "Impeach Giuliani." She explained, "I'm part of a city-wide campaign that formed in October to remove Giuliani from office. If Clinton could almost be impeached, then we think Giuliani definitely should be. We are asking the federal government to come and take the New York City government under receivership." She didn't name any personal reasons for why she was involved in this campaign.

Nearby, a White woman in her forties stands, holding some of the multiple flyers that folks have been handing out. She says, "I'm here to support the march. It shouldn't have to be this way. I've lived here for forty years and seen it get worse." I ask her, what about the Giuliani Quality of Life campaign, which touts a lower crime rate and cleaned-up, safer streets? "It's quality of life for some. What about everybody's responsibility to make a better quality of life for individuals and the community?"

I move forward into the thick of the crowd. A petite Asian woman now takes the stage. "I want you to know that four years ago, my sixteen-year-old brother was killed by police when they received a 911 call in my area of Brooklyn. He was shot in the back of the head." When she protested and tried to get an explanation from the police, she was basically disregarded and threatened for interfering with an investigation.

I turn to a White woman next to me, someone I recognize from a peace and justice conference a few months back. I ask her, how does she think things will change? "With a mass movement monitoring the police and grassroots activity, they will be more cautious. The NYC police were originally formed to catch runaway slaves. Their purpose was to prevent groups of people of color from threatening the distribution of wealth. It's scary that now Giuliani is touring the U.S. with his crime prevention message," she adds.

I notice a Black woman yelling directly at the police on the other side of the sawhorse, who were ignoring her. I approached her and asked why she had come. "Because of the police brutality and for justice. They're shooting our Black babies." She speaks emphatically. "I am a victim of police brutality. Ten years ago I was handcuffed and beaten on the head with a nightstick. I sued the police department but they didn't want to give up money. And no lawyer wanted to defend me and go against the police." She said that in the end, she received some financial compensation, but "it was peanuts to them. They thought that

throwing a little money at me was enough. But it was *nothing* compared to the trauma I experienced."

A Black woman near us notices me and wants to talk to me. She holds a small, handwritten sign with a photo of a young, smiling Black man. It says, "Kyle, 1974-1997." She speaks in a rush, she has a story to tell that is crucial to her very life, a story that too few people want to hear. "My son was murdered, he was the baby of the family. I have two other children, they're school teachers." She raises her voice. "Drugs and guns are annihilating people of color. And the drugs aren't produced by *us*, the guns aren't produced by *us*. What happened to the idea of social responsibility? I'm college educated, I know the great American claim to civic responsibility. What about those gun manufacturers, the people bringing them into our neighborhoods? They're killing our *young men*."

"My son was twenty-three when he was killed. The police haven't solved the case. They were insensitive — until I called them on it. I told the detective, learn a little *compassion*."

If you could say one thing to Giuliani, I ask, what would you say? "'Good-bye.' I think he's impersonal, a paper-pusher, he doesn't listen to people. He's not compassionate. He's only looking at the 'haves.'"

Suddenly, incredibly, her tone lightens from angry frustration to a hopeful peacefulness and determination. "But we'll keep up the work. My son knows that I'm a fighter," she says with a smile, holding up her sign. "He knows that I'm here today, fighting."

We look at each other. "My name is Janice." "I'm Claire," I say. We hug each other.

Some of the women who came out today had a complete analysis of the police as enforcers of a privileged power structure. For other women, Diallo's killing triggered in them the sense that something is deeply wrong in our society. And for many of the women, police brutality and systemic violence is a personal, daily reality, as familiar as garbage that never seems to go away outside your home. They have stories to tell that rarely are heard on the eleven o'clock news.

As I leave the rally, I look to see how many women police officers are on duty. I see six out of maybe eighty. I approach one blonde-haired woman on the other side of the police barricade. Would she like to comment on the Women's Day action? She smiles a little, and shakes her head. I really want to hear her story; instead I sense the gap, widening.

An Education in Relative Sacrifices

Claire



Why did he sit on the tracks while a train rolled over him, taking his two legs with it? "To express truth in the most honest way I know. I'm not ever sure what it accomplishes." The train was carrying arms to the *contras* in Nicaragua in the 1980s. The speaker was Vietnam vet Brian Willson. He expressed this profundity during a lecture in September. I was listening to it on cassette during an eighteen hour van ride to Fort Benning, Georgia. I was considering putting myself at risk by illegally entering the gates of the School of the Americas.

Brian Willson has taken many actions to witness against war and oppression in his life since Vietnam, where he awakened to the immorality of war. As he stated in the above quote, he's never quite sure what will come of his actions, but he knows he has to reveal the truth where he sees it. As I questioned myself on the long ride to Georgia ("What is my getting arrested going to accomplish, anyway? Just my getting in trouble, right? Can't we just pass a law to close the school?"), I thought deeply of Brian's message and his courage.

I suppose a simple metaphor for the idea behind civil disobedience could be the following scenario: you see a child in danger of being run over by a careless driver, and you jaywalk across the street to help save the child,

even when others on the street do not see or seem to care. You've broken the law by jaywalking and put yourself at considerable risk of bodily harm, but you do it because it is clearly the right thing to do. Certain laws — like jaywalking — become irrelevant in cases where harm is done or about to be done.

The School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia trains Latin American soldiers. Many of the soldiers and high-ranking officers of Latin American armies who have been main motivators behind repressive dictatorships (Manuel Noriega, for example) are SOA graduates. There are many notorious examples that I could cite; I'll name the most famous. In 1986 four U.S. Maryknoll nuns were raped and killed by a death squad in El Salvador. Three of the five officers responsible were SOA graduates. In 1990 a U.S. Congressional Task Force discovered that officers responsible for the deaths of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador were trained by the SOA. This prompted a Maryknoll priest here in the U.S. — Fr. Roy Bourgeois — and others to stand vigil outside the gates of the SOA and commit civil disobedience eight years ago. In 1996, declassified U.S. Army manuals revealed that the SOA taught torture as a tactic in a training manual.

Why is the U.S. interested in training Latin American militaries in such blatantly undemocratic and repressive methods? Supporters of the SOA claim that the school teaches democracy to Latin American soldiers and is blocking communism. First of all, this claim is racist, assuming that the people south of our national border are so inferior that they can't figure out human rights, participatory democracy, free speech, etc. for themselves and that they need their military to enforce democracy, a military that needs to be instructed by the righteous U.S.

Well, others have figured out before me that the real reason the U.S. welcomes the Latin American militaries and teaches them repressive tactics is that this will keep movements for the rights of the people down, and thus maintain a "favorable investment climate" for U.S. investors and corporations. After all, The Gap wouldn't want its employees in El Salvador to start getting the idea that they have a right to a living wage — such an idea seems pretty communist!

I chose to break one law — crossing the property line into the SOA — because the U.S. government and the soldiers it trains are breaking so many other laws, including the moral laws that are not necessarily written in the books. I was nervous then, and I am still scared to think of where practicing civil disobedience may lead me. But it was an amazing feeling to stand on Sunday, November 22 with over 2,300 others who were carrying white crosses, prepared to risk arrest as well. I considered myself taking

part in a real funeral service to honor those in Latin America who probably never had a funeral service after their murders or disappearances.

It was even more incredible to realize that we had overwhelmed the base police and security (who were always polite to me, and in some cases surprisingly young) and were being released in a city park! We were free to go anywhere except inside the base for the rest of the day. After a few chaotic moments, we re-organized ourselves into rows of four, as we had done when we entered the base. This time we did not walk in virtual silence, but sang joyous songs through a residential section of Columbus, receiving many friendly waves and a few shaking heads.

I was overwhelmed by the response we received by the approximately five thousand other people waiting outside the Fort Benning gates. People applauded and cheered with huge smiles. I felt a great sense of having accomplished something for the good. I can only expect that this many numbers will pressure the US government to finally close the SOA. (The House of Representatives voted this fall to close it, and it lost by eight votes.)

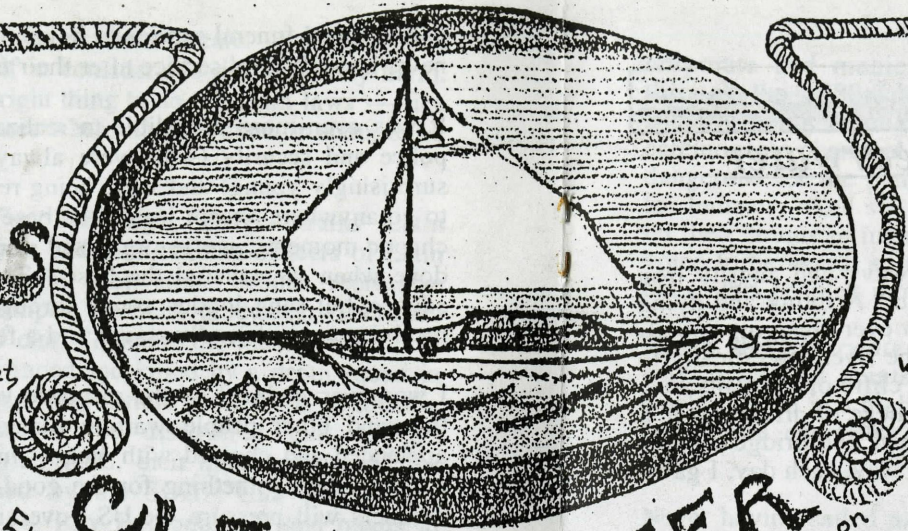
A note of caution, however. Even if the SOA is closed, it is but a symbolic victory, and our government representatives should not feel that they are off the hook. For there are about one hundred other military bases in the U.S. that train foreign soldiers in the tactics of terror. The U.S. has to change its entire policy regarding control of other countries for its own greedy purposes.

The sacrifice I committed to make in crossing the line at Fort Benning was put into perspective by the name of the Salvadoran written on my white cross. It read, "Michaela, age one."



CLAIRE'S

After hoisting the mainsail 100 feet



CALL



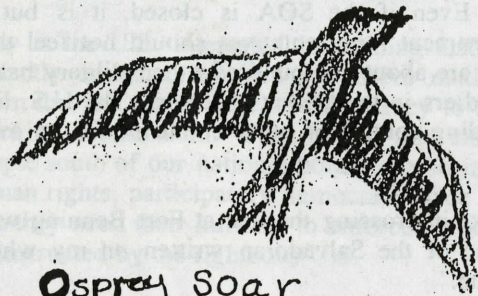
↳ Blue crab

we Flemish coiled the halyard.

CLEAR WATER

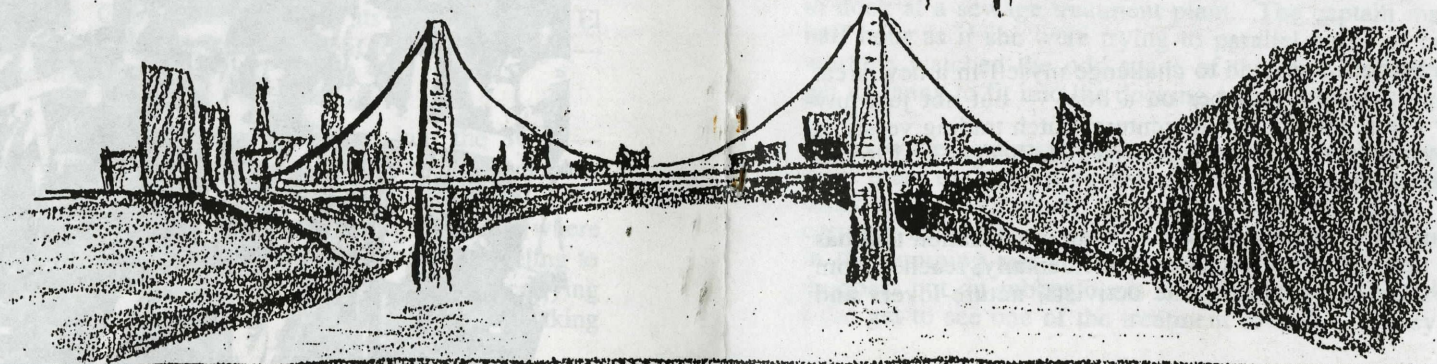
Environmental education on a 17th century Dutch-style sloop on

the HUDSON RIVER - tidal estuary.

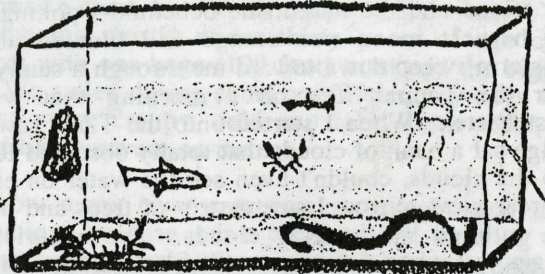


Osprey Soar above the cliffs of the Palisades

the George WASHINGTON BRIDGE



New YORK CITY - the view from Yonkers



The young + young-at-heart are fascinated by the living creatures from the Hudson.

Arrr!!! Sailing with *Clearwater*

Claire

Silky smooth and placid as a lake. Boisterously wavy and angrily iron gray. Polluted and fought-over, abused and enjoyed. A living and dying eco-system. The Hudson River is all of these. Its ever-changing moods have fascinated me since I moved to the banks of the river, specifically to Nyack, New York, near the region of the high rock cliffs of the Palisades. Now I live to the east of the river, and have the privilege of driving over it everyday on my way to work in Nyack. The Tappan Zee bridge crosses the river at its widest point. So for three miles, each way, each day, I gawk at the endlessly varying views.

Some days I can see clear to Manhattan. Other days the smog obscures that island and the man-made behemoths poking up from it. I've seen a full harvest moon rise orange and bloated above it, and watched a rainstorm sweep down toward me through a sunny valley. I recently drove over the Tappan Zee on a morning that was sunny and clear in Westchester. When I started onto the TZ, I saw that halfway across the bridge sat a bank of clouds that totally obscured Rockland County. I drove into the clouds, couldn't even see the water on either side, but looking in my rear-view mirror, I saw a strip of trees and hills in Westchester lit-up and outlined by the gray clouds. I've experienced the most beautiful images just when the sun is setting behind me and I'm driving directly east. On clear days, everything takes on a reddish-yellow glow — the quality of the light changes. I feel changed.

I've lived near the Hudson now for three full years, but because I don't have any familial roots in this area, I've felt disconnected and ignorant of the history of the area. I also miss physical work or exercise from being inside an office and staring at a computer monitor for most of my waking life.

For these reasons, and because I wanted to challenge myself in a new area, I pursued volunteering as a crew member on a boat — but not just any boat. The *Clearwater* is a replica of a 17th century Dutch trading vessel, a sloop that was built by the folk singer and activist Pete Seeger in 1969 to educate and advocate for a clean river.

Actually, *Clearwater* is more than a sail boat. It is an organization that has members from up and down the Hudson (which, incidentally, reaches from north of Albany to New York City). Some activists, nature-lovers and

corporate and municipal sewer and dumping area. In the 1960s up through the 1980s, it was pretty much a toxic disaster area, General Electric being among the worst of corporate abusers. GE dumped the carcinogenic chemical PCB into the river, which was (and still is) not only dangerous for the plankton and animals in and around the river, but also for humans. And state regulators were not doing their jobs, preferring to let their chums in industry do their dumping. Citizens began to want their voice to be heard, so they organized. Clearwater was one group to come out of this people's movement.

Today, the *Clearwater* sails up and down the Hudson, stopping along the way at various points to take school children and adults on board. It teaches them, in a highly participatory way, about sailing, basic navigation, aquatic life, chemistry of the water, the food chain, and a little history of the area.

Never having sailed myself, I was discovering as much as the school-kids were. I quickly learned about knots, halyards (lines of rope), the ebb and flow of the river, how to read a chart, how to lift the peak, and when to just stay quiet and watch how the mostly under thirty years of age crew handled a 106 foot sailboat with one huge (109 foot) mast and the biggest mainsail in the country. We sailed during some beautiful sunny days with almost no wind, and also some crappy, cold and rainy days when we skidded along and pitched like we were on the sea.

I was surprised to see how many river creatures we caught, and their variety. The Hudson is unique because it is a tidal estuary, meaning that there is both salt water and fresh water parts to it, and it has tides like the ocean. So a unique variety of fish, crabs and eels can survive in it. And they are doing a lot better than they were even ten years ago, mostly due to citizens' pressure on local governments and corporations. You still cannot eat fish from the river, though.

A funny thing about the tides: we almost ran aground during an ebbing tide (the water was going out and getting quite low) while we were trying to dock at a sewage treatment plant. The captain maneuvered for about a half hour as if she were trying to parallel park. A crowd of several plant workers watched the odd scene of this dignified-looking vessel trying to get its fanny to fit into the docking area.

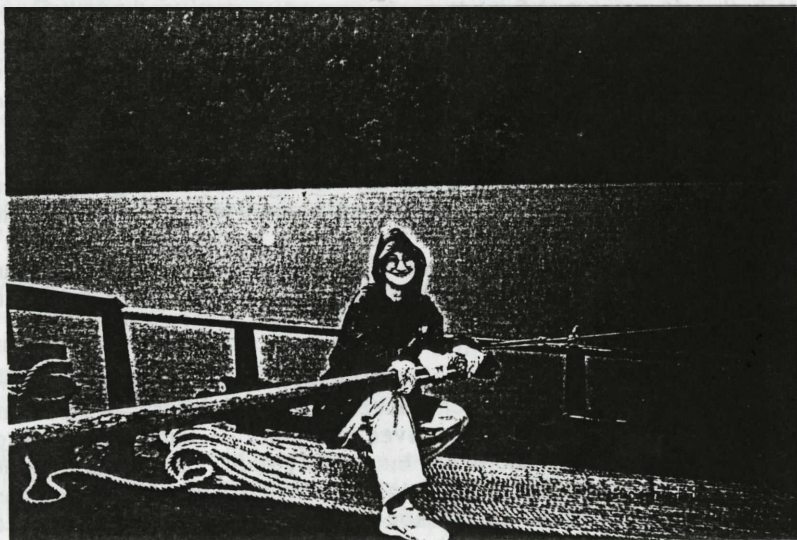
The sewage treatment plant was actually a memorable experience. We went there to drop off several dozen buckets of human refuse — you don't think that they'd dump it into the river, do you? I had the honor of carrying many of them into the plant, but luckily didn't have to participate in the dumping and cleaning of the buckets. When I saw the designated dumpers put on rubber boots and plastic bib overalls I was quite relieved. I did get to see one of the treatment rooms — a busy place deserted of all

humans but pumping and sloshing things through all sorts of pipes, including one labeled "sludge cakes" with an arrow pointing towards the river.

There were all sorts of unique aspects to my one week as a sailor. I lived in a small cabin with ten other people, and my bed, while comfortable, was a mattress with about two feet of head room above it. The volunteers slept next to each other like sardines, while the crew had the luxury of wooden slats separating their bunks. Usually, gentle slaps of waves near my head lulled me to sleep. One night, however, five foot waves made the sloop pitch like an unending carnival ride, causing several permanent crew members to admit their nighttime fear of dock lines snapping. Waking up early, though, to work on the deck, was always pleasant. Someone would sing and play guitar as a wake-up call.

The Hudson is an incredible gift, one that I appreciate more now that I have come face to face with the creatures who live in it. It is not just beautiful to gaze at, or merely the amusement for which the many speed boaters and jet-skiers use it. It is the result of millions of years of evolutionary change and adjustment, a process which balances itself out. Human development and "progress" (i.e., the nearby Indian Point power plant) upset the balance. The *Clearwater* attempts to exist in balance with the system around it.

These days I'm back to driving over the TZ every morning. But now, I stare with more intense and knowing wonder.



Roots of Radicalism

Vincent

High schools are dangerous places for many adolescents. Besides the daily humiliations from the social elite and often authoritarian punishments of the administration, in what is becoming a familiar list of schools — Paducah, Eugene, Jonesboro, Littleton, etc. — students are coping with the rage of a growing number of teens who turn to blazing, random gunfire as a kind of warped, hopeless answer to their problems.

Is it the movies, the music, the video games, the parents, the guns? The list of possible causes for these senseless school shootings are endlessly debated. There is indeed a "culture of violence," but clearly, the easy availability of firepower to minors is one of the leading culprits. Americans must increase the pressure on politicians to take bolder steps to curb the accessibility of handguns to children.

However, the way that our society has turned to deal with this crisis in the schools has been largely to narrow our sights on the weirdos, the misfits, the potential problem children (note the *May Time* cover story, "How to Spot a Troubled Kid"). While there is no excuse for the shooters' abdication of moral responsibility, there are ways of understanding it. We forget that the perpetrators of horrendous violence are also victims.

According to studies conducted by the University of Michigan, since 1976 fifteen to twenty percent of high school seniors have consistently reported being deliberately injured at school. Others who are not physically assaulted are threatened, verbally denigrated, socially ostracized, and dehumanized in ways that devastate the entire world of the adolescent psychology.

Those students who are assaulted usually either fade into the woodwork and stew with damaged self-esteem, or rise up to defend themselves in violent ways. Fights and rivalries often fall below the radar of school officials; in the wake of this year's shootings, it seems more likely that only the restless, resentful freaks dressed in black will be singled out for correction. If we forget the source of the problem — the bullies — and fail to address the violence that they encourage and their victims believe is the only way to fight back, we will be rewarding petty tyrants and reinforcing a hierarchy of top-down control: in short, replicating the worst aspects of our society.

Eric Harris, one of the two Columbine shooters, maintained a personal web site and a journal that recorded his angry, hateful thoughts. Some entries from another high school student's journal are mixed with the excerpts from Harris' writings. Examine the similarities:

1) "Every minute that passes, I tend to become more introverted, more removed, and feel more superior to my peers and some adults, too. I could fill several pages with names of people whom I despise because of their negative qualities. I am the subject of discrimination because I stand out from most others — I am different, make no effort to conform, and like it that way."

2) "Things I hate: liars, country music, racists, people who don't believe in personal hygiene, people who say 'eXpreso' instead of espresso..."

3) "I would like to see a war deep down. I want to experience one (since it is so far away it probably won't affect me), read about the day-to-day operations and feel the national patriotism....I fully support Bush in this crusade. Kick Saddam's ass!!!"

4) "To you assholes in Iraq and Iran and all those other piece of shit desert lands who hate us, shut up and die! We will kick your ass if you try and fuck with us."

5) "Petty, biting, grasping. Might makes right. If you get A's you are a nerd, alienated, shunned. You must fit the norm, even if that means ignoring every morality and values you have ever been taught. To feel superior, proud of yourself, you must put others down — grind them into dust. If there are no blemishes on the victim's character, insults and false stories and passed on through the general body. If the victim has made past mistakes, has faults, they are exaggerated and kept alive for an unnatural length of time. Alone, they merely ignore you, but in sufficient numbers they attack you from all sides, pressing with no mercy until you either walk away and are branded a wimp (more like not wanting suicide) or do fight back and are squashed into a pulp by sheer numbers. Either way there is no victory. Very big of them."

6) "Dead people can't do many things like argue, whine, bitch, complain, narc, rat out, criticize or even fucking talk! So that's the only way to solve arguments with all of you fuckheads out there, I just kill!"

The even quotes are Harris's. The odd ones are my own, written eight years ago. The most intriguing thing about them may be the fact that

while Eric Harris went on to become a mass-murderer/suicide, I became a nonviolent peace activist.

Why is that? The easy answer is that Harris had both an affinity for and a means to acquire guns and bombs that I, as a sheltered teenager, did not (although I admit vengeful fantasies along those lines). That does not begin to explain why Harris (and all of the other students who bring weapons to school) actually used them.

Yet both of us expressed our alienation and anger, and masked our pain in hatred. Although it is difficult to accurately cross-check our personalities and experiences without having known him, there are some surface commonalities that I can note.

Harris stood out by wearing black trenchcoats; in prep school, I had to wear a uniform with everyone else, but I did not meet the standards of manhood and normalcy because I was short and slight of build ("faggot!"). Jocks pummeled him against the school lockers; I too never fared well with the football players and tried to carve a niche for myself in track, but was ridiculed for my ineptitude.

Interestingly, we both transmuted our desires for inflicting suffering in a righteous cause upon a detested enemy by identifying with our government in its wars against Iraq. Both the Gulf War and Desert Fox were conducted like remote-controlled video games, so we could easily plug in and vicariously cast ourselves as the superpower degrading a smaller nation of bad guys.

It is possible that I might have had even deeper motives for injurious reprisals than Harris, since bullies hurled an iceball a foot in diameter at my head at point blank range, flicked a burning cigarette into my eye, and lit my blazer on fire.

Most people would recognize that there is a subterranean world to high school that exists in all places and times: a cauldron of fear, aggression, mistrust, and estrangement that has the potential to overflow in violence. In comparing the things that Eric Harris and I shared in common, I realize that normal people placed in unsupportive situations, if pushed far enough, are capable of doing barbaric things.

Look at Dylan Klebold, the other Columbine shooter. He was also part of the "Trenchcoat Mafia," but classmates described him as more reserved and the follower of the pair; they were shocked and dismayed to find that he was one of the two gunmen. He had similar grievances, and Eric, with his strong charisma, provided him with a way to strike back.

They both crossed the line, yet I know that there would I go also, but for the grace of God, and a few other key factors. Those elements — and a couple of others, which I, part accidentally, stumbled upon in college — are the important things that we need to emphasize in our schools and our society to create radicals for peace instead of radicals for violence.

Even though both Harris and I read the *ubermensch* philosophy of Nietzsche, we had opposite reactions: he spoke in German with his friends as a code for his contempt for others, while I was repulsed by Nietzsche's denigration of Christians as weak. The strong religious grounding I received at home and in Catholic school was crucially important to my development. It nurtured in me a value-centered character, so that I could not even conceive of striking my "enemies." As a pious altar boy, it seemed to me that I always used to take the stories of Jesus more seriously than my peers.

Paradoxically, this may be why I ultimately grew more radical than conventional church teachings. The hypocrisies of the institution and the complacency of much of its flock that Harris and Klebold observed in Littleton repelled me as well. They were said to loathe the dominant Christianity that permeated the school: a stifling brood of true-believers in love with a God-concept that validated their success and harshly judged deviant "sinners." Churches can start undermining these hierarchies in a number of ways, such as by abandoning the second-class citizenship of women and homosexuals, discarding inapplicable just-war justifications and taking challenging stands against all state-sponsored violence (i.e., the death penalty in addition to abortion).

What we need from religion is to foster a deeper experience of the oppressed, especially in affluent suburbs like Littleton (or my home town of Bronxville, New York) where there is little connection to poverty, or understanding that every rich community would not be able to exist without the presence of a servant class. How many churches and schools foster critical discussions of social inequalities that avoid the conventional wisdom that the poor are "lazy"?

When I stumbled into a liberation theology class in college to fulfill a requirement, my limited world view was shattered. I got my first in-depth look at the rampant suffering of people in countries like Peru, and it was easy for me to identify with them because I also had experienced stratification (i.e., being picked on for perennial height disadvantages through adolescence, and excluded from social circles and events because of my family's lack of money). Finally, I could recognize the strands of my religious tradition that affirmed the central places for God's redeeming work: the spiritual poverty of the rich and the material poverty of the oppressed.

Religion is not something that our nation can force upon its public school children. However, that is what the religious right in Congress aims to do, like with its passage of a bill to post the Ten Commandments in all public classrooms. As a substitute for gun control legislation, this is disgraceful, and yet, in my experience, morality is largely missing from the classroom. There students will be subjected to discipline, order, and obedience, but teachers and administrators need to do more to impart basic ethics in post-kindergarten school lessons.

An essential basis for any moral system of ethics is the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Schools can start instilling this into students by adopting mandatory service requirements. It is perplexing that many students and administrators believe that service ought to be a voluntary activity; of course it should, but the worlds of most teenagers naturally focus around the trinity of I, me, and mine. Without parents and educators teaching the value of service, it is likely to be swallowed by the individualist culture of competition and personal goal-setting.

I remember moaning and groaning along with the rest of my class in senior year of high school. Making graduation contingent upon the completion of seventy hours of service seemed like a cruel and unjust punishment, like undeserved detention. Yet why not required service? The state has minimum standards for math and reading proficiency — why not include moral development in the curriculum as well? I know my time spent tutoring learning disabled students made me much more inclined to join community service programs after high school. Even for those students who may have remained annoyed with the concept of forsaking some small measure of selfishness, exposure to the values of service certainly lessened the likelihood that any of them could commit a crime of hatred.

I was fortunate to receive these spiritual and ethical elements in my education, but there were others that I, my peers, and the students in the shooting schools sorely lacked. Boys are wont to prove their manhood by slugging it out with their fists because they have never learned elementary conflict resolution techniques. How many schools create a space for students to exercise creative peacemaking in peer mediation programs? Are school administrations afraid to instill the kind of nonviolence training that activists use for demonstrations into students because it is too empowering?

Such preparation is given at the annual gathering to close the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, a training center for some of the worst terrorists and human rights abusers of Latin America. It could be made into a kind of honor code in our high schools. Students could read and affirm aloud on a weekly basis tenets of nonviolent behavior:

- Our attitude as conveyed through words, symbols, and actions will be one of openness, friendliness, and respect toward all people we encounter;
- We will harbor no anger, but suffer the anger of others;
- We will refuse to return the verbal or physical assaults of others;
- We will refrain from insults and swearing;
- We will protect others from insults or attack;
- We will not damage property;
- We will not bring or use any drugs or alcohol;
- We will carry no weapons.

Like the general society, American students are peace illiterates. We memorize a history of names and dates and places of battles, and learn a reductionist version of popular struggles. The hard-earned victories of organized labor is suppressed into a "Progressive Era," in which the federal government benignly passed reform acts, and the long story of the civil rights movement is condensed to Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. Students are more likely to practice peace if we teach it, if we show them how many ordinary Americans became heroes without picking up a gun, and prepare them to be the history-makers of today.

President Clinton said, in the wake of the Littleton shootings, things like, "We know that we must do more to reach out to our children and teach them to express their anger and to resolve their conflicts with words, not weapons," and "The government must take responsibility to counter the culture of violence." From childhood, however, we learn to disdain what our elders say if we see them do the exact opposite. How can young people respect the President's words, when at the same time he was trying to "resolve" a centuries-old ethnic conflict in the Balkans by randomly dropping bombs?

If we teach war instead of peace, is it any wonder that many young people become inured to violence? Several thousand schools, many strapped for resources and in poor neighborhoods, accept Pentagon funds for Junior Reserve Officer Training Programs (JROTC). Despite the President's zero-tolerance policy for guns in schools, the branches of the armed forces are free to train JROTC students in marksmanship skills while recruiting. Some young people who have enlisted in the military with whom I am acquainted exhibit the mental gymnastics ability they have acquired: they are quick to make a distinction between a "killer" and a "murderer." Eric Harris hoped to become a U.S. Marine after graduation. Have we already forgotten that the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh, learned his skills as a Marine in the Gulf War?

In New York City, many schools believe it is somehow enriching to take classes on field trips to the *Intrepid* War Museum, a retired battleship in the Hudson River, where young people can vicariously experience the thrill of bombing Iraq — literally — in a flight simulator. Mixed messages again: we will never embrace a culture of peace as long as the state continues to sanction some forms of violence as acceptable and even commendable. How about an expedition to places like The Peace Abbey in Sherborn, Massachusetts, which boasts a statue of Gandhi and dozens of monuments to other peace heroes, to balance the constant exposure to war memorials in most American towns?

In the wake of shocking events like school shootings, some would like to believe that they are safe from such violence where they live, but Littleton convincingly revealed the falsity of this myth. Some would like to believe that Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, and the other shooters were psychos, nuts, somehow different from the rest of us normal people. The precise reason why Columbine took everyone by surprise, however, is that in living in a military family, in an affluent suburb, expected to have a bright future, Eric Harris was considered to be very normal.

We all have a great potential for goodness and evil. Our society is not doing enough to nourish the good. There is no question that our educational institutions contain many seeds of violence. Desensitized and tolerant of all kinds of violence, far-away, fictional and real, the time is long-overdue for Americans to make use of the ample resources we have at hand to ground our youth in the strong values and skills that affirm life. It is time to decide is whether we want young people to become radicals for violence or radicals for peace.



When Life Gives You Lemons...

Vincent

Roger was standing in the middle of the street. Not a particularly good idea, with cars swerving and screeching figure-eights around him. He hurriedly hopped off the double yellow line to the sidewalk.

Here, a group of burly men standing next to a familiar building were anxiously heaving large barrels, filled with a liquid that appeared to be lemonade, into the air, where equally frantic folks, leaning out of open windows, caught them and brought them inside.

This seemed unusual.

The building closely resembled the ruins of the Roman Coliseum. Screaming people clambered into the dark recesses of its open doorways, wailing something about the Interlopers.

One of the men cupped his hands around his mouth and called to Roger: "Hey, brother, are you just going to stand there? Give us a hand!"

O.K. It definitely wasn't your typical Saturday.

Suddenly, the group of men scattered. Their one-two-three hurl of a barrel slipped out of the hands of the high receivers, and descended in slow motion. Like they say, what goes up must come down, especially when you drop the object in question.

Liquid sloshed everywhere and doused Roger. He licked his lips. Yep — it was definitely lemonade.

The manic hubbub around him suddenly ceased, as a large shadow darkened the already dark recesses of the Coliseum-like building's open doorways. In the thick silence, Roger thought he detected the rhythmic lock-step march of what sounded like a column of troops.

Ah. The Interlopers. Roger was catching on.

As the column rounded the corner, it was preceded by some of the nastiest looking dogs Roger had ever seen. Except Roger had never seen any dogs like these. Straining at their leashes, these black mutts from hell were at least twice as large as any German Shepard, and salivating some foul yellow drool. Probably not a good sign.

Roger quickly ducked inside one of the doorways. Too late. The hounds were loose, and racing to snap the limbs off the remaining deer-in-headlights frozen pedestrians. And then one of the Cujos — no doubt smelling the pungent lemonade dripping from his clothes — was upon him in the shadows, snarling and spitting in his sorry face. Ouch. Roger never thought it would end for him as kibbles 'n bits — breakfast time for Lucifer's gravy train.

Now, this was confusing. He could still hear the wild dog barking — trying to perform Beethoven's Ninth, perhaps, with its small range of one Satanic note — but it was light, and his face was still attached. That certainly was a good sign.

The light beams had now entirely passed through his optic nerves and into Roger's brain, switching on the realization that the neighbor's dog was bark-happy at 6:00 am again, would keep barking incessantly even though it couldn't do the theme from "Jaws" with its limited repertoire, and didn't care a bit about intruding into neighboring human being's dreams. Bastard.

Still, it was his bed -- a reassuring concept. A rumbling sigh escaped the prone body of the man at his side, twisting the covers away from him. Whoever the Interlopers may have happened to represent in his dream-consciousness, it was irrelevant beside the confirmed discovery that he was, indeed, not puppy chow. Lemons and ruins and dogs, oh my.

Wait a second.

Roger's dawning enlightenment, he quickly confirmed, after cross-checking the various elements of the dream-world and the real world, did not explain the presence of the snoring interloper sharing his bed.

Too tired for more brain teasers, Roger gave up and flipped over, reclaiming his sheets. It was Saturday morning, 6:08 a.m., for God's sake.

Roger opened his eyes. No barking. 8:37 a.m. That was better. He rolled. No strange sleeping man. Much better.

With a large, satisfied yawn, Roger put his arms behind his head and gazed at nothing in particular.

"Breakfast time!"

That was from the direction of the kitchen. A man's voice — seemingly also saying: You hapless little man, to think you were entitled to a self-satisfied reverie on a Saturday morning!

Resigned, Roger felt for his slippers, figuring he ought to try to get a grip on this situation once and for all. Hair sticking straight out of his head, he fumbled his

way into the kitchen and saw a man, wearing *his* bathrobe, standing before the stove. "Excuse me...uh, good morning — who are you?"

"Your brother." The man inspected Roger quizzically.

"Oh." Roger wrinkled his forehead, sitting down at the table. What was this guy trying to pull? He was an only child. But he was past the point of protest. He lifted his cup and puckered his lips at the sour-sweet taste. It was lemonade.

"Can I have some coffee?" Roger blearily asked.

"How do you expect to wake up in the morning if you want to drink coffee?" his "brother" answered. "Besides, you know how rare that stuff is since the Latino Americanos stopped producing the cash crops and went back to subsistence farming. The nerve of them, withholding the mortgage payments on their countries! I don't know why President Austin doesn't send a few Marine battalions down there to set things straight."

"Mm-hmm." Roger thought Minnesota's Governor Ventura was the only professional wrestler elected to public office in the country, but he seemed to be missing a bunch of things lately. The matter at hand was much more pressing: the aroma wafting from the stove was provoking his stomach to mimic his canine neighbor. "What do you have frying up there?" he asked.

"Hot Dogs!" the interloper replied. "Hope you're hungry."

"Hot dogs for breakfast?" Roger raised an eyebrow.

"Well, there was a special on salted terrier at the B&Q," rejoined his cooking bedmate. "I'm fixing an omelet with some kibbles 'n bits tossed in."

"I'm sorry, I don't care for a dog omelet," Roger snapped. "Hot dogs are made from pigs, anyway."

"What on earth are you talking about?" the guy quipped.

"Never mind." Roger flipped on the small kitchen television, hoping the news would give him more of a bearing on the larger context of his world. The micro-part of it was just a bit wacky.

The anchorman was intoning, "...Mayor Sharpton strongly criticized city residents and Council members that have not supported the NYPD's highly successful White-Collar Crime Patrol Unit's crackdown in midtown offices and the Upper East Side. He called those who denounce the sweeps as 'corporate profiling' 'silly and partisan.'"

His female co-host took over. "In the trial of Bill Gates for capital murder and sabotage, the jury returned with a guilty verdict after just one hour of deliberations, and the death penalty is expected to be applied by Judge Darden at sentencing next month.

"Coming up after the break, we'll have the heartwarming story of the courageous Italian police poodle that foiled the attempt of the Hizbubbah terrorists to occupy the Coliseum in Rome, and didn't miss a bark in then saving a cat from a tree. And don't miss Hal Joker's weather report — the sun is so scalding today, you'll need at least 300-level artificial ozone block to go outside."

Roger flipped the switch off. This was going nowhere. Getting up from the table, he said, "Would you excuse me? I need some more sleep."

"Yeah, you look dog-tired," his "brother" sympathized. "But don't ruin the whole day by spending it in bed."

Roger took refuge beneath the covers. Three times might be a charm.

His eyes opened. 10:46 am. The house was quiet. He flipped on the bedside clock radio.

The news announcer buzzed in, "...President Clinton announced that he is seeking an additional twelve billion dollars for the military budget this year to build a national missile defense system. He affirmed that nuclear weapons remain the 'cornerstone of the nation's defense.'...NATO forces admitted that at least seventy Kosovan Albanians in a passenger train were killed by a missile one of its planes fired to destroy a bridge. A State Department official said, 'Unfortunately, we cannot exclude some collateral damage from this bombing campaign.'...A human rights report released in Guatemala implicated the CIA in supporting the military genocide of 200,000 Mayan Indians during the 1980s there, through training in counter-insurgency techniques. The CIA would not offer comment, an official said, until it had a chance to see the report.

"Now, yesterday's winning lottery numbers..."

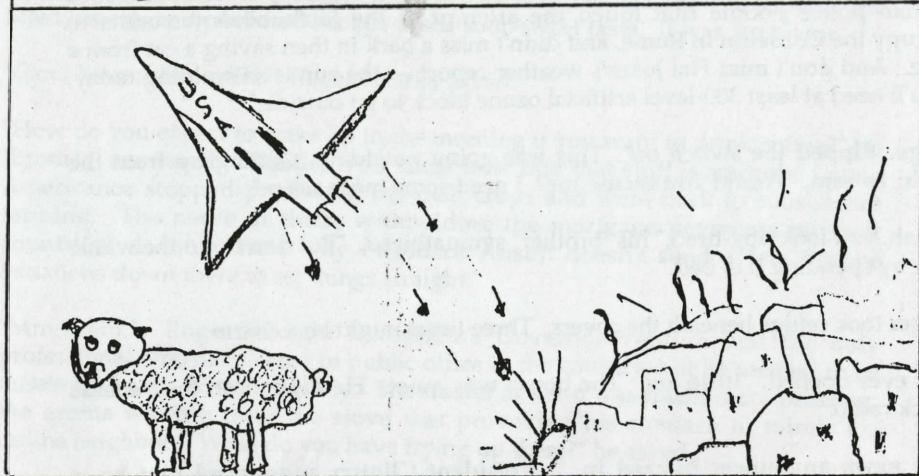
Ah! Things were back to normal.

Roger got out of bed and went to his empty kitchen to fix a long-overdue meal. Dognabbit — he forgot. He put off going to the supermarket until today.

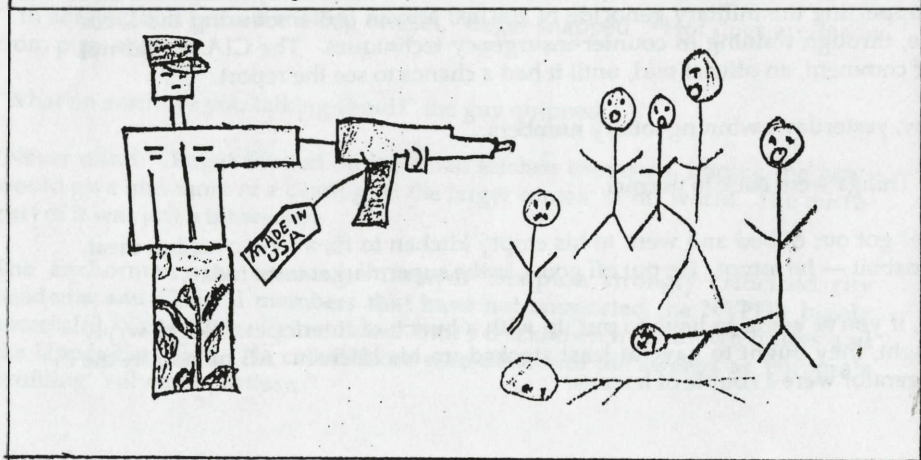
Hell, if you're going to have to put up with a bunch of interlopers, Roger wryly thought, they ought to have at least stocked up his kitchen. All he had in the refrigerator were a couple of lemons.

TRAVEL WITH THE U.S.

YES, YOU TOO CAN FLY IN IRAQI AIRSPACE, FEELING THE THRILL OF TARGET PRACTICE AT TOWNS AND HERDS OF SHEEP IN "SELF-DEFENSE!"



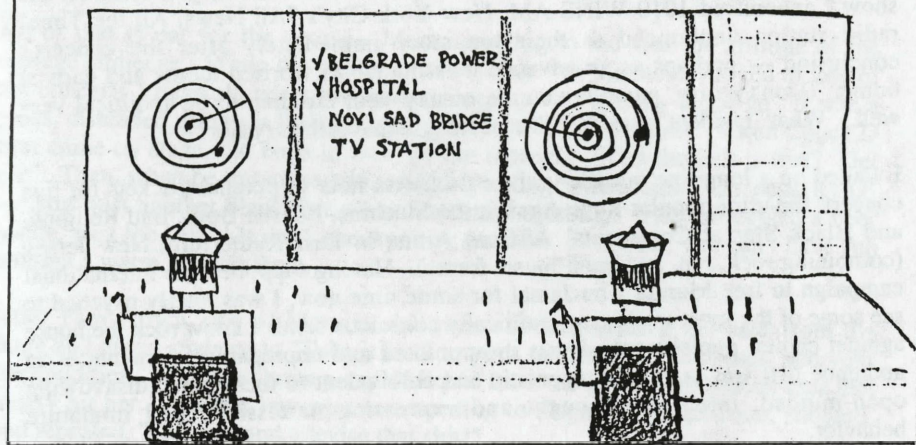
NO NEED TO GO ALL THE WAY TO INDONESIA, MEXICO, NICARAGUA - OUR FRIENDS CAN TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN ATROCITIES!



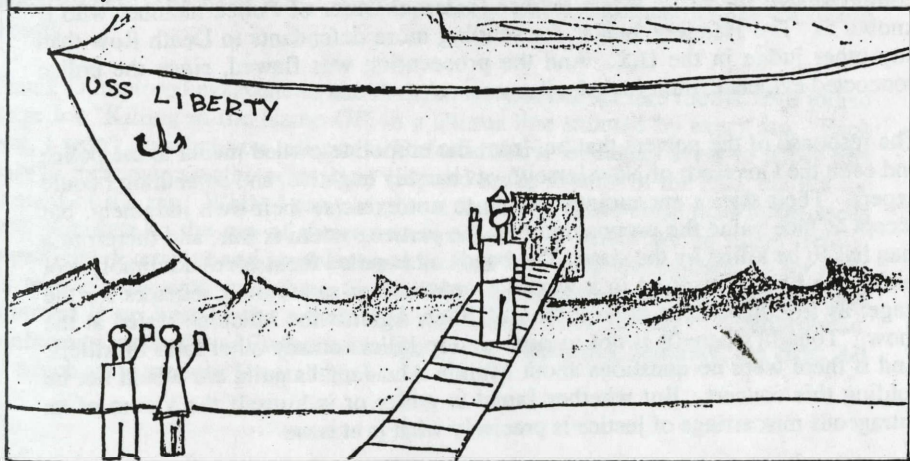
MILITARY!

by Claire Cocco
and Vincent Romano

SEE EXOTIC PLACES LIKE SERBIA AND KOSOVO FROM 15,000 FEET OR A SHIP COMPUTER MONITOR HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY!



SO JOIN NOW! WHO KNOWS WHERE WE'LL GO NEXT TO ENFORCE THE NEW WORLD ORDER! DON'T ASK - WE'LL TELL YOU!



Raging Against Nothing: Free Mumia Concert Review

Vincent

"They came, they saw, they left, with no major incident... many just came for the show," announced 1010 WINS-AM, New York City's "All News, All the Time" radio station announced as their top story immediately after the concert's conclusion — perhaps as an advance reassurance to worried moms and dads at home. (Don't worry, parents, you are raising your children to be apolitical very well.) What "incident" was WINS expecting: a revolutionary riot?

I waited on a long line outside in the cold for an hour to purchase tickets for this concert: the ultra-popular Rage Against the Machine, Beastie Boys, Bad Religion, and Black Star at Continental Airlines Arena in East Rutherford, New Jersey (combining rock, rap, and punk music forms). Having supported the international campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal for some time now, I was totally psyched to see some of the most intelligent, politically conscious bands I know rock the house against capital punishment. I was disappointed and unprepared to encounter an audience that was largely antagonistic and ambivalent to these aims, disavowing open-minded, intelligent thought and expressing narcissistic and immature behavior.

For those of you unfamiliar with his case, it is unclear who the actual killer of Police Officer Daniel Faulkner was in Philadelphia seventeen years ago, but perfectly clear that Mumia was railroaded at his trial. It was racially biased: his Black Panther affiliation as a youth was used as (irrelevant) evidence to sway the minds of an all-white jury, before which Mumia was not allowed to represent himself, in favor of an inexperienced court-appointed lawyer. It was judicially compromised: the judge was a former Fraternal Order of Police member who is known as "The Hanging Judge" for sending more defendants to Death Row than any other judge in the U.S. And the prosecution was flawed, since the police concocted evidence, intimidated witnesses, etc.

The response of the powers that be, from the corporate-owned media to the police and even the Governor of New Jersey, was harshly negative, and something I could expect. Their stance encourages people to not exercise their own judgment, but accept at face value the proposition that the justice system is fair, and therefore a man has to be killed by the state. The bands all handled themselves admirably, not taking the bait to respond in a war of words. They saved their remarks for the stage: as frontman Zach de la Rocha of Rage Against the Machine stated at the show, "Tonight's benefit is not to support cop-killers or any other kind of killers. And if there were no questions about Mumia Abu-Jamal's guilt, we would not be holding this concert. But whether Jamal is guilty or is himself the victim of an outrageous miscarriage of justice is precisely what is at issue."

Chuck D, renowned rapper for Public Enemy, gave the last address to the audience before Rage's final song, saying, "I saw a 'Free Mumia!' sign when I was on tour in Italy, of all places! How come I have not seen those signs in the U.S.A., the 'Land of the Free?'" Maybe because free speech protections can allow successful artists to buy a stage for a night for their cause, but certainly do not allow regular people without money to express their views: Mumia supporters attending the show had their informational leaflets confiscated at the door. The authorities would not allow the truth about Mumia to be spread even at his own benefit concert!

All of that is par for the course. Most upsetting to me was the attitude of the teenage audience. While the political atmosphere was the most charged of any of the concerts I have attended, the spiritual energy was equally negative. It was a gross, distended apathy, a feeling so palpable it nearly choked me. When Chuck D first came on stage, the boys in front of me moaned, "Who the hell is that? Get off!" Then, when he introduced himself, they changed their tune: "Oh, cool, it's D" — from just another black face to an important celebrity. They smuggled a beer inside, past the "No Alcohol" checkpoints, because, of course, you can't have fun without a warm Meister Brau.

After Pam Africa, one of Mumia's full-time advocates, made her case from the stage and urged students to "Take it back to your schools, your churches, and your communities," someone threw a cup of liquid from the general admission area that nearly hit her. Another boy near me, needing to display his machismo, shouted, and repeated, "Kill him and televise that shit!"

The crowd also was obnoxious on the whole. Those Mumia leaflets that did make it inside to be distributed were soon folded into paper airplanes. Literally hundreds of them were careening from the rafters during the set breaks. It was easy, from our high seats, to observe thousands of teenagers lighting up cigarettes — interesting compared to the Black Sabbath concert I saw a week later in the same venue, where hardly anyone smoked (the median age of the fans was at least ten years older). The need to be cool apparently still transcends the known health threats.

Chuck D implored everyone to use their brains and not act like robots, then joined Rage for "Killing in the Name Of" in a chorus line shouted by every fan: "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!" Unfortunately, teenagers seem to apply this only to their own small worlds; they respond to the rhythm of the beat, but not the content of the rap. While I can only hope that, over time, these nonviolent seeds will percolate to the top of their consciousnesses — there are so many trendy, superficial diversions and smokescreens in their way suppressing them — for now, those who work with youth have tremendous obstacles in their way. Rage perhaps summed it up best in the conclusion to "Know Your Enemy": "Compromise, conformity, assimilation, submission, ignorance, hypocrisy, brutality, the elite: All of which are American Dreams!"

Dialogue on Spirituality

Claire & Vincent

[Here we are trying to be more collaborative and spontaneous, having a conversation by writing a paragraph and then having the other person jump on and add his or her thoughts in response. I always liked those "You Continue the Story" books as a kid....We hope that you are engaged and can find places to hook into the flow by sending us your comments.]

Claire: To be honest, I don't feel particularly comfortable about speaking openly in this zine about my "spirituality." This may be because I have done, and still do, a fair share of negative judging of people who affiliate with organized religions, especially Christians. I much more enjoy studying different faiths and the behavior of their adherents in a sociological way. Medieval history was my main focus in college. Maybe it is easier for me to think of myself as observer rather than part of a group that can be studied. Anyway, I think I fear that people will judge me for my spirituality.

Vincent: Really? But if you're saying that you judge other people in organized religion, and are also afraid that you yourself will be judged by them, so you wind up hardly ever broaching the issue, it seems like it will be hard for either you or other people to benefit from each others' experiences, with those defensive walls you've placed in the way. I know, I have aversions to certain kinds of religious behaviors too, but if we agree to respect each other we might see something in a different way.

Claire: I don't really fear being judged by people within organized religion — it's more like I fear being seen by those who are alienated from organized religion as a freak or something. I much prefer to talk about my spirituality than religion. Perhaps this is a product of the general Northeastern-secular culture that has influenced me. Also, I can't really pin down my spiritual identity, and I don't think I want to (as in, I am Buddhist, I am Catholic), and that makes me feel anxious about talking about my "faith." I even have to put it in quotes!

What religious behaviors are you averse to?

Vincent: Anything right-wing, like the Christian Coalition or the creationist fundamentalists, which interprets the Bible as literally inspired by God, but very narrowly to support their own privilege and oppress

others. Also, parasitic televangelists, and anyone who thinks their faith is the only true way.

Let me just say that I conceive of spirituality as being the personal manifestation of the faith tradition in which one is raised — the important essence that you might hold dear without necessarily being confined by all the official dogma. So I'm influenced by Catholic and Buddhist ideas, because I respect the teachings of Jesus and Gotama, but don't consider myself either or both.

Claire: I was raised Catholic — not strictly, but with plenty of familiarity with the Church, through lots of years of CCD and a relative who is a nun. I grew up hearing wacky stories of what it was like for my aunt, just out of high school, to enter the convent and a cloistered culture that repressed youthful urges to talk, laugh, and rebel. (Incidentally, most of the nuns that I know, including my aunt, are fun and have crazy senses of humor.) My mom and her siblings tell stories of sneaking stuff to my aunt through an iron gate at the entrance of the convent, their only access to their sister. These stories really struck me.

Vincent: Well, we all have heaps of crazy Catholic nun stories....My second grade teacher was an ex-nun who thought a good way to keep me from talking out in class was to tell me I was expelled, make me pack my things and sit in the church asking God for forgiveness. After 45 minutes, she came over and told me she didn't mean it and I could come back. I was scarred for life...makes you think about what happens to these sisters in the convent. I am definitely opposed to the unquestioning hierarchy/obedience thing, that you should do what the superiors say always because they know better and it will discipline you to serve God better. Whatever. Serve God in your own way. My God isn't the head of a chain of command; God exists along side us. OK, I got off on a tangent, but I wonder why you don't think very much about this spirituality question and think it is not important.

Claire: To answer that I need to back up a bit. Growing up, I received this image of God: omniscient, He sits up in the sky or another dimension looking down on us; there was a little bit of God in his son, Jesus, who now is also in Heaven looking down on us humans; and there is this invisible entity floating around called the Holy Spirit which is somehow also God. I remember very clearly as an eleven or twelve-year-old having serious doubts that God existed. I couldn't totally buy into the whole thing. Yet I felt like there was *some* value to church — a time for reflection, a time to be with family.

My point is that I still have pretty ingrained in me this idea of an all-knowing male God who is separate from humans. So when I would consider the question of having faith in God, and I thought of God in this

way, I didn't want anything to do with it. But recently, especially with exposure to Quakers and through studying mysticism in a variety of religions, I have developed a sense of a non-personified God, God that is within all beings, all things, really. This is a God I can believe in, because it means honoring the self, all people, animals, and the environment.

Vincent: Honestly, to me the Trinity was one of the most useless concepts in Catholic religious ed. When I was 11 and 12 it made no sense. Only after many more classes (like brainwashing, sort of), I got a bit more understanding of it. The 3-in-1/1-in-3 God is like describing three different aspects of God, sort of like the Hindu idea that there are a thousand gods that all manifest a facet of the divine, except Catholics of course have to declare that there is only this Trinity that is doctrinally correct. God as Father is transcendent, omnipotent; Jesus as Son is supposedly equally God and human and thus God incarnate and immanent in the world; and the Holy Spirit is totally immanent, inspiring us and so on. That is supposed to be a balanced conception, but of course it's a wholly male conception and lacks feminine traits, separates God in substance from us and other problems that you've noted.

I don't subscribe to that either, so now since the Quakers have taught you that there is "that of God in everyone" and held you in the light and stuff like that, are you re-exploring the possibilities? I know, it takes a loong time to recover from Catholicism! From previous conversations, I know that you have questions about the need of having religion or spirituality. Could you see this kind of revised spirituality as an asset to draw upon in the work for social change that we're doing? Or do you feel that religion or spirituality isn't essential or could even be a hindrance to living well and helping others?

Claire: As you know, I can't stand when people are self-righteous in their religious beliefs and proceed to tell others how to live and what to do. If, however, their faith remains in the background of what they do, then faith certainly can be an asset for social change and helping people. Which faith, then, and how to be serious about it without being self-righteous? Well, for me, I have long felt that God, Allah, Yahweh, the Divine in whatever form people profess to believe in, is one, and I prefer to live according to the core values that these religions have in common rather than follow certain tenets. But I am also attracted to the Buddhist idea that "we know nothing" — that we are constantly learning.

Vincent: OK. Let me just say that being self-righteous is not the same as having a strong belief in something and not being afraid to share that with others. It's only when a person is closedminded and not open to change (like the Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). The thing that's tricky about spirituality is that, in trying to take the common values of religions, you have to be able to sift the wheat from the chaff, so to

speak. Like, lots of religions have accommodated to the world, despite rhetoric of prophetic resistance. Many average Catholics, Jews and Protestant Christians, as well as their leadership, especially display this in America. So much of religion is thoroughly domesticated, Sunday (or Saturday) only, very much under the sway of our oppressive, exploitative, self-preoccupied culture. I think trying to have a revolutionary spirituality often implies taking more risks than most religionists are willing to take. What are these common core values for you?

Claire: As I already said, the idea that "there is that of God in everyone" really appeals to me. This idea sustains the belief that killing is always wrong, because there is something GREATER within creation, and holds out the faith in reconciliation that I try to have as a nonviolent activist. Also, faith can serve as a grounding in something larger than the self, family, clan, country — whatever. For me, a spiritual connection to nature keeps me going, keeps me wanting to save the world from ourselves. At times, when I experience the earth in its natural state, I feel how I am part of the universe, as is everyone and everything. But those moments get harder and harder to capture, what with technology and Western culture doing its best to sever our ties to nature. Feminist theory sees that women in the West have been associated with the natural world, and both women and nature were and are seen as unruly, wild, and requiring the control of men (which becomes the practice of domination). So, as a woman, trying to repair the world is a very personal and emotional effort for me.

Vincent: It's obvious that in a place like Bosnia, if the Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims would put aside their superficial religious differences and not see them as a pretext for violence, they could draw upon that Godliness that binds them inextricably together. This interfaith aspect of the Fellowship of Reconciliation is one of its strongest points. I agree that it is the same thread that binds humans to the environment. Indigenous and Gaia/Earth Mother philosophies have made that most clear. On the other hand, I was once discussing this with a friend, and we agreed that sometimes you can't just walk into a forest clearing or mountaintop and automatically feel God's presence. How exactly do you feel the oneness of God? What is it about the world that gave you that idea? Why do you believe that God is present in everything? And how do you get to that point if you are a man, who is molded by sexist conditioning?

Claire: Obviously there is something wrong with you and your friend if you cannot have an epiphany every time you go outside. I mean come on. (Just kidding you literalists.) Well, first of all, I don't think that women are more apt to feel a connection to creation because of their gender than some individual men. There is a pathology there that is hard to shake for both men and women who internalize it.

To answer your last question, men and women conditioned by this sexist culture can start by questioning accepted gender norms, because they reflect a larger cultural tendency to separate humans from the Divine and the rest of creation. Why, for example, have the most natural acts been treated as dirty, unmentionable, and problematic, like menstruation, child birth, and menopause? Why is it that women who wear makeup, high heels and shave all the hair off their body from the neck down are considered beautiful (by some)? Similarly, why are green lawns, sculpted hedges, and manicured parks considered more beautiful (by some) than lawns with weeds and natural hedges or parks? Usually those who are convincing us that these things are beautiful are also trying to sell us something. The connection to spirituality, I guess, is that patriarchy and Western cultural norms tend to distance us from nature and are distractions from the natural order of things, which is one place I perceive God to be.

I think God is present in everything because I think that all people have value inherently, and I also think that people have evolved from this world and are not separate from it because of our intelligence, ability to communicate, etc. (Except for those descendants of aliens, who truly are higher life forms.) :-) Thus I believe that there is inherent value in the world from which we evolved — animals and the natural environment. What is this value? Is it just to be pleasing to the human eye? No, I think this value is harmony; the cycle of birth, death and birth that everyone on this planet shares. And for me, I perceive that cycle when I am physically in nature, and see it in the organic forms around me. Maybe I am particularly attuned to this from watching tons of nature shows when I was a kid. Who knows! And why do I think God is in this? Again, I don't think there's an all-powerful guy or gal who created all this — I just think that it is all part of some Life force. I know this is vague and I don't claim that I have it all thought out. I believe that the wisdom of indigenous people who hold that Westerners normally perceive only a smidgen of reality is intriguing. How come *you* believe in God, Vincent?

Vincent: Oh, thanks! You keep pulling me back to the basics here. Well, isn't it self-evident that God exists? I mean, come on... :-) You know, I don't have a flip answer ready. You'd think I'd be ready with a sound bite, but I actually have to think about it. That's probably good, to revisit this question so one isn't totally complacent about it.

OK, this is my best crack at it. God is, for me, because I am alive. Because of the music of Max Cavalera and Pink Floyd; because of this amazing waterfall in a Kentucky state park, and the sunrise over the Atlantic ocean in Narragansett, Rhode Island. God is because of the lives of Dave Dellinger and Peace Pilgrim; because of spaghetti and raisins; because of this poem, "The Waking," by Theodore Roethke. God is because of Jonah House in Baltimore and the Mustard Seed in Worcester. I believe in God because I'm willing to take that risk, that one day I might be proved wrong.

I believe in God because of what Oskar Schindler did and how Gandhi lived and what the Catholic Workers do each day. Without God, we can live our lives, but it all would be existentially meaningless. God is in my love for you, which I think would be pretty self-absorbed if I murdered God. God makes it possible to love (or try, at least) people I'd otherwise want to kill. I couldn't put God on and off the shelf even if I felt like it, because God is so in my face. That's some ways of trying to explain it.

I think stating that all people have value is such a radical idea that it's almost alienating, although it aims to bind humanity together. Does someone like the CEO of Lockheed Martin, for instance, have value? How about a Ku Klux Klan leader, or Charles Manson, or that homeless criminal who randomly bashed someone's head with a brick in New York City? Does even Hitler have value?

Claire: I am surprised by and really like your answer to why you believe in God. About Hitler, etc. I don't mean to say I like everybody, nor do I say that everyone's actions have a positive value, but their life does have value. Everyone makes choices in their life. Morality is available for everybody, and one can choose whether they will make moral decisions. People like Hitler or Aryan Nation folks or rapists have gotten the way they are due to some socialization factors and probably some real undealt-with psychological issues. Which leads me to think that we all ought to be careful with our actions and how they affect others — 'cause who knows if the video game you're marketing or your snide comment to a gawky boy will turn him onto the path Dylan Klebold chose to take at Columbine.

Vincent: Right. Except I conceive of morality as not simply a kind of option that's "available" to people, but definitely and definitively undergirding every choice we make. And God as being-love is the foundation for an objective moral system, which in its basics isn't too hard to understand — share, sacrifice, don't rape, etc.— but has subtleties over which we subjectively conflict. It's not necessary to believe in God to be a moral person, obviously, but having a consciousness of God can, I think, really help people make good moral choices — unless it's what I would consider to be one of many unhealthy ways that project our own faults and psychological problems onto the image of a deity.

Claire: But it's disagreement over those finer points of morality that sometimes gets people violent, doesn't it? Even if people aren't physically violent, we can be extremely judgmental about others' belief systems. And when you are an activist, there is a fine line between trying to change injustice and judging and therefore invalidating other people's moral beliefs that we may not consider to be moral. On the flip side, activists risk negative judgment for taking conventional morality to extremes. So we need to keep communicating, and as we do, strive for non-attachment to our views, to leave possibilities for change and so we don't maim each other.

Breezemont and the Bronx: Amazing Grace?

Vincent

Jonathan Kozol is one of my favorite authors. His style of writing has deeply influenced my own, and he has won numerous awards as a modern-day Upton Sinclair, a muckraking journalist who penetrates the hearts of his subjects. Through his writing Kozol makes visible the struggles of the homeless, the cast-aside public school children, and the forgotten poor, while simultaneously turning blushing shame upon himself, me, and you.

It was a reality check for me, suburban working class white boy, to read my fourth Kozol book, Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation (Harper, 1996), a chronicle of the lives of some of the poorest neighborhoods in the South Bronx (and the U.S.), while working at Breezemont Day Camp in fair Armonk, New York, a summer playground for kids from families dripping with money.

These kids have everything. The cost of eight weeks of camp, \$4100 — more than \$100 per day — is on a par with tuition for an elite private college. The grounds are acres of fields, a lake, six pools, with facilities for gymnastics, film/video, theater, clay, nature, etc. Of course, there was not one non-white face among the more than 1,000 kids at the camp.

Contrast Breezemont with Kozol talking to a boy in the South Bronx: "Have you ever been away to camp?" 'No,' he answers. 'Are there places here where you can play?' 'Not really,' he replies, his eyes fixed on the ground....In a deep gutter, one small child, wearing only underpants, lies on his stomach in a pool of dirty water about six inches deep, splashing joyfully, pretending he can swim."

Besides the blatantly obvious contrasts in opportunities for these extremely well-off/white and extremely poor/black children, there were some deeply disturbing elements of Breezemont that demonstrated to me how the camp reflected, both institutionally and from the people who comprised it, the dominant culture it celebrates. Ten things stick in my mind:

10. I asked my camper Jared why he was missing the last week of camp. He said, "I'm taking a week off before I go on vacation." Not an uncommon remark from my kids, who had many tales of exotic trips: "My parents are going to Paris!" "I'm going on a cruise!" "I went to the World

Series in San Diego last year!" "I saw a Giants' game in the stadium luxury box!"

Having done none of these things in my life (nor will I, or the kids from the Bronx), I am resentful of the privileges of wealth — not because I don't have them, but because all people can't live like this. These kids will grow up probably never understanding how they take their status for granted, how spoiled they are, and how their inherited "good fortune" could not exist in a capitalist society of gross inequality without literally depriving others of their fair share.

"Segregation," Kozol writes, "is neither sought nor imposed by healthy human beings. Many of my white friends who live in New York City, I believe, would probably agree but might insist that they are personally 'imposing' nothing on the people of the South Bronx. They might say that they have simply come to New York City, found a job, found a home, and settled in to lead their lives within the city as it is. That is the great luxury of long-existing and accepted segregation in New York and almost every other major city of our nation nowadays. The evil is already set in stone. We just move in."

9. I was bemused by Breezemont Day Camp's tours for parents of next year's prospective campers. The parents scrutinized the camp as rigorously as a college, which makes sense since it costs almost as much! "Is Breezemont good enough for *my* children?" is the natural parental attitude that has as its side effect the corollary, "To hell with everyone else." Does anyone care whether garbage is good enough for the kids of the South Bronx?

8. Parents have more money than they know what to do with, so I received their largesse like runoff from a waterfall. I felt like I was working at a country club for juniors; the tips I received were well more than a week's pay (I was a good golf-child caddy). Would they give as much to a supplicant who approached them on their way from the theater in New York City, someone who desperately needs that money? Spare change might be too much, because unlike me (who was just doing my job), the poor are "undeserving."

"The rich,' said St. Vincent de Paul, 'should beg the poor to forgive us for the bread we bring them.'" Kozol's thinking mirrors my own long-time way of viewing the world: "Maybe we simply ask forgiveness for not being born where these poor people have been born, knowing that if we had lived here too, our fate might well have been the same."

7. On visiting day, Travis' mother asked me what I do during the year: "Do you teach like everyone else here?" "No, I work in non-profit organizations, doing peace and justice work." "Is that legal?" she frowned.

I thought to say, "Mostly," but came back politely, "Yes." I told her I edited for magazines, organized demonstrations and stuff like that. "Is that like P.R.?" she asked. Only on corporate planet, where you're from.

6. My driver was perhaps the biggest mental void I've ever met. I was grateful to her for the rides back and forth from camp, but they were agonizing stretches of banal superficialities that numbed me into closeted insanity. Five years my senior, she would only say things like, "My stomach hurts," "I'm hot," "Do you have my five dollars?"

It became clear after a few days that we had little in common, and my conversational attempts were deflected into rock walls. One day I tried to provoke her into responding above and beyond monosyllabic phrases. I told her I had to miss a day of camp. "Why?" I have to go to New York City. "For what?" Well, I have a court date for a trespassing charge from an anti-war protest a couple of months ago. Dead silence. Then, she veered into her daily detour to Dunkin Donuts: "I'm hungry."

No one at camp, to my knowledge, raised any issue that could be considered political during the summer. It's so much easier to ignore any unpleasant subjects, like "Why is one of my co-workers putting himself on the line against the system?" Surrounded by such numbing opulence, it would have been nearly impossible for someone to turn philosophical and wonder, "Why does poverty exist?"

Kozol quoted a young student on life in the ghetto:

"If you weave enough bad things into the fibers of a person's life — sickness and filth, old mattresses and junk thrown in the streets, ruined people, a prison here, sewage there, drug dealers here, the homeless people over there, then give us the very worst schools anyone could ever think of, hospitals that keep you waiting for ten hours, police that don't show up when someone's dying, take the train that's underneath the street in the good neighborhoods and put it up above where it shuts out the sun, you can guess that life will not be very nice. Sometimes it feels like we've been buried six feet under their perceptions."

5. Love those military metaphors: "Battlefield" is a game like dodgeball in a circle. The campers run around with several balls and when they are hit, they have to sit on the ground. But if a camper who is still alive runs near them, they can act like "land mines" and tag them, restoring themselves to life. A fellow counselor joked about writing a strategy book for Capture the Flag because "It's like war"; one of my campers announced with glee, "Launch the missiles!" when four of his teammates prepared to kick their balls simultaneously in line soccer.

Quite a few kids came to camp with American flag paraphernalia: shorts, towels, etc. The Pledge of Allegiance is mandatory every morning before the day begins. One camper wore an "American Combat Planes" t-shirt, with pictures of the F-16, F-117, etc. How much of this do they internalize, before they have the ability to be critical thinkers?

And why would any of them not become staunch defenders of "our way of life" when it has rolled out the red carpet for them? It's an entirely different story for "the children of disappointment," Kozol writes. A social worker there told him, "Many of the ambitions of the children are locked in at a level that suburban kids would scorn. It's as if the very possibilities of life have been scaled back. Boys who are doing well in school will tell me, 'I would like to be a sanitation man.' In this neighborhood, a sanitation job is something to be longed for."

4. The "guyness" my male co-counselors exuded was sickening and not atypical. One told me of his aspirations to found a vegetarian restaurant chain that would be an alternative to McDonald's. Laudable, but he speculated that the ambiance might be enhanced by a coterie of Hooters-like topless waitresses. I told him I wouldn't be eating at any sexist, exploiting establishment. "Where did you get your principles?" he replied.

Another guy would ride any boys who didn't act up to his standards of manhood. "Look at these kids — they're shivering!" he said, as my campers came out of the pool. "Men don't shiver! Be men!" he growled. On another occasion, when a boy playing basketball fell and scraped his knee, he mocked, "Real men don't go to the nurse! Play tough!"

I overheard an older camper say to his friend about something distasteful, "That's so gay!" You have to teach each new generation to hate. With all the machismo around, how many boys will grow to be misogynists and gay-bashers?

3. Gender stereotyping was prevalent in many other ways. Besides the girls' group names being ultra-feminine (e.g. Muffins, Shortcakes, Chicks), I was distressed to see some of the boys' group names are "Apaches" and "Cheyennes." Besides disrespecting indigenous peoples by using their tribal names as mascots like pro sports teams do, I don't appreciate the de facto equivocation of Indians to animals (other groups were Colts, Cougars, Cubs, etc.). Also, instead of the retro-aggro "Hunters," how about the less bloodthirsty "Gardeners?" Too effeminate for our boys, I guess.

2. I'd love to see how some of these kids turn out ten, twenty years down the road. The problem children never listen, incessantly argue about who will be first in line, constantly disobey by throwing dirt, grass, rocks, kicking sand, splashing, hitting, jumping and spitting on other kids. One day, a camper of mine was indulging the young boy's fascination with

stepping on ants. "Why do you do that?" "I don't know." I told him to lay off: "What if someone bigger than you came along and decided you were annoying and stepped on you?" Naturally, a couple of hours later, he was at it again. Wouldn't it be nice if we didn't flatten the little guy just because it feels good?

The little guy often disappears just from sheer neglect. There may be no smoking gun of out-and-out murder, but it is wanton, premeditated killing nonetheless. It is the hand-washing guilt of Pilate, to let things in a decrepit situation run their course without putting oneself on the line by stepping in to help. My campers had me to look after them and supervise their safety in extensive facilities. Other children are not so lucky.

Kozol reports one such tragedy that the powers that be twisted to cover up their own culpability: "The death of an eight year-old is being attributed to a broken elevator door that opened when he leaned against it while he had been playing in the hallway. The city is blaming the family for letting an eight year-old go out in the hallway, but they got to go out *somewhere*. The real outside, where they would get some air, is just too dangerous."

1. The camp also took the easy way out environmentally. Instead of having a dishwasher like my camp did when I was a kid, Breezemont served lunch to 1,000 children over forty days with disposable, indestructible and nonbiodegradeable styrofoam trays. Multiply that out, and watch those landfills grow.

Militarism, patriotism, classism, racism, sexism, homophobia: it's all there at Breezemont. We had a lot of fun, but it was the kind of environment in which I never felt entirely comfortable. It stifled the real Vincent Romano and I suffered the suffocating weight of conformity, afraid to rock the boat and say anything about the things in which I believe.

Why should I have, when everyone was so happy? Only because of the nagging sense that Breezemont in no way accurately encapsulates the reality of most people on the planet. Kozol questioned a South Bronx child, "'Do you know children who cry?' 'Many cry.' 'Do you know children who are happy?' 'Truly happy? No.' 'Happy at all?'... 'Not for one day. For 15 minutes.'" Is this a tolerable state of affairs?

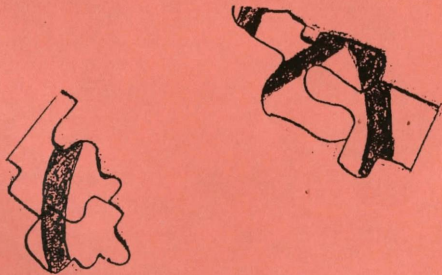
Kozol's book is an important contribution for those who have never drunk from the cup of pain strolling through the barren concrete of Fordham Road and the bad-mouthed areas around Yankee Stadium like I have, who lock their doors when driving through "bad" neighborhoods because they fear the claw of poverty might reach into their mobile suburban bubbles, who come up with all kinds of rationalities to explain away the desperation that chokes the air of these places as the endemic fault of the poor.

He exposes the racism that permeates every level of city life, from hospital services to department store culture to the joke of New York City public schools. Reading his book, we walk through Riker's Island prison, the repository of all the unwanted refuse of the streets, and we see that we pay ridiculous amounts of money to keep the prison system incarcerating, rather than rehabilitating, because it is our safety that is most important — not actually giving prisoners the tools they need to cope with (and thrive as we do in) this dysfunctional system.

I feel for the kids who are crippled by pediatric asthma, with which I also coped with to a milder degree, because I know that it is the wasteland we have created for them that engenders their condition. "The asthma mortality rate for people in the Bronx, the borough with the highest concentration of black and Hispanic residents, is nearly nine times that of Staten Island, which is the whitest borough in the city."

"It has to take extraordinary self-deceit for people who plant flowers on Park Avenue but pump their sewage into Harlem and transport their medical waste to Mott Haven, to imagine that they have the moral standing to be the judges of the people they have segregated and concealed. Only a very glazed and clever culture in which social blindness is accepted as a normal state of mind could possibly permit itself this luxury." Kozol will not hide the honest feelings of the people who live in the South Bronx from us, because that's what Breezemont/polite society demands. I revel in their reprehension, even as I blush from my own complicity.

I find that my acute sense of existential guilt is one (of many) things that separate me from my peers. It is the source of my mourning quietude, and a signal to me that I am still emotionally alive and have not yet lost my humanity. I might have to work at Breezemont Day Camp for a summer to get by financially, but I never aspire to send my own kids there. I wouldn't trade my guilt for any comforts in the world.



VERMONT PERSPECTIVE

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