

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz ★ Wal-Mart in China ★ Sex Toys 101 ★ Bikes Across Borders

New Perspectives on Politics, Culture, Media and Life

# clamor

September/October 2002  
Issue 16

growing old alone  
defying retirement  
the quarterlife crisis  
chicago senior activists

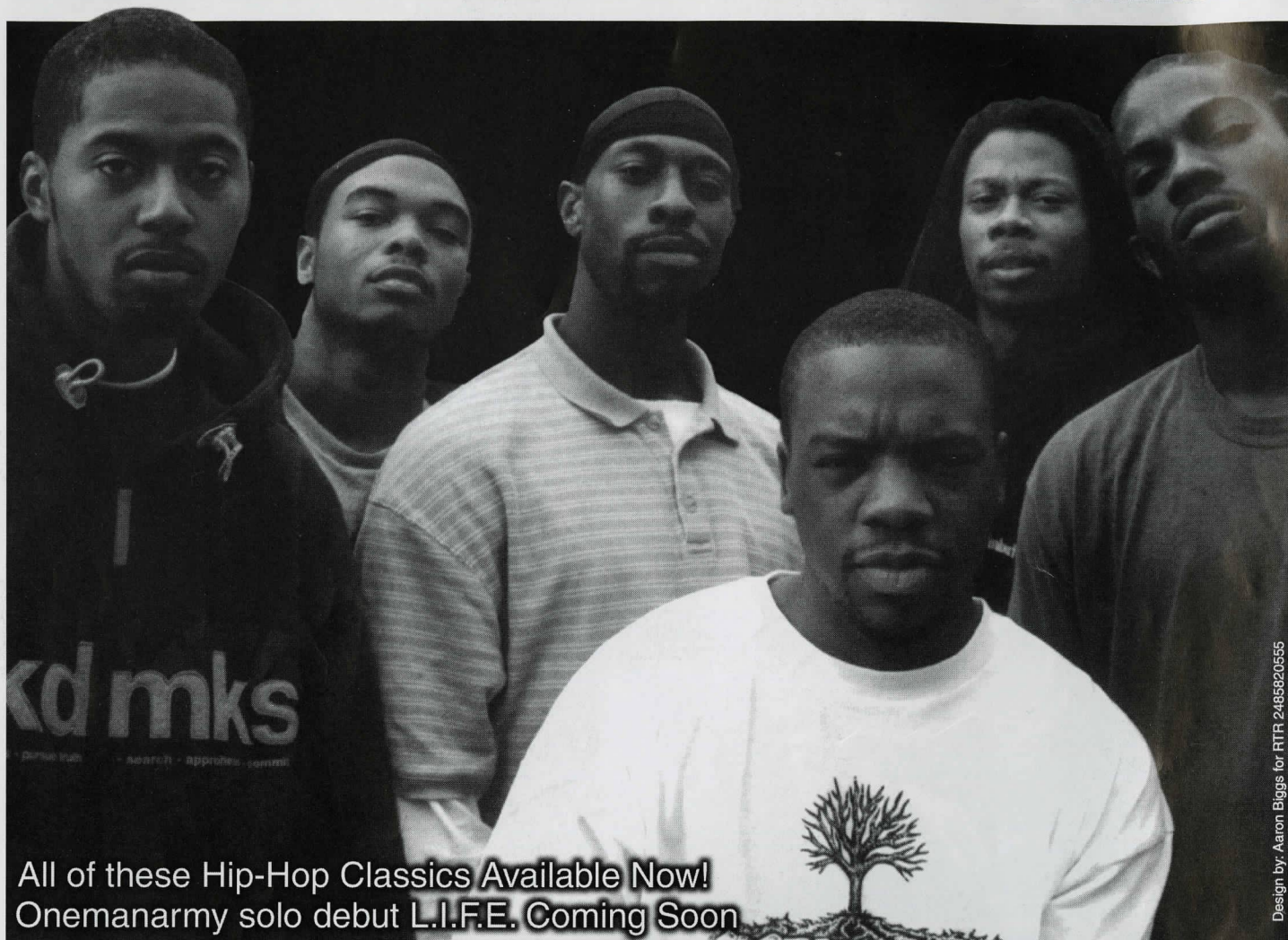
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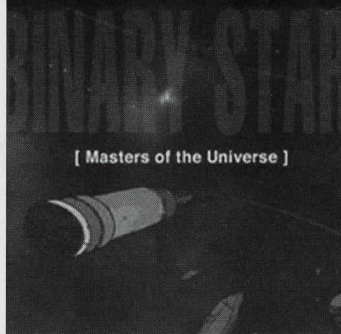


# WHAT'CHA REALLY KNOW ABOUT THE...

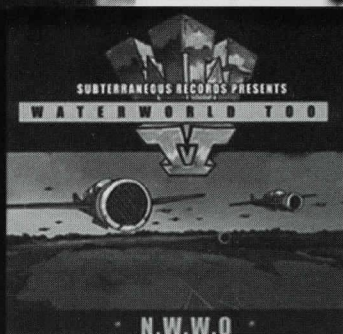


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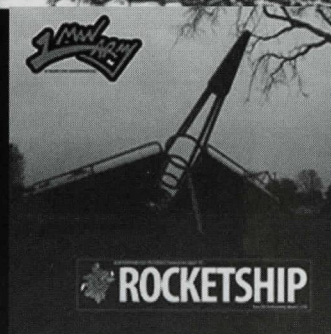
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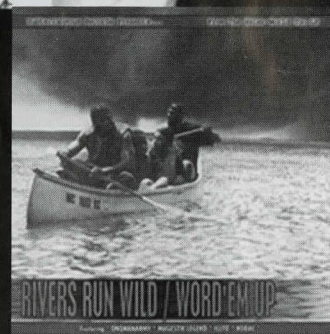
M.O.T.U. CD



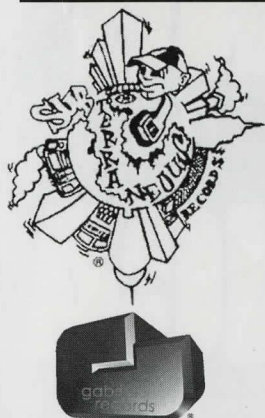
WW Too CD



Rocketship 12"



Rivers Run Wild 12"



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Just as we focused on youth with our May/June 2002 edition, we recognize that in American youth-centered media, older individuals and the topic of aging itself are often left out of the conversation. Sometimes it seems as if magazines and movies define "older" as over 25, doesn't it? This issue we focus on individuals who have the wit and wisdom that comes with age, and a unique and invaluable perspective. Just as we think it makes common sense to work with and learn from folks across economic and racial backgrounds, we also think it makes common sense for folks to cross generational barriers — learning lessons from those who have been there before us and listening to the enthusiasm of youth. In a sense, this issue on aging is not only about what it's like to grow old in America, but also what it's like to grow OLDER in America. What do we do with ourselves between the dusk and dawn years of our lives?

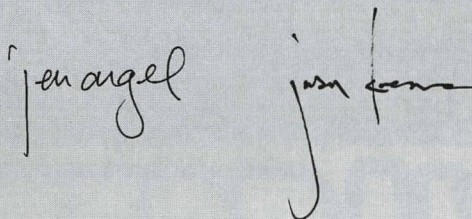
In this issue we talk with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz about what it's like to remain a political activist for four decades. We also listen to Ayun Halliday reflect on being a mother (and still not feeling like she's a grownup). Mike Burke profiles Donald Paneth, a 75-year-old newspaper man who is now working with the alternative newspaper *The Independent* in New York city, while Essa Élan defines "Quarterlife Crisis." Jeff Conant shares what it's like to watch his mother withdraw from and deny the reality of her failing health. To close out this issue, Greg Fuchs introduces us to Dolores Castellano, an amazing woman who exemplifies what it means to grow old gracefully — and with vigor. In the future, we will continue to profile and print the work of progressives of all ages, young and old. We need to learn from each other.

Of course, articles in this issue aren't limited to aging. We have an interview with One Man Army from the up-and-coming "edutainment" hip-hop group Subterraneous Crew from Michigan. We also get a look inside Toys In Babeland's class "Sex Toys 101" from Ayun Halliday, and Robert Jensen examines what the porn industry has to say about us as a people (specifically men).

You'll notice that there are no music reviews. This is unfortunate, but we simply didn't have enough room for all of the great reviews of new music this time around. We certainly don't anticipate this being a regular occurrence, and we hope that in the meantime you will visit our website for the online supplemental music review section. Keep your eyes peeled in the next issue for plenty of reviews of great independent music from a variety of genres. Got something you want to review for Clamor? Let us know!

Of course we're always looking ahead to future issues, and we invite you to contribute articles, photo essays, and art for our upcoming issues on technology (Jan/Feb 2003) and sport (Mar/Apr 2003). Our deadlines and submission information are available online at [www.clamormagazine.org](http://www.clamormagazine.org) or by writing [info@clamormagazine.org](mailto:info@clamormagazine.org). Clamor wouldn't be what it is without its contributors, so take advantage of this resource and let your voices be heard!!

We hope you enjoy this issue!



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





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# Letters

Please address letters to [letters@clamormagazine.org](mailto:letters@clamormagazine.org)  
or write us at PO Box 1225 Bowling Green, OH 43402  
Letters may be edited for length.  
Not all letters received will be printed.

I stumbled upon Clamor with the March/April 2002 issue, and have since picked up the May/June 2002 issue. I'm delighted to have found you. I do have a comment regarding your choice of cover art for these two issues. The highlighted phrasing of "What it Means to Be Active" pulled me in the first time, but I missed the reference to the cover photo in the table of contents so read the whole issue wondering if this was a random photo chosen to suggest that this (who I finally discovered was Beka Economopoulos, co-editor of *Another World Is Possible*) is perhaps what an activist looks like. No biggie, except that the cover photo selected for May/June suggests something similar—another white, very androgynous-looking young activist who I assumed was American, much like my impression from the previous cover. Reading the magazine I discovered that this was an Argentinean girl, so in fact you were, I think, trying to go global with your perspective.

I'd suggest taking a broader view when selecting cover art/photos. With these two issues having been the only ones I have seen, had the initial cover headlines not pulled me in I think I would have been put off by the highlighting of individual white folks (no matter how these two people in fact identify themselves racially or ethnically) on your cover. Your mission statement as a publication is terrific, and the body of the magazine suggests an awareness of the need for both intra- and inter-group connection, among all sorts of groups, to bring about progressive social change. But two issues in a row that highlight individuals, implying (to me) individual action, and seem to highlight white activism (when your pages contain a broader perspective), doesn't do much to help reinforce the "political and cultural alternatives" that your articles suggest.

Noel Rasor  
Lawrence, Kansas

*In the past few months, we have received a handful of letters critiquing the covers of the magazine, specifically the presentation of people with white skin and the absence of people with skin that is not white. Since every email or letter sent probably represents many more that are not, we thought we would take the time to respond. No one has condemned — very few have even mentioned — the actual content of the magazine, so we view all of these comments through the lens of solidarity. Everyone in this discussion shares a roughly equivalent idea of what we would like to see in the magazine and the world.*

*The first thing we would like to make clear is that Clamor is not structured like other magazines. This is not a situation where, if you change the mind of the person at the top, the end result is going to change. While we appreciate any and all criticism,*

*there are only certain things about the magazine that we control. We work very hard to try to keep this channel of communication open for you to use and to expand so other people can use it. While we get to select what goes into the magazine from what gets sent to us, we are able to devote very little of our time toward affecting what gets sent to us. That's your job. This is an open submission publication, which means you control the content. In addition to the small amount of money it takes to purchase or subscribe to the magazine, we are asking you to solicit or produce the kind of content you would like to see in these pages. If that means more pictures by and of people of color, then take those photos or find someone who will. If that means more articles written by young women, send them in.*

*We compensate people for their contributions as best we can. We know that nobody thinks we are actively excluding anyone from this magazine and we are sure that everyone knows we especially encourage the participation of people who do not have access to other national publications. But our first responsibility is to sustain the magazine so there is any outlet at all, which is why we need you to take on the responsibility of soliciting content. If we don't work together on this, we will have a publication that is either irrelevant or bankrupt. If we do work together, we will have a tremendous tool for reaching a broad audience and for combining disparate audiences into a single force to achieve our common goals.*

*Part of holding up our part of the bargain means that we actively work to sell this magazine to readers like you. Despite what we think or want, magazine covers with a face — any face — sell better than ones that feature anything else. That is why most of our covers have a single person looking right at you: we are trying to move the magazine off of the newsstand and into your hand. While one of the goals of Clamor is to solidify the community of activists, revolutionaries, and progressives, the other goal is to grow that community in all directions. This means that we often follow convention when it comes getting this magazine into the hands of readers who might not pick it up otherwise.*

Regarding your Reader Survey (Jul/Aug 2002 and online at [www.clamormagazine.org/survey](http://www.clamormagazine.org/survey)), I'm wondering at your options for ethnic identity (White/Caucasian, Black/African-American, Latino/a, Other/Fill in the Blank). I suppose you had to draw the line somewhere, but then again, you could have left the question simply at fill in the blank.

Having drawn a line, I wonder why did you draw it where you did? I don't know exactly what you're surveying for. ad demographics? I am most amazed at your exclusion of "Asian" from the checkable list.

And I wonder what this exclusion implies about you. Was it a printing error? Do you think people of Asian descent (American or otherwise) identify as white? or black?

I'm actually leaning towards thinking this was a printing mistake and not just an "oh we didn't think of Asians" thing. I'd guess most people on earth are Asian, which would make it more appropriate to have Asian on there and relegate the rest of us to "other." Come to think of it, it would be interested to see a survey with lots of different ethnicities where white and black were the ones left to "other." I don't want to get all into race theory, and I understand there are so many other ethnicities left out of your survey, but it just seemed so jarring for Asian to be left out.

Al Fair  
Brooklyn, NY

*In the print version of the survey, there was very limited space with which to list responses to each question. We could have used the whole page to list the myriad different options that people could list. These three groups (White/Caucasian, Black/African-American, and Latino/a) make up the largest ethnic groups in the United States (where Clamor is primarily sold), and most likely comprise a majority of our readers. We felt that offering the "other" option with a fill in the blank would allow people to list whatever they want. Indeed, people have chosen to fill in things from "Irish" to "alien" in this blank. The primary reason for us to list this question (and a lot of others on the survey) is so that we can make sure that we are reaching the people that we want to reach, and that we are adequately representing and serving the people that we are reaching. We want to live up to our mission statement, and how can we if we don't know who is reading our magazine?*

I certainly support Carol Leigh's call in her interview in "Sex or Sweatshops" for the decriminalization of prostitution and other forms of sex work. I would, however, like to question her contention that the growing acceptance of sex work is a good thing. Does this really represent sexual liberation? Or is this the growing acceptance of the commodification of sex? In both the reformist and radicals wings of the global justice movement, we have been struggling against the elite's drive to commodify everything, from the necessities of life like water down to our very genes. Life should not have a price tag on it and sex — even when not connected with reproduction — is a major manifestation of life's basic energy and mystery. In the ideology of corporate globalization, the market represents liberation. To those of us on the left, it represents alienation, as the human spirit is suppressed and warped to make people hunger



for commodities as a substitute for community and relationships. By arguing for the acceptance of sex work as a positive thing, Leigh is unconsciously buying into the elite's ideology of commodification and commercialization as liberation. Some of the pleasure sex workers like Leigh get from their jobs is doubtless because they feel they are helping people, fulfilling some otherwise unmet need. But does sex work truly meet the need that drives people to purchase sex? Should people's hunger for relationship with others and to experience the deepest mysteries of life be met, not through community and spirituality, but through buying sex (often from a stranger) in the market? This does not seem like liberation, sexual or otherwise, to me. We need to find a way to argue for the decriminalization of sex work and for sex workers' rights without buying into the idea that the selling sex is a good thing. Supporting sex work in a simplistic way is to accept the alienation that is at the heart of capitalism. The fight against corporate globalization must involve not only a the fight against the social conditions that lead to forced prostitution or situations where women feel they have few other choices, but the fight against the alienating ethic of capitalism where it makes sense to try to find a connection with others through paying for sex rather than building relationships.

Matthew Williams  
Somerville, MA

I read the response that Crimethinc wrote to my article ("Middle Class Dominance and the Negation of Class Struggle," Mar/Apr 2002) that was printed in the May/Jun 2002 issue. I didn't quite get it. That's the first time in any Crimethinc literature that I've seen they've ever even pretended to be interested in class struggle. In the recent issue of the Harbinger (#4) they even refer to the working class as an abstraction. Crimethinc poked around some of the side issues of the article I wrote, but totally ignored the main points. Was this response a joke? Or was it just a poor attempt to get off the hook and avoid any accountability to publishing a book with a very classist theme to it?

Confused and insulted,  
Joe Levasseur  
Philadelphia, PA

Did anyone else notice that in an interview with a band named after an awesome woman revolutionary ("Songs for Emma," May/June 2002), in which the drummer is referred to as "a female drummer who plays like most male drummers' teacher," the one voice missing from the entire interview is this same woman drummer? If there was some reason Diane was not present or not participating in the interview, I'd like to know, otherwise it looks like an all too familiar incidence of men's voices drowning out womyn's.

Jen Stare  
Brooklyn, NY

*I completely agree with your comment, Jen. In fact, when I first discovered Songs for Emma, the first thing I did was submit a message to the guest book on their web site that leveled a similar charge. On their first CD, Tommy, the vocalist, not only writes every song but also the printed explanations that accompany the lyrics in the CD booklet. He has told me that he has tried to find a female vocalist and that Diane, like most of the other members of the band shy away from speaking/writing, and prefer to leave all of those duties to Tommy. My understanding is that Tommy sent all the interview questions to Diane who declined to participate. Nevertheless, Songs for Emma have a hell of a lot more to say about politics that is a hell of a lot more sophisticated than most of the bands who purport to do what Songs for Emma do. I suspect that if Diane wished to speak out, Tommy would not drown out her voice with his, but perhaps I am wrong and this query is best put to the band... Find their contact info at <http://www.brokenrekids.com/Songsforemma/>.*

-Richard Gilman-Opalsky, Interviewer

I think you have started a great magazine. I just bought my first issue and I am really amazed with the writing featured in your publication. The subject of Harry Potter ("Making Innocence Look Evil," May/June 2002) was what caught my eye. After reading Felizon Vidad's story/viewpoint, it made me think about the discussion of evil and the supposed Satanism found in Rowling's books. I myself have

read all four of her books (anticipating the next ones) and have viewed the movie several times. I find it extremely hard to believe that religious followers and such people such people could find evil in these children's books. Even if there is a suggestion of evil and Satanism, even highly impressionable children would find it hard to pick up. Most children who are reading these books follow the beliefs of their parents.

I am highly opposed to censorship of any kind and when I read about Vidad's experience in that middle school, I was appalled. Just because the school's librarian had the power to remove these books, doesn't mean she should justify what books were read and not read by the students because of her beliefs.

I am glad you published Ms. Vidad's experience. I think it might help open up people's eyes to the censorship that is occurring everywhere as we speak.

Certainly America cannot be the land of the free when people cannot have access to published works. Clamor, please keep on publishing controversial pieces like this that show both sides of the story. Keep up the great work,

Holly Haines  
Omaha, NE

Gotta take issue with your statement that "Diamond Distribution is the only real distribution house out there" (Review of "Thred," comics by Bruce Orr, July/Aug 2002). What a load of crap! What constitutes "real" anyway? You'd think you could mention the smaller comics distributors out there as a viable alternative to Diamond! We distribute Thred as well as Clamor!

Juliette Torrez  
Last Gasp  
[www.lastgasp.com](http://www.lastgasp.com)

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When not bitching about work, **Pete Lewis** (p. 34) produces a crappy 'zine and is writing a beautiful novel, both entitled, *Cymru* (come-ree (Welsh for Wales)) to *Amerika*. Contact him at: [cymru\\_to\\_amerika@yahoo.com](mailto:cymru_to_amerika@yahoo.com)

**Rachelle Maynard** (p. 48) an illustrator. She draws pictures for money and sometimes for love. Rachelle is destined for New York, unless Starbucks finds her first.

**Josh Medsker's** work (p. 32) has appeared in the *Anchorage Press*, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *Maximum Rock N' Roll*, *Frictionmagazine.com*, and other fine publications. He is currently publishing a literary zine, *Twenty-Four Hours*, and studying fiction writing in Austin, Texas. He can be contacted by singing The King's "Burning Love" with all the soul you can put into it, or via email at [increasethegrease@elvis.com](mailto:increasethegrease@elvis.com)

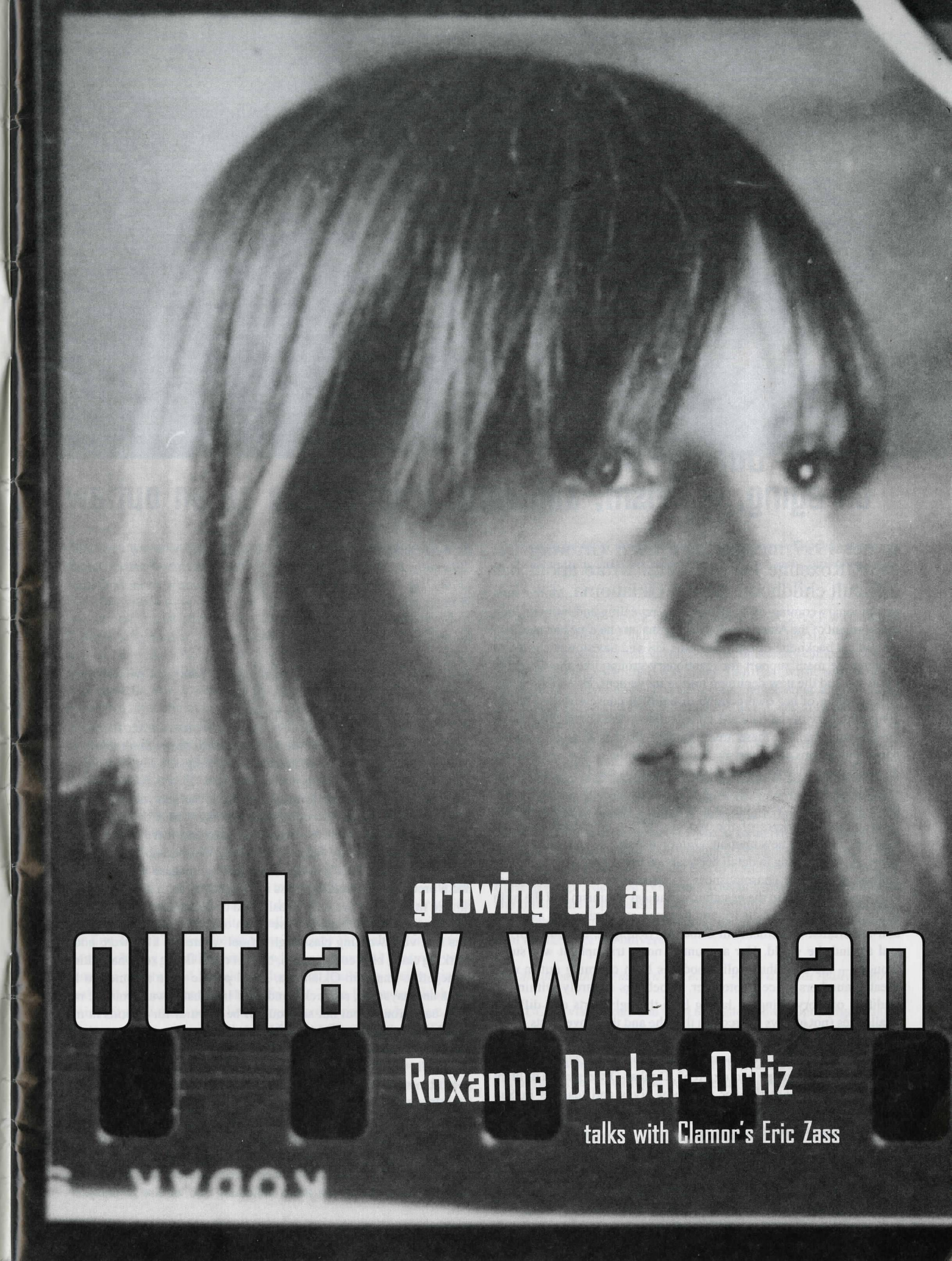
**Jeremy Smith** (p. 46), former publisher of *Dollars and Sense: The Magazine of Economic Justice*, is the director of membership services at the Independent Press Association.

**Andrew Stern** (p. 38) is a documentary photographer who has been traveling the world for the past few years working on a variety of projects, including working with street kids in Calcutta and the Maasai in Kenya. He recently returned from Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia, where he was traveling with a caravan of international Indymedia activists documenting the spectrum of creative resistance blossoming there, as well as helping to forge stronger connections between media activist groups of the global south and global north. He can be contacted at: [expectresistance@yahoo.com](mailto:expectresistance@yahoo.com).

**Eric Zass** (p. 9) lives and writes sometimes in San Francisco. He works at *Tikkun Magazine* and City Lights Books, and is currently working on putting together the San Francisco Zine Fest ([www.sfzinefest.com](http://www.sfzinefest.com)), which you should all come to.

**Leah C. Wells** (p. 72) serves as the Peace Education Coordinator for the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. She may be contacted at [education@napf.org](mailto:education@napf.org).



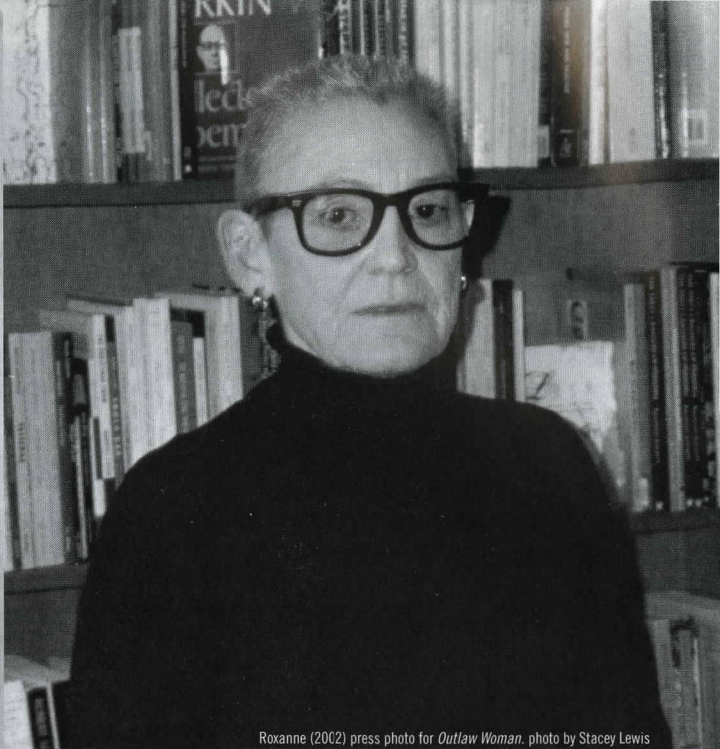
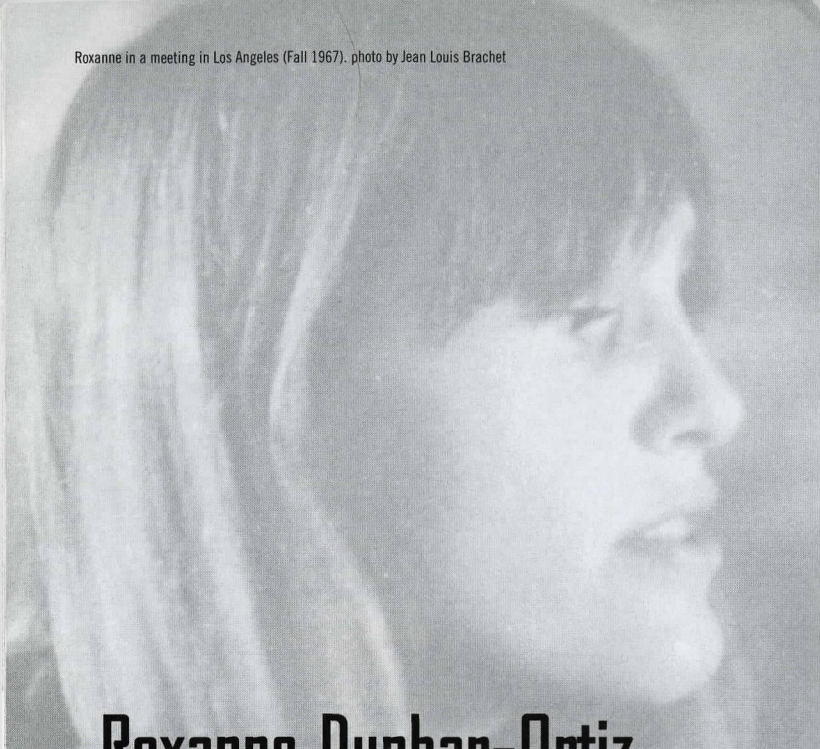


growing up an  
**outlaw woman**

**Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz**

talks with Clamor's Eric Zass





Roxanne (2002) press photo for *Outlaw Woman*, photo by Stacey Lewis

## Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz on aging, activism, and what it means to be an outlaw

In her 1997 memoir, *Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz wrote about her difficult childhood in rural Oklahoma. More than a revolutionary coming-of-age story, it's a revealing and intimate look at a segment of the American population that at one time had made up the radical backbone of Leftism in the US and has slowly shifted to become the main support for reactionary groups like the Christian Coalition and the now declining militia movement. *Red Dirt* was not only a telling of her own coming to political consciousness, but an insightful story of the radical Left's decline in the US and the rise of the extreme Right in these areas. Dunbar-Ortiz is familiar with the hopes and dreams of the mainly Scots-Irish settlers ("the foot soldiers of imperialism") who crossed and conquered the US in search of inhabitable land, and the ways in which they were manipulated. She grew up on stories of her grandfather's involvement with the International Workers of the World (IWW), socialism, and the McCarthy era. Her new memoir, *Outlaw Woman*, is a continuation of her story, chronicling in detail her years on the West Coast coming to increasing political consciousness — organizing with the anti-war movement, her role in the gestation of radical feminism and the birth of the feminist group Cell 16, and her time organizing and assisting anti-imperialist movements in Cuba, in Nicaragua, in South Africa, and around the world. Her account is not a triumphant war story, though — the kind that Hollywood has been churning out in ever greater numbers since September. It belongs squarely within the tradition of storytelling — laying bare the ugly parts and difficult challenges (not always overcome) that she and the movements of the 1960s faced, the successes, and the disappointments. Unlike the folk outlaw stories we're more accustomed to hearing, *Outlaw Woman* has a more or less happy ending. At 63, Dunbar-Ortiz is still a militant activist and brilliant thinker who now lives and teaches in San Francisco. I met up with her after her two-month long reading tour to ask her a few questions ...

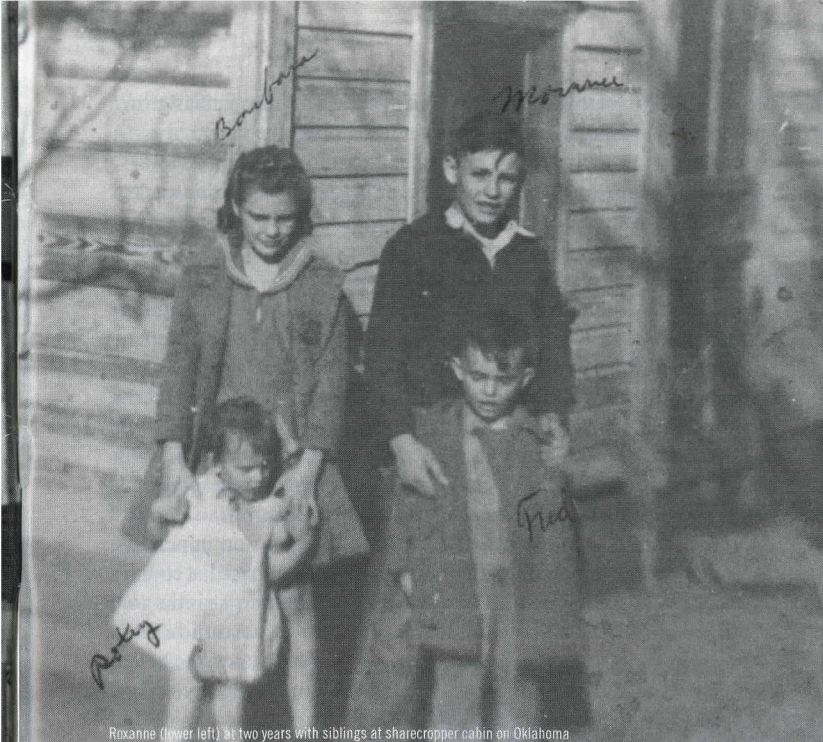
*Between your two memoirs, you characterize yourself extremely differently. In Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie, you characterize yourself as an Okie — which is an outcast, sort of a negative term. In Outlaw Woman, you've ...*

Progressed.

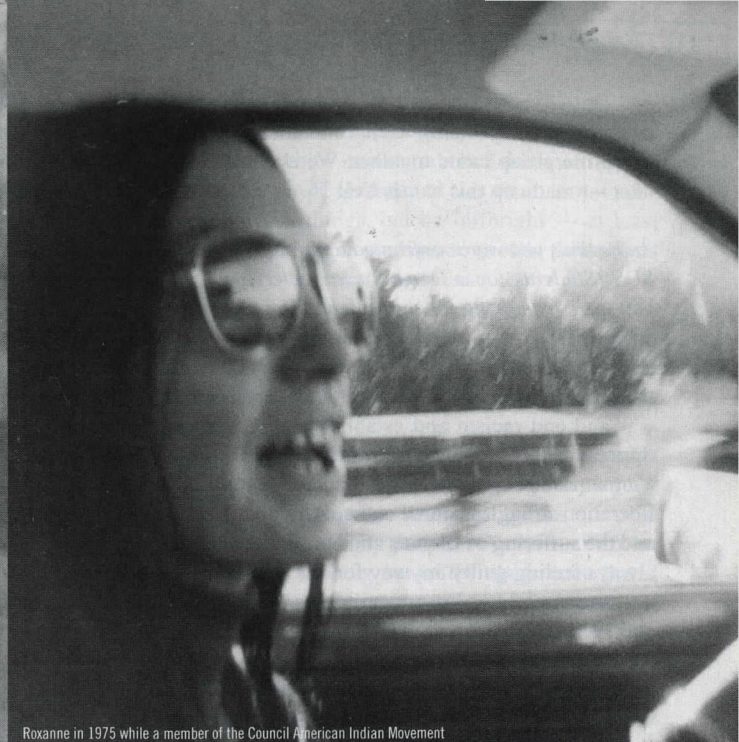
*You're an outlaw — a very proud outcast. How and when do you think those changes took place?*

My father's stories were what developed in my mind a space for seeing things that generally people are not directed to see in this society. In my own family, those stories surrounded getting rich if you could, to marrying a rich man, trying to be president. If you don't make it, especially if you're white, it's assumed that it was just your own fault, because you have all the opportunity in the world. I heard those messages; they were everywhere, but I also had these other stories told unwittingly by my father, you know, that perhaps this society wasn't something I really wanted to aspire to, because it's not right. I had a pretty strong working class identity. Only for a short period of time in my teenage years I was ashamed of being poor and would lie and say my father owned a horse ranch or something like that. This was in a very working class high school where the kids were poor, working class, blue collar, urban, but not rural. Being rural had a kind of negative image in Oklahoma. Rural people were assumed to be hicks and hayseeds, rednecks, and stuff like that. I was proud of my class background, but not so proud of being rural for periods in my life. I think that that pride wouldn't have been there without those stories and the model of my grandfather and the other characters my father told me about. Just knowing something is possible — that it's not just imaginary or some pipe dream — really makes a big difference. I think I really had that fighting spirit and I'm just very lucky that I became an adult as the '60s started and all of the social upheavals began. There was a place I could go to learn more and connect with others like myself. I think there are a lot of people like me throughout history and in every society who then have no place to go to for periods of time, who write poetry, or do something else, or else go crazy.





Roxanne (lower left) at two years with siblings at sharecropper cabin on Oklahoma



Roxanne in 1975 while a member of the Council American Indian Movement

*Was there a moment, any one event that shifted your perspective on the way you viewed your own history?*

The one thing I didn't get from the stories that was very important was an anti-racist perspective. It was all in the context of white struggle. My mother was part Indian, but the community I lived in was all white. The Wobblies were largely all white so the civil rights movement in the 1950s — from school desegregation — was very important for me. I went my last year in high school to the first integrated high school in Oklahoma, Central High School. It was the same year that Little Rock High School exploded and they had to bring troops in, so the Oklahomans decided to do it differently and to avoid resisting desegregation, but it was still a very volatile issue. What they mostly did was steal black athletes from the all-black schools in the inner city. I think just witnessing and seeing whites attack blacks for no reason whatsoever — nothing they did, nothing they said, just for existing — stuck me with such a visceral feeling of injustice, and the way that if you didn't join in, you're seen as a race traitor and shunned — really struck me. You have to actively be a white racist or else you were not trustworthy, you were a "nigger-lover." That's what I was called. I don't remember any other whites in that school who I could sit and talk to about this. There was one — the first Jewish person I ever met. She was the only white person there, including all of the teachers, who wasn't racist. I became hyper-aware of racism, and I could not help but challenge it every time I saw it. It was very hard to make friends. Then I went to Oklahoma University and there was a little larger pool of people who were anti-racist, even though it was almost all white. There were also foreign students — many of them Middle Eastern — so there was some color on campus. The second thing that happened to me, aside from the anti-racist thing — was meeting Palestinians who were studying petroleum engineering. At the time, it had only been nine years since they were forced out of their homes. They were in Jordanian refugee camps and eventually received Jordanian scholarships to study engineering. That was right during the Suez Crisis of 1957. They taught me not only about the Middle Eastern situation, but about US imperialism and the US role in that particular crisis.

*Was there a moment when you decided what you were trying to pursue as an activist wasn't working with what you were pursuing as an intellectual?*

I think I decided in the '60s when I left UCLA. I was deeply disappointed because like many other students, I really thought we could have kind of liberated zones on the university campuses like in Latin America, which I was very familiar with, which have autonomous universities. The police can never enter and the army can never enter, and when that's broken, like it was in El Salvador or in 1968 in Mexico, it is just abhorrent. They have a tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages of having autonomous universities. I thought we could create that. I knew that to the extent that it existed how important that was in Oklahoma, but the more the ties to the military were exposed, the more disappointed I became. In UCLA, where I was, there were enormous ties to the Rand Corporation which did much of the military's research. I was in Latin American Studies and the CIA's involvement in Chile was going on right there, out of UCLA. There were professors who were tied to it and making a lot of money. I just gave up. I decided I certainly couldn't make being a professor and raising the consciousness of students and organizing on campus my primary political work. It would be easier to organize the revolution than to take over the university.

*Tell me about the formation of Cell 16. When did that really begin?*

I left UCLA via Mexico and went to Boston, intent upon organizing a women's liberation movement, not being aware that many other women were thinking the same thing. It was quite a treat when I found these other women in New York and Boston and Florida — even here in the Bay Area — who had been meeting quietly. I went to Boston because I knew it was the center of the anti-war movement with the Boston Draft Resistance and the Sanctuary Movement where churches were taking in deserters, AWOLs, draft resisters, and protecting them from being arrested, and then getting them out to Canada. The place had such a history — from the abolitionist movement to the early women's movement of the 19th Century. That's why I chose Boston



and that's where I began — at the Boston Draft Resistance group teaching and organizing. Cell 16 came out of a course I taught. Our first little group came together. We eventually — about six months later — made up this name, Cell 16.

*At the time, you were confronted by a lot of groups on the left, including SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), about their concern that you were fracturing the movement. How did you respond to that?*

That was their view. It was the whole movement, not just SDS, but the civil rights organizations felt it was too important that we end the war and end racism and establish a socialist society. They felt the oppression of American women was nothing compared to the Vietnamese people's suffering and the oppression of those fighting in liberation struggles, and of course African Americans living in ghettos and the suffering of Latinos and Native Americans. As women, we're always feeling guilty anyway for our social lives and are always told not to complain about our problems and to be strong and sacrifice and everything. These were very powerful attacks that I think were not very helpful. It kind of drew some of us into much more extreme positions than we would have taken and many women began taking stands against the left in general. Young women came in only to see this hostility toward them, mainly from the left. I think it distorted our movement in a way that the left hasn't completely taken responsibility for. Instead, people like Todd Gitlin write that

the beautiful movement that existed in the '60s was ruined by us. They accused blacks of the same thing when they split off into black nationalist movements in the same way women had split the beautiful unity that these white boys had built up. We countered, those of us who remained leftists, that yes, of course we have to build into our women's liberation movement the absolute necessity of ending imperialism and racism and maintaining solidarity with other liberation struggles, but women have to become full actors and developers of strategy and we needed to be free from having this foot on our neck, and our souls and bodies being crushed, if we were to be in this for the long term. This isn't about just ending the war in Vietnam or winning a liberation movement somewhere. This was going to take a long, long time. By then I had lost any hope in the working class in the United States being able to come together as a working class. I felt that that movement had been kind of crushed and gutted and that there was such a powerful mechanism in place to control the 13 percent who were in unions that we had to go for the workers who were not organized in unions. These were mostly women, blacks, and Latinos in service work who the unions were not particularly interested in organizing. I don't think it's ever been resolved. I think women's issues are still segregated and ghettoized and that if women aren't there to bring them up, men don't. They're not brought up. We have to be

constantly vigilant. Internationally, the women's movement has grown and become terribly, terribly important all around the world.

*The attacks still go on, not only against the women's movement, but against any splinter or identity politics. Do you think that there's any time at which the criticism is valid?*

I think on the whole that what the so-called identity politics and the women's movement did was absolutely essential for the movement in the United States and that was internationalize it. All of these are cross-boundary issues, too. It dragged the civil rights movement out of Democratic Party reform mechanism to identifying with the fight against apartheid. In particular, that was very important in the '70s and '80s. It brought the Latino movement into opposing what happened in Chile or supporting the Cuban Revolution or, later on, Chiapas. I think the identity movements have been essential for an imperialist country — not just a nation of immigrants — but an imperialist country where the less we can identify with the state and the patriotic gore

that surrounds the United States, the better, the more progressive. I think that so-called identity politics gives people a grounding with not just being existential individuals roaming around without an identity. I can do that — almost any intellectual can — but for masses of people, that's not very realistic to ask them not to have some kind of grounding, and I would prefer Mexican Americans identify with Mexico rather than the US government, or that African Americans identify with Africa and the struggles there. How



Roxanne's face inserted in a photo of a Viet Cong guerilla (1968), by Jean Louis Brachet

can they bring to our future society in this country an internationalism and a true solidarity with other people.

*At the same time you have Jewish Americans often times identifying with Israel for the wrong reasons ...*

That's true. That's certainly the impulse. I just read an article by Edward Said this morning in which he analyzes why Jewish Americans are more supportive of the worst aspects of Israel than Israelis are. There's a very large peace movement there and many people opposed to Sharon's policies. American Jews have the identity thing. I think it's more harmful because of the geopolitical nature of the conflict, but technically it's no worse than many blacks I knew in the '70s who identified with Idi Amin, for instance. Obviously you're not automatically granted good political consciousness just because you identify with your own people. It doesn't do everything. It can't stop there. There has to be leadership like Malcolm X once was or Stokely Carmichael; today, a Randall Robinson or a Manning Marable or Cornel West or bell hooks, who guide and give shape to solidarity, and are able to condemn those who would exploit that identity.

*Then there are boundaries to that sort of ideal ...*



Well, I think you pick and choose. What I would like to see Jewish Americans do, for instance, is — not so much the Michael Lerner/*Tikkun* thing of insisting on peace and insisting that the Palestinians be nonviolent, too. There's so much violence there already that this is not a very effective first step. It's exactly what Sharon is calling for — that Palestinians be peaceful, with the promise that then the Israelis will do something constructive. I'd rather that American Jews identify with the forces of anti-imperialism in Israel. Those who are for solidarity, you'll almost always be identifying with a minority segment of the population. I think that I had to face that in the 1980s with the struggle in Nicaragua. Many indigenous folks here were used to support the Contras because of the Sandanistas' questionable policies toward the indigenous peoples. There were different groups among the indigenous representing different ideas on how things should change, but to pick out of that and identify with the US-sponsored Contras rather than other groups who were there is what I see as a kind of misuse of identity politics. It's sort of like having your cake and eating it too. You'll be rewarded by the United States for your support but you're still sort of expressing your own identity.

*In your experience, do you think it's better to specialize in one area of knowledge or activism, or to broaden and try to cover all at once as some amazing figures such as yourself or Chomsky are able to do?*

Well, we can do that because we're old. You accumulate all of this stuff. I think there's something to be said for intensive, consistent work. I think it takes all kinds of people — the generalists like myself or Chomsky, but the people I most admire are people who are really involved in the actual work. I can think of a few I know like Danny Schechter who is sort of a media watchdog or Randall Robinson who has been arguing for reparations for years or a woman I know does work accumulating data and taking testimony about marriage and date rape or a woman who runs battered women's centers. I think this is really the heart of a movement. Not enough credit is given to the people who do these things, people who work away for years organizing in a progressive way. I name these particular people because within their own particular work, they also have a larger view. I'm not sure how long anyone can keep doing that type of work so intensely without having a larger vision of social justice and changing the world. It gives me a lot of confidence to know that these people exist everywhere. This isn't something new. These are people struggling in the most dire of circumstances. It's just amazing. I think our job as militant organizers is not to try to form some national organization that will force all of these people into a kind of mold, but to help with the linkages, communicating, networking, putting people together, voicing their concerns at the international level, and spreading information about international solidarity with them. I think that's happening. I think it's happening internationally. Those are building blocks for the long haul of what we're trying to do. I think the younger generation right now doesn't give itself enough credit for the organizations its members have built that are just amazing, and far more penetrative into the whole culture than even those of the '60s. At the same time, there's been a kind of diminishing of the '60s as a kind of sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll era on the one hand, or else — for those who are positive to it — it was a golden age that can never be emulated or lived up to. Of course it was neither of those. I think — in fact, I'm sure — there are many more people politically conscious and knowledgeable about these issues now than there were then. Except for a few huge national demonstrations that took place then, there's really as much activism now. It's just that you can't rely on the media anymore to report that so there are other means for keeping up to date. Someone started tracking all of the demonstrations against the war in Afghanistan. They were just everywhere. Every day there were things going on in the United States and in every little hamlet of

the country. When 50 people demonstrate in a town of 10,000 people, that's just extraordinary. It was not newsworthy but we don't even know yet the results of that and how important it is. I think we need to be everywhere, to be outspoken. Especially at this time, to not self-censor, to not try to soft-pedal things, but be forthright — at least those who can afford to be. I think people have to protect themselves in some ways, but many of us have nothing to lose.

*I know we're living in sort of a different world after 9/11. In what recent events do you see an opportunity for activists to reclaim some of what the government seems to be stealing away?*

When it first happened, I had just come back from the UN conference on racism in Durban, South Africa. I got back the night of September 10th and woke up to this news. All of us who were there — 50,000 activists from around the world, mostly people of color — were so angry at the United States for walking out of the conference that it seemed to me that we must have done it to ourselves. I could see how people could believe in a conspiracy theory that we must have done this ourselves. It fits so well to this administration's advantage. What this administration and the whole right wing is trying to do seems to be very authoritarian and police state-like, and at the same time self-righteous. "We've been victimized." When 8,000 people died in Bhopal, India, for Union-Carbide, people did not mourn. Why are American lives worth so much more? I could see the writing on the wall, and I was awfully glad that I had this book to work on. We had to delay it because nothing was coming out in the fall. That kept me busy, but since I've been going around reading and travelling through March and April into May, I'm finding that the stuff that's coming out and being read, like Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men* and Chomsky's *9/11*, is a little inspiring. *9/11* is a best-seller in New York even though it's never had a single review. It's from Seven Stories Press, which is even smaller than City Lights. And then there's Gore Vidal's book *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* and Howard Zinn's book on terrorism — people are eating this stuff up. When I vowed not to pussyfoot around when I give readings but be very bold about what I think, it just opened this space for people to have discussions. Down at Midnight Special Bookstore in Santa Monica, I swear the reading started at seven and at midnight I couldn't get rid of these people. We were sitting there talking and talking and talking. It just frees them. People are afraid. I started seeing it as important wherever I could just to break the ice and break the fear. People are self-censoring a lot these days. You will be attacked. Some of my right-wing colleagues at Hayward attack me when I post things on our listserv but I think it's giving courage to some of the people who aren't speaking out, who feel intimidated, and then I feel that this new anti-war newspaper that we started is so much in demand. They just can't keep enough copies in stock and it's on the Internet. It's called *War Times* and it's bilingual, Spanish and English. It's a little tabloid, and it's free. We just have to raise the money for printing and shipping but it's very low cost. It was just an experiment to see if this works. The third issue has just come out and it's everywhere. People are welcome to translate it into different languages. It's not copyrighted, just use the material for whatever they want. It has really been encouraging to see that all over the United States. Churches and schools are getting and using that newspaper. Its writers are all fairly radical people. It's pretty blatant about our beliefs on the Palestinian question and US interventionism. It was originally meant for organizers; they thought 5,000 copies would be enough. I think the first run went through 100,000 copies. People like Noam and Michael Moore are drawing thousands and thousands of people everywhere they speak. I think there's a real hunger for this information. I think people really, really meant that first question they asked, "Why do people hate us so much?" and they still want to figure it out. It's just logical, you know, to think



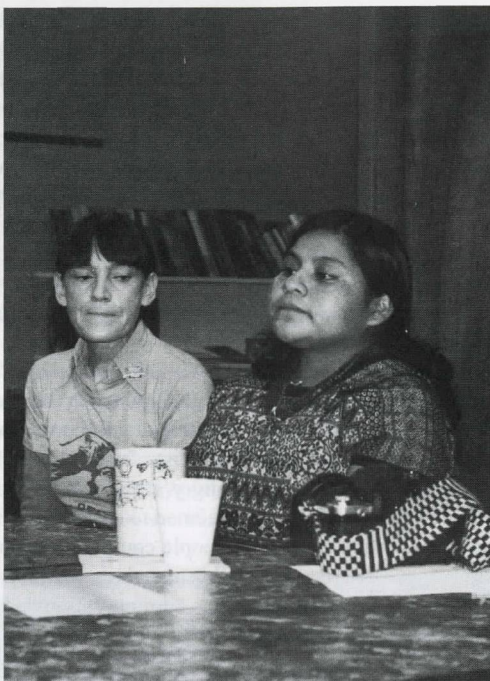
"Well, there must be something there. They seem to hate us." We're told all the time how loveable we are and there's a disconnection there because people know that they're kind of loveable. Most Americans haven't done any harm to anyone personally and certainly not to someone in Afghanistan. It's kind of hard to make the connections when there's such a void of knowledge and information, and because they don't know why, they want to find out what these "terrorists" reasons are, even if they're not valid, what are their reasons for doing this? I think just that natural curiosity has made people open in a way that they haven't been in the past. I think 9/11 did blow a big hole in the smokescreen that camouflages the United States. It's interesting how the right-wing dissidents who are so filled with white supremacy and Christian fundamentalism who made up a large part of the militias, these people are not the ones who are able to pick up the slack. It's the left that's actually able to make some explanations for this. I think it has put the right wing in kind of a disarray.

*It has. At the same time, just from working at a bookstore, I know that you have more people coming in and asking for copies of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and other right-wing tracts.*

That's true. In Stockton, after I had talked and read from the book for about an hour, this one woman piped up and asked, to what extent do you think the Illuminati were involved with this. It was a friendly question, that's what was scary about it. I said, "Ugghh, to no extent." Then I spent about an hour talking about this and I thought, I better remember to bring this up next time, because people are probably assuming that 9/11 is part of these larger conspiracies like "the Protocols." That's Pat Buchanan's message. He's a real anti-Semite. He can be talking along — he's against intervention in Afghanistan, he's for a Palestinian state, he was against the Gulf War and you think, "Wow, Pat really sounds good," but underneath it all there's this rabid anti-Semitism.

*The Right has no problems making alliances with groups it hates; the Left often times will not do that even with groups it feels are slightly racist or slightly sexist or anti-Semitic. I was wondering where you thought the boundaries are.*

I think there are certain principles but I do think one can make interventions and not just toss everyone away. For instance, young white men are really sought out by the right wing for recruitment. Trying to seek them out and educate them about anti-war or feminist causes, and not just throw them away just because they're more likely to be targeted by the right, is probably a good idea. Similarly, women in the suburbs in the Central Valley, or are one generation away from being rural, are targeted by anti-abortion rights groups because they have certain tendencies but that doesn't mean that the women's movement shouldn't try to attract them. What I think we shouldn't do is pander to the prejudices that exist within these groups but really confront them, but actually aligning with groups that espouse white supremacy and the like, I think it's a bad idea. They're usually very corrupt. They're usually not very spontaneous. I think the militias were more spontaneous and had more potential, but now they're all



Roxanne with Rigoberta Menchu (October 1982)  
at San Francisco American Indian Center.

in disarray. White supremacists were really trying to take them over but their initial sense came from the whole rural movement against agribusiness coming in and taking over.

*You characterize yourself as a militant organizer. I wanted to know what you meant by that.*

It's hard to know what to call yourself these days. I like the word militant.

*Rather than progressive or organizer?*

Progressive I like, too. Organizer I'm never sure about. It has the connotation of superiority. I think people are very capable of organizing themselves. They don't need a whole lot of top-down organizing. They often need knowledge, information, and tools sometimes — you know, a computer or connections. Chiapas is a really good model for that. The Zapatistas have changed the whole nature

of organizing in the world by their model of what to ask of people who are in solidarity with them. They've refined that in a way that no other liberation movement has been able to.

*At the end of Outlaw Woman you make explicitly clear that storytelling is really what this has been about. I wonder what in particular do you want people to take away from these stories?*

Well, the value of storytelling itself. Not just the valiant, heroic stories, but the stories of pain and suffering and loss and addiction, of bad relationships — all of those things. It's about being able to be fully human and validate other people's being fully human. I think in the '60s, we too often only told heroic stories and stories to inspire, but that that can have the opposite effect of making someone feeling diminished: "Well, I can never be like that," rather than constantly feeling that "I'm doing the best I can," or "I'm doing what I can." We should be able to value that. That comes more naturally now for the younger generation, but we tended toward burn-out and a kind of obsessiveness and policing each other so that we allowed no cracks in the armor. One of the reasons I called the book *Outlaw Woman* — people keep calling it "Warrior Woman." A warrior is someone admirable, someone valiant, someone above the fray. I'm not that and I don't want to be that. An outlaw is a much more ambiguous term. You really are living outside the acceptable norms and you want to build a community of people there who have the strength to keep resisting because at any time you want, you could climb back over that fence and be back with the crowd and blend into acceptable society. We need to validate the imperfect nature of what we're doing. I was very inspired by Che Guevara's diaries of both Africa and Bolivia which are very very despairing and sad, and of course he died. His last entry was about five hours before he died, saying that they were doomed. That, to me, doesn't make the stance he took and what he was doing any less important as a model. He was really messing up. They were in the wrong place and they weren't going to get out of there. It was a mistake, but people make mistakes. You have to take risks. There are lessons we can get out of real human stories, rather than stories about idealized people who never really existed in the first place. ★



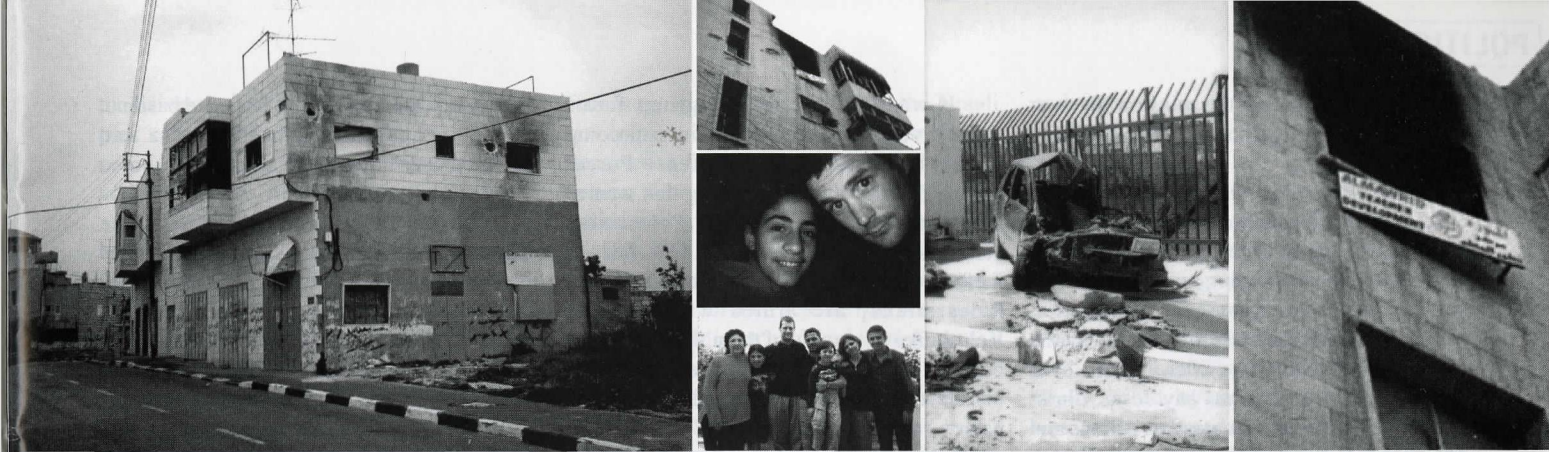


photo far left and third column by Jake Mundy. Other photos courtesy Trevor Baumgartner and [www.movementbuilding.org](http://www.movementbuilding.org)

# It Hit Me Straight In The Heart.

Trevor Baumgartner Explains Why He Was Willing to (Almost) Die  
for the National Liberation of Palestine

by Sophia Delaney

Trevor Baumgartner points to a small piece of construction equipment, a dirt-mover with a mechanized scooping arm. It's next to a broken sidewalk on a sunny Oakland, California street. "In Jenin," he says, referring to the refugee camp in Palestine he visited only a month before, "they have two of these things. Two."

Jenin camp, home to about 13,000 Palestinians, drew the world's attention in April, when it and several other West Bank cities were invaded by the Israeli army. The Israeli Defense Forces bulldozed and blew up dozens of homes, motivated by a Palestinian suicide bomber in Netanya, Israel, in March. At least 100 square meters of Jenin were turned from tightly packed living space to a lunar landscape built of rubble. A United Nations envoy called the wreckage "horrific beyond belief," while an IDF soldier who had bulldozed homes later callously said, "We left them a football field... it was our present to Jenin. They should play on it."

And they have two — just two — of these tiny dirt-moving things, which are between a large lawnmower and a small tractor in size, to clean up the wreckage of entire city blocks full of rubble?

"Yeah," he says. "Two. It's sickening." From his tone and expression, he might mean sickening literally.

But if his empathy for the horrors of the recent invasion of Palestine (dubbed "Operation Defensive Wall" by the IDF) looks extreme, it also seems understandable: he's had a closer view of the destruction than most Americans. Trevor is a part of International

Solidarity Movement, an activist group that brings foreigners to the West Bank and Gaza to act as a protective force for Palestinians against the Israeli army. By riding in ambulances to ensure medical teams aren't detained or shot at by troops, delivering humanitarian relief in the form of food and medicine, and garnering media attention, the group says it helps maintain human rights standards in the region and draw attention to the suffering of a war-torn population.

Trevor's just come back from his second trip with the group.

"This most recent time, it was because I had friends there," he says, explaining his motivations for travelling to Palestine in mid-April, when Operation Defensive Wall was already in full swing. "I got a call from my friend Hurriya, who is 12 years old. She lives in Ramallah, and she was scared, crying sometimes, talking about how soldiers had just completed house to house searches [seeking militant Palestinian men] and they had blindfolded and kidnapped her brother — 18 years old — and her father. I had to make a very difficult decision, whether putting myself into work here... was the best way to go, or get myself over there and use the privilege I have to defy curfew and not get killed. I agonized over it, literally. And I felt that it was important to take the opportunity to try and mitigate some of the violence."

He had already witnessed violence in the West Bank when he traveled there as part of ISM's December 2001 delegation. His Web site, which features writings on his experiences, includes the story of seeing an

adolescent boy shot in the face by Israelis during a firefight in the town of Qalandia. "[The boy] staggered off, his hand over his bleeding face, falling into a cinder-block wall before a group of his friends scuttled him into a nearby van. I just wanted to leave. To pretend I didn't just see all that. To pretend that this place called Palestine didn't exist. To pretend that war and bullets didn't live here. To pretend I didn't care. I just wanted to leave. But it hit me straight in my heart."

Despite his desire to not witness any more of the conflict, Trevor followed his heart back to Palestine, arriving on April 17, 2002.

To be sure, the protection that activists have provided has been necessary lately. In the course of the recent invasion, the IDF put whole cities under 24-hour-a-day curfews, enforcing the quarantine with a shoot-to-kill order for anyone found in the street; stopped ambulances at military checkpoints and occasionally killed the drivers and medics; bulldozed dozens of buildings, some with people inside; detained over 1,000 Palestinian men; and occupied the Palestinian Authority's Ramallah offices, allowing soldiers to use every room as a toilet.

The death toll officially stood at 53 people killed in Jenin camp after the month-long incursion, but some have claimed that the fatalities were far higher — particularly when counting those who were buried beneath destroyed buildings. The claims quickly became impossible to corroborate. The Israeli government first approved, then barred, a UN investigation team from entering the West Bank in the aftermath of



the invasion, delaying the mission for over a week before causing it to disband completely.

But while arguments about sending official international observers to Jenin raged, their grassroots counterparts were hard at work in Bethlehem. During a round of gunfire in Bethlehem's Manger Square on April 2, about 200 Palestinians took refuge in the Church of the Nativity, which is built over the spot where Christians say Jesus Christ was born. The group was mostly civilians and policemen, but included a few gunmen from the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Fatah faction as well as a few Christian clergymen. The Palestinians, according to Trevor, "went in there thinking it would be over in a day or two."

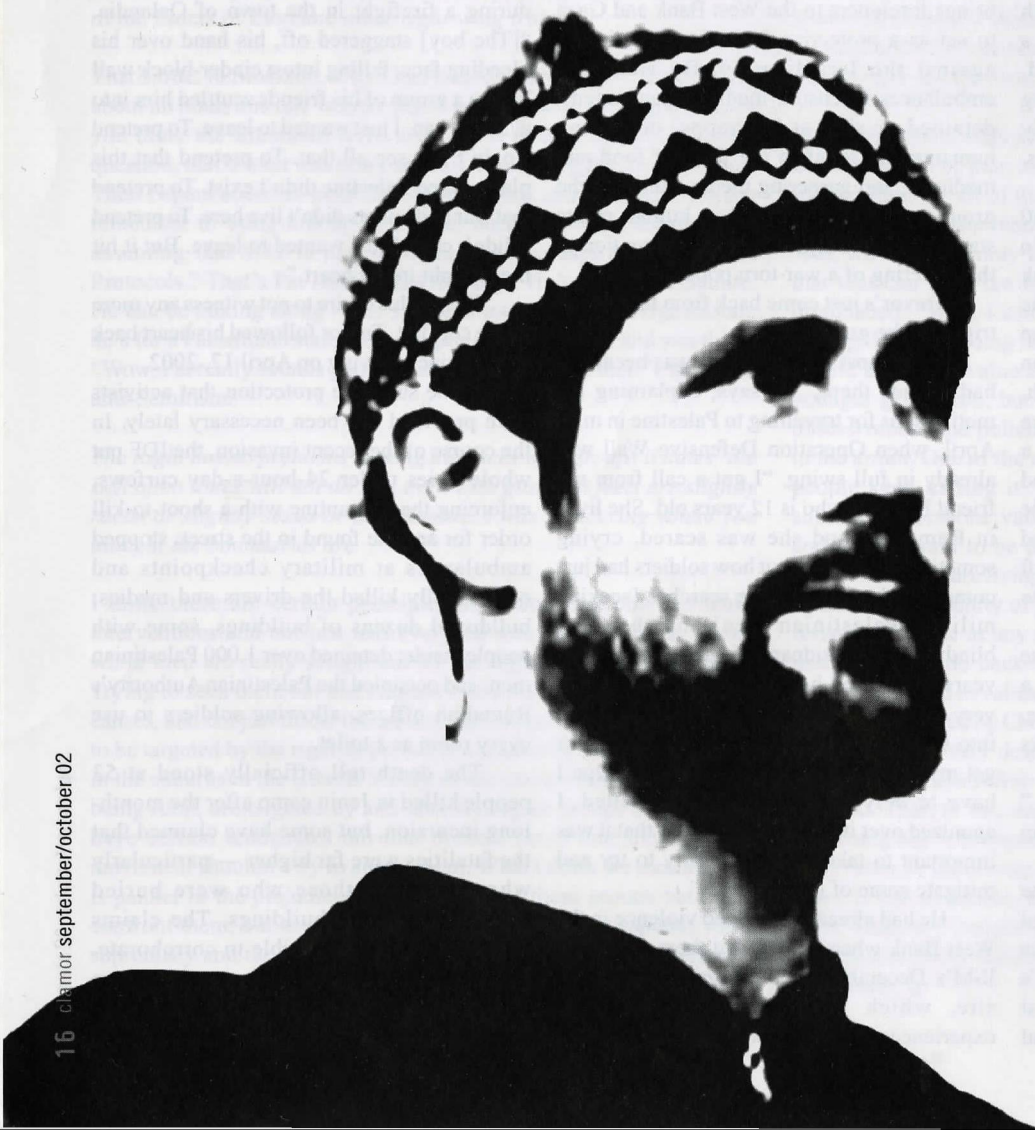
It wasn't. Instead, the group found themselves embroiled in an international controversy when Israeli Defense Forces surrounded the church, claiming that wanted militants were inside using Palestinian civilians as hostages. IDF Lt. Col. Olivier Rafowicz claimed that "all of [the Palestinians] are armed with at least Kalashnikovs... some of them with explosive belts..." live on CNN, while the Palestinians insisted that that wasn't true, and the siege had been a matter of circumstance, not strategy, on their part. The standoff lasted for 38 days, grabbing headlines and provoking an international debate on the rights — and crimes — of both the people trapped inside and the Israelis outside. While everyone from Internet trolls to the Vatican weighed in with

an opinion on the fate of the besieged basilica, Israeli troops erected barbed wire and stationed tanks around the church and shot at least three men inside.

By April 21, Father Ibrahim Faltas, the warden of the church, said that food supplies inside had run out. Groups of international activists who had contact with people in the church began planning to circumvent the building's IDF blockade to deliver food to those under siege.

"There was a request put out to bring food and basically an international protective presence... People had tried to get in four or five times and just weren't able to," Trevor said about ISM's decision to get involved in the crisis. He continues, "People [inside] were starving, quite literally. People were risking

Being able to speak from a place of personal experience, you have a different credibility. You have a have a human connection there. You can say, "Look, I've seen some of this. I don't ask you to agree with my politics, I just ask you to recognize the truth behind what I'm telling you, that's all." That's irrefutable.





their lives to get to the courtyard inside and pick leaves off the lemon tree to boil so they could have some kind of nutritional value added to water. This is how savage it was.

"The larger issues behind this are basically principles of human rights, of which food is one, water is another, shelter is another.

"These are acts of war. This is autonomous territory that's under invasion. In times of war and invasion, it is the occupying army's responsibility to assure civilian people that they have access to food and water. Nobody was standing up to demand that the human rights of Palestinian civilians were being respected in this time of war. So we felt like... as our governments refuse to act, we felt like we will. And we did."

On May 2, ISM delegates staged another attempt and were successful at getting into the church. While one group created a diversion, another 10 managed to slip past the doors carrying food and medicine.

IDF soldiers immediately arrested a contingent of 13 that hadn't entered the church, including Trevor. They were interrogated ("They asked us to call our friends and tell them to come out") and taken to Masiyahu Prison in Ramle, Israel.

Trevor refused to eat as soon as he arrived. "I didn't and don't recognize the legitimacy of my incarceration. So I wasn't going to take handouts from my jailers. I was the only one from the beginning who refused to eat."

Eight activists were deported within a few days, while the other five Americans — Trevor plus Nathan Mauger, Thomas Koutsoukos, Nathan Musselman, and Huwaida Arraf — remained in custody, although they were never officially arrested.

"We were never charged with a crime. Therefore we had no legal recourse. We were being deported for violating Israeli law for entering a closed military zone. And officially, they said we were being deported for collaborating with the enemy, which is something to be proud of in this case."

Denied a legal avenue for release, and ignored by their embassy, Trevor's companions joined his hunger strike. The group demanded the right to leave Israel voluntarily (as opposed to deportation), and a letter from the Ministry of the Interior stating in English that they had not been banned from the country. Huwaida Arraf, the group's only female, was granted the letter and left for New York on May 7, five days into the hunger strike.

Soon after arriving, though, she learned that the assurances she had received from Israeli authorities that her companions would be given the same letter had been false. All

four were still in detention, with the Israeli government now saying that they would be deported without the letter or would stay in prison. Trevor, now on the sixth day of his strike, was so weak he could not move from his bed, and had began refusing water, too. Although a good-faith agreement that should have allowed for their release had been made between the Ministry of the Interior and the prisoners' lawyer, they stayed put.

On May 11, after more than a week of not eating, Trevor collapsed. After being given sugar-water and threatened with force feeding, he began to sip water, as did his comrades.

After the hunger strike was made public on Jerusalem Indymedia, reactions were sometimes less than supportive. One reader commented, "If you starve yourself, that's your choice. Have fun!" But Trevor believes that the value of strike wasn't necessarily in gaining condolences. "It wasn't about me, and I didn't ask anyone for their sympathy," he says, preferring to think in terms of bringing peace to the Occupied Territories. "Basic human rights, that's what this was about."

"We could have done a better job making our position clear, which is that we were there in support of Palestinian's human rights, which... are contingent upon Israeli human rights. This is not just about Palestinians, this is not just about Israelis, it's about human living — and that's the place that I moved from, personally."

He also says that the human strike was a matter of strategy. "...We know that Israel has been very blunt about their plans to deport activists and humanitarian workers who are coming to support Palestinians. ...We felt like, if they're going to detain us from Palestinian land and then deport us from Israel, this was a very dangerous prospect. Especially since Palestinians who we spoke with... felt like they need international observation. They've been calling for international observers, peace observers, for years and years, and it's been steadily opposed by governments around the world. [Getting rid of internationals] makes it easier for something like what they call "population transfer" to happen, which is to say, ethnic cleansing."

At least a few activists got the message. A rally in Seattle in mid-May drew a few hundred people, who chanted "Free Palestine, Free Trevor!" And some people took heed of the notice to call the American embassy in Tel Aviv: "Our embassy people were being hounded twelve, sixteen hours a day. This is not in their interest. So we tried to put pressure on them to get Israel not to [deport activists]."

After 15 days in jail, the pressure worked, at least for Trevor. He was released

and put on a plane to Seattle, where he arrived on May 18 to a cheering throng of friends and supporters.

His friends remained in jail, where the activists who had originally entered the besieged Church of the Nativity had recently joined them. The group was divided and some were sent to Netzion Prison, where guards told their Israeli cellmates that the activists were "terrorists." The insult could have gotten them killed by angry inmates, but all eventually emerged unscathed.

Trevor says he doesn't regret the experience.

"There are some things that I feel are very important. One of them is speaking from a place of personal experience. I can rattle off UN Resolutions to somebody for days, I can talk about... any of these very abstract principles that no one really cares about anyway. And that's only so effective.

"Being able to speak from a place of personal experience, you have a different credibility, you have a have a human connection there. You can say, 'Look, I've seen some of this. I don't ask you to agree with my politics, I just ask you to recognize the truth behind what I'm telling you, that's all.' That's irrefutable."

It might seem odd that Trevor, who identifies himself as an anarchist, feels so strongly about a national liberation movement. "Yeah, there are inherent contradictions," he admits, "Our job, I believe, is not to only act when something is perfect, when we have a clear and perfect outcome. I feel like, on a much larger scale, we're talking about millions of people's lives here. Millions. Refugees, people who are living in intense forced isolation. Whether or not they choose a capitalist system is not material to me at this point. Whether they have the right to choose is material. I feel like if we anarchists or anti-capitalists choose only to support movements which are going to take into consideration all of our analyses, then we are going to make ourselves irrelevant. If we are talking about supporting human struggles... for the right to live with some semblance of dignity, then we can further talk about the building of a community which will support us when we need it."

So, would he do it all again?

"If I was allowed to," he says, laughing. "Without a doubt, without a doubt." ★



# Chicago Seniors



## Takin' it to the Streets

by Kari Lydersen

"Getting in the Mayor's face." To hear her tell it, that is one of Norma Murray's favorite things to do. And she does it often, as part of her work as president of Metro Seniors in Action, an organization of Chicago seniors who take to the streets, city hall, and various other venues around the city to fight for the rights of seniors. They have shown that in-your-face and effective activism are not just the realm of the youth activist crowd. The 15,000 members of Metro Seniors, who work closely with other seniors' groups, disability rights groups, and community and religious groups, have logged an impressive rap sheet of campaigns and victories, using direct action, lobbying and various other creative tactics.

"We have a bill of rights for reliable and accessible public transportation, freedom from crime, lower utility bills, affordable housing, and lots of wonderful things," said Dorothy Sims, an eight-year member. The group has forced the city government to make reforms in areas of public transportation, health care, public safety, and consumer protection as it relates to seniors. They led the fight to get signs placed in buses and trains saying "Stand up for the rights of seniors and people with disabilities" in response to the people who didn't know it is common courtesy to offer an older person your seat.

When train lines that served lower income areas of Chicago were being cut right and left, Metro Seniors helped shoot down the city's plan to spend \$780 million on a public transit line directly from the suburbs to the ritzy Magnificent Mile shopping district downtown. "That was going to be \$780 million just to bring people from the suburbs in while bypassing the city. It wouldn't have done anything for people in the city," said Syd Bild, a former physician and President of Metro Seniors from 1995 to 1996. "Eventually it was defeated," Bild said, "The mayor wanted it but he didn't get it."

Metro Seniors also convinced City Hall to pass ordinances affirming the right to universal health care and demanded affordable prescription drugs. They continually work on these campaigns, both on state and national levels. The organization is working on the passage of a bill mandating the state purchase drugs in bulk at a lower cost the way it now buys drugs for veterans and Medicare patients. This bill has already passed in the House but has been buried three times in the State Senate by conservative Senate President Pat Phillips. Nonetheless Metro Seniors are not giving up.

Metro Seniors are also responsible for pushing through House Bill 1984, currently on the floor, which would mandate a universal





health care plan by 2006. Additionally, the group led the successful campaign to get police officers assigned specifically to senior issues in all 25 Chicago police districts. These officers are supposed to do everything from check up on housebound seniors to investigate crimes and fraud against seniors.

Currently they are working on a campaign for traffic safety in the downtown Loop, where many seniors and others have been injured in the chaotic pedestrian and car traffic. This campaign includes installing a better system of traffic lights and expanding training or police powers for the crossing guards who direct traffic. "Last year when another Metro Senior and I were leaving a meeting downtown we were run down crossing the street," Bild said. "She is still in the hospital from brain injuries, and I was in the hospital several times from the accident. The guard who was there wrote a report claiming we were going west to east, when it was east to west. She had us stepping into traffic on a red light like we were idiots. We had crossed when the light changed but she wasn't doing her job directing traffic. The guards need better training to prevent things like this." Bild noted that one Metro Seniors' member was hit and pinned by a car in the Loop and ended up paying his own medical bills because the driver of the car fled the

scene and police never tracked him down. "They couldn't bring the ambulance in because the car that hit him was on top of him," Bild said. "The driver ran away and no one stopped him. The victim couldn't get any insurance money because there was no record of who did it. While the car was on top of him, no one even went to see if there was a letter to show whose car it was. After the city towed the car away there was no record of where they towed it."

As Murray happily pointed out, Metro Seniors have been a constant thorn in the side of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. "We've been to City Hall many times," said Sims. "We've been able to get a lot of things straightened out there." For four years the group pestered Daley to have a public meeting with them. He finally agreed, and hundreds of members were ready to bring up numerous issues and hold him accountable for his statements. Among other things, the mayor agreed to support the ordinance calling for universal health care.

Because Metro Seniors are a 501c3 non-profit organization, they don't endorse candidates. But the group regularly publicizes the record and positions of candidates for elected office on issues that relate to seniors. "We've called people to speak for us and then had accountability

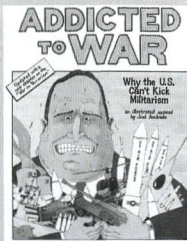
sessions with them, where we ask a series of questions and rate them 'for,' 'against' or 'waffling' on certain issues," Bild said. They conducted a session of this type with former Congressman Michael Flanigan. And they take some credit for Flanigan's ultimate defeat when he ran for re-election, since he didn't hold true on many of his promises. "We got him to agree to not sign onto any measures that would call for the privatization of Social Security or anything that would hurt Medicare," Bild said. "He reneged on that promise. We were part of a campaign that pointed that out to the public, and he lost the next election."

The group recently celebrated its 25-year anniversary with an all-day event at a South Side restaurant. State Representative Constance Howard and Senator Barak Obama, two South Side politicians known for their progressive stances on many issues, spoke at the event. The seniors planned for a "walk-a-thon" coming up in the fall and other activist campaigns and fundraisers. These folks are more energized and active than a lot of younger people," said long-time member, Sam Ackerman. ★



## Addicted to War

Joel Andreas  
AK Press, 2002  
www.addictedtowar.com  
www.akpress.org



*Addicted to War* is a 62-page "illustrated expose" (comic) presenting and discussing the United States' history of militarism.

My father is a survivor of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; he spent six years in the Navy, and 20 years as a police officer. It's safe to say that he and I have different opinions on the relative value of a militaristic, police state.

For most of my adult life, I've tried to articulate to him why I'm deeply troubled, saddened, and angered by our country's commitment to militarism, and the structural dependency of our economy upon the military industrial complex. I've never been terribly successful (though we have managed to agree on a few specific points, like which politicians are idiots; all of them).

I read this book in an afternoon, and gave it to my father the next time I saw him. He gets it! He likes it! He even loaned the book to a friend of his, another veteran, because he was so surprised by the facts *Addicted to War* contains.

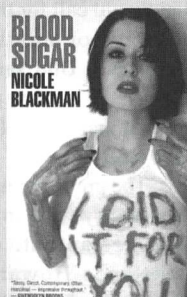
I've never experienced so readable, so well-researched an indictment of US policy. The comic style kept me turning pages, and the footnotes kept calling me to the Web to do further research. This book is perfect for a high school history class, or peace activist discussion groups. Great talking points, nicely researched, entertainingly presented.

The book doesn't direct readers toward any actionable strategies, but simply says "Kick out the war junkies!" When another character asks how, the book answers "That's up to us to figure out." I hope we do; *Addicted to War* will help.

—Bruce Bullis

## Blood Sugar

by Nicole Blackman  
Akashic Press, 2002  
www.akashicbooks.com



Nicole Blackman honed her poetic chops as a spoken-word performer, and it shows. The poems in *Blood Sugar* read like they are supposed to be performed.

Not just read, but performed. She has performed with musicians such as KMFDM, and Bill Laswell, and has graced the stage at the storied Nuyorican Poets Café in New York City, and appeared in the Nuyorican anthology, *Aloud*. She's been labeled an "alt-rock diva," and a "spoken-word diva," but these tags don't fully describe what Blackman does. I don't want to label her. I just like what she does.

As much as I love spoken-word artists, and slam poets, a lot of their work doesn't make the translation to the printed page. Blackman's poetry

makes the jump. She skillfully avoids the mistakes a lot of performance poetry makes, like sacrificing the poem's content for an easy rhyme, or turning the poem into a rant or a "dirty laundry" list. Her poems are tight and carefully paced, but never bookish. She comes off as modern, but not trendy.

There is a lot of sex in these poems. Sex is shown as a way to wield power, and as an obligation, but is rarely about love or intimacy. When love does show up in the poems, it's often unrequited love, obsession instead of love, or love for someone who's dead. A lot of the poems are about the differences between men and women, and how they perceive relationships. Even though a lot of these poems dealt with depressing subjects, they still made me want to go back and read them again, to revel on a cool turn of a phrase, or a great image.

Her best poems are the ones that tell a story. The poem, "Kim," which is a narrative poem about having coffee with a heroin-addicted friend, is my personal favorite of the book. It has the casual, loose feel of a slam-type poem, but it was still polished, with a careful and measured delivery. The narrative poems build and build, hooking you with strong images and good dynamics, and then smack you in the face with the last line. She has a great way with last lines.

The thing I liked the most about these poems was the imagery. Her descriptions were clear and tight. She uses a half a line to describe a feeling or to describe the setting of the poem, where a lesser writer might use a whole stanza.

There were a few poems in here that didn't work, though. There were a few, longer, prose poems and politically oriented poems that generally had a poor flow, were overlong and were a little heavy-handed.

For all of the heartache, death, betrayal, and manipulation in Blackman's poems, here is always a little hope, or something close to it, lurking in the background. There's not a whole lot, but it's there. And that glimmer is why the poems are so satisfying.

—Josh Medsker

## Everything You Know Is Wrong:

The Disinformation Guide to Secrets and Lies  
Edited by Russ Kick  
Disinformation Company, 2002



Based on the table of contents, contributing authors, and reviewer materials sent with this book, I expected the essays in it to be of the basic paranoid-liberal-shocking-truth-smoking-gun variety; something like a John Stockwell approach to current events. I was very wrong.

First, it's not simply a left-winger's anthology; there are no cows too sacred for EYKIW. Here are some assertions contained in the essays:

- Liberal anti-defamation organizations scare and intimidate black churchgoers in ways the KKK never could.

- Gun ownership prevents more crime than it enables.
- Mad cow disease has been present in the US for years, and is routinely mis-diagnosed.
- Pornography is empowering for women.
- Our country's educational system was intentionally designed to produce unthinking worker drones.

Did any of those surprise you? Do you disagree with any of them? Read this book. The essays are often written by people with uniquely informed viewpoints on their subject matter. A former police chief writes about the complicity and participation of police officers in organized crime, throughout America. A nuclear engineer writes about a disquieting number of nearly-tragic (and almost always preventable) incidents at nuclear power plants around the US. Arianna Huffington (yes, that Arianna Huffington) makes a great case for why advertising for prescription drugs should be banned.

There is an extra lesson here; just because someone has been pigeon-holed as conservative or liberal doesn't mean they can't find common ground with someone in their opposing camp.

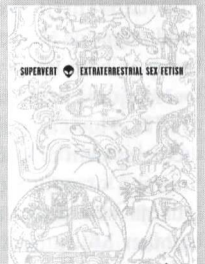
The essays aren't all pessimistic doom saying; some of them are quite funny, both in their playful treatment of subject matter ("Burn the Olive Tree, Sell the Lexus," addressing globalism and the IMF) and writing style ("Postcards From the Planet of the Freaks" shows a great attitude in the face of societal assumptions about the differently-abled). Also, "Fission Stories" has a dry, technical sense of humor which I really enjoyed.

Howard Zinn's account of the Colorado miner's strike and the birth of Pinkerton's reputation for union busting, was a personal favorite. He writing gave the subject stark immediacy and realism. I was moved.

I love this book.

—Bruce Bullis

**Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish**  
by Supervert  
Supervert 32C Inc., 2001  
www.supervert.com



Mercury de Sade is the shaved-head protagonist of *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*, and he's got a "thing" for ETs. In *ETSF*, Supervert ingeniously takes the UFO abduction myth and turns it upside-down. In the usual UFO abduction, UFO occupants kidnap an unsuspecting Earthling and take her to their flying saucer, where they perform unspeakable "experiments" involving sexual violation. Mercury de Sade, in contrast, is an Earth human who violates extraterrestrials.

The book is written in a non-linear "collage" form, comprised of short essays and vignettes. These short essays are grouped into four categories:

Alien Sex Scenes (ASS): these are fantasies where Mercury de Sade makes it with various extraterrestrials. The aliens are inventive parodies



of human women, and give Mercury de Sade the opportunity for insights into earthling sexuality. Alien planets are named after letters from the Greek alphabet — “aliens from Epsilon are unusually sensitive to telekinetic transmission” (p. 39). Usually, Mercury de Sade’s “exophilia” involves violence or rape.

**Methods of Deterrestrialization (MOD):** These are scenes from planet earth, where Mercury de Sade is a computer programmer in New York City. They involve other human characters—Charlotte Goddard (AKA Ninfa XIX), Charlotte’s father, and a couple of detectives hired by Charlotte’s father. Apparently, Mercury de Sade and Charlotte’s father vie for control of her. Charlotte is trying to get something from her father, but I’m not sure what. It’s hard to tell what’s going on exactly, as the book is written in a non-traditional collection of interleaved ASSes, MODs, LIEs, and DATs. However, this has the advantage of allowing the reader to browse the pieces, like a magazine. These scenes suggest the possibility that they’re the result of an attempt to write a traditional novel, with the usual continuity of scenes and plot, before it was cut up into essays.

**Lessons in Exophilosophy (LIE):** These are essays concerning what great Western philosophers thought about extraterrestrial life. They’re arranged chronologically, from ancient up to modern philosophers. These essays exhibit an impressive understanding of Western philosophy—many major Western philosophers are considered, including (but not limited to) Plato, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Husserl, Wittgenstein, and the Frankfurt School. It’s fascinating that so many great philosophers speculated about the existence of extraterrestrial life. These are written in a straightforward, serious style, and depart in tone from the other essays. These essays afford Supervert the chance to not only summarize much of Western philosophy, but also the discussions one finds in UFO literature. Some of these, for example, include, “If extraterrestrials exist, why haven’t they contacted us?” and “Are extraterrestrials good or evil?” and “Are extraterrestrials more (spiritually, socially, or technologically) advanced than us?” Although these essays have philosophical heft, their serious tone parodies Western philosophy, insofar as they’re in a book entitled *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*.

**Digressions and Tangents (DAT):** These are the pieces that don’t fit into any of the other categories. They contain diary excerpts of Mercury de Sade, observations about New York City, and even a description of Mercury de Sade’s appearance: “However, it was not hygiene that inspired Mercury de Sade to shave his head. Really he had been deeply affected by popular depictions of extraterrestrial beings, in which they were never shown with such amenities as hair and fingernails”.

That’s the parts that make up the whole of *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*. Does the whole work? It does. This book is entertaining for science-fiction aficionados, armchair philosophers, and UFO buffs. As a comic parody of UFO literature, ETSF is a welcome counterbalance to the strident seriousness of much UFO lit.

When I first encountered *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish* I was put off by the untraditional composition, but entered into the spirit of the book by random browsing. I was soon hooked by hilarious descriptions of alien sex. However, I’ve yet to unravel what’s going on with Charlotte, Mercury de Sade, and Charlotte’s father.

The documentary style of the “Lessons in Exophilosophy” work well, and give the reader an overview of extraterrestrial issues. One thing that might’ve been included is a bibliography of good UFO books, for those wanting to delve deeper. Also, with all the references to mathematical set theory and computer programming, I was disappointed not to find any mention of the famous Drake equation, which predicts the number (N) of detectable, intelligent extraterrestrial species:

$$N = (R^*) (F_p) (N_e) (F_l) (F_i) (F_c) \times L$$

$R^*$  is the rate of star formation

$F_p$  is the fraction of stars with planets

$N_e$  is the fraction of planets with an environment suitable for life

$F_l$  is the fraction of suitable planets where life actually appears

$F_i$  is the fraction of life-bearing planets on which intelligence emerges

$F_c$  is the fraction of intelligent societies with a desire and ability to communicate with other worlds

$L$  is the length of time an intelligent ET society remains communicative.

Scientific work has been done on each of these factors. Notably, when the Drake equation was first invented, no planets outside of our solar system ( $F_p$ ) had been discovered, and there was even some question as to whether planets orbiting distant stars existed at all. Just in the last few years, however, evidence of planets orbiting other stars besides our sun has been detected.

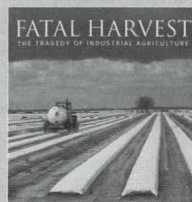
Supervert reveals his hand in Appendix Two of ETSF, where he states: “I believe that there is no conscious intelligence (other than man) anywhere in the universe.” This reviewer believes that the jury is still out. However, given the number of stars visible in an unpolluted sky (perhaps Supervert has spent too much time in Manhattan), I don’t see why there shouldn’t be extraterrestrials out there somewhere. Whether anyone wants to fuck them is the question posed by *Extraterrestrial Sex Fetish*.

—Joshua Berlow

## Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture

Edited by Andrew Kimbrell  
Island Press, 2002

Symmetrical rows of rich furrowed earth under an endless sky; tender green shoots pushing out of thick black soil; bright sunflowers bowing their heads in the searing midday sun; green, gold and blue fields seen from the air, forming a lovely



patchwork cut by dirt roads and irrigation systems.

These are some of the lush, full-color and full-page images in *Fatal Harvest*, a majestic coffee table book covering the current economic, cultural and environmental crisis in farming in the U.S. The activist groups who have worked together to put out this book hope it will be something of a call to action for people about the health, economic, environmental and cultural dangers of our country’s rapid embrace of industrial mega-farms and cost-effective biotechnology. Along with the stunning photos, the book is made up of a collection of essays and articles on various facets of industrial farming. There is “The Preservation of the Agrarian Mind” by Wendell Berry, “Industrial Agriculture’s War Against Nature” and many others. There are also sections on toxins in farming; the social and economic impacts of industrial agriculture and biodiversity and wildlife.

There is a whole section debunking industry myths about industrial agriculture — the myths that industrial food is cheaper and more efficient; that it can solve world hunger; that it offers more choices and helps the environment.

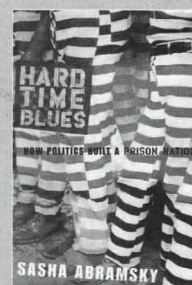
A running theme throughout the book is the tragedy of the mental and physical disconnect between food and our awareness of the earth — along with discussion of how to protect and re-establish this awareness. The section offering ideas and hope for the future includes articles on organic foods and the ethics of eating.

The book also includes easy to read sidebars on melons, soybeans, raspberries and various other crops — how they are grown and how their production is affected by industrial farming.

—Kari Lydersen

## Hard Time Blues: How Politics Built a Prison Nation

By Sasha Abramsky  
St. Martin’s Press, 2002



Former California governor Pete Wilson was driven by a lust for power and an astute understanding of how to manipulate public opinion and emotion.

Working-class Mexican-American Billy Ochoa was driven by a penchant for taking the easy road and a taste for heroin.

Wilson never met Ochoa, and Ochoa might have hardly recognized Wilson’s name, but in his first book, *Hard Time Blues*, journalist Sasha Abramsky shows how the fates of the two men at opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum are linked.

Using black humor and extensive research, Abramsky lays a foundation of the history and philosophy of crime and punishment and prison systems as a whole around the world. Then with colorful, down to earth narrative he shows how these



two men figure into the illogical war on drugs and fanatical American desire for more punishment and by extension more prisons. The book provides ample facts and background information for understanding of and activism around prison and drug war issues; and also puts a human face on the countless people caught up in this system as well as the politicians and powers driving it.

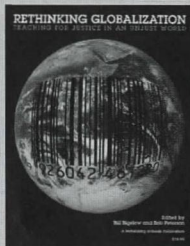
-Kari Lydersen

## Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World

Edited by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson

Rethinking Schools Press, 2002

[www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org)



The cost of our comfort exacts an enormous toll on millions of working children and women around the world. In Honduras, a seven-year old spends ten hours a day making softballs. Overcome by the weariness of the work and the exacting toll sewing hundreds of softballs takes on his little body, he often falls asleep. In Chiriqui, the westernmost province of Panama, it is not uncommon to find 8-13 year olds picking coffee beans instead of thriving from the challenges of learning math. In Haiti women work for 28 cents an hour making garments for Disney, while women in Vietnam labor just as long hours working in Nike factories.

From Honduras to Panama and Vietnam to Pakistan, the boiling and poorly ventilated corridors of buildings are filled with women and children producing everything from tennis shoes to Barbie Dolls and soccer balls to electronic toys. Global sweatshops are decades long fixtures in small villages throughout Kenya and urban enclaves in the United States. The stories behind the lives of those, toiling for the comfort of others, is grueling.

In *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*, editors Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson offer a solid and comprehensive collection of essays, riveting poems, great source materials, teaching ideas, lesson plans, and resources for teachers detailing the horrors of in the injustices of the "Global Village" and proposing suggestions for more equitable economic solutions. From sections on the "Legacy of Inequality: Colonial Roots" and "Kids for Sale: Child Labor in the Global Economy" to "Just Food?" and "Culture, Consumption and the Environment," Bigelow and Peterson lay a road map to assist teachers in examining what globalization really means and what it could mean a decade from now.

The book includes essays like Leticia Bula-at's "The Kalinga Women Against the Chico Dam." Focusing on the daunting struggle of the Ibaloi women, protesting the San Roque Dam project in the Philippines, Bula-at provides an overview of the economic strategies used to deconstruct and destabilize communities and nations, resealing their fate in the tentacles of "colonialism without

colonies." In "Globalization Myths" the editors provide a list of ten myths that drive the thinking about the "principles" of Globalization. Myth Number Nine states, "Globalization will spread freedom and Democracy by increasing trade between nations." From China to Honduras and Haiti to Thailand, one would be hard pressed to provide daily examples of freedom and Democracy thriving. But under the guise of bringing the human family closer together and uniting communities into a global village, these women and children are being exploited through the commerce of the sex trade, electronics industry as well as through the manufacture of equipment for aspiring and professional athletes.

From compelling poems by Marge Piercy, Langston Hughes, Okot P'Bitek, and Jimmy Santiago Baca to "Prayers for a Dignified Life" to comprehensive resource sections and the bar coded globe on the cover, Bigelow and Peterson have created an essential document for teachers seeking a guidebook on the impact and ramifications of globalization. I urge the millions of America's teachers to use this book to take a reality tour of the global village.

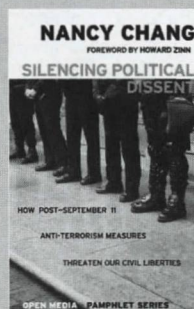
-Daphne Muse

## Silencing Political Dissent: How The USA PATRIOT Act Undermines The Constitution

Nancy Chang and the Center for Constitutional Rights

Open Media Pamphlet Series, 2002

[www.sevenstories.com](http://www.sevenstories.com)



The very phrase USA PATRIOT Act sounds sinister, and in the wake of 9/11 and the resulting hysteria, much has been said about it in the independent and mainstream media. This pamphlet, which is an excerpt from an upcoming larger book, lays out some of the basic ways that the act undermines our liberties.

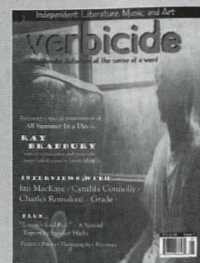
Some of the key ways in which it does this is by expanding the rights of investigators to act without warrants, tracking internet usage, and sharing intelligence among the FBI, CIA, INS and other agencies. Some parts of the act will expire in 2005, such as Section 218 which allows law enforcement to ignore the 4th amendment if they claim they're acting to prevent terrorism, while other parts have no scheduled expiration date, such as section 216 which allows increased tracking of internet usage.

For those who don't have the time to read the 342 page act, this pamphlet is a good introduction to some of the act's key elements. However, if you're looking for an in-depth look at the act and it's implications, then you're probably better off waiting for the forthcoming book which this pamphlet is just a small part of.

-Rich Booher

## Verbicide # 5

[www.scissorpress.com](http://www.scissorpress.com)



*Verbicide* is a zine that takes itself much more seriously than many other publications, and it shows. Aiming much higher than the typical interview/article/record reviews zine, *Verbicide* continually hits the mark, emphasizing content over style, substance over "hey! Look at the cool people we got to interview!"

That isn't to say that they don't interview some exciting and dynamic people. I had never heard of *Salad Days* author Charles Romalotti or photographer Cynthia Connolly; after reading well-written and well-thought-out interviews with them by co-editor Jackson Ellis I feel that I have learned much about them, their work, and their creative process. There is even an interview with some guy named Ian MacKaye. Too many interviews in too many DIY and mainstream magazine skim the surface for tiny bits of throw-away information; *Verbicide* interviews combine the best of what-do-you and why-do-you with amazing looks into HOW-do-you, and that distinguishes this zine from the pack. Romalotti even says at one point "You ask the best questions I've ever been asked in an interview."

There are a few things that seem out of place content and quality-wise in *Verbicide*, but the nice thing is that those few things are the exception, not the rule. I felt like they included their record reviews and band profiles just because they felt like a zine should have them, but they didn't add much to the overall magazine. The anti-protester rant near the end of the magazine was not only hastily, poorly written, but also treated its subjects like a bunch of morons. This last article disrupted the continuity of the zine and threatened to overshadow the quality the zine as a whole displayed.

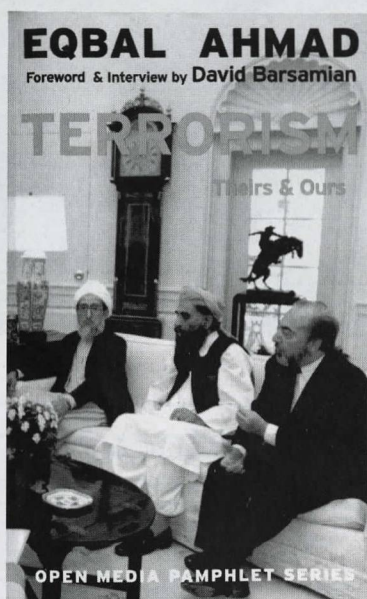
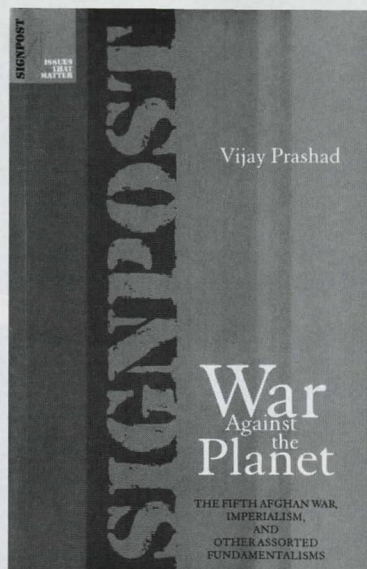
An artist myself, it was interesting to read what makes other creative people tick. Sometimes *Verbicide* strays a little bit too far into academia (an essay discussing ethics could be seen as a primer on why I don't read philosophy) or into incoherence (what exactly were they trying to say in the introductory notes?), but even when straying they do so with conviction and confidence, knowing that those who *do* understand them will appreciate their efforts even more.

-Jim Withington

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## **Terrorism: Theirs and Ours**

by Eqbal Ahmad  
Seven Stories Press, 2002  
[www.sevenstories.com](http://www.sevenstories.com)

## **War Against the Planet: The Fifth Afghan War Imperialism, and Other Assorted Fundamentalisms**

by Vijay Prashad  
LeftWord Books, 2002  
[www.cpim.org/leftword.htm](http://www.cpim.org/leftword.htm)

"I also made it clear that we were going to do everything possible to deny sanctuary — that means places to train, places to recruit, places to — places from which to fight — deny sanctuary to the terrorists. And we did that. Thanks to a mighty United States military and our coalition...we threw out a barbaric regime.... We didn't go to conquer a country; we went in to free a country, because we believe in freedom for every individual, no matter where they live in the world."

—President George W. Bush, In a May 2002 Speech to Milwaukee, Wisconsin High School Students.

Official statements about terrorism, the Afghan war, freedom, and democracy are rife with hypocrisy. Few in the media, let alone our government, dare question and discuss the fundamental problems that have created this massive, stateless network of people so wrathful they used commercial airplanes as guided missiles. But for those that are asking why — why nearly 3,000 people died on September 11, and why approximately 4,000 Afghan civilians were killed in response — two recently published books will answer many of your questions.

*War Against the Planet: The Fifth Afghan War, Imperialism; and Other Assorted Fundamentalisms* by Vijay Prashad and *Terrorism: Theirs and Ours* by Eqbal Ahmad cover the internal and external stimuli leading to the rise in Islamic fundamentalism and the new form of violence that is, much like the economy, now globalized. Both authors make statements criticizing the U.S. response to terrorism, and both agree there will be more attacks if the U.S. continues in its hegemonic pursuits. Prashad deals more with the U.S. influence in East Asia and the Middle East, while Ahmad focuses specifically on the definitions and sources of terrorism.

Prashad, native of India and now Professor of International Studies at Trinity College and contributor to *Z Magazine*, says there is a simple explanation as to why the Islamic right is so hostile to the West. The U.S. has exploited these groups for over 50 years in efforts to undermine communist and progressive movements in the East Asia and the Middle East. Prashad explains why the U.S. facilitated the destruction of these movements, and how it gained strategic influence in the region, most notably in Saudi Arabia. He describes the unbalanced relationship between the Saudi royal family and the U.S. that has created the phenomenon of "McJihad" — repressive regimes using the U.S. as a broker to sell their national interests to transnational corporations behind the backs of a populace bred on fealty and anti-modernity. When the people learn of this submission to U.S. imperialism, Prashad says, feelings of disenchantment and abandonment lead them to embrace fundamentalist Islam and paramilitary fervor. Prashad describes the CIA sculpting of Bin Laden, his fulminating hatred for the U.S., and how he will prove to be most threatening as an enduring symbol for a violent worldwide network.

The reasons why the U.S. isolates bin Laden as the "Evil" responsible for September 11 are clear, says Prashad. Reminding us that not one of the attackers was of Afghan descent, he states that focusing on bin Laden suppresses the need to investigate the 19 Saudi men that were involved and the conditions that influenced their behavior. It suppresses the need to assess why so many others will continue to lack freedoms long after the U.S. declares itself the victor of yet another war for "democracy."

Prashad says that in the late 1970s, Afghanistan had a regime of tolerance and participation. One that encouraged the formation of labor unions, implemented land reforms, established a minimum wage, and promoted equal rights of women. He believes that this is key; that

the rebirth of the Left will naturally erode the conditions that have created bin Laden and other adherents to radical Islam.

The second book, *Terrorism: Theirs and Ours*, is part of the Seven Stories Press "Open Media Pamphlet Series." It includes a transcription of one of Eqbal Ahmad's lectures and two interviews with Ahmad and David Barsamian. In his introduction, Barsamian says that Ahmad, who died in 1999, had a "prophetic sense" of the major threat of terrorism. Ahmad, another native of India who taught in the U.S. and is remembered for his dedication to human rights, discussed the mutating face of terrorism. Listing Palestinians and the Mujahideen as examples, Ahmad noted a history where the freedom fighters of yesterday become the terrorists of today (the cover of the book is a photo of former President Reagan meeting with members of the Mujahideen in the White House). Ahmad found the State Department definition of terrorism conveniently ambiguous and cited official documents using "modern barbarism," "a threat to Western Civilization," and "a menace to Western moral values." He preferred the more judicious definition of Webster's Collegiate: terrorism is "the use of terrorizing methods of governing or resisting a government." Like Prashad, Ahmad concluded that the U.S. avoids defining terrorism because that would involve a deeper understanding of its roots and uniform policies to deal with it.

In this lecture delivered at the University of Boulder, Colorado in 1998, Ahmad described the reasoning of terrorists. First, he said, as a minority group that feels they are not being heard, terrorism is a form of expression. Second, terrorism is a declaration of anger and a reaction to the terrorist act continues the pattern of abuse. Third, terrorists believe in loyalty and revenge, the two pillars of tribal ethics. When bin Laden and others are an ally one-day, and an enemy the next, said Ahmad, confusion sets in. They are loyal until promises are broken and then they take revenge.

Stating that the absence of revolutionary ideology helps terrorism thrive, Ahmad affirmed that social problems are not solved by individual acts of violence. He said social problems require social mobilization. Stating that when "you practice double standards, you'll be paid with double standards," Ahmad offered advice about how the U.S. could deal with this likely tinderbox. "Look for political solutions," advised Ahmad, "Military solutions cause more problems than they solve."

Ahmad's advice may be too late, but the context both he and Prashad provide for a greater understanding of the issues and agendas that have created terrorism can be applied toward wider social comprehension of what is necessary to improve global relations. Finding the courage to ask difficult questions about terrorism, the attacks of September 11, and the Fifth Afghan War is crucial. But even more imperative, is making a commitment to seek the answers.

— Catherine Komp

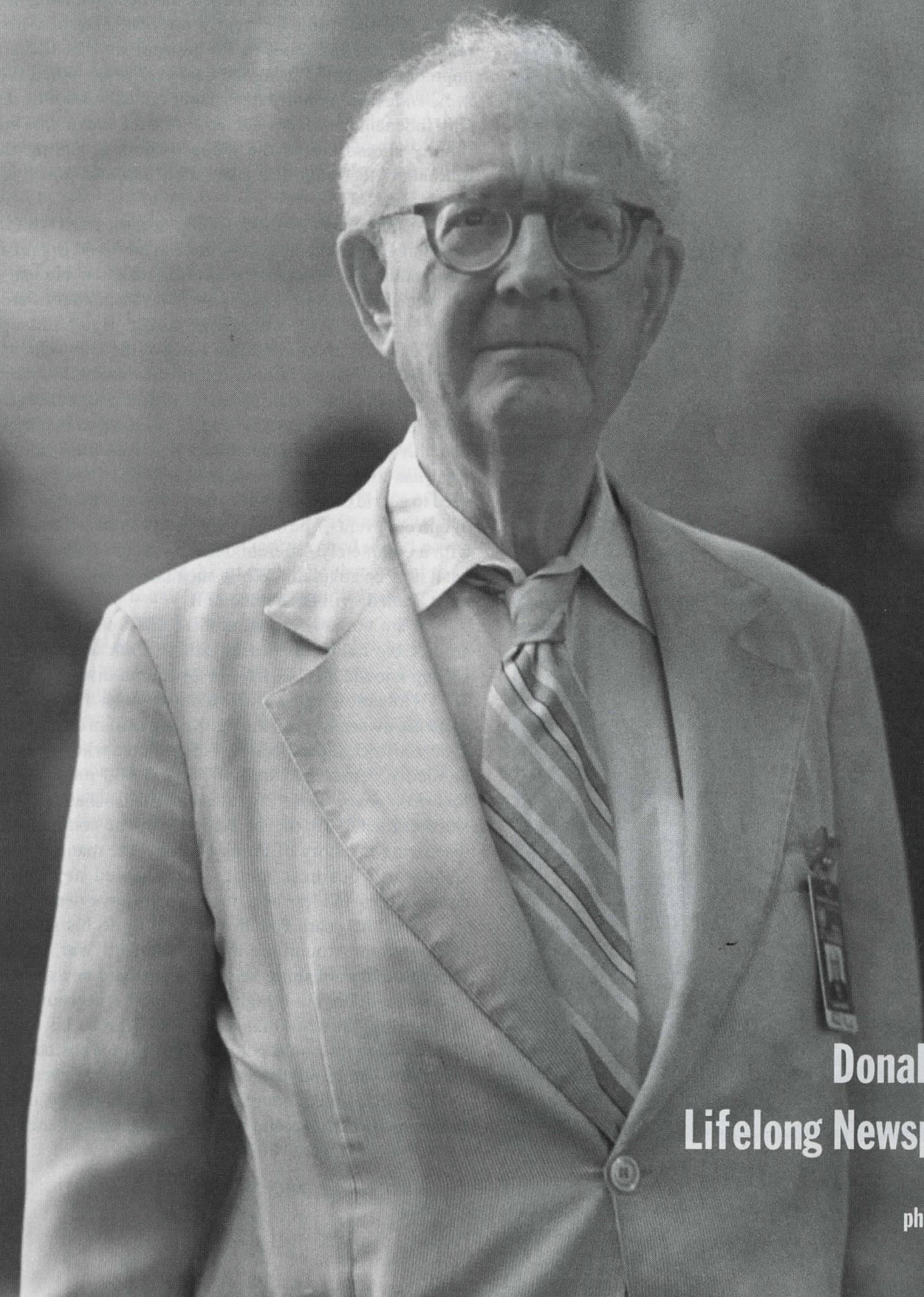


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# RETIREMENT?

## What's That?



**Donald Paneth,**  
**Lifelong Newspaperman**

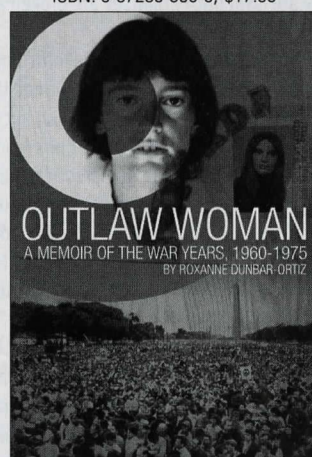
by Michael Burke  
photos by Fred Askew

New from City Lights Publishers

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A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975

By Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz  
ISBN: 0-87286-390-5; \$17.95

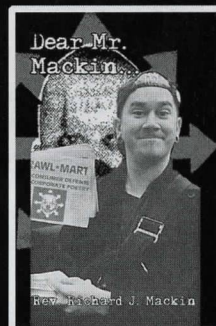


A founder of the feminist movement tells of her life as a radical activist and revolutionary.

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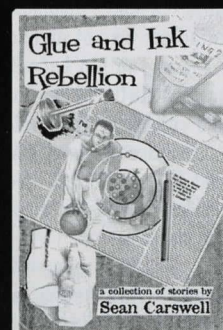


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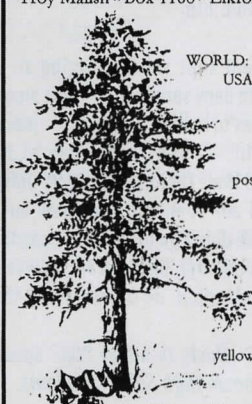
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DROP OUT AND STICK AROUND (lyrics) - wakes up, there's a new crack in the ceiling. still not big enough to squeeze through; the days get long as years get short. revolution waits on weekends, eats tofu while we wait tables. cheques are signed with the same stamp as the grocery store receipt. if we knew their names maybe we could look them in their eyes and walk away. i've got this feeling that we could squat the castle at the end of the rainbow. stand toe to toe with mirrors and mist the glass with the words, "how can life be worth living when our lives are best spent sleeping?" teach me to revolt against this need to need. send me the message to fight this urge to fight. sell me the machine to kill this want to own. send me the means to end this eating and eating and sleeping. let me do nothing, i'll do anything. let me have nothing, i'll give you everything. to a soldier without a country an anthem is only a song. i don't want to do this anymore.

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# I am not radical, not at all. I don't consider myself radical. I am not the radical professor, no sir. I am talking sense, and I am talking knowledge.



Retirement? Never an option. A nursing home? Out of the question. Age is no reason to slow down or lose focus, there is simply too much to do, says Donald Paneth, a 75-year-old newspaperman from New York. "To keep going is no problem. Things are too utterly fascinating," said Paneth in a recent interview in front of New York City Hall, a few blocks north of ground zero. "Even if we all get blown to hell while we are sitting here. It is so fascinating. How can one take one's eyes away from the world."

As a reporter for the *New York Times*, the *Newark Star Ledger*, and the *Jersey City Journal*, as well as a staff writer for the United Nations' annual yearbook, Paneth has been focusing his eyes on the world and reporting for nearly 60 years. Despite his impressive resume, Paneth's passion for journalism has led him down an unpredictable path during the past year as he joined the staff of the *Indydependent*, a monthly newspaper published out of the New York City Independent Media Center. While the Indymedia movement has rapidly spread across the globe, Paneth is among the few elder journalists to bridge the generation gap and join this new media movement.

At first glance, Paneth simply doesn't fit in with the high-tech world of Indymedia. A typewriter can be found in his office, but not a computer, cell phone, or answering machine. He had never surfed the Web until last year. MP3 is not in his vocabulary. And his standard dress includes a tie and sports jacket. But philosophically and intellectually, Paneth and papers such as the *Indydependent* are a perfect match. His view on how to reform our media institutions is likely more extreme than that of many of his new colleagues, about 50 years his junior. "It is a lost cause. We need to begin all over," says Paneth. "[Take] the *Indydependent*. It started from scratch and that is what has to be done. We need to get rid of the current dailies. We need to get rid of the television news which is a ridiculous presentation of current events," he says. "We've got to start all over again freshly with a completely different understanding of what is to be done and what is to be covered." While such talk would be deemed radical by most, Paneth will have none of it.

"I am not radical, not at all. I don't consider myself radical. I am not the radical professor, no sir. I am talking sense, and I am talking knowledge," he says in a firm but distinguished voice.

While most media critics today bemoan the recent concentration of media ownership and the right-wing shift in coverage, Paneth takes a more historical perspective. This is a man who, in the 1980s, single-handedly researched and wrote the 600-page *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*. "American journalism has deteriorated steadily since at least 1910, maybe since 1900," he comments, as he begins discussing the story of Frank Munsey, the man who introduced the strong-arm business tactics that viewed newspapers more as commodities and less as a means to preserve democracy.

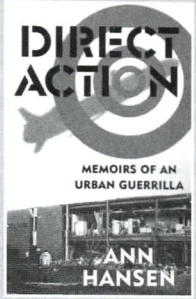
Over the years Paneth has tried to do his part to reverse this deterioration. Around the time of the Gulf War, he began his own underground publishing venture: a postcard newspaper. The project never caught on, but it highlights Paneth's ingenuity and dedication in spreading the news that is not fit to print by his former employer. "I decided that I could get more news on a postcard than what the New York Times publishes any single day," he recalled.

His ideas seem boundless as does his energy, traits that remain rare in many activists and writers younger than Paneth, and virtually



**Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerilla\***

by Ann Hansen  
AK Press/BTL, 2001  
www.akpress.org



There's quite a fetishism on the left about armed groups, and it clearly reveals that a lot of people are spending a lot of time, and soul-searching, in considering picking up the gun. Ann Hansen reveals her own views and choices that led her into what is usually called the "Vancouver Five" actually two separate groups, Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade. *Direct Action* is all details and accounting, as Hansen tries to reconstruct every detail of their couple years underground. Initially an exciting read, the recitation of minute details soon bogged down, and grinds to its anti-climatic halt.

Hansen came out of Vancouver, Canada's radical scene in the early '80s. With a few others — including Gerry Hannah, the bassist of the Canadian political punk band the Subhumans — they went underground to take on the system. With a politics that has Anarchy championing them as proto-Primitivists, Direct Action focused on the continued militarization of Canada during the Cold War; the expansion of capitalism into the still-undeveloped wilderness; the oppression of native peoples; and a now out-of-favor, Dworkinite feminism which focused on opposition to pornography and lesbian separatism.

But all of this was framed by the Cold War, where world leaders were willing to toy with nuclear war to defend their own power and systems of control. In desperation and moral revulsion, and guided by a vision of true egalitarianism, Direct Action took just that.

After abandoning legal political activity, they first vandalized the offices of the Amax corporation and the Canadian Ministry of the Environment, who they saw as exploiting the environment. After these successes, they stole dynamite, started constructing illegal identities, stockpiled guns and compulsively stole vehicles to use.

They bombed the Hydro's Cheekeye-Dunsmuir power transmission substation on Vancouver Island in B.C., after legal and civil disobedience strategies by environmentalists and native peoples failed. An expansion of industrial Canada into the wilderness, it was funded by taxpayers and was ultimately meant to sell hydro-electric power to the States.

They then turned to the Litton Systems plant near Toronto, where guidance system components for Cruise missiles were made. They parked a truck full of dynamite against the Litton Systems plant, and phoned in a warning. Tragically, the message was garbled, the plant wasn't evacuated immediately, and the bomb's timer malfunctioned and exploded early. A building unconnected to the Cruise components manufacturing was completely trashed, and several people were severely injured.

Although they continued to make plans for further actions, only one came off. In conjunction with local radical feminists, the Wimmin's Fire Brigade firebombed several Red Hot Video outlets in Vancouver, which carried violent porn videos. Local feminist groups had already unsuccessfully attempted to have the stores prosecuted, and the attacks garnered vocal public support from women's groups. The Five were arrested soon after by the police, who had watched the last attacks, fearful that their arrests would compromise their case against them for the other bombings. This is amidst the last hundred pages, which drag on interminably, as Hansen meticulously recounts the plans for a Brink's robbery which never happens.

Amid all of this is much hand-wrangling over what the group is doing. Hansen eventually admits that they are neither challenging the system directly, nor inspiring others to take up arms as well. In a recent interview, she says, "The most important error was in not realizing that without a revolutionary social movement in place urban guerrilla tactics won't work — there is no continuity. These links between social movements and radical actions are strategic political questions that must be addressed." But by the time she came to this realization, it was all too late.

The five were caught and given sentences that ranged from 6 years to Hansen's life sentence. Astoundingly, she was out in only eight years. Total resistance had garnered, not a martyr's death in a hail of bullets, but relative leniency.

Ultimately, one can criticize Ann Hansen for wanting to expunge her life publicly in an overly long book, or for failing to get the editor she needed (and, indeed, deserved). But maybe that's still too harsh — she does have a fluid and readable style. One can even take the high ground, if one dares, and charge her with participating in reckless political action. But I don't think it's possible to assail someone for their willingness to give everything for what was so transparently right.

-Sasha Ethiopia

\*this entire review is published online at <http://info.interactivist.net>

non-existent among many of his fellow 70-somethings, especially journalists. He has discussed recently what it would take to start publishing a one-sided broadsheet akin to this country's earliest publications. "There is so much to write about and there are so many possibilities in things," Paneth explains. "The young people are wonderful. When you get on a little bit in America you lose the motivation. You get married, you have kids, you buy a car and a house. That's what happened to newspapermen. They acquired families and some possessions and everything else disappeared on them. Well, that didn't happen to my wife and myself, I can say that," Paneth asserts. "We didn't let that happen. We never owned a car. We learned to drive back around 1973. We never even rented a car."

Paneth's wife, Elma, died in 1987 after a six-year battle with breast cancer. Based loosely on a series of interviews with "El" between 1981 and her death, Paneth has been drafting a trilogy of novels. "I knew I wouldn't just let it go, her death and our lives together," said Paneth who has vowed to remain unmarried. Three years after El's passing, Paneth returned to Stockholm where they had vacationed in 1974 with their two children. He now returns as often as possible and has considered moving there to escape America. "I'd like to get a job in Stockholm and get the hell out of here. Fuck all this is what I say. If they [the Bush administration] want to run things, they can, because they are running it into the ground. I don't give a damn," he said. "There is nothing I want here except when something catches me up like the *Independent* where the people are wonderful. I am going to stay with that for the foreseeable future."

Returning to the official work world will not likely phase Paneth who is retired only in theory. He maintains a grueling work schedule where he often stays up until 5 a.m. writing and researching. While his former journalist colleagues are enjoying their senior years living off their fame and fortunes, Paneth is volunteering for a free activist newspaper with distribution at a mere 10,000. "I have never retired; I am against retirement. At least for me it is not a good idea. I have a lot of things on my mind, a lot of things to do and that I want to do and that I am doing. Work is extremely important," he said.

Paneth's secrets on aging could apply to anyone: continual education, continual self-growth, and the acceptance of change. "You are constantly trying to define yourself, asking who am I? You keep changing. You are not the same person even a year ago, five years ago. You are different. You change, you grow. That's the thing, a human being is capable of great growth and most people stop growing, they don't have the concept of growth. You don't get into a mode of living, you keep aspiring, changing and growing so ten years later you see what've you done and you see it is surprising how much one can do." ★



## Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media;

by DeeDee Halleck

Fordham University Press, 2002

www.fordhampress.com

## Writing Dissent:

### Taking Radical Ideas from the Margins to the Mainstream

by Robert Jensen

Peter Lang, 2001

www.peterlang.com

*Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media* takes the reader through a comprehensive history of modern grassroots media, spanning forty years, four continents, and hundreds of community media makers. Focusing on film, video, and TV activism, this book chronicles the work of the passionate and persistent people who helped contribute to the healthy state of community media today. For most of her life, author DeeDee Halleck has cultivated grassroots media projects and relationships. Her book is both an archive and a guide for those interested in strengthening the people's media.

*Hand-Held Visions* is a collection of Halleck's essays, presentations, and lectures written throughout her career, often during climactic events and intense projects. Chapters of the book include "A Salutary Dose of Poison: Teaching Media as a Homeopathic Cure," "Smashing the Myths of the Information Industry: Creating Alternatives," and "Public Space/Public Sphere: Infrastructures for Resistance." Recalling her exposure to one of first TVs — the neighborhood gathering around a jerry-rigged tube wired up to a — "box of junk" in someone's garage — Halleck remarks that the onset of this technology was a communal event. After witnessing corporations take control of TV for commercial purposes, Halleck resolved to bring it back to the people.

The democratizing process of making media is a critical force driving Halleck's work. In addition to teaching people the technical aspects of film and video and fostering accessibility to the necessary resources, Halleck encourages people to use this media as a form of expression. She hopes the addition of numerous voices and views will restore some integrity to U.S. democracy. She sees public access television, which is often derided by both the mainstream and the Left, as a truly democratic representation of media made by and for the people. All the programs may not be interesting, says Halleck, but the emphasis is on the process and the potential power unleashed when people become the media. Halleck herself worked with the Paper Tiger collective and Deep Dish Network in Manhattan, two groups flaunting their ragtag methods of creating low-budget television in efforts to spark more interest in the underutilized channel of public access.

One of the most fascinating parts of Halleck's book is a chronology of the Gulf Crisis TV Project. Aptly titled "The Camcorder Goes to War: Making Outrage Contagious," this chapter recounts the dizzying events of a project that began with a plea for an alternative program on the looming Gulf War and a \$300 check, and exploded into a ten-part series made from footage taken by video activists across the U.S. that was transmitted via satellite all over the world.

Halleck's testimonies forward the idea that people can beat the mechanization of modern life through the power of production. With increased access to cameras and computers, groups can come together to document their struggles and triumphs. Yes, corporations have a stronghold on the media, but Halleck maintains it is not all-powerful and beyond control. Taking issue with the Left for their wholesale neglect of public access, she maintains that people need to create alternatives to commercial media instead of waging futile battles with existing media structures. Halleck calls for a new information order — one driven by culture and participation, not passively absorbed by consumers.

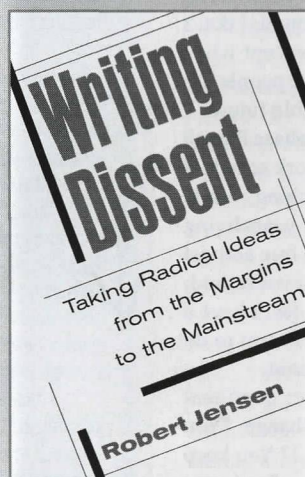
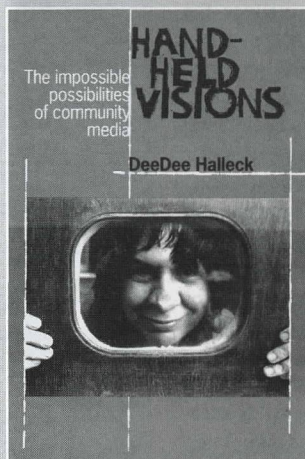
Indeed Halleck's rallying call strikes an urgent need to create and fortify grassroots media structures. But to reach a wider audience, infiltration is helpful. *Writing Dissent: Taking Radical Ideas from the Margins to the Mainstream* takes another approach to broadening the scope of alternative media. Journalist, academic, and activist Robert Jensen has developed a manual that provides seasoned advice on how to get published in the mainstream media. Describing journalistic writing as a craft anyone can learn, Jensen asks all progressive and radically minded people to consider whether writing for the mainstream is worth the investment. His answer is yes, but is parcel to a three-part strategy: production of and support for alternative media; monitoring and criticism of mainstream media; and the use of mainstream media as a means to disseminate progressive thought. Jensen argues an obvious but often slighted logic: because the majority of Americans get information from the mainstream, radicals must use this outlet to reach new people. The hundreds of calls and letters Jensen receives in response to pieces he has published in the mainstream are proof that his message is resounding.

Strategies in *Writing Dissent* include how to work with and appeal to editors, how to write a radical argument in 700 words or less, and how to turn conventional wisdom upside down. He advises readers on how to find new angles for persistent issues and how to spotlight stories neglected by the mainstream. Jensen, who some call one of the leading radical writers of our time, offers his published pieces as examples of how he employs these techniques. From his work at a daily paper, Jensen learned that editors want pieces that comment on current issues. Jensen used foreknowledge of the demonstrations at the Seattle WTO meetings, to wedge in a criticism of corporate globalization. He knew most journalists would be focusing on the protests and that a fresh angle would appeal to editors. Jensen's piece on how the WTO is an attack on democracy ran in the Houston Chronicle on November 30, 1999, the first day of the meetings and the protests. Jensen also suggests that, at times, the personal approach can be very effective in the discussion of political issues. In a 1999 piece titled "Even a Child Sees Through Iraq Policy," published in the Dallas Morning News, Jensen contrasts his seven-year old son's resolve to send his allowance to Iraqi civilians with Madeline Albright's infamous remark that the deaths of half a million children in Iraq were "worth the price" of economic sanctions.

Jensen admits that on many issues, he's no expert. He doesn't need to be. And neither does anyone else. Being moved by an event or issue to the point of wanting to write about it is enough. Assembling the research of other writers and specialists (published articles, reports, studies, and legislation) and breaking it down into a language that ordinary citizens understand is one of the best approaches to diffusing issues and information. Describing his emotional reaction to many aspects of the Gulf War, Jensen shares what compels him as a writer: "I wrote mostly because I did not know what to do with my anger and pain. I wrote because when I was done writing, I felt as if there was a purpose for the pain and anger. I wrote because if I hadn't written, I would have felt worse than I did. And I wrote to be part of a larger movement for progressive change. I wrote for myself, and I wrote for others."

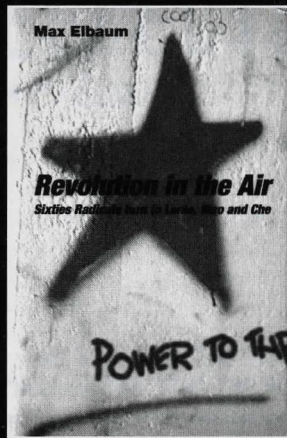
By providing advice and strategies along with encouragement, both Halleck and Jensen have moved beyond their individual roles in generating alternative media and reached out to embolden a wider audience. Their experiences underscore the level of commitment and work necessary to participate in media. But they demonstrate that the rewards — public empowerment, stronger communities, and a gradual rebuilding of democracy through a greater representation of voices in media — are clearly worth the investment.

—Catherine Komp





# Old is the new New.



## REVOLUTION IN THE AIR Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che

Max Elbaum

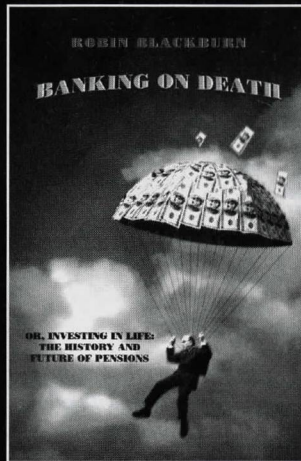
Cloth 1 85984 617 3 \$30

*Revolution in the Air* is the first in-depth study of the long march of the US New Left after 1968. It is the story of the New Communist Movement which was the most racially integrated and fast-growing movement on the Left. But by the 1980s the groups had either collapsed or become tiny shards of the dream of a Maoist world revolution.

Elbaum reclaims the lessons of the New Communist Movement for today's activists who, like their sixties' predecessors, are coming of age at a time when the Left lacks mass support and is fragmented along racial lines.

*If you still believe sixties radicalism was nothing more than youthful middle-class confusion or parochial identity politics, then open these pages and dig.*

— Robin D.G. Kelley, author of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*



## BANKING ON DEATH Or, Investing in Life: The History and Future of Pensions

Robin Blackburn

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*Banking on Death* offers a panoramic view of the history and future of pension provision, tracing the origins and development of the pension idea, from the days of the French Revolution to the troubles of the modern welfare state and concludes with a bold proposal for how to pay decent pensions for all.

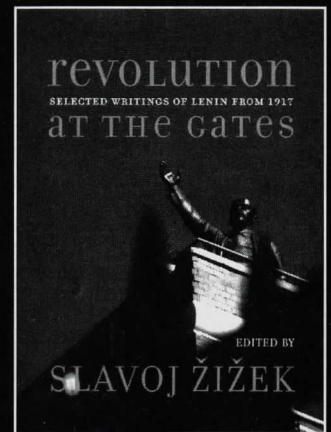
*Robin Blackburn...in this urgent and brilliant book, proposes a new strategy that unites workers of the world around democratic control of their own savings.*

— Mike Davis



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## REVOLUTION AT THE GATES Selected Writings of Lenin From 1917

edited with foreword and afterword by  
Slavoj Žižek

Cloth 1 85984 661 0 \$25

Lenin's writings of 1917 are a testament to a formidable political figure that reveal his ability to grasp the significance of an extraordinary moment in history. Everything is here, from Lenin-the-ingenious-revolutionary-strategist to Lenin-of-the-enacted-utopia. Žižek tackles the question of whether Lenin can be reinvented in our era of 'cultural capitalism' and he is convinced that Lenin's time has come again.

*After the Hungarian rebellion of 1956 was crushed by the Russian tanks, Georg Lukács was taken prisoner; when a KGB officer asked him if he had a weapon, Lukács calmly reached into his pocket and handed over his pen...If ever a pen was a weapon, it was the pen which wrote Lenin's 1917 texts.*

— from the Introduction



# CHASING

# WINDMILLS

## REFLECTIONS ON LIFE AFTER SCHOOL

BY MATT DINEEN

*"The problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities."*

-Emma Goldman

Where will you be in 10 years? Everyone secretly has this image in the back of his or her mind. The question is infinitely more profound when you find yourself at a "crossroads" in which 10 years in the future seems equally as uncertain (and exciting) as 10 months ahead. This is what those of us who are finishing up college are facing. It's something that is constantly swimming around in our consciousness. "What will I be doing," and "Who will I be in my post-school life?" are questions that we cannot escape. We would like to think that our ideals and life choices will remain consistent and hopefully develop further into something that we would be proud of, and even inspired by today. As a Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organizer once challenged young activists of the '60s — "How will you live your life so that it does not make a mockery of your values?" — this can be a constant struggle. A struggle that is often met with compromise as people enter the so-called real world. I was pummeled by this reality recently through a peculiar chain of events that I will attempt to narrate.

I go to Bard College in upstate New York. At Bard everyone does a senior project their final year. The archive of senior projects is found in the basement of the college's library and some of them go back several decades. Many of the projects are quite interesting and worth exploring. Every once in a while I'll find myself in the bowels of the library procrastinating from my course work and I'll peruse the archive. This was the situation one early spring day this past semester and I decided to search for projects by friends of mine who have graduated. I was unsuccessful, so I decided to look at a few random projects that all had the same last name of a friend of mine at Bard.

The first was a short mathematics project published four decades ago and I don't even remember the second one but it was only a couple years old. I casually picked up the last one, not expecting much. With that said it is difficult to accurately express my absolute delight when I read the title of this project that was submitted to the Department of Social Studies in 1990. I read the title over and over again to make sure I was not hallucinating: *Chasing Windmills: The Anarchist Vision of Emma Goldman*.

This was very exciting for me as I have been inspired by the life and struggle of this great anarchist and feminist since I read her autobiography, *Living My Life*, in 11th grade. That year I wrote a paper comparing Emma Goldman with Noam Chomsky and the ways in which both were/are repressed by ruling elites because of their dissenting beliefs and actions. Goldman's passion for life and her cause of a new society built on cooperation and solidarity had a profound effect on me. Her ideas, on topics such as militarism, gender roles, and freedom of speech were so radical in early 20th Century America and Europe that one could say that she was ahead of our time. Just amazing.

So, of course, rather than doing the assigned reading for my early morning class, I spent the next two hours reading this project on Emma Goldman's revolutionary life. I was glowing as this Bard alumna's project reinvigorated the intangible sensation that Goldman's words first evoked in me five years ago. In fact, I was so enthusiastic about this project that I decided that I must get in touch with its author. So, I contacted the alumni association and they promised to pass the message along to her. The following day she responded: "I received your email from the Bard alumni office and was delighted to hear that you are interested in my senior project. Please feel free to contact me by email or by phone at... Regards..."

The signature at the bottom of the e-mail read: "This message, which contains information from a law firm, may be confidential and privileged..." Hmmm... Whatever. I proceeded to write her back a passionate description of my connection with Emma Goldman and how thrilled I was to discover her project. I inquired about what she was doing, now that she had been away from Bard for nearly 12 years, and assured her that I did not expect her to be a revolutionary herself but that I was simply curious. I told her to write back when she had a chance. She *still* has not replied.

A couple days after I e-mailed her I decided to research the law firm she works for in New York City. Fulfilling my deepest fear, it turned out to be one of the largest corporate law firms in the country with additional offices in Chicago and Washington D.C. According to their Web site, the work they do ranges from assisting corporate mergers, protecting intellectual property for big business, and representing biotechnology firms. The author of *Chasing Windmills* is a leading attorney in the New York office practicing in the field of "corporate securities and finance work."

You can probably imagine my initial reaction to this new development. Yes, I was shocked. I denounced her as a hypocritical sell-out who has lost her soul, and there was part of me that wanted to share this with her. But after some reflection I decided to simply let my spirited e-mail stand for itself. Perhaps my hopeful words of inspiration would cause her to reflect where her life has ended up and conjure up similar sentiments that she once felt. Maybe not. I just thought it might have been more effective and appropriate than writing her back a hostile message of self-righteous condemnation.

I thought about this more, hypothesizing the various possibilities of this Bard graduate's life choices. Chances are that she, although interested in Emma Goldman, never identified with radical politics. Or perhaps she is attempting to change the system "from within," making a living acquiring sensitive information from the Monsanto corporation just to leak it to the Earth Liberation Front. Well, I suppose there might be more subtle methods.

I had a correspondence on this very subject with a faculty member at Bard and he suggested that working for the system, "offers the only opportunities for learning how the damned thing works." He assured me that I should, "expect to do the same." For him it's a matter of "where you end up, and how you can end up there equipped to make a real difference."

What do *you* think? Personally, I have no desire to climb the corporate ladder simply to gain a better understanding of "how the system works." I mean, why not just become a janitor or something in the corporate office and carefully eavesdrop and sabotage their operations? I don't know.

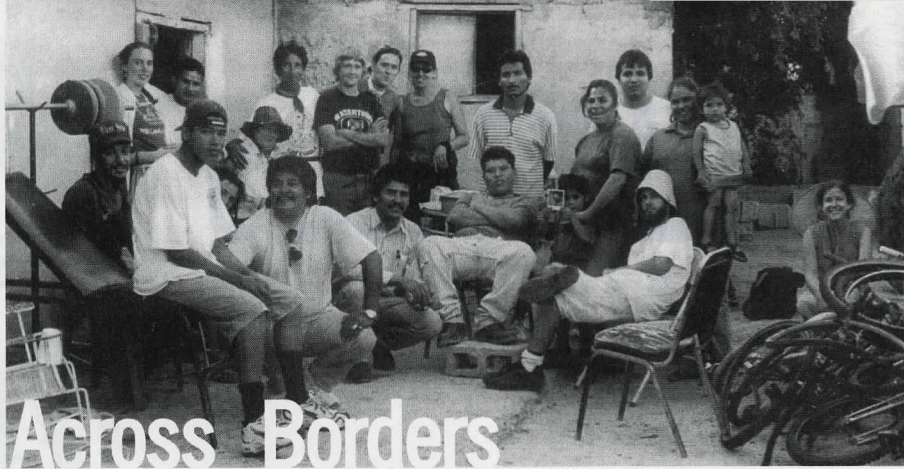
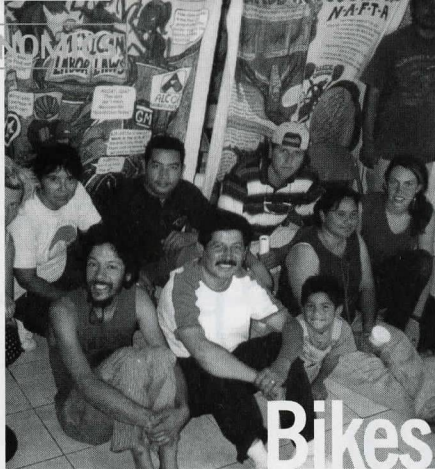
I can understand why some people make these decisions in their lives, but I personally reject the social construction of success. What does it mean to be "successful" in our society? In order to be deemed "worthy" one must obtain a certain level of material success. That means a high paying job that provides an economic surplus to afford a luxurious home, the newest model SUV, and countless other commodities. The dominant assumption suggests that this brand of success fundamentally provides happiness. Millions convince themselves that they will be miserable until they reach this level (hence the popularity of the lottery). However, I believe that most people who do obtain this success are *not* happy with their lives. Think about people you know who are rich. Are they the happiest people you know?

The slogan, "Live Simply. Simply Live," is actually very revealing here. For me, it makes so much sense that if I reduce my wants and simplify my needs, I won't have to kill myself to reach their standards of material success. This means being rewarded by not having to work as much, or working for something that "doesn't make a mockery of your values." Recently, I have been exposed to this potential.

Another Bard alumnus that I have stayed in touch with is the artistic director for a radical book publisher in New York City and still has time to play drums in a local band. And this summer I interned at a progressive media watch group that operates as a collective with nobody "in charge." It has been so positive for me to work with a group of people who truly love what they do for a living and are redefining social standards of success. Very inspirational.

So, where will *you* be in 10 years? Perhaps you will be exactly where you are today or you may turn 180 degrees. Most likely it will be somewhere in between as you struggle to find the balance between where your ideals push you and where your circumstances pull you back. Keep up the struggle!





## Bikes Across Borders

by Josh Medsker

The first thing I noticed as I walked up to the warehouse was the bikes. Everywhere. Bikes on the ground, bikes hanging against a wall. I had arranged to meet with Beth Ferguson, a member of the Rhizome Collective, the group that is heading up the Bikes Across Borders project. She showed me around the collective's east Austin warehouse. Their bike shop had even more bicycles hanging from the wall, and others lying on the floor in various states of repair. There were stenciled slogans covering nearly all the available wall space, as well as pictures of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo and Che Guevarra. To help fund the Bikes Across Borders project, the group tours around the country doing political puppet shows, circus performances, and college lecture tours.

Although they have a lot of space, and a lot of bicycles, Ferguson says it's still difficult for the collective to get their goals accomplished. "It's always a challenge to get the word out when we're doing events," Ferguson said. "And to get people psyched to come and fix bikes."

Since 2001, the Bikes Across Borders crew, with the help of volunteers, have been fixing up these bikes and taking them to Mexico for workers in the *maquiladores*. *Maquiladores* are large assembly plants where workers assemble products and send them to the U.S. "As consumers, we need to realize the reason we have cheap prices, is because people are being exploited," Ferguson said.

People travel from all over Mexico for jobs in the *maquiladores*. "When they get there, there aren't many services to help them get started," she said. "And if they do get jobs, they usually work from seven in the morning to seven at night and get paid about 40 dollars a week. Forty dollars a week you think might be different in Mexico, but [on the border] food prices are really not much different."

The new workers often have to live in cardboard houses, and have to buy the materials for them also. "Often folks live in squatted communities," Ferguson said. "[and] they don't have running water. There aren't many resources. It was eye-opening stuff to see that and talk to them about that."

The collective began the Bikes Across Borders project soon after they got their warehouse space in early 2001. "The group was planning a trip to Mexico to do bicycle and circus performances," Ferguson said. One of the collective members, Brackin Firecracker, had gone down to Mexico with Austin Tan Cerca, an Austin-based group that takes Austinites down to Mexico to show them the way people live, and teach them about Mexican/U.S. border issues. In Mexico, they met with the Committee Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO), a Mexican organization that fights for the rights of border workers. "She made contacts with human rights [organizers] and union organizers there," Ferguson said. "We found out that bicycles are something [the workers] are really interested in having." The collective began gathering bikes from around Austin, and repairing them, receiving bicycle donations from fellow Austin activists from the Yellow Bike Project and Bikes Not Bombs, and other sources as well. "There's a lot of bicycle waste from the University, and a lot [from] bike shops," Ferguson said. They made their first trip to Mexico in May 2001, with 80 bicycles, and about 15 or so volunteers. But, they ran into trouble when they tried to take the trailer-load of bikes across the border to Ciudad Acuna.

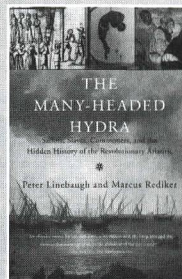
"They wanted 700 dollars in taxes to go into Mexico," Ferguson said. "It was a first-time group, and not having the funds, that wasn't realistic for us." Julia Quinonez from the CFO, who was helping the collective get the bikes across told them that it was only 25 cents per bike, if they took them across one by one. So they did. "Luckily we had a lot of volunteers, as well as Mexicans that came over and helped us cross the bikes," Ferguson said. "The guards just kind of laughed." Quinonez told them that a group of schoolchildren had taken desks across before, also to get around the high taxes.

The group then met with the CFO and went to a neighborhood on the outskirts of Ciudad Acuna, where they set up a bike repair shop in an old, unfinished building. "It was kind of a mechanic's shop," Ferguson said. "Then, we had a big fiesta [with them]," Ferguson said. "and did puppet shows and had a good time with them."

After the first bike drop-off, 10 of the volunteers pedaled 60 miles down to Piedras Negras, where the main office of the CFO is located, and did a puppet show. Afterwards, they biked 350 miles back to Austin. Soon afterwards, they performed at the International Puppet Festival in Chicago, and reenacted their first border crossing. "[It] touched on issues of trade, NAFTA, and what it's like to work in a sweatshop," Ferguson said.



**The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic**  
Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker  
Beacon Press, 2000



It's no surprise that studying history reveals much relevant to today. Still, it's a rare pleasure to find a work as full of first-hand accounts, meticulous in detail, and political relevance as Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's book *The Many Headed Hydra*.

*Hydra* focuses primarily on the 17th and 18th century Atlantic economy. The book's not a work of economic history, though, but a history from below, like Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States*. Linebaugh and Rediker detail an inspiring litany of uprisings, refusals, and revolts by people fighting the imposition of early capitalism. The authors perform a great service to all radicals by supplying us accounts of our forbears in resistance, often in their own words. *Hydra* provides accounts of insurrections, movements, and individuals that may otherwise have been lost to us.

The book takes its title from a prominent pair of metaphors in 17th century ruling class discussions — Hercules and the Hydra. Hercules embodied the self-conception of the ruling classes' ongoing struggle to stamp out the evils of revolt and mold people into the disciplined and docile workers demanded by capital. The Hydra embodied all that the ruling classes feared — and still fear — about the revolt of workers and peasants.

The Hydra was a mythical, many-headed snake who would grow two new heads whenever one head was cut off. Similarly, anti-capitalist struggles have arisen again and again at new points and with new methods of attack, despite capital's attacks on our power. The Hydra metaphor is particularly apt to contemporary class struggle, occurring in myriad ways and at myriad points to threaten capital's dominance. The central aim of the ruling class's brutality (the increase of which demonstrates their desperation) is to break or prevent the coordination of resistance of the multiple fronts of struggle or Hydra heads.

The ruling class nightmare of organized and increasing resistance is clear in *Hydra's* discussion of the ruling class discourse on the monstrosity of oppressed people, a forerunner to racism, one of capital's most effective weapons against the working class. Fear of our power haunts the ruling class today, knowing as they do that our movements "do not forget, and... are ever ready from Africa to the Caribbean to Seattle to resist slavery and restore the Commons." (p.353) Capitalists can't cut off all the heads of the rebellious Hydra, since capitalism requires us to work their jobs and buy their products. This dependence forces capitalists to find new methods to contain us in the capital relation and suppress those who would turn the world upside down. The authors provide numerous accounts of resistance and insurrections turning the world upside down, both on land and at sea, wreaking havoc upon the operation of transatlantic capitalism.

*Hydra* details how the labor of sailors was crucial for maritime production, rendering the Atlantic

economy a particularly vulnerable point to attack capitalism. *Hydra* demonstrates that ships and ports were a tool for both capital accumulation and for resistance. Aboard ships sailors faced a harsh and deadly discipline, vicious corporal and capital punishments, lethal working conditions and lack of provisions. Simultaneously, sailors mixed between cultures, learned new languages, and spread knowledge and practitioners of insurrection among the sailors, slaves, soldiers, servants, and workers of the Atlantic economy.

A widespread form of rebellion against the brutality of early capitalism was piracy. Pirates enjoyed a much more egalitarian and democratic life than slaves, servants, or sailors. Sailors aboard merchant ships frequently mutinied when pirates attacked, joining the pirates. A number of women became pirates, escaping the increasingly narrow range of options within capitalist patriarchy in favor of the more self-determining piratical life.

Pirates preyed upon seafaring commerce, disrupting the trade in goods, slaves, and servants, thereby threatening the accumulation of Atlantic capital. The centrality of the maritime made pirates' flotillas of resistance particularly dangerous to capitalism. In response to increasing disruption of accumulation, capital attacked piracy with the same ferocity it employed in enclosing common lands. Capitalism then as now cannot co-exist with any alternatives to itself that allow people access to what they need without entering into the power relations of capitalist society.

Confronted with capitalism's brutal "campaign of terror" on land and at sea, the Hydra's resistance, though "forced below decks" did not disappear but transformed itself "into an existence that would prove both fugitive and durable" (p.156). Every time a slave rebellion was broken or a mutiny put down, some of the rebels were killed to make an example, while the rest were dispersed. Like a vampire, capitalism can't kill all the people who keep it alive. This dispersal spread people with skills, experiences, and memories of resistance and revolt to new places in the transatlantic economy, where they often linked up with others conspiring to end capitalism's rule.

The presentation of resistance at every moment of capitalism's creation and development drives home the point that capitalism was — and is — a social relation imposed and maintained by force. Our resistance forces capital to continually modify itself to survive. In a sense, the ruling class is not Hercules but Proteus, shifting shape to dodge the blows of our resistance and retain its hold.

*Hydra's* most inspiring passages present cycles of struggle largely unknown today that resisted capitalism's foreclosure and foreshortening of human possibility. These cycles remind us that despite capital's oppression "[t]he volatile, serpentine tradition" of resistance lives on, "raising its heads unexpectedly in mutinies, strikes, riots, urban insurrections, slave revolts, and revolutions." (p.173) *Hydra* doesn't only provide inspiring stories from the untold lineage of past struggles. The book leads us to look closely at contemporary capitalism's global circuits, to circulate our knowledge and our struggles, and to speed the growth of new hydra heads, communities of revolt embodying alternatives antithetical to global capitalism.

-Nate Holdren

A five-month East Coast tour with fellow radical puppeteers, The Puppetistas, followed in Detroit, Columbus, Philadelphia, Vermont, and New York City. They were set to do a show in Montreal on September 11 of last year, but were turned away at the border. They watched the news on TV at a nearby drugstore. Then they went back to work. "We went to the Institute for Social Ecology," Ferguson said. "It's kind of an anarchist, environmental, political school in Vermont. We were able to use their library and [do] a lot of research."

"We made puppet shows [based] on current events," she continued, "and tried to figure out what was going on, and how we could respond as artists and political activists."

The group went to a peace rally in Washington D.C. soon after the September 11 attacks, and then embarked on a college tour, speaking in Massachusetts and Vermont. They made their second trip to Mexico in January of this year, and their third trip this past May. So far, Bikes Across Borders has donated over 180 bicycles to different Mexican border towns. They are currently planning a trip to Cuba in July. They are going with the help of a more established group, called Pastors for Peace. "We met a woman that works with [them] who has protested the U.S. embargo [against Cuba] for years and encouraged us to get involved," Ferguson said. "[They're taking] a delegation of folks from all over the U.S. and Canada."

"They're an old organization that's taken resources and products and goods to Cuba," she continued. "They're not necessarily all pastors. They are [also] volunteers that use the Pastors for Peace name. They have a really great name there."

On this trip, Bikes Across Borders is taking medical supplies, as well as bikes, over to Cuba. "A few folks from the [collective] want to go there as well, and [look] for different places we could do a tour in the future," Ferguson said. "We'd like to do a bicycle tour in Cuba and work with the farmers there." ★

For more information on Bikes Across Borders or the Rhizome Collective, you can visit their Web site at [www.rhizomecollective.org](http://www.rhizomecollective.org), or you can email them at [cyclecircuit@riseup.net](mailto:cyclecircuit@riseup.net).





# Philosophy versus Reality in the world of Social Services

by Pete Lewis, Andrew Anon, and Jason Powers

illustration by Pete Baldwin

The following is a collaboration of three individuals who work for the same homeless youth organization in Portland, Oregon. Over the last few months, whenever we would get together to enjoy a pint of beer, the discussion would inevitably drift towards that dreaded topic, work! We have spent hours discussing the problems we had with being authority figures, hierarchy in the work place, the institutional nature of social service work amongst other issues. Finally, we put pen to paper to get these issues out of our systems once and for all.

We work for a large non-profit corporation called Janus Youth Programs. The division that we work under is called Willamette Bridge Programs, a clever metaphor referencing the river and many bridges that separate the east and west sides of Portland, as well as the "bridge" from the streets to success. It serves homeless youths as part of what is known as the "downtown youth continuum," a large network of services in downtown Portland.

The age range of youths using these services is 14-20 with the cutoff being 21, but most of the youths fall in the 17-20 range. Some are voluntarily homeless, but the vast majority are not. Many come from highly abusive home situations, are drug addicts, or are mentally unstable. There is a relatively high number of gay and transsexual youths that probably had to leave home because of

their sexual orientation. A good number have been institutionalized for much of their life. Many, both males and females, are prostitutes.

Integral to the philosophy of Willamette Bridge is the "youth empowerment model" with the ideal being self-governance of each shelter. This idea is based on three basic tenets:

1. People control themselves, and are responsible for their choices and actions.
2. Young people are inherently intelligent, capable human beings.
3. You don't prepare people for responsibility and independence by taking control of their lives, and making their choices and decisions for them.

*(from Willamette Bridge Program's Program Philosophy literature)*

The first rung on the continuum ladder (from the streets to "success") is the Access and Assessment Center (AAC), which until recently served as a hangout and night drop-in, providing meals, phones, and showers, and serving as an intake center for Janus services. It has recently scaled down to a day program only, open from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m.

Porchlight is a dorm-style overnight crisis shelter where youths can stay for up to 14 nights a month, a temporary step while the youths find case management and better services. This shelter currently sleeps up to

25 youths nightly, has two staff at a time and is usually full. Porchlight opens at 8:45 nightly and is the least structured shelter, providing only a bed, snack, and some hangout time, often with a movie. Bedtime is 11:00 and strictly enforced. The point is to get them to sleep. The youths must be out by 8:30 a.m.

Generally, if a youth can get case management through one of the downtown organizations that provide it, they can access Streetlight, a more long-term shelter. They need case managers to reserve space for them on a weekly basis. Some stay for a few days, others for months. Streetlight is a step up in the amount of responsibility a youth is expected to take on. Each youth picks a cleaning chore for the morning and the shelter has a merit system of sorts called "non-uses." Non-uses are essentially a cushion. So long as a youth does her chores, shows up on time, and doesn't violate any of the rules, they earn a non-use every three days they stay in the shelter. If they don't fulfill one of the requirements and have no non-uses, they lose their bed space. With a buildup of non-uses they can skip doing chores, show up late, etc., at the expense of a non-use. There is more provided at Streetlight as well. It is still a dorm-style shelter, but each youth gets a locker for their things and has no bedtime. Dinner and breakfast are served. Thirty youths can stay at once and there are two staff at



night. It is almost always full with an overflowing wait list.

Bridgehouse is the most long-term and structured of the four. It is a house in southeast Portland. Up to seven youths live there for up to a year. The goal is to successfully transition youths, empowering them to be independent in the process. It has a system of evaluations based on doing house chores, "productive time," and fulfilling other house responsibilities. "Productive time" requirements are based on the 40-hour work week. A resident's week is mapped out in a color-coded graph showing when they slept, worked, went to school, were at appointments, were at home, and were away. All of this information is entered each week into a computer program that spits out a weekly score.

These places are all governed by what are called "agreements," a nicer way of saying "rules." There are three main "agreements" called Bottom Line Agreements, which include basic safety concerns: No Violence, No Drugs, and No Sex. The interpretations of these rules are similar from place to place, but vary slightly. For example, at Bridgehouse, it is considered violence if a youth is verbally abusive toward a real person that is on television. At the other shelters it is not. Additionally, each shelter has other rules that cannot be changed, the rest are (potentially) changeable.

Ideally, there is a cooperation between staff and youths in weekly house meetings where the youths can make suggestions on how to change the agreements. Staff and youths vote by consensus on whether they pass or fail. The presence of youths in the meetings generally is more frequent at the more structured levels of the continuum where they have more of a stake in how their environment is run. Usually, at Porchlight, which is very short term, very few youths participate, whereas all of the residents do at Bridgehouse, where it is required.

Each place has its own separate staff, and shares substitute workers. Our role is mainly making sure the rules are followed, paperwork, cleaning, getting youths things they need (toothbrushes, food, etc.), problem solving, and recommending youths to other services. The job is usually not very stressful, but can be hectic, and occasionally extremely stressful. Sometimes we need to break up fights, staff have been threatened with weapons and punched. Verbal abuse of staff is frequent.

We all work in different places in this system. Pete works full time at Porchlight, but has occasionally worked at Streetlight as a sub. Andrew was a year-long sub, recently hired part-time at Bridgehouse. Jason has

been a sub for over a year and a half. Our perspectives are different, as each place requires different things from workers, has different levels of involvement with the youths, and the rules one is required to enforce change as the programs become more structured.

★★★

*If children are capable of shifting for themselves and of being autonomous, why wouldn't adults be so too? Every human aspires to be free, to be the master of his own life, without having to submit to the oversight or authority of anyone or anything. -J.M. Raynaud and C. Ambaues Libertarian Education (1978)*

**Pete:**

When I initially sat down to write about my place of work, I wanted to discuss the complications of being organized by a "radical" union (the Industrial Workers of the World) in a non-profit social service. However, I soon realized that such a discussion was going to prove quite boring. To put it simply, it is not that complicated. Yes, some form of union (preferably organized and run by the workers with as little bureaucracy as possible) was and remains necessary. We do the job because we want to provide a service to such a neglected and misunderstood population but that doesn't mean we have to settle for crappy wages and very little or no say in running our programs. Our supervisors, bosses and managers expect us to treat our clients with the utmost respect while expressing virtually none towards us. I have lost count of the number of times I have heard, "Always remember, homeless and street dependent youth are capable and intelligent human beings" come from one of my supervisors' mouths. Yes, they are and guess what? So are we. For me, the endless meetings, the media campaigns, the office occupations, police negotiations, internal bickering, the collective bargaining process, and the federal mediation that finally secured our contract were not so much about wages but about us finding some measly form of

empowerment. Maybe this should be obvious or maybe it is a shocking revelation but the bullshit hierarchy that permeates every other sector of American society is just as deeply rooted in an organization that strives to provide progressive programs for at risk youths.

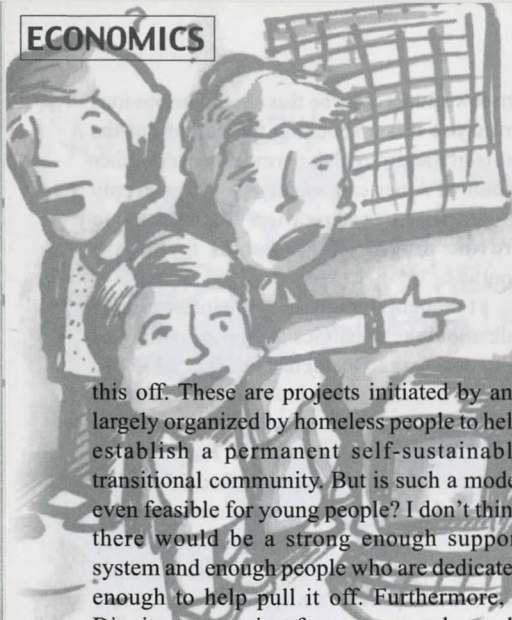
I thought it might be more interesting to talk about the dynamics and power struggles between us as Residential Advocates, our clients, and the hierarchical structure that we work in. I compromise many of my principles to some extent to do this job. For instance, each shift there are two staff and 25 youths and it is hard not to be an authoritarian in a situation like this. Our shelter is for youths coming straight off the streets and our main purpose is to provide a safe, comfortable place to sleep. To do this we have to have a "quiet time" at 10:15 p.m. when people can only talk at a whisper. Then at 11:00 p.m. it is "bed time." The "guests" (as we call them) can only stay up if they cannot sleep and there is absolutely no talking. If they talk we give them a warning, if they continue they are asked to go to bed or leave the shelter (the idea is to give them a choice not an order). If they refuse, they can potentially get banned until they work it out with our supervisor. Pretty strong stuff, especially when I think how I would have reacted at 20 years of age to being told to go to bed by someone only a few years older than me. Try kicking a kid out on the streets because he/she is refusing to acknowledge shelter "agreements," yet with the current system we work in, it has to be that way. We have to be consistent every night to the minute, with every "agreement," with every guest, or all hell could break loose.

Many of my co-workers, past and present, are obviously into social justice issues. Some of them might even label themselves as activists, radicals, etc., and many of them will say that they are not sure whether the system they work in is the best we can come up with.

One co-worker and I were discussing the compromises of working such a job and he said that someone (perhaps the youths themselves) should open a "revolutionary" shelter. In many ways, Dignity Village and the Out of the Doorways project is pulling

**I have lost count of the number of times I have heard, "Always remember, homeless and street dependent youth are capable and intelligent human beings" come from one of my supervisors' mouths. Yes, they are and guess what? So are we.**





this off. These are projects initiated by and largely organized by homeless people to help establish a permanent self-sustainable transitional community. But is such a model even feasible for young people? I don't think there would be a strong enough support system and enough people who are dedicated enough to help pull it off. Furthermore, a Dignity-type project for young people would inevitably be met with much more resistance from the city and public. That is partly why I will continue to work in this shelter for the foreseeable future, and why as someone who is anti-authoritarian, I will continue to bite the bullet and act as some form of authority.

I have to admit that I am less comfortable taking my politics to work at my present workplace than any other place I have worked in the past because I genuinely want to do a good job. I hate the misconceptions that people have about street dependent youths. I am slowly learning about the very complicated and intertwined causes and consequences of life on the streets for a young person and I am keen to play a role in helping young people escape such a tumultuous existence. Consequently, I do not want any youths to think I am unapproachable because my views are different from their own. We work by the philosophy that we cannot let a racist, sexist, or homophobic remark go unnoticed. For instance, if I fail to say something when someone calls somebody else a "fag," the gay youths will think I condone that opinion. By that same token, if a youth asks me if I think there is a God, I cannot tell them my honest opinion or the shy Christian girl in the corner might be afraid to ask me for a towel so she can take a shower. This is a reality. And I won't treat the youth with a swastika tattoo who reads gun magazines any differently than the punk kid who asks me if I think America is fascist. Other people I work with might disagree with me on this but I feel it is dangerous to offer too many of my own personal views while trying to create a safe and comfortable environment.

Can we really work within the system to beat the system? In some ways, I think this is the only way to do it. I feel that I can continue to do my job while making efforts to challenge hierarchy and the authoritarian nature of management. I am sure many of my

coworkers could write pages and pages of very valid complaints against management (which we are, in fact, in the process of doing in the form of a collective grievance) but I'll refrain from getting into the details. It basically boils down to these issues: We work with the youths. They do not. And, they repeatedly fail to show us the same respect that they insist we treat the youths with.

Essentially, it seems to me that once someone assumes the role of a manager, supervisor, etc., a barrier is automatically erected between them and those that are "answerable" to them. Even supervisors who have been known to challenge authority in other aspects of their lives sit quite comfortably in a position of authority at work. There is one supervisor, younger than most of the line staff, who allegedly put on a face mask at an energetic protest to challenge the last visit George W Bush made to Portland. Yet, this same supervisor, when challenged on his authoritarian manner, has been known to say "(because)...I AM YOUR BOSS!" It often seems our supervisors and managers are more than happy to pick up the pieces of our sick society (i.e. providing services for homeless youths) but fail to show any critique of the social structures that contribute to such symptoms as homelessness by continuing to enforce a rigid hierarchical and grossly undemocratic structure. Not all my coworkers agree with me but I believe, perhaps naively, that the organization I work for and my "superiors" really do care about the work they are attempting to do. I believe that their main concern is providing a valuable service to vulnerable children and young people.

However, I fail to understand how they can act as though the issues surrounding homeless and street dependent youths are isolated. I know they are trying to achieve a specific task but that does not mean they should ignore the bigger societal picture. I don't think it is unreasonable to say that homeless youths and everything that comes with the population — from mental health to sexual abuse to drug addiction — are just as symptomatic of a failing capitalist industrial society as poor labor relations. But now I'm expecting too much. All I can really hope is that I do not replicate management's treatment of line workers in my relationship with the youths I work with.

★★★

Jason:

In this work, I am in a position of authority as someone who is against authority, an ironic position to be in, but one that many find themselves in more and more as we age. Granted, I am not always running

around enforcing rules when I'm at work, but that part, being a cop, is always there.

Cognitive dissonance surrounding my role increases as the rules I need to enforce stray further from basic safety concerns. It is when I have to enforce, say, a youth falling asleep on the couch at Streetlight, again and again to the point where I almost need to threaten their expulsion from the shelter, that I really question what the hell I'm doing. I feel compromised when I have to tell a resident with a baby that she may need to leave the house by the following afternoon because she remembered at 1:00 p.m. that she forgot to turn in her schedule by 10:00 a.m. This is where the great divide between how I see the world as an anti-authoritarian person and how I need to function in my job role becomes very apparent.

The philosophy of the programs is one that I agree with and is pretty progressive as far as homeless youth services go. However, the reality feels different both because of our inevitable authority role and because management actually works against this philosophy in the treatment of the youths and staff.

For example, Porchlight and Streetlight, unionized as IWW, had a year-long battle with management over wages. Everything else in the contract was settled early on. Janus had a high-powered attorney representing them. In the end, because of how the bargaining unit got defined, most subs essentially had their wages frozen at \$8.25/hour until wages are renegotiated in a year and a half. We were asking for \$9/hour, not an unreasonable request. Everyone else got fairly small raises, but this was only after two federal mediation sessions in response to a threat from us to strike. As a sub who knows three of the programs well, I have felt unappreciated on numerous occasions. A supervisor once told me that the only reason they had subs was that it is financially beneficial to not have full-time staff go into overtime when someone is sick or on vacation, ignoring the fact that subs play an important role in avoiding staff burnout.

Beyond the problems of the managerial hierarchy, the unavoidable division of staff and youths remains. The power differential is felt by all, the difference between the enforcer and the enforced going all the way down the line. Granted, the youths are there by their own free will (as are we), free to leave if they wish, but where would they go?

Despite the rhetoric of the youth empowerment model, the reality of the programs for the youths feels more like authority framed in gentler language, just as the "agreements" are a gentler name for rules. This is supposed to teach what it is like in the "real world": action =



consequence. I often wonder what the programs we work for really instill that into the youths we serve. More often than not, it just makes a youth angry at a particular staff member. The fact remains that we have something they need and can take it away. They are kept in line by the existence of their needs and our ability to control their fulfillment.

Undoubtedly, a person needs to learn consequences for their actions. On the other hand, many of the consequences we impose are consequences that I don't agree with for rules that I don't agree with. But that's "professionalism" isn't it? We are usually encouraged in our jobs to represent the institution and in turn put our personality aside.

Despite the opportunities that exist for youths to affect their environment, even in limited ways, through the house meeting process, relatively few youths seem to participate in changing it. Few actually feel empowered by this structure, more express feeling controlled by it. I have had discussions with youths to encourage them to come up with alternatives to rules they are having problems with, but to no avail. It is hard to say how much of this is because of the structure or the difficulty of the process, and how much is due to the way we are all shaped by society to not be proactive in regards to our environment. I would imagine it is both.

The actual "success rate" is relatively low, but how much of this is shortcomings in the institution and how much of it is simply the nature of the population we work with? It is hard to tell. Unfortunately, a "success" in this system, based on the status quo of "normalcy" and "functional adulthood" in our society, is usually limited to finding a job (usually low-paying food service) and an apartment. They are made functional by reinforcing the status quo. This end is inarguably better than the situation they were in before, but is questionable to me as an end in and of itself.

Ultimately, this system, like most social services in our society, seems like a big Band-Aid. One would think that the organization running these programs would take a more critical stance on the status quo of America today. One would think that they would run their institution more progressively for all involved, paralleling their proclaimed philosophy. Instead, it mirrors the shortsightedness of most institutions by keeping to a rigid top-down structure, and by responding only to the effects while leaving the causes alone. If the ultimate goal is to eliminate these problems, then a more radical stance needs to be taken on the causes, and a more radical approach

needs to be taken on all levels of an institution's structure.

★★★

**Andrew:**

I am employed by a comparatively liberal social service program where the prevailing ideology views young people as autonomous individuals capable of making decisions for themselves. I "help" these young people become time-managing and anger-managing workers and consumers — in other words, Happy Citizens of the Freest Country in the World — rather than mere troubled youths. Or something like that. The ultimate goal of the program is to move homeless kids from the world of the streets, where they are often raped, prostituted, and addled with drugs among other things, to the world of rent, work, and some semblance of stability and routine. This latter world is the one that I have the, um, privilege of coping with every day. Indeed, I have never in my life been homeless. So, I ask myself, who am I to tell these kids that the system that I'm encouraging them to integrate themselves into is a sham, despite the advertisements and their own poverty? Is it all the more important that they hear critical voices from people like me, who must seem to have a lot of responsibility?

Unlike Pete, I am uncomfortable with the idea of NOT bringing my politics to work, at least to some minimal extent. I see the relationships I have with the residents as mutually enlightening (with me doing most of the learning), and part of this involves revealing ideas and opinions I might have about topics of discussion. Sometimes I can see my own influence, when I overhear someone thoughtfully debating the history of warfare on the phone, or even when a resident comes back from the store with a bottle of organic juice — though, of course, I secretly hope that they didn't pay for it. I hope that I can occasionally be what I rarely had in my adolescence: a mentor of sorts who listens and gives hopefully wise feedback. Sometimes in our lives we find ourselves in situations we'd rather not be in, like high school, or a homeless shelter, and a person or two stands out as being honest, knowledgeable, and rebellious. The integrity of these connections is often ambiguous due to the roles of the participants, yet still valuable in important ways.

When I look at the bigger picture, though, I know that I also facilitate the perpetuation of this system, patching up the pipes where they are leaking (particularly when I hand over a Prozac or a Zoloft). Sure, I can subtly encourage the kids to take a critical look at the world around them, but to succeed in the program they must accept certain realities and

accommodate themselves to certain expectations such as getting a GED so that they can get a job so that they can put down rent on an apartment, all of which will lock them into a new cycle. They learn to cultivate a "respectable" appearance, follow orders, engage in socially useless activities like working for Taco Bell, and on and on. Social work as a profession looks at its "clients" as patients to be treated, much like run-of-the-mill therapy, and even much of what passes for an education these days. The "clients" are usually not encouraged to situate themselves within the context of society at large; certainly not from a critical perspective that seeks not only to affect individuals but also to transform or abolish institutional structures, technologies, and social mores.

Bridgehouse is structured in such a way — the "self-government" model — that the residents have to be self-motivated to function better in this world by fulfilling certain programmatic expectations. They are free to come and go as they please, but they must live up to these expectations to keep their bedspaces. No one gets reminded to go to work or do a chore, but there are consequences for not doing what is expected of a resident, up to and including the loss of bedspace. This is where my role as Residential Advocate veers close to being cop-like. I enforce the agreements (most of which the residents have a say in). I monitor their comings and goings, and I chart their daily activities, which then get run through a computer and turned into weekly stats. I also happily confront homophobia, racism, gender oppression and intimidation. Somewhere in this process, a few people do become more self-directed and confident, and perhaps even more understanding of the tragedy of social dislocation and ecological devastation that our society continues to cultivate.

I've had to deal with a similar balancing of contradictions in my dealings with the IWW. The union foresees a future world organized around work and democratic decisions about production. Division of labor? Technology? Work itself? Rarely challenged seriously. Most of the ideas found in Wob pamphlets seem like leftovers from an earlier and considerably less complicated age. At the same time, the union has enabled us to confront the hierarchical structure we face in this non-profit organization, and agitate (with partial success) for better wages, and in its overt anti-capitalism it's better than most unions. I support it for now, despite the fact that my thinking diverges at a certain point. As in most of my daily activities, I do the best that I can while keeping my eyes peeled for ways to hasten the inevitable collapse of this soul-sucking civilization, and a re-birth of the human spirit. ★

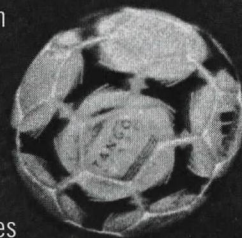


On June 26th 2002, the city of Calgary became host to the most expensive soccer game in history. While the exact costs of this year's G8 summit security are unknown, depending on the source, estimates range from \$300-400 million. Headlines in the Calgary Sun proclaimed, "The Anarchists are Coming!" while press releases from the Canadian government stated that "lethal force has been authorized" to defend the summit. Faced with a massive fear propaganda campaign created by the corporate media, the global anti-capitalist movement once again converged to do the unexpected.

In spite of all the build up, the closest thing to "violence" was the black bloc challenging the police to a soccer match. Although the police declined to play and forfeited the game to the anarchists, the game went on as planned, blocking traffic in downtown Calgary's financial district under the hot midmorning sun. The police looked on helplessly, and it seemed as if they would rather have played than be forced to bear witness to such silliness which so clearly highlighted the absolute ridiculousness of a police presence numbering in the thousands.

Global governance and financial institutions are increasingly facing a major crisis of legitimacy. The WTO's last meeting was held in Qatar (a monarchy state where protest is illegal), and a dark cloud is looming over the IMF due to their central role in the economic collapse of Argentina. This year's G8 summit retreated to a remote mountain fortress with its airspace shut down and a 6.5 kilometer no-go security buffer zone set around it. The "powers that be" are beginning to resemble an animal backing further and further into a corner, ready to lash out in fear with unchecked aggression.

In the end, police declined to comment on not fulfilling conditions laid out by The Federation of International Footballing Anti-Capitalists (F.I.F.A.): "If the people win, the police will so be required to hand over their expensive bicycles as well as arrest the eight terrorists meeting in Kananaskis. Another condition will be their trial for the deaths of the 30,000 children who will die today from malnutrition, and all the other ravages of global capitalism."



# THE MOST EXPENSIVE SOCCER GAME IN HISTORY

Text and Photo by Andrew Stern



## Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism

Steve Wright

Pluto Press, 2002

Long a key English language source on the Italian new left, *Storming Heaven* languished in a drawer for several years, a completed but unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Its availability now provides a lot to those of us fighting to build a better world today.

*Storming Heaven* details the history of workerist currents in Italy from their precursors in the late 1950s to their collapse in the 1980s. Like movements today, the Italian far left featured many contradictions and disagreements, and people in highly charged conflicts often shared certain assumptions. These conflicts proved tremendously productive for the workerists, who generated useful ideas on class composition, refusal of work, and the extension of capitalism into all avenues of life.

A central concept, class composition refers to the technical composition of the production process and the political composition of the working class. Workerists studied class composition by conducting surveys and discussions with workers. This enquiry tried to discover sources of resistance in working class culture, memory, and history as well as forms of workplace resistance made possible by changes in the production process.

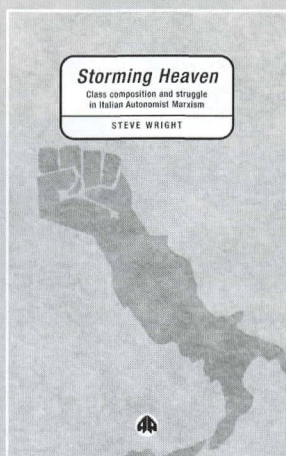
Through these studies, the workerists uncovered the political function of technology. Faced with fierce resistance in the workplace, employers used new technologies to counter-attack, undermining or decomposing working class power and organization. Confronted with the changed circumstances, workers' politically recomposed themselves, developing new forms of resistance and organization in ways appropriate to the changed technical. For example, facing work speed ups due to new assembly line technology, workers started rotating work stoppages inside factories. With key parts of the assembly line shut down all production ceased, and by taking turns striking workers distributed more evenly the cost to strikers in lost wages.

De-skilling, attacks on workplace organization, and other aspects of capitalism's attack, led younger workers to begin refusing to enter factory work altogether. This undercut capitalism's traditional use of unemployment to control workers. Workers' refusal forced capital to expand into other aspects of life. This is the condition of the social factory, where "the whole of society exists as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over the whole of society." (p 38) The entry of immigrants, youth, and women into the workforce spread conflict to other sites within capitalist society — neighborhoods and homes, schools and universities — helping create the "new social subjects" and upheavals which would eventually unravel the workerist organizations.

The view of technology as political caused conflicts between workerists and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The PCI viewed technology as a neutral force without political ramifications. Holding technology to be a weapon against the working class was incompatible with the Communists' idea that revolution would entail even greater productivity (an ideology put to brutal use in Russian Communists forcing speed-ups onto Russian assembly line workers).

Despite their clashes with the PCI, many workerists shared a great deal with their sometime enemies, particularly hierarchical ideas about how political struggle should proceed. Both held to vanguardism, believing working class struggle was the most (or only) important struggle in society and that the working class needed the leadership of some organization, such as the vanguard political party or other organization.

Some workerists like Mario Tronti eventually returned to the Italian Communist Party. Others like Antonio Negri identified a still forming "socialized worker," a formulation overlooking important differences in order to posit a unified working class capable of opposing capital. Still others constituted alternative vanguard organizations, questioning who should lead but never questioning



the need for leadership itself.

The workerists' vanguardism expressed itself in "factoryist" over-emphasis on industrial workers to the relative exclusion of important struggles, both in and out of the workplace, such as feminism and parts of the student movement. This blinded the workerists to many ramifications of their own positions and of struggles occurring in Italy. Full development of their insights, particularly the account of struggles "within capital's total circuit of production [but on] a horizon beyond the immediate process of production," is still a pressing and incomplete project. (p 95)

The recurrence of vanguardism are *Storming Heaven's* most tragic moments, when the workerists maintain "a quite traditional, if dissident, political outlook." (p 53) Despite their important innovations, much of the Italian left repeatedly fell back into vanguardism, in part overwhelmed by the rapid changes and explosive social upheaval in Italy and in part due to a failure of vision. These parts of the book are also most resonant with today. Standing in the post-cold war world amid the rapid changes of globalization and the "war on terror" it's easy to lose our bearings and fall back into old forms. Many people today propose vanguardism as a way forward. It's vital that we don't listen to these voices. We need to avoid reverting to old hierarchical organizations and ideas. Vanguardism is a dead-end incompatible with many of the innovations and successes of the anti-globalization movements.

In building our movements, the ideas laid out in *Storming Heaven* offer a lot. We also need to understand the mistakes the book details, and why they were made. We need to engage with past mistakes or we'll likely repeat them.

-Nate Holdren

## Terrorism and War

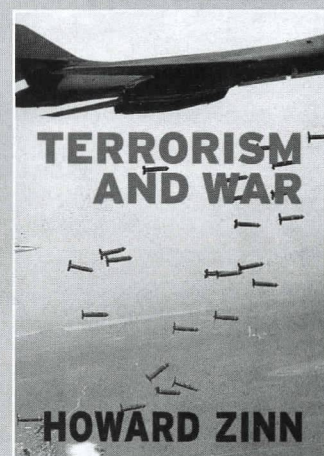
Howard Zinn

Seven Stories Press, 2002

www.sevenstories.com

Obviously published prompted by and in reaction to the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, *Terrorism and War* is the first full-length work in a number of years. Acutely observant, this sagely historian presents the facets of America's War on Terrorism not covered on CNN or in White House press meetings. The book is in the format of a lengthy interview chunked out in chapters. This approach directs the discussions directly to the mechanics and motivations of America's situation and response. However, this also interrupts the fluid narrative and detailed contextualization found in Zinn's other works, like *A People's History of the United States*. It is fairly widely known that irony that the U.S. directly supported Taliban et al against Russia as part of the Cold War, but Zinn goes further to reveal more. Zinn disconnects the WTC even from Pearl Harbor comparison. (This is not a military attack between nations.) Zinn also unveils the duplicity in America's previous war initiatives. Not only does Zinn recall such recent engagements as Grenada, but the able historian summons up such remote affairs as the U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor (vis-à-vis the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen) and the Mayaguez affair which nearly led to out-and-out war with Cambodia. Among the appendices are relevant extractions from the Geneva Protocol on civilian safety during engagements. The 160-page book has a thorough index.

-Thomas Schulte



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# WAL★MART SUPERCENTER 沃尔玛购物广场

入口 Entrance

2008

可口可乐

可口可乐

WAL-MART  
吴昊  
平价!



While traveling in the south of The People's Republic of China, I was shocked to discover both a Sam's Club and a Wal-Mart in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province. Cynically, I thought it made great business sense. The cost of shipping Chinese-produced goods all the way to the U.S. could finally be eliminated. Now Wal-Mart would be able to sell their merchandise back to those who made it instead of transporting consumer goods halfway around the world and selling them to Americans. The clothing made in Wal-Mart-supported sweatshops can finally clothe those who produce it! (An interesting thought, but doubtful.)

I thought it was at least overly ambitious for Wal-Mart to attempt to establish a franchise in a country such as The People's Republic of China. Many factors seemed to oppose this move. Wal-Mart is certainly one of the most well-known and overtly patriotic American corporations. Employees wear red, white, and blue uniforms to match the color scheme of all Wal-Mart owned structures. Years ago the allegiant American family values and self-made-man image of Wal-Mart's founder, Sam Walton, were thoroughly publicized (read: advertised) along with its hollow charter to carry only American-made goods, which supposedly evolved out of Sam's commitment to protecting the jobs of his fellow countrymen. However, in recent years, Uncle Sam's brainchild has not only contradicted Sam's entrepreneurial ethics but has turned downright un-American. By greedily conquering America's urban sprawling landscape, Wal-Mart management has eliminated the choices — those so necessary to free market economics, and supposedly protected under anti-monopoly legislation — obtainable by Americans. Wal-Mart has closed down countless mom and pop shops along with the mind of the consumer who might consider shopping elsewhere out of spite, habit, convenience, etc.

In fact, Wal-Mart has eliminated its competition and dominated multiple markets so successfully it is expected soon to usurp General Motors, ending GM's 50-year reign as the largest company in the U.S. Though its economic "success" in America is obvious, how could

a store such as this hope to succeed in any foreign market, much less China? As the official plebian name would imply, The People's Republic of China is a long way from the nationalistic, American family value heartstrings that marketers pulled a decade ago in order to originally hook us on Sam Walton-Mart and feed our growing consumer addiction.

The cultural and political climate of The People's Republic of China is very different from that of the U.S. Amnesty International has ranked PRC worst in human rights violations. Crashed spy planes have strained international relations and apparently exposed the mistrust between our two governments. And, of course, fundamentally, the big, red, -ism, which I have been taught to fear most of all. Combined with a significant language barrier, these cultural differences would seem to determine a market off limits and inhospitable to such an "All American" institution. In addition, setting up a franchise in China would be out of the question if Wal-Mart's loyalties were in fact where they have — at least a decade ago — claimed.

It seems that it was necessary for Wal-Mart to look to other markets, since the discount store war was won back on U.S. soil. At first, I was tempted to dismiss the long-term significance of the two stores as an isolated market expansion experiment that would inevitably fail. That notion couldn't have been more wrong. Since first encountering the Supercenter and Sam's Club in Kunming, I have learned that 1,159 (as of Nov. 2001 according to Wal-Mart's homepage) of Wal-Mart Stores Inc.'s over 4,000 business ventures are outside of the U.S.! Wal-Mart currently operates franchises in Mexico (545 stores), Canada (194), Europe (343), Korea, Argentina, and Brazil. The move to PRC was undoubtedly well researched and thoroughly planned.

In order to examine Wal-Mart Stores Inc.'s motives, it is most important to consider the market. In the eyes of Wal-Mart's board members, China is simply a market. That is, 1.3 billion people, at least one-fifth of the world's population, and no Kmart — Wal-Mart's



# ★ CULTURAL COLONIZATION

## Wal-Mart and the People's Republic of China

text and photos by Bleu Cease



most recent and formidable casualty — or Target to halfheartedly compete with. In addition to PRC's huge, untouched, yet rapidly westernizing market, it is also important to examine the somewhat counter-intuitive truth that Wal-Mart's "Stars and Stripes" image will only help and certainly not hinder the store's acceptance in The People's Republic of China.

Though it alludes to a gross generalization, it is safe to say that certain age and social groups around the world, as is certainly the case in PRC, are very interested in certain aspects of American culture. Despite the widely held belief that the Chinese and American governments are far from allies, Chinese people on the whole seem to be willing to make the important distinction between the American people and our government's foreign policies. In my (admittedly limited) experience, the varying degrees of resentment which some Chinese people feel towards the U.S. government is rarely transferred to Americans as individuals or to other indications of American corporate influence, and certainly does not spoil the allure of American lifestyle.

The most disgusting example of this embrace of American culture that I witnessed came in the form of the Wal-Mart employee nametags in Kunming. Each contained the employee's name in Chinese characters, that damned yellow smiley face, and a common American name such as Jim (by no means a translation). Wal-Mart's self-serving policy of encouraging or even allowing this is simply furthering the acceptance of American culture, which conveniently paves the way for the proliferation of the western consumer lifestyle that Wal-Mart's growth is dependant upon. Additionally, Wal-Mart must be held accountable for supporting and contributing to a further rejection of their employee's native language and culture.

In Wal-Mart's defense, it could be said that management does not force its employees to change their name; they develop this alias on their own and only if they want to. It may be true that many employees are happy to do so. However, this means little considering the self-selecting nature of employment at an establishment such as the Supercenter in Kunming. Because of Wal-Mart's unavoidable, all-American image, among young job seekers only those who are

most interested in American culture are likely to seek employment at Wal-Mart. As a result, Wal-Mart management in Kunming is surrounding itself with an aura of Americana which includes the mentalities of their employees. The apparent popularity of taking on an American name, especially among students studying English, makes Wal-Mart's opportunism and blatant cultural insensitivity no less despicable.

Willingness to accept and embrace what is, at least on the surface, seen as American is an important trend that Wal-Mart has either happened upon by chance or so astutely identified and plans to cash in on. As a foreign observer, the best I could tell was that Wal-Mart in Kunming was most attractive to a young, upper class peer group. Wal-Mart shopping bags seemed already to have become somewhat of a status symbol. Undoubtedly, Wal-Mart is more than willing to allow their name and trademark to join Nike's "swoosh" as the next cultural icons to represent American style and affluence — if not American culture and lifestyle as a whole — on the streets of Chinese cities.

Amid such economic imperialism, some sense of justice can be found in the popularity and widespread availability of counterfeit American brand name copies. However, this type of piracy and patent violation, which at least in theory harms Nike, The North Face, and others, will only provide Wal-Mart with free advertising and greater mystique. Incidentally, the Chinese government will probably be forced to crack down on the relatively small-scale operations that manufacture such products. The PRC's recent membership in the World Trade Organization extends protection of intellectual property rights.

As a traveler, it is a terrible thing to realize that around the world corporate advertising has successfully reduced your native culture in its entirety to the brand name products that your fellow countrymen and women have been taught to prefer. It is tragically ironic that what is most readily conveyed across cultures is a handful of popular insignias and logos of the culturally immature yet economically dominant nation. When transplanted and taken out of context, these symbols can quickly become cultural icons that represent the affluent lifestyle enjoyed by the citizens of the superpower.

At home in the U.S., Wal-Mart has misconstrued and subsequently cashed in on America's own ideas of pride and nationalism since it was incorporated. Wal-Mart's marketing experts have laced their corporate logos and agendas with the most basic symbolism (both visual and conceptual) that most Americans identify with. Realizing that Wal-Mart is exploiting and making a mockery of the American values that it initially claimed to be aligned with should leave even the slightly patriotic American no less than outraged.

Wal-Mart, and it is certainly not alone, has exploited impoverished laborers and capitalized on economic inequality around the world for years. This apparently was not enough. Now as Wal-Mart establishes franchises in China (as of November 2001 — 17 stores) it is further cashing in on "what it means to be American" in the eyes of people all around the world. Internationally, Wal-Mart is not only allowing but is banking on the mental correlation between a superficial view of American culture and the simplified format of their jingoistic logos. Further capitalizing on (for lack of a better term) the "American mystique" in order to infiltrate Chinese culture and gain access to its virgin (as far as American



Near Guiyang, Ghizou Province



discount stores are concerned) market is disgusting. It is worse still when this jewel of a market consists of the very workers to whom Wal-Mart executives owe their disproportionate salaries, as most Americans owe their cheap televisions. Though Wal-Mart currently employs — directly or indirectly — Chinese peasants and caters to an upper or middle class clientele, the ironic possibility remains. Perhaps some of the Kunming Supercenter's future patrons have worked for pennies a day producing the low quality consumer goods that Wal-Mart has built its now international empire upon.

Again, Wal-Mart is peddling so much more than its merchandise in The People's Republic of China. Most detrimentally, it is furthering the consumer lifestyle that must be considered a root cause of so many of the environmental and social problems facing the world today. The smiley face, the "swoosh," the golden arches, and other logos all represent something in the mind of the consumer. Generalizing among different people with regards to the strength of this influence is not something that I will attempt to do. However, it is undeniable that such ubiquitous trademarks maintain a constant presence in the minds of the most consumptive stratum of people on the planet. If Wal-Mart is as successful at infiltrating the Chinese psyche as it has been the American; with its cheerful logos and consumerism propaganda, the future for the Chinese will look even more similar to ours.

Wal-Mart of course is not the first transnational corporation to set up shop in PRC. However, its presence more than any other (perhaps solely in my mind), portends the inevitable. Wal-Mart's influence will greatly accelerate this trend of Westernization and the resulting extermination of the last remnants of an ancient culture. Perhaps in a decade the already developed regions of China will take on the familiar consistency of the corporate color scheme: that which has already come to dominate the suburban landscape of the U.S. Long after corporate logos have been successfully paired with the alluring and prosperous American lifestyle, brand favoritism and over-consumption will ensue. When more and more Chinese peasants start to get that "all American" urge to buy something frivolous and unnecessary, yet surprisingly affordable, who will beckon them in but Uncle Sam Walton (or a "door-greeter" with an Americanized name) with open arms and bright lights and flag-like décor?

★★★

Demographic factors along with the willing embrace of American culture seem to have made The People's Republic of China an irresistible market. However, a huge cultural gap remains between the American and Chinese people and the very different lives they currently

lead. Simply transplanting a Red, White, and Blue Supercenter — of the conventional American variety, filled with everything necessary for suburban American life — to Kunming would not have been accepted as easily as The Colonel and his buckets of fried chicken. Lifestyles change more slowly. The novelty of trying and accepting foreign foods is different than adjusting one's home, clothing, and diet to the products sold in a foreign country. The average home in China is very different from the average home in the U.S. The mentality of most Chinese consumers and the shopping environment that they are used to are also very different from the typical American and the strip malls that they frequent. Some of the products that Wal-Mart carries in the states may be novel and appealing but could not yet be professed as essential purchases for the average Chinese consumer. In order to initially gain a foothold in this new market, Wal-Mart has had to carry those products that are already popular and commonly available throughout PRC. In fact, the merchandise sold in Wal-Mart Kunming is very similar to that sold in any other large, state, or privately-owned Chinese department store.

The Wal-Mart store in Kunming is an odd mix of both the American and Chinese shopping experiences. The meat department is unlike that of any other Wal-Mart in the U.S. Customers can choose individual fish live from an aquarium as well as frogs and snakes. And as is common in most street markets, a butcher will trim meat to the specifications of the customer as they wait. Incorporating these features of the marketplace that most Chinese people are accustomed to is the most obvious way to make the customer more comfortable and of course gain acceptance.

Keeping certain prominent characteristics common to Wal-Mart in the United States is as important for business as adapting other aspects of American Wal-Mart stores to Chinese culture. In order to maintain the modernity of a "uniquely American" shopping experience, Wal-Mart has deployed our old subliminal friend Sam



Kunming, Yunnan Province

**If Wal-Mart is as successful at infiltrating the Chinese psyche as it has been the American, with its cheerful logos and consumerism propaganda, the future for the Chinese will look even more similar to ours.**



the smiley face. In full force, this plain yellow icon and an infinite number of clones are battling the last remaining socialist values. Wal-Mart has of course kept its Kunming employee uniforms American flag-like. The huge “sale” signs at the end of every aisle are written in Chinese yet, ironically, also resemble Old Glory. Perhaps Wal-Mart’s ethnocentric marketing experts actually believe that the American style shopping experience is what the citizens of The People’s Republic of China really want and need. “No more walking through the dirty, noisy streets to fight for the days produce!” “Everything under one roof!” “And no more bargaining hassles either!” Arguing over prices is a part of life in China, as it is throughout most of the world. However, price flexibility is one aspect of the traditional marketplace that Wal-Mart did not dare try to emulate. Apparently, Wal-Mart executives did not feel that “haggling” complemented their image.

In the U.S., Wal-Mart claims to “sell for less” so loudly with cute commercials and catchy jingles that we can’t help but be thoroughly convinced. It is this subtle market domination that has dealt countless small businesses and many smaller chains, which survived Wal-Mart’s initial move into town, their final deathblow. We have been so thoroughly convinced of Wal-Mart’s low prices and self-proclaimed convenience that other smaller, less dominating shopping establishments quickly fade from our minds. Once culturally adjusted, techniques such as these, which Wal-Mart has perfected on we unsuspectingly frugal Americans, will help this corporation subjugate the mind of the Chinese (and many other nationalities) consumer as well.

For some it might be reassuring that any aspects of Chinese culture have been taken into account when designing the Supercenter in Kunming. If such cultural “adjustments” necessary for acceptance are ever viewed as conciliatory efforts, mention of Wal-Mart’s track record should wash away such “better than nothing” optimism. As we have seen in the states, Wal-Mart has been obliged to go back upon its original claims and practices in favor of higher profits. If current globalization trends continue, Wal-Mart’s many international variations will start to look more and more alike. After all, one worldwide version of Wal-Mart would require fewer employees to manage and would inevitably result in greater profits than several distinct sorts; each requiring individual attention based upon the culture it inhabits. When the same clothes, toys, household goods, and foods are sold to people all around the globe, homogenization is inevitable. Soon Wal-Mart’s once multinational, multilingual, multicultural patrons worldwide will begin to dress, then act, then talk more and more alike.

★★★

For many Americans, a defining characteristic of Wal-Mart is the familiarity and consistency between stores. Wal-Mart franchises all across America are laid out departmentally in the same way, and contain mostly identical items at the same prices. This consistency simplifies shopping and comforts people into the buying mood. Surely consumer science has demonstrated a direct relationship between the ease of locating an item and a consumer’s likelihood of actually purchasing it. According to this American perspective of consistency, the Supercenter in Kunming is not really a Wal-Mart per se. Perhaps



Inside the Forbidden City, Beijing

it would be more accurately described as a Chinese department store with a traditionally American color scheme and foreign name. Wal-Mart officials might affectionately call their creation a modern red, white, and blue shopping experience. Of course, the all-important connection between Wal-Mart, Your Home Town, USA, and Wal-Mart, Kunming, People’s Republic of China, is the small group of wealthy people who profit greatly from both — in addition to over 1,000 other multicultural amalgamations. Those who have identified a possible market in China, and have altered Wal-Mart as every American can’t help but know it to something that would work there. Those who see some of the last remaining characteristics of the oldest civilization on the planet as barriers to profit; which can simply be adjusted to, or at least painted red, white, and blue.

Maybe it shouldn’t be surprising that Wal-Mart has been able to establish a franchise in the People’s Republic of China. Considering Wal-Mart’s apparently well-established international presence, I can imagine plenty of less likely markets that Wal-Mart could be

moving into, unannounced to most Americans. In two months traveling and photographing in China, the Kunming Supercenter was the only non-religious location that universally prohibited me from taking pictures. Does this policy indicate an awareness that at least some people may not agree with their new Sino-sized store, imperialistic practices, and overall lack of scruples? Surely, this ban on photography would be defended — as it is by many other stores in the U.S. — as an attempt to protect Wal-Mart’s secret marketing strategies and store design from competitors. However, without public knowledge and the accountability that it should (albeit naively) imply, corporations have too few boundaries. What’s next Sam? The possibilities are endless. Perhaps a franchise coffeehouse in Amsterdam, “Sam’s Club Hash.” Certainly, no photographs allowed.

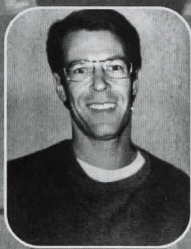
Perhaps the citizens of the People’s Republic of China, as well as all around the world, should be grateful to Wal-Mart for bringing them the American shopping dream or some compromise that is both acceptable to the host culture and profitable for the parasitic, transnational corporation. As a traveler, maybe I should be thankful that Wal-Mart is doing their part to make the world a smaller, more familiar place. For closing a huge cultural and language gap to the point where I couldn’t speak enough Mandarin to ask for the bathroom, yet I had little trouble asking directions to Wal-Mart. Maybe we should all be mad as hell. As consumers, we should be ashamed to have ever, even if just once, supported such a corporation. As informed consumers within a capitalist system, we must exercise our all-powerful right to vote monetarily. Now more than ever, because at least this culprit still proudly bears its name; in many cases it is not so clear who or what is being supported. America’s most nationalistic corporation’s ability to adapt so completely to a seemingly opposite foreign market demonstrates that Wal-Mart (of course among other transnationals) is not only capable and willing of deceit, but its growth is reliant upon the continued deception of its employees, its patrons, and society at large. This shameless adaptability and the power that it represents may be most terrifying to those already concerned with globalization issues. However, Wal-Mart’s conniving misrepresentation and exploitation of American culture, insatiable market domination in the U.S., and habit of blatantly lying to American citizens should unite — most of all — truly patriotic Americans with other concerned citizens worldwide. Boycott! ★



# Kim Stanley Robinson, The Ambiguous Utopian

by Jeremy Smith

a look at one of  
America's greatest  
living utopian thinkers  
and novelists.



Fourteen miles west of California's parking lot covered capital, Sacramento, you'll find a 70-acre neighborhood of single-family homes and coop apartments called Village Homes. Each structure in the quiet, tree-lined Davis, CA suburb features solar water heating, natural cooling systems, and a natural drainage system that also irrigates eight cooperatively cultivated orchards and a vineyard. Energy consumption is one-third to one-half that of other neighborhoods in Davis.

Bound together through the "warp and weft" of committees, boards, and potlucks, its residents govern Village Homes with a cheerful semblance of democracy. Science fiction novelist Kim Stanley Robinson has served on its elected board of directors, volunteered on the community's horticultural committee and architectural review board, and written for its newsletter. "I moved into Village Homes in 1991," says Robinson, "and it strangely echoed what I had already written in my utopian novel *Pacific Edge*, so that I felt I was coming home in a way. Its strong sense of community, focus on children, volunteer committee work and agricultural work, and lives led outdoors doing a fair bit of vegetable gardening, [has] been the biggest single influence on my thinking in this last decade."

Along with Ursula K. Le Guin, the 50-year-old Kim Stanley Robinson is one of America's greatest living utopian thinkers and novelists. His "Three Californias" trilogy, which includes *Pacific Edge*, extrapolates three possible futures for California, one catastrophic, another dystopian, the third utopian. His acclaimed *Mars* novels, all of which won either Hugo or Nebula awards, are probably the most successful attempt to reach a mass audience with a post-capitalist vision since Le Guin's 1974 novel, *The Dispossessed*.

Science fiction, says Robinson, is "about the histories that we cannot know — future, alternative, deep past. These are all historical fictions. So every time you write one you sketch out a kind of theory of how history happens." His new novel, *The Years of Rice and Salt* (Bantam, 2002), describes an alternate history that begins when 99 percent of the population of Europe is wiped out in the fourteenth century by the Black Plague, instead of the one third that died in our timeline.

In the 700 years that follow, a world dominated by China and Islam steadily evolves into a precarious, ambiguous utopia shaped by the values of Sufism and Buddhism. The same characters brought back through reincarnation connect each historical period, meeting between lives in the Bardo, the Buddhist realm of the dead. In life they change the world through a combination of geographic exploration, scientific discovery, and political rebellion.

Robinson's characters are often scientists or students of nature who are drawn into conflict with systems of profit and exploitation, joining social movements that, in Robinson's future and alternative histories, actually succeed in fundamentally changing society along ecological, egalitarian, and democratic lines. "I do consider my books to be a political work," says Robinson, "It seems to me that the more stories out there that encourage these kinds of actions, then the better off people would be."

In the 1980s, when Robinson published his first novels, science fiction was dominated by cyberpunk, a genre movement shaped by information technology and free market hegemony. In the worlds described by cyberpunk, the future "wasn't going to change and so all you could do was just try to make

continued next page



# Metabolite Lady

text by Susan Finch. art by Rachelle Maynard

Your biological clock started ticking when you were twenty-two and what else could you really do but ignore and reset it like an ambling old-maid from a kitchen in 1952 who thinks thirty is old age and your aspirations mute? I mean, society and failure and innate fear that you can't and won't be validated without A, B, and C times two, keeps you on the straight and narrow through six-figure incomes and titles like VP of Domestic Affairs within zip codes 30269 - 51143. You didn't bother to wonder if you ever wanted this life, you let it choose you. But what about her? You point with an anemic wrist in a gray power suit to the 26 year old woman who's been married and divorced and toting two. Dried vomit and poop diapers with a cheerio drying in each ear. She doesn't even know who she is. Ended up working that job in bitter taste just to bring home the organic soy milk and whole wheat seven grain bread. Her kids don't even know who she is. Call their Day Care leader Momma Jones, their entire universal zone.



teenage angst. No thanks. You're having rapidly approaching middle age angst where psychology, society, and biology aren't even in the same book, let alone the same page. Who can keep up with the finish line blurred by the rain. Oh yeah, didn't I tell you? A torrential rain pour of could-have-beens will drown you in a tsunamic blame of should-have-beens. You just took the finish line as your own. You're just too stupid to know, liposucked lady. There's never a goddamn end to psychology vs. society vs. biology will sow. Don't believe it. Don't believe a goddamn syllable.

Cause that book of rules, who wrote it anyway? A man? A man who decided to start a family at sixty-two with a freshly ticking wife by his side, ready to copulate and impregnate and lactate?

Apple pies and sexy thigh-highs. His creasing face of folds and aging flesh is called distinguished, his salt and pepper hair mature. Your hair suffers to hide the truth of what you call fear disguised in a color you call Autumn Sunset, how queer. Moisturize and tantalize and don't let your somewhat firm thighs go weak. Keep your stomach tight and your breasts sky high. You haven't got much that won't turn. Oh, hey metabolite lady, I didn't mean it like that. I'm sure you must have something going for you besides perpetually pedicured feet. Someone still may notice you. He might not even leave you when you're old and fat. Look on the bright side, when you're dead and gone, you'll never have to worry about graying hair, barren wombs, or vein-splattered thighs. God won't even care if you can't keep a guy. ★

## Kim Stanley Robinson (continued)

your way as in some *noir* film, get your own and not worry about the world at large," a sensibility reflected throughout the culture and politics of the period. "This had to be opposed," says Robinson. "There's got to be a utopian strand, there's gotta be positive stories. You can criticize over and over again, but it also helps to have some vision of what should happen."

Despite pressure to glorify the capitalist dystopia in which we live, utopias do manage to thrive in our society, from Star Trek's multicultural, quasi-socialist Federation to computer games like *Sim City* to dozens of science fiction novels published each year. "All these ways of trying to imagine some post-capitalist world are useful," says Robinson, "even though — or precisely because — they are wish fulfillment and escapist in some senses. It means there are wishes still in existence for a better and more just world, and it means people want to escape, like prisoners, the current reality. All to the good!"

Robinson is routinely chastised in both science fiction and mainstream venues for embracing this political, utopian sensibility. In an otherwise positive review, *Salon.com* editor Laura Miller criticizes the closing chapters of *The Years of Rice and Salt* as "unduly Pollyannaish," when "Robinson's utopian inclinations wrest the novel away from his storytelling ones." Some reader reviews on Amazon.com betray obvious discomfort with political and philosophical debates that permeate Robinson's novels, calling them "preachy" and "boring."

These criticisms may have validity, but Robinson doesn't take them lying down. "The idea that [utopias] would be 'boring' to live in and are boring to read about [are] disguised political attacks on behalf of the status quo," he says. "These days [utopian stories] are all about the struggle of getting to a juster society, and then keeping it there, or fending off counter-attacks, or making further progress. Utopia, in other words, is

just a name for a positive dynamic in history; history will never stop happening; and so to call for utopia is to call for an increase in justice in the world, and a *different economic system* that is based on justice and ecological sustainability. This is exactly the subject matter on which science fiction is by definition focused — science fiction being a matter of imagining fictional histories for the future, some better, some worse, all different — all therefore challenging the current power system and its attempt to portray itself as inevitable and eternal."

After crossing many centuries, continents, and lives, *The Years of Rice and Salt* quietly concludes in a small university town called Putatoui on the west coast of the Yingzhou continent — in what our timeline calls Davis, California. There a traumatized widower and former revolutionary named Bao learns to live alone in a community that Robinson describes as "a kind of alternative Village Homes." Bao tends garden, baby-sits neighborhood children, and teaches the history of the revolution he helped to make. As Bao achieves balance in his life, so does the rest of the world. When the book ends, Robinson's alternative history continues. Like the real Village Homes, the fictional utopia built by his characters must be defended, renewed, and spread.

There's entertainment and even comfort in *The Years of Rice and Salt*, but like the rest of Robinson's work, this is not a story that flatters its readers or offers them an easy escape from reality. Robinson's novels ask each of us to challenge exploitation and injustice, question what we believe and the way we live, and have the courage to create. Utopia — that "positive dynamic in history" — begins in such stories. "Everybody is addicted to stories," says Robinson, "and all of religion is just a version of stories, and so stories become more important than just entertainment, because we model so much behavior. Life imitating art is as common as can be." ★



# SUBTERRANEANUS CREW



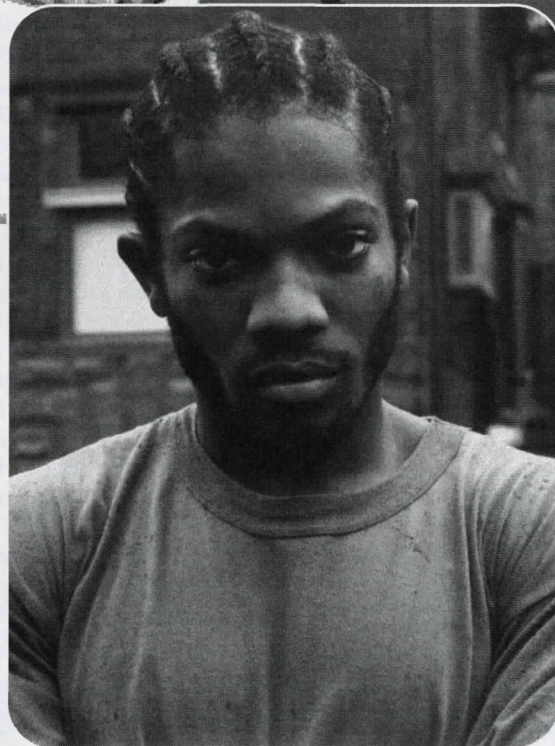
## featuring One Man Army

*This summer at the Underground Publishing Conference, we kicked off the festivities with a live show featuring rock, electronica, noise, djs, and a hip hop crew. The latter of which are a collective from the Ann Arbor/Detroit/Pontiac, Michigan area called Subterranean Crew — and they blew everyone away. DJ Dub had arranged to bring Subterranean Crew down for the show, and I had no idea what to expect. What we got was a solid hour of skilled rhymes and crowd-moving beats that impressed visitors from New York City to Oakland. Letting my midwest pride flare a little, I wanted to talk with one of the collective members, One Man Army, and introduce Subterranean Crew to Clamor readers all around the world. If positive hip hop that skillfully combines entertainment, education and political consciousness is something you're into, Subterranean Crew is some shit that will move you ...*

**CLAMOR:** Tell me a little about your history as a Michigan hip hop artist and how it all fits in with Subterranean Crew (including some background about SubCrew).

**One Man Army:** As a Michigan artist, I did open mics and such starting as early as '91. My first release was with Binary Star in '98 with our "New HipHop" EP. In Jan 2000, I started the Subterranean Records/Movement, and from there continued to build with Decompoze, Phrikshun, as well as newcomers like Magestik Legend, Kodac, and Illite. As a test, I decided to work on the Waterworld Too project, it was a test to see how we would all feel about working with each other.

*What is the Waterworld Too project? Could you explain it for those who might not even know where Waterworld is?*





To put it simple, the Waterworld Too project is an introduction to the Subterranean camp, as well as a preview of what's to come. Waterworld is a title that we use for Michigan, and since the crew is from Michigan, some of us Pontiac, others Detroit, we represent the entire state. We call it Waterworld because of the Great Lakes.

*What do see as your defining mission as a hip hop artist? How does this gel with the current climate of mainstream hip hop (i.e. the Jay-z's, the Nellys, etc.). Where do you fit into this picture? Sub is understandably critical of it all. Talk a bit about the alternatives that are out there.*

My mission as a hip hop artist is to honestly express myself, my views, and my creativity in a way that can motivate, inspire, educate, and uplift this society, community, youth, whatever and whoever my music contacts.

In contrast to the "mainstream" hip hop, my music — I consider it to be the pure stuff. Meaning untainted by the corporate influence. Not the poison that is going to corrupt today's youth, but [I want to] offer them positive alternatives to the garbage that's brainwashing them. Hoes, money, sex, cars, clothes, etc. These things are definitely a part of everyday life, but not the most important things in life.

After spending time in prison, and after seeing my community and peers affected by the repetitious rubbish, I feel that my place is to bring positive creativity to the table.

*Can you talk a little more explicitly about what impact prison had on you? Can you point to certain moments/ideas/people that directly changed the way you think about things or at least raised your consciousness about issues affecting your community?*

Prison was a wake-up call, a training ground, a rebirth, a spiritual evolution, a maturing process, and probably the place that ultimately saved my life. There are so many moments, ideas, and people that help me to develop and grow that I could write a book, but I guess one of the biggest observations about that whole situation is that it took me out of my environment and gave me a chance to look at the picture from an outside perspective. My friends, family, myself. I realized how the youth (myself at the time) in my community had little opportunities to explore positive routes, and easy alternatives to the wrong routes, and I felt like now I was put in a position to be able to speak from experience about the traps.

*A lot of the lyrics on Waterworld Too represent life that's a lot more real than the shit people hear about in mainstream hip hop. How do you see hip hop's connection with movements striving for social/political/economic justice for all people?*

Hip hop originally started as a voice for the community, from the community, to the community, about the community. Even though corporations have altered the true nature of hip hop, and turned it into a corporation, that is strictly about making money. My stand is that the community still needs that voice, and that's why I'm here, and that's why so many artists who remain loyal to the cause are here.

*Who are some of the other artists out there right now that are keeping true to the history*

*and nature of hip hop that you're down with? Who would you like to hold as most accountable for damaging hip hop as it's seen in mainstream America? In other words, where did all this shit go awry and who should we support?*

Honestly, from what I've seen and learned over the years, I don't know who's who anymore. The ones you think got a good head on their shoulders lose it when that deal is on the table. I'm not saying they ain't out there, I'm just saying that actions speak louder than words, and time will tell who is and who's not.

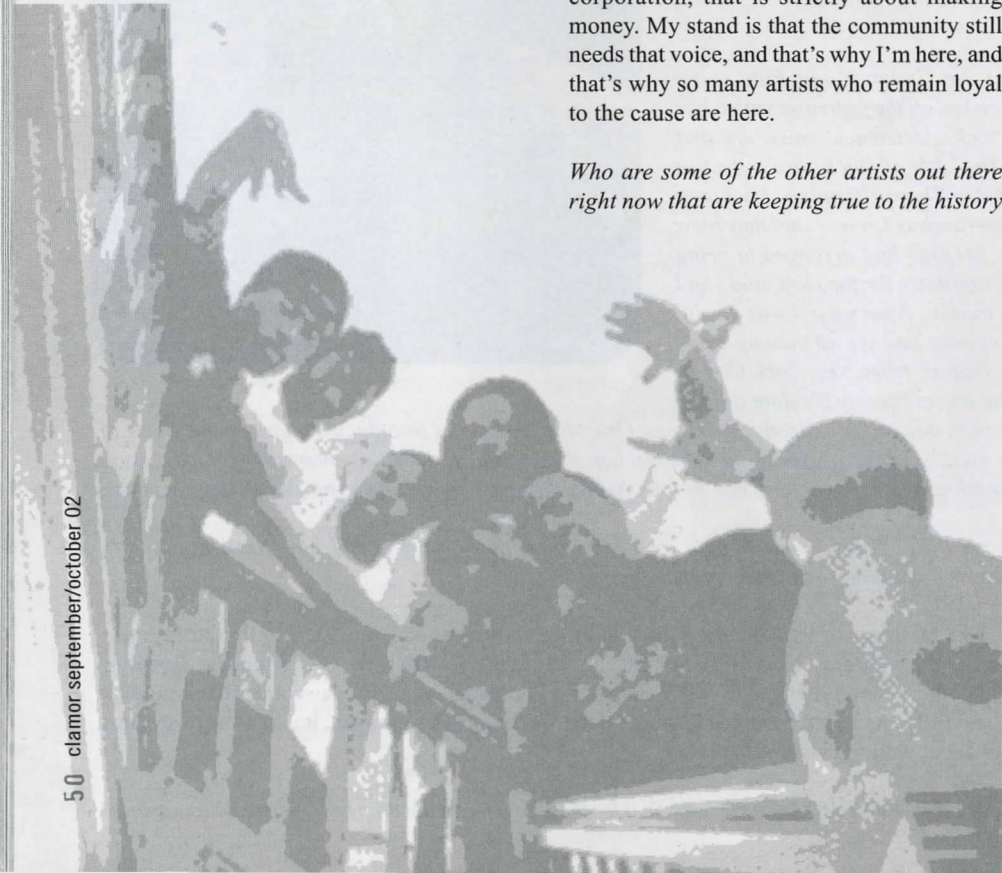
As far as damaging hip hop, I truly don't think hip hop is damaged. I do think that the industry is responsible for sweeping true hip hop under the rug and promoting what "appears" to be hip hop. But for those who know, we know that what they market and promote is not hip hop. What mainstream radio plays is not hip hop. There are people, or should I say artists, who I believe know what true hip hop is (because they used to do it), and have made a conscious decision to trade that in for a mainstream paycheck, and I do believe that this is the biggest distraction of who is hip hop and what is hip hop — and the corporations know this. So they go out and get MC such and such, make him some type of offer, and use him as a spokesperson for the garbage they want to promote, and the youth accept it because so and so is doing it.

*On a related note: You're most likely consumed with your work as an artist, but what other kinds of things are you involved in that also address the issues you think are important?*

Islam consumes a huge part of my life because Islam is "a way of life." So it affects me in all aspects. I also try to make a positive impact on my environment in more ways than one, so occasionally we spend time in elementary, middle, and high schools. Also juvenile detention centers. Anything community related that is positive.

*What kind of work are you doing in schools and detention centers?*

The school work varies. For example, at a high school, I've performed for the whole school. I did motivational sessions... I've gone to philosophy classes and spoke on the relation of mental prison to an actual prison... I've gone to creative writing classes and did creative writing workshops. In middle and elementary schools, I helped kids write poetry, in one class all the third graders wrote raps, and performed them for the class. In many of the schools I've explained the difference between hip hop and the





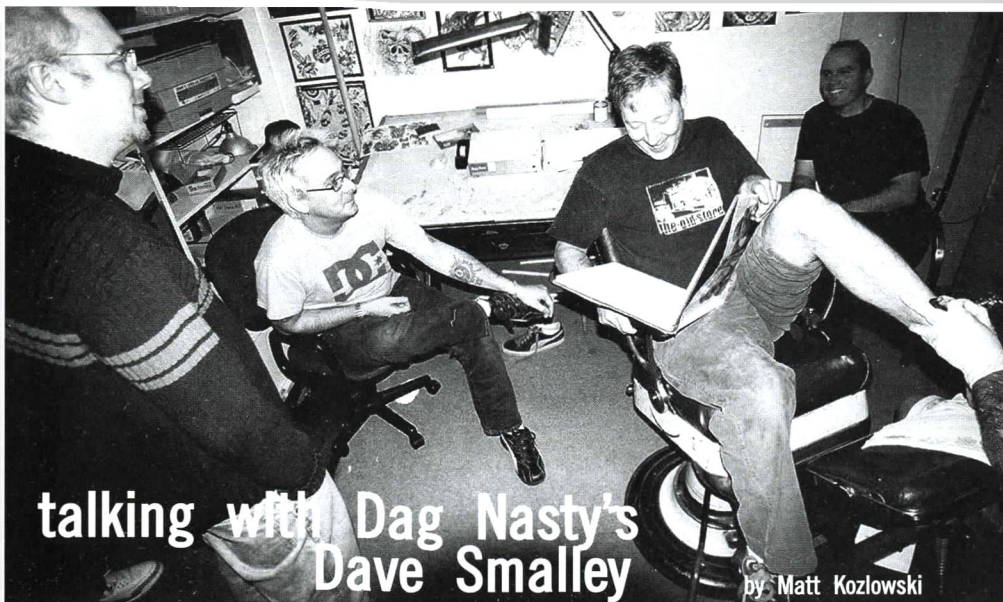
"mainstream." This is very important because none of these kids ever heard of Subterraneous, but they all heard of "Nelly" or "Lil' Bow Wow." In schools, and detention centers especially, I speak about personal experiences with school and prison. Sometimes there's an agenda, but most times I read the kids and go with the flow. I believe that it's important for a person like me to do that because when I was in school, the people who came to talk to us were old people that I couldn't really relate to, or just didn't care to listen. But for me to be fairly young, I can talk about personal experiences alone and get the kids open, and to top it off, drop a ill verse... Hip hop is that tool to get inside there head, and once I got 'em it's over. The teachers/administration are beggin' me to come back.

*On an unrelated note: Do you think it's necessary for you to be located in one of urban hotspots like NYC for SubCrew or OneManArmy to be successful? I ask this because I know y'all got Midwest pride like no other (we got it too!), and a lot of people have told us that doing a project like Clamor will never float if we don't move to one of the coasts. What do you think?*

As far as location goes, I truly believe you can make a difference wherever you are. As far as success goes, I guess we all have our own definition of what that is. To me, my mission ain't a hip hop mission, hip hop is one of the tools to accomplish that mission. I look at people like Martin Luther King for example... He did what he did in Montgomery, Alabama, and there are so many other great men and women who accomplished great things from different parts of the world. So I truly believe that the mission I'm on can be accomplished from the Midwest. Eventually, the distribution will travel worldwide, but I don't think my location will effect the truth of the message.

I think the more we understand what needs to be done, we can make people come to us, whether they be fans, consumers, distributors, record labels, the press, etc... If you make enough noise, they will come. ★

*One Man Army and Subterraneous Crew have recently released their full-length CD Waterworld Too. Check out where you can get it at [www.subterraneousrecords.com](http://www.subterraneousrecords.com).*



## talking with Dag Nasty's Dave Smalley

by Matt Kozlowski

Dag Nasty is a band that I've grown up with. Their first two albums, *Can I Say* and *Wig Out at Denkos*, got me through high school in '86 and '87. Their third and fourth albums, *Field Day* and *Four on the Floor*, got me through college in '88 and '92. Their music and lyrics are still a part of my everyday life. There's not a week that goes by without me popping in a bootleg show, a rare track, or one of their great full-length albums. With the band now re-uniting for the release of the spectacular new album, *Minority of One*, singer Dave Smalley agreed to answer a few of my more nitpicking questions. Fronting Dag Nasty, All, or Down By Law at one time or another, Smalley has been a constant presence in the scene for years...as well as the nicest guy in punk rock today.

*CLAMOR: What events lead to your initial departure from Dag Nasty back in '86?*

Dave: Well, basically I got a scholarship to go to graduate school. I had applied for it before joining the band, and it was awarded right before the *Can I Say* album was to be released. It was a rough decision, and a hard thing, to leave the group I loved.

*What are your views regarding the punk scene, and it's evolution over the years? How were things different back in the day with DYS and Dag Nasty, as compared to now?*

Well, I guess the most obvious is the size. Punk and hardcore are much bigger now. You have the super huge punk groups like the Offspring, Blink 182, Green Day, and Bad Religion — and then there's a whole lot of groups smaller than that but still successful. And even below that are groups out there making it happen, making CDs and getting fans. In the early to mid 1980s, punks would have laughed at you if you'd told them that punk groups would even make a living from their music.

*What have you been doing for the last 10 years?*

In the last 10 years, I married a beautiful girl, had children, formed and toured all over in Down By Law, made six albums with said punk group, been a

producer for a number of bands, bought a house, finished an M.A. in Political Science, done two Dag Nasty records now, and gotten lots and lots of tattoos. It's been a good last ten.

*How has your perspective on punk music and the "scene" in general changed now that you are quite a bit older than most of the people who will be listening to your new (and old) records?*

I actually disagree with that premise. Many of the really hardcore Dag Nasty fans are people in their 30s, who were our age when we put out *Can I Say* and are now still there with us. But, of course, there will be many fans younger than us, and that's obviously excellent. But to me, that age thing isn't an issue. I mean, the Jam had already broken up and were definitely older than me when I really learned about them and got into them. There are a ton of groups that are older than their audience, for one thing because it takes a long time to get really good at your craft in life.

As for perspective...it hasn't changed, really. I love punk rock and all that it did for me, all the doorways it opened for me as a fan and a musician. I wouldn't be who I am without punk rock, and I just think it's cool that punk proved all the music snobs wrong. I don't think we'll change the world, but I am sure that it's here to stay and that it will affect a lot of people in a thoughtful way. I try to view Down ByLaw and Dag Nasty as keepers of a very important flame. We were handed it by others, and someday we'll pass it along.

*I know you're currently working with journalism students for your "day job," could you explain a little bit about that?*

I am the youth editor at a large regional daily newspaper in Virginia. The paper puts out two sections per week written entirely by teenagers, and I am the editor for those two sections. It's a great paper and a great place to work, and a really cool opportunity for the kids in our area to be published and read by a mass audience.

*Dag Nasty's new album Minority of One is available at [www.revhq.com](http://www.revhq.com).*



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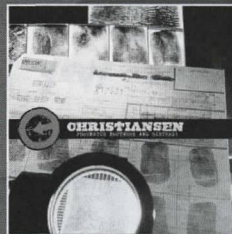
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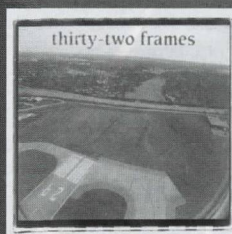
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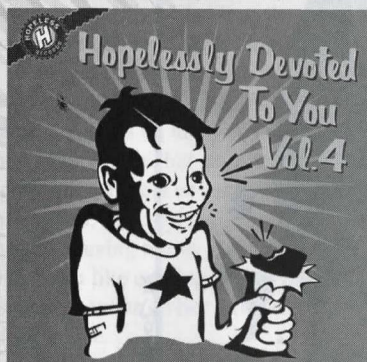
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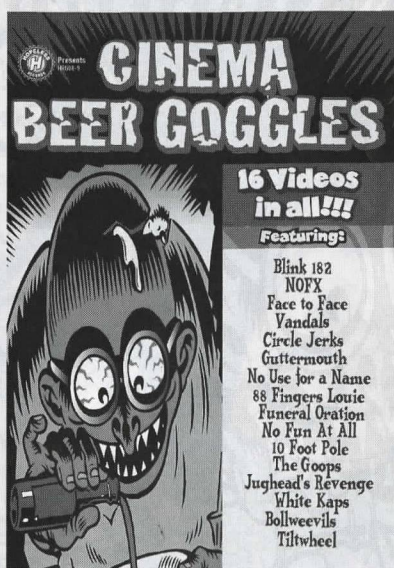
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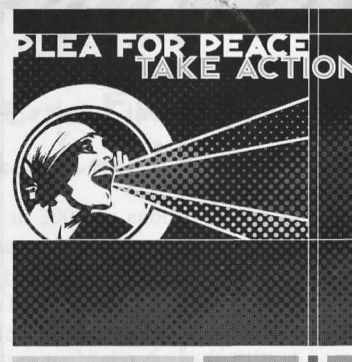
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# YOU ARE





# WHAT YOU EAT

Robert Jensen discusses the pervasive porn industry and what it says about you and your desires.

Before we get to the debates about how to define pornography, or whether pornography and sexual violence are connected, or how the First Amendment should apply to pornography, let's stop to ponder something more basic: What does the existence of a multi-billion dollar pornography industry say about us, about men? More specifically, what does "Blow Bang #4" say?

## This is What Pornography Looks Like

"Blow Bang #4" was in the "mainstream" section of a local adult video store. For a research project on the content of contemporary mass-marketed pornography, I asked the folks who work there to help me pick out typical videos rented by the typical customer. One of the 15 tapes I left with was "Blow Bang #4."

"Blow Bang #4" is: Eight different scenes in which a woman kneels in the middle of a group of three to eight men and performs oral sex on them. At the end of each scene, each of the men ejaculates onto the woman's face or into her mouth. To borrow from the description on the video box, the video consists of: "Dirty little bitches surrounded by hard throbbing cocks ... and they like it."

In one of these scenes, a young woman dressed as a cheerleader is surrounded by six men. For about seven minutes, "Dynamite" (the name she gives on tape) methodically moves from man to man while they offer insults that start with "you little cheerleading slut" and get uglier from there. For another minute and a half, she sits upside down on a couch, her head hanging over the edge, while men thrust into her mouth, causing her to gag. She strikes the pose of the bad girl to the end. "You like coming on my pretty little face, don't you," she says, as they ejaculate on her face and in her mouth for the final two minutes of the scene.

Five men have finished. The sixth steps up. As she waits for him to ejaculate onto her face, now covered with semen, she closes her eyes tightly and grimaces. For a moment, her face changes; it is difficult to read her emotions, but it appears she may cry. After the last man, number six, ejaculates, she regains her composure and smiles. Then the narrator off-camera hands her the pom-pom she had been holding at the beginning of the tape and says, "Here's your little cum mop, sweetheart — mop up." She buries her face in the pom-pom. The screen fades, and she is gone.

You can rent "Blow Bang #4" for \$3 at the store I visited, or buy it online for \$19.95. Or if you like, you can track down one of the other six tapes in the "Blow Bang" series. "If you love seeing one girl sucking on a bunch of cocks at one time, then this is the series for you," a reviewer says, adding, "The camera work is great."

Even a cursory review of pornography reveals that great camera work is not a requirement for success. "Blow Bang #4" is one of 11,000 new hardcore pornographic videos released each year, one of 721 million tapes rented each year in a country where total pornographic video sales and rentals reach about \$4 billion annually.

Pornography's profits rely not on quality of camera work but on the ability to produce erections in men quickly. There are many pornographic videos less harsh than "Blow Bang #4," and some that push much further into "extreme" territory with overt violence and sadomasochism. The company that produces the "Blow Bang" series, Armageddon Productions, boasts on one of its Web sites that "Vivid Sucks/Armageddon Fucks," taking a shot at the reputation of Vivid, one of the industry leaders that is known for tamer videos with slicker production values, or in Vivid's own words, "quality erotic film entertainment for the couples market."

## This is What Quality Erotic Film Entertainment for the Couples Market Looks Like

"Delusional," a Vivid release in 2000, is another of the 15 tapes I viewed. In its final sex scene, the lead male character (Randy) professes his love for the female lead (Lindsay). After discovering that her husband had been cheating on her, Lindsay had been slow to get into another relationship, waiting for the right man — a sensitive man — to come along. It looked as if Randy — was the man. "I'll always be here for you no matter what," Randy tells her. "I just want to look out for you," He says. Lindsay lets down her defenses, and they embrace.

After about three minutes of kissing and removing their clothes, Lindsay begins oral sex on Randy while on her knees on the couch, and he then performs oral sex on her while she lies on the couch. They then have intercourse, with Lindsay saying, "Fuck me, fuck me, please," and "I have two fingers in my ass, do you like that?" This leads to the usual progression of positions: She is on top of him





while he sits on the couch, and then he enters her vaginally from behind before he asks, “Do you want me to fuck you in the ass?” She answers in the affirmative, saying “Stick it in my ass.” After two minutes of anal intercourse, the scene ends with him masturbating and ejaculating on her breasts.

Which is the most accurate description of what contemporary men in the United States want sexually, Armageddon or Vivid? The question assumes a significant difference between the two; the answer is that both express the same sexual norm. “Blow Bang #4” begins and ends with the assumption that women live for male pleasure and want men to ejaculate on them. “Delusional” begins with the idea that women want something more caring in a man, but ends with the woman begging for anal penetration and ejaculation. One is cruder, the other slicker. Both represent a single pornographic mindset, in which male pleasure defines sex and female pleasure is a derivative of male pleasure. In pornography, women just happen to love exactly what men love to do to them, and what men love to do in pornography is to control and use, which allows the men who watch pornography to control and use as well.

When I do public talks on pornography and the feminist critique of the commercial sex industry, I describe, but do not show, these kinds of videos. I explain the other conventions of the industry, such as “double penetration,” the common practice in which two men’s penises penetrate a woman, vaginally and anally, at the same time. In some of those scenes the woman also performs oral sex on a third man at the same time. I explain that virtually every sex scene ends

with a man or men ejaculating onto a woman, most often in the face, what the industry calls a “facial.”

Many of the people in the audience, particularly the women, tell me that they find it difficult to hear about these things, even when the acts are described with the kind of clinical detachment I try to maintain. One woman approached me after a lecture and said, “What you said was important, but I wish I hadn’t been here. I wish I didn’t know what you told us. I wish I could forget it.”

For many of the women who feel so defeated by knowing, the most distressing part doesn’t seem to be simply learning what is in the videos, but knowing that men gain pleasure from what is in the videos. They ask me, over and over, “Why do men like this? What do you guys get from this?” They want to know why the mostly male consumers spend an estimated \$10 billion a year on pornography in the United States and \$56 billion around the world.

It is an important question with, no doubt, complex answers. What does it say about our society when men will take home a tape like “Blow Bang #4” and watch it, and masturbate to it. What does it say about our society’s conception of sexuality and masculinity that large numbers of men can find pleasure in watching a young woman gag while a penis is pushed into her throat followed by six men ejaculating on her face and in her mouth? Or that other men, who might find that scene too extreme, prefer to watch one man have sex with a woman that begins with tender words and ends with “Do you want me to fuck you in the ass?” and ejaculation on her breasts? What does it say that such a video, made for men to masturbate to, is considered classy and upscale? I think it says masculinity in this culture is in trouble.

### *A Footnote: Why has the Feminist Critique of Pornography been Attacked so Strenuously?*

There are many points in the pornography debate on which reasonable people can disagree. Legal strategies raise important issues about freedom and responsibility, and definitive connections between media consumption and human behavior are always difficult to establish. More generally, sexuality is a complex phenomenon in which wide human variation makes universal claims suspect.

But the feminist critique inspires an apoplectic reaction from pornography’s defenders that, to me, has always seemed over the top. The political debate that the critique set off, both within feminism and in the wider culture, seems unusually intense. From my experience of writing and speaking publicly, I can be fairly certain that what little I have written here so far will cause some readers to condemn me as a sexual fascist or a prude.

One obvious reason for the strength of these denunciations is that pornographers make money, hence there is a profit motive in moving quickly with maximal force to marginalize or eliminate criticism of the industry. But the more important reason, I believe, is that at some level everyone knows that the feminist critique of pornography is about more than pornography. It encompasses a critique of the way “normal” men in this culture have learned to experience sexual pleasure — and the ways in which women and children learn to accommodate that and/or

When I do public talks ... they ask me, over and over, “Why do men like this? What do you guys get from this?” They want to know why the mostly male consumers spend an estimated \$10 billion a year on pornography in the United States and \$56 billion around the world.



suffer its consequences. That critique is not just a threat to the pornography industry or to the personal collections that men have stashed in their closets, but to everyone. The feminist critique asks a simple but devastating question of men: "Why is this sexually pleasurable to you, and what kind of person does that make you?" And because heterosexual women live with men and men's sexual desire, those women can't escape the question — either in terms of the desire of their boyfriends, partners, and husbands, or the way they have come to experience sexuality. That takes us way beyond magazines, movies, and computer screens, to the heart of who we are and how we live sexually and emotionally. That scares people. It probably should scare us. It has always scared me.

## Another Footnote: What is the Feminist Critique of Pornography?

The feminist critique of pornography emerged from the wider movement against sexual violence in the late 1970s. The previous moral debate about obscenity between liberals and conservatives had pitted the critics of "dirty pictures" against the defenders of "sexual liberation." The feminist critics shifted the discussion to the ways in which pornography eroticizes domination and subordination. Those critics identified the harms to women and children that are connected to pornography, including the harm: (1) to the women and children used in the production of pornography; (2) to women and children who have pornography forced on them; (3) to women and children who are sexually assaulted by men who use pornography; and (4) in living in a culture in which pornography reinforces and sexualizes women's subordinate status.

## Troubled Masculinity

The focus of my work, and the feminist anti-pornography movement more generally, has been the harm to women and children. But that movement has long understood that coming to terms with the violence, sexual violence, sexualized violence, and violence-by-sex that are endemic in this culture requires that we confront masculinity. Just as we have come to see that racism is a problem of white people, we can say that sexual abuse and violence are problems of men. Just as we can start to deal with the pathological nature of the culture's conception of whiteness, so also we can start to come to terms with the pathological nature of masculinity.

The traditional traits associated with masculinity in this culture are control, domination, toughness, hyper-competitiveness, emotional repression, aggressiveness, and violence. A common insult that boys hurl at each other is the accusation of being a girl, a being who lacks strength. No insult on the playground is worse than being called a girl, except perhaps being called a "fag," a derivative of girl. Feminism and other progressive movements have tried to change that definition of masculinity, but it has proved to be difficult to dislodge.

Not surprisingly, pornography reflects that conception of masculinity; men generally are trained to view sex as a realm of life in which men are naturally dominant and women's sexuality should conform to men's needs. Like any system, there is variation both in how this plays out and how specific men experience it. To point out patterns of male dominance in socialization and behavior is not to say every man is a rapist. Let me repeat: I am not asserting that every man is a rapist. Now that I have said that, I can be sure of only one thing: Some men who read this will say, "This guy is one of those radical feminists who believes every man is a rapist."

So, let me put this in the first person: I was born in the United States in 1958, the post-*Playboy* generation. I was taught a very specific sexual grammar, which Catharine MacKinnon has succinctly

summarized: "Man fucks woman; subject verb object." In the world in which I learned about sex, sex was the acquisition of pleasure by the taking of women. In the locker room, the question was not, "Did you and your girlfriend find a way to feel passionate and close last night?" but, "Did you get any last night?" What does one get? One gets "a piece of ass." What kind of relationship can one have to a piece of ass? Subject, verb, object.

Now, maybe I had an idiosyncratic upbringing. Maybe the sex education I got — on the street, in pornography — was different than what most men learn. Maybe what I was taught about being a man — on the street, in the locker room — was an aberration. But I have spent a lot of time talking to men about this, and I don't think so. My approach to all this is simple: Masculinity is a bad idea, for everyone, and it's time to get rid of it. Not reform it, but eliminate it.

## Masculinity, Not

While most everyone agrees masculinity needs to change, few are interested in eliminating it. Take the "real men don't rape" campaigns. As a response to men's violence, those campaigns ask men to think about redefining what a "real man" is. It's hard to disagree with the goal of reducing men's violence, and one can see how as a short-term strategy it might work. But I don't want to redefine masculinity. I don't want to identify any set of traits that adhere to being biologically male. I want to get rid of masculinity.

But wait, some might say. Just because at this point the traits assigned to men are pretty ugly doesn't mean we can't assign different traits. How about redefining masculinity as being sensitive and caring? What's wrong with that? There is nothing wrong with asking men to be more caring, but the question raised is obvious: Why are those specifically masculine traits? Are they not human traits we might want everyone to share? If so, why label them a feature of masculinity?

Real men, in this sense, would be like real women. We would all be real people. Traits would not adhere to biological categories. But once we start playing the masculinity/femininity game, the goal has to be to find some things that men are and women aren't, or vice versa. Otherwise, there is no sense to assigning the same qualities to two groups and pretending that the qualities are masculine and feminine, male and female. If that is the case, they are human traits, present or absent in people to varying degrees but not rooted in biology. The fact that we still want to assign them to sex categories shows only how desperate we are to hang onto the notion that the sex categories are indicators of inherent social and psychological attributes.

In other words, so long as there is masculinity, we're in trouble. We can mitigate the trouble in some ways, but it seems to me much better to get out of trouble than consciously deciding to stay stuck in it.

## "Blow Bang" Revisited, or Why Pornography Makes Me So Sad, Part I -

Like many men in this culture, I used pornography through my childhood and early adult years. But in the dozen years that I have been researching and writing about pornography and the feminist critique, I have seen relatively little pornography, and then only in very controlled settings. Five years ago, a co-author and I did an analysis of pornographic videos that required more exposure to pornography than I had had in many years, and my reaction to the material took me by surprise. I found myself struggling to understand the sexual arousal I felt while watching, and it took me some time to deal emotionally with the brutality of the material and my sexual reaction to it.



When I undertook this recent project, a replication of earlier work to look for changes in the industry, I was prepared to deal with my physical reactions to the tapes. I had come to understand that it was completely predictable that I would be aroused by videos, which after all were produced specifically for the purpose of arousing people like me. I talked through things beforehand with my co-author and other friends. I was ready to do the work, though I wasn't looking forward to it. A friend joked, "Too bad you can't subcontract this job out to someone who would enjoy it."

I had about 25 hours of tape to watch. I treated the work as any other scholarly project. I went to work at 8 a.m., setting up in a conference room at the university where I work. I had a TV and VCR, with headphones so that no one in adjoining rooms would be bothered by the sound. I typed notes into my laptop computer. I took a lunch break. At the end of a long day, I put the tools of the task away and went home for dinner.

I was alternately aroused and bored by the tapes — predictable given how intensely sexual, and at the same time rigidly formatted, the genre is. I was prepared for both of those reactions. What I wasn't prepared for was the deep sadness I felt during the viewing. During that weekend and for days afterward I was flooded with a wild range of intense emotions and a deep sense of despair.

I assume this was partly due to the intensity of watching so much pornography in such concentrated form. Men usually view pornography in short bursts to achieve a sexual result; pornography is primarily a masturbation facilitator. I suspect men rarely watch an entire videotape, given the heavy use of the fast-forward button. If men finish their masturbation before the end of the tape, it's likely most don't finish viewing.

When viewed episodically like that, the sexual pleasure dominates the experience of consuming pornography. It's difficult to see what lies just beneath one's erection. But when viewed one after another, in this numbing fashion, the pleasure wears off quickly and the underlying ideology becomes easier to see. After a few tapes, it becomes difficult not to see the concentrated woman-hating and subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) violence that saturates most of these "mainstream" videos. I think that leads to empathy for the women, something that the typical pornography consumer doesn't experience.

Such empathy is a pornographer's nightmare. The men using pornography are supposed to identify with the men in the video, not the women. If men ask the question, "Do women really want to be penetrated by two men at the same time?" the pornographic game is over. Women must remain less-than-human if pornography is to work. If women become anything more than, in the words of notorious "extreme" pornography producer Max Hardcore, a "cock receptacle," then the men seeking pleasure might stop to ask how it feels for the real woman in the scene, the woman-who-is-a-person.

"Blow Bang #4" was the sixth tape I had watched that day. By the time I put it in the VCR, my body had, for the most part, quit reacting to the sexual stimulation. At that point, it would have been difficult not to wonder how the woman in one scene felt as eight men did their best to make her gag by grabbing her head and pressing it down on their penis as far as possible. On tape, the woman said she loved it. Indeed, it's possible that woman enjoyed it, but I couldn't help but wonder how she felt when it was over and the cameras were turned off. How would women who watched this feel? How would women I know feel if it were happening to them? That's not denying women's autonomy and agency; it's simple empathy, caring about another human being and her feelings, trying to understand the experience of another person.

If empathy is part of what makes us human, and pornography requires that men repress empathy, then we have to ask a rather difficult question. While men watch pornography, are men human? More on that later.

## Why Pornography Makes Me so Sad, Part II

At the end of the first day's viewing, I was driving home. With no warning and no apparent provocation, I began to sob. The images from the videos flooded over me, especially the young woman in "Blow Bang #4." I found myself saying to myself, "I don't want to live in this world."

I realized later that the sadness was very selfish. It wasn't at that moment primarily about the women in the videos or their pain. I believe that at that moment, the feeling in me was a reaction to what the videos say about me, not what they say about women. If pornography helps define what a man is sexually in this culture, then it's not clear to me how I can live as a sexual being in this culture.

I live in a world in which men, lots of men, not just a few isolated, crazy men, like to watch and masturbate to images of other men ejaculating onto a woman-made-less-than-human. The videos forced me to remember that at one point in my life, I watched. I am past feeling guilt or shame about that; my reaction is more about my current struggle to carve out a place for myself in a world in which being a man is associated with sexual pleasure at the expense of women. I don't want to always have to fight that association, in the world or inside my own body.

When I watched those videos, I felt trapped, as if I had no place to be a man and be a sexual being. I don't want to associate myself with masculinity, but there is no other obvious place for me to be. I am not a woman, and I have no interest in being a eunuch. Is there a way to be a sexual being outside of what the culture tells me I should be?

One possible response: If you don't like it, then create something different. That is an answer, but not all that useful. Trying to build a different approach to gender and sex is not a solitary project. I have allies in that project, but I also have to live in the wider society, which constantly pulls me back into the conventional categories. Our identity is a complex combination of the categories that the society we live in creates, of how the people around us define us, and of who we actively will ourselves to be. We do not create ourselves in isolation; we cannot will ourselves to be something new, all alone, without help and support.

Another possible response: We could talk honestly about why these images exist, and why we use them. We could try to answer women's questions: "Why do men like this? What do you guys get from this?"

Do not mistake this for self-indulgence or whining. I am aware that the people who bear the most serious costs of this sexual system are the women and children who are most vulnerable to sexual invasion. As a white adult male with privilege, my psychological struggles are relatively insignificant compared with the pain of those others. I talk about this not to focus attention on my struggle, but to connect to the collective struggle against masculinity. If men are to join in the project of taking apart masculinity, we must have some sense that we can find an identity to replace it. If we don't talk about the sadness and fear that come with this struggle, masculinity has nothing to worry about. It will endure in its present form. Men will keep marching off to war. Men will keep slamming into each other's bodies on the football field. And "Blow Bang #4," and perhaps someday #104, will keep doing a brisk business at the adult video store.

## The Humanity of Men

To be clear: I don't hate men. I don't hate myself. I am talking about masculinity, not the state of being a male human. I am talking about men's behavior.

Feminists are often accused of hating men. Radical feminists in the anti-pornography movement are accused of being the most man-hating of the feminists. And Andrea Dworkin is typically held



I have never met a man who didn't feel uneasy about masculinity, who didn't feel that in some way he wasn't living up to what it meant to be a man. There's a reason for that: Masculinity is a fraud; it's a trap. None of us are man enough.

up as the most fanatical of the fanatics, the ultimate castrating feminist. I have read Dworkin's work, and I do not think she hates men. Neither does she. Here's what Dworkin has written about men: "I don't believe rape is inevitable or natural. If I did, I would have no reason to be here [speaking to a conference of men]. If I did, my political practice would be different than it is. Have you ever wondered why we are not just in armed combat against you? It's not because there's a shortage of kitchen knives in this country. It is because we believe in your humanity, against all the evidence."

Feminists believe in the humanity of men, against all the evidence of rape and battering and harassment, of discrimination and dismissal. That faith in men's humanity is true of every woman, heterosexual and lesbian, I have met and worked with in movements against sexual violence and the commercial sex industry. They are women who have no illusions about the way the world works, yet still they believe in the humanity of men. They believe in it more deeply, I suspect, than I do. There are days when I have my doubts. But indulging such doubt is a luxury of privilege. Dworkin reminds men of that, of how hiding behind our shame about what we do is cowardly: "[Women] do not want to do the work of helping you to believe in your humanity. We cannot do it anymore. We have always tried. We have been repaid with systematic exploitation and systematic abuse. You are going to have to do this yourselves from now on and you know it."

Maybe a first step is identifying the markers of humanity. Here's the beginning of my list: Compassion and passion, solidarity and self-respect, the ability to love, and the willingness to struggle. Add your own to it. Then ask this question: Can we men acknowledge our humanity if we find sexual pleasure in watching three men penetrate a woman orally, vaginally, and anally at the same time? Can we and live our humanity to the fullest if we find sexual pleasure in watching eight men ejaculate onto a woman's face and into her mouth? Can we masturbate to those images and truly believe they have no effect beyond the rise and fall of our penises in that moment? Even if you believe that such sexual "fantasies" have no effect in the world outside our heads, what does that pleasure say about our humanity?

Brothers, this matters. Please don't let yourself off easy right now. Don't ignore that question and start arguing about whether or not we can really define pornography. Don't start explaining that social scientists have not yet established a definitive link between pornography and sexual violence. And please, don't begin explaining how it's important to defend pornography because you really are defending free speech.

No matter how important you think those questions are, right now I am not asking those questions. I am asking you to think about what it means to be a human being. Please don't ignore the question. I need you to ask it. Women need you to ask it, too.

## What I am Not Saying

I am not telling women how to feel or what to do. I am not accusing them of having false consciousness or being dupes of patriarchy. I am not talking to women. I am speaking to men. Women, you have your own struggles and your own debates among yourselves. I want to be an ally in those struggles, but I stand outside of them.

## What I am Saying

I do not stand outside of masculinity. I am stuck in the middle of it, fighting for my life. I need help, not from women but from other men. I cannot resist masculinity alone; it must be a project we undertake together. And Dworkin is right; we have to do it ourselves. Women have been kind to us, kinder perhaps than is in their own interests, no doubt kinder than we deserve. We cannot rely on the kindness of women any longer; it is not inexhaustible, and it is not fair or just to continue to exploit it.

Here are some ways we can start resisting masculinity: We can stop glorifying violence and we can reject its socially sanctioned forms, primarily in the military and the sports world. We can make peace heroic. We can find ways to use and enjoy our bodies in play without watching each other crumble to the ground in pain after a "great hit."

We can stop providing the profits for activities that deny our own humanity, hurt other people, and make sexual justice impossible: pornography, strip bars, prostitution, sex tourism. There is no justice in a world in which some bodies can be bought and sold.

We can take seriously the feminist critique of sexual violence, not just by agreeing that rape and battery are bad, but by holding each other accountable and not looking the other way when our friends do it. And, just as important, we can ask ourselves how the sexual ethic of male dominance plays out in our own intimate relationships, and then ask our partners how it looks to them.

If we do those things, the world will be a better place not just for the people who currently suffer because of our violence, but for us. If you are not moved by arguments about justice and the humanity of others, then be moved by the idea that you can help make a better world for yourself. If you cannot take the pain of others seriously, then take seriously your own pain, your own hesitations, your own sense of unease about masculinity. You feel it; I know you do. I have never met a man who didn't feel uneasy about masculinity, who didn't feel that in some way he wasn't living up to what it meant to be a man. There's a reason for that: Masculinity is a fraud; it's a trap. None of us are man enough.

There are men who know this, more men than will admit it. We are looking for each other. We are gathering. We search each other's eyes with hope. "Can I trust you?" we ask silently. Can I trust myself? In the end, will we both get scared and rush back to masculinity, to what we know? In the end, will we both reach for "Blow Bang #4"?

In a world full of the pain that comes with being alive, death and disease, disappointment and distress, being a human being is hard enough. Let's not add to our troubles by trying to be men. Let's not add to the suffering of others.

Let's stop trying to be men. Let's struggle to be human beings. ★





# SEX TOYS 101

Ayun Halliday dons a strap-on to bring you this story about Toys in Babeland's sexy school.

When enrolling in a class titled "Sex Toys 101," human nature tricks you into worrying that all of the other students will have loads more hands-on experience with slippery, vibrating, silicone, cucumber-shaped things than you. Minutes into the two-and-a-half hour session I attended at Toys in Babeland, it was easy to divide the haves from the have-nots (or the have-a-little-bit-and-would-like-to-know-mores). The women who work at Toys in Babeland have clocked a lot more creative action in the sack (and the elevator and the shower and the ladies room) than the rest of us who have yet to venture too far afield of vanilla. I think. Maybe the grandmotherly pupil in pearls and a carefully coiffed silver bouffant is more of a horndog than appearances suggest. She certainly aspired to greatness, taking notes as dildos of all shapes and sizes were handed around like dim sum or exam papers. She, like the rest of us, had opted to sit out of camera range of the Oxygen network crew, who were filming the class for an upcoming segment. The only "students" who will turn up in the documentary are on the Toys in Babeland payroll. A pigtailed Swedish woman who shared an anecdote about her masturbating octogenarian grandmother sat with them for the first minute, but relocated an off-camera chair when she was overwhelmed by her proximity to the air-conditioner. When the segment airs, Oxygen viewers may be left wondering why a pack of feisty young women (whose erotic knowledge would fill several books) would bother with a 101 class. Filmed against a wall of black leather and colorful vinyl harnesses, they didn't hesitate to name a favorite brand of lube, recommend a waterproof vibrator well suited for hot tub fun (The Water Dancer), and nod knowingly when the discussion ran to butt plugs. Those of us who chose not to appear on television included a 20-something Asian lesbian with limited English skills, a gray-bearded man seeking confirmation that a strap-on dildo could spice things up for a woman with an impotent male partner, and a young lady whose admission that she'd never used a sex toy earned her a complimentary silver bullet, a sleek metallic vibe the size of a quail's egg.

The sheer volume of items with which one might fuck oneself — or another —

became mind-numbing after awhile, an effect not unlike the moment midway through a Tupperware party when one of the weary guests thinks: "Why should I spend money on this stuff when I can recycle a quart-sized container of yogurt for free. They're just leftovers for god's sake."

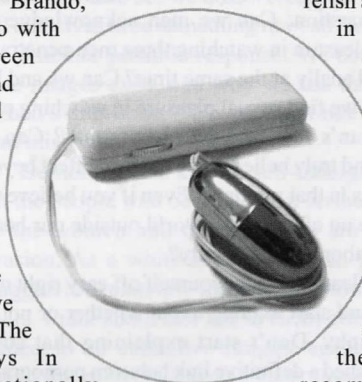
"This is a really nice one," commented Claire Cavanah, who co-owns Toys In Babeland with Rachel Venning, our other teacher for this session of "Sex Toys 101." She held up a particularly juicy specimen, a realistic, flesh-colored model with pendulous balls. "It's silicone, feels like meat." The silver fox on the folding chair ahead of mine made a notation on her purse-sized memo pad. The young woman behind me bumped me on the shoulder with a \$54 Ultraflesh Six-Incher to signal that she was ready to pass it forward. I was caught up in examining "Brando," a veritable pillar of a dildo with linoleum-like swirls of green and black that put me in mind of the toilet seat and matching vanity in my father's bathroom, circa 1975. Later, Claire would caution us not to get too hung up on color because a black condom can be unrolled over anything to give it "fetishy-looking" appeal. The novelty items that Toys In Babeland stocks are functionally discreet and extremely durable, guaranteed not to fall apart immediately after the bridal shower or stag party.

"Note how butch this is," Rachel crowed, brandishing the aptly named "Fleshlight," a gray plastic canister with a cap that unscrews to reveal a penetration-hungry mouth. "It could be sitting in your garage! It makes me wish I had a penis." Claire took the Fleshlight from her partner, expertly upending it to demonstrate how easily the ultraflesh core can be removed for washing. Without its utilitarian shell, the pliant mass sprawled obscenely, like a bloated sea slug fattened on spoooge. "It's also available in butt," Claire remarked slyly.

Our intrepid leaders, Claire and Rachel were the best part of the experience as far as I was concerned. Clad in jeans, sensible shoes and black "Toys in Babeland" t-shirts, they could have been anybody's favorite camp counselors, capable, good humored and endlessly patient with the flabby, sunburned kid who can't figure out how to hit the ball. They started the class with an anatomy lesson ("We believe that when you know the territory it's easier to get off"), utilizing charts and an adorable vulva puppet equipped with a G-spot and a clitoris denoted by a single sequin. They were quick to praise and murmur sympathetically in response to their students' questions and anecdotes. Neither was shy about drawing on examples from their own life. Rachel alluded to her introduction to the multi-beaded "Ripple" butt plug with obvious relish and Claire, jiggling her rump in a pantomime of obviously staged ecstasy, scoffed that no real lesbians are going to get off going ass to ass on one of those extra-long double-headed dildos that are a staple of porn films. They're not out to fleece the public with fancy gadgetry either. For the shipwrecked who are allowed only one sex toy on their desert islands, Rachel recommends a big bottle of

modestly priced lube. I think most of us in class developed an immediate crush on both of them.

Still when they asked for a student volunteer to model a strap-on dildo over his or her clothes, no hands shot up. The employees in the camera-range chairs sat tight. Having spent years performing in theatre that relied on audience participation, I understood. No one wants to see an actor called up onstage to risk making an ass of his or herself; You want Mort, the plumber from New Jersey, whose wife dragged him to the theatre for their 10<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. "We can turn off the cameras," Rachel offered, her eyebrows knit hopefully. Okay. I raised my hand to the supportive, relieved applause of my





classmates. Our beloved counselors asked my name and gave me my choice of thong or jockstrap-style black leather, studded harness. From the days when I was the one shepherding a nervous audience participant through a potentially scary process, I recognized the reassuring "Don't be nervous — we're right here with you — you're the one in charge" quality of the attention Rachel and Claire lavished on me as they tenderly buckled me in. It was almost like they were psyching me up for my first bungee jump. "How does that feel?" Rachel asked when "Leo," a fire-engine red, non-naturalistic dildo was positioned just above my pubic bone.

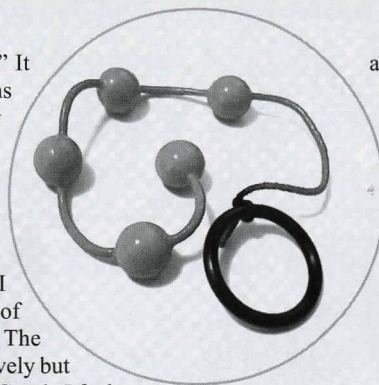
"Uh, loose," I said, desperately wishing I had done laundry so I could have been wearing something more flattering than dumpy jeans, rag wool socks and a second-hand orange t-shirt with an off-center monkey decal.

"Alright!" Rachel said approvingly and cinched the straps a few notches tighter while Claire inserted a vibrating silver bullet into a

small pocket above "Leo." It buzzed against the buttons of my Levis. "Okay, now how's this?"

I looked out at the twenty or so people facing me on folding chairs. "Leo" was pointed right at them. "Good!" I replied. "I feel less like the mother of two preschoolers now." The others chuckled appreciatively but what I really meant was, "Good. I feel like I could fuck somebody with this thing."

The only thing that could have improved the class for me would have been a diploma, suitable for framing, and maybe some cookies and punch, an American post-commencement standard. The graduates milled around, inspecting cock rings, 3-ring binders describing porn videos available for rent and the notorious bunny-eared vibe. I took the subway home with something black, rippled

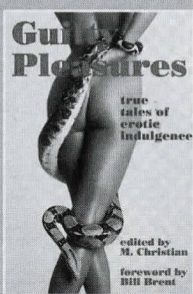


and silicone that was handed to me in a brown wrapper that would have been plain but for the Toys In Babeland logo stamped proudly onto one side. ★

**CONTACT TOYS IN BABELAND:**  
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212/375-1701

**Guilty Pleasures: True Tales of Erotic Indulgence**  
edited by M. Christian, with a foreword by Bill Brent.  
Black Books 2002  
www.queernet.org/BlackBooks



What's your private fantasy? What turns you on...but also makes you a little uncomfortable? If you can't yet admit to your secret sexual daydreams, at least you can read about other people's deepest desires in *Guilty Pleasures: True Tales of Erotic Indulgence*, edited by M. Christian. In this anthology, Christian, who writes intelligent and titillating erotica, collects 29 stories from some of the hippest, most popular sex writers in the business. As Bill Brent says in the foreword, "Tangling with propriety is a turn-on. What seems bad can feel awfully good."

Many of the stories are about breaking taboos. In "The Babysitter's Tale (Or the Fine Edge of Disaster)," iconoclast Carol Queen writes of having consensual sex with a married man, who "was twice my age, but we were friends." Alison Tyler explores issues of incest in "Bad Girl," a scenario in which her male partner spontaneously pretends to be her lecherous father. "Confessional Blue" by Linda Poelzl tells of a Catholic high school girl lifting her plaid skirt for oral sex from her boyfriend in the church's new confessional booth; the scene gets even steamier when the young, studly priest opens the panel and asks the narrator if she has any sins to confess. Porn-noir writer Thomas S. Roche explores his fascination with lust and death in "Sex With the Dead: An Appreciation," and in "Jane Austen Must Be Turning in Her Grave," Sukie de la Croix shares his penchant for ejaculating on the gravesites of famous literary figures.

Other writings describe the relationship between pleasure and pain. Marcy Sheiner will forever change the way you think of a visit to the dentist with "Open." Patrick Califia-Rice describes his attraction to inflicting physical punishment in "True North on the Com-

pass of Desire," while in "Fuckstruck," Andrea Bertonelli describes her wish to be the recipient of such attention.

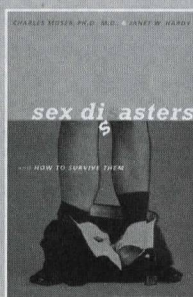
There's more: threesomes, cross dressing, masturbation with inanimate objects, anal sex, people with deviant gender, anonymous sex, pimple picking, build-up demolition, and sex work.

I think that the finest feature of this collection is that the stories are well written, sexy, and smart. Although each tale may not be arousing to all readers, they are all a pleasure to read, sure to broaden horizons and provoke thought. In an age when the proliferation of erotica means that there are books filled with stories that don't seem to have been revised after the first draft, *Guilty Pleasures* stands out as a treasure of finely crafted writing.

-Chantel Guidry

#### **Sex Disasters and How To Survive Them**

Charles Moser, PHD, MD, and Janet W Hardy  
Greenery Press 2002  
www.greenerypress.com



*Sex Disasters* should be on every bedside table. You may think I'm kidding, but really — even if you have totally normal, vanilla sex, there may come a point when you need to know what to do if a condom falls off during sex or if it breaks. Or, what if vaginal penetration hurts you or if you have a pain in your testicles or penis? All very common things, which could happen to anyone.

However, this book is ALSO for people who have ANYTHING but everyday, pedestrian sex. What happens if you get something stuck up your butt? What if it is glass? And it breaks? Or, what if you're involved in a totally consensual bondage or S&M play, and someone comes to the door? What if it's a cop who heard the screaming?

These are all things that you may need help with

at some point in your sexual life, and we never really know what's in our future, do we? *Sex Disasters* has answers to the questions above as well as about four dozen more, from what to do if you get an STD to dealing with sexual dysfunction or simply just uncomfortable situations (like walking in on your son or daughter having sex). There are also a few chapters titled "Extremely Complicated Instructions for Simple Stuff" that cover such basics as putting on a condom, cleaning your sex toys, or talking to your doctor about sex.

The reason that I love this book so much is that it is the most sex-positive, non-judgmental sex guide I have read in ages. It doesn't matter how straightforward or twisted your sex life is, you will find a welcome place in this book, all presented in a way that makes you feel good about the choices you've made in regards to your own sexual life.

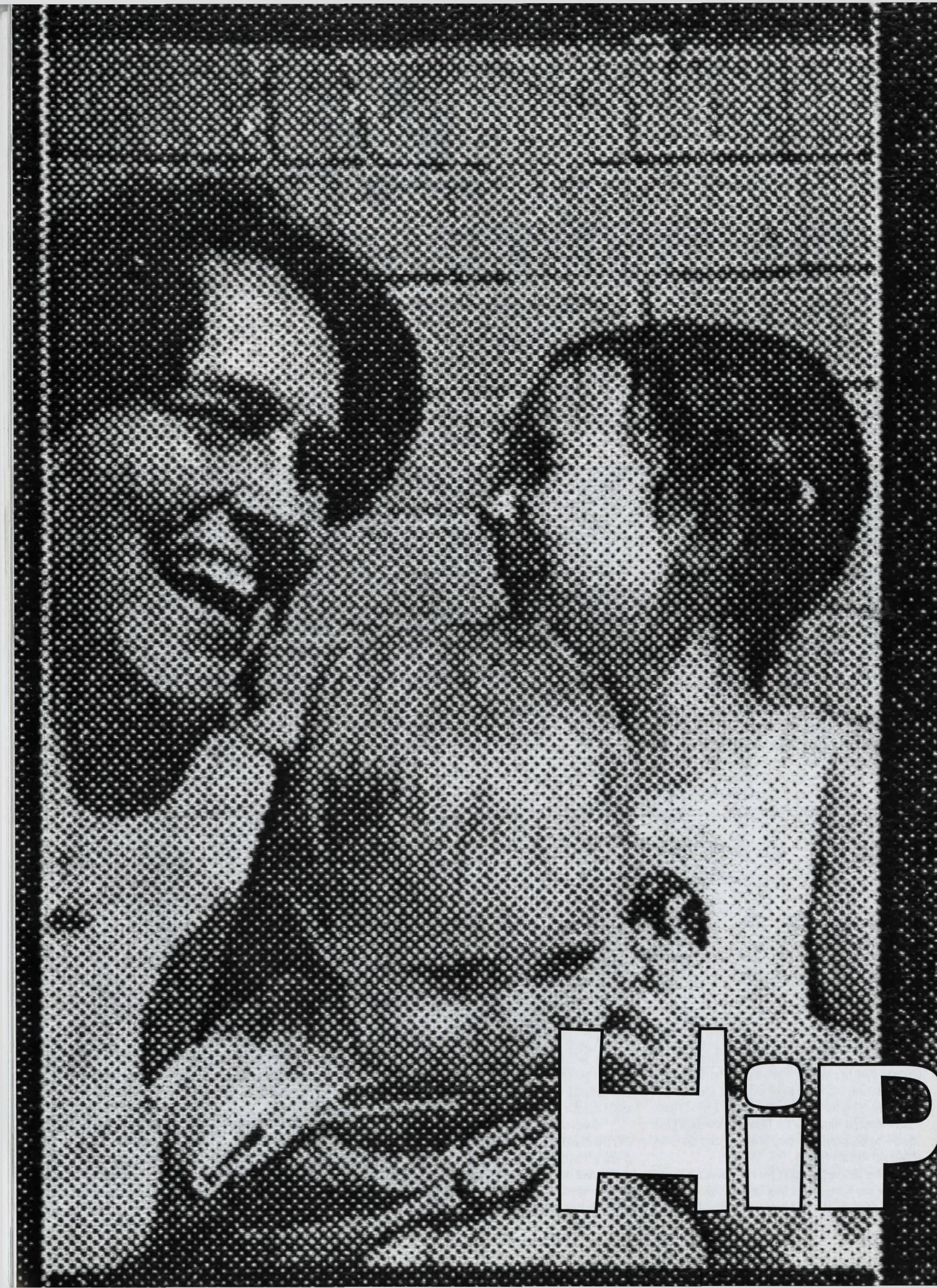
Also, because I deal with sexual health on a daily basis through my workplace, I find that the amount of accurate and thorough sex health info in this book very exciting. Along with recommending regular testing for STD's, this book also recommends self breast and testicular exams and annual pap smears — right between a section on stalkers and a chapter called "The sex went fine. But now I've got this nasty itchy rash" — without breaking stride, and with the same wit and wisdom present throughout the rest of the book. Don't get me wrong, *Sex Disasters* is very humorous, but when it's time to be serious (like when talking about rape and sexual assault), the authors get down to business. And they don't hesitate to tell you when you need to go to the emergency room for that thing stuck in your penis ("Thanks Doc. Now I've got something stuck in my pee-hole." Ouch!).

This is a brand new resource to help you have a happy and healthy sexual life, all with humor and ease. This book is written in a way that it seems perfectly natural to do everything that you are doing, and the sex-positiveness and the accessibility make this essential for everyone who has sex — whether it's with men, women, one at a time or more at a time, or just yourself. The three word review? Buy this book.

-Jen Angel

## THIRTY REVIEW





**HiP**



# HOOSIER MOMMA AND EAST VILLAGE INKY CREATOR AYUN HALLIDAY DISCUSSES PARENTING, GROWING UP AND MAINTAINING IDENTITY THROUGH IT ALL

INTERVIEW BY CHANTEL GUIDRY

*Ayun Halliday is the author of the recently released book The Big Rumpus. She is also the writer and illustrator of the quarterly zine The East Village Inky and the mother of two in the under-five crowd. I adore her work. I'm sucked into the amusing and real stories of life with four-year-old daughter Inky, toddler son Milo, and husband Greg. Despite the fact that I have no children and no husband (and live in the Midwest), I can relate to Ayun's life because her writing, and the stories, are universal. Her illustrations are as grand as her writing. Fatter than stick figures and with more detail, they're not so elaborate that I curse my lack of artistic ability and wallow in low self-esteem. Ah, I am a content gal when I am immersed in Ayun's work. I was quite pleased when I had the chance to conduct an e-mail interview with this multi-talented woman.*

**CLAMOR:** When you're asked, "What do you do?" how do you answer?

Ayun Halliday: "I'm a writer," I say, over my shoulder, as I race towards a child who's in danger of plummeting Kramer vs. Kramer-style from the top of the jungle gym.

*What's the origin of your name?*

The short answer is "It's Welsh." Thank god I rarely encounter citizens of Wales, as the short answer also happens to be untrue. It's the phonetic spelling of the Indiana pronunciation of the plain Jane name I was given at birth — so it rhymes with neither Pashtun nor Ryan, as telemarketers frequently assume. As a teenager growing up in Indiana at the height of the preppy craze, I was desperate to seem exotic. So I happily adopted the idiosyncratic nickname/spelling that was foisted on me by a couple of fellow camp counselors. It seems typical of me that my name is a bit unwieldy, embarrassing, wilfully unusual, and self-inflicted.

*My first encounter with The East Village Inky was Issue #9. For latecomers like me, would you summarize your original vision and how the zine has evolved?*

I go into this in depth in the prologue of my book *The Big Rumpus*. Basically I started it because in 1998 I was suffering a common

affliction of many creatively inclined stay-at-home mothers. I felt diminished, like the party was going on without me. My background is in theatre and it was difficult and then impossible to soldier on in that under-funded collaborative art. After a decade of working with the NeoFuturists, creating work that was very self-reflexive, often with humorous intent, it was easy to redirect the voice I'd cultivated onstage into a handwritten zine that could be banged out during Baby Inky's naps. The first one was so raw that none of the margins synched up and we had to bind it with rubber bands so that pages could be pulled to the left or the right in order for the reader to see all of the text. The first issues make a lot of hay out of our shitty 340 square foot apartment in the East Village. We moved to Brooklyn in Issue #5, but I didn't change the name because I hoped that the old saw would hold true: you can take Inky out of the East Village but . . . And Milo was born in Issue #9. The drawings and the margins have improved over time. People who have been reading since the early days have watched Inky learn to speak, switch from diapers to the toilet, grow hair, go to nursery school, and become a big sister. One of my favorite things is the continuum of the core group: Jambo, our doll humping cat, our friend Little MoMo, now the toast of Broadway, and Abby, Inky's best friend from the Tompkins Square playground.

*In The East Village Inky #11, you write " . . . the existential certainty that if I stopped [publishing the zine], I'd lose the last shreds of my identity as a creative adult in the tedious vortex of two small children's needs provides quite an impetus, that's how I manage to publish like clockwork!" Why did you decide to focus on your kids and your domestic life in a project undertaken to retain your identity as a creative adult?*

When Inky was one, Greg was working constantly at his day job and we had no money or faith in babysitters. Inky was my 24-hour sidekick, which meant I was limited in where I could go. Just getting me to a movie was a major undertaking — thoroughly reported on in the zine, of course. Although I don't aspire to be one of those parents whose only contribution to the conversation is cute anecdotes regarding the offspring, there wasn't much else going on in my life besides my unending involvement with my child. I think most people find it a profound life changing experience to assume absolute responsibility for the well being of a child. This isn't something I

# MAMA

While definitely descriptive of Ayun Halliday, this title is borrowed graciously from Hip Mama magazine, a magazine bursting with political commentary and ribald tales from the front lines of motherhood. You should check it out at [www.hipmama.org](http://www.hipmama.org)



*Why was marriage, as opposed to committing, cohabiting, and/or co-parenting, important to you?*

*What aspect of parenting has been most surprising to you?*

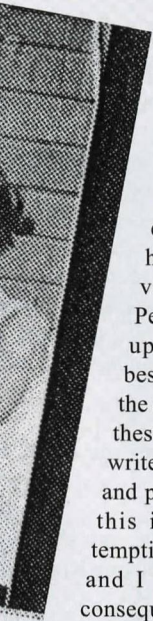
*What do you hope your kids will say about you when they are adults?*

*What is your worst parental nightmare?*

That my children will die before me. That's in *The Big Rumpus* too. That one eclipses everything else, drinking and driving, drug addiction, conservative politics.

Yes. I'm trying to make motherhood the "M" in feminism. Typing that out, I see that there are two Ms in feminism. The tools of my activism are a talent with words and a hopefully palatable self-mockery. I'm all for packing social action with humor.

*Do you feel like a grownup? If you do, when did you make the transition from kid to adult?*



I don't feel like a grownup. Often I marvel that it's my decision, my responsibility, my mess to clean up. Sometimes I pass a gray haired, wrinkled arthritic woman on the street and wonder how she feels. Some of my current opinions strike me as nuanced and evolved, but I bet they'll appear pretty half-baked when I look back from the vantage point of 50 or 70-years old. Perhaps that's the definition of a true grown up: someone to whom experience has bestowed wisdom and the ability to discern the complexities of most situations, who uses these powers for good! I admire young adult writers for not condescending to the concerns and passions of teenagers. Too often I fail at this inclusive, understanding spirit; it's tempting to lord it over Inky that I'm the boss and I know best and I can anticipate the consequences of her using the blender without assistance. Out of exasperation, I calcify into Bitchmother! The trick is to remember that she's only four-years old. If I take a breath to keep my irritation and fatigue in check, I can remember what mattered to me when I was four.

Here are a few grown-up things I haven't been able to swing: Driving a car in Manhattan, buying real estate, and dressing in clothes that are flattering, unstained, wrinkle-free, and appropriate.

*You don't seem to write much about being out without the kids and about socializing with adults other than your husband.. Do you feel isolated within your nuclear family?*

Well, you know there's a lot that happens in my life that doesn't make it into the zine. There's a zone of privacy. We've got lots of friends, many of whom don't have children. Mostly people come over to our house for dinner. I look forward to the day that I can get out and partake of the cultural banquet that is New York more freely than I can now. At the present moment, it's complicated by Milo's attachment to his mommy — What a baby, huh? — and the disparity between the two children's ages. I scour *Time Out New York* looking for fun things one can do with children and frequently see things that Inky and I both would love, sketching at the Met, foreign film festivals for kids at NYU, going out for a fancy tea, but it would be more stress than its worth trying to include a toddler in those activities. As an only child, I romanticize how jolly it would be to have a big tribe, but I'm beginning to think that perhaps two children might be enough. Fortunately, it seems like Milo is inclined to enjoy the same sort of pursuits as Inky: drawing, playing with the dollhouse, and puppetry. Going out and doing fun things with them will be the trade-off for losing all of that snugly baby fat. Theirs, not mine. My baby fat seems like it's on for the long haul.





*What are your views on home schooling and unschooling? Will your kids attend public school?*

Many people that know me assumed that I would home school, but I don't have the patience for it. Inky attends nursery school and loves it as do I. Her teachers are infinitely patient and consistent and they seem like they get a lot more sleep than I do. Perhaps if I lived in a rural area where there was only one choice of school and that school was abysmal I would consider the huge commitment of home schooling. Unschooling I would consider if I had a child who had attended school for several years and was miserable. I do feel there's something to be said for putting one's children in a community in which perhaps not everyone will like them and they will have to find a way to resolve these differences and/or function as an individual in a group despite adversity. Also, for all we know, Inky might find herself really turned on by science or math, two subjects she would never encounter if Ms. Ayun was ringing the old school bell. I think the kids will attend public school. Private school in New York costs something like \$14,000 a year for KINDERGARTEN! It's crazy here. The competition to get in a "good" public school is like auditioning for the lead role in the high school musical, fraught with emotional turmoil, unfairness, and resentment. It's a mindscrew. Right now I've got my fingers crossed hoping that the public school of my choice, which is not in my district, will have room for Inky. This is provided that she tests into the gifted program, which I think she will since she's one of those kids who's loved school from the moment she was introduced to the concept. Plan B is to not freak out if she doesn't get into that school. We'll send her to the public school across the street whose reputation ranges from "great" to "used to be great" to "pretty okay" to "wonderfully diverse," with all the inherent innuendo and ideals that signifies. What a headache.

*In addition to The East Village Inky, I know that you have written plays for and been a member of the Neo-Futurists performance troupe, and I've read your articles in Hip Mama. Is The Big Rumpus your first book?*

Yes. I've had essays published in several anthologies including *Breeder*, *The Unsavvy Traveler*, and *A Woman Alone*, (all from Seal Press, 2002). I'm also the parenting columnist for *BUST*.

*What's The Big Rumpus all about?*

It expands on our daily existence as depicted in *The East Village Inky*. There are more references to my own childhood and it's more overtly political about the need to support mothers and children within the community. Inky's difficult and scary birth and Milo's lickety split water birth are both given their due. I mouth off about breastfeeding and the need to be open with children about sexuality and other "adult" concerns. It's loaded with lice, spilled juice, babyshit, and misguided holiday traditions discerning readers of *The East Village Inky* regard as the hallmark of quality. It ends with a love letter to Milo, who also appears on the cover, which ought to please those who were concerned he'd get a complex when I didn't change the title of the zine to *The East Village Inky and Milo*.

*Why should folks buy copies of The Big Rumpus?*

If enough of them do, I'll be a famous author and then I'll be able to send my kids to private school and the *New York Times* will pay out the nose for my wry cultural commentary and other famous people will invite me to their swanky parties where I will stuff myself on catered food and complimentary cocktails! Mostly, I hope that other parents will recognize their own experience and that people who don't have and may not want kids of their own will go out of their way to integrate mothers and children into the community at large. Then there's the side of me that hopes that somehow the book will fall into the hands of women who are raising their children according to the standards of Parents magazine and all of those authoritative, spirit-crushing child rearing manuals. Upon reading *The Big Rumpus*, they'll scrap their Barney videos, their bottle feeding schedules, and their Disney's Winnie the Pooh-themed nurseries and cross over to the dark side, where my breastfeedin', co-sleepin', rumped sisters and I await them with open arms. ★

### **Faster Pussycats: Live Girls: After Hours**

edited by Trixi

Alyson Publications, 2001

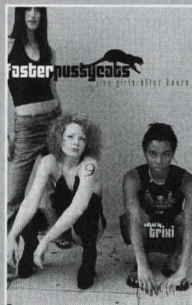
www.ALYSON.com

Sex, love, lust, voyeurism, jealousy and control are the subjects dealt with in this collection of true-life lesbian erotica grouped into the specific sections of: Virgins and Good Girls, Drag Kings, Chix in Bars, Chix at Parties, Clubland, Strip Joints, Bathhouses, Fuck Clubs, and Fetish.

The stories take place all over the world in bedrooms, bathrooms, cars, bathhouses, clubs, bars, back-alleys and dungeons and involve long-term lovers, relationships on the verge of break-up, strippers, dominatrixes and one night stands.

Since this is erotica, the sex is graphic, those squeamish about fisting should probably skip this book. A few of these stories also include lesbian safe sex techniques, like condoms over strap-ons, avoidance of their partner's bodily fluids and several items that I did not know even existed like individual finger condoms ("finger cots").

Occasionally the bondage is over the top as in "Collared," by Meghan Maury, where a woman wants to regain the collar her bull dyke girlfriend has torn off her (thereby symbolizing the end of their relationship). To "earn" the collar back, she is publically humiliated in a crowded bar, beaten by her lover with a paddle,



strap, and cane, then cut with a pinwheel and a knife. Apparently the kitchen sink was not available to beat her with and yes, she gets the collar back.

With the stories grouped together thematically, it occasionally makes some of the stories blend together. Also, this collection contains the work of 23 amateur and professional writers, some who have a grasp of the medium better than others. Standout stories included "Bathtub Girl and Psychobitch" by Trixi which is about a couple that takes their lukewarm relationship and brings it to a full boil as they explore the goings-on in the dank catacombs of a Los Angeles fetish ball and "I Was A Pro-Dom Virgin" by Adventure Girl columnist Tristan Taormino which details a first time visit to a professional dominatrix for an enema, humiliation and clothespin torture.

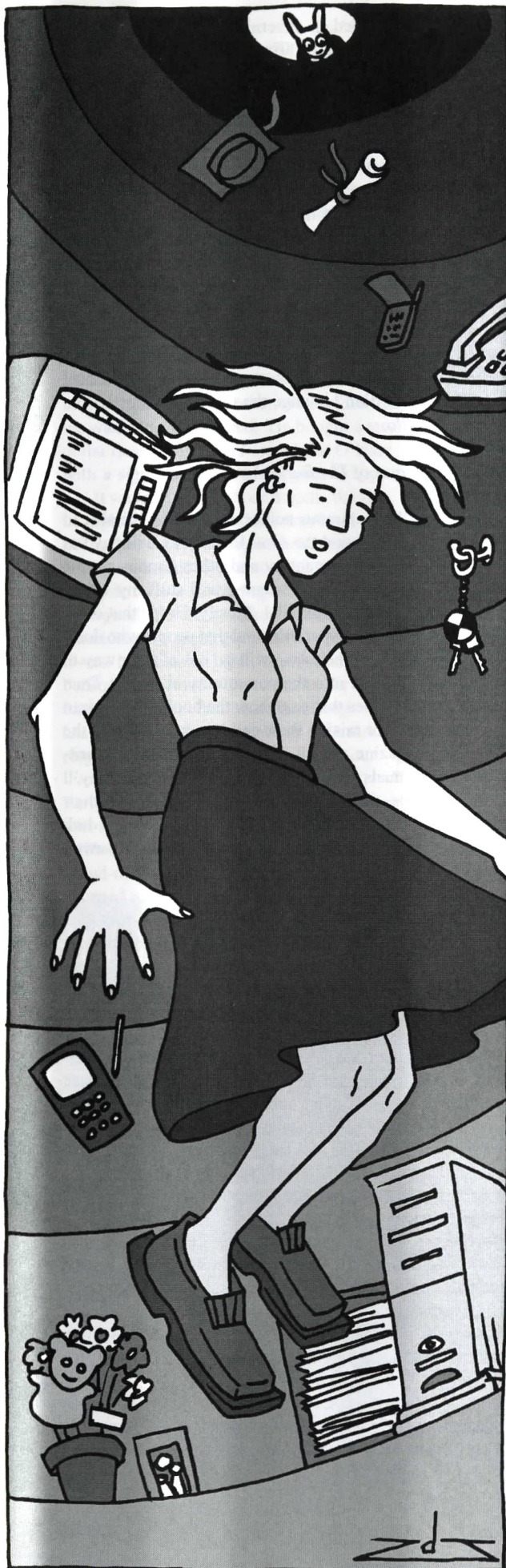
Another good section of the book is the "About the Contributors" section where each author gives their bio and humorous asides like "spends her idle hours working up the courage to wear the flamboyant shoes she bought in Korea," "she now lives back in Toronto with her two children, four computers, and the young butch girlfriend she abducted from San Diego," "a dyke lawyer with hammer-swinging, child-carrying biceps," and "she can usually be found sleazing in dark alleys, parking lots, or smelly bathrooms looking for a hot fag-dyke time."

From drag kings to go-go girls, butch bottoms to riot grrrls, freak and geeks to girlfags and club chix, *Faster Pussycats* leaves no stone unturned in regards to lesbians having sex. Collections of short stories from multiple authors in any genre are often hit or miss but this collection is mostly a hit.

-Jason Ziemniak

THIRTY REVIEW





## Tumbling Down the Rabbit Hole: A Question of Quarterlife Crisis

by Essa Élan

illustration by Zanne deJanvier

One of these days, no matter how hard you try, you must grow up.

We all know the typical trials and tribulations of maturing: acne, wet dreams, peer pressure, profound existential questions. Fortunately, these troubles screech to a halt around age 18 as we officially become adults. However, an unknown shadow is lurking over today's young people in America. Is it adult adolescence? Some wonderland complex? The quarterlife crisis? It seems like a myth, and my spell check doesn't even recognize "quarterlife" as a word, but there is a surging movement to bring this phenomena to light. People are talking about it on Oprah. Books on the subject are being sold at Barnes & Noble. Hundreds of Web sites equipped with support groups are dedicated to it.

More and more twenty-somethings are experiencing rapid emotional, intellectual, and physical changes so overwhelming that feelings of depression and isolation begin to permeate their lives. There's even an occasional *Oh my God, I could die-pimple* in the middle of the forehead. Sounds familiar? Could this be some post-teenage adolescence? Well, let's see.

The phrase "quarterlife crisis" was officially spotlighted in May of 2001 when Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner, both then 25, wrote a book featuring excerpted interviews with over 200 people in their mid-twenties. Reflecting on their findings, they titled the work *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your 20s*. Robbins and Wilner discovered that today's young people often feel bewildered, dislocated, and dehumanized by their career and life choices.

It seems the trouble begins in the last few months of a college career. These people, adult in age, still childlike in responsibility, are perched at the threshold of a major transition: life into the real world. Theirs has been an existence rich with benefits: no major war and, ergo, no draft into said major war, no great economic depression, and a future of myriad career choices.

Where college is a microcosm that allows young people to do whatever they want when they want and only requires class attendance while loans and parents pay the bills, the real world is true life that demands you begin to make good on the debt you have incurred. Young adults finally recognize the rub: oops, you have to pay it back, just like those charges on a credit card.

Older people start giving life advice through quotes such as, "to who much is given, much is expected." Instead of slick frat boys, Fortune 500 companies come courting. Mindless shopping in the Gap is replaced by hunts for strategic blue power-suits in Brooks Brothers. No more "purple stuff or Sunny D?" — the tough question now is "grad school or a job?"

Where some young adults are flawlessly transitioning from sponging student to productive world-citizen, others are feeling a bit like Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole. These young adults have found themselves living life based on others' expectations (mommy chose their college, daddy picked their job). Or, they snatched the golden apple so quickly that they didn't realize until later that the apple is inedible. That great looking job with all its perks is actually a suckfest of boredom and dissatisfaction.

Newly disillusioned, these recent college grads feel unmoored from life. They have life insurance but their jobs offer no deep emotional or intellectual satisfaction. Work is simply an avenue for money. Their bodies, once supple and lean, are now magnets for cellulite since they slave all day and are subsequently too tired to exercise, let alone date. They long for career serenity, but it eludes them. They search for true intimacy and personal solace, but that also eludes them. Sad and desperate, some even consider going back to school in order to escape the real world for a few more years.

They may voice this disappointment to an older adult and quickly find that *sympathy* only exists in the dictionary between *shit* and *syphilis*. The older person will giggle, yield a pat on the back and say "You're worrying about nothing. Now, go back to work." This young person, who drives a BMW one year out of college, has vainly complained about too many choices to someone who spent their twenties being shot at in Vietnam.



In other words, the cries of these twenty-somethings sound like whining since their troubles don't amount to a hill of beans in this world. Clay Risen, an editor at *Flak Magazine*, responded to the crisis with an article entitled "Qualms of the Quarterlife" in which he compared several professionals interviewed in the book to people of the same age in other countries. One striking parallel is made between Gabriella, a 26 year old Oberlin College grad who often feels off-centered while re-evaluating her life, and Sveta, a 24-year-old Russian prostitute, who worries about AIDS and dying.

On the surface, this unbalanced symmetry makes young Americans seem completely out of touch with reality and extremely selfish. The message is quite clear- how dare Gabriella be dissatisfied with her life while there are thousands of people worse off than her. Risen goes on to comment, "Americans have never cared about the rest of the world, and no one should expect modern 25-year-olds to be any different." His retort ends with the observation that 21st century young people aren't experiencing any kind of special situation and the phrase "Quarterlife crisis" only illustrates the American tendency to overemphasis "every opinion as a condition."

O.K. Let's get real for a second and stop overreacting. Where it is fair to attest that twenty-somethings today, like their predecessors, are supposed to contest life decisions, it's unfair to assume that no real situation arises from the session of question and answer. Most of the people featured in Robbins and Wilner's book are experiencing extreme introspection, the most powerful examination of self they

have encountered thus far. Their previous life hypotheses of go to school, get a good-paying job and happiness will follow, are crumbling.

There is an underexposed challenge of life in the twenties: the quest for self-realization. Many young Americans are confused because they haven't been the major catalysts for their own decisions. They picked their careers and spouses and neighborhoods with hopes of sating their family and/or friends. They did this because they are *self-less*, not selfish, and this lack of self-realization, not a catchphrase crisis or self-preoccupation, is the true culprit of their pain. Young people may enter the real world with degrees and lots of ambition, but few have any idea what will truly make them happy. It takes their mid-twenties to finally start wondering.

Many are quickly realizing that happiness isn't found through societal prestige and a set-in-stone life plan. This is very real, and though it may not be adult adolescence or a life crisis, it is enough to take a person through all kinds of changes. Discovering one's true self is a pivotal lesson that can only begin once an individual is no longer a child trying to please her parents or a teenager trying to satisfy peers. Self-doubt, depression, denial, and even self-loathing inevitably mark this path since definitions are being flipped and change, especially self-change, is always scary. But, it's still a journey worth taking. It's a journey that, for the lucky, begins during the twenties so that by the time the thirties come along, life is a more manageable, big ol' mess. ★

## THIRTY REVIEW

### Lexicon Devil: The Fast Times and Short Life of Darby Crash and The Germs

Edited by Brendan Mullen, with Don Bolles and Adam Parfrey  
Feral House, 2002  
[www.feralhouse.com](http://www.feralhouse.com)

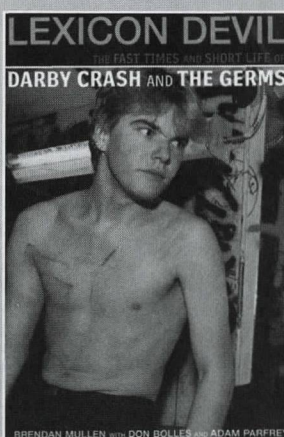
The Germs were by far the noisiest, most chaotic, and most underrated band of the early L.A. punk scene. They were only around for about 3 years, from early 1977 to the end of 1980, when Darby Crash died of a heroin overdose at 22.

The Germs bridged the gap between the early Glam-oriented Hollywood punk scene and the hardcore scene that followed. I first saw The Germs in the movie, "The Decline Of Western Civilization," when I was eighteen, and it changed me forever. I knew that I had missed something good, and that watching it on tape couldn't compare to being there as it was happening.

This book is an oral history of The Germs, and of their fellow weirdos in the late-70s Los Angeles punk rock scene. It was written and compiled from interviews conducted by Brendan Mullen, a club booker and promoter who booked shows at The Masque, the Whisky A Go-Go and other clubs in L.A. at that time. Former Germs drummer Don Bolles came up with the idea, and also conducted interviews, and publisher Adam Parfrey later helped with writing the book.

The philosophizing is kept to the beginning of the book, then the editors leave the reader to make up their own minds about what The Germs, and Darby Crash were about. It doesn't try to make Darby Crash out to be a saint (which he wasn't) or a complete bastard (which he wasn't either). Instead, it lets his friends and family do the talking.

The book traces Crash's change from Jan Paul Beahm (his given name), to the mildly antagonistic Bobby Pyn, and finally to the wild, reckless person known as Darby Crash. It also traces the arc of the band, from their inauspicious beginnings back in when they were stumbling through "Sugar Sugar" and



throwing food around onstage to make up for the fact that they couldn't play, to the recording of their only full album, "G.I." (in 1979), to their last shows in 1980, when they were as tight as any other working band in Los Angeles. It also talks about the short-lived Darby Crash Band, which didn't go over well, prompting Crash to get The Germs back together in December 1980 for a reunion show. The reunion was a huge success. Crash died five days later.

By all accounts, Darby Crash had a turbulent childhood, and never really had a solid father figure. During Crash's high school years, he attended University High, an alternative high school in L.A. He was enrolled in a sort of "school-within-a-school" called IPS, whose philosophy was heavily influenced by Scientology. The school's emphasis on rhetoric, debate, and mastery of language was deeply influential to Crash, and would be enamored with it his whole life. Over time, he became obsessed

with figures such as Hitler, Nietzsche, and Charles Manson, for their ability to speak. And he was eternally obsessed with David Bowie. According to the interviewees, Crash usually had a horde of groupies (male and female) surrounding him, ready to do whatever he asked.

A big issue in Darby Crash's life, one that he never fully dealt with, was his closeted homosexuality. He had relationships with both men and women, but the relationships with women were portrayed in the book as a cover. He went to great lengths to hide the fact that he was gay, even from people he knew and trusted.

Darby Crash comes across as a highly intelligent, highly charismatic, but ultimately deeply unhappy guy, who needed to control people to get what he wanted from them. But he was always portrayed as a human being, not a curiosity. If this book had been attempted by someone outside of The Germs circle, it would have lost its intimacy. And that's what makes it worthwhile.

-Josh Medsker





# Growing Old Alone

## a visit to mother

by Jeff Conant

A visit to my mother begins with an airport security check. At 7 in the morning the airport is half deserted, and everyone — ticketed passengers, airline reps, police officers, security agents, directors of traffic, information desk attendants — is doing his or her job calmly and with excessive politeness. Before the security check my girlfriend and I stop for a brief farewell. As we say goodbye we both shed a few tears because my visit will be difficult. My mother is rapidly declining into immobility and it is impossible to think of her without feeling the immanence of death.

★★★

What kind of family history leads a son to put 3000 miles of continent between himself and his mother? What kind of culture allows this distance to be the rule, rather than the exception? I've always felt a tremendous sense of shame as I explain the intimacies of a broken family to friends from abroad, whether they be from Norway, India or Guatemala. And so I've learned, for better or worse, to explain away the shame and loneliness by giving it cultural context. The American family.

A few years back I spent Christmas in a squatted villa in rural Spain with some friends from Barcelona. As we drank cheap local wine and cooked sausage on the fire, the conversation turned to questions of family. I tried to explain the American family, in all its complexity, to my Spanish friends who couldn't comprehend the atomization of the American individual. It's well known, I began, that the business of America is business, not love. The classic loneliness of the traveling salesman — one kind of American icon — lacks emotional significance for us when placed in the shadow of the rugged individual: the solitary astronaut stepping into space, the Lone Ranger, the Marlboro man with his strong chin aimed at a vast wilderness. Even Lady Liberty stands alone as she presides over the memory of Ellis Island where families were broken into individual immigrant units — part of the great global march towards liberty and equality — and where each unit received its number, its new name, its social security, its government-issue ID. My description made them laugh. The icons were familiar.

In my effort to explain the vast loneliness of American culture to my Catalan comrades, I laid hold of a world map. The distance between my home and my birthplace, I discovered, equals the distance from Barcelona to St. Petersburg or from Madrid to the Congo. The distance between my birthplace in Manhattan and my grandmother's in Kiev is a distance of centuries. What choice do I have but to point



my chin towards the wilderness and chart my own course? In America we can become whoever we want in the landscape of Newness; we can design our lives, design our communities, even design our pasts to fit our present needs.

But every now and again we turn around to look at what we've designed and we have to ask: "Is this all there is?"

★★★

I'm flying home to enroll my mother — a victim of clinical depression, alcohol-induced dementia, malnutrition, and who knows what else — in the bureaucratic web of the medical-industrial complex known as "managed care." It is easy to imagine that managed care has as much to do with familial love as the thoroughly decimated, cubed, paved, and salinated remains of the desert below me have in common with wilderness. However unnatural, there is a structure there that may allow me to help one aged American — my mother — find dignity in her illness and death. My dread and confusion at entering the world of managed care is, perhaps, akin to the feeling a box turtle has as it stumbles into a strip mall. I'm not looking forward to this.

It is many years now since my mother, 71 years old at the time of this writing, decided to give up actively living. She sometimes dates the end of her life back to the beginning of motherhood, when she gave up living for herself in order to live for her children. At other times she marks the end of her life with her move from Manhattan to the suburbs, as if what many New Yorkers fear is true — there is no life outside of the Island. Another high-water mark in her ambivalence towards her own life was when both children left home for good. The next and last, when she really gave up her grip once and for all, was the death of my father in 1996. Although they fought constantly right up to his death, his departure left her with no one to blame for the failure of her spirit. She decided to move into a senior home and begin what she hoped would be a rapid descent. Unfortunately for her failed spirit, the human body, well-fed, sheltered, and sometimes accompanied, is unforgivingly resilient.

★★★

Although my father died after a long illness, little preparation was made for his passing. During the years he was sick, I visited from California to lend a hand at crisis moments. I drove him to the hospital when his emphysema grew bad enough that he needed oxygen. When he could no longer walk upstairs, I helped move his bed into the living room. But my relations with my family

were never strong enough that I felt compelled to move back home to caretake. And the family made it clear that my help wasn't really needed. So when the moment of my father's death actually came, I was far away, traveling in Central America. When I received the news in an internet cafe in Antigua, Guatemala, I was saddened, but not surprised. When I called home later that day, I was told that there was no reason to rush home. So I stayed.

A week after his death I traveled to the highland village of Todos Santos. As a student at the small language school there I was placed with a family who would house and feed me. In the small mud-floored thatched-roofed hut I slept well, but dreamed constantly of my father. I saw his aged face, heard his voice, and wondered what I was doing here. But there was nowhere else that it would make sense to be either: not Connecticut, where he died, nor Boston where he grew up, nor the rocky southwest coast of England where his ancestors hailed from. I would draw as little relief from the geography of those places as I did from the strange misty outcropping of the remote Chuchumatan mountains of Guatemala. In fact I found the remoteness a relief.

There were no men in the family I stayed with in Todos Santos, because the older men of the family had been killed by government troops in the '80s, and the younger men were working in factories in the city or on plantations on the coast. The family consisted of Maria Rosa, about my age, her three young daughters, and her mother, who was dying.

The dying woman lay on a mat in a dark corner of the house and did not move or speak. In the day sometimes her granddaughters moved her outside to get some warmth. She was withered and small, nearly blind, and was wrapped in a thick woolen shawl. I don't remember if they fed her or not, but my memory tells me that her family was allowing

her to starve to death. It was probably the same way that her mother, and her mother before her, had passed on: no tubes or blinking lights, or pharmaceutical pain killers; no oxygen masks, sterilized sheets, or bedpans; not even a doctor. Simply compassionate care, the old-fashioned way. Naive and romantic as it is to say it, it's better this way.

★★★

At least twice a year I fly to New York to sit with my mother. She doesn't want help, so all I can offer her is company. Often, she doesn't want that either. Often I plan to spend a week with her and I end up passing most of the time with friends in the city and generally avoiding my caretaking role. This time there can be none of that. She lives in a HUD independent living complex for the elderly and the manager of her home has made it clear that she needs more regular care or she needs to move out. This visit is about getting her a social worker, signing her up for a meals-on-wheels program, and taking her to a doctor. All against her will, and all vaguely beyond her understanding. Her mind, as it was, is gone, and she is simply waiting for her failed understanding of the world around her to fade to black



Jeff's mother with Frank Newton (Billie Holiday's trumpet player) in Florida in 1956

once and for all.

She was a vibrant woman, spirited and willful at best, angry and drunk at worst. In her twenties and thirties she worked as an editor in Manhattan, and for a short and glorious moment, lived in the West Village and attended parties with the likes of Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso, Richard Wright, Dylan Thomas, and Peter Falk. One of her ex-husbands, institutionalized at Bellevue, shared a room with J.D. Salinger just after he'd written *A Catcher in the Rye*. When I express sadness at her current state, she tells me again and again "I had a life. I knew people. I lived." When she talks about the life she had, more than anything she's referring



to the ten years between 1955 and 1965 when she was a liberated woman in the great city of New York.

I was born in 1967. It was the Summer of Love and my mother, 35, was bearing her second child and planning a future with her third husband. She took me in a stroller to the protests against the Vietnam War. When we moved to the suburbs in 1970, she immersed herself in the life of the community. She joined the cooperative nursery school, became a substitute teacher, and later helped to integrate black kids into my mostly white Little League. She nearly single-handedly organized a demand that the city provide a bus service so that kids from the Projects could play on the Little League in our more affluent neighborhood. She managed to take her liberal ideals from the early days of civil rights and put them to work in the suburbs in the mid-70's. She did good work.

So how do I explain her bitterness? As her son, I have no finger on the pulse of her psychology, but I can speculate. All three of her husbands, my own dad being the third, were either alcoholic or lunatic or both. And all three, my dad being the last, took care of her as men "took care" of their wives in the American Fifties. So she became a kept woman, a slave to self-pity, and a restless alcoholic.

I've always suspected that my mother, breaking out of her depression-era childhood and first-generation child-of-immigrant roots, experienced a profound freedom in the beatnik years of the late fifties in New York. She was a proto-liberated woman in the proto-liberated years when the shadow of McCarthyism was about to give way to the sunshine of Timothy Leary and the Beatles. As a New American Woman she resented and despised her Old World roots. And later, when she lost her freedom to marriage and the suburbs, to child-rearing and middle age, she grew to resent and despise her new American woman-ness because it, too, was constricting and dull. Through her I grew up with an intuitive sense of that particular American form of psychological trauma: regret about the past, boredom with the present, and fear of the future.

Growing up watching my father work too much and my mother drink herself numb, it was easy to develop the feeling that the philosophers call *ennui* and the aging call disappointment. It is this same feeling that middle class punk kids recycle into rage: a quasi-political intuitive understanding that all of life is organized as a single system of suffocation and domination. Birth, school, work, death. The challenge of growing older: to avoid being dominated the way one's parents were. (Thus the rock-n-roll credo: Hope I die before I get old.)

**Watching my mother age has been like watching a ship drifting towards an iceberg. Now, after years of witnessing, with an extreme sense of powerlessness myself, I'm seeing the ship breaking on the ice.**



Watching my mother age has been like watching a ship drifting towards an iceberg. Now, after years of witnessing, with an extreme sense of powerlessness myself, I'm seeing the ship breaking on the ice. The powerlessness I feel as my flight descends into JFK International airport in the midst of America's new invisible War on Terror is a mixture of personal sorrow and political outrage, social alienation and bodily fatigue. I cannot separate the personal from the political, and in both arenas the message seems clear: things go from bad to worse. Like many of us accidentally born inside the Empire in a post-enlightenment, post-family, post-meaning, past-hope age, I am empty, exhausted, and sick.

★★★

On the long subway ride towards Brooklyn, I am still trying to make sense of the vast separation between son and mother. I am too aware that it's not just my problem, not just my fucked-up life. Without trying too hard to boost the drama, I imagine the hundreds of thousands of Afghani refugees fleeing U.S. attacks into Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Iran. The New York Times is beginning to print reports of civilian casualties, but there is no headline naming the grief of all the families broken apart and separated by hardship, distance, or death.

It is easy to feel dramatic on this visit to Mom, because the circumstances of her hopelessness are so dramatic. At the same time, there is too much to do to let me sink into self-pity. Between the first day of my visit — when I rented an economy car in Manhattan and drove straight to her home in suburban Connecticut — to the last — when I walked out of a doctor's office with the new

certainty that my mother's illness was called Cancer — I went about my work like a good son caretaking his aged mother.

Every time I walk into her small apartment I'm shocked to see her. First there is the smell — not the "old-people smell" of lanolin and Listerine that I remember from childhood, but a smell of cigarettes and piss. Then there is the sight of her, shaking and emaciated in a cloud of cigarette smoke. She is thin — seventy pounds — and her bones protrude from her withered flesh. Her hair has grown patchy on her head and her skin is almost translucent. She is unsteady on her feet and her eyes are glazed over as if full of smoke themselves. When I reach out to hug her she barely reaches me, and she feels like a skeleton.

In a culture driven full speed towards the New, youth fears the aged, and I am afraid of what I see when I visit my mother. She is old. But she is more than old — she is tired and angry and alone. Seeing anyone so vanquished, bewildered, and abandoned is frightening in itself; feeling responsibility for the abandonment makes the fear worse; and being unwelcome to help, being told there is nothing to do but wait out a slow and humiliating death, is the final note of helplessness and fear.

My reaction to her is painful and difficult. I've tried, over the years, to convince her to stop drinking, to quit smoking, to join a social group, to take walks. In short, to choose life. At the same time, I question my own place here, and I wonder how it is that I have fought so hard to believe that life itself, and a sense of dignity and empowerment, is worth fighting for.

My efforts to help her have included one long winter when I moved to live near her and I visited and took her shopping once a week.



Our conversations naturally revolved around her unhappiness and sense of loss and my own failure to support her. I followed her through the supermarket week by week as she supported herself on the shopping cart and collected her weekly lot of provisions: Coke, cat food, cigarettes, candy, breakfast cakes, and a few frozen dinners. She often got lost in the aisles. Her memory loss left her stranded, insisting that they rearranged the supermarket each week.

After several long months of offering this kind of help, and after being told *ad nauseam* that my help was neither needed nor wanted, I moved back to California, to my own life.

I'm back now because her failing bladder is causing her to mess the sofa, bed, and carpet in her apartment, and even the hallway of her home. She needs a doctor visit, and to be fitted with diapers, and to be better fed, and the company of a family member. I've never done this before, and there's no one to tell me what to do, so each step in the process is a painful mystery to me. I'm talking to her about her drinking and getting denial, though there is a musty glass half full of scotch in the kitchen and another in the living room. When I ask about her diet she claims to eat just fine, though it's clear from a look at her cupboards that the cookpots I brought her six months ago are unused. Her freezer is filled with months-old freezer-burned ground meat. The packs of lunchmeat in the refrigerator are fuzzy and blue with mold.

When I finally get around to the subject of her incontinence, and the fact that her home smells like a litterbox, she insists that it's the cat. If the cat wants to pee on the sofa, she tells me, that's the cat's business, not mine.

After I fail several times to have her accept her body's failure and the need to stay clean, I call the agency on aging at the local Health Department and talk with a case worker there. He is available to help. So I take leave of my mother and drive out to see him in my rental car. Contrary to my fears, the man who greets me is friendly and compassionate, with the abstracted sense of duty of a County worker. In his windowless concrete cubicle on East Main Street, I describe the challenges, and he spreads out a fan of different colored flyers and brochures: the hospital's geriatric assessment service, the meals-on-wheels program, Friends for the Elderly, Lifeline, In Home Care, Prescription Drug Assistance, the Senior News. He asks me his standard set of questions:

"Who takes care of her?" "No one. She's refused any care."

"Does she go to any social group?" "None."

"Has she ever attended AA for her drinking?" "No."

"What medications does she take?" "None."

"When was her last visit to a doctor?"

"Nineteen-ninety five."

"Is there any other family?"

"No. Well, there's my sister, but she doesn't talk to us."

★★★

After many phone calls I arrange for a geriatric assessment at the hospital. She protests, but is too weak to fight. I get her in the rental car and take her in. The doctors are friendly and personable, and allow me to stay through the verbal portion of the exam. They ask her a series of questions — who's the president, what's today's date, where are we — to assess her general awareness. She answers them all with her slurred voice and crooked smile, doing her best to feign control over her faculties. They ask her about current events and she faithfully names the War on Terrorism and Osama bin what's-is-name. They ask her to count backwards from 100 by sevens, and she even manages to get pretty far. But it's clear that her mind is weak. They send me out and give her a physical.

After a half hour or so I'm invited back in to hear the results. She weighs seventy pounds, and they've found some sort of mass in her breast. She's unclean and seems to have a problem with incontinence. They take urine and blood samples and do a brainscan. They'll send me the results. In the meantime I should take her to see a primary physician. They can't say for sure, but cancer is likely. They recommend a mammogram, which she refuses. They recommend that she improve her diet. She insists it's fine. They recommend that she cut down on smoking. Out of the question.

The next day I take her to another doctor. He, too, is friendly, and despite the American flags and pharmaceutical ads that fill his office, I take him into my confidence and explain her situation. I ask that, if he finds anything serious, he tell me before he tells her. He says that's an ethical consideration and he'll see what seems right. I tell him about her incontinence, her drinking, her denial, and I warn him that she may refuse any recommendations he gives her. I tell him to call the hospital and have them send over the results of the blood and urine tests.

After the visit he takes me aside. "She's a unique case," he says. "It's amazing you even got her here." He's also found the breast mass. He talked to her about her incontinence, and she insists it's the cat that pees on the rug. He's concerned about her weight and he's going to prescribe her an anti-depressant which will stimulate her appetite. He asks her if she'll take it and she says "Maybe, maybe

not." Finally he tells me that the hospital found blood in her urine. That, combined with her weight loss, her incontinence, her smoking and her general state leads him to suspect cancer of the bladder. Of course lung cancer is likely as well, and breast cancer is almost a given. But without tests there's no way to know for sure, and she's refused tests. In fact, she's refused the possibility of cancer.

"The doctor says I'm fine," she reports after he's just told me the opposite. "He says I should go home and have a smoke."

★★★

My fear of doctors and social service people, and of the web of bureaucracy I expected to find, eventually comes to nothing. My mother's resolve to refuse help of any kind has rendered the available social services entirely impotent. Confirmation of her multiple illnesses helps me to understand her condition, but her denial negates any good the doctors may have done her. The good that the doctors have done me, however, is immeasurable for its validation of what I've struggled with in solitary for many years. "She's a unique case. It's amazing you even got her here."

I take her home and apologize for all the trouble I've caused by forcing her to see these doctors. She's angry at me and tells me she's had a terrible time. If I ever come to visit again, she says, I shouldn't make her do these things. How is it that she raised such a mean kid?

On the last day of my visit I set up a daily meal program for her, and buy her a microwave oven after much protest. I also call to get her set up with Lifeline, an electronic necklace with a call button she can press for help in case she falls down. This is standard care for the old and neglected. It's miserable and, in the absence of family and friends, it's the only option.

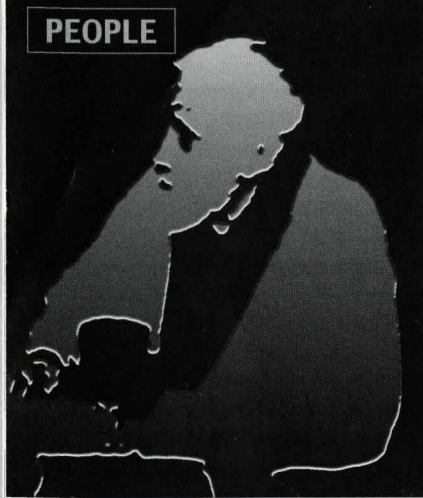
I say farewell, and give her a last hug. She's shaking, and reeks of urine. As I wrap my arms carefully around her breakable form, I wish I could just push her out to sea in a canoe and watch her float away with dignity. As it's been with every farewell for several years now, I feel that this may be the last time I see her.

Returning to California by way of JFK airport, the soldiers and the security checks don't bother me so much. This is America. Get used to it.

When I call her from Oakland a few days later she tells me she's cancelled the meal service and refused to accept Lifeline. When I come back again I should take the microwave back. She won't use it.

"Oh," she says, "and another thing. The doctor called. He says I'm fine." ★





# My friend, Marty Knowlton

by Leah Wells

You might not recognize his name, but your grandparents might have heard of him before. Or perhaps drop the name "Elderhostel," a travel and educational society for older adults which started in 1975 with a participating group of just over 200 people. This group, which Marty founded, has grown to more than 10,000 programs in over 100 countries with more than 200,000 participants. The Elderhostel family grew out of Marty's wanderings in Europe where he found groups of older people in Scandinavian folk schools gathering to learn, dance, work on crafts, and travel.

In the past two years I have had the opportunity to spend quality time listening to Marty's stories of activism, of conscientious choices, of teaching, and of life wisdom. I have been blessed with wise male figures who have imparted sage advice, interesting stories, and loving guidance throughout my lifetime. While many young activists think that skills training, nonviolence workshops, watching cutting-edge documentaries, and participating in street demonstrations are the best ways to gain experience in combating oppression, I believe that the links to our activist past hold some of the best keys for learning about how to organize, demonstrate, and create positive change in our world.

When I first moved to California, the only activist crowd I could find had a median age of 70. Marty was 80 when we first met, introduced by a mutual teacher-friend who'd known him for years. My grandfather had just died the year before at the age of 94; he'd lived with us for many years and I had helped to take care of him and enjoyed spending time listening to his stories. So hanging out with a grandpa-type was not uncommon for me. What I would like to share with you today are some stories from Marty's life which deserve audience because they are important historical nuggets.

## Pre-teen Civil Disobedience

Marty was born on July 31, 1920, and when he was nine or 10 years old, he lived in

a segregated Birmingham, Alabama, with clearly demarcated boundaries for whites and blacks. On his way home from school one day, Marty witnessed a young black girl being turned away from the library, told that she couldn't check out a book.

Marty comforted the girl and then went into the library and asked to check out the book that she wanted, and was told he couldn't because he would turn around and give the book to the young girl. He said, that well, yeah, he would just give it to her! She deserves to be able to read books, like anybody else! The librarian told him she'd have to call the police and have him arrested for giving a book to this young black girl. When Marty didn't leave and persisted about checking out the book, the librarian had him arrested.

The police came to get him, and took him down to the station whereupon they called Marty's dad to come pick him up. When I asked Marty how his father felt about retrieving his son from the police station for an act of conscience, he said, "Elated!"

To Marty it seemed ludicrous to deny anyone access to literature, and much less to arrest him for checking out a book. Many young boys were being arrested for truancy or vagrancy; the implicit encouragement that Marty's father gave him in not punishing him for being arrested made quite an impression.

## The Accidental Peace Teacher

Many years later, Marty found himself teaching in a New England high school, with no formal training as a teacher or experience in the classroom.

His classroom was very simple: students watched videos of his choosing in class while he pattered around his office in the basement of the school. Marty would visit his friends at a local monastery and chose movie selections from their library and to show to his students. Some were about boxing, some were about war, some were about nature, and most were simply interesting films unrelated to any formal subject matter.

His students started out quite puzzled: A teacher who didn't teach — nor stay in the classroom during class time — and just showed videos? Quite perplexing. The students began to wonder if there was a pattern to Marty's video selections. They wondered if he had a master plan, some overarching idea that eventually would be wrapped around and spun into some life lesson. He had no such plan. In fact, he wasn't even quite sure how to go about the business of giving grades.

After a few weeks of the students watching videos, they started to talk amongst themselves. At lunch they would form discussion groups, arising independently out of sheer curiosity and self-organization. Their movie club was a spontaneous and self-regulating entity, and the content of their discussions pertained to the films and to Marty's unconventional teaching style.

Toward the end of the semester, a student timidly approached Marty in his office one afternoon and asked what grade she would receive in the class. Now Marty wasn't quite sure what to do with this request because he'd never assigned homework and had spent no time in class with his students. He had merely chosen the subject matter.

Marty asked her what she thought she deserved in the class, allowing her power and authority over her grade rather than handing down some irrelevant percentage from above. He applied this tactic to the rest of his students, allowing them to grade themselves.

He found that students consistently graded themselves quite low, that their academic self-esteem was sagging. The young woman who first approached Marty about giving grades had this to say: "In those lunchroom discussion groups, I found out something that I had never experienced before. I have never in my life been listened to until this class. My classmates heard and understood me and valued what I had to say. I have learned how to speak and have confidence in this class. Thank you, Mr.



### *Why Do You Stand There in the Rain?*

The weekend was exceptionally rainy, and the students walked together to the White House whereupon President and Mrs. Roosevelt came out to address them personally. After the President spoke, John L. Lewis, President of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) and President of the Mine Workers' Union, spoke to the crowd as well.

*It was raining mighty hard  
on the old Capitol yard,  
And the young folks  
gathered at the White  
House gate,  
The President raised his  
head and to the  
young folks said:  
Tell me why do you come  
here in the rain?*

Marty said that after congregating at the White House, he and a few other students walked a few blocks to drip-dry at the Willard Hotel near the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue.

## Afterthoughts

I am surprised by Marty's stories. I am shocked that the President would step outside to address a group of demonstrators on the lawn of the White House. I am amazed to hear the casual contact between those in power and those who questioned authority. I feel so privileged to have heard this history firsthand from Marty, and I truly believe that an integral part of activist progression and training ought to mean

We don't know it all; those of us who are working to abolish the death penalty, lift the sanctions on Iraq, and end the global threat of nuclear weapons. Many of us are disconnected from the roots of civil disobedience in the United States. Many call themselves anarchists and have never heard of Emma Goldman. Many people struggling for workers' rights through strikes and boycotts do not know the history of the labor movement in the United States.

And where can we learn this invaluable information? We can take history classes,

And the implications for repeating history are as relevant for war makers as they are for nonviolent resisters and social revolutionists. ★



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# SHE'S A NATIVE NEW YORKER

Still Making The Neighborhood Scene At The Tender Age Of 82

Decades before Soho became the epicenter of consumer culture, when it was still known as the West Side, Dolores Castellano arrived. More than 60 years ago she left her parent's home on the Lower East Side and never returned. Although it's only about a mile away, the cultures were worlds apart. She has lived the rest of her life on Thompson Street — in love, becoming Italian, raising a family, and having a ball.

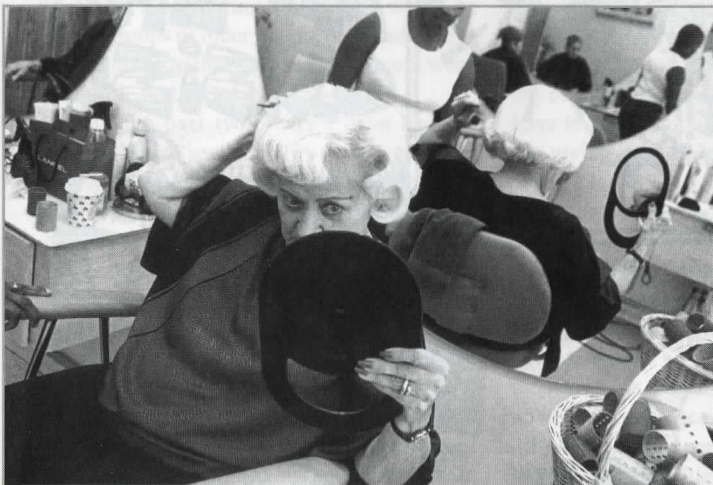
text and photos by Greg Fuchs



Dolores always makes a stop in The Hat Shop, where we first met. Usually she'll be seated in this chair sharing tales. As one shop employee, Alison, says, "Dolores is like your best girlfriend, mother, and grandmother all rolled into one."



Dolores no longer plays bingo, cards, or the numbers, but she still gets her lottery tickets at the corner store. She possesses a supernatural fascination for numbers. She wants to know your birth date, phone number, or whatever digits happen to be in your head.



Every Sunday at noon, Dolores goes to the hair salon. A perfectly styled Marilyn Monroe hairdo, her signature, besides her terrific personality, is the ingredient that makes her stand out in a crowd. It's her one luxury, her most valuable asset.



Living on a fixed-income, basically just social security, makes simple grocery shopping a challenge. Weekly she buys enough food for herself as well as the half-dozen people on the block for whom she lovingly cooks a lunch. Her eggplant is delicious.



Thursday is Seniors Day at St. Anthony's Church. With about one hundred other women from the neighborhood, Dolores eats lunch and swaps news. One woman joked that the men were out fooling around, another that all the women killed them.



Dolores has lived almost all of her years on Thompson Street in this apartment. Remembering her loving and passionate marriage, she told me all of her girlfriends would ask for sexual advice — she was a notoriously great lover.



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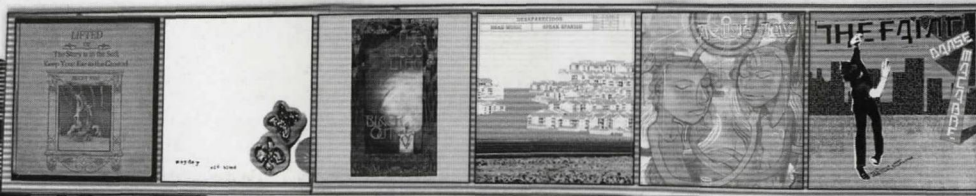
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