

Radical Cheerleaders ★ Sebastião Selgado ★ Bob Kerrey in Vietnam ★ Portland's IPRC

*New Perspectives on Politics, Culture, Media and Life*

# clamor

September/October 2001

## Back to School

**real talk from students  
and teachers**

**Radical Substitutes  
the Post College Hangover  
Rethinking History  
Fighting for Education in Chicago  
(Un) Learning Class Privilege**

**plus: Carol Queen  
In The Bible Belt**

**Robert King Wilkerson  
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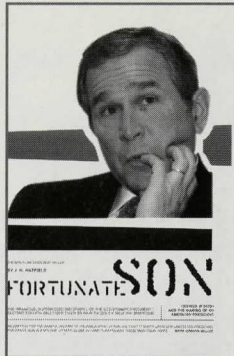


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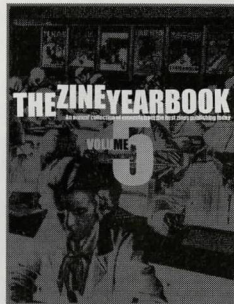


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## Mis/Re/Un-Education

We always hear how learning is a lifelong process. You learn something new  
everyday, right? As true as all this may be, it's perhaps more accurate to say that  
learning is a constant, omnipresent process. Every time we engage a book, movie,  
television show, person or even thought in our own head, learning is happening. We're  
either reinventing new ways of seeing things or reinforcing ideas that have been in-  
stilled through other learning experiences — and a multitude of negotiations in be-  
tween. That said, welcome to the "Back to School" issue of CLAMOR.

This issue we'd like to examine the important role that teachers play in our soci-  
ety and our culture. Instead of piling on the statistics and the analysis, we thought we  
would let teachers speak for themselves. We're featuring the real-life stories of teach-  
ers as they deal with students and administrations each day, from the college level on  
down, from traditional to non-traditional roles. Teachers fulfill a most basic need in  
our society, but it so often seems that they are undervalued or taken for granted. A  
few of the featured articles show teachers battling with the system, and this is some-  
thing, perhaps, to reflect on — what, besides low wages, lack of job security and poor  
working conditions drives our best and brightest away from teaching?

Because learning is this constant process, we recognize that it need not be lim-  
ited to a structured school setting or to a teacher-student relationship. Each article in  
this magazine could be considered a learning experience and could fit the "educa-  
tion" theme of this issue, whether the topic addresses the classroom or not. Jane  
Minx's interview with Marisa Carnesky details her respect for and relationship with a  
fellow performance artist — a mutually beneficial, and educational, relationship.  
Robert King Wilkerson, in an interview with Alec Dunn and Brice White, details his  
learning experiences inside of Angola Prison in Louisiana. Tennessee Jones tells us  
how she learned about class consciousness growing up. These are important educa-  
tional experiences that happen outside of the classroom, that are sometimes more  
real and valid than what we learn in school.

We hope that you take away from this issue a bit of insight into the daily lives  
and motivations of teachers and students, as you are both all of the time. Please take  
time to reflect on learning and teaching that you do in your own life.

## Size and Sustainability

In an effort to ensure stability and growth of the magazine, we are temporarily  
cutting the size from 92 to 76 pages, while still attempting to maintain a low content-  
to-advertising ratio. We hope that this will be one of a few things that we can do to  
make sure we're able to keep printing this magazine. It's definitely not cheap to do!

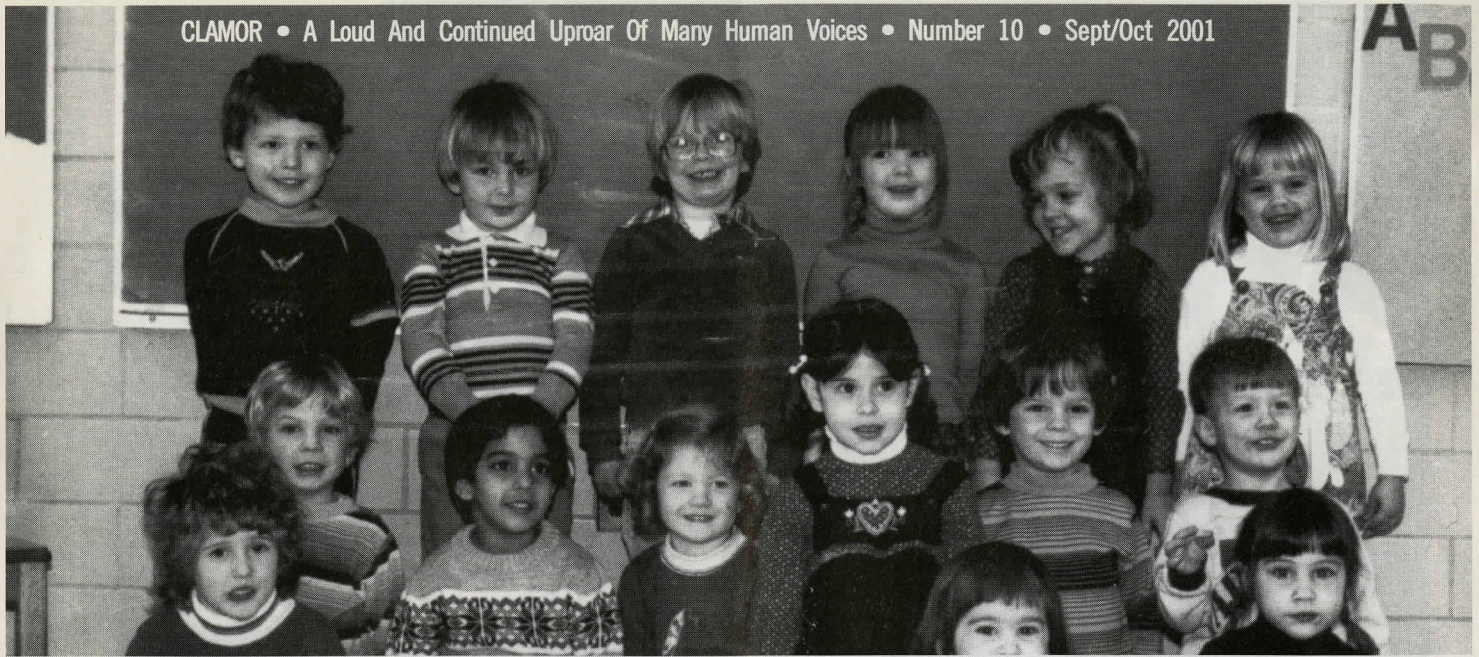
## Helping Out

Thanks to a unique fundraising collaboration between Soft Skull Press and Be-  
come the Media, you can help us keep things going while also getting your hands on  
the controversial book about G.W. Bush that St. Martin's Press tried to bury. Visit the  
Become the Media store (at [www.clamormagazine.org](http://www.clamormagazine.org)) and purchase J.H. Hatfield's  
*Fortunate Son* for a premium fundraising rate of \$25. Ten dollars of your purchase  
goes towards helping CLAMOR pay mounting bills.

Thanks, as always, for reading.

*Jen Angel*      *Jason K.*





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on the cover: Vieve Griffith @ Wilmington Charter School, Wilmington Delaware 1997.

Photo by Greg Fuchs

above: CLAMOR proofreader, volunteer and all-around great friend Sarah Stippich  
(third from right in top row) in kindergarten





# Letters

please address any correspondence to [letters@clamormagazine.org](mailto:letters@clamormagazine.org) or via USPS at PO Box 1225 Bowling Green, OH 43402

Clamor,

There is plenty of misery going on at Pelican Bay. The publicity is leaking out everywhere and I'm glad that *Clamor Magazine* ("Inside Pelican Bay State Prison," July/Aug. 2001) really points out the atrocities that are taking place at this hellhole establishment. The SHU (Security Housing Unit) is cruel and unusual punishment. We are supposed to be a civilized people, how can we mistreat our wayward kind like this? With 80 square foot cells that inmates are supposed to be kept in for 23 hours a day, is way too harsh. Plus knowing that they may share this cell with someone else? What madness is this? This is not the dark days of humankind! Super Max is not the way to go, what are we teaching our children, when they learn that fellow humans are being kept in restrictive premises that is not even worthy to keep our dog in! For shame, for shame!

Sincerely yours,

Paul Dale Roberts, Office Manager  
Political Reform  
Secretary of State  
Elk Grove, CA  
[pdroberts@jazmaonline.com](mailto:pdroberts@jazmaonline.com)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Call to "third wave" feminists/womanists!

We are compiling an anthology on the kind of organizing and activism you (collectively or individually) are doing around the issue(s) of violence against women in the U.S. A few examples include: *participating in a women's action coalition engaged in consciousness raising activities, doing personal outreach, community education, organizing rallies/marches/protests, participating in clinic defense or cop watch and many others!*

The book will be by and for young women activists with a combination of theoretical and experiential perspectives on activ-

ism and community organizing. It will explore individual and/or organizational process. We would like the essays/articles submitted to be in conversation with or considering the following questions:

- What is the relationship between feminism and violence against women?
- How does personal experience combine with/influence practice?
- How do feminists translate theory into practice?

*We are interested in the nuts and bolts of feminist organizing/activism, thoroughly exploring this question with a discussion of how your organization is run, who you collaborate with or don't, struggles, tensions, what works/what doesn't, etc)*

• How can feminists encourage creativity, growth, and sustainability in organizing? The books discussion about violence against women will include such varied topics as: sexual assault, domestic violence, lesbian bashing, sexual harassment, eating disorders, body image, poverty, incest, reproductive rights, "violent" pornography, child porn, police brutality/prison industrial complex, media, pop culture

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE is Thursday, November 1, 2001!** If there are any questions please e-mail [thirdwavevaw@hotmail.com](mailto:thirdwavevaw@hotmail.com)

We are looking for submissions of essays/articles of up to 15 pages by individuals roughly between the ages of 16 through 26. \*When submitting please include (if applicable) document/materials that illustrate your organizing strategy, including: a mission statement, manifesto, brochures, guidelines, etc. With submission please include your name & contact information (phone, e-mail, address).

Please send/e-mail submissions to:  
*Third Wave VAW, c/o Katy Otto, P.O. Box 297, College Park, Maryland 20741-0297*  
OR [thirdwavevaw@hotmail.com](mailto:thirdwavevaw@hotmail.com).





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The Salt Lake City Public Library is one of the up and coming zine collections in the US. If you have zines to donate or you publish a zine, please send them! The library even has a small budget with which to buy zines, so if you have any questions, please contact the library directly. Zines can be sent to: Salt Lake City Public Library, Attention: Zine Collection: 209 East 500 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111. Questions can be directed to Julie Bartel, [jthomas@mail.slclpl.lib.ut.us](mailto:jthomas@mail.slclpl.lib.ut.us).

The National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools seeks to unite and organize a grass roots movement of learners and learning communities dedicated to participant control and the elimination of human and ecological oppression. Find out more at [www.ncacs.org](http://www.ncacs.org) or write NCACS 1266 Rosewood #1, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

The Inside Books Project sends books and literature for free to people incarcerated in Texas Prisons. IBP is a volunteer-run organization that survives solely on donations and grants of money and books. For more information contact the Inside Books Project, c/o 12<sup>th</sup> Street Books, 827 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Austin, TX 78701 or 512-647-4803.

The third edition of Resources for Radicals, an annotated bibliography of print resources, is now available. The focus is on material related to non-violent protest and practical alternative social institutions. Resources for Radicals is available from Toronto Action for Social Change. The price is: \$12.00 Canada, \$13.00 U.S. (U.S. funds), \$15.00 Rest of the World. (U.S. funds) Cheques should be made payable to Toronto Action for Social Change. Orders should be sent to: Toronto Action for Social Change, P.O. Box 73620, 509 St. Clair Ave. West, Toronto, Ontario, M6C 1C0, CANADA, [tasc@web.ca](mailto:tasc@web.ca).

Z is an independent political magazine/ web community of critical thinking on political, cultural, social, and economic life in the United States. It sees the racial, sexual, political, and class dimensions of personal life as fundamental to understanding and improving contemporary circumstances and it aims to assist activist efforts to attain a better future. For more information visit Z online at: <http://www.zmag.org>

to benefit independent publishing and improve the mental environment we are sending out scores of stickers (and posters)-- (please) send ten dollars and a large self-addressed stamped envelope to: sticker exchange (attn: m/sz), po box 1225 bowling green OH 43402, checks/money orders to: "become the media." if you've got cool stickers or posters (please) send a bunch and we'll trade.

C.O.R.E. - Center Of Radical Empowerment, a new infoshop in sunny St. Petersburg, FL, featuring a lending library of independent media on social, educational and economic issues; a radical book and record distribution; a show venue; a space for grassroots organizing, and more! Check us out when you're in town! 1615 16th St. S, St. Petersburg, FL 33705/ [www.core-info.org](http://www.core-info.org) / [TheCORECenter@yahoo.com](mailto:TheCORECenter@yahoo.com).

The Kate Sharpley Library holds a huge archive of newspapers, journals, private letters, manuscripts and ephemera to do with the history of anarchism. They also publish reprinted historical pamphlets and recently published "The Story of a Proletarian Life" by Bartolomeo, available from AK Press for \$3 at 674-A 23rd St. Oakland, CA 94612



## Dignity Village Update

by Pete Lewis ([pyt\\_lewis@hotmail.com](mailto:pyt_lewis@hotmail.com))

Since the July/August 2001 issue of *Clamor*, Dignity Village has undergone many developments, and I thought readers might be interested to know that the City of Portland has decided to give the village until September 1<sup>st</sup> 2001 at their current site to continue negotiations. This will hopefully allow the residents to explore the idea of a potential one year "pilot project" of self governance. Secondly, the City is working with villagers and supporters in an attempt to find public land on which to relocate the village under a one-year lease agreement. Supporters and villagers are also exploring the idea of setting up a housing collective to address a number of issues including: to house villagers in a crisis, to help supporters who might face homelessness due to Portland's rising housing costs, to serve as a HQ/office space, to use as storage space and perhaps as a transitional home for villagers looking to move into permanent housing.

Unfortunately, it is not all good news for Dignity as the task of finding a new site is becoming an increasing obstacle, since the campaign has become so high-profile. Dignity fears it will face ever-increasing scrutiny by detractors, the media, immediate neighbors and neighborhood groups. The village also fears that despite overwhelming public support there are hints of legal challenges by detractors on the horizon. Apparently, there are indications that the campaign might meet organized resistance through lawsuits aimed at the city or the Oregon Department of Transport.

Furthermore, if (and it is still a big if), everything goes according to plan, there is little doubt that the authorities will only tolerate the existence of Dignity if villagers and supporters agree to compromise on the size and function of the village. There is a very real possibility that the campaign could really help the living conditions of forty or so of Portland's homeless population but that leaves thousands more in the same situation they have always been in. Dignity Village will have to work really hard not to become an elite project for a limited few.

Please contact [www.outofthedoors.org](http://www.outofthedoors.org) for more information, updates, words of encouragement, advice or solidarity!



# clamor contributors

**Beth A. Barnett** (p. 38) publishes a zine called *Eight Items or Less*, is a contributor to *EcoZine*, and periodically contributes to *Clamor*. She lives in Corvallis, Oregon, where there are still no interesting jobs that "fit her skill set," and plenty of temp office work. She hasn't yet been able to decide what to "do" industriously besides write, make oil pastel drawings, ride bikes ... and obsessively listen to the Magnetic Fields. You can contact her via [bbarnett@peak.org](mailto:bbarnett@peak.org).

**Nathan Berg**, (p. 57) Well this year sure had its ups and downs. Sorry things didn't work out between us, but you're just too busy of a guy to be dating. It was great studying political science with you and reading your monthly *Maximum Rockroll* column in study hall, but those were about the only times I'd hear from you. Otherwise, you were busy making fancy food in home ec or selling produce in cooperative business class. Sorry...but I need someone who can stay in one place for longer than 10 minutes. Hope we have some classes together next fall.

Peace,  
Jessie Howard

P.S. Are you going to be the 'zine coordinator' for the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative again this year? When I finish my latest issue, I'll send you a sample. Is the address still 426 W. Gilman St., Madison, WI 53703?

**Casey Boland!** (p. 13) Yo dude, I'm not gonna write 'have a great summer' like every other chode. Dude man, it's been a great year. I'll never forget how you scammed all those copies of that zine, or cut those classes to go play in those bands. That was so cool. And man, yer stories about all those jobs you had, like workin with rowdy teenagers and stuff — they rocked. I can't wait to chill at yer place, 614 S. 48th. St. Apt.1 in Philly, PA 19143, or send lewd messages to yer e-mail, [rsch@earthlink.net](mailto:rsch@earthlink.net). I only wish I could go eight months without working like you did, and then get a job teaching the second grade this fall. Man, those kids are gonna eat ya alive. Good luck!

Hey **Sean Carswell**, (p. 9) would have been nice to see you around in class more. What were you always doing out there in your van in the parking lot, anyway? Working on that zine of yours? Ha ha! Oh wait, you really do have a zine! Razorcake, PO Box 42129, LA, CA 90042, [www.razorcake.com](http://www.razorcake.com).

**Chris Dixon** (p. 55) is a former rad sub, an expatriate Alaskan, an 'activist,' and a writer. He lives in the Pacific Northwest with his beloved partner Tanya and generally causes trouble. Check out one of his latest essays in *Global Uprising*, forthcoming this fall from New Society Publishers. Write him at [chrisak@tao.ca](mailto:chrisak@tao.ca).

**Basil Elias** (p. 28) hated high school and served saturday detention every single saturday of his sophomore year with 16 inschool suspensions. He loved college though, but wants to tear down compulsory schooling systems everywhere. He is profoundly moved by the pursuit of anti-oppressive healing, love and community. Contact him via Planting Seeds (see ad in this issue) or via email at [basilelias@hotmail.com](mailto:basilelias@hotmail.com)

**Greg Fuchs** (cover, p. 32) is a journalist, poet and photographer. He is the author of *Came Like It Went* (BD Books, Washington, D.C. 1999) and *Uma Ternura* (Canvas and Companhia, Oportom, 1998). He is also an affiliate of MediaChannel.org. You can reach him at [Greg@fntad.com](mailto:Greg@fntad.com)

**John Gerken** (p. 34) is hobo-erotic, smells like freight trains and bike chains. He is currently involved with putting together the *DIY Book* with Tree of Knowledge Press as well as various projects concerning handmade maps, which you should make and send to him. He can be reached c/o Tree of Knowledge at PO Box 251766, Little Rock, AR 72225.

Hey **Shawn Granton!** (p. 75) Sorry I didn't get to know you this year even tho we sat next to each other in Horesco's Trig class (what a bore!) you seem like a cool person. Remember that time you snuck into the a/v room and ran off a whole bunch of copies of your comix-zine, *FUTURISTA! MODERN INDUSTRY* (\$6.00 ppd to 3719 SE Hawthorne Blvd #243, Portland OR 97214, [shawntfr@hotmail.com](mailto:shawntfr@hotmail.com)) without Mr. Jenkins ever knowing? Y'know, the comic with thirty one different rad cartoonists? That was soooo cool!

Well, hope you have a great summer (maybe I'll see you at Dunkin' Donuts?) and fun wherever you go off to school. P.S. POMPERAUG FOOTBALL KICKS ASS!!!

Formally known as Kim, **Tennessee Jones** (p. 63) published the now defunct lit-zine *Teenage Death Songs* for three years. An excommunicated southerner, she is currently living in Brooklyn, New York and pursuing writing and activism. She can be reached at 1090 Greene Ave #2 Brooklyn NY 11221 or at [kdoberts@hotmail.com](mailto:kdoberts@hotmail.com).

**Ammi Keller** (p. 72) builds bikes, fixes bikes, rides cross country, delivers pizza on her bike, hops freight trains with her bike and is part of the newly-

formed New Orleans Community Bike Project. She can be reached at [gorillagorilla@hotmail.com](mailto:gorillagorilla@hotmail.com).

**Christine Knorr**, (p. 57) Well, we made it. No more school...ever. Until college starts next fall. Graphic Design is such a good course of study for you. I hear the Children's Museum in downtown Madison, WI is looking for someone in that field. Well, have fun with your 'hubbie' in India this summer. If I need to reach you, I guess I'll write 1201 Williamson (53703). See you in the fall.

Peace,  
Jessie Howard

I know we were "ultra competitive" this year, but I just wanted to say, if it wasn't for **Amanda Luker** (p. 44) "Whoa", I probably wouldn't have gotten into Cornell because you made me study twice as hard, so thanks. - Sheila PO Box 8344, Minneapolis, MN 55408 [www.arisebookstore.org](http://www.arisebookstore.org)

**Kari Lydersen** (p. 13) is DJ Gurgle at Guerrilla Love Radio in Chicago and is trying to overthrow "the boss's sick system" at *StreetWise* newspaper, where the staff just won a nasty battle to unionize and had fun doing it. You can reach Kari c/o CLAMOR.

**James Marks** (p. 23) spends a disproportionately large amount of his time screen printing under the alias vgkids. When he isn't printing someone else's designs, he works his hardest to establish himself as an art geek- complete with cheesy cliches, blunt imagery and months on end waiting to be struck by inspiration.

**Jane Minx** (p. 66) aka Minx Grill is a writer, performer, zine maker and voyeur from the north of England relocated to Copenhagen, Denmark, who hopes to get no. 9 of her zine *Shag Stamp* out sometime this year ... amongst many other writing projects. Contact via email at [minxjane@yahoo.com](mailto:minxjane@yahoo.com)

**Richard Gilman Opalsky** (p. 50) studies philosophy at one school while teaching philosophy at another. "I like to play 'musical activism' with my comrades, Countdown to Putsch. And I spend my time with Robyn (human), Spartacus (small, squishy, orange cat) and Ramona Africa (chubby, squirmy, caramel cat) ... Struggling to transform thought into action." Email [thoughtandaction@yahoo.com](mailto:thoughtandaction@yahoo.com)

**Rich Ristow** (p. 41) was born in Bittburg, Germany and spent the first 18 years of his life on overseas military bases. He holds a BA in English and a MA in Education from West Virginia University. Currently, he is enrolled in a creative writing Master's of Fine Arts program at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He's taught writing and literature at two community colleges in North Carolina.

**Gibby Peach** (p. 62) Peach! Hope you like the stupid picture I sent of your dumb ass to Clamor magazine. You look like a clown. Sucker! That's what you get for making fun of my stupid vegetable tattoos all year. We should get completely wasted all summer; I'm 'Running Free' now, instead of 'Poison Free'. I might stay in winnipeg for awhile because I've gotta work on my website ([www.kickitliltbreaks.com](http://www.kickitliltbreaks.com)) so you can see more pictures of your ugly ass... as well as live action shots of superstars like Propagandhi, Dead Prez, and International Noise Conspiracy (and some killer political photography, as well). Are you staying in Emerson? I heard you guys have new bar owners down there. Klan was telling me that their Shih Tzu, Nikki, met the Langes' three Shih Tzus on a walk the other day! Cool!!! Anyways... if your email is still [rob\\_pilatus@hotmail.com](mailto:rob_pilatus@hotmail.com) I will get ahold of you over the summer. Up the Irons!

**Li'l Jonny Slapowitz** (photo on p. 62)

Voted by his high school classmates as "most likely to get arrested at a protest," **Sunfrog** (p. 70) enjoyed brief stints as a newspaper editor and deejay after earning a varsity letter in slut wrestling. Condemned by the gods to work in academia as atonement for his sins as a student, Sunfrog tries to subvert the paradigm of public service. Contact: [sunfrog@hotmail.com](mailto:sunfrog@hotmail.com)

**m/szuberla** (p. 31) spends a great deal of time helping to create a decentralized mutual aid eco-village complete with a community land trust, urban orchards, a multimedia community center (consisting of two connected warehouses), and a cooperative cruelty-free cafe ... alienated access: [mszuberla@yahoo.com](mailto:mszuberla@yahoo.com)

**jt yost** (back cover), i enjoyed sitting next to your illustration in home ec., but it kind of frightened and disgusted me. you know i've always loved hanging out with you, but maybe you should reconsider having that thing as your sidekick. it's always spurring blood or ink and popping its eyes out and stuff. we should hang out this summer...call me #1-800-745-7013. L.Y.L.A.S., R.H.T.S., B.O.B., etc.

**Alec "Icky" Dunn** and **Brice White** (p. 17) were late one too many times and spent this issue in detention. Reach them care of the principal's office at CLAMOR.



[POLITICS]

# Teaching the History of All Wars

dissent and controversy in the classroom  
with Sean Carswell





I didn't get into teaching to save the world. I got into it by default. I wanted to get away from the nine-to-five world and take some time to study great novelists and write a novel myself. The best way I could find to do this was to get a Master's degree. The only way I could afford to get the degree was by teaching at the university while working on the Master's, so I became a teacher.

My initial goal was to do as little teaching as possible and focus all of my creative energy on writing. This plan self-destructed almost immediately. I was twenty-four years old. Most of my students were only a few years younger. They were my peers. I couldn't bullshit them, and when I tried, I felt like I was betraying myself as much as I was betraying them. So I decided to take the job seriously. The first step was to ditch the dry, dull textbook that I was required to teach and instead bring in something interesting for them to read. In one of my classes, I developed a section that was all about the history of wars. On the first day of that section, my class got pretty heated up. Students who would barely glance at previous assignments were suddenly very passionate about what they'd read. One student, a blond suburban girl named Carrie, finally stopped taking notes when others spoke and joined in on the discussion. More than that, she argued against the text. I was proud of her. I didn't agree with a word she said, but I had to agree with her dissent. Apparently her father had been a veteran, and the idea of an unjust war didn't sit well with her. She'd been talking for a while when I noticed Eric, a Navajo student, getting jittery. He tucked his hair behind his ears five times in the matter of a minute, and I knew he wanted to speak. When Carrie paused, I called on Eric.

"Of course the history of all wars is written by the winners," Eric said. "That's why you don't even think about where you are right now."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Carrie asked.

"Exactly," Eric said.

I wasn't going to let him off the hook that easily. I'd been trying to get him to speak up during a discussion all semester, and he finally had. And, just as I'd suspected, he had something intelligent to say. And Carrie, who was kind of a naïve girl, was clearly ready to learn. My class seemed to be coming together.

I knew what Eric was talking about when he mentioned where we were. I'd thought a lot about where we were. I actually wanted to talk about it, but I wanted to see if I could draw it out of Eric first. I figured a few questions would get us right where we needed to be, so I said, "Humor us, Eric. Where are we?"

"Flagstaff," he said.

"Where's that?" I asked, hoping like hell he wouldn't say Arizona.

"In the San Francisco Mountains."

"What's the significance of the mountains?"

"It's a sacred place for the Navajos."

"And what does this have to do with the history of wars being written by the victors?"

"Because the victors are sitting in this classroom right now and don't even think about how they got here. Because the United States took Mexico's land and didn't even consider that Mexico took it from the Navajos, didn't even consider giving it back when the US decided they could make more money logging and mining it. And because no one ever teaches that part of the story."

The rest of the class was silent. Even I was silent. Eric had gotten to his point a few questions sooner than I'd expected him to. He'd said more than anyone had expected him to. And when a Navajo guy says something like this to a room full of white people, suddenly, no one has anything to say.

Before the silence reached its full effect, Mike, another kid who was quiet and intelligent and never seemed to have much to say, asked Eric, "What war did the Na-

vajos win to get this mountain? What history are they rewriting?" Mike wasn't Hopi or a member of any of the eleven other indigenous tribes who consider the San Francisco Mountain a sacred place, but apparently he had put some thought into the history of where he was. And now he was ready to talk about it.

I smiled. Finally, my time spent teaching felt worthwhile.

The whole discussion spawned from an essay on the Vietnam War. The essay was written by a Vietnamese woman. Though her tone was calm, the essay was unsettling in its subtleties – the way she referred to the "American War," her casual reference to the two million Vietnamese killed in the war, her mention of the American land mines that still occasionally maim a Vietnamese farmer even though the war supposedly ended 20 years ago, and her offhand way of saying things like "Most Vietnamese people no longer resent Americans," or "we understand the importance of distinguishing between the American people and the American government. This is what allows us to forgive the people."

My purpose in teaching this essay – this whole session – was to get the students thinking about history in a larger context. I wanted them to understand that history is by no means an exact science. History is a transitory. The history you learn depends as much upon who is in power in the present as it depends upon what actually occurred in the past. The Vietnam War is a good example of this because it's an ugly event in our very recent history and it simply cannot be taught as what it was – essentially an act of aggression driven by American corporate greed for oil, tin, and rubber – because acts of aggression driven by corporate greed are still pretty much the current government policy. So I decided to teach about the war as an act of aggression, then take the time, with my class, to compare this with what they had previously been taught about the war, and try to understand the various perspectives that make up the history of any one event. This didn't seem, to me anyway, to be all that radical or controversial. It seemed like something that should go on in a college class. We were simply trying to translate facts into knowledge. That's what learning is.

I should probably also mention that the class I taught wasn't a History class. It was a sophomore level English class called "Reading and Writing for the University Community." It was geared to teach





students how to analyze the stuff they were reading in college, how to extract the main point from texts so that they could write research papers, that kind of thing. That's why I decided to include the section on the Vietnam War. I figured that, if they were taking History courses, it would be good for them to think about who writes the history. And though the Vietnam War section wasn't part of the textbook that I was supposed to be teaching, my class found it very interesting. The two weeks we spent analyzing these essays were the best two weeks of the course. The papers my students wrote on the Vietnam War were their best essays. Everyone was happy.

Before the next semester started, I attended a meeting of English teachers chaired by the English Department head, who was also my boss, a guy named Geoff Chase. Geoff was an ambitious ex-hippie who was trying to climb the ladder to president of the university. He wasn't a bad guy, just a guy who'd compromised his values so many times that he'd forgotten what his values were. I knew this. Still, it surprised me when he said, "It's come to our attention that some of the English 205 instructors are covering the Vietnam War. We discussed this in the last faculty meeting and decided that the subject was too controversial, so we're not going to teach it anymore."

I felt suckerpunched. I was amazed that Geoff would recoil from allowing me to teach about the Vietnam War when he himself had protested against it. I understood that he was on a career path to the university presidency and any controversy could kick him right off that path, but, for christ's sake, this was the same guy who'd taught a class on labor movements and included the Wobblies. How could he say something like this?

I was also struck by the very calculated passive aggression of his remark, because 1. "instructors" weren't covering the Vietnam War. I was. Just me. No one else. 2. He didn't even look at me when he said this. For a long time I stared at the flecks of grey in his thick beard and at his dark, calm eyes. He never once cast a glance in my direction. 3. I wasn't in the faculty meeting that decided the subject was too controversial. I didn't decide that. Most importantly, I hadn't stirred up any controversy. And 4. the very use of the word faculty was a sneaky thing, because I wasn't "faculty." I was "staff." The main difference between the two being about thirty thousand dollars a year. So I kept staring at Geoff and Geoff kept avoiding my glance. I wondered what to do about the situation.

That afternoon, I did a lot of thinking. I paced around my apartment, looking at the brown renter's carpet, the kind that's designed to absorb bongwater stains. I sat and picked at the loose foam in a chair that another graduate student had rescued from the curb, then gave to me. I noticed that all the other furniture and really everything else in the apartment, including the food in the refrigerator, belonged to my roommate. I felt suddenly poor. I knew I was poor. It just usually didn't bug me. But on this afternoon, it definitely bugged me. I grabbed my bike and went for a ride.

I peddled down to campus, then around it for a bit. I rode past Old Main (the administration building) and Taylor Hall (a dorm), both of which had been built before this was a university and before Arizona was a state. No one knew what they were going to do with these two buildings when they built them. More than anything, the buildings were originally just a sign saying, "We own Flagstaff. It's a mining and log-

ging and railroad town and we own it." I rode all around campus thinking about this, thinking about what the administration building said to me now. Then, I turned north, up the mountain and back towards home.

The whole time I peddled up the mountain, I stared at the peak looming over me. The afternoon sun cast long shadows across the barren snow line. I thought about winter time, when the peak would be covered in snow and the north side of the mountain would be full of skiers. Skiing on a sacred mountain. I thought back to my first year as an undergraduate and how excited I'd been that finally, after thirteen years of public schools, someone was finally teaching me something. I finally had teachers who challenged me and encouraged me to think for myself and encouraged me to disagree, as long as I could explain why. And, of course, I thought of my Vietnam War section being stripped from me. I felt like someone was skiing on my sacred mountain. I made my decision.

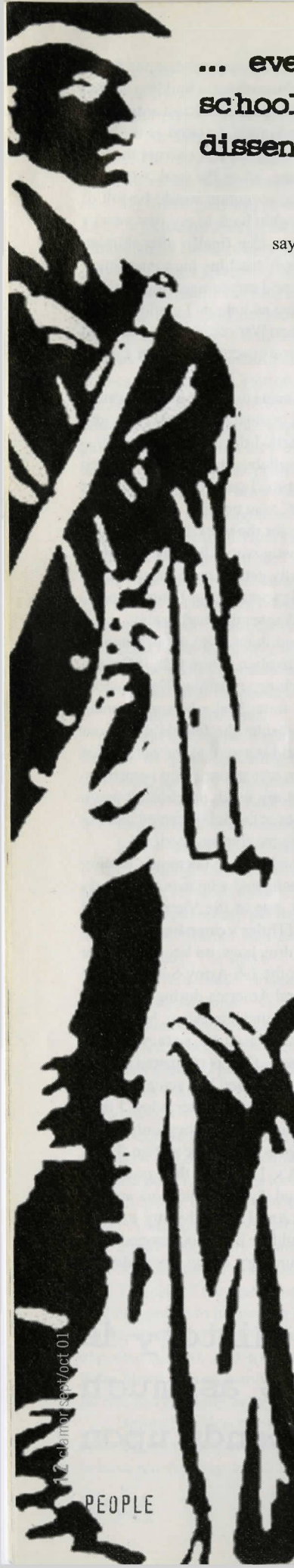
I decided that my teaching job didn't mean anything to me. I wasn't even considered a teacher, per se. I was a graduate assistant - though I assisted no one. I taught the classes myself. I developed the syllabus (well, I wasn't supposed to develop the syllabus. I just did). I created the lesson plans. I made up the assignments. I gave the grades. I was the teacher. The title "graduate assistant" was nothing more than an excuse to pay me less than a living wage for the work I did. I decided that, if the school wasn't paying me a living wage, then they weren't really paying me at all. And if I wasn't really getting paid, then the only compensation I could find out of the whole scenario was to teach something I found stimulating. The Vietnam War section had to stay.

Next, I decided that I had to figure out how to go about teaching it. I could present my argument to Geoff, explain to him that, if I'm not challenging my students and I'm not teaching something I'm passionate about, then I'm wasting everyone's time. Make him understand that every major concept that we now consider the foundation of our belief systems, from the idea that the world is round to the notion that the history of war is written by the victor, was at one point controversial. So I outlined the entire argument in my head, practiced it again and again, and decided to just teach whatever the hell I wanted and not tell anyone. Fight passive aggression with passive aggression.

Plan B worked swimmingly. I learned how to become a teacher who was anonymous to the rest of the faculty and who was completely radical in the classroom. I figured, why stop at the Vietnam War. I taught articles on Henry Ford's funding of Hitler's campaign; on fourth amendment rights and how they relate to drug laws; on Leonard Peltier and the American Indian Movement; on the US Army School of the Americas; on US foreign policy in Central America during the eighties; and on whatever else I was reading and found interesting. My classes loved it, by and large. They saw that I was enthusiastic, so they became enthusiastic. They read what I assigned them. They participated in class discussion. To keep them a little happier, I assigned less actual writing. I figured, why make them write nine essays a semester when I only have to hand three essays in to the department? So they only wrote three essays. My time spent grading papers was reduced two-thirds. Also, to cover my ass, I gave a lot of A's. I decided that grades are counter-productive to learning anyway, and if you did the work and put actual effort into it, that's all I could ask. And I know that my students learned more that semester than they would've if I'd condemned them to the typical mindless drudgery of writing dry essays about dry es-

... history is by no means an exact science. History is a transitory. The history you learn depends as much upon who is in power in the present as it depends upon what actually occurred in the past.





**... even though every level of education, from nursery school to the university, will frown upon controversy and dissent, they are essential stages of the learning process.**

says. In fact, I'd say they learned a hell of a lot. Except for one kid. Jason.

Jason was a parentally funded slacker dwelling in college so that he wouldn't have to get a real job. He rarely showed up to class and didn't put any effort into it when he did. Occasionally, I'd ask him to join in on a class discussion and he'd respond by saying something like, "I didn't read the assignment."

"Well, go home and read it," I'd usually say. "Come back when you know what we're talking about." Because this was college. I wasn't his baby sitter. No truant officer was going to hunt him down. Besides, it bummed me out to have a class of nineteen excited students who were happy to have a teacher who finally challenged them and gave them good shit to read, and one guy moping because he knew he couldn't pass the class by buying essays off his frat brothers.

By the end of the semester, Jason had handed in only one of the three essays. It was the one on the Vietnam War. I should've failed him, but, because I didn't want any trouble, I gave him a D.

Jason protested the grade.

When I got back to school after Christmas break, but before the semester started, Geoff called me into his office. He asked me about Jason and about the grade. I shrugged. "He only handed in one assignment all semester. I should've failed him."

Geoff opened a manila folder and pulled out some papers. "I know," he said. "He wrote the other two over the break." Geoff held the papers out to me. I didn't reach for them. Geoff's small hand lingered for a second: the papers rigid, his hand steady. Then, he put them back in the manila folder. "I'm not going to accept them. I'm going to let the grade stand."

All right, I thought. Finally, a little evidence that my boss had a backbone. I smiled and

nodded. Then I wondered to myself, so why did he call me in here?

Geoff answered that right away. "I did read the essay he wrote. It was on the Vietnam War."

"Yes," I said. I hadn't really invited this confrontation, but I was ready for it. I still had all my reasons, and after putting them to the test, I was even more prepared to lay them all on the table.

Before I could start, though, Geoff said, "He also wants me to refund his money for the textbook. He says that you didn't teach anything out of it. Is that true?"

"Yes it is," I said. "You see..."

"It's okay. I just needed to know."

"But I want to explain, Geoff. I want you to understand."

"No need," Geoff said. He stood up and started to walk towards the door. I stayed seated and tried again to explain. Geoff said that it wasn't necessary, that he was sure I was busy getting ready for the semester and that he'd already taken up enough of my time. I really had no choice but to leave.

The next day, Geoff refunded Jason's money and cancelled the section of English 205 that I was scheduled to teach. I was reassigned to the university writing center, where I'd have to sit out the last semester of my contract as a tutor. I was still able to teach my freshman English class, though.

Strangely enough, a couple of months later, I was nominated for a teaching award – something about being an outstanding graduate assistant. Apparently, another faculty member knew about the whole Vietnam War situation and nominated me. That, coupled with my extremely positive student evaluations (in one class, every single student had given me the highest instructor rating possible), made me a shoe-in to win. Of course, I didn't win the award. I needed a letter of recommendation from Geoff to win it and he wouldn't write the letter. But it didn't matter. I knew that teaching had as little to do with awards as learning had to with grades.

I have gone on and done some teaching since then, mostly at the college level. I still get into it by default. Two community colleges call me before every fall and spring semester, and if I really need the money, I'll pick up a class or two. When I do teach, I still bring in the texts, and though I don't think what I teach is radical, I know most people do. I've learned from that first instance, though. I've learned to gradually introduce concepts, so that when I'm teaching something about the Vietnam War, my students have already read something like Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant," and have already been introduced to concepts like imperialism and revisionist history. I've learned to stay anonymous to my boss. I currently have three former employers who consistently give me glowing recommendations, but probably couldn't pick me out of a police line up. I've also learned to give A's to any students who show up and do their work. Happy students tend to keep radical professors from getting into too much trouble. Most importantly, I've learned that a job teaching is never as important as the act of teaching. And even though every level of education, from nursery school to the university, will frown upon controversy and dissent, they are essential stages of the learning process. As revisionist historian Howard Zinn says, it's "the most important principle in education: that all premises must be examined." ★



# Two Day Teacher

By Casey Boland

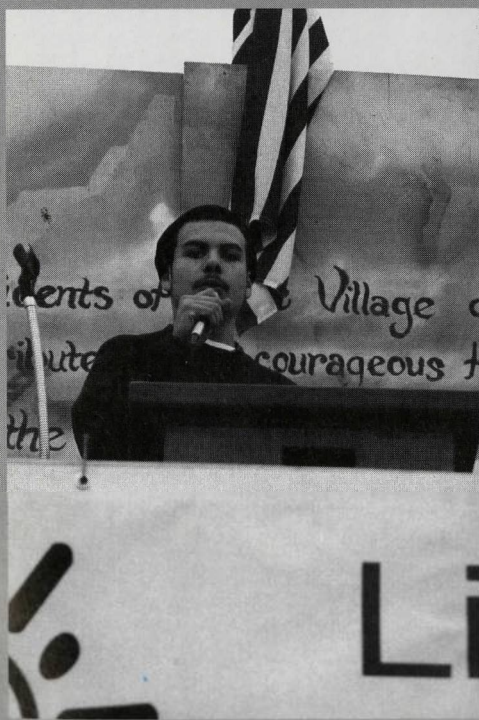
"Yo, Mr. Casey? He looks like he should be in some alternative band. He looks like he should be Korn."

Intense laughter exploded in the room and threatened to blow down the walls.

This was my introduction to a small group of teenagers I'd be spending some quality time with for the next two months. I don't remember what disturbed me more: knowing I'd be partly responsible for other people or my alleged likeness to a member of Korn. The non-profit social services agency I worked for required me to partake in their new program. Like many programs found in the non-profit sector, the aim was good: provide homework assistance, life skills discussions and workshops on jobs and careers. My supervisor and myself would run it until they hired a certified teacher. Little did I know just what they were getting me into.

I worked as an administrative assistant, a fancy title for gofer. I did what I was told, all in the name of serving our clients, i.e., the people receiving assistance. Throughout my tenure, I rarely interacted with the folks who we helped. Like most college grads, I spent most of my time in front of computer screens. So it was a drastic change of pace when my supervisor informed me I would work on the organization's new after-school program for teens. At first I was quite apprehensive; actually, fear possessed me like an evil spirit. How could I handle a room full of teens when I could barely handle associating with a room full of adults? And these teens were what the non-profit industry called at-risk youth, meaning kids that live in poverty-stricken, violence-torn neighborhoods, the bad areas, the non-white regions of a city segregated pretty intensely along class and race lines. Could I, as a suburban-bred middle-class white dude, connect with kids of an entirely different background than my own?

My supervisor seemed to think so. She exuded a flood of optimism about her new project, which overflowed the dams of credulity. "Don't worry about that," she reassured my obviously anxiety-ridden self, "you'll do fine. Just be *yourself*. You care. That's the most important factor." Somehow her words did little to allay my fear. Who did she think she was? Didn't she realize that people actually went to school for this thing called a teaching certificate? Somehow I didn't think my degree in Journalism and Political Science afforded me the proper training in working with inner-city youth.



## Starving for Education

photos and words by Kari Lydersen

On May 31, T.V. footage of a rally at "Camp Cesar Chavez" in Chicago showed a handful of kids age 8 or 9 stomping on a coffin bearing the name "Paul Vallas," then CEO of the Chicago Public Schools.

Vallas's name had constantly been invoked with hatred at the Camp, which was actually a tent city erected on a weedy strip of land in Little Village, a mostly Mexican, low-income neighborhood on Chicago's South Side.

For 19 days in May, starting on Mothers Day and ending May 30, 17 members of the community lived at the camp and consumed nothing but fruit juice and water, starving physically the way they said their children were starving for decent education.

More than three years ago, Vallas, Mayor Richard M. Daley and the Chicago Board of Education had promised to build a new high school at 31<sup>st</sup> and Kostner streets, the site of the tent city.

There is a dire need for a new high school in Little Village, since the existing school, David G. Farragut High School, is overcrowded with 2,187 students. (Its stated capacity is 2,626). There are a total of over 4,000 high school age students living in the area, meaning hundreds of students spend hours in transit to schools in other parts of the city.

Farragut is also designated as a career academy, meaning it is not intended to prepare kids for college.

"Who are they to say our kids aren't good enough to go to college?" asked Carolina Gaete, 29, one of the hunger strikers.

At the same time the new Little Village high school was promised, the Board of Education  
(continued on next page)

Youth activist Sammy speaks at Camp Cesar Chavez.



The first two days with the kids proved just how challenging the experience could be. Before they arrived on the first day, my supervisor filled me in on her game plan: "I've got this *great* icebreaker planned." Immediately I recalled tortuous moments in college classes on the first day when the more flighty professors chose such an inane tactic as the icebreaker, as if the icebreaker would chill us all out and make us best friends. And now I was being asked to help foist it upon the unsuspecting teens.

They entered the building together. There was Sheena (intelligent and strong-minded), Sheila (quiet and compassionate), Carla (talkative and smart), Tasha (argumentative and tough), Rashine (class clown), Walt (precocious yet easily distracted), Thomas (dour and angry) and Kevin (mature and confident). The icebreaker failed miserably. The kids seemed less than enthusiastic. And it became abundantly clear that the small stipend the kids received was the sole incentive to attend our fun-filled program.

When our group of students left at 6:30 on that first fateful day, my supervisor leaned back on a table in the conference room (the site of the program, a less than friendly and comfy environment for teenagers). She said, in between munches on the store-brand cookies she bought for the kids: "That bombed." A look of total defeat hung from her face like an ugly painting. "Try to brainstorm some ideas on what we can do with them," she demanded. The only idea I was brainstorming was how to extricate myself from the sticky web she had spun.

And then, by chance, I saw something that shook me to the core. While goofing off and hanging out in the mailroom, I happened to look at the monthly calendar. It listed when employees would be off. I looked to the next week, and saw that my supervisor would be out for two days. Quickly my brain processed this information and came to one harrowing conclusion: I would have to teach the kids alone. Immediately I went to see her about this most distressing matter. "Um, yeah, I

wanted to talk with you about that," she said cautiously, knowing each word was potential dynamite. "Don't worry, you'll do fine!" With that, she handed me a foot-high stack of materials on classroom management and designing the curriculum. It would be a long weekend.

Despite the debilitating dread infecting me like the plague, I chose to play the role of teacher. I'd develop the perfect classroom exercises and win those teenagers over. My supervisor was right: I wasn't much older than them. I could relate. I could be down. Didn't I harbor some dreams of teaching anyway? Now was the chance, my chance, to change

the world, one student at a time. So I locked myself inside for the weekend and hammered out two class plans, one on job applications and resumes, the other on conflict resolution. By Sunday night, I was nervous yet excited.

The big day arrived. I awoke in a sweat, panic storming my senses. The

outside hung gray and gloomy, not an auspicious start to the morning. The next few hours tormented me. Nothing could relieve the anxiety, the anguish of the thought of standing before the kids as the teacher, the authority, the adult. It was a role that did not fit me.

Finally, after what felt like millennia, two o'clock hit. With a folder full of worksheets and classroom planning outlines in my shaky, sweaty hand, I marched up to the conference room. I could almost hear a faint drum roll as if I was to face the firing squad. I set the room up to be kid friendly, arranging the activity sheets the kids never did (would you want to complete grade school level crossword puzzles if you were 15?) and the junk food they always devoured. The rain beat against the windows as the sky grew darker, more ominous and threatening.

The apprehension was too much to bear. I paced the room, hands damp and constantly in motion. I thrust them in my pockets, then out.

Didn't she realize that people actually went to school for this thing called a teaching certificate? Somehow I didn't think my degree in Journalism and Political Science afforded me the proper training in working with inner-city youth.

promised to build two new magnet schools, elite academic schools which serve 800 students each drawn from around the city based on their test scores.

Today, the two magnet schools, located in wealthy, mostly-white areas on the north side of the city, are completed and have been open for a full school year. But the area at 31<sup>st</sup> and Kostner remains a vacant lot, fenced in and full of rubble from the cooking oil factory that was demolished after the city acquired the land for the school. Since the demolition and soil testing in 1998 and 1999, no progress has been made.

Vallas, Daley and then-School Board President Gery Chico maintained that there was no money to build the school, even though city budgets for 1999 and 2000 showed a total of \$30 million for the construction. They also claimed that the community was divided about whether a high school or grammar

school should be built, and about where the school should be located. Community activists allege that the supposed division was a stalling tactic orchestrated by a city-aligned community organization called UNO; rallies at Camp Cesar Chavez attended by hundreds of local residents and various independent local elected officials demonstrated the widespread support for the 31<sup>st</sup> and Kostner site.

The hunger strikers say the money for the Little Village school was there but was used to build the magnet schools or elsewhere, continuing a pattern of discrimination against

low-income and immigrant students.

Vallas said that of the \$2.6 billion spent on new school construction in the last six years, Latino students have benefited proportionately more than any other group. Eighty-six percent of the students who benefited from this new construction are minorities, he said. The unspoken side to this fact is that the Chicago pub-

lic school system as a whole is predominantly made up of low-income students of color, since the schools are so bad that families who can afford to (and even many who can't) send their students to private schools.

On May 25, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund filed charges with the civil rights divisions of the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Attorney asking for an investigation into the funds.

"Paul Vallas only cares about the money, he doesn't care about our kids," said Teresa Yanec, 32, one of the strikers. "I think it's racism."

The hunger strikers note that they began the strike only after visiting the state capitol several times and writing numerous letters and making phone calls lobbying for funds for the school — with no results.

Militant activism was something new for the community of Little Village, residents say, since the mostly immigrant community of people who work long days and are often undocumented usually don't want to rock the boat. Their voices quickly became heard, however, as they disrupted several Board of Education meetings and even shut down a May 21 press conference about energy issues by visiting California Governor Gray Davis, who has a poor education record of his own. Television footage of a May 23 Board of Education meeting showed security guards shoving high school students and moth-





I peered outside to watch for my students (my students?), but didn't see them. I flushed myself cup after cup of water from the hi-tech water cooler. At close to three I looked outside again and saw Sheila running to the building, book bag held tightly above her as a shield against the rain. My pulse pounded harder, violently. And then she entered the room, the first kid to enter my classroom.

"Hey Sheila, how ya doin'?" I ask, the only phrase I seem to know how to say to them. "O.K.," she quietly responds. Working with the kids, I came to realize that they don't exactly enjoy protracted and in-depth discussions with old people, especially old people like me in positions of authority, and most especially old people like me in positions of authority over them, but neither did I at their age. And then it hit me cold and fast like a bullet between the eyes: I was the adult here. The old person. The authority. I may have been 24 years old, but that was about eight years their senior. That meant I was in grade school when they were born. I was in college when they were about to hit puberty (and they were still enduring its physiological wrath). The kids and I were not allies; I was their enemy. This was war.

I tried to shake these disturbing notions from my head, but they clung tight. I watched the clock - the minute hand fell from 3:00 to 3:15 to 3:30. No kids came. Would I be so lucky as to only have to face two or three kids today? As instantaneously as this thought brightened the prospects for the coming two hours, a handful of students dribbled into the room. Walter, Rashine, Tasha. Carlene always arrived at 4:00, so that would leave Thomas, Kevin and Sheena. I hoped with all my lucky stars that Thomas would not show. Nothing personal against him, but whenever he congregated with the other boys, all possibilities for control and order disintegrated. A natural reaction among the young male. But there it was again, that nagging notion of all that I despised creeping into my desires - control, order, authority. How could I, with my anarchist dispositions, possibly deal with the classroom situation?

At 4:00, Carlene wandered in, always dressed in a Catholic school uniform and a book bag strapped in front of her. Alright, I say to myself, this is it. Time to play teacher. 4:00 means start the class. But I couldn't do it. I felt paralyzed. And the kids were restless. Thomas arrived and as if on cue, the noise level in the room rose a few decibels.

Everyone joked and laughed and carried on loudly and obnoxiously. Louis, the maintenance man, poked his head in and said, "Uh, sorry to interrupt, but some people are complaining about the noise." "All right Louis, thanks. Sorry about that," I replied, trying to look and sound as confident and in control as I really am not. Now I was immersed in total fear. On the verge of wetting myself and making a break for it. What's the worst that could happen, I wondered, seriously contemplating just getting up and running the hell out of there. I made a cost-benefit analysis and deduced that it would be in my best interest to chance it on the youth.

It was time to rock. I planned out the itinerary for class, including an attention-grabbing introduction that would have scored me an "A" in my old public speaking class. I had to admit, it seemed a rather kick ass method to capture their interest and get things rolling on the right foot. My mom did suggest it but what better way to commence a discussion on job applications, resumés and life than by writing in bright red marker on the dry-erase board "I HATE SCHOOL"? It seemed perfect. I knew these kids held no love for institutionalized education. They didn't enjoy waking up at 6 a.m. for a long day of being patronized, condescended, stepped on, picked on, told what to do and how to do it. I was here to tell them that such a life certainly sucks but hey, it will only get better (of course I'd be lying). No doubt about it — my technique would fire them up and out of their boredom and apathy. I'd show my supervisor who the real teacher was around here. I would do the impossible and connect with them, engage them, encourage and inspire their quest for knowledge. I could be that teacher Edward James Olmos played, that teacher Robin Williams played and Chris Jensen all rolled into one Educator Powerhouse. After all, I read *No More Prisons* and *Bomb the Suburbs*. I listened to KRS-ONE and Dead Prez. That made me down, right? That made me bangin', right? Wrong.

After a few more agonizing minutes of a most horrible procrastination, I cautiously stood up. The kids talked, laughed and carried on as if I did not exist. I rose a nervous, shaky hand to the dry-erase board, red marker gripped tightly, as if it were the only thing preventing me from being eaten alive. I scribbled "I HATE SCHOOL" in jagged, barely legible handwriting. As I scrawled, I heard a voice reading along. Then

ers with babies, forcing them to leave the meeting.

The day after that Board meeting, President Chico resigned unexpectedly. Though he claimed he wanted to spend more time with his family and law practice, many hunger strikers think the publicity about the board's neglect of their community played a large role in his resignation. Just two weeks later, not long after the television news showed kids jumping on his coffin, Vallas also resigned.

On May 30, the state allocated \$148 million for new school construction in Chicago. Local alderman Ricardo Munoz and other officials noted that this was \$48 million more than expected, and attributed the extra money to the efforts of the hunger strikers. The hunger strike ended the next day, but the battle for the school continues. Despite ongoing pressure, neither Daley nor the newly named Board president has made any commitment to building the new school. The committee formed during the strike has continued to hold weekly meetings and rallies, including candlelight marches through the neighborhood and a youth summit featuring punk bands and hip hop artists.

"They're going to build this high school here whether they like it or not," said hunger striker Linda Sarate, whose birthday fell on the last day of the strike.

Many of the strikers also note that their activ-

ism will likely not stop at the school, but continue to grow and address the many other issues of economic and environmental injustice that affect their community.

"Our voice has been heard," said hunger

striker Patricia Buenrostro, reading a statement from the strike committee. "This has inspired the beginning of an unprecedented movement in Little Village." ★



opposite: mural at Camp Cesar Chavez; above: "school" constructed at proposed site.



I heard Tasha proclaim insouciantly, "You hate school? So do I." Their noise died down. "All right," I told myself, in need of a quick self-affirmation, "This will work. This *must* work." I turned around and faced the audience: six teenagers brimming with post-school energy. Only six kids, but it might as well have been 60. I was so drenched in fear. The girls read what I wrote, squinting to decipher it, and then looked at me like I was crazy. The boys returned to their roaring round of joking and busting on each other and their all-around madness, a madness known only to 14-year-olds. I barely ejaculated my carefully constructed and manicured introductory statement, butchering it crudely. "Um, O.K., we're gonna talk about resumes and job applications and stuff today, and I wanted to start by saying that school doesn't last forever," I shot at them rapid fire, my voice a nervous AK-47 spitting words as fast as bullets and not knowing if I hit my target given the empty look on their faces. "It may seem like it and you may not like it, but it'll seem so small and insignificant later on." The words came out about as smooth as sandpaper, as confident as a long tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

Realizing that no one took the bait, I asked: "So, someone tell me what they hate about school?" No response. Tough crowd. I suddenly thought, for some absurd reason, of Henry Rollins recounting his former band suffering at the hands of angry mobs of spitting, punching, shouting, bottle and feces-throwing punks in *Get in the Van*. I preferred that abuse to this. I decided to do the unthinkable, the most loathsome option imaginable, what I always hated in school. I called on a student.

"Tasha, what do you hate about school?" She looked straight into my brain, past my eyes, and said nothing. Ouch. I asked Walt - he looked down and sheepishly murmured "Nuthin'." I aimed and fired at Rashine. His response: "Nuthin'." Tasha saved me. She blurted: "I hate the people." Carlene agreed, and a muttering of yeahs and uh-huhs followed from the rest. Not exactly the response I anticipated. What about teachers, homework, gym or school itself? Tasha repeated her previous assertion: "I hate the people." Then she did precisely what I wished no one would do: she pointed to the males in the room and said slow, cool and with all the ferocity of an animal hunting its prey, "I hate the people, like those boys over there." This unleashed the dis/bust/ridicule wrath of the boys, sending the room over the edge into the rough seas of chaos. My tenuous grasp on control was instantaneously eviscerated. "You a lesbian! She's a lesbian!" Rashine shouted and chanted. My heart collapsed to my feet. Then it was squashed when Tasha pointed at Rashine and yelled, "Yo, I can have you shot any day of the week. You betta watch yo back." A look of horror draped across his face. Dread spilled through my guts. No one told me there'd be days like this.

"All right, all right, everybody calm down. Be quiet. Let's get on with this," I demanded in the calmest, most boss-like tone I could muster. My words flew into the air and drifted away. They are out of control, talking, yelling, laughing, obliterating my Master Plan, my dream of a perfect first teaching experience. Almost by instinct, I revert to an authoritarian stance. I wanted to avoid it, and felt incapable of it, and I prove myself quite unable to implement it. How do I discipline them, I wonder? My supervisor provided no instruction on how to handle unruly situations. I do not have any sort of background or experience with this. I am furious and petrified simultaneously and neither emotion helps me one bit in the midst of this storm.

I loudly pronounced: "If you don't be quiet then you won't get paid." This evoked the desired effect. For several seconds the eye of the storm passes over us. All was quiet. Then the kids raged as tempestuously as before. Never before had I faced a more frustrating, challenging, debilitating scenario. I felt torpid, foolish, petrified. And they kept on talking, yelling, carrying on loudly and proudly. Behaving like teenagers. I didn't know what to do anymore. Here I was, Mr. lefty anarchist-leaning social progressive, faced with real kids in a real life debacle, wondering how to handle a rowdy group but in a way that is in keeping with my beliefs. These kids bear the brunt of authoritarianism all day. Do they need to come here after school to have me yelling at them, barking orders like a drill sergeant? No. I witnessed my supervisor's failure to scare them into compliant students. And I lived through almost 20 years of trained and certified teachers and professors using anger and fear as a motivational tool for learning, seeing again and again how such tools rarely produced the optimum results.

I plowed ahead with my plan. I talked a bit about job applications and resumes. As I talked, the class settled down ... with an occasional outburst. Some kids replied to my questions. Others leaned back in their seats and gazed out the window. After an hour or so I gave up. We

took a break, and I decided to end all of our misery and let them out early at 5:20 PM.

"Fuck that, I'm never teaching again," I cursed to myself when everyone had gone. Defeat enveloped everything. I failed. I failed myself and worst of all I failed those six teenagers. The next day proved less traumatic. I again did the unfathomable and handed out worksheets. I assaulted

Here I was, Mr. lefty anarchist-leaning social progressive, faced with real kids in a real life debacle, wondering how to handle a rowdy group but in a way that is in keeping with my beliefs. These kids bear the brunt of authoritarianism all day. Do they need to come here after school to have me yelling at them, barking orders like a drill sergeant?

them with an hour's worth of dittos, and then led a somewhat fruitful discussion. Yet it all seemed pointless. This was not school. But even in school, what were they learning? Most of the teens could barely write a sentence (as evidenced on the worksheets some chose to hand in). One boy still sucked his thumb. Could I do anything to encourage them? Could I do anything to change them and make them want to learn? And through it all, I couldn't shake the memories of school and how I loathed it passionately.

I lasted another two months with those teenagers, sitting back and saying little as my supervisor played the part of the Teacher, the Disciplinarian, the Authoritarian. Not much seemed to change in their behavior or interest in that program. I gained a whole new respect for those brave few who muster the fortitude to embark on adventures in the classroom. Clearly, I was not ready to go on such a quest. But soon enough, this ex-student will once again stand before the kids at an elementary school as a teacher's assistant. At least second graders don't know what Korn looks like. ★





# Out of Angola

Robert King Wilkerson talks about resistance, the Black Panther Party, and life inside Louisiana's maximum security prison in Angola.

interview by  
Alec "Icky" Dunn  
and Brice White

Sometimes organizing around political prisoners feels like a necessary impossibility. The people in control have laws, police, and facilities to control those who disagree. We make fliers, call the media, and rally support, but ultimately it is a legal battle that frees incarcerated individuals. So, when we found out that Robert King Wilkerson had the chance to go free in the first months of this year, it was incredible news. It was the kind of news I didn't want to repeat or tell people until I was absolutely sure, until I saw him walk through that gate. On February 8, 2001, the state of Louisiana overturned King's murder conviction. A plea bargain to avoid a lengthy retrial allowed him to walk out of Louisiana's maximum-security men's prison later that afternoon.

The Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola is notorious for holding onto people; 85 percent of the inmates sent to Angola will die there. Just north of Baton Rouge, Angola is on an 18,000-acre former plantation, which from the end of Reconstruction to the turn of the century was run as an incredibly violent and inhumane convict-lease system. In 1901 the state of Louisiana bought it and turned it into a state-run sugar plantation. Angola's brutality and corruption was infamous, reaching a point of crisis and notoriety in the early '70s. According to the *Angolite*, "...violence was a brutal, daily reality. Double bladed hatchets, swords, long steel knives and Roman style shields were commonplace. Men slept with steel plates and JC Penney catalogues tied to their chests; even in maximum-security cellblocks, men slept with their doors tied and with blankets tied around their bunks as a means of protection and security." In 1975 a U.S. District court declared Angola "an extreme public emergency" and began 15 years of federal oversight by U.S. Magistrate Frank Polozola.

It's within the belly of this nightmare that Herman "Hooks" Wallace and Albert Woodfox formed the first official chapter of the Black Panther Party inside prison walls. In 1972 they were joined by King, who a year later was convicted of killing another inmate in a fight, the charge that landed him a life sentence. All three men know that they were targeted by the administration at Angola for organizing their fellow inmates, stopping rapes and sex slavery, doing legal work for themselves and others and for working across race lines and other divisions designed to keep 4,000 men under control.

Robert King Wilkerson served almost 29 years in Angola's solitary confinement cells, CCR, before finding some measure of justice. His co-defendant repeatedly claimed to be the only one responsible and the state's witnesses later recanted their testimony. In the Promethean world of prisoner appeals, these facts didn't make a difference until his federal hearing in June of 2000, where one judge berated the state prosecutor for al-



lowing this man to sit in jail for 28 years without a case against him. A year later he is a free man.

His two comrades, Albert Woodfox and Herman 'Hooks' Wallace, however, are still there serving time in CCR for the murder of an Angola guard, a murder they did not commit. King, Woodfox and Hooks have been the forces to buoy each other over these long years. They are each other's best friends, strongest support and most diehard warriors. With King on the outside, Herman and Albert have gained the most powerful force to win their own freedom. We interviewed King at the National Coalition to Free the Angola Three's office in New Orleans. King's story is the story of many young black men in New Orleans, with a police record and harassment that starts as a young man. It is also an incredible story of a man released after a staggering 28 years in solitary confinement, a story of freedom gained through determination and struggle, a story of hope.

*What year did you first go into prison?*

My first time in Angola was some time in September 1969.

*Angola was the first correctional facility you were in?*

First adult facility. I had went to LTI, what they call the Louisiana Training Institute. At the time, it was called the State Industrial School for Colored Youth located in Baton Rouge. I was there a year or so.

*When you were growing up, things were segregated at that point?*

Yes indeed, it was totally segregated, I remember times I used to get on the bus and there was a sign "for colored patrons only" and you would get on the bus and we would have to sit behind that sign. Lots of times we would take that sign and put it way up front. It used to amaze me even at that age; I was around eight or 10 years old, how segregation was brainwashing. It was psychological. I say this because when we would take the signs and put them up front, there was scores of empty seats beyond the sign and I noticed that whites would get on the bus and they would never allow themselves to go beyond that sign, even though there were lots of empty seats. I found it was ironic and a little foolish, and I learned to think of it later on as psychological, and that people were unable to rise above this perception. It was the status quo, Jim Crow, but they just couldn't rise above it.

*How about with the police? Were they something that was constant in your community?*

They were patrolling the black community sort of regular. At that time I had a fear of the police, like anyone else who came up in that day. They were seen as something akin to God or omnipotent or all powerful. As I grew into

adulthood, I remember coming into contact with the police. I would have a job, but there was a law on the books called the vagrancy law, if you couldn't show visible means of support. The police at that time used that law to harass, intimidate and arrest a lot of blacks in the community. I used to keep a job. I like to have things, so if I could find a job I always did work, even when I really young. I cut grass. I worked on vegetable trucks. I had no problem with work, but I did have a problem that when I did get a job when I got off into adulthood, sometime on a Friday or a Saturday, during the weekend, I remember being arrested many times on the weekend on a vagrancy law, showing no visible means of support. And I would have check stubs and envelopes where I would have my pay, and the police would come to a place where we might have congregated, it could be a bar room or some other facility. They would arrest you; they didn't like the way you looked, didn't like the way you talked and you'd be arrested. At that time it was a 72; they'd keep you in jail for investigation allegedly to see if you had a job, but by that time if you had a job that required your presence, well if they arrested you for 72 hours, like on a Saturday, you didn't get out until Monday evening; you go back to your job, it was gone. So, that was my early experience with the police. Back to your question whether or not it was segregated; it was the law, whites and blacks didn't congregate.

*What was it like when you first went to Angola in 1961?*

For some reason, I had a vague idea of how it would have been during chattel slavery. When I got to Angola, coming from New Orleans, an urban area, and going out there in this rural environment. It was almost like I had entered a different era, I mean the mannerism of the bosses who were at that time all white, the people in general, and the location, it was like I had entered the past. When they spoke to you they spoke to you like you lived in the past, like something you might read out of a novel. If you addressed a letter, if you put the term Mr. in front of your name on the return address, it would come back to you, no such thing as Mr. then. You had to address all the officers by their title, you had to address them 'boss' or 'mister' or something along those lines. Some guys wouldn't call them boss and they didn't want to say sir every time they said anything, or mister, so we invented a name which was 'chief' and for some reason it caught on, because they loved that name. I guess it denotes you the chief of-

ficer, you the top notch, big-time, so they accepted that. Guys sort of invented this new colloquialism, so to keep us from having to say boss or mister.

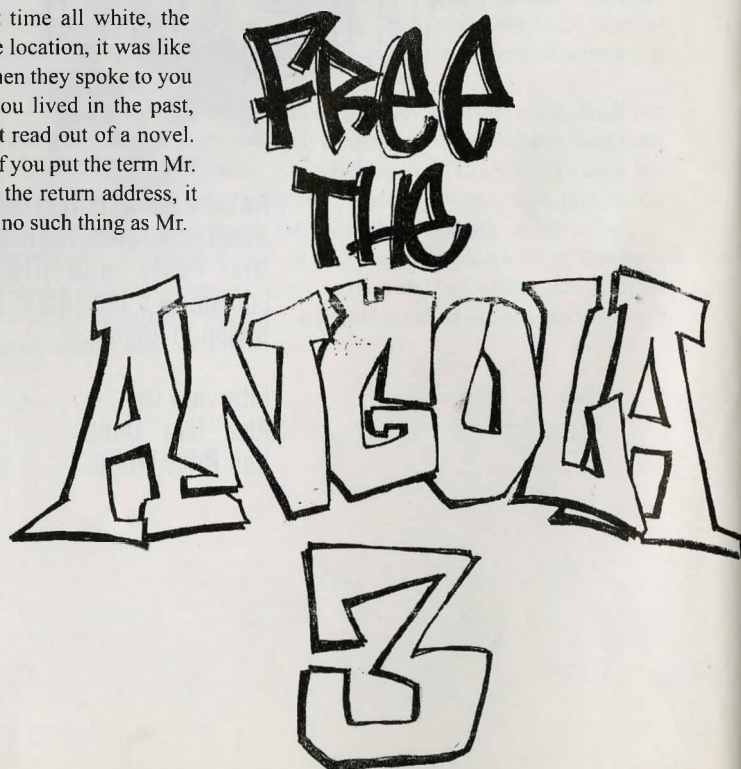
*But it was sarcastic?*

Well, yeah, but I don't think they perceived it as sarcastic. They saw it as you referring to them as chief, and I think they acted the part, they played the role. That was one way guys achieved not having to call them boss all the time.


Guys worked in the field under the gun. They had inmate guards too. The inmate guards had the guns and they were worse than the officers. They held the guns, they lived in different areas or locations of the prison. During that period of time, it was pretty rough. They had orders to shoot a prisoner if a prisoner accosted free personnel. I know one guy who got shot due to an altercation with an officer. But then I've known two guys were killed in one day in the field. You would walk in the field and if you deviate left or right they had the option to shoot and some of them would shoot you. One day, one guy was wounded and two guys were killed as a result of stepping out of the guard line; they made a mistake and stepped out of the guard line. Here was a line maybe five feet from the regular inmate working line and you could deviate, you could step to the left maybe a foot, a foot and a half, and you were nowhere near the guards. But they had the option and they had the orders, if they wanted they could shoot you.

*Was the inmate population segregated at Angola at the time?*

At that time yeah, there was a partition even in the kitchen. Actually before I was clerk I







# The inmate guards had the guns and they were worse than the officers ... I've known two guys were killed in one day in the field. You would walk in the field and if you deviate left or right they had the option to shoot and some of them *would* shoot you.

worked in the kitchen, I got on a cook shift. You had two shifts, a shift for whites and a shift for blacks. The dormitories that I lived in, I lived in Hickory at the time, Walnut and Hickory were supposed to be black. They was all black, colored inmates. Then there was Pine and Oak. Those were for the white inmates. I was on what they call the big yard in the main prison at the time.

*Was there different treatment for black and white inmates?*

Oh yeah! There wasn't any doubt. Even now, but it's a little more subtle, there's a difference now, but at that time, it was blatant. I used to watch both lines, work details out in the fields. You had only one white line, maybe two, but you had 10 to 12 black lines. I would see the truck drive up and take all the white lines out. Don't get me wrong, whites were in the field too. But there were many times I saw they would go to the posts, the officer would take them out to the field and they would have everything all set up, but they would set out there for maybe an hour or so and they'd say well your line is cancelled and they'd send them back to the dormitory.

*Did you feel like there was any inmates at the time who were attempting to organize?*

During that time, this was around '61, I remember on one occasion guys did come together. This was an incident where one of the white officers had beat up a black prisoner, kicked him around pretty good, then they put him in CCR. This guy was kind of well known, so what happened was the guys on the big yard got together and they initiated what they call a buck. This was a buck against food, which would mean to them not eating. I took part in the buck. They took us as a result after a couple of days, a day or two of not eating, they took us out of the dormitory, loaded us up on cattle trucks, and we had to go through a gambit of inmate guards and free people. And the guys who were real well known got roughed up pretty bad because they had picked them out as the ones who had started the buck. That was about the closest they would ever come to organizing, when something blatant would happen.

As far as anyone being politically conscious at the time or politically aware of what was really taking place, or define what was going on, there wasn't anything like that at all. Not until late '60s, '69 or '70, at the time when students, white and black, were taking part in protests out here on the street and of course during

the emergence of when the Black Panther Party came on the set. You had chapters around the country and you had some of those people, such as Woodfox and Herman, joining the party when they went to Angola. Ronald Ailsworth, he was another one who went to Angola. There was lots of others who were affiliated and guys who became politically aware of what was taking place who went to Angola. I think they put a political spin on what was taking place in larger society so they put a political spin on what was taking place in Angola, and they could see historical connection that Angola was just reflecting the larger society. This is when the political spin came on struggling and resistance. It was as a result of the Black Panther Party, Albert, Herman, and others, later on I joined them.

*What's your first contact with consciousness and black power?*

I knew about Malcolm, Martin Luther King, and even during the early '60s I had read a book called *Born a Slave, Died a King*. It was dealing with the Haitian revolution, Henry Christophe, Jean Jacques Dessaline, all of them. I was a rebel from way way back, even before I went to Angola, but I couldn't articulate the way I felt. It wasn't until about well '68 or '69 that I became aware, what was going on inside of society. You couldn't help but feel it because there was a level of consciousness taking place, especially among black people. It seemed as if blacks were trying to redefine themselves as opposed to having been defined by hundreds of years by the definition the system had accorded them. That was during the period when blacks started wearing what they considered was more rooted to their culture. People had stopped processing their hair, were wearing naturals and Afros, dashikis and what have you. Later on I learned it doesn't define you because for some people it was just a fad but for others who are sincere about their roots it wasn't a fad.

*Were you on the streets in '68 and '69?*

I was on the streets in '69 and I caught a little bit of what was taking place. I saw and felt the change in society. I was arrested in early '70 and that physical arrest arrested me psychologically too. I had the opportunity to look at what was going on. I was arrested and charged with another crime and being subsequently found guilty and sent to Angola. I felt at this time with the experience I had already had with the system, that the police knew that I shouldn't have been found guilty, because the persons who had robbed a supermarket uptown didn't remotely

resemble me at all. I was offered a cop-out, which means if I would have took 10 to 15 years without a trial and everything would have been all right. They were using me just to clean the books on a robbery that someone else had committed. So I refused and I went to trial and I was found guilty and I was given 35 years, and it was then that I took a good look at what was going on. I was like whoa man, this is wild. I think at that time the real me emerged because I rebelled and I escaped. I see myself as a slave and that's a right, one of the only rights a slave has, is to rebel and you take that right, they don't give it to you. So, I escaped. It was short lived.

*Where did you escape from?*

New Orleans Parish Prison. This took place in maybe May or June 1970. I was charged with aggravated escape and I was given eight years. We grabbed some of the guards, locked them up in the cell. Our objective was not to hurt anybody and nobody got hurt, except the inmates who they caught that night, but none of the guards got hurt. The idea was to escape and I achieved that, I was one of the few. Incidentally, one of the guys, six hours later that night, he was killed by a deputy sheriff. He was seen somewhere uptown on the street. They say he had a gun, and he pointed it at the deputy and he was killed, but they found out the gun didn't have a firing pin if in fact he had a gun. Anyway, I was arrested not long after that.

*How many escaped?*

26, yeah 26.

*You hit the streets and just scattered?*

Yeah, I went my way and that's the reason why a lot got rearrested soon after or moments after the escape, because it was really unorganized. At that time I wasn't trying to organize, I had one objective in mind, escape and I made sure I escaped. The rest of the guys, I think three of us got free that night, the rest were caught somewhere in the vicinity of the prison, but I made it. I was rearrested later.

I remember meeting some of the brothers who were busted in the shoot out, in the ninth ward, Black Panther Party. I met up with them and it was at this time that I really put everything in perspective, rather they put it in perspective for me. I was able to see that I was dealing with a monster, that I was dealing with a system that oppresses blacks and poor alike, whites and everybody else. If you didn't have the dollar, you were lost, you was out of here, it didn't make a difference. I still saw the discrepancy



and the double standard they showed towards blacks and whites. Usually any organization that comes on the set has a tendency towards nationalism, but sooner or later it becomes internationalism. The Party embraced all, some people think that they were a group of individuals as some call them lumpen proletariat, with a criminal mentality, but no, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, they weren't criminals, they were intellectuals. They created an ideology centered around analyzing the historical plight of blacks in this country and they used other incidents of people's revolutionary struggle to define what was taking place in America. The Black Panther Party had an international ideology and it engulfed all forms of revolutionary struggle. With blacks being most oppressed, it may seem as if it was confined to just cover blacks, but it covered poor and oppressed people. It was an ideology centered around eliminating the oppression of black people, but it tried to get blacks and poor whites and Mexicans and Native Americans and anybody else who had common interest. It was something that I could really relate to and I could embrace it. I never saw myself as being opposed to humans, I saw human beings as being equals and so I never had a problem living with whomever. Not that I didn't see color and even if I didn't want to see color, I was forced to see it.

*You met the New Orleans Black Panthers at Orleans Parish Prison?*

I think they were 12 of them, two females and 10 males. C1 at that time, that was the tier they eventually called the Panther tier, this is where most of them resided at. On C1 they steel-plated the windows and everything for the first period, but we were still able to communicate with them. Guys have ways to communicate; it wasn't no problem. Even the sisters who was being held in a different area of the prison, they were able to get letters over to their comrades who were in the Parish Prison. We communicated; it was no problem to communicate. I was on C3 at the time and they were on C1 which

only one tier separated us. That was until around maybe '71. There was another protest against conditions in the Parish Prison, and Ronald Ailsworth and Shelly Batiste they were Panthers, they were on the tier where I was. We used to hold political education classes and we initiated a food strike to try and affect some changes, because the food was bad and the tier was built to house no more than 48 prisoners, but they must have had 80 or 90 on the tier, maybe more. Guys were sleeping on the floor on filthy mattresses, roaches three inches long, biggest you ever saw a roach, rats. It was pretty weird, so we initiated a hunger strike. We sent out fliers, sent out letters, said what we were going to do. As a result of that, a few days later, they shipped what they called the ringleaders out. They came on the tier and got about five of us, off the tier and we went to what they call the Annex, which was located on Rampart Street, formerly the first precinct. They called it the Parish Prison Annex, but it was also a place where guys were being shipped out to the war in Vietnam, or they were being brought back to the Federal detention center for going AWOL. We met a lot of those guys who were shipping out and we tried to tell them not to go to war and the ones that went AWOL, we applauded them. I was over there about six months and they eventually sent me back to Parish Prison, but shortly thereafter they sent me to Angola. The National Guard was coming by in armored trucks and we were being loaded up on armed trucks and were being escorted by the National Guard to Angola.

*Because you were political?*

Because of that and because I think the guards were scared because that jail was full. Guys were being held in the prison on charges that they should have went to trial for and whatever they were going to do with them and shipped them out and even the ones who had been to trial and had time, they were being held in Parish Prison. So, I guess the guards felt it was time to ship them out. They were shipping out truckloads everyday. I had a battery charge,

aggravated battery against one of the deputies, so they shipped me to Angola in '71, by these armored trucks escorted by national guardsmen. But what they did, they sent me back a day or so later. I stayed in Parish up until April, from November '71 until the latter part of April 1972.

*You met Herman and Albert then in Orleans Parish Prison?*

I met Herman in 1966; I met Albert in '65.

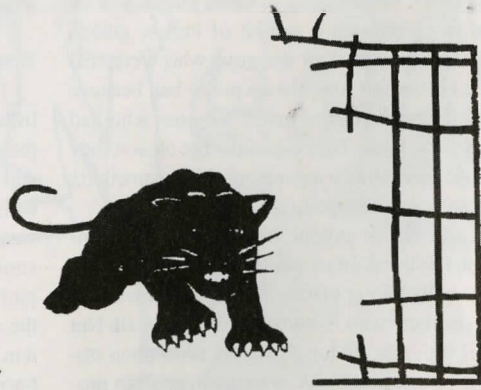
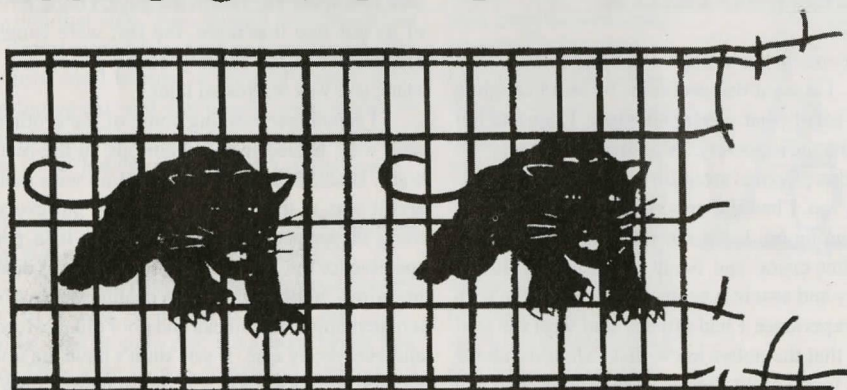
*How about Hooks, what was it like when you first met him?*

I was really impressed with meeting Hooks, because Hooks was arrested for robbing a bank. In 1966, even though it was being done, it was kind of unprecedented. I immediately liked him because he was a likeable guy.

*In 1971, were you three tight, like real tight?*

Oh yeah, we was tight tight, real tight, say because when I had got arrested and just before I escaped, Hooks was on the tier with me in C3. It so happened he had been coming backwards and forwards, filing post-conviction to get back, try and get that time back, and about two weeks before I escaped they had just sent him back to Angola. Boy was he mad. Said I waited until he left. He wanted to escape also. He subsequently escaped again and he was rearrested again. Albert, he escaped from Parish Prison in '69 after he was convicted for an armed robbery. I think he was given 50 years, and he left and he went to New York. In the Tombs, he joined the Black Panther Party. He gone and escaped and they rearrested him and he met those guys there. So we knew each other and we was real tight. And when we got back together again it was 1972, in CCR because at that time because when they sent me back in April '72, they were on B tier and I was on D tier. It wasn't until '73, well they split Albert and Hooks up, Albert and I ended up on the tier together, and we were next door to each other for years. We held political education classes, we taught guys how to read and write, if they didn't know how to read and write, and lot of other

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changes and other things that we engaged that we felt would kind of change our conditions. It was bad. They would feed you underneath the door, push food underneath the door. You would be handcuffed and shackled anywhere you go outside the cell. Prior to them putting them on they want to strip search you and go through an anal search and then when you come back, even if you didn't come in contact with nobody, they want you to go through the same thing. We had to kind of struggle against that. We got some changes done.

*Did you go immediately to CCR (Closed Cell Restricted-solitary confinement)?*

I went straight to CCR. Initially they told me I was playing lawyer for the inmates, that's why they put me in CCR, but then some years later I found out I was being investigated and didn't know what it was and still later found out they were investigating me for that Brent Miller killing.

I know it was because of my affiliation with the Black Panther Party, that I was placed in CCR.

*They wanted to keep you out of the general population for organizing?*

Yes.

*Was there any fear when George Jackson got killed and others were getting killed in prisons in other parts of the country; was there any fear that that would happen to you all?*

No, I was angry and it was a regrettable loss, I saw it as a loss, I was hoping he would've gotten out. I was just angry; it intensified what I already felt.

*Were there any guard threats on you all for being organizers? Especially after Brent Miller's death?*

There were lots of them, yes indeed they came to CCR many times. I don't know if this has been exposed yet, but they came one time on the tier. I think we was protesting something, they say it's in the record that they came on the tier with guns and they was discussing and debating who was going to kill Woodfox and who was going to kill Hooks, and this is on tape. They was debating who was going to kill who, and it just so happens the gun misfires though. I remember another time an inmate came on the tier with a pistol, telling Woodfox he wanted to escape. He had the gun on him, showed him the gun, the gun was checked out and it didn't have no firing pin.

*So, it was a set-up?*

Obviously. Those are just some. There have been cases where we had been gassed, beaten and you know we fought back. You can fight back for so long. You make your little showing, let them know you not totally intimidated. After that you know, things improved. They might not like

you, but they learn to respect you a little, I think that's what we achieved.

*There was a time when you all seemed lost, we had never heard of the Angola two, three, even in New Orleans, but around critical resistance in 1998 is when people rediscovered your situation. What happened in that interim?*

We communicated mostly with our relatives. We kept up with current events that were taking place. We were familiar with activists doing things, but we weren't in contact with any organization or no person. It wasn't until, like you said, 1998, when Albert got ready to go to trial. I think they put it on the Internet, 'Black Panther being retried for crime that took place whenever...' and so forth. And I think it was then that people really got some interest in the case. But prior to that time, no, it was sort of like we were in exile.

*Did you all talk about the lack of support outside that nobody knew, or did you not even consider that there should be?*

Well, we may have thought over the years that we should have, but we never griped over that. We felt like we had a stick to carry and this was our own stick. We didn't have any lawyers working on our cases; this is why we filed our own stuff. We filed our own post-convictions; we initiated that ourselves. We weren't looking for someone else to do something for us. If we were, we wouldn't be as far as we are now. Then you know the court was taking a different approach to dealing with post-convictions and so forth. At one time, you could wait any length of time to file a post-conviction and you weren't barred from the court, but things don't stand still. They don't wait on you. Some dudes are stuck out now, some guys are real stuck out in jail, they're legally dead, they're legally barred from the court. Like I said, at one time you could always go back in court, but now there are laws that have been erected both on a state and on the federal level that prevents you from going to court, to get you back in court after a certain period of time. In other words, you become procedurally barred if you don't initiate post-conviction proceedings after a certain period of time. It doesn't matter whether you are innocent or whether you are guilty, whether you are factually innocent or whether you are actually innocent. If you wait a certain period of time, and unless new evidence surfaces that allows you to get back in court, you are legally dead, you can't get back in court and at one time it wasn't like this. So good thing we had initiated our own post-conviction because we would have been legally barred with the laws that subsequently came up that have prevented people from getting back in court. As a result, Hooks is still legally alive, and Albert is still legally alive, and I was up until the time I was released.

*I am going to rewind a little. Could you talk a*

*bit about some of the things you guys organized around in Angola? I know that Albert talked a lot about early on trying to organize against sex slavery, but other things as well...*

That was part of prison culture, sexual slavery. I guess almost in any prison, you got weaker and you got stronger guys, or what they may consider weaker or stronger guys. What I saw, what Albert saw, and what Hooks saw, the only way that you can really prepare a person's thinking or thought process for change is the person himself has to change. Even though sexual slavery at the time was a big part of the prison culture, and it was something that the stronger prisoners took for granted to prey on the weaker prisoners, they had to be convinced that what they were doing was wrong. And it was equal to what was being done to the overall prison population. The only way that this could be done was to educate them politically. It stands to reason that the only way a person can really change society is to change himself or herself. So, if you are trying to change society, but you have a mentality or practice that is inconsistent with the ideology that you were trying to portray, it doesn't make sense. And not that Albert or I or anyone else was against homosexuality, because we know that that is part of the larger society, but it was just forced homosexuality. Guys didn't want to participate and they were being forced to participate and this is the thing that Albert and Herman and I spoke against. If this is what they wanted, it was cool, but being forced off in to it was a thing that the Black Panther Party and progressive people took issues with. Many of them said "Yeah bro, I can see where you're coming from." I think dialogue was a good weapon that the Black Panther Party used, basically and mostly it was dialoging with guys, but sometimes if it was a forced rape, if you needed to show equal strength to prevent it, at times we were willing to do that.

*I was thinking that it was a time of reform and that some gains had been made, but recently a lot of that has been rolling back.*

When federal mediators got off into the prison, there were some changes in procedure in how the prison operated. What they did though, these changes weren't designed to protect the rights of the inmates, but it was done mostly to protect the rights of the prison. There was a growing trend in the courts and laws that were being erected which were centered around prisoner rights. If the state violated these rights they was subjected to having to compensate the prisoner for violating his rights. So the Federal mediator and federal laws were affected mostly to protect the laws of the state of having to issue out any money for guys having their rights violated. Angola was living in the 16th century. They wasn't aware, some of the lawyers, some of the judges out there in St. Francisville who oversee Angola. They weren't aware of certain laws based on prisoners' rights. Where if pris-

PEOPLE



oners' rights were violated that they could seek redress in the court and the state would have to pay. So, these laws they really only brought Angola up to par with what was taking place across the country. In actuality, it was to protect the officials from being sued. A person can look at it like prisoners have more rights today than they had, but those are rights that you should have had a long time ago that was on the books but Angola wasn't practicing. Are we slipping back? I was and Hooks and Albert were still in solitary confinement, going on 29 years now. They might try to beautify or give you certain things that other prisoners in a men's prison might have. The thing is they can't really beautify, they can't justify, keeping a person in a cell for that long. I don't think they can.

*Because your rights are still grossly violated.*

Right. So even though Angola was brought up into what you might call the 21st century, they still apply to a certain degree, some of the age-old archaic laws that they were doing back in the '60s and '70s. So is there any change? Some people might say there was a change. But to me they could have given me a computer, they could have given me a car, they could have given me a woman 24 hours a day. They could have given me everything I wanted in that cell. As long as they kept me in that cell 23 hours a day for 28 years, nearly 29 years, they wouldn't have done anything except continue to violate my human rights. When they got guys to frame me up, to include me into an event that took another inmate's life, and later on these guys recanted saying that they were put up to do this by the prison officials, anytime they could do this and get away with it, that's not much change. Anytime they could do this with Albert and Herman, get guys to lie, pay guys off to say they participated in the murder of a guard. Anytime they can send guys to Angola who are actually innocent of crimes because they want to clean the books and can keep them there and violate their human rights for the rest of their lives, I can't see where there's much change. Like I say, some people are satisfied with seeing much of nothing. They strive for mediocrity. I don't see any change, I think it's human rights violation to the utmost.

*I wanted to get your perspective on how things have changed coming back to New Orleans. I think people our age want to know whether you see a change in say race relations or class war. You are in a unique position, having a time lapse to life on the street.*

The class war between the rich and the poor hasn't changed, I don't think. What I have seen is change in perception and mentality. I've seen with younger whites and younger blacks, I think there is a more ongoing dialogue, and working relationship than existed when I was out here 30 some years ago. Recently at Critical Resistance at Columbia University, I saw a lot of young students who were real interested in the state of affairs of America. It reminded me of 1968 when the students became involved in trying to prevent America from continuing the Vietnam War. I've been inspired by what I've seen so I imagine you can call this change. For awhile there seemed to be a period where change had stopped, there seemed to be a rest period. I think there is a renewed focus and a wave of momentum, a momentum that is taking things in this country that probably can affect that gulf that exists between the rich and the poor. So in that sense there I guess there is hope, there is the possibility that there could be some change. I tell you what; the foundation for change is being laid, so for that I am encouraged. I'm very encouraged about that. What's taking place now, we have to be consistent. Like someone told me not long ago, there has to be some continuity in what we're doing. As long as we keep doing what we're doing, as long as we keep growing, as long as we stay focused.

*We should wrap this up. But the last thing, where do we go from here?*

My commission is what it was while I was in Angola, to affect change. My commission whatever time I have left on this planet is the work, keep focus on the Angola Three and other groups, to work for prison reform and to continue on doing whatever is necessary to bring about these changes. Hopefully some changes will come about. In any event, I'll continue to hope for the change and to work for the change and do whatever I can, to try to affect these changes work with whomever I can. I will work

with whomever will work with me to bring about these changes. I'll continue, If I've got to speak at this place or that place, if I've got to travel here or there, hey, so be it, bring it on, I'm ready to go. I've been resting 31 years and I'm not tired.

*Albert Woodfox achieved the retrial that broke the A3 story to the world. Filing all his own legal work, Albert's conviction was overturned and in December 1998, he was retried. With supporters organizing only several weeks before the trial and with painfully inadequate court appointed attorneys actually doing the courtroom work, Albert was reconvicted and sent right back to CCR at Angola. From there, he resumed his efforts of legal work on his and others' cases. Originally from the Tremé neighborhood, a self-described 'knucklehead' and petty-criminal, he was in and out of penal institutions as a youth, he escaped from a New Orleans courthouse in 1969 and went to New York City, where he hooked up with Black Panther Party there in the NYC Jails. He was extradited back to Angola shortly after, but his focus had permanently shifted to liberation struggles, both for himself and others.*

*Herman 'Hooks' Wallace has his first shot at freedom in a long time. On June 28, as this article goes to print, Herman will have a hearing in Louisiana's 19th Judicial District Court. The state will argue that Herman's time limit for a new trial has expired. From a legal standpoint, this is clearly not the case. There is no evidence to tie Hooks or Albert to the Miller murder, except testimony of other inmates long since dead and who received early release based and thanks from the warden after this case closed. Local supporters are turning out to show that Herman has a community that cares and is watching what happens, that we cannot let the state railroad this case any longer.*

*For the complete story of these three men and their situation, plus updates on what you can do to get involved, go to <http://www.prisonactivist.org/angola> or [www.prisonactivist.org/angola](http://www.prisonactivist.org/angola). To find out how to start a chapter of the National Coalition to Free the Angola Three, call 504.940.6756. The fight is not limited to them. There are political prisoners throughout this nation, many still serving time as a result of vicious COINTELPRO activities in the '60s and '70s. With the heightened surveillance and intimidation of today's activist community, we must learn from the past and never forget. In 30 years, it may be some of our comrades that we fight for. ★*

**Anytime they can send guys to Angola who are actually innocent of crimes because they want to clean the books and can keep them there and violate their human rights for the rest of their lives, I can't see where there's much change.**



# the Memorization of Clarity

a fictitious log of events by James Marks

Thin rays of sunlight are coming through the closed blinds of the waiting room/employee lounge I've been sitting in for the last 20 minutes. I can see dust particles crowding the air over the thin, gray, gum-spotted budget carpeting. Dark brown paneling on the walls matches the fake wood front of the empty water cooler, on top of which are a crowded collection of office mugs: "40 isn't old if you're a tree," the Farside "bummer of a birthmark" cup, and my favorite, "Nobody's perfect — except my Dad" cup, which is leaning to the side on a 15-degree angle. All the fantastic slogans of the last few decades. The type of thing that nowadays gets sold in the island stores at the mall — the little carts in the middle of the hallway that specialize in crap that you would never, ever buy for yourself but figure someone else would just love.

I heard about a study someone did where they asked students at the University of Michigan what they thought of the rest of the student body and basically everyone said the same thing. "I'm pretty smart and know what's going on, but everyone else doesn't really get it." It would be cool if you could blame it on the fact that they only asked kids at U of M who are probably prone to the ego and elitism that go along with people who can afford to send their kids to a top ten school, but that seems a little too easy to dismiss.

You watch TV and there are advertisements for cars and the spokesperson is a middle-aged guy wearing a cape. Or that show *Alf*. A really bad costume depicting a furry guy from outer space with a big nose and a hankering for the nice white family's cat. On the other hand, that show was actually pretty popular. Maybe I'm giving the masses too much credit.

Maybe as individuals we are pretty bright, but viewed as a group... it's an intellectual slaughter. It's like if we think we're being watched, we'll behave ourselves, but if you're alone, or invisible in a throng of people, you give in to the things that are against your better judgement. Like buying a car from a guy in a cape. Or laughing when *Alf* goes after the cat for the millionth time.

I'm sitting in the leftmost of three chairs lined up against the wall, the furthest from the water cooler and the door leading inside. The chairs are the really hard ones with itchy brown fabric on the butt and the back, and the frame made out of shiny metal. In front of the chairs on a low table are a few packets of fast food sugar and coffee stirrers, parts of an outdated newspaper, and a few magazines.

I pick up the top magazine on the stack to distract myself from the feeling that I'm sitting in the living room of someone I don't know nearly well enough to be sitting in their living room. There are envi-

ronments that are new to you but that you can relate to, and there are those that are foreign the moment you see them and never really get much more intimate.

The magazine is called *Hayes* and grinning on the cover they've got a 70 year old guy in a real bowtie holding a pinwheel like he's the happiest guy in the world. I glance through it and catch a handful of ads for copy machines and health insurance, computer backup software and trucks that will make you feel tough and successful. Their style is perfectly respectable and upper-crust, and with that unique ability to discuss and defend crazy, fucked up things with a flat, impartial, businesslike tone.





I realize this as I skim an article on "keeping your business fit" that's about demoralizing your employees so they feel like you're doing them a favor just by giving them a job. Another article appears to be the business-world equivalent of a Seventeen questionnaire; only instead of judging if the boy you're dating is a good kisser (because we all know that's something you need to be told, that no one could possibly decide that for themselves), they're going to determine if outsourcing your factory work to sweatshops in places like Honduras and Nicaragua is right for you. On one hand, you've got a dirt-cheap work force with no alternative but to work for what you pay them. On the other hand, it could be a PR nuisance if word gets out in the extremist circles. Nowhere in the article is it mentioned that real people's lives are at stake and that sweatshops are one of today's leading crimes against humanity.

I hope that *Hayes* is done entirely by some rich asshole with no conscience, and that no one really takes him seriously. But judging by the looks and the amount of advertiser support, that could be a bit of a long shot.

It's a slow dawning of realization that they're seriously discussing the pros and cons of sweatshops — like in "The Lost Boys" where they say, "hey, have some rice" and he starts eating it, and then they're like, "how are those maggots?" and he looks down and it's a carryout dish of maggots. It takes a second for you to really understand that a scenario that shitty could actually exist and that hey, you're the main character and it's happening at this very moment.

A similar thing happened a few weeks ago when I got the idea that I was getting really good at skateboarding and I was going to do some downhill. It all came about when I was just cruising along and then there was a cool hill I happened to be at the top of. In my mind I played the scene from the best '80s skate video of my childhood with Tommy Guerrero doing some downhill stuff that was pretty boring to watch, but you could still tell it was a lot of fun to do.

It never even occurred to me to be scared. Didn't even cross my mind. I turned down the street and I'm just messing around, doing big carves and stuff just like he did. And it was fine at first, until about 20 seconds into it when I started building a little more momentum. I looked up to see where the hill ended, something that hadn't seemed important prior to that, and it happened to be a street full of traffic. So I'm thinking, that's cool, don't panic, I'll slow down just like Tommy — power slides. For those of you who didn't grow up a consumer of skateboard culture like myself, a power slide is when you turn the board sideways while you're going really fast to get rid of some of your speed, and then really quickly turn back to rolling forward again. Maybe you can guess what happened when I suddenly turned my wheels at a 90 degree angle from the direction of inertia. As I was flying through the air and subsequently skidding to a stop on alternately my left knee, hip, wrist and elbow, and then chasing after my board at a full run to keep it out from under some speeding car, and then stumbling to a park bench, there was that same stupor. I remember very vividly thinking during the airborne part of the climactic action scene, "What? Wait a minute, something is wrong here..."

I toss the magazine back onto the table. Christ. What's taking this guy so long? You'd think I was doing him a favor here, when so far as I last checked, he was the one getting paid for this. I rummage through

my bag to keep entertained, hoping I haven't cleaned it in so long or looked through it thoroughly that there might be something of interest I've forgotten about.

Mostly the same crap I have a knack for collecting — bus schedules, pamphlets for tourist traps that seemed cool for some infinitely brief moment of time, computer print outs of web pages that describe some process or product that I was interested in for about as long as I was the tourist traps. Full-spectrum fluorescent lights, skateboard ramp plans, secret codes for skateboard video games, a catalog for a place that sells you the parts to rebuild a 2-seater sports car that went out of production 20 year ago.

It's belittling, the crap I carry around with me. I tend to think of myself as somewhat of an intellectual, above the petty whims of this materialist culture of ours, but you certainly wouldn't get that impression from going through my things, and doesn't that seem like a pretty good way to get right to the core of a person? True, I've got some slightly cooler stuff in there... a bike lock that I actually use regularly, a book by Gordon Parks, and a pack of Juicy Fruit chewing gum, which, according to the commercials on TV, makes me a pretty cool guy. I can feel a cavity coming in all the way in the back on the bottom left side of my mouth though, and it hurts when I chew the gum... does that make me less cool again, or cooler yet because I've got battle scars from it?

I turn to the room again for even if it gets me down, at least it's not my own habits illustrating major inconsistencies between the way I perceive myself and the way others perceive me.

My girlfriend used to be a projectionist at U of M and she'd sit in on all these high-end classes so when the professor said, "slide, please" it would magically pop up on the screen. Kelly was the one who sat in the back of the room with the remote control. (There's actually a lot more to it than that, that's just the glorious facade the public gets to see. She learned all sorts of stuff about wireless mics and how many hours a battery would last in various remote controls, how many hours a light bulb lasts in a projector, and the words to all the songs in Elvis's movie "Viva Las Vegas." It was their test movie to make sure every-

thing was working, but she had her own little monitor in the back where she'd watch it during class. She got so attached to it that she brought it home one night to prove it's excellence). It was in one of the classes where she wasn't watching Elvis that she learned the word that describes how closely your perception of yourself coincides with others' perception of you. Trouble is she couldn't remember what it was so we still don't know it. It's still exciting just to know that it exists though.

I'm drawn to a unicorn sculpture mounted on the wall — it's a unicorn mugshot, really, dipped in fake gold and framed (in fake gold) on a black velvet background. It's hard for me to describe; it stands in my mind only with other things just like it, all of them equally bizarre and incomparable to something more universal. It reminds me of my Dad's house growing up, in fact this may well have been in his house at one point. One day he went to the Dixieland Fleamarket and came back with a little unicorn sculpture, and then went back every weekend after that and did the same thing. They weren't all sculptures of course, there were paintings, t-shirts, embroideries and pretty much anything else that bore a unicorn resemblance. I don't really know what his motivation was, I guess he just thought they were classy. He's always had a little trouble executing class and cool.

He used to tell me how the best thing you could do to look cool was to lean against a wall drinking a Coke and smoking a cigarette. I never thought to ask the nurses when they were trying to understand

For those of you who didn't grow up a consumer of skateboard culture like myself, a power slide is when you turn the board sideways while you're going really fast to get rid of some of your speed, and then really quickly turn back to rolling forward again. Maybe you can guess what happened when I suddenly turned my wheels at a 90 degree angle from the direction of inertia.



what he needed as he lay immobilized in bed, mouth and nose filled with every imaginable tube, yellow greasy eyes rolled half way back into his head, dragging his hand across a copy of the alphabet, stopping at the important letters, is that cool?

Do you think the neighbors were impressed by your image when two months later you were able to make a half hour, labor intense stroll 20 feet down to the end of the driveway to check the mail?

Or what about the ticket checkers at Cedar Point the summer after that — do you think they were into the tight black sock that went all the way up your thigh you had to wear because the doctors had to cut the artery out of your left leg from you ankle to your groin, cut it into 3 pieces, break your ribs and tear open your chest cavity so they could replace the tar encrusted and defunct ones already there?

You definitely helped define my image of cool, Dad. When I was standing next to your hospital bed while you lay there bloated and unconscious, I accidentally kicked something under the bed. I leaned to check what it was and came face to face with about 5 quarts of your blood, somehow being siphoned from tubes coming straight out of your chest. I knew right then and there, as I stumbled out of the room so as not to puke on your equipment, what it took to be cool and how much of that I wanted.

Probably he looks back at his unicorn collection with great pride, thinking that as far as style went, his pad was maxed out back in those days. Although my perception is filtered through the dim memory of my 8-year-old eyes, something tells me it wasn't really the pinnacle of avant-garde interior decorating he was shooting for. I could ask him about it, but that'd be taking the risk that he wouldn't have a clue what I was talking about, denying any unicorn fetish and detaching a currently solid (if not a little bizarre) memory from any sense of reality. From precisely that same phenomenon I have a vision of Bozo the Clown attending my 4th birthday party that, because I chose to talk about it with my family, wanders back and forth in my head between absolute truth and total fabrication.

At 7:30 I finally hear shuffling footsteps and the cheap hollow door squeaks in it's frame as it pushes open and Roger comes waddling into the room. He's wearing a wrinkled blue pinstripe suit that looks like it hasn't left his body in weeks, and his face is greasy from either cologne or sweat. I wish I could say that I didn't find out in a minute that it was probably both, but the smell was overpowering. Cheap, astringent cologne struggling in a vain attempt to cover the man's serious body odor. Not like armpits or regular body odor, but I could smell every ounce of his human self.

It reminds me of animals in the wild giving off a scent to attract the opposite sex. Maybe there's some women out there who would get one whiff of this guy and go absolutely nuts, but I think most folks would take offense at the sheer ludity (and volume) of it. Someone who was really sexy could pull it off maybe, but Roger isn't the guy you want to ever, ever picture naked or having sex. Fat rolls and body hair so thick and crusty it mattes to his skin, his whole body glossy with grease, and without a barrier of cloth, the fumes must really be raging. And who would he be having sex with? Christ. I pictured it. See, this is exactly the road I didn't want to go down on. Uhg, christ, I didn't just say that. I'm going to be sick. What have I done to bring this depiction upon myself? Maybe it's like a natural selection thing, his

subconscious effort to make sure people who aren't his type keep their distance. Or, maybe he just isn't into personal hygiene.

He walks straight across the room to me and extends his hand in a cheery way, saying how it's great to see me and would I like a cup of coffee, because he sure needs one. He takes a packet of instant coffee and pours it into his cup, fills it with water from the cooler, opens two packets of sugar and pours them in, and then mixes it all up with a plastic coffee stirrer. "Are you ready?"

I respond that I am.

"Well, let's get going then" in that same purposeful tone. He heads

out the door, the plastic blinds swinging out and clanging as we step through it.

Back out in the gravel parking lot after what seems like eons and the heat of the day is picking up speed. Even though it's early the air is already heavy and thick with dust. I follow him towards an old blue Cadillac that's speckled with dings and sunspots. He gets in and reaches over to

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unlock my door and clear the seat of debris; it's quite a stretch for him and not too pleasant to watch; it brings more flashes of him in bed and I force back the reflex to gag.

It seems like most of the time in my life, I'm holding on very tightly to a sense of who I'm trying to be. I judge my decisions very carefully to see if they're in line with a predetermined plan. Sometimes though, like right now, I let go a little bit and just float along letting things happen to me, but I'm not really sure which is better. Is it bad watching this total stranger pour sugar into cold, lumpy coffee? There are people who would say being open enough to picture him in bed and have a gag reflex is good because you're out in the world letting things affect you, really feeling them.

It's different from something I would have done intentionally, that's for sure, but I'm not sure if it's inherently bad. My better sense tells me that, yes, it is inherently bad and I should get the fuck out of here ASAP. And I do get out of that parking lot, but it happens to be in the passenger seat of Rog's car, which isn't what my better sense had in mind.

He insists that I call him Rog, and who am I to make things difficult? I'm trying to take this all in stride, be cool and natural and just go with the flow, I've got nowhere to be. So Rog and I are chilling at the gas station a minute while he uses the restroom. Cool. It's totally cool.

Turns out Rog is quite the talker; at first I tried to keep up with him and act interested as he rambled on about the real estate market on the east coast and oil drilling in the Great Lakes. A lot of, "oh, yeah?"s and "right, right"s and my personal favorite, "really? I had no idea." He lost me somewhere in the high-profile battle between closed-caption TV technologies and I guess I fell asleep because when I came to, we were on an exit ramp getting off the highway and he had settled into singing along with an old blues guy on the radio. It hurt to watch him miss the beat and mumble through the parts he didn't know.

Off the highway I stare out the window at the empty countryside, trying to milk the attention I wasn't getting when I was asleep by faking to be asleep. After what seems like another year of struggling to block Rog trying to sing low like the radio guys, he pulls off the road and up to an old red barn. The sun is high overhead now, and I'm trying to guess how long we were in the car, only so I can gauge my level of



dread for the ride back. Three, maybe four hours? These are the things that happen when you don't assert yourself. Mental note: don't float around letting things happen to you.

"This is it, huh?" I say, trying not to sound disappointed.

"Yup, this was Marge's pride and joy, alright. She loved every inch of it I'd fair say. Last few years she used to set up her easel in all different areas around here and just paint what she saw. That barn is near full of her paintings. Come on up and we'll take a look."

I'm thinking to myself, this is it? I sat in this fat fuck's office for an hour reading his shitty magazines and listened to his socially-retarded off-key singing all the way up here for this lame barn? Great. Fan-fucking-tastic. The heat and company are certainly helping me into a really great mood.

My feet are heavy and I have to drag myself up the tiny incline towards the barn like a little kid in a department store with his mom, different only in that Rog and I certainly aren't holding hands. He pulls a small set of keys from the breast pocket of his suit jacket and unlatches a padlock that holds the monstrous double doors. Inside it's very much like any barn; dark and a little damp, hay strewn around the hard packed dirt floor, light pouring in beams through the cracks in the roof. A few birds are flitting about in the rafters. As we walk in there's a pile of painting things — the easel I'd already heard about, hundreds of crumpled tubes of oil paint, jars half full with liquid and brushes. Bits of wood frame and rolls of canvas. It's the disorganized, unloved pile of related objects, things to be dealt with all at once and later, made by someone cleaning up and trying to organize something they don't understand or know about.

I can imagine it was Roger himself going through Marge's house, being both her friend and legal advisor, but obviously not a painter.

It's crazy to have to be the one going through the personal things of someone you love. It has to be done, and a stranger would be so callous and uninformed it would be a tragedy.

But just as much is the tragedy of having secrets uncovered that were meant to stay hidden. Notebooks opened and read for the first time by anyone but the owner, things written for documentation and self-evaluation only; not for public viewing. Is it right to respect that privacy, and send these items to the grave, secrets forever undisclosed? The intense stabbing of the hollow loneliness of loss goes beyond moral objections; you're holding a book in your hands that contains the last contact of any kind you will ever have from your sister, your brother, spouse or friend. New words that have never been spoken, your last conversation for eternity. It may be right to let it go because in love and respect for this person so recently passed, you owe it to them to be good to their memory- to the idea of their existence.

But I don't know anyone who could not gently pry open the covers and gaze upon the magic of newfound knowledge, the last drink from your favorite spring.

At what point does something become so personal that to describe it in general terms is to betray your subject? When is it appropriate to discuss the things I've witnessed in my life as small truths and bits of perspective, and when is it necessary to put down the mask and stop pretending it's not me whose conversation has been cut short? This is that point. Here. Now.

I will be the first to condemn those who were there, reading Julie's private journals the very day following her death. I'm furious that they could not respect something that emanated from her body every moment she was alive — a simple request for privacy

and a controlled environment.

But I wasn't there, holding the books she had stitched together by hand and filled with 4 point type describing every whim and irrational thought, every rationale and path not taken. In a way I'm jealous and hurt; pushed to the side by a family who had grown so far detached they only knew her as a little girl and didn't understand the person she had become, or even realize she'd grown up.

In exchange for that though, I have honored what I know her wishes would have been and I've never read the journals, haven't even laid eyes on them starting 6 months before the accident, something I don't know if I could have done, presented with the opportunity to get a glimpse at what we might have talked about.

And then I see the tarp covering what I can assume to be my aunt's extensive collection of portraits of her land. I lift back the cover a little bit to find a painting of the exact room I'm standing in. The tarp is even shown in the portrait, only it seems to be covering a much smaller area, and there's a horse bridle hanging on the wall that doesn't seem to be here anymore.

It's funny I never notice how distracted I am until I stumble on some new little piece of information that makes me realize how inaccurate my entire perspective is. Then I replay my past week or month, and all of the opportunities I had to realize what was going on are so obvious. All the times people told me something and I listened, but didn't hear them because I thought I knew what they were trying to say.

I had only been seeing all the material aspects of my aunt's death.

Suddenly I have wealth and property from someone I didn't even know- it was like winning the lottery without even buying a ticket. I was happy and excited, never questioning why it was happening to me, shrugging it off as a crazy old lady who didn't have any friends and remembered me as a baby.

My brother had tried to convince me that I

knew who Aunt Marge was; the sun nut, electric car dork, the crazy painter who moved way out into the country into an abandoned farmhouse. I didn't have a clue what he was talking about; it was as if I was trying to reminisce with him about the time Bozo came to my birthday party.

But then looking at her painting of the barn, warm and gingerly and welcoming, something clicked and it all came back to me.

She was my cool aunt.

The one who was into solar energy and organized an electric car race when she was 60 because she thought car fumes were sketchy. The eccentric painter who rebuilt an old farmhouse by herself.

The black sheep, just like me.

Like the lead blanket at the dentist that pins you in the chair as a kid, preceding only briefly the sharp jab of whatever those metal pieces of cardboard are that they make you bite on before they take your x-ray, signifying the eminent arrival of the styrofoam pieces they'll fill with the worst bubble gum flavor ever and leave crammed in your mouth for 20 minutes to watch you suffer in your own drool, followed by an afternoon of fluoride-induced nausea, I'm the clueless and hopelessly uninformed.

I pull the tarp back over the huge pile of paintings and bask in the heat of the sun pouring through the roof in strips; trying to absorb my environment and memorize what clarity feels like. ★

It's funny I never notice how distracted I am until I stumble on some new little piece of information that makes me realize how inaccurate my entire perspective is. Then I replay my past week or month, and all of the opportunities I had to realize what was going on are so obvious.



# EVASION

... then life began,  
and since then we  
remember each  
dumpster, abandoned  
house, and foot-chase  
by retail security. At  
night, after running  
around, plotting and  
scheming, our checklist  
items all crossed out,  
we paused to think—  
"What to do tomorrow?"  
and the answer  
was always,  
"As we please ..."

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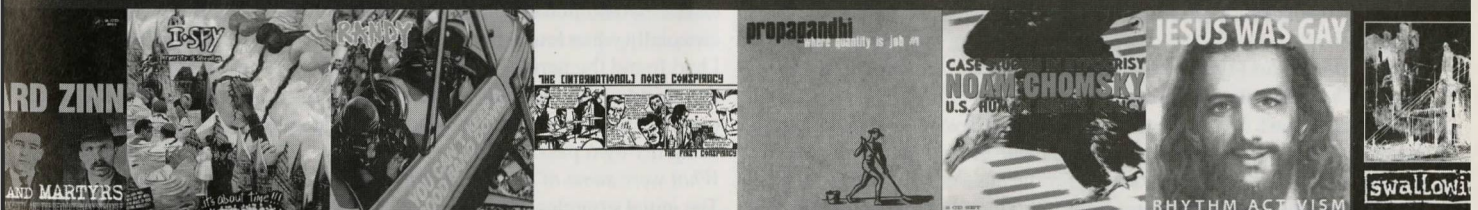
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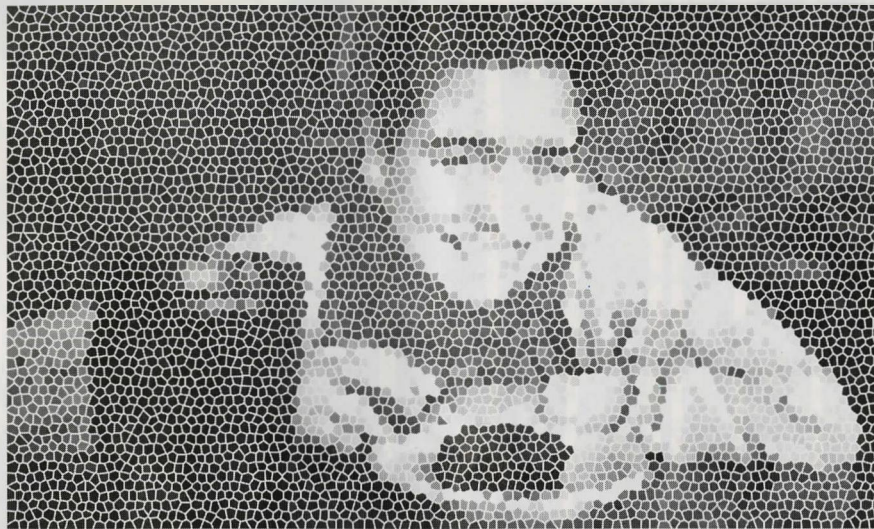
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# I WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD

an interview by basil elias

## Social Change and Free Speech in the Classroom



Lindsay and I have been on similar paths with our passionate interest in education in this country. We've been engaged with popular education in different ways and have come to each other time and time again for advice and support.

When she came to me with her latest struggle, I was convinced of the need publicize her story. What follows is a testimony of the symbolic strife between a curriculum focused on liberation for all people and standardized compulsory education. The names in this story have been changed.

*Before you did your teaching internship, what was your vision of how it would be to teach?*

I was at the University of Michigan taking a class called "Theatre and Social Change." We students were inside prisons doing improvisational theatre workshops with inmates; but behind the scenes, there was really intense education about prisons and how we live in a society which is absolutely economically benefiting from locking people up. So we were reading a lot of intense literature about creating disposable communities. One of the books that we read was Jonathon Kozol's *The Night Is Dark, And I Am Far From Home*, which is this very fiery and angry book about how education replicates all the injustices in the larger community and prepares students to feel powerless in the face of that. All of this learning I was doing tapped into a lot of the beliefs I already had but didn't have all the language for yet, and I was furious, and knew that I wanted to be in schools working against a lot of what I thought was wrong with them. But on a less reactive note, I started to really see the power of education—the power of knowledge, and what that meant in terms of people beginning to dream a beautiful world for themselves and put those dreams into action.

So, I knew that teaching would be hard and very often heartbreaking. I knew that I needed support or I would be overwhelmed and feel powerless. I also thought it would be deeply rewarding work and work that would continue to shape my own identity and beliefs. I can also admit now that I thought I would be great at it.

*How, if at all, did this vision change after your initial teaching internship? What lessons did you learn?*

Teaching is hard. HARD. I wasn't great at it. I was good and I cared, but I didn't have a lot of the answers, and the woman with whom I student taught had given up looking for the answers. I started to realize that it is really hard if you care, because you end up expecting perfection but falling short, so you second guess yourself, struggle with all

that is heartbreaking, lie up at night wondering how better you could have handled a situation, and yet still feeling like you will never connect with every kid, which is, of course, your hope.

I am pretty sure I expected to butt heads with colleagues and administration, but I never thought the kids would also be so set in their ways and institutionalized. I feel funny admitting that now, because of course it is difficult to be a student, and there is a lot of self-preservation going on there, but while I knew that, I didn't realize how much that would affect my ability to teach.

I learned that I needed much more support than I had thought and that I needed to have much more experience in putting my theories into practice.

*What about after you graduated, what was your vision of what it would be like to be a teacher? What kind of influence did you think you would have on kids? What did you hope for?*

I say this sort of as a joke in its grandiose-ness, but it is true: I wanted to be a teacher because I want to change the world. I wanted to empower my kids and give them a sense of how limitless their talents and knowledge and abilities are. I wanted to be the kind of teacher that was real and accessible to my students, and I wanted them to learn that education happens all over, not just in a classroom, but everywhere. And I knew that having my own classroom and not being a student teacher would make that more possible. I expected it to be easier, and especially when I met my vice-principal and mentor teacher, I believed I had found the perfect community where I could keep pushing to put theory into practice. They were both fairly progressive in their ideas on education and on the world in general, and I was encouraged to bring my own passions to the community.

*What were some of the initial struggles at your new job?*

The initial struggles I had ended up being continual struggles. I struggled with students who, simply by virtue of being 12, 13, 14 had a million



other things on their mind than school, or that so many of them had already come to see school as this boring, horrible inevitable, so no amount of fun activities or freedom inspired them. I struggled with just the amount of time, effort, and energy teaching required—grading papers, planning lesson, phoning students' homes, meetings, in-services, educating myself, being a friend, a disciplinarian, a counselor, a babysitter, and sometimes a surrogate parent.

On top of all of that, the district itself was struggling with lawsuits, including several against the superintendent for embezzlement. Money that was earmarked for certain projects was never received, and we were told things like we would not be compensated monetarily for lost prep time. We never had enough subs, so if a teacher was out, the students would be spread about to other teachers, regardless of our contract saying that we had a certain number of students which could not be surpassed.

And, eventually, over time, I came to realize that my principal did not like me. I can only speculate as to why, but she would condescend to me in front of my students, not answer my questions in in-services, and generally treat me as though I was incompetent.

*What, if any, compromises did you make between your initial vision and your day-to-day realities as a teacher?*

It is hard to call them compromises because it doesn't feel like I necessarily traded in certain values for the values of the system. There were certain things, like preparing my students for standardized tests, that I disagreed with, but I always knew they would be present in my job. There are other examples like this. For instance, I strongly disagree with the idea of grades and grading. I think it reduces the power of learning to a competition and fear of failure, BUT I knew that I had to grade my students, and, to this day, I don't necessarily feel successful in the grading system I came up with, but I have faith that, as time goes on, I can figure out more how to, for instance, grade in accordance with my beliefs, or not grade at all. So, yes, it is a compromise, but I still have the same beliefs I always had.

I also really struggle with giving my students a lot of freedom over the curriculum. Especially in California, there is a real strong emphasis on the standards, and it is difficult to deviate from them. They even give a "pacing schedule" so that you know exactly what day to teach which topic. I want for my students to really be able to pursue what fascinates them and then be able to take off from there. And again, I have seen this happen in really great classrooms in the public school system, but I am still not sure how to truly make it happen.

*How did you attempt to actualize your pedagogical ideas into the classroom?*

I listened to my students. I honored their questions and discussed the things that they were thinking about but are often shunned as "taboo" in a classroom such as sex, sexuality, dating. I gave them a choice whenever possible—choice in how to explore a subject or what questions we were going to ask, or how to do an assignment. I gave a lot of open-ended assignments that involved more creative and critical thinking. I supplemented a lot—brought in reading outside the textbooks, guest speakers, different opinions and perspectives. I always tried to give multiple sides of issues and demonstrate that social studies is not black and white. We played games, inside and outside the classroom. I loaned books, newspaper articles, magazines. I talked to them, inside and outside the classroom, made time for them. They all had my phone number if they needed help or just someone to talk to. I encouraged the things they were really good at. I was honest with them and tried to explain as much as possible. I had high expectations for them, and tried to instill those expectations in themselves. I had them reflect on their learning and experiences in school through journals and asking questions.

And outside of the classroom when I was frustrated or stuck, I did a lot of journaling and reflecting with other teacher friends or with my amazing mentor teacher.

*What were some of the results?*

I know a lot of my students came to trust me and want to talk to me about

their lives. They felt more comfortable asking questions and showing an interest. This was especially true in terms of "non-academics." I have this memory of school starting off one day with a million jokes about li'l bow wow, and how he had been raped, and so I stopped and we talked about rape and what it is and how it is not a joke. And they were open to it. They had questions and wanted to talk, and when I told them about how many of my friends had been raped, it became real and heavy to them. We talked about queer sexualities too. They knew they couldn't say, "oh that's gay," and mean it as an insult because it offended me. We talked about racism, stereotypes, all kinds of things. It also helped that I was a social studies teacher, because they started connecting what we were talking about to the things we were studying—stereotypes of Native Americans and Africans and how those stereotypes led to their colonization, etc.

There were times when my students would go off to other classes talking animatedly about some topic we had been studying—Japanese rock gardens, tea ceremonies, Chinese culture—because they were excited about it because we had used art or hands-on activities to learn more.

There were of course times that they were not so excited. Students complained that the work was too hard or that they "hated critical thinking."

But I also had one student who wrote me a journal saying I was her favorite teacher because I let her express herself in the ways she was good at, and another very sweet student who always wrote me journals saying she loved me like a mother. I had a group of boys who often called to talk and one time invited me to Great America with them. We were really starting to develop a community of learning. I still think I was a long way away from my picture of a great teacher, but it was a strong start.

*Tell me a story of a really good teaching experience you had?*

I did the zine project two times. The first time I did it with my homeroom was an incredible success. They were so excited, and produced the most amazing, touching, creative zines. They would beg me to work on them. Whenever there was free time, they would ask if they could please work on their zines. One girl made a total of three zines in about three weeks. Two of them were at least 50 pages and full of her art and photos. Another student did two zines. One was full of her own short stories and the other was full of games: puzzles, crosswords, word games. Some of my students who struggled the most with school really got into this project, because it was theirs—what they were good at and wanted to say.

I had a friend, another teacher, visiting from out of town, and this class had been so wonderful all week, so we planned a pizza party while they worked on their zines. The pizza came, and my friend spread the pizza out all over the room so that there wouldn't be any fighting or crowding. And the pizzas sort of just sat there. My friend went up to some students and said, ya know, "don't you want any pizza?" and they answered, "yeah, but in a minute; I want to finish this page."

*What did you hope to get out of facilitating a student-led zine making project?*

So a bit of explanation: every day, from 2-3:00, there is this block of time in which the students are not in an "academic" class. The time is spent in what are called "electives," these courses that we teach. So I created this class called "people's art." Aside from the zine project, we also did theatre based on people's theatre, and the whole idea behind this class was you don't have to be "an artist;" you just have to have the desire and something to say. So, that is a bit of background.

The actual wording of the zine project pretty much spoke to what I was excited about. The handout I gave the students said, "When I was just a little older than you all, I began writing my own zines. What I loved most about doing zines is that it was a great outlet for my ideas and desire to express myself. I also made friends all over the world—other people my age who were also making zines and wanting to trade them with other people.

The most important thing is that your zine is yours—that it reflects your ideas and creativity. You probably should have a title for your zine



and a cover, but other than that, it's all you!!! "And then I gave them a long list of suggestions for things they could put in it.

I wanted them to own this project. I also hoped that it would be a spark for their own creativity and ideas later in life. That maybe they would remember they had created this book which had gotten *read* and *looked at* and *appreciated*. Ideally, they would be sold on making zines and maybe continue later in life.

I know that, for me, doing a zine was and still is a way for me to feel more connected. That I don't have to be famous or rich to have something to say. I became more validated. And especially for my kids who are poor, kids of color, the majority of whom speak English as a second language, it is so easy to not feel connected; to feel like the people who are famous and in power don't look like them or speak the same language as them. So in a lot of ways, this project summed up my goals as a teacher: to empower them in a way that felt important.

#### *What were the initial reactions from your students?*

As I said earlier, I had a really positive reaction from my seventh graders. My eighth graders were a bit harder to convince, but that was not surprising to me. That class was less excited, and a lot of students didn't do the project at all. Some of them really needed a lot of support as to what they should put in it, which I was definitely willing to give. I tried to go with what interested them, so a typical conversation might look like this: student: "I don't know what to do." me: "what do you like to do in your free time?" student: "play video games." me: "okay, so you could write video game reviews or give secrets to beating the games, or imagine what your own video game would be like..."

#### *What about from other staff and faculty?*

There was very little reaction. When the first group of kids did the project, their other teachers were really impressed and proud of them. My mentor kept saying it was a great project.

When we had the publishing party, I invited my vice-principal. I asked him please not to say anything to the students if there were any swear words (of which there were some) or topics he found not appropriate to school (of which there weren't really any, but they weren't "academic") because I had given them the go ahead to do whatever they wanted. He seemed unconcerned and didn't even come to the party.

My principal eventually rearranged the whole schedule so that the electives would end, and I was deeply upset, trying to convince her of how great that time had been for me and my students. She really gave me

no feedback, and to this day, I am not totally sure that she even knew anything about my class.

#### *What was your reaction to material that students were submitting to the zine? What kinds of restrictions did you place upon them?*

I didn't give them any restrictions. Doing the project with my seventh graders instilled a certain feeling of confidence and success. When the students were like, "you mean we can do *anything*?!" I usually gave them a wry look and said, "don't take advantage." There were certainly things I would not have accepted, but I figured we'd cross that bridge when we came to it.

Ironically, my biggest concern was with the fact that the eighth graders were not being all that creative. They would print up rap lyrics from the Internet or submit other people's art, and I kept saying, "This is *yours*, not someone else's," but ultimately, what they turned in to me, I went with.

#### *Did you receive any restrictions from other faculty, management, etc.?*

No.

#### *What was your reaction to the zine after it was finished, before you made copies?*

Again, for a little background, the zine in question was full of art—22 pages of drawings, no text. Only three of the drawings were the students'. The rest were copied from low rider magazines. I was definitely a bit unhappy with this, since the students had been doing all kinds of drawing during class time. So I asked them where their other art was, and they reassured me that this was what they wanted to use. One of the three original drawings was a hand drawn naked woman. I said I was a little concerned about it because it could be offensive to women, and again, they reminded me that I had said it was their project.

It's tough to explain. I didn't love the zine, but the three students were very excited, something which was rare. And, as I have said, I was hoping that, even if their first attempt was not great, it would plant the seed that they can create an outlet for their art on their own. I honestly didn't think that much about the picture because it was the only picture of its type in the zine, the rest of the art was quite good, and frankly, it just didn't seem like a big deal to me.

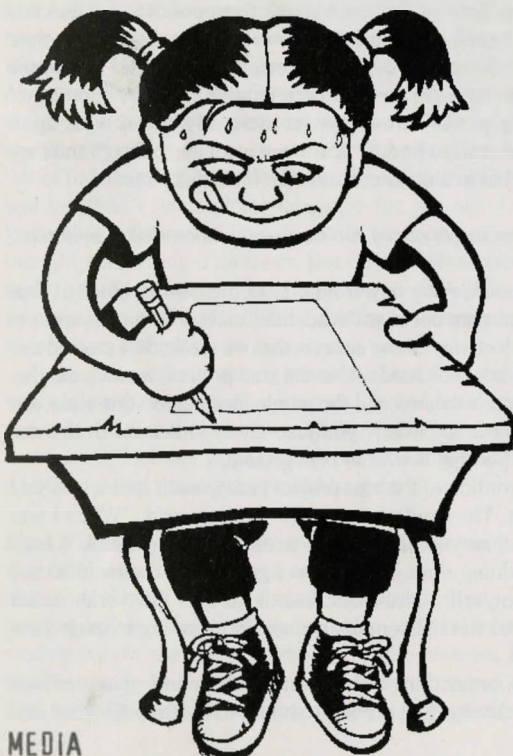
#### *What happened when your boss — the principal — saw it?*

I was in the middle of teaching class when she came to my room. She held up the zine, which apparently a second grader had a copy of, and asked if I knew what it was, and I said yes, and explained that I had printed it with a small local grant that was available to most teachers. She asked if I had seen it, and I said yes and asked if we could talk after class, and she said, "I don't want to talk. This is pornography, and I am calling the district."

A few minutes later, the vice-principal came and took my class so I could see the principal in her office. An hour-long conversation ensued, in which she said some pretty horrible things, including that I am a person of no moral character, that I am dangerous, and a bad influence on children. She asked for my key and said the district would contact me at the beginning of next week.

#### *What was the specific wording about why you were fired?*

As of right now, I have not been fired. I am on administrative leave, which means I am being paid not to teach. The district has not contacted me at all, and, ironically, didn't even seem to know that any of this had happened. What my principal called it during our horrendous conversation was that I was "distributing pornography to minors." She threatened to call the cops and to revoke my teaching credential.



I did the zine project two times. The first time I did it with my homeroom was an incredible success. They were so excited, and produced the most amazing, touching, creative zines. They would beg me to work on them. Whenever there was free time, they would ask if they could please work on their zines.



*Where is the case going from here?*

I am waiting for some stuff to be ironed out with my union. It seems like such an absurd joke right now that every little thing has gone wrong due to some kind of staff error. For instance, they have screwed up the status of my union membership; they lost the message in the district, etc. So I have nothing whatsoever formal from the district, and I am not even sure that they know about any of this. I am waiting to be in touch with my lawyer, and school ends in two weeks. I have been encouraged by everyone not to go back to school, even if the district rules that I can, because my principal will make my life a living hell. Some feel that she would fabricate something to get me in trouble or be so angry that she pursued my teaching credential. In fact, I have been strongly recommended not to do this interview, because people feel it will jeopardize my entire career, which is why it is remaining pretty anonymous.

The saddest things to me are that, one, I have had zero closure with my students and miss them horribly, and two, for the last three weeks of school, they will not even have a sub. The administration is justifying it by saying that a sub couldn't handle the kids the last weeks of school, and so they are, like I said earlier, spreading the kids out amongst the other seventh and eighth grade teachers, and even some sixth grade teachers. Apparently, the classes are so crowded, and there are often two different grade levels in one room, and so instruction and planning is becoming impossible. And my principal says this is better than my being there, because I am dangerous.

*What are some of the thoughts floating around in your head about teaching now? Where will you go from here?*

I think the worst feeling is just feeling like there is this horrible power imbalance, and there is nothing I can do about it because I am a first year teacher, and she is this well-connected principal. This has happened before with her, and nothing changes. It feels like even if I win this, I still have not won because she has used her power to push someone out.

Friends keep telling me this is part of my education, that I will become a stronger teacher and fighter for justice because of this. I hope they are right. At this point, I am not sure that I even want to teach anymore, but that would be her winning too.

As of right now, I do have some good news, which is that I got a job as a program head at a very progressive educational center/organic farm/summer camp. So that is exciting, and I am hoping it nourishes my spirit a bit.

Without making too rash of a decision with all of this still pretty fresh, I think I might do a year teaching in an alternative school, so that I can get a bit more experience putting radical theory into practice, and then I will go back to the public schools with a bit more experience under my belt. No resumes have been sent, but we'll see...

*What kind of community support, if any, do you need?*

Right now? That's a hard question to answer, because, again, I am concerned about my credential right now, and that this could go beyond the district level—that I lose both of my state certifications as well as face possible criminal proceedings. It sounds so ridiculous to say that, but it's

true. This woman truly hates me, and I am not sure what I need. I know that, I personally, need to know that this isn't me, that I'm not crazy or a horrible teacher. The anger that my friends have had when I tell them is helpful to me, because it helps me feel more convinced that there is reason to fight, even if that fight never is too specific to this particular situation.

I would also love for there to be public pressure on the school for its high turn-over rate of teachers and lack of resources. Actually, I would love that kind of attention to be given to education in general. It seems like all the attention given schools lately has come from a bunch of talking heads who know very little about how schools actually work. The emphasis is in the totally wrong place—standardized and high stakes tests, vouchers, and a bunch of rhetoric about accountability with little idea of what that means. And here the climate being created is one where teachers are afraid to be innovative, make mistakes, stray from the path outlined by politicians and big business, again, people who have little idea of what the reality of teaching is. I just read this article in the New York Times, this story about a new teacher in New York City who is expected to follow a script and never deviate from the plans outlined on a day-to-day basis. And I interviewed for a position where I would be expected to follow a script. I mean, as a professional, that is an insult to me, and I could go on and on about how I think the teaching profession is devalued because it is traditionally woman's work, but now I am just going off on a tangent.

I guess my ultimate point here is that people should be angry, and figure out ways to get that anger out and heard. I know I am angry, and that anger is the reason I decided to teach in the first place.

*What advice would you give to other first year teachers who want to bring liberty education into their classrooms?*

Do it, and expect for it to be hard. Don't expect to always see the results right away, because you won't. Teaching can feel very unrewarding, but know that you are planting seeds.

Find someone who can support you and tell you what a great job you are doing. Journal a lot—always focus on the positive things that happened even if you feel weighted down by the hard things.

Be in touch with your parents. I think parents get a bad reputation for not caring about their kids' education, but I think at the heart of it, most do, but don't feel empowered in their relationships to school. So get them on your side and communicate with them.

Read *36 Children* by Herbert Kohl, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, and *The Long Haul* by Myles Horton with Judith and Herbert Kohl.

Ask a lot of questions and open yourself to taking advice. Listen to your students and to your heart. Try not to be afraid to fail or to deviate from the traditional path. And at the very heart of everything, realize there are a ton of teachers who want the same things you do and are on your side, and that change will only happen if we have a critical mass, so hang in there. ★

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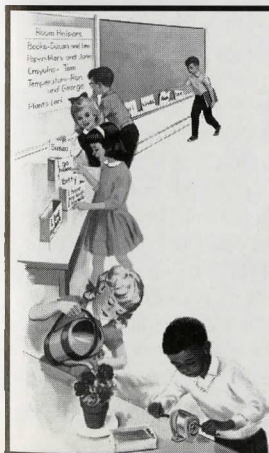
## as serious as children at play

most people present their most creative challenges to corporate culture in childhood... refusing to recognize or respect the rigid grids which mutilate and constrict the worlds of adults— children efficiently and ecstatically move through their surroundings—

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children constantly create consensual convivial communities which are certainly complex but are instantaneously internalized by all involved... schooling and socialization damages and perverts these instincts for freedom and corrupts the craving for community and individuality...

-m/sz(uberla)





## Witness or Exploitation?

### the photography of Sebastião Salgado in New York City

A review by Greg Fuchs

*Migrations, Humanity in Transition: Photographs by Sebastião Salgado*, an exhibition at the International Center of Photography, New York City, June 22 through September 9, 2001.

*Salgado: The Spectre of Hope*, directed by Paul Carlin, produced by Paula Jafon, Colin McCabe and Adam Simon, executive producer Tim Robbins, for "Cinemax Reel Life" debuted August 8, 2001.

"Artists give a report of the state of civilization."

—Leon Golub

During summer 2001 the International Center of Photography (ICP) displayed a blockbuster exhibition. *Migrations, Humanity in Transition: Photographs by Sebastião Salgado* filled two floors and several galleries of the newly renovated center at 1133 Avenue of the Americas, ground zero of recently gentrified Times Square. The exhibition, coordinated by APERTURE Foundation For Photography and The Visual Arts to travel to more than 30 cities throughout the world, is a documentary of mass migration on every continent, generally rural peoples to urban centers, and is a testimony that globalization is its root. Salgado documents the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, Mexico to people living on top of a water pipe line in Bombay.

Across the street from ICP are the headquarters of Home Box Office (HBO), the cable media giant. In August 2001 HBO debuted *Salgado: Spectre of Hope* part of its *Cinemax Reel Life* documentary series. The set-up is a conversation between Salgado and John Berger. Berger's work as a writer is as prolific, terrific, and as complicated as Salgado's photography. He's best known as the author of *Ways of Seeing*, but his best book may be his collaborative documentary with photographer Jean Mohr, *The Seventh Man*, which depicts the lives of migrant workers in Europe. It is where he most closely crosses paths with Salgado. Berger ranges wide in his commentary. He uses art, photography, and poetry as yardsticks by which to understand economics, politics, and the clash between peasant and urban life. They sit at Berger's kitchen table in the French Alps leafing through the two books published by APERTURE to accompany the show, *Migrations: Humanity in Transition* and *The Children: Refugees and Migrants*. They each describe their impressions of the photographs. They discuss the destructive road from 1600 global trade to globalization's devastating effect on poor and rural peoples. Ultimately, what, if anything these pictures can do to counter its devastation.

Eureka! Precisely the rub, the perfect question, can Salgado's photography achieve his goals with so much at stake? What is at stake? The ways in which we've become accustomed to doing business, the nation state, and the dominance of the bottom line over human lives. The movement toward a more equitable life for all mankind is clearly Salgado's goal. It is written plainly in the exhibition wall text. He also stated clearly before a screening of *Spectre of Hope* at HBO's headquarters that we are living in one of the most terrible times of mankind caused by the free reign of corporations to maximize their profits by influencing public policy across the globe. Yet, the ICP exhibition, by extension the books and film, are financially backed by British Petroleum, known in this context by its less imperialist initials, BP. According to Adriana Marques, Travelling Exhibition Coordinator for Aperture, each of the more than 30 institutions exhibiting the work is responsible for raising its own funding. BP is not overtly sponsoring any of the other shows. Yet, the show is the same in every venue. It stands to reason that the costs would be similar across currencies and locations. Equivalent funding must be risen from someone or where else with equally deep pockets. Few corporations as powerful as BP would fund the work of an artist whose goal is to criticize their methods of business, unless of course they wager the criticism will be ineffective. It's a public relations gamble but if it works then they funding

source comes off less treacherous than its competitors. I would venture that BP's goal is to create plausible deniability for global warming or aiding the destruction of the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge. Ultimately to persuade the viewer to pull into BP-Amoco next time one needs to fill-up their automobile.

All this mainstream attention makes Salgado one of the few, if any, documentary photographers to have gained superstar status. Perhaps Robert Capa, the famed war photographer and brother of Corneli Capa, the founder of ICP, was more popular and sexy in his day. Hitchcock did base *Rear Window* on him and Jimmy Stewart played him. In America, to have a genius director fictionalize your life and be played by a superstar makes one more venerable than to be the star of a documentary about their own work, i.e. we are more comfortable with fake life than real life. We prefer the official culture's interpretation to the folk culture tale; it's more digestible, less complicated. It enables us to sleep at night and get to work on time the next morning. In the fake life the black person always dies first, the nice white family triumphs adversity, real poverty is non-existent, and only rogue nations hurt their citizens. In the folk life, bad things befall good people and we all have our day of reckoning. Furthermore, superstars sell, even anti-capitalist, ethical, unpretentious, down-to-earth superstars. Dig the Che Guevara paraphernalia all over America, the country that's stood most adversarial to Cuba during its 40-plus years as a revolutionary government. Recently I overheard some loudmouth at a bar in Soho tell his date over a martini-up about his cool Che t-shirt.

The corporate makeover of Times Square is just the latest stage of a longstanding tradition of official culture subsuming marginal culture. Times Square, long known as a Tenderloin district, where one could exit Port Authority bus terminal or ascend the subway, blend anonymously into the masses of people on the street, seek and find illicit pleasures is now known for clean, safe fun for the whole family.

The timing, location, and style of this blockbuster exhibition are uncannily apropos. The American Summer is all about blockbusters and theme parks. Hollywood blockbusters, for example, are all about cooperative marketing, cross-pollination. The movie sells the book, characters become action figures, maybe a t.v. spin-off is developed; there's generally a soundtrack, always t-shirts, and some sort of crossover advertising campaign. It's worth all the risk, and generally there's no risk anyway. If the movie loses at the box office the parent company absorbs the loss, because when it wins the parent company wins big, our entire culture's conscience is invaded, sales are rampant. It's an evolved and far-reaching strategy built on that of the theme park. Get the suckers inside with a promise of a death defying roller coaster, or a bearded lady, then charge whatever you can for a Coca-Cola. It's a shakedown, a rigged game. In this case, the exhibition sells the book and the movie, the movie sells the exhibition and the book, and the book sells the movie and the exhibition. It is the current mode of marketing and promotion. If this show is a flop only Salgado suffers. Aperture, BP, HBO, and ICP will forge ahead. If the show is

a success then the real success is BP's. It's a public relations coup, and we barely see it. That cute little green flower logo next to letters BP just barely lingers in the conscience, but it lingers.

Times Square represents the super-structural theme park that we all live in everyday, everywhere. It's more than a physical location it is the current state of being, the epicenter of multi-national media consolidation and a billboard for the triumph of globalization, cheap clothes, endless entertainment, and rising stock prizes, at least in the long term. It is a corridor of tourism, news, entertainment, shopping, movies, and media. Run into Bergdorf's, check out Rockefeller Center, mug for the *Today Show*, pop into Radio City Music Hall, check your stocks, get Disneyed, stop in to see the pictures of starving refugees and immigrants

by Salgado. After such a multi-national corporate onslaught can a viewer really take a critical look at what Salgado depicts, migration by peasants to over-crowded, under-funded cities due to the takeover of their land by big business. Can even the clued-in viewer go to the exhibition without thinking there's absolutely nothing she can do to change the conditions which have caused the situations which Salgado documents, that it is impossible to try to think outside or live beyond the god-forsaken theme park called contemporary life? British Petroleum wins. We're outraged







yet dumbfounded. All we can say is how beautiful his pictures are instead of how horrific the places are he depicts, or ask ourselves what we can do to change the policies which create these conditions so we no longer have to see humans degraded the way they are in these photographs.

Salgado understands the problems of documentary. Is it witness or exploitation? He says in broken-English in *Spectre of Hope*, "the book, the film, the photographs may not be the right solution, but we must accept responsibility for our actions, I feel compelled to provoke a debate about our economic policies." He realizes that most of the people that will view his pictures have little experience with the scenes depicted. That many will aestheticize the work, call it beautiful, say that it has heroic, universal qualities that bind all of mankind together, thoroughly miss the point. Shouldn't we be outraged by what Salgado depicts? Should we recognize that we are culpable, yes, especially those of us who, for example, know nothing of carrying all of our belongings over a South American mountain range to find a city in which to live and work?

Salgado's pictures depict extreme suffering. One beyond anything with which I am familiar. Families are displaced by war, by economic expansion. They come to crowded cities looking for work; live in homes so tiny sometimes the ceiling is only higher than a sitting-adult. Berger says, "The worst element of globalization is its bigotry. How it pretends that no other choice is available. That is a lie." We can change our policies, the way we do business, we create fair lives for all instead of manufacturing lifestyles for those with expendable income. Salgado's professed hope is that his pictures will instigate this change. He photographs the four out of five people that suffer unnecessary poverty due to globalization. He was trained and worked as an economist before becoming a photographer. He understands that statistics are manipulated to excuse the greed that has caused so much profit for the few and so much suffering for the many. Not only does he understand the numbers, the motives, he has witnessed its worst effects. Something most people completely ignore, or pretend does not exist.

The question remains, is his witness testimony for the prosecution of the devastating effects of globalization on the world's poor or is it exploitation of those victims? Are his subjects depicted for his own gain and the titillation of the one of five in the world who enjoy prosperity? To salve their greedy souls? Perhaps Time Square is one of the best places, a place rich by globalization, in which to critique its effects? It is the eye of the storm, it gets the traffic of those benefiting the most by globalization and

major media outlets are in the neighborhood. Yet the obvious has been ignored before.

At the end of the week that I viewed Salgado's exhibition I attended an exhibition of the paintings of Leon Golub. Like Salgado, Golub's most powerful and famous paintings depict horrific acts of state-sanctioned violence. He paints mercenaries torturing innocent victims. He paints American soldiers murdering gangs of civilians. He once said that historically embedded forms of figuration retain a radical edge more than non-referential painting, which is the freedom of escape rather than action. He chose to paint state run terror to inform the viewer, to remind the viewer that many of the bad things going on in the world are sanctioned and can be put to an end. In other words, while we investigate and critique documentary we must keep our cameras pointed at the world in which we live, we must report on the state of the civilization in which we live.

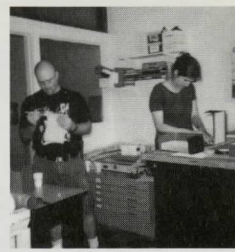
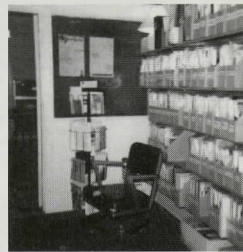
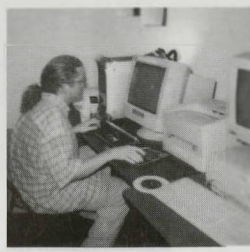
The burgeoning independent media movement has shown the importance of pointing the camera outward. The Independent Media Center's goal is to report the stories that go unreported, the ones that do not fit the company agenda. MediaChannel.org's motto is "while the media watches the world, we watch the media." Are APERTURE, BP, HBO, and ICP subsuming the international anti-globalization, pro-democracy movement? ICP's and *Cinemax Reel Life* producers' goals are not very different than Salgado's professed goals. Yet, the cost of mounting and producing such shows is so expensive that we often must accept contributions from those that are potentially part of the problem, BP, specifically. Salgado and the institutions that support him would do well to reveal their funder's missions, policies, and political milieu to deepen the viewers understanding of his work.

#### SALGADO ON THE ROAD

##### An itinerary for *Migrations: Humanity in Transition*

Whenever Aperture coordinates a travelling show they usually run for several years and travel all over the world. *Migrations* opened in spring 2000 travelling mostly throughout Europe, South America and a couple of stops in the states. Following New York City, it moves throughout the United States, then to Australia, and finally Germany. Salgado is so popular, this exhibition may run longer than other shows, a few dates are still available. Look out for an exhibition near you or check out [www.Aperture.org](http://www.Aperture.org) for more information. ★





# Portland's Independent Publishing Resource Center

*The Independent Publishing Resource Center in Portland, Oregon, is located downtown in an unassuming building, upstairs from Reading Frenzy, an independent press emporium. The IPRC has everything you could hope for in a resource center. There is a zine library that is completely cataloged and able to be referenced through the web site as well as the workspace; computer stations for word processing, scanning, internet, and design; a press room with three hand presses, type, and printmaking supplies; a meeting room; and all kinds of supplies, from scissors to staplers to wax and laminating gear. They offer in house workshops and groups, as well as presentations on bookbinding, letterpress printing, printmaking, computer programs, and zine-making. Rebecca has been doing zines and DIY media projects for years, and last summer we got to talking about the Center. Interview by John Gerken.*

**Clamor:** A place like this excites me because it is just one more thing that we are doing ourselves. It makes me wonder, what next? What else are we capable of? In this instance, the zine and independent publishing communities have built a network, enough of a foundation that we are now able to create and sustain places like this, an entire resource center. Just one more block in the building of community, and just another example of our vast potential.

Rebecca: The IPRC was originally started in July of 1998. Chloe [proprietress of Reading Frenzy] and I had the space for a year and a half previous that was acting as a studio for myself and as an office for Reading Frenzy. When we rented the space, we had this idea that eventually we'd like to turn it into some sort of resource center for publishers. We held meetings that summer to collect a steering committee, a kind of interim Board of Directors. In 1999, we started as an official organization; we incorporated as a non-profit, did all the bylaws, all that stuff that you have to do to be an official organization on everybody's charts. And we decided to do that because we wanted to legitimize this project. Not that it's not legitimate to just do it and have it go, but we wanted to have it be something outside of just the five or six people that jumped in to

start it. By creating a separate entity, we're removing liability from ourselves, while making it that much more accessible for other people. It's not this project that belongs to six people, it's something that other people can walk into and get involved at whatever level they feel comfortable with.

**And so you said you came up with five people that had specific interests and they were responsible for that?**

Yes, they had specific interests in developing different aspects of the Center and every time we had a meeting, each person would "report" on their area. And then we got totally sidetracked, as any project does, and we started worrying about funds. We had one person who was interested specifically in having a library and having items cataloged and organized well, free and open to anybody. Not one where you could only browse at the Center, but where materials could be checked out. Someone who was interested in overall operations, just trying to get people involved and getting supplies and keeping track of money. Really important stuff that we don't often think of, but stuff that actually keeps everything together. The glue. Someone who was interested in letterpress printing and making that accessible to people as an art form and as a way to publish material. Someone who was interested in silk-screening, making it accessible (though it hasn't become a big part of our offering). And myself, who kind of had a general overall idea of a few different things; computer stuff, how to set up some Mac stations and general design and layout information. I have a background in book arts, doing bookbinding and general publishing info. And then another person who was very interested in promotion and distribution. That sort of became the basis.

**You said that you realized you shared a dream about having a space like this after so many people were coming into Reading Frenzy and asking, "how do you do this?"**

I just went to this grant writing class, and one of the things they tell you when you're writing a grant is that you have to have a compelling need. Well, how do you prove that it's a compelling need when people come in and say

they want to learn how to do this one little thing, and it's part of such a marginal subculture to start with? The IPRC was started because so many people walked up to us in Reading Frenzy and said, "I want to learn how to make a zine, how do you do it?" We just found ourselves spending a portion of each shift saying, "I can give you some general information," and always looking for the book on how to publish a fanzine. It fueled this dream to have a resource center where we could send people to find some answers and some other folks to learn from.

**As my friends and I get older, we get to this point, it feels like, where we're saying: we've got this viable subculture that we maintain, but let's take a little bit more of the means of production. Rather than just knowing how to go and scam Kinko's. Let's just have our own spaces where we're doing all of it.**

And also, how do you pass that information on? We've got this community and this network, but it's based on people our age and what happens to the twelve-year-old that starts to publish? There isn't much contact. Even at shows you're probably not running into the younger kids that are into publishing now. So it's important to have a space that they know they could walk into. It will still be scary, but there will be someone who is there, specifically, because they want to answer questions about publishing. And that's part of our goal, to keep this culture going. And to support those people that are already involved in it. Hopefully it acts as an inspiration for my individual projects too. "How do I keep publishing, how do I remain interested in it?" It's contact with other people, that drives it.

**As far as the decision to make it something that perpetuates itself...**

My idea is not to be the initial organizer or director of this place forever. Just to be here to create a solid foundation and let it continue. Part of that is the Board of Directors. After one year, we brought on board an official board of directors, and they're people from outside the organization. There was one carryover, actually: Chloe sits on our board and she was part of that initial organizing committee.



**So what is those people's connection then?** They have a passion for what we're doing. They're really interested in our mission. They're either self-publishers themselves, or they support independent media. And what you look for in a board, is people who have skills that will keep your organization afloat. A lot of that is moneymaking skills. A lot it is connections in the community. Also, experience with fundraising and grant writing.

**And grants and donations are what is supporting the Center?**

We're still mainly funded by individual donations right now. We did receive one grant last year. Individual donors make this place run, for the most part. Membership and user fees are the other part. We receive donations of anywhere from twenty-five dollars to five thousand dollars. It's a real range. I'd say a hundred dollars is probably the median.

**So you're actually an employee right now?**

Yes. The board identified that one of our primary needs for this year, as far as the overall vision of the place, was to have a full-time or part-time director. Someone who is here to answer questions and feels responsible to the organization. The kind-of natural choice for that job was me, because I had an interest in doing it and I've been involved in the place. Chloe felt like it was more appropriate for her to sit on the board and be involved in the overall vision. And I'm more of a person who likes to have contact with volunteers and the people who are actually making things run, day-to-day. Other initial organizers have either continued in volunteer capacities or left town.

So the board identified that need and all their fundraising has been directed towards it. We received one individual donation that was equivalent to half a year's salary. So, it's the second half of the year, and we're starting off this half with me as a paid part-time employee. I just quit my 3rd job, hoping that this will go. I have six months of income so, after that, either the board has to come up with the money, or we have to do some re-organizing as far as what I do for my income.

**Did this start out with originally a lot of people paying out of their pockets?**

Yes, three out of the original six were paying rent, essentially, and supplies and bills and stuff like that came out of pocket. About halfway through last year we stopped having to pay rent out of our pockets because our fundraising skills increased, and that was great.

**I think that is what a lot of people fear about starting something: not wanting to sink a lot of money into it, and THEN having it fall apart. It's a lot easier to put a lot of money, and time and energy and passion**

**into something and have it go, but there's the fear that it will collapse.**

The way that I thought about it, originally, was that if I were to have my own studio to do my art or publishing work, this is the amount of money I would pay anyway to have that happen. And I don't think I ever paid more than that. So by doing that, it helped me to detach a little bit. It's still pretty hard, if someone takes advantage of what you've done and you've put in money from your own pocket, it's hard not to feel bitter. But I kept trying to think about it in terms of renting this space anyway, to have my own studio.

**That type of tendency is what I see a lot more of people wanting to try to do, with their projects, or homes, or spaces, or their belongings. For example, if you felt like your zine collection was in a safe place, where it wasn't going to get stolen or the organization wouldn't fall apart in the next year, you would put it there. And you'd be able to come back to your personal collection in a few years, knowing that it's not just sitting in boxes in some attic. I kind of see that as a synthesis of a couple different things: One of them being the punk rock tendency I see a lot - say, with a record label- that it's okay to just lose money because it's punk. Which isn't actually feasible or sustainable if you want to do something on this scale.**

This was an initial battle when we were first starting this place. That tendency, my gut reaction is that I'll just do it, because it's a good thing to do. But we also want it to be appreciated and see something in return for that, not have it be "all for nothing". So we really thought about how this organization might work, before we started doing it. We thought really hard about how to cover our costs at a minimal level. We started out with a year's membership on a sliding scale-thirty to sixty dollars. That entitled you to use of any resource in here. And it entitled you to discounts on workshops, so it's about half price for members to take workshops as opposed to non-members.

Now we're up to sliding scale of forty to a hundred dollars, having moved into the new space and increased our resources. But still, if you think about forty dollars for a year to be able to use all this equipment and supplies, any variety of stapler you want, paper cutters, computers, printing on a laser printer, internet, the printing press ... there's all sorts of stuff here that you pay that much for just a one time use. And the idea is that this would be a good place to do it, a creative atmosphere and you have a supportive group around you. Everyone else in here is working on publishing projects as well.

**That's something that I think is just invaluable, the "support network" aspect. And you probably wouldn't think, "okay I'm paying forty dollars for this stuff," PLUS a bunch of people around me that are inspiring me and can answer my questions and give me new ideas.**

And also for me as a publisher, I'm shy. I don't know how to go out and meet other people who are doing publications. You do it through the mail, sure, but usually if you end up in the room with someone else who's a publisher you're scared to even say hello. So hopefully with a staff person or volunteer here who is introducing people to each other and talking about what their projects are, or just because you know you have this place in common it opens up that channel of communication and exchange. It's really important, and part of our goal is to create some kind of more communicative network.

**Maybe you could mention some things you have done, a little bit of where you come from.**

For the last couple of years, all my energy has gone into making this place happen. Generally, in the past, I've always been involved in do-it-yourself projects, either publishing my own zine or helping out with shows or doing a radio show that relates to punk music and community. For the radio show & the related audiozine we interviewed people about issues that related to punk culture, and then aired those. It was kind of a documentary kind of thing, along with music. And I always have seen myself as kind of a behind-the-scenes person, I think this is the first project that I've taken on that I've put myself at the forefront. But it's also a real collection of all the things that I've learned over the years, either through my formal schooling or through the punk community. All the parts of myself put together in one place and finally using all that information for something.

**As far as seeing people our age, or at this level of experience, it's just so amazing to see all my friends take all this DIY knowledge and put it into action, in such broad ways.**

That's what it's for. People have been in this culture for a sustained period of time. So those people that got involved in punk or DIY culture in the '80s, they've been in this culture long enough now that they've learned what they need to do and how to do it.

I think that's a pretty good overview of the IPRC. People can find out more information on our web site ([www.iprc.org](http://www.iprc.org)) or by writing to us for a brochure or newsletter (published twice a year). Our address is 917 SW Oak Street, Portland, Oregon 97205. ★



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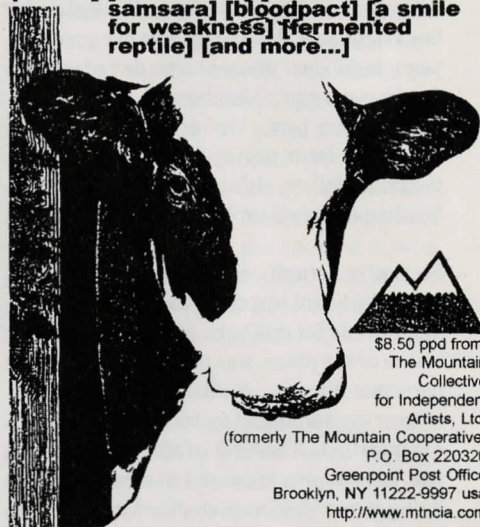
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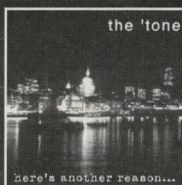
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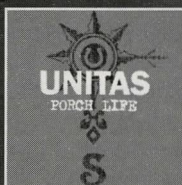
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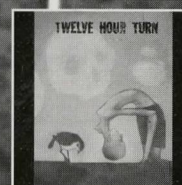
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# WAKE UP!

## You're Not in School Anymore!



The Post-College Hangover  
By Beth Barnett

I spent 20 years in school from preschool through college. It is a structure that has shaped most of my life so far and I was good at it. Maybe I was a good student because my parents were highly educated and thoroughly believed in school. Maybe they taught me how to succeed in school because they knew the formula. Maybe it was because I am intelligent in the "testable" kind of ways or because I learned to be interested in learning. I was good at taking tests and studying textbooks. Certainly I succeeded in school because I believed in it and had faith in its purpose. Toward the end, I became aware of arguments against school, against its passive learning and the alternative of un-schooling, but since I was good at being a student, nothing could pull me away from the course I was on. Spending the majority of my time learning things was enjoyable, especially after high school. Although I tried not to take it for granted, it helped that I wasn't paying for it anyway. I liked school, and when one's life has been constructed around goals of academic success, success in academia is very rewarding. It's almost intoxicating. You challenge yourself to do the work over and over again to get another A. It's a pure, simple experience of validation. It feels good. You accumulate As like points in a game. With all those points, it seems like you ought to win something in the end for all your efforts.

Until school is over. In the school environment, honors and scholarships and GPAs are given an ultimate importance. Up until that last day they matter, and then in a day their importance quickly flutters away. The familiar rules and rewards built up through so many years of school evaporate. The only way to redeem their value is to go back to school and get another degree or to stay in academia forever. The better you are at school, — the more interested in learning for its own sake, in thinking about scholarly topics — the harder it is to see this climax coming and realize what it means. I was certainly hypnotized by the narrative that school teaches — that academic success is the key to success in life. Part of me was suspicious of this story but it was always easier to believe it. No one seemed to really challenge it. The school system perpetuates it. Others were aware of the disconnection between the promises that school makes and the reality of its outcome but they didn't tell me about the problem or couldn't convince me of it. I was so determined to enjoy learning that I didn't want to believe that it had a catch.

Actually, our entire society quietly knows that most of what is done and learned in school is irrelevant to the demands of the economic system, but we all want to believe that there is a social reward for learning for its own sake. We perpetuate a myth of meritocracy in our society because we want it to exist, no matter what we actually experience. If we didn't want to believe this, school would be completely different. Most people who have bachelor's degrees work in jobs that simply require that they have them. Their jobs have little or nothing to do with what they studied. If it has little to do with what they learned, then the quality of



the education is also somewhat irrelevant, and often what they do could be done with or without that degree. Graphs in magazines show us that more educated people earn more money, so we faithfully go through the motions to get our degrees and certificates. But why then are most of my college-educated friends working in jobs that under-utilize their abilities and fail to inspire them? Why hasn't a perfectly suited job fallen in my lap, with my high grades and academic honors?

These days, as more people obtain bachelor's degrees and attend college, having a degree or even excellent grades means less than it once meant. And yet, a college education still acts as a dividing line of social class, though more symbolic than economic. Since a degree alone promises little, counselors tend to recommend a new course of action in the last year of college for the "job search." It sounds so alien to how we have functioned before that a lot of us ignore the advice. They quietly insinuate that the world outside doesn't operate like school. They rarely teach more than résumé preparation. Professors simply tell their best students to come back. No one is bluntly honest about the limitations of a graduate's options. If a student's parents didn't prevent him or her from getting a liberal arts or science degree, the school certainly won't tell him or her what to realistically expect.

I was supposed to take my GPA and my grades and my honor societies to college recruiters from larger corporations that would hopefully invite me into their world. I could start in an entry-level job and work upwards. The degree and the grades would be the key for me to get in the door. My GPA would give me a leg up on all those kids who spent college wallpapering their apartments with beer cartons. All the studying would pay off. My parents tell me about their friends' children who took that route. They have salaries and health insurance and a 401(k) plan. I shrug and tell them that's not my way and not where I want to work.

If I didn't want to do that, the only other clear option was to head to graduate school where grades and test scores continue to matter for fellowships and teaching positions. If I stayed in school, I could continue to be interested in economically useless topics and become one of the select few who live to perpetuate the institution of school and intellectual inquiry - and make a living doing it. I keep this option on the back burner if nothing else works, but I have a rebellious streak that told me to try something else - to try living life outside of school, knowing that most people don't stay there forever. I wanted to live this life for myself.

Once I rejected those options, I found myself in a totally different world where I and most of my peers were confused and irritated that we had been duped. The better we had done in school, the more thoughtful we were, the more irritated and confused we were. And I never could relate until I was standing in that world myself. Sure, many of my friends had college degrees before me with no particular indicators of "success," working for low pay, but I must have always thought that I was going to be different because I had very good grades and honors, or because I had an intellectual job during school, or because I would try harder. I'm not sure what I was thinking but the goals and certificates of education weren't nearly enough to prepare me for the obstacles ahead. No one really warned me of the risks of finishing school and trying to work doing something outside of the two suggested options. No one stressed the absolute importance of personal connections. That was all extracurricular. Perhaps they figured there was something about me that would guarantee success that they didn't have. We all feel like there's something wrong with what we're doing,

rather than something lacking in the institutions we attended. Even if we know our society and its economy are convoluted, we still have a hard time questioning academia unless we were unsuccessful students in the first place. Many of the academics who run schools never really deal with the world outside of it and don't notice the problem so most schools do a half-assed job of preparing their students to do well outside of school.

Most liberal arts bachelor's degrees fail to teach people a trade or discipline but teach them a skill set of how to be a student. Then the students forget most of the information they read or memorized and maybe know how to do some math and read and write well when they are finished. Learning interesting information for fun may be fulfilling, but its cost keeps going up. Yet we seem to *have to* believe that success in school promises success in life because academic disciplines that don't make money on their own need something to sustain them. They need students to choose those majors so professors can continue to write histories, classify insects and dig in archaeological sites. We make a silent bargain to preserve "high culture" and scholarship when we — or our parents or the government — buy our diplomas.

All of this is obvious to everyone who left school behind them, regardless of how much they enjoyed or hated it. Good grades don't ensure much of anything by themselves and if we don't use what we learned soon, it eventually doesn't matter what we actually studied. When the simple goals of graduation and test scores are gone, it is finally clear that it's all on us to decide what our other goals are for the rest of our lives and the easiest options aren't usually as pure and idealistic as intellectual inquiry. The more complicated and thoughtful we are about setting our goals, the harder it is to decide what they are. I know there's a recipe for being an adult that includes educational degrees, a steady job, marriage, children and material stuff that most people follow because they accept the path, because they are *supposed*

to, but if I decide to make all my goals things that I accomplish because I *want to*, it might be more challenging.

I realize that in our so-

ciety, finishing school successfully is one of the generic things one is supposed to do, but because I enjoyed school and actually like learning, the realization that most people eventually treat the accomplishment as a token event is disheartening. All the things I learned will continue to mean a lot to me while they mean very little in the job market. School may be a quasi-meritocracy, but the rest of the world is not. By actually being interested in learning for its own sake, I was setting myself up for disappointment. If I was going school to learn things as an end in itself then I was doomed to be in a predicament from the beginning, but, for 20 years of my life, that is what I was told was valuable and would be rewarded in the end, and I decided to believe. I felt good that I was doing the right thing since I liked doing it anyway.

The sense of importance of going through school is strong enough that people go into debt for it, overwork themselves and put other things in their lives on hold. It doesn't seem to matter whether or not there's anything tangible or financial to gain from all the expense and effort. For some people, the distinction of being educated alone must be worth the cost, but what differentiates one person's experience of going through college from another's? The quality and meaning and benefit of the experience are not testable. In the end, most people sum it all up in one line on their resume.

**I'm not sure what I was thinking but the goals and certificates of education weren't nearly enough to prepare me for the obstacles ahead. No one really warned me of the risks of finishing school and trying to work doing something outside of the two suggested options. No one stressed the absolute importance of personal connections.**



And regardless of all the school in the world or none, there are some people who seem to always be successful. School has nothing to do with it. It's part of their personality, and that cannot be taught and tested. School doesn't have much to do with how well we will do our jobs or what kinds of accomplishments we will make later. Creativity, charisma and determination aren't taught in school and really can't be. Luck and family or other social connections can't be taught and ensured through a classroom course. And in the end, the kids who partied their way through school often are more "successful" in meeting their goals and they make more money because they have less complicated expectations, fewer ethical dilemmas about work and a network of social connections with people like themselves.

By idealistically expecting that I should be able to do interesting work and live an interesting life, am I expecting far more than what this society and economy is willing to hand to me? I don't get much of anything just for succeeding in school if I reject the conventional options and conventional occupations. If I don't stick around my parents and use their stockpile of connections, I don't benefit from their social positions or reputations. There aren't a lot of jobs outside of academia for doing things that are barely economically profitable. If I study liberal arts and then don't join a corporation, become a teacher or get a higher degree, the course is definitely not set for me. Even those options aren't guaranteed to work in an economic downturn. There are far more jobs that pay well that require technical schooling. Many jobs that now require or prefer college degrees are cleaner, though not more interesting or better paid, than learned trades. Didn't I already know that but ignore it until it actually came true?

While picking out a GRE test prep book at the library, unambitiously re-considering graduate school, I happened upon a book called *The Case Against College*, by Caroline Bird. It was published in 1975, two years before I was even born, and many of its arguments corroborated my current concerns. In over a generation, nothing has changed. I looked through it, eagerly seeking insights on why our society still believes that college is a requirement and guarantee of success. I was depressed to find its arguments so relevant to the present.

A lot of people like myself are struggling to understand the right path to take to do what they really want, what is ethically acceptable, and support themselves doing it. No one explains how much harder we have to work to get there than we ever thought. The economy doesn't have a lot of ethical, well-compensated and glamorous jobs that college teaches us to want. Many of us see how much more complicated our definition of success is and don't have the energy to go for it. We are confused and frustrated by social definitions of class, achievement and success, and flounder when we try to redefine them. I have failed to follow an increasingly important rule of our modern economy by refusing to move geographically just to find a relevant job. I have failed to use my parents' connections. I have failed to follow the conventional rules to achieve success in the job market, but it wasn't a requirement of my degrees. It annoys me that the day I left school, the rules for achievement changed. I wasn't as willing to follow the new rules. I consciously chose to avoid the easy path to success. By conventional definitions, I really didn't want to be successful. I think that's why, so far, I haven't won. ★

## *Dance of Days: two decades of punk in the nation's capitol*

by Mark Andersen and Mark Jenkins

Soft Skull Press, 411 pp., \$20

Unlike its London punk-predecessors who came from working class neighborhoods where unemployment was high and the future uncertain, Washington, DC punk was born in the quiet, affluent neighborhoods of Glover Park and Georgetown—a bourgeois haven. Punk's spirited music, unkempt appearance, and ready-to-fight attitude challenged the pervasive boredom and unreality felt by urban youth in the middle class.

Punk is an assault on passivity and the dismal reality Ivan Chtcheglov wrote about in *Formulary for a New Urbanism*, "Presented with the alternative of love or a garbage disposal unit, young people of all countries have chosen the garbage disposal unit." The punk challenge is based on a DIY (Do it Yourself) ethic. You don't have to be a talented musician, you don't have to have the best equipment, you don't have to be commercially viable; all that is required is that you act and, more importantly, that you act for your own reasons. Early DC punk band Teen Idles exemplified this ethic in their song "Get Up and Go":

You keep talking about talent,  
Talent? What do you know?  
Instead of studying theory  
We're gonna get up and go...

Mark Andersen, with help from Mark Jenkins who mostly rewrote the manuscript, chronicles the rise and fall, and the rise and fall again and again, of the DC punk scene in *Dance of Days: two decades of punk in the nation's capitol*. Andersen covers the punk scene, later known as hardCore, from 1975 to 1995.

*Dance of Days* begins with an emotional preface that recounts Andersen's transformation from an alienated Midwest youth to punk. The opening chapters are filled with vivid description from a sympathetic writer, recounting the exploits of Overkill and the Slickee Boys and Georgetown University's political and punk haven WGBT radio station.

We soon meet the charismatic leaders of a youth rebellion, a bright but directionless Paul Hudson, later Bad Brain's HR; a longhaired skateboarder Ian Macaye, currently Fugazi's front man; and a hyperactive bomb maker Henry Garfield, now Henry Rollins. Andersen documents their transformation into full-fledged punks as well as the transformation of the scene into a political community. hardCore veteran Guy Picciotto remarked, "Anytime a group of kids gets together outside adult authority, it's political."

Everything went well as the youth rebellion unfolded. With each door closed to them, they forced another one open. However, after the first chapters a pattern emerges. The bands break apart and reassemble countless times, Teen Idles break apart and form Minor Threat, Minor Threat break apart and form Embrace, etc. What began with energy and enthusiasm becomes a ritual and the energy that once defined hardCore is sapped. Andersen

makes no significant attempt to analyze this blatant dysfunction; instead he repeats each account as if it was the first time, with a few added remarks.

The next wave of punks to emerge is more musically inclined and more politically explicit. This second wave is heralded by punk-associate Amy Pickering in hastily written notes sent to friends anonymously, "Be on your toes. This is...REVOLUTION SUMMER." Perhaps hardCore's version of Mao's Cultural Revolution—without the violence.

By Revolution Summer, 1985, the homophobia, racism, and sexism within the scene had become all too obvious. New bands such as Rites of Spring, Beefeater, and Grey Matter broke from the macho-dancing and skinhead violence associated with earlier shows and infused the scene with much needed direction. At the same time, Positive Force was formed, a pro-hardCore political activist group. A feminist movement also erupted within the scene, Riot Grrrl, with Bikini Kill at the head.

Summer passed and, once again, new bands blurred with the old. The far left Nation of Ulysses announced the beginning of the end, "...the establishment viewing its own mortality." The Nation of Ulysses' prophecy rings empty, as punk ascended within the mainstream.

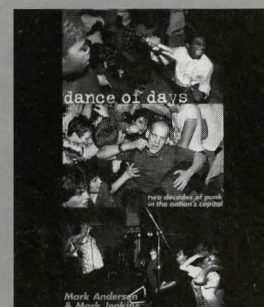
Nirvana reached unprecedented commercial success with DC native David Grohl as drummer. Ideological punks are mortified as punk-as-commodity became profitable and mainstream youth began to emulate punk fashion, something completely antithetical to the DIY ethic. With few exceptions, punk succumbed to the very culture it sought to negate by becoming another cheap spectacle.

With all the promises of hardCore it seems a shame that what began well ends with a few good ideas and vague sentiments. Andersen ends *Dance of Days* the same way. A more critical-historical account would help to unravel the knots that hardCore tied itself in, a book more akin to Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*.

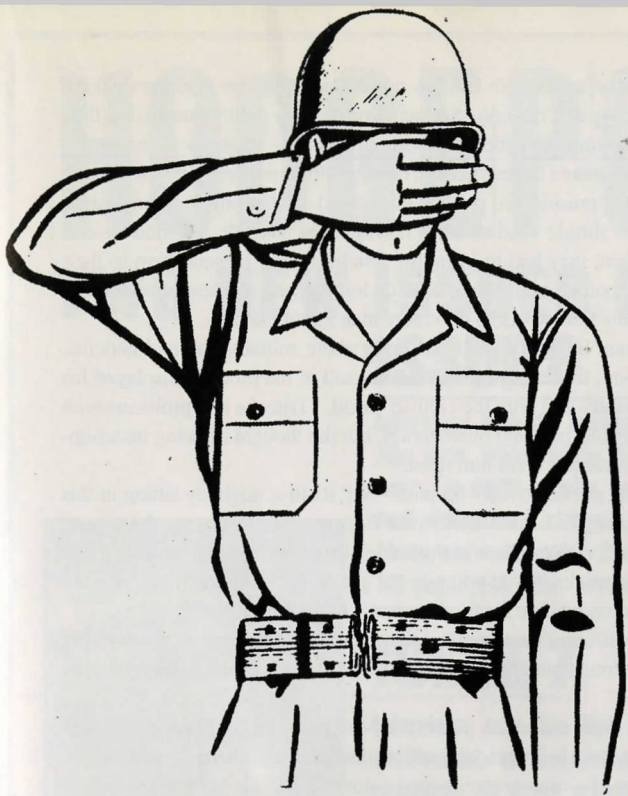
Overall, *Dance of Days* is a tremendously executed chronicle of an exciting music scene that stretched beyond music. Andersen does well to note the many personal transformations that resulted from hardCore, even his own.

The neighborhoods where punk sprouted forth are still sleepy, but punk hasn't flat-lined yet (although it's ailing at best). Those with a view toward going beyond the limitations hardCore met should heed the advice of the two imposing letters in the middle of hardCore, which stand for the District of Columbia but could also stand for the musical notations Da Capo: to begin again from the beginning.

-DMYankowski

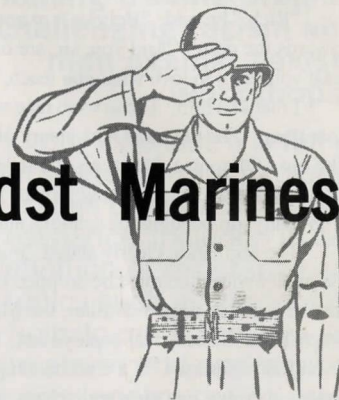






# A Civilian Amidst Marines

by Rich Ristow



"Sir," he said. "I object. Can't you assign us a topic for the paper? If you haven't noticed, we're Marines, and we're not supposed to think." A smile stretched across his face, and he stared me straight in the eyes.

That smile seemed infectious. One by one, each my students grinned, as if privy to some inside joke, and once it'd gone around the room, ten men and women dressed in dog tags, combat boots, and camouflaged fatigues waited from my response. I leaned on my podium and smirked back at them.

"And I thought Marines were tough?" I said, trying to stop from bursting with laughter. "After enduring boot camp and long deployments, you can't do something as simple as pick a topic for a paper? Come on."

The student still stared into my eyes, smiling. "Since you put it that way," he said, "I suppose I could write about my grandmother's cooking. Or I could write about life in rural Georgia. Maybe both?"

"You understand," I said. "I don't assign topics for good reasons. First, you may hate what I'd require. Second... let me put it this way. Pretend you teach English. Would you really want to read ten papers on the same theme? So like I've said many times before, no assigned subject matter. It's your responsibility to know what you find interesting."

For my part, the sentiment rings true. I believe all my students have the capacity to think for themselves, and I hate reading papers dealing with the same subject matter. Still, few of my Marines want their education through an IV drip. I learned quickly: schooling a member of the Marine Corp is no different than teaching traditional students. Some want to learn, some want the career advancement an education can provide, and some sit at their desks and want to be elsewhere. On different days, a person can be any of the aforementioned three, but for members of the armed services, a stereotype exists: Marines are big, tough troglodytes who can't spell a word, enunciate a complete sentence, or have an original thought. Professional colleagues seem to have thought so.

Once, at a community college in a different county, I'd completed classes for the day and walked through the parking lot. I'd hoped to go home. But in the parking lot, I bumped into my boss, the man who hired me and read my evaluations. We chatted for awhile on subjects as diverse as surfing, flesh eating plants, and education.

"I respect you," he said.

"Why?"

"You deal with the Marine Corps. It must be a testament to your patience."

"No more than dealing with a smart ass, a sleeper, and somebody motivated."

From there, the conversation meandered its way to other topics like "How can I get a full time job here?" to "I swear Happy China Gardens gave me food poisoning." In the back of my consciousness, the jab at the Marine Corps unsettled me, but during my career so far, I have met service members who meet and surpass the stereotype.

Once, my father woke me from a dream about someone on the phone. He said the guy demanded to speak to me, even though I was sleeping, so I swung my feet out of bed, yawned, and rubbed my eyes. Lumbering down the stairs, I stopped by the fridge, grabbed a Diet Coke, and took the call in the kitchen.

"Buddy," he said. "This is Gunnery Sargent Brockner, and I have a situation.

Brockner? The name seemed as familiar as an unknown stranger. "How can I assist?"

"You see, pal. I have to miss the first day of your British Lit class. Corp Business. I could tell, but I'd have to have to kill you." He cackled so loud, I pulled the receiver away for my ear.

"Mr. Brockner." I waited for the laughter to end. "Mr. Brockner. The first day of class is a syllabus reading. Just read Thomas De Quincey for Thursday."

As it turned out, starting out the summer term with *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* was a mistake. From that moment onwards, Mel Brockner accused every writer, from John Keats to Seamus Heaney, of being a "dope head."

Until the end of the term, I had the feeling Mel Brockner never respected me. He liked to argue about the most inane things. On one occasion, he accused William Blake of atheism. Ted Hughes? Justified in dumping Sylvia Plath because "that fem-a-nazi wasn't right in the head." Mary Wollstonecraft? After reading *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, a look of abject horror swelled over his face. Still, I never stifled his opinion, but everybody else in class pounced every time he spoke. Out of the months he sat through my course, the midterm exam provided the largest controversy — Mel confronted me over the following exam question:

In poetry, *meter* is:

- a) a unit of length
- b) the pattern of end rhymes
- c) a system of stressed and unstressed syllables
- d) none of the above



For ten minutes, Mel Brockner lectured about the metric system of weights and measurements. I tried everything in response. On the dry-erase board, I dissected lines from Shakespeare, showing iambic pentameter through scansion, but in the end, I told him to look at his lecture notes. Brockner flipped through his legal pad, back to the day in question, and sighed. He read aloud, "Meter: A system of stressed and unstressed syllables."

On the last day of the semester, after he'd completed his final and turned it in, he squeezed my hand in a death-grip handshake and grinned. Ignoring the pain, I tried to smile back.

"Rich," he said. "Believe it or not, I really liked this class." He edged towards the door. "And you, sir, are one of the best teachers I've had. At least you seem to love what you teach."

I thanked him. Those were nice words, even though I was shocked to hear them. For the most part, many of the Marines I've taught seemed to like me. Of course, I may be due for a rude awakening, but I believe my Corp students recognize how lenient I can be — I've personally worked with many on bending the school's attendance policy.

The regulation clearly stated: miss more than a week and a half, and the pupil in question must be dropped from the roll. Yet, in order to prepare for the possible armed conflict, the Marines routinely go into the field or onto a boat. Besides real deployment, Marines are either on base, on leave, or on field exercises. If a commanding officer says, "Stay late at work," a service member has no wiggle room. As such, duty can get in the way of one's education. What am I supposed to do? Fail them for following orders? Other instructors strike harder line, telling their student's "tough." I've always maintained a singular attitude: take the tests, turn in the papers, and we can find mutual ground.

However, my willingness to accommodate hasn't always met with keen results. Recently, I passed out my first F. The student in question deserved an A; he never, however, turned in his final project. Instead of flunking him on the spot, I filled out the forms for an "incomplete" on his report card. Then, over the course of three months, I had the Base Education Center call him, and the secretary never could establish contact. As the deadline for grade adjustments drew near, he finally phoned.

"But I turned in my paper," he said.

"I waited in the office well after closing time. You never showed."

"I slipped it under the door."

"It never appeared in my mail box."

He sighed over the phone, "It's unfair. Just not right. I did the work, and I'm going to be punished for a secretary's mistake?"

"Did you save it on a disk?"

"Yes."

"Then print out another copy. I teach an American Lit class tomorrow night at 5:15 PM. Show up and hand it to me in person."

"Ok," he said. "I'll be there . . . and thanks for your consideration."

He never showed up, and he never contacted me again. The due date slipped by like a forgotten dental appointment. Remorse? Pity? I had none, as I offered everyone chances to retest and revise papers for higher grades. My leniency comes with responsibility. After months of extra time, he couldn't return phone calls or at least hand the paper to me?

Whether or not people used the advantages offered, I've arrived at a single premise. Education is always a two way process. The student, whatever their motivation may be, comes to class to learn — whether they know it or not. Still, many forget that teaching is a learning process for the instructor. Many occasions tested my resolve.

A few terms ago, I developed lessons on fallacies of argumentation for my composition classes. The 2000 election went wheezing by without a winner, and I thought politics provided fodder for my class. I took snippets off of Rush Limbaugh's website and photocopied several syndicated columns to illustrate "Begging the Question," "Sweeping Generalization," and other lapses of logic. The debate proved fierce, and many students demonstrated the conservative ideals typical in the Department of Defense. As the days passed, I heard them repeat the debating errors I've heard on radio talk shows. In the end, I never changed their politics — my job is not indoctrina-

tion because as an English teacher, my mission is foster creative thinking through writing and reading. So their world views didn't change, but they began articulating their thoughts without resorting to shaky premises. I have an assignment I believe helped; however, the controversy it raised shook me more than presidential politics ever could. I administered an assignment. It was simple: read as much newsprint as possible, and find a worst writing. Then, they had to bring the articles in and present them to their classmates, pointing out every lapse on logic, every element of poor composition. This fleshed out to into more than I anticipated.

One man brought in a op-ed essay about military pay and benefits. Point by point, he destroyed the column, and in the process, displayed his complete displeasure with the civilian world. True, he had problems with service hospitals, pay, and bureaucracy, but the thought of being under-appreciated appeared to hurt him most.

"I could get deployed," he said. "Mr. Ristow, anybody sitting in this classroom could be sent to Kosovo or Bosnia. There's always the chance we'll have to forfeit our lives in the name of somebody else's freedom." He stared at his article. "And what do we get for it? Slaves wages, and the chance to go on welfare for food stamps. It just isn't right."

The topic upset the rest of the class. But I tried to forge on, recognizing that I had a tough situation. The next article just seemed to highlight the gloom.

At the time, class took place on a Marine Corps Air Station. Most of my students, with a few exceptions, worked on helicopters, freight planes, and vehicles of a more experimental nature — the Air Station provided a home for several Osprey airplanes. It had a tilt rotor system, which means the propeller engines could move from a forward to an upright position. Thus, it could take off like a plane, but it could hover and land like a helicopter. The history of this hardware speaks of controversy and crashes.

One of my students brought in clippings from the Marine Corps Times which took a very positive view of the Osprey — something which my student wholly disagreed with. As he parsed the opinion apart, he often returned to one central thesis.

"I work on this everyday. There are problems, tons of them. But you know what? Nobody gives a rat's ass about the mechanic's point of view. Until they do, Ospreys will continue to fall from the sky."

Two days later, I parked my truck outside the education center, lit a cigarette, and graded essays. At the time, I listened to the news, and most of it didn't interest me — town hall politics. Then, a newsbreak.

"Moments ago, an Osprey crashed outside of town. A fire rages with no survivors."

The cigarette fell from my mouth, onto my leg, where it burned a hole in my trousers. Picking the butt up, flicked it out the window, and when I stroked the ashes off my pants, I felt spooked. The timing between this and my student's prophesy was uncanny. I got out of my truck, grabbed my satchel, and walked into the education office. The secretary looked overcome with grief. I peered into my mailbox, noticing a mass of post-it notes, and as I flipped through them, the secretary wiped a tear from eye, and looked at me.

"Don't expect your class to show up. Most have to deal with crash in some official capacity."

Only two people attended.

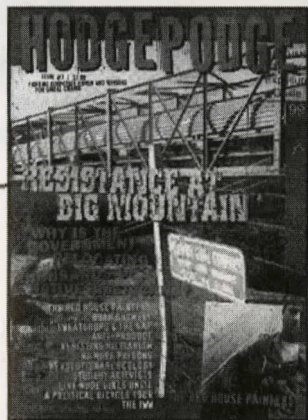
Besides tragedy, unruly students, and other things, I've enjoyed my time with my Marines. The experience has been invaluable, and as time stretches into the future, I hope to continue my contact with service members. It has nothing to do with patriotism, high regard for the Marine Corps, or receiving a paycheck. It's something very similar to teaching traditional students — I like the contact, meeting new personalities, seeing the unexpected. Every time I drive through the main gate, I pass the armed sentries completely unaware of what awaits me in the classroom. ★



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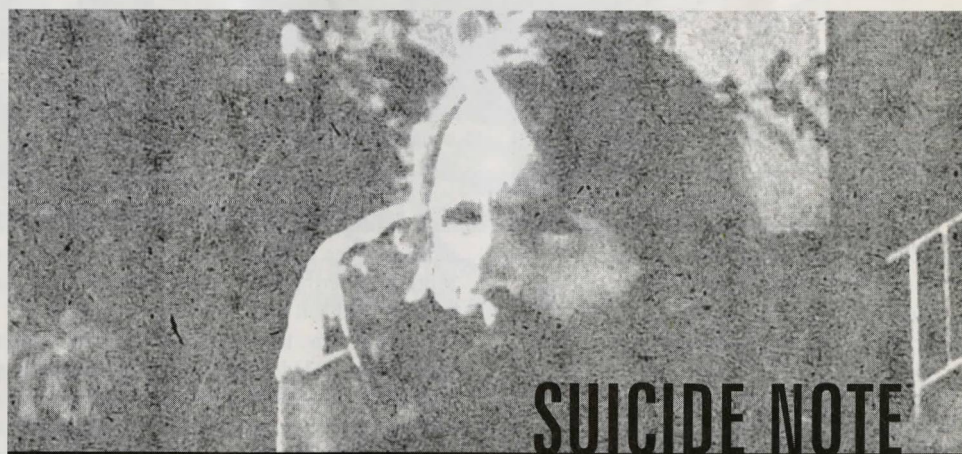
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***Ready? O-KAY!***

# **Stomp.**

Way back in 1997, something began stirring inside many young women (and some men) involved in political rallies and protest movements all over the world. They found their voice: a new, fresh and inspiring way to take radical issues and force people to listen. To be honest, this form of expression is one of the last things I ever expected to interview a group for: cheerleading. But in the last few years, a tide of radical cheerleaders has swept the nation, drawing the corporate media's selective eye when banners and signs no longer did the trick.

In Minneapolis, the Radical Cheerleaders first hit the streets on October 22 of 1998, at a rally against police brutality. Since then, they have been arguably the most popular features of local protests, cheering at everything from the local gay Pride parade to the picket lines of HERE Local 17 (the hotel and restaurant employee union).

Right now, there are about 12 cheerleaders on the squad, give or take a few drifters. Six cheerleaders (Madeleine, Sin, Emily, Angie, Scogin and Amanda) and I gathered in early June for a picnic in Minneapolis' Powderhorn Park, and we contentedly lounged in the sun, talking about subversion of distorted stereotypes, the mainstream media's superficial and dismissive coverage of rallies and the need for creativity in modern protesting.

*For the Minneapolis branch, what was the first event for the Radical Cheerleaders?*

Angie- It was [a rally against] police brutality— October 22 of 1998.

Sin- Wow, we actually have a birthday! I didn't realize that until just now.

Emily- It's hard when you are born in a lab.

Sin- We come from a test tube, you know.

Emily- But the radical cheerleading squad that was active then went into somewhat of a dormancy, I think. Is that fair to say?

Sin- We mostly just did Police Brutality (October 22) and then June 18, right, before we were in our present formation. We were much more, like, freestyle. No uniforms, various color pom-poms, limited repertoire.



# Smash the State!



## an interview with Minneapolis Radical Cheerleaders

by Amanda Luker  
photos by Seth Johnson

Madeleine- Was it last May Day that our (uniformity) emerged?

Emily- We had a dozen cheerleaders for 2000's May Day. Then we did the street May Day downtown and the In the Heart of the Beast Mayday (parade), Pride, ISAG (International Society of Animal Genetics) conference. And the ISAG conference was the big Radical Cheerleader arrest day.

*Radical Cheerleaders got arrested at the ISAG conference?*

Emily- Two of us were arrested by the evening of that day. We had gone to the protest, we cheered at the protest, done medic work, gone home, changed clothes, ate food, hung out, went out and never came home...because we were arrested on the street in south Minneapolis, the corner of 16th Avenue and 22nd Street.

*That's not even close to where the protests were!*

Emily- No, not at all. We weren't in uniform either, but I think there has gotten to be a certain level of recognition on the part of the Minneapolis Police Department of who at least some of us are. And I don't know if they like us or

not!

*Can you talk about the good impressions and bad impressions that people have had of you? I know you've gotten tons of positive responses for what you are doing, and a lot of people are saying "Right on!" but what about negative response-from the police or from spectators?*  
Emily- I think there is a certain level at which people respond to seeing ladies in mini skirts. That sort of response is disrupted when we open our mouths, which is really fun and exciting. People will think about us in a particular way in their initial impression and get uncomfortable after we start to do our thing.

Sin- I've never, except with some of the cops, I've never encountered a particularly negative response that I can think of right now, but I'm sure there are a lot of people who aren't really

into what we're doing. But we're probably not important enough to them where they would feel like they had to tell us, like "I think you're really stupid," or something. Not everyone's going to like us; that's fine. Most people who feel motivated to communicate a response to us have been positive.

Scogin- They request us to do cheers now.

*So they know enough of your cheers to say "I love this one, I want to hear that one?"*

Amanda- Sometimes. Sometimes they want us to do a cheer no matter what it is. They've seen us before but they don't recognize the cheers. Depends on the person.

Sin- We've got a couple sing-a-longs, too.  
*What are some of your more "successful" cheers?*

Amanda- "Shoot the Rapist"

Emily- Cheers about police brutality also get a pretty positive response. We have a number of those.



Amanda- "Fat is Fabulous" is one people like.

Sin- "Stomp, Smash the State" is pretty standard of all the squads, so, people, even if they travel, will know that one. "I don't know but I've been told..."

Angie- Actually last year at May Day we had this woman who was standing by Lake and Bloomington and she started yelling that beginning part to us-"I don't know but I've been told!" We were like, "Yeah!"

Emily- We're always on the lookout for new cheers. We'll make up cheers, like anti-corporate Pride cheers for the Pride parade or cheers about genetic engineering. We made up a couple of those for the ISAG conference.

*You all don't have any particular leadership, so how are decisions made as a group? Are they collectively made? And how do you come up with new cheers? Are you all good enough friends where you can sit down and hash it all out?*

All- Yeah.

Emily- That's probably one of the things we're best at. Our practices are hanging out intensive. I think that makes us stronger as a group because if we are in a street protest, for example, we act as an affinity group with each other. Knowing each other really well makes for a strong connection among us--in situations like that or in situations like building a cheer.

*And how do you decide what events you are going to participate in? Do you ever hesitate on an event?*

Sin- We pretty much just talk about all the events on a case by case basis. Sometimes it's unanimous and everyone's really psyched and sometimes we'll sit down and discuss the pros and cons of it and what each event means to each of us and as a group.

Emily- We did an event recently that was not a sliding scale. They charged to get in and it was pretty expensive. One of the things we discussed with each other beforehand in committing to do something like that, which some of us have misgivings about, is that we were going to do as many cheers [for free] outside as we did inside.

Sin- The selection of what cheers we do at an event is pretty important to us; we definitely put thought into that. For example, an event like that is an opportunity for us to get the word out to people who aren't at demonstrations or out on the streets. We try to do cheers that will challenge people's perceptions of reality or try to bring home things for them that they wouldn't. We try to put certain

ideas into the space where those ideas don't usually enter.

*Which cheers do you think do that pretty well?*

Amanda- "Jump Back." It's "Jump back/Take a look at your life/Does your consumption/Cause strife?"

[Everyone joins in]

Jump Back  
Take a look at your life  
Does your consumption  
Cause strife?

How we gonna stop the oppressor man?  
Buy nothing  
Take a stand

How we gonna stop the oppressor man?  
Buy nothing  
Take a stand

Multinational corporations  
Exploiting third world nations  
Bloody handprints on those clothes  
Forced labor by 12-year-olds

Sweatshop clothes  
On the rack  
If you bought them  
Take them back

Jump Back  
Take a look at your life  
Does your consumption  
Cause strife?

Jump back  
Take a look at your life  
Does your consumption  
Cause strife?

Amanda- Yeah, that's a good one for that particular crowd.

Emily- And we've got a cheer about Starbucks, like an anti-Starbucks coffee cheer that is kind of a fun one. At that particular event we did another one that starts out: "We're sexy/we're cute/we're radical to boot." And then it transitions into "Two, Four, Six, Eight/Fuck the police state!" And it was one of the first cheers we did, and people were like, "They ARE sexy, they ARE cute...oh my goodness, what are they saying?"

Angie- Their faces were like "Huh?"

Emily- And I think that crowd and other crowds are a little bit shocked by "Shoot the Rapist," which we also did.

Sin- Everyone's used to seeing us a demos and marches, but you enter into that space where it is supposed to be all fun and

entertainment...and then there's us, and they're like, "What the hell is that?" They don't know what to think at first, you know?

*To change the subject, what did you all think of cheerleaders when you were in high school? Did you ever think that you would be cheerleaders or were any of you cheerleaders in high school?*

Scogin- Hey, I'm still in high school and I'm a cheerleader!

Amanda- I was still in high school when I became a [radical] cheerleader. I don't think I had any cheerleaders at my high school.

Emily- I was not a cheerleader in high school.

Angie- I was not particularly fond of cheerleaders during in high school.

Sin- Yeah, I was about as far as you could go away from cheerleaders in high school.

Emily- And you, over there, who doesn't talk. She was a cheerleader!

Madeleine -Not in high school, though. It was for my church.

Emily- "Goooo God!"... Every now and then we'll run into people who were actual cheerleaders and we'll get them to teach us moves. We do a pretty good job coming up with stuff on our own, but people who are trained more in the formal sense as cheerleaders do have certain advantages.

Sin- This woman out in Olympia that Angie and I met was a cheerleader and she taught us how to do pyramids.

Emily- We're very much into knowledge sharing.

Madeleine- We've discussed going to high schools while they're having cheerleading practice to recruit girls who didn't make the team!

*I also wanted to talk about subversion of the cheerleader stereotype...like do you think you all are doing a lot to subvert feminine stereotypes of how "rah-rah" girls should be?*

Madeleine- Something I think about is that in traditional cheerleading, you're cheerleading for someone else; you are cheering for the boys. We're cheerleading...for ourselves, and for everyone. It's a nice change.

*And you do have a boy on the team!*

Scogin- Yeah! I'm trying to take down the male stereotypes. And I don't just dress in skirts for cheerleading. I do it all the time.

*Do you guys have any good stories from the front lines?*

Angie- "Stop in the name of love!"



... we did another one that starts out: "We're sexy/we're cute/we're radical to boot." And then it transitions into "Two, Four, Six, Eight/Fuck the police state!" And it was one of the first cheers we did, and people were like, "They ARE sexy, they ARE cute...oh my goodness, what are they saying?"

Sin- Oh yeah, that was good! That one was during the ISAG conference. There was a bunch of us taking up the rear of the ISAG march and there was a blockade of riot cops coming at us, so we turned to them and said:

Everyone: "Stop in the name of love/Before you break my skull/Think it o-o-ver!"

Angie- And interestingly enough, that little clip was in a video they showed during one of the ISAG trials that I was recently testifying at. And I was sitting in the courtroom, watching this videotape, and we're on there, singing that song, and...we sounded good! We sounded really good! But I was like, "Oh my god!"

Emily- My favorite cheerleading story, or at least one of them...it's actually kind of an unfortunate story because it was for May Day 2000 and it was when crowd had gotten to Loring Park and the police had stepped back to being across the street from the crowd. So, the cheerleading squad stepped out to the curb on the Loring Park side of the street and we all did our "Fuck the police/They're fucking you/Can't you see what's going/Down with the cops." We did that cheer, with nine or 12 of us all standing there on the curb. All the cops across the street, for whom we were doing this cheer, moved the line forward again, so that the police line, instead of being across the street, was nose to nose with us. We were doing this cheer nose to nose...they were on the gutter and we were on the curb. So, we were nose to nose with all the visors of the riot-gearred cops.

Then the crowd, who had been scattered a little bit in the park, assembled right behind us. So we had protesters here (motioning in back) and cops here (motioning in front) and we were like "...fucking you/Can't you see what's going/Down with the cops?" and we just kept going. I think we did a couple more cheers, too. And then we just disappeared. It was really cool because it wasn't organized at all. Unfortunately, in a way, we helped escalate the situation, which was not our intention, but it ended up being...euphoric. Luckily the situation didn't continue to escalate...we disappeared and that calmed things down. But it was a certain feeling.

At the same time, being a performance group and looking the way we did was to our advantage. That was the first time the cheerleaders had busted out like that, and I think the police were still giving us the benefit of the doubt. We were performing; were they going

t o  
interrupt  
a perform-  
ance of people  
in miniskirts? I think  
there was some part of them  
that hesitated with us, and that  
helped to keep us safe. I'm not sure  
they have that same hesitation now, hav-  
ing been to a lot of events where we were  
present. They love to come to events we do...  
for some reason! They totally like us!

*They're your biggest fans!*

Emily- Yeah! But it was pretty exciting to see the power of performance in unexpected ways-guerilla performance, in a way. Nobody knows when we're going to show up. Like in any guerilla performance, you don't know when you're going to see them or what they'll do when they get there. And hopefully that changes things, or helps people to think, gets people excited or articulates something in a fun, smart sort of way.

*Do you think you all have helped bring some issues to the fore that other people may not have heard about before?*

Amanda- In some situations, like when we were at May Day, we did the Starbucks cheer, and people asked what we were talking about. I don't think it necessarily makes people go home and quit their jobs, but it certainly can throw people off and make them think along different lines. I don't know if it happens all the time, but I've seen people say, "What are you guys talking about?" and that's always a positive thing.

Madeleine- Also, though I think it's died down a little bit. For a while last year the corporate news media was getting a big kick out of us. So, going to smaller demos, we would help bring more cameras out.

*In another way, do you ever worry that you all are creating a spectacle where people are seeing you but not getting it? Perhaps that you are*





taking away from the issues?

Emily- Sometimes I worry that the cameras might watch us. While we are messengers of the message of the day, as well as our own political agendas, it is possible that messages could be lost by the mainstream media's fascination with this weird thing that is "Radical Cheerleaders." For example, for May Day 2001, the one photo that the



Star Tribune ran was of the Radical Cheerleaders, and there was no article about what people were talking about that day. It was condescending, too. It was a picture on the last page on the inside of the Metro section with a really condescending caption, like how "the Radical Cheerleaders tried to motivate the crowd on May Day," how Communists were calling for a shorter workweek, and something about amnesty for illegal aliens. It was totally dismissive. That was frustrating, but I don't internalize that as our fault for catching the media's eye, because it's the corporate media's own agenda that creates the problem. It was frustrating as all corporate media is.

Scogin- They're going to distort whatever message there is anyway. It's more an issue of getting the people that are out on the street excited.

Madeleine- They're going to do that anyway, whether it's a picture of us or a picture of someone in a ski mask.

*I know all of you are pretty political outside of cheerleading. Maybe you could go around and talk about the things that have politicized you and gotten you to the point where you could become so vocal about politics.*

Amanda- School. Punk rock.

Scogin- My dad took me to a protest against dumping waste on Prairie Island when I was in grade school, and my school took me too. Both my dad and my school were taking me to these protests, so I've kind of been in it since then. I grew up in a family that was very supportive of this kind of stuff.

Sin- After the Department of Defense...

Scogin- Right! Yeah...I mean, aww shit. My adopted family, that is.

Amanda- A lot of things like school disempowered me, while other things empow-

ered me, like learning on my own and meeting other people. I traveled a lot, too, and got to see a lot of things that other people don't get to see. I did a lot with ARA (Anti-Racist Action) when I was younger, because that was one of the only things in Fargo [ND] for younger kids. I did a lot of learning about police repression with them, and we did demos, Copwatch

and other things like that. Copwatch, especially, made me see a lot of things I otherwise wouldn't have seen as a kid growing up in the town that I did...er, in the hollow center of the Earth. A lot of how you grow up really does it to you...it can make you into a cheerleader!

Emily- You don't HAVE to have been a Department of Defense project or spend time in the center of the Earth to become a Radical Cheerleader.

Amanda- You, too, can become a Radical Cheerleader!

Emily- I've been involved in a bunch of different things, but I think the most transformational was the Minnehaha Free State and the encampment to stop the reroute of Highway 55. That affected me in terms of seeing what people can accomplish if they get together, and what people can do when they care intensely about protecting something and each other, if they decide to realize those values in their lives. I learned a lot through that experience in particular. I was lucky enough to have radicalizing experiences before that and since, but that was a big one for me, and after that I did support at Big Mountain. Coming back to Minneapolis, I was wondering what the next big thing was, and I wasn't sure what it would be. I really WASN'T into the idea of being a Radical Cheerleader, and then started hanging out with these two (Sin and Angie) and decided to just give it a try for that May Day. I ended up really liking it, and have been really thankful since to be working with such a solid group of people.

Being a cheerleader has been a radicalizing experience in and of itself. I appreciate that Scogin is a part of our group, but it is especially gratifying that it's a group of solid women-not just solid, but smart, trustworthy, challenging, supportive-all of those things. These weren't things I got into cheerleading to gain, but found myself having, and thankful for

having, because in this scene, it's not something we all have easy access to. I think it is really important for radical women to be able to spend time with other radical women, and to work within those kinds of formats.

*What made you hesitate to join the group in the first place?*

Emily- I was never really cheerleader material. I'm not particularly well coordinated. I wasn't into the idea. I didn't think it was a good match. But now I'm as coordinated as I've ever been! I think becoming a Radical Cheerleader has helped me move past those issues, too.

Madeleine- Thank you Radical Cheerleaders! *How have all of you been changed by joining the Radical Cheerleaders? Has it changed you?*

Amanda- It helps me work in groups better, and I'm not very good at that. I can be good at it, but sometimes I'm really stubborn. It's always nice to have something that you can DO, that you can be a part of, no matter what it is.

Sin- It has helped me and probably some other people get over the fear of performing and putting yourself physically out there and in the spotlight. I think each of us have our own hang-ups, they are as individual as we are, but putting yourself up there...I've never been a performer in any way or put myself in that space, until now. I think that's really helpful.

Amanda- Using my chest voice instead of my head voice. That's one thing I've learned! How to be really loud.

*Do you ever have political disagreements, like how far you are willing to take it?*

Sin- I don't really see them as disagreements. No matter what happens, we are all really supportive of what people feel comfortable doing and that people have different needs to be taken into consideration. Some people have very legitimate reasons for not wanting to risk arrest, or different physical realities that have to be taken into consideration. Part of being in an affinity group and a good friend is talking about these things, and, in the street protests, following through on these.

Emily- Like taking turns holding each other's babies. We have two mamas on the squad (who aren't here) who have a 3-year-old and a 5-month-old, and so we work with stuff like that. Two of us are trained EMTs, and we do medic work, and go into protests, not necessarily connected in with formal medic squads but prepared on our own to do medic work. And it's not just abandoning the rest of the squad. At ISAG last year, I ended up transitioning into medic mode when the shit hit the fan in Loring Park, and they knew that's what I needed to do. And it wasn't even spoken. I didn't say, "I have to do this now, I don't know what y'all are going to do, but I have to do this thing." I just started



doing medic work, and one of the other cheerleaders just came and said "I'm going to help you," and did medic work with me, getting a really quick training on stuff. And there were other cheerleaders around who were watching the crowd and watching the police, and said, while I was helping someone, "We need to go now. This isn't safe any more" to those injured and hurt, as well as to the medic crew. And we all got out together to a safe place to do more medic care. People were facilitating to make sure that people who needed care got to us and got the help that they needed. That's just beautiful.

One thing that we talked about in terms of coming to be a Radical Cheerleader was about stuff that we had done, but I'm wondering if it would be good to put out there what other things we do now, just to give us dimension as people. While being a cheerleader is part of my political agenda, I don't want us to be perceived as people for whom cheerleading is the beginning and end of it.

*Maybe you all could go around the circle.*

Emily- I do community gardening and sexual assault work-prevention and crisis hotline and education in high schools.

Scogin- Currently I'm working on organizing the Youth Liberation Conference, along with this cheerleader over here (Amanda). I also do forest defense work.

Amanda- I am working on the Youth Liberation Conference, too, and I work at Arise!

[Bookstore and Resource Center]. The conference takes up quite a bit of my time.

Sin- My job is giving low income folks with families free raised-bed vegetable gardens. I've done all kinds of stuff over the years. Right now the political work I do doesn't have much of an official structure, but I do work on projects going on in Mexico, like on an anarchist library in Mexico City, though not on a consistent basis, and various things around prison issues. I was also part of the Minnehaha Free State.

Angie- I just take it as it comes...a little bit of everything. My job is working on a free landscaping project in conjunction with Sin, but one thing I'm working on right now is trying to save our community garden from the hands of the neighborhood business association. Also I've done Chiapas solidarity work, immigrant rights work, anti-prison industrial complex organizing, the list goes on...

Madeleine- I just got back from doing support work in Mesa, Arizona. I also do community gardening and I'm on my way to be a camp counselor at Camp Warren. When I was in Minneapolis, I was working at the Hard Times Café.

Angie- Actually, Madeleine is an amazing organizer and non-violence trainer, and way too modest to mention any of these accomplishments!

*Any words of advice to people who might want to start their own group?*

Emily- We'd be more than happy to provide anyone with cheers. And I'd personally be thrilled to see other radical cheerleading squads, because we do a lot of stuff really well! But obviously we're not the be-all end-all of anything, so if there were other squads who have an affinity for this kind of thing, go with it.

Sin- Or even different things. It's about using creativity to subvert the bullshit they're laying down on us.

Amanda- An anarchist choir...

Sin- Or a diva squad, like going back to the Supremes.

*A barbershop quartet!*

Sin- Yeah, there are so many different things and so many different ways to do guerilla performance. I think it makes activism more vibrant and compelling. I think it's hard to reach people with the whole sign-carrying and marching thing, because people think "Oh, another protest. I don't know what they're bitching about," or "Oh, they're holding up traffic and I have to get home." It's not met with welcoming eyes. They don't care or want to know what you are protesting about. If they see things happening that are new and different and unexpected, they'll say, "What the hell is that?" and at least check out what it's about. ★

#### Strike Anywhere: Chorus of One CD

Red Leader Records/No Idea Records: 2000  
www.noidearecords.com

#### Strike Anywhere: Change Is A Sound CD

Jade Tree Records: 2001  
www.jadetree.com

Music becomes amazing when it speaks to us in a personal way, when there are elements in the music with which we can connect and identify. It's the same with all media, I suppose, that the best writers and performers strike a chord within their audience.

If I were ever in a band, I would want to sound like Strike Anywhere. What sets them apart is the over-arching positive outlook. Yes, this is a very political band. But while they are singing about ending oppression they are talking about rising up, individually and collectively. They talk about arming desire, being moved to action through love, about having hope and determination for the future. Perhaps most importantly, their lyrics advocate taking responsibility for your own life, about actively fighting what you oppose and celebrating life. This is a remarkable thing.

*They preach their disorder  
They make you accomplice  
And try to say there's nothing  
Left for you to do*

*But we can liberate each other  
Scream out against the void  
Communicate! Not separated  
We live to arm this joy*

This philosophy is reflected not just in the lyrics, but in the passion and enthusiasm that is their music. Strike Anywhere's sound is non-stop hardcore energy and appeals to fans of Fat Wreck Chords Southern California punk, bands like Dillinger 4, as well as to Ebullition-style hardcore. They fulfill the Richmond tradition of creating bands like Avail that cross musical boundaries all over the place. Strike Anywhere is made up of members of other bands like The Exploder, Count Me Out, and one of my favorite bands ever, Inquisition. Much of their sound is built on Inquisition, mainly because they've retained the same singer, Thomas, who's distinctive voice shouts and screams the vocals. Despite the punk and hardcore roots, Strike Anywhere's music is universal enough to appeal to anyone who likes rock and roll and who can relate to the politics and the passion.

Strike Anywhere's newest CD, "Change Is A Sound," builds on this sound and creates music that is more accessible and possibly more palatable to someone without the punk background, with more straightforward melody. While, as with most bands, their first recording remains the most classic and raw.

-Jen Angel





# Poor Murderers Are Meant For Prisons

Comments on Bob Kerrey and the endorsement  
of his involvement in Vietnam

by Richard Gilman Opalsky

## Who is a criminal?

*Imagine this: a prison warden leads us into a narrow hallway lined with cells along both sides. We have been elected to represent the community and will be determining the responsible course of action for the community and state with regard to each prisoner and his or her crimes. The first prisoner we meet admits to an accident resulting from drunk driving, but tells us that he never intended to hurt the people he killed. We have no reason to believe that he is a man of bad conscience and so we unlock his cell and set him free. Next, we meet a man who was involved in a shoot out related to a drug deal debacle where the prisoner accidentally shot and killed a young boy who was never an intended target. He very emotionally concedes that he has been in mental anguish over his mistake - tortured by the atrocity of his act every day since. He, having been in his cell for 35 years, explains to us that he considers what he did to be indefensible and he never expects to be set free for his crime. He tells us that he accepts full responsibility for this horrible murder - that he was operating on a lapse of judgment and has since turned to God. In fact, he has actually become something of a morality guru to his prison-mates. We verify this story with the warden and a few randomly selected prisoners, unlock his cell and set him free. The prisoners admit their accountability but are nonetheless released from confinement. We continue through the corridors, questioning and freeing in this manner.*

While I do not consider this story morally horrifying, I certainly do not need to tell you that it is fiction. Americans love to have prisoners and, as Americans, granting them freedom after they commit an act of murder, by accident or otherwise, is almost inconceivable. However, it would seem that confessed murderers are often maintained as heroes in wartime, and accountability becomes a vague and impenetrable question. While I do not at all condone the neglectful and hopeless way we treat our criminals, one thing is certain - we should not be treating war criminals any better. Even those of us who are critical of prisons are unlikely to renounce the application of any and all consequences or punitive measures for people who commit heinous, murderous crimes.

To make this picture even sharper, consider the following story: 32 years ago, a young man in charge of a group of armed men crept up on a small village. It was wartime in Vietnam and this young man, eager to be a soldier in service of his country, and of his government that told him he was fighting for freedom, led his men to fire their guns at targets in the village. Each and

## The Trial of Henry Kissinger

by Christopher Hitchens

Verso 2001, London and New York ISBN: 1-85984-631-19

It is not unusual, actually it's testament to the audacity of U.S. leaders, that on the day that I write this review, President George W. Bush is greeted in Brussels by hundreds of protesters carrying banners that read "George W. Bush: Wanted for crimes against the environment and humanity." Many Europeans are appalled at Bush's refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming and by the prolific number of capital punishments over which he's presided as Governor of Texas and two as U.S. President.

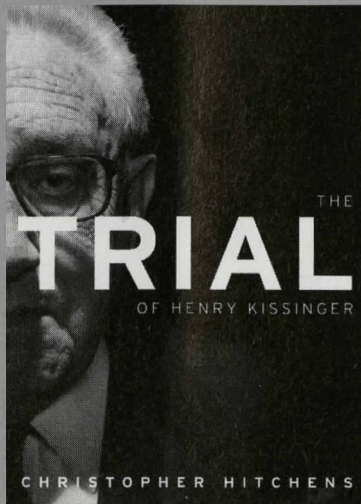
Also, today, June 13, 2001 marks the thirtieth anniversary of Daniel Ellsberg's unauthorized release of the 47-volume Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times*. The Papers document the more than 20-year history of U.S. covert operations in Indochina, specifically actions leading up to and during the Vietnam War. By extension, the deception of the American public. In an interview by Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now!*, Ellsberg commented, "Things haven't changed. U.S. officials often undertake secret foreign policies that are totally at odds with what they tell the public."

Christopher Hitchens wrote *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* as a "basis for legal prosecution (of Henry A. Kissinger) for war crimes, for crimes against humanity, and for offenses against common or customary or international law, including conspiracy to commit murder, kidnap, and torture." If Hitchens' evidence stands up in court remains to be seen. Nevertheless, he writes a passionate, provocative, frightening, and all too realistic peek underneath the cloaks of realpolitik. Disclosed in *Trial* are the real actions statesmen do not disclose to their fellow citizens, the types of policies that are totally at odds with the public. Hitchens

begins the book just as Kissinger walks onto the Indochina scene. Which happened to be the last year chronicled by the Pentagon Papers. Kissinger along with Richard Nixon and others allegedly sabotaged the Paris peace negotiations on Vietnam. They offered the South Vietnamese a clear-cut deal. They assured the South Vietnamese that they would get a better deal from the Republicans than from the Democrats, so asked them to wait until Nixon is in office and work with them on a proposal for peace. The only excuse for this act of treason is an alcoholic's thirst for power. So lustful that they were willing to risk the lives of thousands of American soldiers as well as Vietnamese soldiers and citizens.

As Kyle Conner writes in his poem 'Finesse Filibuster', "...the dream only works if we don't try to penetrate beyond it." One dream that many of us live is that our elected and appointed officials always work in our best interest. They do not deliberately commit mass killings of civilian populations in Indochina. Nor do they collude in mass murder and assassination in Bangladesh. Never do they suborn and plan the murder of a senior constitutional officer, General Schneider of Chile, for example, in a democratic nation with which the United States is not at war. Never plan to murder a head of state in the democratic nation of Cyprus. Never incite and enable genocide in East Timor. Or plan to kidnap and murder a journalist, Elias P. Demetracopoulos, living in Washington, D.C. On the contrary, perhaps they do. These are the list of charges that Hitchens brings against Kissinger. It is what he discovered when he penetrated beyond the dream.

Hitchens passionately deconstructs the notorious split personality of Kissinger. He is the respected veteran states-





# ... And The Wealthy Ones Shall Lead Us.

every one of these targets was an old man, a woman or a child - none of them were armed enemies dangerous to the intruding soldiers. It is not disputed that over a dozen of these innocent civilians were killed that night. The man appointed as the leader of this squadron was a Navy SEAL - a man determined to possess the most sensitive intellect for making decisions in the field. This man, the leader of this massacre, has opened a successful health club business, become the senator of Nebraska, ran for Democratic presidential candidacy and became the president of *New School University*. His name is Bob Kerrey.

There are three things that differentiate Bob Kerrey from the rest of America's imprisoned unfortunates - three things that are used to make his wartime mass murder more acceptable than the gruesome acts of so many others: 1. his murders took place in the context of war, a mechanism far bigger than Kerrey himself; 2. over 30 years have passed since his crime and he has since proved quite unthreatening as a free man; and 3. he is a wealthy, white, American politician. It is the intention of this article to show

how the context of war actually makes him more, not less, accountable and how it is inconsistent for the time and his behavior since the date of the crime to exonerate him. Such exoneration could only work for a wealthy, white, American politician.

## The Facts:

Kerrey, a Navy SEAL, was given command over a squadron of SEALs called Kerrey's Raiders. Throughout the month of May 2001, he has graced the daily pages of every kind of media for the murder of nearly two dozen unarmed, non-combatant Vietnamese elderly men, women and children. This horrific incident occurred in the village of Thanh Phong, a hamlet in what was then considered South Vietnam. According to military reports, the mission of Kerrey's Raiders was to assassinate, or capture and restrain, a village official thought to be in the area. As was the case with other Vietnam interventions, the projected enemy was communism and they were looking for a political organizer of some kind.

There are different versions of the story. Kerrey's version of the story is that the killings

were an error, that the squadron thought they were being fired upon and that they were shooting from about 100 yards away at people who they thought were Viet Cong. He claims that his team of Navy SEALs opened fire furiously in the village and that they only learned that they'd killed over a dozen people found piled together in a group after the shooting was over. Kerrey's interpretation is disputed by one of the men on his team. Gerhard Klann, who was the most experienced SEAL in Kerrey's Raiders, asserts that their team rounded up the victims and shot them down with full awareness of their non-combatant status. Klann's story finds the team in the position either of having to contain all of these civilians as hostages, hoping that they could prevent them from alerting the Viet Cong to their presence, or of killing them, leaving no witnesses to their slaughter of a family (an elderly man, a woman and three children) at a neighboring hooch (home). No threats to their safety could be risked. Klann says that the team fired knowingly at the civilians but they still were able to hear a baby crying after they stopped. The sound of the baby was coming from the huddled mass

men, often called on by the national media, for example, *Charlie Rose* or *Nightline* to help us, the dunderheaded masses, understand complex international politics and economics. He bills speaking fees of at least \$25,000 per appearance. Rick Perlstein of the *Village Voice* explains that Kissinger rose to these heights from humble beginnings, a Jewish Bavarian immigrant who earned his way through City College working in a brush factory, won advanced degrees from Harvard, then quickly became Nelson Rockefeller's chief foreign-affairs adviser by the age of 30. Yet, Hitchens bitingly debunks this popular myth. He depicts a despicable charlatan motivated by greed and a lust for power, whose crowning achievement has simply been to get everyone to call him Doctor. Hitchens reminds us that complex issues are not impossible to understand, and understand we must if we are to create a healthy peaceful world. If we don't grasp and address said issues we will continue to get more of the same—risky business, coups d'etat, and covert-ops all directed toward the monetary gain and the fulfillment of the melgomoniactal dreams of the few who wear blue suits and carry diplomatic pouches. In which, according to Hitchens, Kissinger delivered the gun that shot General Schneider.

Hitchens' news may be old to those who've been on the case all these years, like my ex-yippie drinking buddy who's been active on the Lower East Side for more than 40 years. Every time we're at the pub he provides me with loads of information on the atrocities perpetrated by the Alphabet Soup—CIA, NSA, FBI, BIA, etc. Yet, *Trial*, along with Hitchens' series of articles in *Harpers*, which culminated in the book, is a mindblower to those that have not been in-the-know. It enables those too young to remember Kissinger other than a giant-head rolled onto the evening news, or for those not hip to the Mr. Hyde side of the Doctor, to employ a battery of information from which to reevaluate not only the Doctor's actions but those of all leaders'. Despite *The Economist's* accusation that *Trial* is unconvincing (of course they would think that) I find Hitchens' evidence well substantiated and convincing. Even if it will not prove Kissinger's guilt beyond a shadow-of-a-doubt, it does raise enough questions to warrant a more thorough investigation.

Luckily for Hitchens and not for Kissinger, *Trial* has been released at a time when we as a nation and international community are reevaluating our violent past, holding leaders accountable for their actions, and questioning the policies

of the United States. General Augusto Pinochet, the bloody dictator who took control of Chile following the overthrow of Allende, recently was summoned by Spain to stand trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This certainly should have Kissinger worried. He clearly supported Pinochet's style of rule and control. If a trial does happen, the paper trail will certainly lead back to the Doctor. Also, Ex-Senator and current president of the New School, Bob Kerrey was questioned by *60 Minutes* about his leadership of a midnight raid in the Mekong Delta on February 25, 1969 where several innocent civilians were killed. The thread to investigate is not where Kerrey's actions morally wrong or rogue, but how are they connected to the general orders and strategy of the war's leaders. If so who is ultimately responsible for giving these orders? Among the many actions of the U.S. that are being questioned internationally, which were clearly revealed during President Bush's visit to Europe, the most indicting is the United Nation's voting off the U.S. from the Human Rights Commission. The wall protecting powerful leaders from culpability in international crimes has begun to crumble. If this continues, and Hitchens is right, Kissinger should be as scared as a mouse at a cat convention, or specifically as scared as an average South Vietnamese citizen of American soldiers between 1968 and 1973.

Ultimately the most infuriating lesson to learn from *Trial* is the impunity and audacity with which our leaders commit crimes. Currently in the U.S. more people than ever are incarcerated and this during the lowest crime rate in decades. More prisons are being built than schools. As the Woody Guthrie song goes, "Everything is against the law in Winston-Salem, against the law to walk, against the law to talk. ..." Everything has been against the law in most big cities in America for a long time. Recently the much touted quality-of-life law approach to policing is being used to incarcerate more and more people for smaller and smaller crimes. It's almost a national epidemic. Death-penalty feverish leaders like President Bush may say this is the price of paradise. Yet the men in blue suits who commit murder in the name of freedom, democracy, or free-trade need not worry about spending even a minute in jail. They know it and they abuse this common law. It's time we give our leaders a lesson in justice and hold them accountable to the laws to which they hold all citizens.

—Greg Fuchs



of bodies and blood and human remains were exploded everywhere. They unleashed another round of fire to silence the dangerous crying. All of this, Klann says, took place under the conscious, deliberate command of Bob Kerrey. Klann's version is the only explanation so far that makes sense out of the irrefutable fact that the bodies were found in a huddled mass. Kerrey could not refute Klann's account, except to say that it is not at all how he remembers the night. The biggest problem for Kerrey's version, aside from the fact that it is less likely than Klann's for significant historical and practical reasons (free fire zones, My Lai, rampant indiscretion), is that Klann's version has been corroborated by two Vietnamese women. Pham Tri Lanh was the main witness interviewed in *The New York Times Magazine* and by *60 Minutes II*. In her eyewitness account (she was hiding along the perimeter of the village), Klann's account emerges again. Klann's story, which was never shared with Pham Tri Lanh, is as incriminating for him as it is for Kerrey so it is unlikely that he is acting out of any brand of self-interest.

Some facts are common between all the divergent accounts. For example, when the team was approaching the village, they came across a first hooch occupied by five people. Kerrey acknowledges that he ordered his team to murder them all by stabbing them repeatedly and cutting their throats. This family, living, was a liability to the SEALs and their mission. The descriptions of the details of these first killings appear in *The New York Times Magazine* article, published on April 29, 2001. The details of this first encounter, undisputed by Kerrey himself, are only describable as disgusting.

Kerrey was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions in Thanh Phong and the citation justifying his medal credits him with having killed 21 Viet Cong. Knowing this is untrue, Kerrey neither rejected nor returned the medal and has proceeded to build a political career on being a war hero.

Since the most common charges in Kerrey's defense claim that "war is hell," that "Kerrey was a mere pawn" and that "we can't know what it was like," it is instructive to review what another Vietnam veteran has to say about this case:

"I want you to know that from my point of view, i.e. someone that spent countless nights on night ambush patrols deep in enemy controlled territory, there is simply no excuse for what Kerrey and his men did. Even on the blackest night, you know what you're shooting at. Those men were in a village ... by definition exactly where one would expect women and children to be. The fact that they were in a free fire zone doesn't change a thing. (I spent my entire tour operating in free fire zones, and I can tell you that the Vietnamese refused

It would seem that in wartime, confessed murderers are often maintained as heroes, and accountability becomes a vague and impenetrable question. While I do not at all condone the neglectful and hopeless way we treat our criminals, one thing is certain - we should not be treating war criminals any better.

to leave their villages, preferring to risk their lives in their ancestral homes than starve to death in refugee camps) ... if Kerrey had been the one to come clean, years ago, I might have some sympathy for him. But the fact is that Kerrey has spent his entire life covering it up, quite obviously hoping that none of the other men in his unit, all eye witnesses, would ever go public with what really happened."

#### **A Progressive Perspective To Be Ignored By Apologists:**

As a full-time staff member and student at The Graduate Faculty of New School University, I would like to explain why this situation regarding Bob Kerrey necessitates his resignation/removal from the presidency of our university and, furthermore, warrants his incompatibility with any position of moral or political leadership.

The Graduate Faculty, a division of The New School that was formed to house European academics in exile during World War II, has famously held radical left, Marxist and anti-war stances. There are many disparate views as to how successful, if at all, The New School has been in upholding progressive ideals, but for The Graduate Faculty, these intellectual and ideological commitments are very boldly stated. Yet, there is no consensus on Kerrey. And I think, despite some overwhelming outrage over this, we are going to be forced to live with Kerrey - or to look for a new employer, resigning in protest.

As long as the only living individuals involved in the massacre of Kerrey's Raiders have radically divergent recollections, there will remain a severe lack of clarity regarding the specifics of the night in question. For the sake of legal action, a congressional investigation can and should be conducted - although this is a highly unlikely outcome. Kerrey opposes an investigation and if he does not ask for it, what politician will? American politicians have built careers on defending the Vietnam War, trying to rehabilitate it as a just war in the American mind, but I do not think it is possible for The New School or The Graduate Faculty to undertake the kind of archeology required for such a discovery of the true history behind this tragedy. For us to assume that we can excavate some higher level of certainty and a greater version of truth from an individual whose memories are, as he admits on his own, likely to be shaped by

his own desire, is far worse than mere presumption. While the sordid events of Vietnam support the likelihood of Klann's story over Kerrey's, debating this issue and seeking to investigate it ourselves is wasted energy. We can, and I believe should, state our support for a congressional investigation, but at the same time we need to realize that petitioning our government is not our only recourse. At our government's discretion, not much can be expected. Let us not forget how rough and tough they've gotten with our most celebrated mass murderer, Henry Kissinger.

Furthermore, we must be cautious in discussing Kerrey's character. We cannot judge a person's character by reducing him or her to the worst thing he or she has done, and for this reason I think that an assessment of his personality or his humanity that only examines the details of this atrocity is invalid. There are many concerned people who are consumed with asking Kerrey questions to try to get a better understanding of his humanity. In his posturing and rhetoric, and with regard to the most atrocious thing he's done, we will never firmly assess his character. We don't need to ask Kerrey any more questions. The very act of asking admits that we need information we don't yet possess. Otherwise, the act of asking is deprived of its meaning (unless our questions are only rhetorical). It is true that we don't have all of the information, all of the facts, but how much information do we need before we take an oppositional stance against American war criminals who have acted in clear violation of the Geneva Convention?

I believe that Bob Kerrey must resign from his position at New School University for reasons that are more fundamental and less imprecise than judgments of his character and the fine details of what happened in an massacre over 30 years ago in Vietnam. Kerrey's main reason to dissuade a congressional investigation, as he told me and hundreds of other Graduate Faculty students on May 14, 2001, is that an investigation never has, nor ever will, settle doubt and as long as there is doubt about the details of that night in Thanh Phong, we must grant him this point. Accepting that there is unsettled doubt, we are left with a new question. What are we, a decisively conscientious community, supposed to do with unsettled doubt? If there is no measure whereby this doubt can be settled, then we must decide what to do with it.

Whenever a severe lack of clarity defines our understanding of an atrocity, most especially when that atrocity is committed by military in-



tervention or any other state force, it is amongst the responsibilities of any progressive institution to give the benefit of the doubt to the victims, not to the perpetrators of the incident. Progressive critiques, in fact, are posited as such precisely because of their placement of doubt and accountability - a placement which contradicts the many regressive defenses that we witness in response to atrocities such as police violence, rape and war crimes. Considering the vast lack of clarity which defines our knowledge of the events we wish to hold Bob Kerrey accountable for, it must be said that we are giving him the benefit of the doubt if we tolerate his remaining as our president. We cannot give the benefit of the doubt to both Klann and Pham Tri Lanh and then to Bob Kerrey simultaneously. When Amadou Diallo was shot at 41 times by the Street Crimes Unit of the NYPD, there were diverse reactions. Nobody, except for the officers and a dead victim, was actually there that night. The officers gave an account of their fear, anguish and lapse of judgment, but there is still a lack of clarity. As with Kerrey, we only have victims and emotionally charged memories. In the face of this unsettled doubt, some refused to form an opinion about the Diallo murder. Some, like Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and the New York Fire Department, took the regressive position of giving the benefit of the doubt to the officers - defending them and their accidental murder of an unarmed man. Others, members of various progressive communities, gave the benefit of the doubt to Diallo, the innocent victim. What do you want to do with unsettled doubt - nothing at all or something? Many want to ask what I mean by progressive community or simply by progressive. For the record, my own definition of a progressive community is one that questions the disparities between different classes and kinds of people and seeks equity through the benefit of the underrepresented and under-privileged. Kerrey, of course, is neither, but my own definition is not all too important for my argument. No matter how many different versions and definitions you can get of progressivity, we will never meet a version that argues in defense of the military (or other state mechanism) when it murders innocent people. How can there be an account of progressivity that positions its doubt to the benefit of political forces over people? I challenge you to think up such a view and posit it as progressive.

Some apologists prefer to say that, in wartime, murder should be judged with more lenience. However, I find the opposite to be much more convincing. It is precisely during those times, when civilian villages can be infiltrated by an armed death squadron that the standards against murder ought to be heightened. Recalling Mr. Holland, "those men were in a village ... by definition exactly where one would expect women and children to be." When armed state forces are deployed to civilian communi-

ties, whether we are talking about Vietnam or the South Bronx, discretion needs to be more intensely upheld than it is in less contentious times and places. Such soldiers need to be intensively trained to determine their targets, as the Street Crimes Unit and the Navy SEALs are supposed to be.

Students and faculty at The Graduate Faculty have been characteristically interested in the disparities of wealth and privilege that affect the ways we understand and enact justice. Our prisons are bursting at the seams, mostly with perpetrators of petty thievery and minor infractions while, of course, they also house some guilty of more gruesome crimes. We know that if any of these prisoners simply disclose to us that they regret their crimes, that for the past three decades they have been in anguish over them and that their crimes are indefensible, we will not unlock their cells and set them free. Personal anguish seems to go much further in vindicating wealthy senators than it does for the more common recipient of our moral scorn. How do we reconcile the fact that thousands upon thousands of people are imprisoned or killed in the name of mistakes that they made while Bob Kerrey, whose mistake resulted in a mass murder, can go on to be the president of a famously progressive institution? I don't know what the ideal treatment of Kerrey should look like but I cannot accept that it is any better than the treatment an ex-convict gets. Kerrey, of course, is not an ex-convict but his own errors amounted to more suffering and death than the errors of most ex-convicts' crimes combined. Hence, how do we resolve the life of opportunity, celebrity and extreme wealth that he has secured while our ex-convicts are sent to offices of unemployment?

Whether The New School has been a successfully progressive institution is debatable but it is not debatable that it has always sought or pretended to be one. The present situation regarding Bob Kerrey is an occasion where communities, institutions and individuals can position themselves in accordance with their ideological and intellectual commitments. Sadly, there is no solidarity here on this issue and many of us seem to be bracing to continue on - ideologically defeated, demoralized and dispirited. ★

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#### Countdown to Putsch

*Ideas for the Living and Willing to Act*

Ebullition Records

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

Packaged neatly as a magazine with a supplemental CD, this release urges you that separation of the music from the message could be detrimental to your health. Countdown to Putsch is a full-on academic/political/vernacular juggernaut lurching forward through the mess wrought by American consumer culture and colonial history lessons. CTP is a dischordant musical engagement of the idea that people can and should resist the ease of mainstream American lifestyles and history lessons. The magazine is over 90 pages of essays and art dedicated to the advocacy of free thought and creation outside the confines of the status quo. Graphically, the magazine reads like a more substantial version of Adbusters with lengthy essays on activism, obsessive compulsive disorder and hilarious classifieds. Musically, the CTP audio arm blurs an entire album into one cohesive commentary on culture and politics that encourages the squawk and squeak of the trumpet and saxophone to compliment the spoken and screamed lyrics that trickle in and out of the magazine. This is an extremely well-done project.

-jason kucsma

#### Good Riddance

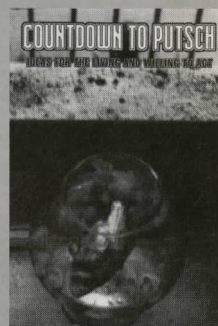
*Symptoms of a Leveling Spirit*

Fat Wreck Chords

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

Sometime around 1993, I got a 7" that was a split between 88 Fingers Louie and Good Riddance. It was brilliant. Fast, furious, melodic-as-hell, and insightful in its approach to personal politics. Almost ten years later, Good Riddance is still kicking it (as am I) and I can't deny that this CD is catchy enough to find numerous plays on my mini hi-fi. While I sometimes get bored with the political ambiguity of Good Riddance's lyrics, I still find it refreshing to hear solid rock anthems that have more of a message behind them than pissing and moaning about some lame-ass hardcore scene. Russ Rankin (singer/songwriter) does a great job of articulating the negotiation of radical politics with the everyday world of sleep, eat, work and more sleep. So while Good Riddance seems macho enough to kick my queer ass, I still enjoy it and hope that some people will be radicalized by the very accessible rock and fucking roll that Good Riddance bring solid.

-jason kucsma





# Substituting as a subversive activity: *reflections from a radical sub*

by Chris Dixon

Being a radical substitute teacher is like being a secret agent. At least that's how I experience it. Less than six years ago, I strolled into high school in Anchorage, Alaska as an unrepentant punk rock kid with a strange haircut, weird clothes, and plenty of scrawled political messages. Now I walk into schools in the very same district with a nondescript haircut, a shirt and slacks, and political messages tucked discretely into my briefcase. Somehow it works. How I look, along with my privilege as a white, middle-class, seemingly straight guy, gets me through the door.

Perhaps I'm the most surprised. As a recently graduated college student activist, I'm more accustomed to challenging authority—state and corporate authority in the streets of Seattle, or administrative authority at my former college. Yet, with no questions asked, administrators, secretaries, and teachers all *give* me authority. They trust me as a sub.

I should clarify: I *am* a trustworthy person. I'm not sneaking into classrooms to abduct or indoctrinate students. No, I work as a substitute teacher because I want to do something really subversive: assist young people in thinking and acting critically in their lives, their schools, their communities, and ultimately their world. Paulo Freire would call it "educating for freedom." That, with my commitment to fundamental social change, makes me an unabashed radical substitute teacher—a rad sub.

There are fringe benefits. With no credentials but a college degree, I get an insider's view of the US educational system. Under few other circumstances would I be able to read the small quote tacked in one social studies teacher's office: "Our bombs are smarter than the average college student. At least they can find Kuwait." No other way would a 'special ed' teacher confide in me that she wished she could work with students who actually "think."

Being a sub gives me the opportunity, unavailable to even most full-time teachers, to see a broad range of students and classrooms. So, of course I see the disturbing social realities. At the same time, though, I see so much promise, self-determination, and critical minds that I encounter in young people every day that I venture into classrooms.

Along with plenty of promise, my job is also full of complexities and dilemmas, insights and outrages. Indeed, radical substitute teaching is an incredibly multi-faceted experience. Here, I hope to offer some glimpses—vitality and necessarily connected to student experiences—into it. Consider this a crash course, beginning with the politics of the job, pointing to troubling ironies, pulling out some critical lessons, and ending with a constant sense of hope. This is rad subbing as I know it—sometimes discouraging, sometimes inspiring, always enriching.

## *politics and power*

Last winter, I joined with several dozen other subs in a bleak school district conference room to munch on snacks and listen to a recently retired teacher. Her words offered countless precious jewels of wisdom, particularly concerning students: "they'll do *anything* for free time," "I don't mean to make excuses for them," "they have a *different* reality than you do." This, of course, was substitute orientation training,

where young people are viewed as a different species and "behavior management" is the phrase on everyone's tongue. In a room full of scared subs (many fearfully anticipating their first classroom experiences), more than a few obviously found our trainer's words reassuring.

Ostensibly, we're teaching and learning. Yet, if I were to take my sub training seriously, I would likely accept that my job is to monitor, anticipate, and "manage" student behavior. I would understand that actual opportunities for teaching and learning are, regrettably but inevitably, rare in my life as a sub. In other words, it would be clear that what I'm supposed to be doing is deciding and enforcing when students can talk, move, question, and much more—policing as teaching, teaching as policing.

Ira Shor reminds us that the classroom has its own micropolitics, its own relations and legacies of power. Usually we don't hear them labeled so clearly, but they are always present. With a careful eye, we can see them in *how* teachers talk about the classroom. Our sub trainer, for instance, warned us about students saying "deflating things that make you as an educator lose control of the group." Her example? "History sucks."

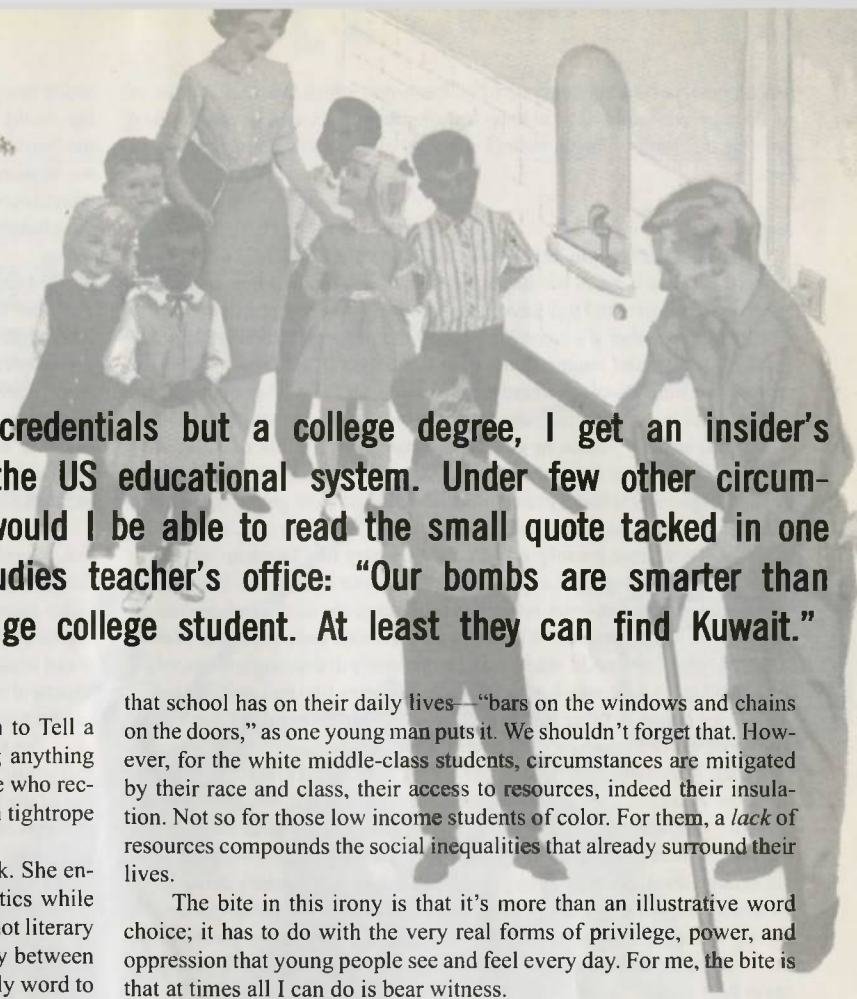
If subbing chiefly means outsmarting adversaries, otherwise known as 'students,' then, yes, that comment can be construed as disruptive. But for those of us who remember our own school experiences, "history sucks" is really a very reasonable and fairly moderate complaint. Indeed, it can even provide an opportunity for grappling with some key issues about what history is and how it is taught and learned. Of course, that would mean validating student concerns—that is, intervening in the micropolitics of the classroom, undermining what is normally expected of a sub.

It can be done. One of my favorite lesson plans is in fact called "why school sucks." I first used it in a high school English class with a sudden teacher absence and some tired fifteen-year-olds. Grabbing two volunteers to write ideas on the board, I asked students to tell me all of the reasons they thought school sucks. At first cautious, they offered generalities like "getting up early" and "homework." Seeing that I was actually listening to them, though, they grew more bold, discussing particularly punitive security guards, examples of dreary learning experiences, and even details about the physical structure of their school. Soon the board was full.

With more time and energy, we could have gone further—into student visions of what learning should look like, for example. Within the space of minutes, however, it was obvious that they had plenty of meaningful ideas. And contrary to my training, the classroom wasn't disrupted; it was engaged.

Interestingly, one of the last brainstormed words that went on the board was "subs." Most of the folks at the sub training months before would do well to know that. However young people may express it, they perceptively see what most subs (and teachers) ignore: the choices educators make are often about power—policing, if you will. To students, subs are the most widely recognized and distrusted cops in the classroom, but certainly not the only ones.





**With no credentials but a college degree, I get an insider's view of the US educational system. Under few other circumstances would I be able to read the small quote tacked in one social studies teacher's office: "Our bombs are smarter than the average college student. At least they can find Kuwait."**

*ironies and inequities*

When I was originally considering the idea of subbing, I mentioned it to my fourteen-year-old friend Neotony. "Just remember: you're not forced to be there; kids are," she warned. Of course, she's right. When social psychologists Craig Haney and Philip Zimbardo wrote their article "It's Tough to Tell a High School From a Prison" in 1975, they weren't saying anything that generations of students didn't already know. For anyone who recognizes that but still chooses to work in schools, it's a tough tightrope to walk.

I'm grateful to Neotony because she keeps me in check. She encourages me to see the ironies of maintaining radical politics while working within established institutions like schools. This is not literary irony—no idle wordplay—but, rather, the ironic incongruity between what I believe and what I must do. Indeed, 'ironic' is the only word to explain, for instance, the fact that during classes I have to write licenses, otherwise known as 'passes,' simply for students to use the restroom. And nothing else could describe the reality that I have to steadily endure using brain-draining, stultifying, white-washed history textbooks no matter how much I hate them.

Sometimes the ironies are even more biting—as much because of the harsh social realities of schools as my politics. For example, one day I found myself presenting a bland list of vocabulary words to a junior high social studies class, the majority of whom were low-income students of color. They carefully copied down each one: "capital," "tariffs," "means of production," etc. Half a year earlier, acting as an organizer with the Direct Action Network, planning protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, I echoed the slogan, "Let our resistance be as transnational as capital." Standing before these twenty-five students, though, I realized that those well-intended words would make about as much sense as those on their next vocabulary quiz.

That particular school, located in the 'bad' part of town, sticks out in my mind. Above all, I remember the rundown facilities, the lack of computers, and the students struggling to keep up with their rote assignments from outdated textbooks. There, irony merged with inequity. Still, the students were enthusiastic, helpful, and sincere—more so than in most other schools at which I've worked.

A week later, the inequity was unmistakable as I found myself at the high school, largely white and upper middle class, on the opposite side of town. With two computers in my classroom (and abundantly stocked computer labs elsewhere), not to mention newer textbooks, I was in a completely different world. At one point, during a class discussion about the Great Depression, a young white man offered his view of a major difference between the US in the 1930's and now: "today, most people own stock." Around him, many students nodded in agreement. Obviously, most people *they know* own stock. I suspect that the eighth-graders in my social studies classes at the first school would have a different take on the matter.

Students at both institutions, no doubt, experience the iron grip

that school has on their daily lives—"bars on the windows and chains on the doors," as one young man puts it. We shouldn't forget that. However, for the white middle-class students, circumstances are mitigated by their race and class, their access to resources, indeed their insulation. Not so for those low income students of color. For them, a *lack* of resources compounds the social inequalities that already surround their lives.

The bite in this irony is that it's more than an illustrative word choice; it has to do with the very real forms of privilege, power, and oppression that young people see and feel every day. For me, the bite is that at times all I can do is bear witness.

*lessons and limits*

Some of the most important lessons have to do with openness and honesty. That sounds corny but it's true. I'm not certified, I don't have years of classroom teaching experience, and I don't try to pretend otherwise. Moreover, I sympathize with students. So I don't hide my distaste for issuing bathroom passes, taking attendance, and assigning busy-work. I'm clear about who I am and how I feel.

Students usually return the favor. One day in a geography class, for instance, I noticed a young man sitting quietly at his desk while most of the other students busily worked on extra credit assignments. Walking over, I asked if he was okay. Sincerely, he replied that on most days he "worked hard," but on that day he needed to "take a break." We agreed that it was unfortunate that he had to have his break in a place like school. Certainly I can think of plenty of ways that I could have "managed" that situation, but none so open and honest.

Beyond myself and my interactions, I've learned that there is something else to be open and honest about in the classroom—the limits of educators. At their best, even full-time teachers face institutional constraints. With thousands of students crammed into one building, with uniform class periods and just minutes for kids to rush in between, with racially and class-stratified tracking systems—with all of this and more, even the most dedicated teachers have limits to what they can accomplish. For subs, it's double. One day in the life of a school is barely enough time to get comfortable in a classroom, much less influence an institution.

As a rad sub, then, I recognize my limits. Alone, I can't transform the schools where I work or fundamentally change the lives of my students. But I can encourage student reflection, honestly present myself, and—with others—struggle *outside* the classroom to change social conditions that affect us *inside* the classroom. The alternative is to approach teaching simply as a 'social service,' momentarily improving students' lives—justified, of course, but insufficient. As teacher Stan Karp asks, "Is our job essentially to create 'safe spaces' inside an often ineffective



and oppressive educational system?" Clearly not, which means that those of us who are educators have to keep learning lessons as well as pushing and probing our limits. This is radical subbing, indeed radical teaching, at its best.

#### *seeds of hope*

Being a rad sub can be difficult, tiring, even depressing. I come back, though, because it gives me hope. I can count on the fact that each day I spend in the classroom I will have at least one experience that will make it all worthwhile, whether it's a conversation with a student, a critical class discussion, or a shared laugh. That's how I understand bell hooks when she writes, "learning is a place where paradise can be created"—not in the sense that a school can be a perfect, cheery place, but, rather, a place of *possibility*.

Hope usually comes in glimmers, occasionally in the most unlikely circumstances. I was fortunate, for example, to be subbing one day in a discussion-based world history class in which students were going over the rise of Hitler and the Holocaust—hardly inspirational topics, for sure. In the midst of it all, one student intently asked how a country like Germany comes to terms with such a legacy. Leaping in, I pointed out that the US has its own comparable holocaust—the relocation and genocide of the indigenous inhabitants of North America. With some gasps, a brief uncomfortable silence, and then many slow nods, students began seriously discussing and grappling with *that* legacy, one which affects us all. Moments like that sustain me.

Hope comes in other forms, too. For one, I remember that I don't work in a vacuum. Through chance social encounters, random sub calls, and friends of friends, I've met a diverse array of deeply committed progressive educators. For example, after giving a speech about mounting struggles against capitalist globalization at a local church, I was surprised when a number of activist teachers "outed" themselves to me. Some are radical simply in caring enough about their students to build inclusive, participatory classrooms. Others have more explicitly political orientations and analyses. And there is a lively spectrum in between. Beyond all of them, I also realize that there are other radical educators and students doing incredible work that I will likely never hear about.

Moreover, the political climate is changing. Many younger radicals like me are even tentatively referring to "the movement," that is, the burgeoning

and at times uneasy coalition that challenged the WTO in Seattle, confronted the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Prague, and disrupted the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. It's altogether unlike anything we've seen in the last twenty-five years. And although still absorbed in birthing convulsions, it's growing, changing, learning. I never forget that what I do in the classroom is directly connected to those struggles, which are global in scale.

My experience in the classroom, in fact, reassures me that those struggles are vital. I think, in particular, of an economics class for which I subbed. About halfway through a lesson, I noticed the vacant stares as I wielded supply and demand charts. "Tell me," I asked, "why is economics so boring for *you*?" Slowly but surely, students came up with answers: the way it's taught, how abstract it is, the examples used. Finally, one said, "if we had more control over economics, we might care." At that, many agreed. Unknowingly, they had leveled a fundamental critique of capitalism—one that we used, incidentally, in the streets of Seattle.

I'm not blithely hopeful. To my core, I'm still an unrepentant punk rock kid, relentlessly critical of schools. My mind rarely drifts far from the students I've seen who fall through the cracks—the bored young man who played video games through an entire mind-numbing geography assignment or the driven young woman who looked tiredly upon another dreary chapter in her social studies textbook. While unforgiving of the institutional constraints and structural inequalities of schools, though, I remain equally hopeful about what can be accomplished.

I'm sure some of this hope is related to the potential of those who are still young. And I admit that there is nothing new about seeing the possibilities of the future in the eyes of youth. But I hold out. I see a promise—not in kids that can be manipulated to accept my or anyone else's version of a 'better world,' but in young people who can learn the skills to grasp their own destinies and work together to challenge and change prevailing social, political, and economic orders.

As a rad sub, I try to do my part. With a growing awareness of classroom politics, biting ironies, and critical lessons, I enter schools. With openness and honesty, I work with students. And collaboratively, we sow seeds of subversion—sometimes imperceptible, sometimes overwhelming—which are unmistakably seeds of hope. ★

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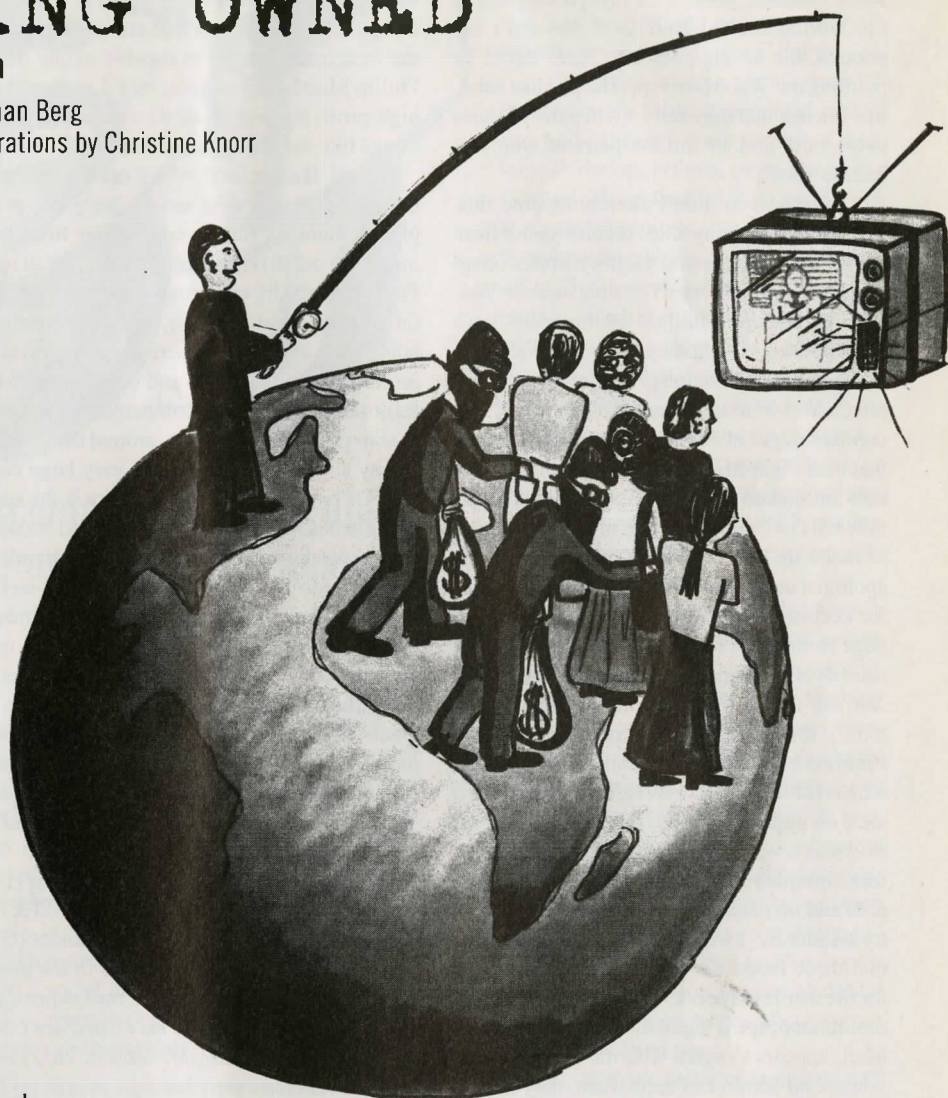
# The Economics OF BEING OWNED

An Overview of Globalization

by Nathan Berg  
illustrations by Christine Knorr

The past year and a half have marked a significant change in the politics-as-usual vision of modern society. November '99 saw an enormous coalition of activists from every spectrum of human existence descend upon Seattle, WA to shutdown the World Trade Organization, blaming it for perpetuating everything from environmental destruction to sweatshop labor; from the undercutting of governmental regulations to the squashing of organized labor forces. Less than five months later, a nearly identical mass of concerned citizens took to the streets of Washington DC to protest the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank for putting countless Third World nations into debt, ravaging their local environments, and forcing the modern US mode of capitalism down their throats. Yet more protests occurred in Philadelphia and Los Angeles over the summer to shame the respective national conventions of the Republican and Democratic parties for selling governmental policies to the highest bidder and essentially leaving people out of the much-exhausted and seldom-witnessed process of democracy. Around this same time, Ralph Nader (with Green Party backing) stepped his presidential campaign into high gear, constantly referring to the two prominent parties as "different heads of the same corporate body," and bringing a certain passion to a presidential process that hasn't ignited anything close to passion (or even interest, for that matter) in decades.

Through all of these various struggles and the overwhelmingly diverse number of issues being protested, a common thread can easily be found. It's not the increasing destruction of the environment, as tree-huggers have found themselves marching hand-in-hand with the very folks who cut down trees to make a living. Nor is it racism, sexism, labor issues, or any of the typical 'progressive' issues that often move people who care to take to the streets. These issues are but ugly symptoms of a greater disease. No, this seemingly new era of discontent and social uprising stems from one issue and one issue alone: corporate control. Multinationals, in an apparent attempt to extend global capitalism to its logical end, have spent the past few decades increasing in both size and influence to create the strangest of monsters—a tiny percentage of wealthy humans with the ability to control and manipulate the whole planet for their own selfish gains and the means by which to cover up the fact that it's happening at all. However, this willingness to exploit anything and everyone has left quite the victim's support group...and they're starting to make some noise.



Unfortunately, noise is often all that's made. Protests, while completely relevant (and almost necessary) in this day and age, often reduce complicated issues into mere slogans or chants, pushing most of the specifics aside. And so, I'd say it's time for a little refresher course on the politics of Wall Street...the economics of being owned. Keeping up with the subject of corporate dominance can give one a solid argument, and a solid argument has proven itself to be much more effective than any cardboard sign could ever be.



On Oct. 22nd 2000, the cover story of *The New York Times* revealed a shocking statistic. The total amount of yearly retail spending in the US (excluding cars and boats) is about \$2.3 trillion. Behemoth retailer Wal-Mart's total domestic sales at the end of their fiscal year were \$142 billion. This means that Wal-Mart alone sells 6.2 percent of everything sold in the United States! And as if this isn't big enough, the article goes into more detail by pointing out Wal-Mart's specific product sales, like the fact that they sell 19,634 pairs of shoes every hour and 19 million pairs of women's jeans a year.

In case you didn't already assume this, Wal-Mart's amazing sales records come from the ability to sell items at the lowest price imaginable. While activists fighting against Wal-Mart construction in their communities have often pointed to its history of running local ma-and-pa retailers into the ground with their low prices, Wal-Mart is also now putting other large companies out of business. And so, the factors that make Wal-Mart a successful company are now mimicked by their competitors. The article tells us (with me filling in the parenthesis to make up for The Times' vague, business-apologist language): "The Wal-Mart hallmarks for keeping costs down — the use of cutting-edge technology (the ability to track the sales records of consumers so painstakingly that they can use that information to sell them even more), masterful logistics (placing huge distribution centers throughout the world as hubs which fill the 'needs' of regional stores), reliance on imported goods (products made from overseas sweatshops), and a nonunion work force (employees with little income, less benefits and no recourse) — are becoming industry standards." I would go even further and say that these facets are fast becoming standards for the whole corporate world. Economist Carl Steidtmann, speaking in the article about Wal-Mart, appears to agree with me by saying, "If you are an admirer of capitalism, they are the epitome of it." And thus, even if Wal-Mart serves as a prime example of corporate control, they are not alone. Companies nearly identical to them have a virtual stranglehold on nearly every aspect of modern life...and their grip keeps getting tighter.

Since eating is one of the few things that human beings need to do to live, what example of corporate dominance could be more relevant than the food industry? Unless you live a lifestyle religiously devoted to locally-grown, organic food, chances are that most of your food has ties to some of the most heinous companies to grace our landscape. Staple crops (like corn, soybeans, flour, etc.) are under the nearly complete control of huge agri-business firms like ConAgra, Archer Daniels Midland,

and Cargill, who are increasingly more likely to be working in cahoots with the giants of the new biotech/agricultural chemical industry (Monsanto, Du Pont, and Dow). Much of this food is grown with no connection to nature's intentions, but hailed as an improvement because of one simple benefit: higher yields (which equals more money). This raw product is then shipped over the world to be processed by other big food companies (Nabisco Group Holdings, Sara Lee, General Mills, etc.) who then sell the finished product to grocery stores (typically regional or national chain stores like Safeway, Cub Foods, Wal-Mart, Kroger, Albertson's, etc.) and restaurants (typically regional or national chain stores like McDonalds, Olive Garden, Outback Steakhouse, Domino's Pizza, etc.). One of the most stunning examples of the food industry's grip is the ability of a few companies to collect serious money and power selling items that are in no way beneficial to consumers (at least by any stretch of the imagination that I'm capable of) by developing a simple 'brand image' (see: PepsiCo, Phillip Morris, Coca-Cola, etc.). Let there be no doubt, what we eat is largely controlled by high-profit transnationals who are much more concerned with efficiency than with frivolous things like health, the environment, or human/animal rights.

And like our food, which once traveled from field to table with few, if any, pit-stops, we ourselves are speeding around the globe at an increasing rate. With suburban development placing humans further and further from their jobs, entertainment, and finances, we have increased our driving habits to the point of reckless abandon. The automotive giants like GM, Ford, Mitsubishi, etc. provide the transports (at an enormous profit), big oil provides the fuel (at an even greater profit), and government provides the pathways (at phenomenal cost to taxpayers). And we're increasing air travel as well, with huge conglomerates like Boeing producing the machines and companies like Delta, United, and AMR running the airports. Railroads and shipping companies are not completely a thing of the past, but are more likely to ship product, not people, around the planet. Regardless, both industries are predominantly run by a very small number of very large companies.

Of course, the buzz of our era is the sound of technology. Whether it's computers, mobile phones, DVD players, hand-held broadband devices, or home satellites, technology is the new fashion of the world, pitting friends and neighbors against each other in a contest to see who can have the freshest, most hi-tech piece of machinery. Super-technology is truly only a product of the past 40 years or so, many of its products even more recent than that. So the technology industry is unique in that many of its players are small firms that stumble upon a 'good' idea (note sarcasm) and suddenly find themselves swimming in pools of money. Nevertheless, their concepts are more often than not stolen or simply purchased by the tech giants and they respectively fade or disappear from the mix. This leaves us with the same multi-nationals, intent on changing the intimate human relations of the past with a vast array of radio waves, wires, and screens, and making a boat-load of cash in the process. In every separate technology department, you'll find one or two (or if it's really competitive, three or four!) corporations dominating the field — computers (IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Compaq, Dell), software (Microsoft), networking (Lucent Technologies, Cisco Systems), semiconductors (Intel), telecommunications (AT&T, SBC, MCI Worldcom, Bell Atlantic), mobile phones (Motorola), and home appliances (GE, Emerson, Whirlpool). *\*When referring to the dominance of mega-corporations in the area of technology, two points should be noted: A) most of these companies delve into many different arenas and aren't easy classifiable along product lines and B) the firms I listed are US-based, even though some of the largest technology giants (think Sony, Mitsubishi, etc.) are based elsewhere— typically Asia. If I were to include them (and their business practices) in this article, I would need about 5 more months to complete this article and a few more pages. It should go without saying that this topic alone could comprise its own article (shit, books have been written on the subject) and I can't shed that much light on it in one paragraph.*

With all of these huge companies taking in more money every 5 minutes than you or I will ever see in our lifetimes (and in case you think I'm over-stating their riches, consider this: GM's 1999 revenues average out to almost \$360,000 every minute!!), who better to handle all of this cash than a few mega-banks. Whether it's commercial banks (Bank Of America, Chase Manhattan, Bank One), savings institutions (Washington Mutual, Charter One), securities (Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter), diversified financials (Citigroup, American Express, GE), or insurance (TIAA-CREF, Prudential, Metropolitan Life, State Farm, American International Group), there are a good handful of firms ready to take in money in whatever manner a person or company chooses to invest it. Under the guise of 'managing money,' they basically only serve to take it in and transform it into numbers, tacking a up an obscenely large one for themselves when all is said and done. If capitalism were a body, financial institutions would be its heart, filtering and pumping money to the 'necessary' components, and keeping a fair share for itself.

And if, like me, these examples of corporate dominance are enough to make you sick,





## This seemingly new era of discontent and social up- rising stems from one issue and one issue alone: corporate control.

there is no remedy quite like the health care industry. While most of the world relies on government-funded health care, the US is blessed by having most of the nation's health dependent upon a few not-for-profit HMOs (like Aetna, Cigna, UnitedHealth, and Columbia/HCA). The devastating effects of basing human health on the bottom line of small number of money-hungry companies have been so well-documented (and are so ill-conceived to begin with) that they are quite simply a sad testament to the power of wealth in this country. However, it is not just HMOs that are raking it in off human suffering, massive pharmaceuticals companies are in the fold as well. In fact, major drug companies (Merck, Johnson & Johnson, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Pfizer) have recently created the most profitable industry to be in. Along with it, they have created a social mindset that any ailment can be subdued (note that I didn't use the word "cured" — there isn't a heck of a lot money to be made in that department) by the continual use of more and more pills, which are getting more and more expensive.

To reduce this down, a terribly small number of big corporations are in control of our lives as we know them. We eat *their* food, drive *their* cars, use *their* technological gadgets, and when this corporate-controlled lifestyle makes us physically and mental ill, we use *their* medicines and health practices. And, coupled with our insistence on putting our leftover money into corporate-dominated financial holdings, we line the pockets of only the top-tier of management within these companies, helping to create that statistic you've probably seen that shows the top 1 percent of Americans with as much wealth as the bottom 95 percent. And all of this wealth serves only to increase their ability to create new methods of obtaining further wealth and power. In this day and age, our lives are truly not our own.

### *Crime Called 'Wrongdoing'*

Unless you live in a huge city, today's newspaper probably has a story regarding some horrible crime committed by some horrible person amongst its articles, if not right on the front page. Someone killed someone else, or beat them up, or robbed them, most likely in a graphic way or for a pathetically trivial reason. Such events can terrorize entire communities,

and the media (most likely for the simple logic of printing what's important to its readers) toils away, expending a large amount of time and energy to bring this relevant information to the public.

What you probably won't find on the front page is a story about a crime committed by a corporation. If you were to find such an article, it wouldn't be until you got way back to the depths of the business section and never would you actually see the word 'crime' being used.

Can corporations commit crimes? It seems simple to most people that they can, and have, in a wide variety of fashions. Pollution, bribery, price-fixing, tax evasion, drug trafficking, dangerous working conditions, fraud — corporations have been guilty of them all and then some. But there many folks who wish to remain blissfully ignorant of corporate crime, including George Mason University Law School professor, Jeffrey Parker, who argues that "crime exists only in the mind of an individual and since a corporation has no mind, it can commit no crime." This rationale, as misguided as it might be, seems to be shared by an important faction of society, most notably by the justice system.

Corporations have, with only the smallest imaginable number of exceptions, been treated as untouchables by criminal law. A crime that would send any individual to prison, whether it stems from malicious intent or malign neglect, is almost always handled by civil law, which ensures that no CEO will have to spend time behind bars. Civil court instead opts to dish out fines that are easily payable by these wealthy companies, some of which actually keep funds in their budgets specifically for this 'operating expense.' And civil law, through its slower procedures and preferential treatment of defendants, assists in keeping stories about corporate crime off the front page.

Another strategic tactic of multinationals is the exploitation of borders to deny the existence of crime. Laws designed in wealthy, developed nations as a result of decades of abuse to workers and the environment can be easily side-stepped by moving production to a Third World country where tyrannical governments put wealth even further atop common sense than our own. This is, of course, completely legal and many of the products that we buy everyday are created through these means. Corporations benefit in that they don't need to answer to governments or workers and will only change their actions when consumers stand up and make enough noise (i.e. the sweatshop movement). Even then, they will admit to no wrong doing and will make only the slightest changes necessary to feign moral righteousness.



Corporate crime, by its magnitude alone, does way more damage to society than all petty street crimes combined. But through their wealth and power, they can deny (or make light of) their crimes, or in those worst case scenarios where they are forced into court, get off with a small slap of the hand and a minor monetary donation. It is safe to say that organized crime has a new face.

### ***The Financial As Political***

As I pointed out before, corporations get away with many of their dastardly deeds by claiming legality. Naturally then, one shouldn't be surprised to see corporations directly involved in the political process, molding entire governmental policies (or in some cases, entire governments) to fit their business agendas.

Most major politicians today have gotten into their positions because of funding provided by major corporations. Whether Democrat or Republican, positions of power in this day and age are won by those with the biggest treasure chests and corporations will spend millions to make sure that anyone unfriendly to their causes (read: NOT a Democrat or Republican) doesn't make it into office. This is precisely why nothing will ever come of campaign finance reform. To expect that politicians will pass a law preventing the very practices that put them in a position to pass such a law is absurd. An even scarier look at how far business' foot is in government's door is provided by studying how many top-ranking public figures are either major shareholders or board members of giant corporations. A quick review of the cabinet selected by our new King George shows an alarming number of examples. Tommy Thompson, the former governor of Wisconsin, was publicly upset when he was selected as the head of Health and (lack of) Human Services by the new administration. He had apparently been hoping to take the helms of the Department of Transportation, never once considering that his position as vice-president of Amtrak might create a conflict of interest.

Getting *their* people elected is really only the first step to political power that corporations use. After that, they have to find something for all of these appropriately business-friendly politicians to do. Over the past 50 years, much of that has involved dumping regulations placed on companies in a time where society was much more able to see the detrimental effects of giving too much power to those with a known tendency to abuse it. History has shown what happens when a company must pick between its bottom line or sound business practices, yet the past few decades have seen endless regulations on business get flushed down the drain, allowing the

market be the only policing force for the corporate sector. This system has worked well for corporations who have created, through funding, hundreds of their own think tanks and industry front groups (read: lobbyists) to feed politicians junk information in the process of deregulation.

More recently however, the business world has stumbled upon a better idea. Instead of spending so much time trying to nullify governmental regulations, they've found it fairly easy to just evade them altogether. Through treaties like NAFTA and GATT, multinationals are allowed to operate in numerous countries with the added ability to transcend the laws of any of them. Assisting in this process are powerful groups like the WTO, The World Bank, and the IMF, whose ability to work above the bounds of national laws have them shooting down 'barriers to free trade' with all the subtlety of a tank shooting cans off the fencepost.

Of course, much of humanity is not blind to what's going on and have taken to the streets to show their scars and have their voices heard. Increasingly however, especially in the past two years, they have collected in the streets only to find guns and tear gas canisters aimed at their heads. This is yet another remarkable spectacle of our modern market-based society. People, through their tax dollars, pay for overly-bloated military and police forces under the guise of needing it to protect them from threats to their way of life. But when threats to their way of life are found not to be enemy nations or terrorists but companies whose products and services are fed to them every day, these same military and police forces are used to keep them from speaking up and acting out.

Surely, there are so many connections between business and governments that no one could ever see them all. But the ones that are apparent paint a disturbing picture indeed. The world is being run for profit and our democratic system that's supposed to quell any one or thing that impedes our health, wealth, and happiness, has been bought and sold.

### ***Misinformation Overload***

Why, if this problem of corporate control is as big and dangerous as I claim it to be, does one never hear much about it? Surely if it affected our lives so drastically, the general public would be more apt to discuss it and fight against its effects. Couldn't this just be some stupid conspiracy theory that only a small fraction of people on the fringe of rational thought dreamed up because they needed something to be paranoid about? Could a problem of this magnitude really be at work without the majority of us seeing it?

Frankly, unless one is equipped with a natural tendency towards critical thought (which isn't being taught in schools these days...), it really is difficult to see. Mainstream media, which means media that is owned and run by huge corporations, purposely keeps this information as well-hidden as possible for a variety of reasons.

Naturally, money plays the biggest role. Say what you like about the benefits of a free press, but when it defines its intent not by providing the most relevant and timely information to the public, choosing instead to make financial gains the highest-exhausted goal, one can't help but wonder if certain sources of information can be considered unbiased. Advertising has become the main income source for nearly all forms of media (maybe not quite yet for the internet but, hang on, we're gettin' there). With mass media being so massive, the 'potential customers' it has the ability to reach allows it to charge obscene amounts of money to advertisers for use of 'its space,' thereby guaranteeing that only large companies with lots of money and a product or service to sell can afford to advertise. These corporations often spend an ungodly amount of dough to peddle their goods, so much so that the media makes a conscious effort to not air (or print) stories that it suspects might upset these major advertisers.

Jane Akre and Steve Wilson, two investigative reporters working for a Fox Television affiliate in Tampa Bay, Florida, were fired from their jobs after completing a four-part series questioning the use of bovine growth hormone, a controversial dairy hormone made by Monsanto, when Monsanto's lawyers threatened lawsuit. Their story never aired. Countless examples like this can be found everywhere and journalism has suffered as a result. Media conglomerates no longer look for the reporters that can dig up a significant story, they want someone who will write what the boss tells them to write—in the manner that makes the company more money. Sometimes, the intent of corporations to have their stories told only through their own ads isn't even just implied, it's specifically spelled out. Coca-Cola has a specific list that it sends out to the magazines it advertises in, detailing exactly which types of stories can and can't appear within three pages of Coca-Cola ads. And they can't possibly be the only company to have stumbled upon that tactic.

But even more disturbing than the willingness of the media to cater to advertisers'



every whim is the very intrusiveness of the advertising itself. Corporate advertisements are literally everywhere...and it's estimated that the average American sees 3,000 of them a day. They're on TV screens, radio waves, and the internet. They're in movies, newspapers, and magazines, and schools. They're on billboards, buses, skyscrapers, coffee mugs, footballs, and your cousin's T-shirt. Everywhere you look, corporations are toying with well-studied emotions and desires in a fervent attempt to draw in as many suckers as possible. Advertisements are self-glorifying by their very nature, using any gimmick imaginable to convince viewers that a certain company or product is fantastic (and no doubt vastly superior to all others), and almost always feeding the message that they are only there because of a underlying desire to help people make their lives better. Ironically enough, industry-speak often refers to these as company or brand 'images,' which is precisely what they are — prefabricated (and well-researched) campaigns that explicitly serve to create a fictional 'image,' one that often differs greatly from that of reality.

When over-stimulated by such facades, mainstream society is bound to remain relatively clueless to the heinous games played by major corporations. We've been taught to befriend them or even worse, develop a unique loyalty to them, even while they seem dead set on making our lives worse for the wear. They pollute our natural resources, they meddle with (or simply supersede) our systems of government and the principals of democracy, they exploit us as workers, and they generally suck the beauty out of life; all for the noble purpose of attaining wealth and power. Yet somehow, as a society, we can't get enough of 'em — which proves how powerful these images really are.

#### *A Direction Of Hope (hopefully..)*

Yes, all of this paints a pretty shitty portrait of our modern world but being owned is not as futile of a lifestyle as it might seem. In the end, we are still in control of our own lives. We still make our own decisions and don't necessarily *have* to do so with the 'help' of such an overwhelming display of uselessness and misinformation. There are still quite a few smart people and good ideas out there. I'm actually convinced that they're the majority and that we've just been gradually taught to focus on the lesser important facets of life.

To be against this system does not mean that you have to be a radical, attending every protest you can find or moving to the middle of nowhere and eating tree bark just to remove yourself as far from society as possible (though I bet that we all at least consider it a pleasant thought sometimes). Sure, there are millions of people who are amazingly active in fighting their owners—some who've taken the battle so close to heart that it appears that they've given up on the thought of relaxing and enjoying life in the slightest. Not everyone can do that and this should be apparent. But there are ways in our daily lives, even if we don't think of them as big differences, that we can use to challenge what we're told life should be about from our owners. In fact, there are a terrible number of 'minor' tweaks that can make life better for society and more liberating for the individual. Viewing mainstream media with a critical eye is one. So is making sure to have well-varied sources of information. Having a conversation with that co-worker you just never get a chance to talk to could be another though. And so could changing a certain store you always shop at but know deep down that you shouldn't be supporting or sitting down with a good informative book. Little things like this can not only make life a bit more interesting, they can actually help to make it better. It might not bring about as rapid or far-sweeping amount of change as we might desire sometimes, but it at least steers us in that direction. Before you know it, things could improve. ★

**American Steel**  
*Jagged Thoughts CD*  
Lookout Records  
[www.lookoutrecords.com](http://www.lookoutrecords.com)



American Steel is a hard-working outfit that has been waiting to be recognized as the talented rock and roll outfit that they obviously are. Their previous CD, *Rogue's March*, while noteworthy in its own right, was only a glimpse of how creative American Steel is, and *Jagged Edge* takes it one step further by offering 12 well-written songs that combine working class rock with 60's soul and anthemic ballads. Leatherface, John Cougar Mellencamp, Stiff Little Fingers and Van Morrison would equally hear their influence in American Steel, with the gruff, East Bay vocals and the strong guitar sound. On the other hand, there is no denying the skill American Steel possess to pull together such a well-rounded release. This is one of the best rock CDs this year.

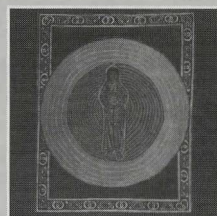
**Cursive**  
*Burst and Bloom CDEP*  
Saddle Creek Records  
[www.saddle-creek.com](http://www.saddle-creek.com)



Singer/Songwriter Tim Kasher and Co. follow up the critically acclaimed *Domestica* CD that came out last year with five tracks that progress nicely from the full-length that reinvigorated interest in the four-year-old project know as Cursive. The music is intricate and meditatively catchy. The first track "Sink to the Beat" sounds like a satirical look at the music industry and the ridiculous imposition of record, tour, promote, record again schedules on the creative process. Wrap up the sound like a neat commodity for sale on the market. Cursive doesn't flinch with the dead-on critique and rolls into the remainder of the EP with the same intentionally heartfelt compositions of connection and alienation that rock consistently in the vein of Fugazi with a touch of melodrama that conjures the Cure.

-jason kucsma

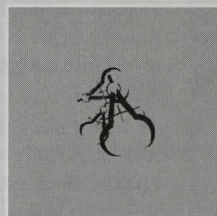
**Son, Ambulance**  
*Euphemystic*  
Saddle Creek Records  
[www.saddle-creek.com](http://www.saddle-creek.com)



If you say you want to do a musical project that combines some rockin' guitars, piano/keyboards, and some feel-good lyrics, you better be damned sure that you know what you're doing. I, for one, have no love for Ben Folds Five and I am thankful to say that I don't even know if they exist anymore. As far as I'm concerned, Billy Joel can remain the Piano Man as long as I don't have to hear him. Joe Knapp, on the other hand, has managed to put together a full-length that sounds combines the optimism and melancholy of Simon and Garfunkel with the pop sensibilities of Belle and Sebastian and the eclectic songwriting style that reflects his friendship with Bright Eyes genius Conor Oberst (who cameos on this CD). The result is an honest record of human emotion and creativity. Songs like *Maria in Motion* will leave your heart racing while *A Book Laid on its Binding* stir introspection with its sauntering tempo and timid vocals. As a follow-up to the *Oh, Holy Fools* split with Bright Eyes, this full-length is much more likely to win over new fans as Knapp steps out of the shadows of Bright Eyes and is allowed to shine on his own.

-jason kucsma

**The Ladderback**  
*Introductions to Departure*  
Bifocal Media  
[www.bifocalmedia.com](http://www.bifocalmedia.com)



When The Ladderback released their first CD on Bifocal *Honest, I Swear It's the Turnstiles*, it was messy. They were really great at what they were doing, but it was really hard to figure out what exactly they were trying to do. They made really great screamo-hardcore music, but they also had all these pop-punk tracks that were excellent, too. So after touring a shitload and releasing some singles, it seems like The Ladderback is comfortable being what they are, a talented group of kids that make swirling intricate music that harnesses the potential to inspire simultaneous dance parties or chaotic hurricanes of flying bodies. The songs pour emotion from the bottom of Ladderback-ian lungs through occasional harmonized choruses or more frequently screamed lyrics that recall the heyday of when screamo had yet to be named and it was exemplified by the likes of Native Nod, Indian Summer and Amber Inn. While the rest of the kids were content to mimic the style and move on to whatever sells next, The Ladderback have been working hard to create emotional hardcore that is sincere and inspiring.

-jason kucsma



# Would You Like a Smile With That? W(h)ip(p)ing Ass at the Merch Table With Gibby Peach

Rather than waste my days massaging some overpaid white male's testicles with the smooth of my palm - like most of the brain-dead proles out there - I spend my free time (all of it) participating in activities that would be considered frivolous, by conventional standards. For example, I might wake up tomorrow morning and go climb a tree, or sit in the library reading about some useless junk like Carson Daly's sex life, in Rolling Stallone. I could spend my whole day jerking off to Saved By the Bell reruns and I wouldn't have some 23 year-old beneficiary of nepotism telling me to take a 15 minute break at exactly 10 am so my hand doesn't get sore. Remember... turn BOSS around and it becomes Stupid Son Of a Bitch.

Now, I haven't found my sugar-mommy yet (any takers???) so, every now and then, I have to find a means to score some loot. And, every now and then, the gods of luck and chance let their blessings rain down on me like semen in a Bukkake video, by sending my friends' bands on tour. If I'm lucky, I manage to weasel my sorry ass onto these great orgies of stress, cattiness, and unhealthy food. Whether as a roadie, a driver, or, the lowliest position of all - merch person - I'll drop Lark Voorhees and company in five seconds to go on tour!

More often than not, I find myself behind the merch table and, it is in this capacity, that I've come across the ideas I'm about to share. I am, after all, the target of every suburban fashion punk who NEEDS "the sweatshirt" or "the hat". I become the last bastion of anti-consumer hope between the so-called "kids" and the "capitalist marketplace" which manages to pervade even the most religiously organized DIY space. And the kids can get pretty fuckin' rabid. God forbid I don't have any free stickers...

Considering that most of these suckers are both rude and apolitical, I find consolation in the fact that they will - to a large extent - shut their idiot mouths and listen to whatever I have to say (due to my proximity to the starz). Often, I would like to throat-punch some of these halfwits for asking retarded meatball questions like "how much are the shirts?" (when there are twenty million fucking signs that say 10 DOLLARS!!!) but, usually, I just refuse to sell them anything until they get their brain back from their 4 year-old brother after he's finished pissing on it in the back yard. The good part is, I can proselytize with impunity. I put out "why vegan?" pamphlets, sell books, and run my mouth to no end. As long as they're free, I could put out fuckin' NAMBLA bulletins and most of these plaster-headed mooks would go home to learn about the joys that lie between a young gentleman's thighs!

I also tell people, if I don't like their attitude, to take their ten dollar bill, roll it up, and snort diarrhea through it (but not very often).

Which brings me to the point of this diatribe...

Most merch kids are good people who put up with a lot of hogshit in order to travel for free with whining rock starz. We usually suck up the abuse but, because of the fact that we're "sellin' the shit", we get walked on by imbeciles, nightly.

You don't walk into McDonald's and shit on the nice, smiling, minimum-wage-getting, overworked employees while ordering your McJerky sunday, do you? I didn't think so!

People reap what they sow.

If you are nice to us, tip us, bake us cookies, etc. you will probably get something free. You might not, but you would've paid for the stupid patch any damn way.

This one time, two kids from North Carolina named Lou and Amanda gave me a free t-shirt with a picture of Dale Earnhardt that read "One More Dead Redneck". I had seen Lou wearing it the night before and, after laughing myself into a fit, had remarked how funny I thought it was. On their own volition, they MADE me one and risked their young lives in the octane-fueled South - still grieving from ol' "mustache ride"'s death - to get me that shirt and, dog gone it, I couldn't let them go home empty-handed. Now, their sheer act of selflessness has got them written up in a big, fancy magazine.

So what is my point? Only this: We often lose sight of that stupid hippy notion, Karma, but that shit is real, my friends. Being nice to people, smiling, talking to strangers... these things can enrich your miserable lives. I've met some of my best friends by being, simply, a nice person. You can, too. Who knows? Take a fuckin' chance. You probably don't have much to lose.

With that in mind, here are some things to remember the next time you go see whichever generic band happens to be rolling through your town: Visit the merch table, even if you aren't buying anything. Talk to us merch kids. Smile, and say thank please. Compliment us on our impeccable fashion sense and bright, positive demeanor. Hell, hit on us (we WILL remember you!). Offer us a place to stay (we often need it and will always return the favor). If we have free information, take it. Read it! It's there for a reason. If we're selling Clamor, buy a copy. You probably have enough t-shirts, anyway, and, besides, do you really want to look like every other fifteen year-old kid in your town with a green mohawk and a \_\_\_\_\_ shirt? Be fuckin' nice. But, whatever you do, please refrain from leaning on our tables and asking us stupid questions.

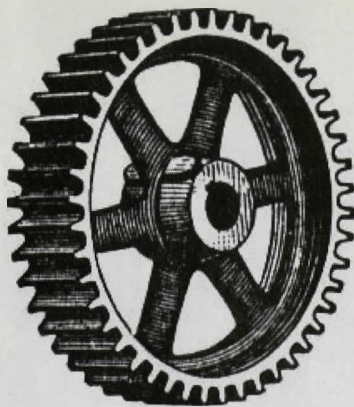
If you are part of the unholy trinity consisting of jocks, drunks, and christian sXe boys, please stay home.

A good attitude may not get you a job picking cabbage on a Ukrainian collective farm but, you'll find out, it can pay off in the long run. So, mes amis, you should try to be nice to people all the time (especially us merch people), or you will probably end up eating mayonnaise sandwiches for the rest of your life.



photo by Jon Schledewitz





# The Mistakes I've Made: *Thoughts on Class Fluidity*

by Tennessee Jones

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A few weeks ago I picked up an anthology entitled *Growing Up Poor*, in a New York City bookstore. A young girl appears on the cover of the book, her pale chin, arms, and knees smudged with soot, her dirty white dress rising almost luminescent from the lacquered gloom that surrounds her. I flipped through the collection hastily, skeptical of its contents. Like most fiction volumes on the subject of poverty, it was filled with either half-truths or downright lies. In those flashing pages I read descriptions of quilts, yards, simple dinners, of the bare planks of front porches, of fathers leaving for work in the still-blue hour before dawn. The truth of denial and hardship, of having stunted ambitions, of being ashamed and ridiculed, are hard to write about without applying a veneer that separates, however subtly, those experiences from the real world.

I wasn't aware of class as a political force when I was young. It manifested itself as something psychological instead. I was ashamed to wear my sneakers for more than one school year, ashamed to wear the misprinted shirts my mother brought home from the sewing factory where she worked. Occasionally I noticed the eyes of my teachers falling towards the jagged lines of color where the printed patterns did not quite match up. Those glances penetrated my skin and worked their way into who I was becoming. It wasn't resentment I had towards those who had more than me, but a vast bewilderment, a wonder that some families could afford to buy one hundred dollar shoes for their children.

During the difficult years before entering high school, I thought about brand names before falling asleep at night. The desire for certain material possessions and the denial of them kept me awake, gnawed at my psyche, created in me an inferiority, and eventually made space for a slow, seething anger to fill certain parts of my brain. In the restless hours before falling asleep I swore I would never do manual labor again (as an adolescent I worked in my father's tobacco fields), that I would have a well-paying job, that I would be able to have everything I wanted. When I began to talk about achieving monetary success to my fam-

ily, my enthusiasm was often met with a deep-seated apathy, with the slow drawl of my father and the spreading wrinkles around his eyes. There was a dogged hopelessness in the way my family thought about living, a resignation that I was terrified of.

Near the end of my first year of high school I began to rebel against the weight of the fear caused by artificial desires. In the pent-up early summer heat of my best friend's bedroom I discovered the existence of a counterculture. I began listening to punk records, reading the album inserts with wet fingers, singing into humid air instead of remaining silent.

When I took the first tentative steps into a subculture that resisted consumerism and the ideas about what was considered an acceptable standard of living, I shrugged off many of the psychological constraints that had bound me. My second hand clothes weren't a sign that I could not afford any better, they were a badge that said I refused to contribute to a culture based on unnecessary consumption and waste. More philosophically, my choices stated that I had faith in the basic good of humanity, that I would be judged by personality instead of appearance. It was an amorphous liberatory politics, a politics that I have never given a name to, one that gave me the strength to move beyond my past. My ideas of what constituted an acceptable standard of living changed. Suddenly, by force of political ideology, I began to identify as middle class for the first time in my life. Unfortunately, this newfound class identity would come at the cost of denying my own history.

When I moved away from Tennessee to Richmond, Virginia, I began to view my family with the same contempt and pity that my elementary school teachers had viewed me. I forced myself to forget that some people spend their entire lives working in factories or on farms. I put distance between myself and my cousins, terrified that their lives, marked by early marriages, children, and dead-end jobs, could still be my fate.

Despite my political convictions I still had, buried deep within me, a shame of growing up poor. I was making less than 3,000 dollars a year, but my "poverty" was a carefully calculated decision. My choice to live simply was a political one. I was straddling class cat-

egories by living well under the poverty line while maintaining a sense of privilege. I did not have the hopelessness, angst, and feelings of powerlessness that often go along with growing up poor. The contempt for my family grew, as well as a fear that their rampant alcoholism, lack of education, and stunted lives would appear in my life.

I spent a year and a half in the center of the anarchist community in Richmond feeling like I enjoyed immense middle class privilege before I began to realize that my experiences of being "middle class" were very different from most of my friends' experiences. It occurred to me that most of the people I had surrounded myself with had not gone through the things I had, had grown up with their desires fulfilled, had grown up believing they would be someone, had never thought they would melt into the mountains, had not seen themselves lying among gravestones at the age of eight. I realized that the difference between myself, and most people in the radical community, is that they were divorcing themselves from middle class privilege rather than running from the stress of being poor in a capitalist society.

Amorphous ideas about class began to solidify when I met Sara, an Ivy-Leaguer and freelance writer who had grown up in an affluent DC suburb. Through conversations with her, I began to realize that the dynamics of class categories are comprised not only of financial brackets, but also of cultural knowledge, and the even more elusive quality of entitlement. The small, laughable differences between us, such as my fervor for classic rock and her knowledge of classical music, reflected the different ways we had grown up. The differences between our personalities, ambitions, and expectations became amplified through knowledge of our differing class backgrounds. I began to see how two people with similar intelligence and desires could have very different lives based on the resources made available to them and the belief that they were entitled to them.

This realization began to gnaw at who I was. After years of forgetting, I began to consciously remember how I had grown up. I re-



membered the anger and bewilderment I had felt as a child. I began to wonder who I would have been and how I would have acted differently on my ambitions had I been taught that my life was important.

Memories of my childhood in Tennessee came back with amazing force and I began to have a small crisis of identity, realizing that by denying my past I had cut off a part of myself. The leaning fences of Oregon Hill, the poor white Richmond neighborhood I lived in, mocked me. The faces of the men that lined the porches in the evenings and the faces of the women down at the corner store were like the faces of my mother and father. These people treated me with disdain, as one more spoiled rich college kid who had moved in and exploited their neighborhood for cheap rent. They had never seen my parents' ruined hands, did not know about our small houses and trailers scattered over the country-side.

I wanted to reclaim my history, but I also had conflicts about using the term working class to describe myself. I still felt as if I had an amazing amount of privilege because of cultural knowledge and education I had accumulated over the years. Less tangibly, I also had the unshakable knowledge that I would *be* someone. This was a belief acquired through involvement with a subculture that valued self-actualization and the importance of community.

This conflict did not disappear but was partially resolved when I moved to New York City, and discovered that my poverty was not voluntary at all. After years of working low-wage unskilled jobs I decided to get a real job. For months, despite intelligence, experience, cultural awareness, and even borrowed feelings of entitlement I could not get a job that would allow me to use my brain or to save enough money to go to community college. Desperation began to seep back into my life. I thought of my parents almost daily, was suddenly awed by their resolve to continue living their lives in the face of repetition and under-stimulation. In the months I spent stumbling through New York jobless or in jobs that I hated, I felt closer to my family and their struggles than I ever had before. I began to understand what they had been through, began to see how important it is to have a community

to support us, to tell us our lives are important.

I experienced a rage deeper than any I had ever known after being in New York for a only few weeks. I began to see the subversion of desire that had existed in my family and on the faces of the people I worked with in unskilled jobs. I heard them talk about their lives as if they didn't matter. I was filled with a rage so huge and impotent that I would cry on the El platform. My cheeks filled with concrete when I thought about the weight of my mother's life, the heaviness of the fact that she was *never taught to believe her life was worth anything*. I looked around as the J train rumbled closer and wondered: How many people understand their own potential? And, beyond that, how many people are given the tools to fulfill that potential?

I am lucky. Largely because of my involvement with the anarchist community I eventually landed a job with a small press that I respected. My old sense of acquired privilege and entitlement is returning. The rage that I initially felt over class division in New York is beginning to fade, to sink into corners as I become more comfortable. The desire to forget what desperation feels like is very strong. This comfort is the greatest danger to social change. It is an insidious thing, its worst manifestation the belief that some people's lives are more worthwhile than others. Despite my experiences working mentally debilitating jobs, my class background, and my political convictions, the promise of living a comfortable lifestyle has lessened my fervor for working or doing activist work. Having an excess amount of wealth allows a person to move through this society easily, to feel that they are special because they have access to things that other people do not.

To combat this feeling I carry with me the picture of who I was as a child, the lives of my cousins, the lives and personalities of the people I have worked with. I think of the anger and desire that has rumbled through me for most of my life. I know that I should be working to give pieces of my borrowed entitlement to others, to share the idea that everyone's life is equally valuable and full of potential. My liberation means nothing without theirs. ★

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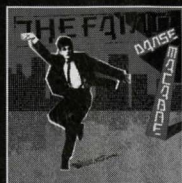
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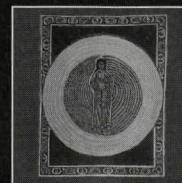




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I first met Marisa Carnesky at a performance she did in the U.K. in May 1996. I was a student, stripper and budding performance artist and was introduced to her by mutual friends who thought we ought to know each other. We hit it off immediately. I was a fan from the moment I saw her first show. She mixed sideshow and carnival gimmicks and old-style burlesque with elements of fairy tale and grand guignol theatrics into an irresistible, yet still somehow modern show.

In 1998, she produced the *Grotesque Burlesque Revue* with her company, Dragon Ladies, using latex body costumes to create strange creatures with breasts of monstrous proportions, telling stories of armless pirate's molls and freakish, tragic heroines in adult fairy tales reminiscent of Bluebeard.

Over the years, we've performed together and supported each other's work, and Marisa has been both a help and inspiration to me. Marisa was in Copenhagen where I am currently living to perform an abridged version of her show, *Jewess Tattooess*, which I'd originally seen in December 1999. She was in Denmark as a participant in the Live Art Festival at Kanonhallen theatre curated by Gritt Uldall Jessen (January 2001), along with fellow artists Ron Athey, Giovanna Maria Casetta, Kira O'Reilly, Franko B and Otmar Wagner. The festival proved to be very inspiring for me with a supportive atmosphere of like-minded artists and performers.

I find *Jewess Tattooess* to be Marisa's most considered and grown-up work. Her work has always been revolutionary in its sexual content but this is the first to look seriously at her identity as a Jewish woman and tattooed striptease artist - the fact that she is going against all Jewish teachings which regard the body as yours only insofar as it is on loan from God, but also exploring what it means to her to be Jewish; after years of dismissing this part of her, discovering and celebrating the richness of her cultural heritage. Powerful both in philosophical content and in its visual and textual imagery, the show also makes reference to a story of a woman who got herself a tattoo of a flower to cover up the one made in a Nazi concentration camp and finally her nightmare of dying as a carnival woman only to be refused burial by a rabbi in a proper Jewish service and instead preserved forever as a stuffed tattooed exhibit. The piece ends with Marisa tattooing a Jewish Star of David over her stomach.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED IN DRESSING ROOM OF KANONHALLEN THEATER, COPENHAGEN, last day of Live Arts Festival, January 21<sup>st</sup> 2001.

We began by talking about the punk and anarchist roots we came from - I wanted to question what I see as the desexualization of punk since its beginnings in the late '70s.

MARISA: I think that punks and anarchists and hippies are three different things, for a start, and I think the punks coming from New York Dolls, Sex Pistols, etc., wanted to really play with what is taboo so they wanted to dress like dominatrices and prostitutes and go against culture, do what your parents don't do, not be thinking about responsibility. It was coming out of suburban teenage boredom and that really had to be said at that time and it came out really strong visually ... and all these different strands came in, there's the peace and love movement of the '60s and there's political anarchists and they're mixing all these things together as anarchists influenced by punk music culture which is maybe more about images and glamour and art ideas, but rather than just disrupting and subverting culture, also trying to create solutions about how we can make new

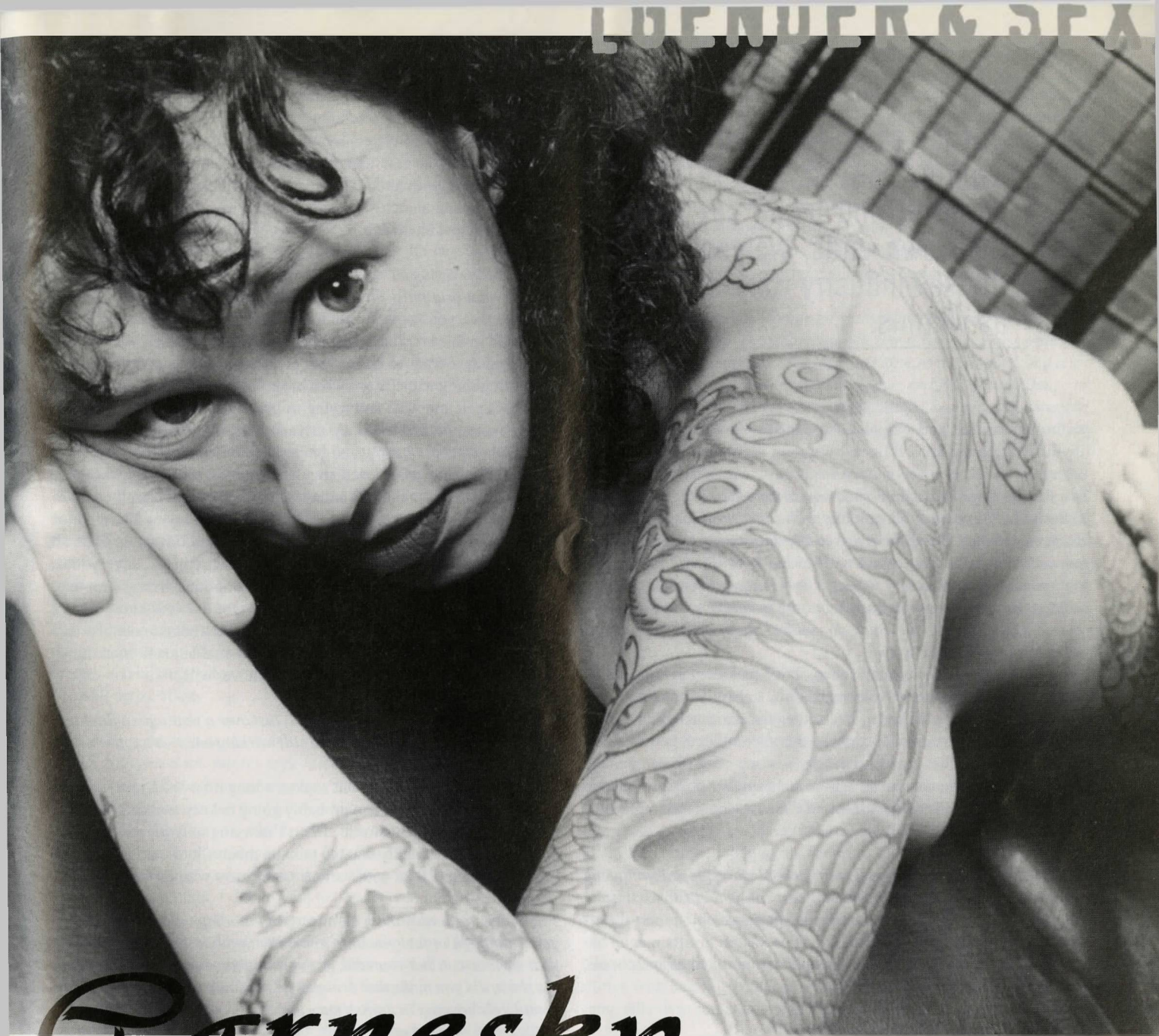
I think there's a big movement though, I think that people like Annie Sprinkle have really affected a lot of women's ideas and lots of smart, political, young women are also really into sex.

performance artist

Marisa

communities, so they became really involved and concerned with social and animal issues and being cooperative, and I think that sex somehow got left behind and I think that we truly punk girls are doing all of those things and we're subverting our sex and being able to use our sexuality in a really important way ... but it almost seems like those concerns for women didn't seem to take precedence in the anarchist community, it was almost like they were too flippant, so that rather than focusing on women being sexually powerful and using sex to their own ends, women in the sex industry were seen as victims and a lot of women in the sex industry are victims and a lot of them aren't ... I think there's a big movement though, I think that people like Annie Sprinkle have really affected a lot of women's ideas and lots of smart, political, young women are also really into sex, and I think there's more and more women of our generation who aren't





# Barnesky

on art, culture, and sexuality

interview by jane minx

afraid of being ballsy and going and working in the sex industry so that we have more time to be creative ...

*JANE: Do you think that we're entering a new era that will be more positive about sex?*

MARISA: Well I think we're trying, but what's a bit difficult is that the media doesn't seem to have become better about the way it portrays women, and the mainstream spectacle that anarchists have been trying to affect and break for a long time is still intact, and so the liberating ideas of people like Annie Sprinkle don't seem to have affected the mainstream in a particularly positive way ... there's more bimbos on TV than there has been since the '50s, and everything's been blanded out and everything's a huge hybrid and everything's just over produced ... but yeah ... it's filtering through ...

*How do you find you've been represented by the mainstream media?*

Well, I don't really get represented by them anymore - I used to almost seek that attention when I was trying to put big events on and get a big audience ... but I'm now trying to get on with my work as an artist, I'm less worried about press now than I was then, so I suppose I'm less political in a way. I'm not trying to infiltrate the press and subvert people's ideas, I just do it on a more personal level because you can't cope with it anymore. I mean, I don't want to be a media star ... because when you start dealing with the mainstream media you just get sucked into their huge void and I think if you want to make work with integrity you can't really go chasing press because the ideas just start to fall apart, somehow there's this power that the media has that just ruins genuine underground ideas ... you know, you end up being a bloody TV presenter ... if music is your medium then your music maybe has a chance of surviving, but if you're a



## Rather than focusing on women being sexually powerful and using sex to their own ends, women in the sex industry were seen as victims.

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performance artist and you chase the media, you're really making life difficult, in a way.

*This festival is something in between the art world and the subculture - it's being held in an arts theatre and we've just sat through a heavily academic seminar, but all the artists to a certain extent, but particularly you and Ron Athey, you're not really what I would call part of the traditional art world, and to me that's been a good thing, like all these people have been thrown together and the theatre's not really known what to make of it all, but which do you feel more at home in, the art world or the subculture world?*

I feel at home equally in each of them, but I feel most at home when they put subculture into art venues like this. I also don't want to give up my club shows, you know, my audiences are usually subculture people rather than art school people ... there are still artists who didn't do it through art school, and I mean Ron is one of those people, and there are people who went to art school and came out still interested in underground culture and rejected lots of their art school training, which is what I did.

*I knew a lot of people who went to art school who stopped producing art afterwards, or they did a zine and that's it, which I think is quite sad, really, they should have kept up the challenge and not let the art school ...*

... Make them inhibited about art, people get inhibited at art schools, because everything's so pretentious ...

*And everything has to be explained, as well ...*

And coded and pretentious that people get afraid to do or say anything, which is what I really like about Ron ... he doesn't give a fuck, he's a true punk and he comes from that and he does what he likes. At a big arts festival he lies on the stage and fucks himself in the arse with big dildos.

*Which doesn't need to be explained, to me, things like that - it's like, what do you think it's about?*

But when you look at this audience you can tell this has been a subcultural event in a fancy venue, and it's also been an art event that's got subculture in it, so it's managed to cross that bridge because it chose artists that did, and that's what I like.

*I've found this festival and this scene extremely supportive; this is such a small group of people from all over the world, and somehow we still keep in touch and support each other, rather than competing, but sadly, the live art world isn't always like that ...*

... Well, you know we're people, and that's like London trendiness, and I'm sure there's a New York trendiness too, and in lots of cities, but London is particularly bad for having a lot of graduates who are more

interested in the design and the surface of things than in the content, and they're so afraid that they won't be trendy that they make art that's got nothing in it, and does nothing ... but I don't have to compete with those people - I have my people, and there is regard and respect for real artists, but they're few and far between, because people become obsessed with money and fame and style and all the evils of our culture that I as a young anarchist girl growing up was desperately trying to fight against and challenge.

*Yeah, it's like trying to remember, why am I making this art, let's go back to what originally drove me, in the beginning ...*

I want to live, you know, I want to feel real feelings, which is why I'm interested in this art where people do give blood, 'cause I want to feel real emotion, I want to be moved ... and art I like is people that are clearly throbbing with life and what life is about in a really humanitarian, somehow genuine way, and trying to get to the bottom of it, and not just be into superficial, money-driven goals, and I don't think that's what makes people happy, and having been a dominatrix, when I've had clients that have been rich, they've been fucking unhappy because they don't do genuine things and they have to be beaten really hard to feel anything real anymore and I think it's really easy to lose sight of what's important, especially as you get older - and I'm going to be 30 in a month, and everybody starts to lose all their ethics ... everyone's buying designer clothes and flats and there's nothing wrong with that, but you've still got to be happy with who you are and know what's important, things like love and sharing things and a community of artists ... I think you can't even say what they are - real humanitarian things that if you don't know what they are you never will.

*I first saw this piece, Jewess Tattooes, just over a year ago in England, so is this the main piece that you're still working on, or are you working on new things as well?*

Well, I've reworked this, and it's taken a long time and I just feel now like I'm getting there, so I'm probably going to keep working with this idea, and make new bits for it ... then I'm trying to work on a big new project that I don't really want to talk too much about until it goes into production, but it'll be with various performers with different skills.

*You told me yesterday that you'd stopped tattooing the Jewish star onto you - although in fact you didn't actually tattoo it this time, you did it as a surface cut, but you said you've stopped performing that part of the show, did you make that decision just because you didn't want to be completely covered in Jewish stars, or ...*

Well, I only ever did one with ink, I use the tattoo machine to make the cut, but I do it now without the ink, so it means it just disappears ... I just don't put ink on the needle, and then it's a cut and it leaves a very faint scar, sometimes it doesn't scar at all if I've done it quite neatly, but I kind of went up and down about that, some people said, you're just trying to be like Franko B or one of the blood-letters, and I said, no, I'm doing this for myself, and they said, it's a bit like, "here's a big vaudeville show and I can also cut myself as well," so it looked a little bit like I was tacking it on to get every possible thing in but it was really that I hadn't worked the show out properly, whereas when I did it here this time it had much more meaning and resonance and rather than looking like I had stuck it on the end of the show it was like a proper part of it, so I think it's that I didn't know where to put it, or how to do it, I did all these little stars on my leg, it wasn't as effective and doing it on my stomach just seemed to be more meaningful for me and I did it properly and I gave that part of the show respect by giving myself time to do it and having proper lights on it ... but I love doing little burlesque turns, and I was a stripper for seven years and I know how to give a good show in three minutes, but I'm trying to start to work through things a little bit more maturely, and not just throw things together ... but it's good to have a little bit of that raw edge still in a



show, I don't want to lose that completely and be so clean and aesthetic that I look like a really boring contemporary artist.

*Maybe my mind shouldn't work like that because I went to art school and it should be pure and composed and full of golden sections, but my mind doesn't, it's all over the place ... I think that's how people's brains are, certainly mine ...*

Yeah, absolutely, I like messiness in work, I don't like anything to be too neat, it takes away some of the power and the passion if it's all sewn up, it's nice to have a bit of mess and a bit of chaos, chaos is what live performances are all about, as well ...

*And also the moments when you realize people are human, like when Ron (Athey) was performing, you could see he was shaking, and to me that made it all the more powerful ... you have to believe that somebody's the same as you are, in the audience ...*

Well, that's what makes performance art different from, say, a circus show where it's about the fact that they're almost not human, they can defy everything, and it's about their skill and how unreal they can be, and I think what's nice about performance art is it's about the real person and how real and fragile they are, how much they can show of themselves, and how you can connect with things that are psychological or emotional ... although you can get emotional feelings from watching a fantastic aerialist, it's just a different approach to making a show, so I don't think one art form is greater than the other, I think both circus and stripping are fantastic art forms, but performance art is a particular thing to me that is about psychological and emotional states through images and talking and nudity and doing things that are challenging to yourself up on stage.

*Both of us have seen each other's work for many years now, and your work's changed a lot, but it's kept those, Marisa touches, if you like - what others call the B-movie touches, like when you're sleepwalking and possessed by the spirit of Lilith - but the first pieces I saw never really explored the fact you were Jewish - was that something you wanted to put into your work for a long time but didn't know how?*

Well I wasn't really interested in it for a long time ... I rejected my Judaism, I was a punk, I didn't want to be involved in boring religious things, it was nothing to do with me or my life for so long, and then I had all these tattoos and I just started to think about my family and how I could reconcile my relationship with them, and that just started to make me think about the Jewish thing ... I thought it was about boring things, like going to synagogue or eating funny food, I didn't know about all the old stories and the occult and demonology in Judaism, because growing up in a boring suburb in London, that was really not what Jewish people were about, they were about being nouveau riche and having a big house and the best clothes and being ... a Jewish princess, and so I started to explore how I could relate to where I was from, and found this whole wealth of fantastic stuff that I thought was really about my personality, like why am I really interested in theatrical things and magic and horror, and these are actually really Jewish things, though I didn't know that, and that was exciting, and then by being really tattooed and out there, being really opposite to what I come from, I really had to think about where I had come from, and that's what the show's about, can I be both? And that's how I've made myself both by doing this show, and I can come to terms with that, and I can say I don't believe in god and I don't want to go to synagogue and I'm not interested in those things, but I can love all those stories, and be really interested in history and - I talk like a Jewish person, I'm fast-talking, I'm over friendly, and there's something about my personality that's very Jewish that I can't escape from, I can pretend I'm not, but Jews can tell if there's other Jews in the room ... and it's really bizarre, and it's not even just visual, it's the personality - and that's cultural, and I'm quite pleased about that.

*Do you think you tried to fight it for many years?*

I did, and I couldn't understand why I couldn't be cool, and not bothered and not worried - I worry all the time because I'm Jewish, because my grandmother worried all the time, and my great grandmother too, I'm over-analytical and I talk too much in social situations because I'm Jewish - and also because I'm a human being and I'm not saying I only want to be in a community of other people like that, but I now understand some parts of the reason why I'm different to other people, to a lot of British people, because I come from a different background, and that doesn't mean I want to stay there, it means I acknowledge that.

*I know you got tattooed - amongst many other reasons - because you wanted to rebel against the fact you felt like a very nice girl, which is part of the reason I did it ... but then, working as a stripper I find a lot of people telling me I should dress in rubber and leather and dance to hard goth music because it'll go with the tattoos, but actually, I want to dance in little white dresses and pink eye shadow, 'cause really I am very girly, and the tattoos are totally at odds with that ...*

Well, that's what people used to say to me as a stripper and I wanted to dance to old '50s burlesque music and do like a Gypsy Rose Lee act, and they were all like, "but you're all tattooed, you should wear rubber and do Marilyn Manson, you'd do really well with that," and I really like that stuff, but it's not me, but that's just a cultural association, that tattoos are heavy metal and Hell's Angels, I mean they are that for a lot of people but for a lot of other people they're something else, and I'm really girly too.

*I think you can still be the nice girl next door with tattoos.*

Well that's what we have to show people, I think that's what my show does, it's like, she's a really nice Jewish girl, and she's fucking massively tattooed, but she's a thinking person ... you can be really girly and really feminine and not be completely wussy and awful, and being covered in massive tattoos is a really girly thing for me, and I've always been girly and people have always been funny about that - and that's why I like dressing now in old '40s dresses because I feel like I want to look like a tattooed lady in the carnivals ... but each to his own, and I think it's great when I see really rocking young girls like my friend's daughter, she's 17 and a massive Marilyn Manson fan with wool dreadlocks, and she's totally into rubber and leather and wearing corsets and huge platform boots and I love her and I think she's so feisty and I'm so glad she's turned out like that, because I can share my old goth stories with her, but at this point in my life I like wearing really twee camp silly twin sets and having big tattoos, but that's just where I'm at.

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I love doing little burlesque turns, and I was a stripper for seven years and I know how to give a good show in three minutes, but I'm trying to start to work through things a little bit more maturely, and not just throw things together.



# Unbuckling the Bible Belt:

*Reflections on Carol Queen and Her Week in Middle Tennessee*

by sunfrog

Among the religious, sending missionaries to distant or dangerous places to preach and proselytize is integral to the program. I'll never forget the time a duo of devout believers showed up at an anarchist performance space in Detroit to voyeuristically contemplate and vigorously condemn the heathen punks and hippies dancing half-naked to the sounds of Chumbawamba. Conversely, pagan perverts tend not to testify too aggressively in hotbeds of holiness, but by inviting writer-activist Carol Queen to bring her gospel of libidinal liberty to the mid-South, I realized that, in fact, I was calling on a sex-positive priestess to open the minds, if only slightly, of the fervent and faithful.

At the very least, Carol found comrades in a place her West Coast friends admonished her to be extremely wary of. She reflects, "Pretty much everyone in San Francisco who knew we were going to Tennessee had gasped melodramatically and urged extreme caution. We even got a rabid warning or two: 'They'll kill you out there!'" Whether Carol Queen truly challenged the status quo of indigenous monosexuality or merely rallied a few of the troops in a small Whitmanesque "army of lovers," since her visit in March 2001, the state of Tennessee may never be the same.

It's obvious that there's been a revival in religious fundamentalism and sexual conservatism over the last two decades. But living wildly for most of my adult life in Utopian enclaves of playful community, I've luckily developed a certain immunity to the forces of intolerance. How-

ever, moving to the South erased any doubts that uptight sexual moralism remains alive and well in certain geographical and cultural enclaves. On the one hand, I've learned that tolerance goes both ways as I've found friendships and alliances across great chasms in the ideological divide. On the other, I've done a delicate and difficult dance from the small towns near my home to the large public university where I work; I depend on a sort of "love the bigot, hate the bigotry" ethic to survive. Offering Carol free reign to publicly educate and titillate in lecture halls, seminar rooms, and smoky bars, I garnered a sense of sweet revenge for all the quiet rage I feel when exposed to the innumerable public displays of salvation that are as common as cell phones around here.

We nicknamed our whirlwind tour "unbuckling the Bible Belt," and it seems we succeeded to a large degree. Carol agrees: "There's no question that many residents of Tennessee are ready to have the belt pulled wide open—and maybe even

the pants buttons undone. I felt my time in Tennessee was well spent. I sold a lot of seditious books, met some warm and wonderful people, talked until I was hoarse, picked up a few mid-century smutty antiques, and knocked down a few of my preconceived notions about life in the Bible Belt."

We spent most of our week on the fringes of academia, from sociology class to women's studies conference. Although not a hardcore scholar, Carol can more than hold her own in the scholarly crowd. She holds her doctorate in sex ("sexology," to be precise), a credential that she will be the first to tell you was earned as much in the bedroom as in the classroom, as much from tempting bodies as from textbooks. This fact prompted my friends in the Eggplant Faerie Players to write the "Dr. Carol" theme song to serenade her with at our steamy performance night at the dingiest of Nashville dives. The chorus is something like: "Real Live Nude Girl kinky sexy

horny/A real live doctor of Sexu-ology/She'll tell you 'bout your G-spot and your prostate gland/She'll even tell you why it is you like to get spanked/She's Dr. Carol/Carol Queen!" Carol's response? "Damn, even Dr. Ruth doesn't have a theme song!" I wonder if Annie Sprinkle, Susie Bright, or Pat Califia have theme songs? Perhaps lesser known than her aforementioned comrades in sex-positive feminism (I've also heard it called "do me" feminism), Carol demonstrates extraordinary intelligence and stage presence and remains genuinely radical and down-to-earth. She de-



If sex-positivity is Utopian—and in a way, it is—we have to be willing to envision the world we want, wherever we are, and start figuring out how to create it: who our allies and appropriate partners are, how to challenge the internal and external voices that say, "You can't do that."

— Carol Queen



serves all the "fame" she's recently accumulated.

In the early 1990s, when I came out as a bisexual, I read extensively about the emerging bisexual community. At this time, I discovered Carol Queen. Two influential pieces of writing color my earliest memories of her work. Reading these again almost a decade later, they still reverberate with the power that inspired and aroused me a decade ago.

The first of these is an essay that appeared in the anthology *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*. Here, as elsewhere, Carol speaks to my own frustrations with the limits of language to articulate sexual issues, at the same time she reinforces my belief that we can use prose to push the boundaries of culture and increase our potential for pleasure in the world. In that essay, she writes: "It is the queer in me that empowers, that lets me see those lines and burn to cross them; that lets me question the lies we were all told about who women are, who men are, how we may properly interact . . . what nice girls do and don't do. The queer in all of us clamors for pleasure and change, will not be tamed or regulated, wants a say in the creation of a new reality."

The other sample of her writing I discovered in the early '90s came from the steamy and sophisticated journal called *Libido*—a sort of thinking person's *Penthouse*—a feminist, erotic, and intellectual magazine for folks bored by mainstream porn. Here, rather than a politically sharp essay, I found an utterly intoxicating short story. "The Golden Boy" and its young female narrator explore some of Carol's earliest experience and fascination with the eroticism of gay men. Now, the notion of a man getting excited by images of lesbian love has become such a cliché that many don't see that as particularly liberating. But this story covers new territory: a woman, a queer woman at that, finding extraordinary arousal as a voyeur of gay men; this is, to put it bluntly, hot.

Since those early discoveries of Carol's work, I've read her fiction and non-fiction extensively and have never ceased to be amazed, inspired, and excited by her intelligence, conviction, and skill as a writer. Since first meeting Carol in April 1993 at the Bisexual Conference preceding the historic March on Washington for LGBT liberation, I've had the joy of developing a friendship with her and her partner Robert. Carol has taught me a few invaluable things. First, she's shown me, through her own insistence on erotic pleasure—and pretty wild and kinky pleasure to boot—that our feminist values for freedom and gender equality do not require the sacrifice of our personal desires, fantasies, and practices. In fact, Carol makes certain that people understand that she sees her work in sexuality—from education to entertainment—as an affirmation not a negation of her feminism.

Additionally, Carol demonstrates through her prose and life practice that sex itself can be a form of activism; she makes clear that access to consensual pleasure, in whatever form, is an integral

part of our politics, and that pleasure should be high on our list as we work to create a new, more just and peaceful world. That is, Carol understands that our right to feel good about ourselves in our bodies and in the bedroom can be as important as our right to food, clothing, shelter, and meaningful work.

As an ambassador from that sex-positive Mecca of San Francisco, Carol managed to offend some people in Tennessee while inspiring many others. Her biggest challenge may not have been reaching the religious (or avoiding their wrath) but in finding sympathy among some college feminists for whom being "sex positive" may not be a priority.

Although Carol literally spent hours answering questions after all of her talks, performances, and book-signings, she still had more to say about this trip upon returning to the West Coast. Writing online, Carol addresses the issue implied by some of her Tennessee critics that she lives in "a bubble of utopian sex privilege," coming as she does from California the sex radical milieu. She explains:

"People living positive sexual lives, exploring their own erotic individuality, espousing sex-positive ideals, aren't born in cabbages, and we don't all live in San Francisco. People fitting this description live in all parts of the country and come from almost all walks of life. Many of us struggled with the exact issues the young Tennessee feminists are dealing with now. Access to self-esteem has not always been easy for us; some of us have had horrific sexual experiences (and most of the rest of us have had at least a few really mediocre ones); many of us have had to search for information about our bodies and the way they function, or information that would help us understand and accept our desires. Many of us come from frankly sex-negative backgrounds, often with religious dogma adding to our own families' discomfort and dysfunction around sexual issues. In short, we come from backgrounds pretty similar to those of most everybody else, including the young women who thought sex-positive thought was irrelevant in their lives."

Only a modest drive from the university into the hills, Short Mountain Sanctuary is like another world compared to the rest of rural Tennessee. Even some people from California consider this radical faery outpost to be an erotic Mecca. This is one place where just about everyone felt that what Carol and Robert had to say was totally relevant to his or her lives. While Carol occupied the limelight for most of the week, when we finally got to the Sanctuary, it was Robert's turn to share the spotlight. Their scintillating science class called the "Anatomy of Pleasure" lasted for hours and delved into intricacies of how we all experience sensation in our bodies. My neighbors who stayed for the duration seemed completely captivated—especially considering that some of them gave up an afternoon in the sauna to listen. Carol appears to be as impressed with this scene as I'd hoped

she would be when she writes: "I'm not sure what can outdo the impact of groups of faeries going back to the land and learning to live with rural neighbors." Sharing my faery friends with Carol and Robert—from Eggplant's over-the-top antics at the bar to our afternoon at the mountain—was as much my gift to her as recruiting groups at school to help pay for her airfare. Our sex-positive culture in Tennessee can be as Utopian as anything on either coast; we just tend to do things somewhat clandestinely. But when we venture to more publicly push the buttons of the bible-pounders, it's nice to have a sexology diva like Carol Queen by our side. ★

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GENDER & SEX



# Gender Equity in (Bike) Workspaces

Confronting our own Sexism  
by Ammi Keller

We live in a world in which existing systems of power survive via the extension of not only physical but social control. Racism, sexism, misogyny and homophobia are part of the landscape. Like rocks and trees, violence against people of color, women and queer people is always there, a backdrop to 'more important' stories. In our personal and group projects, we try to create a different picture. We try to establish a space where individuals feel comfortable exploring options and interests. Where the weight of institutional prejudice is held—if only for a short time—aloft of people's shoulders.

In projects with a mechanical focus involving both women and men, sexism is going to enter the workspace. Both groups have been heavily socialized to act in certain ways around technology, in ways that limit the process of sharing skills and flatten the learning curve. This article—originally written for the newly formed New Orleans Community Bicycle Project—is an attempt to quantify behaviors before they become entrenched, to work pro-actively towards deciding what an anti-sexist collective works and acts like. As such, all examples apply to bike building and repair, though the behaviors listed and solutions presented extend (hopefully) to a variety of groups and situations.

Also, the terms 'men' and 'women' are used frequently below, and out of quotes. They should be taken as a way to represent gender expression and identification rather than as concrete terms excluding transgendered people, intersexed people and others. Gender can be and is fluid. The following is an attempt to keep it that way.

*For the fellas (damaging gendered behavior men engage in):*

- **Relaying information freely to men while withholding information from women.** Where men have no problem telling other men how to do things, they often safeguard 'how-to' information when talking to a woman. This includes not using the proper names of tools and parts. Men have been conditioned to believe their worth depends on their being 'fixers' able to woo women with their abilities in a forbidden sphere. Not using names is one—and only one—way to keep women out of that sphere, also to make a woman dependant on you rather than her own abilities.
- **Taking over.** After you came over to help, did a woman who had been taking apart her bike and puzzling over it retreat to a corner, watching as you ran after pumps and levers and spoke wrenches? Five minutes later is she glassy-eyed, hands in pockets, staring off into space? If she isn't in the director's chair while work is being done, she isn't going to feel empowered and capable of performing the same tasks in the future. She also won't learn to make mistakes and trust herself. Check in frequently and know when to back off.
- **Refusing to ask questions (especially technical questions) of women.** Men are told they're supposed to know everything and that if they don't, people will think less of them. Refuse to be hemmed in by this stereotype. Request and expect help and support from those around you.

- **Pretending expertise.** Where a woman will often refuse to acknowledge her competence until it's unavoidable, a man will exaggerate his abilities to gain social stature. This can waste someone's time or create fresh problems.
- **Damaging tools and parts due to lack of info.** I've watched men true wheels (sans questions) until the rims contorted and I've seen them hit just about anything possible with a mallet. Inexperience sometimes contributes to broken tools and parts, but carelessness and bluster don't have to. Similarly, small, specialized tools are often more effective than their big, heavy counterparts. Learn the right piece for the job. Don't let the stereotypical push to wield large or familiar tools keep you from becoming a versatile mechanic.
- **Problem solving.** Finding solutions to snags before other, less experienced people have had time and space to work on it for themselves. Experimenting and realizing one can make mistakes are crucial to the learning process. Be available but not ever-present.
- **Flirting: Exchanging information or assistance for (sexual) attention.** When a man is helping a woman with her bike, it is important that information not become a means of power and control. Men and women flirting often fall into prescribed gender roles where men's competence and women's helplessness comprise the dialogue. Be aware of disempowering dynamics.
- **Creating a competitive workspace.** Men in groups can create a space where competition takes over. Where it's suddenly all about first, biggest, loudest, most dangerous. In a collective setting, this is exclusionary. It also makes both the women and men present feel terrible and learn almost nothing. Take a deep breath and refuse to join in. When possible, name the behavior. Address it. Act pro-actively to create a supportive work environment.
- **Defensiveness/backlash.** Reacting defensively when gender issues are brought up. Taking statements about gender personally. Finding ways to discredit women who discuss sexism by challenging them in other arenas.
- **Condescension and paternalism.**

*Both men and women do the things listed above and below.* As a woman, I have found myself engaging in several damaging 'male' behaviors, and often. That doesn't mean the behaviors aren't gendered and that they don't affect space in a gendered way. Both men and women need to pay attention to both lists. But men should be conspicuously aware of the above, and women of what follows.

*'Female' behaviors:*

- **Defeatism: "just do it for me."** Women have been conditioned to believe they can "just give up," and that someone (usually a man) will step in to fix it. Take a deep breath, step outside and refuse to act like a 'damsel in distress.' If necessary, ask for help with a specific problem, and then go back to work on the rest





of the tasks needed to get the bike running.

- **Asking questions they already know the answers to.** Trust your instincts and experience more in a technical setting. Nine times out of 10, that's all you'll need. Look in a book. Seek out not only knowledge, but also the knowledge that you can do it yourself.
- **Refusing credit for skills/ avoiding demonstrating technical superiority to men.** Where a woman will say she's 'not really sure,' a man with less experience will attack the problem. Trust your skills. Trust that if you make mistakes, the rest of the group will support you. Women are told that if they can't do something perfectly, it reflects on the technical abilities of their entire gender. Refuse this to let this stop you from experimenting or taking on new challenges. Similarly, women sometimes become apologetic when they know more about mechanics than a man present does. Be forthright and encouraging, not conciliatory. Groups of people will give in when faced with overwhelming female competence. But they may then only acquiesce to one or a few female experts while pushing an agenda that says women in general are less capable than men are in general. Refuse it.
- **Handing over expertise.** Consulting an (usually male) 'expert' on every issue while assuming one's own acquired knowledge to be substandard. What works for you is as good as what works for anyone else. There's more than one way to complete nearly every aspect of bike building and repair. Keep your experience and add theirs to it. Find ways to learn from other people that don't involve the creation of hierarchy, especially when it puts you on the bottom.
- **Alpha femalism.** Being friendly to men while competing with women. Internalized misogyny. Needing to best other women (but not men) in order to feel capable.
- **Flirting.** Using 'feminine wiles' to procure information, help or to get men to do the work for you.

Despite the reactionary line, feminism isn't anti-man. It's anti-patriarchy. Men can be and are vital allies in feminist struggles. Some of the best lessons I learned about this were from a male collective member who refused to acknowledge my defeatism one afternoon. He just kept handing me tools, then showing me how to use them when I tried to claim mechanical ignorance as a way to avoid dealing with the problem. With my gendered behavior outmoded and useless, I realized how lame I was being and fixed the bike myself. This is exactly what we need to do: create an environment where disempowering attitudes no longer work. Where reimagined roles fit the socket that stereotyped ones never did.

How do we work—really work—as women and as men together in ways that challenge patriarchy and empower people? Men (and women) often feel like they're walking on unsteady ground here. How can they relay information without pretending to be experts? Be helpful and encouraging yet standoffish enough that women (and men) experiment mechanically for themselves? Situations can be difficult but with open dialogue and common goals, spaces can be committedly anti-sexist. This is important for dozens of reasons, not the least of which is that anti-sexist efforts go hand-in-hand with anti-racist organizing. Creating a comfort zone for women and a safe space for people of color are two of our most vital tasks as participants in an inclusive, life-affirming collective.

*Some good suggestions for skillsharing:*

- **Name things.** Teaching people the language of the shop is empowering across the board. Label everything and share information freely. You will find that a skill isn't really yours until you have successfully seen it off to someone else.
- **Keep your hands off the bike.** Nobody can learn a mechanical skill without *feeling* it. Demonstrations are useless unless the other person immediately takes the tools *into their hands* and does it for him or herself. Repeatedly. Give them the tools, parts, space, written and spoken information necessary to do the job and then step off.
- **Think ahead.** Will they be stuck using the 'bad' pliers? If they cut the brake cable too short, will the handlebars not turn? Let them know of possible obstacles right off. It prevents the doling out of knowledge in bits and thus the creation of a mystique surrounding it. As though replacing brake cables, or biking itself, were some secret and difficult activity only learned across time.
- **Teach tools.** Demonstrating the proper use of tools—slowly and patiently—is one of the best ways to encourage real learning. The idea is to provide people with a foundation rooted in safety and capable of supporting accumulated experience. If they know how to use a tool correctly, they may still not be able to fix the problem. But they will know how to go about trying in the future.
- **Pass around the book.** Or books. Show that knowledge is attainable, comprehensive and impersonal. Open charts and reference materials to the applicable page and leave them with the person working. Some people learn well independently, and teaching things to oneself encourages a confidence that crosses over. At the same time, not everyone has a comparable level of literacy. Individuals will tell you how they learn best and what they need from you. Find ways to listen.
- **Orient all visitors similarly.** Don't assume technical experience based on gender. Offer women components and space first, assistance only second. Make sure men know how to use tools and are comfortable asking for help.
- **Share space.** Are all the men at workstations and stands while the women are crunched up on the floor? Women are socialized to 'stay out of the way' while men are encouraged to spread out and use what's available. Pay attention to the gendered distribution of resources.
- **Give and receive support.** Seeing the look on someone's face as they accomplish something they'd previously thought impossible is the reason we enter into these sorts of projects in the first place.

*This essay has barely touched on issues of race and class and the ways they affect skillsharing and coalition building. It almost assumes communication between men and women of similar ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. As though gender were separate from these factors in shaping human experience. Suffice it to say that what exists now as a list of 'do' and 'do not's' seeks to be part of a larger critique that encompasses gender, race, class and bicycles in an attempt to transform the shared physical and social landscape, as well as our movements across it.*

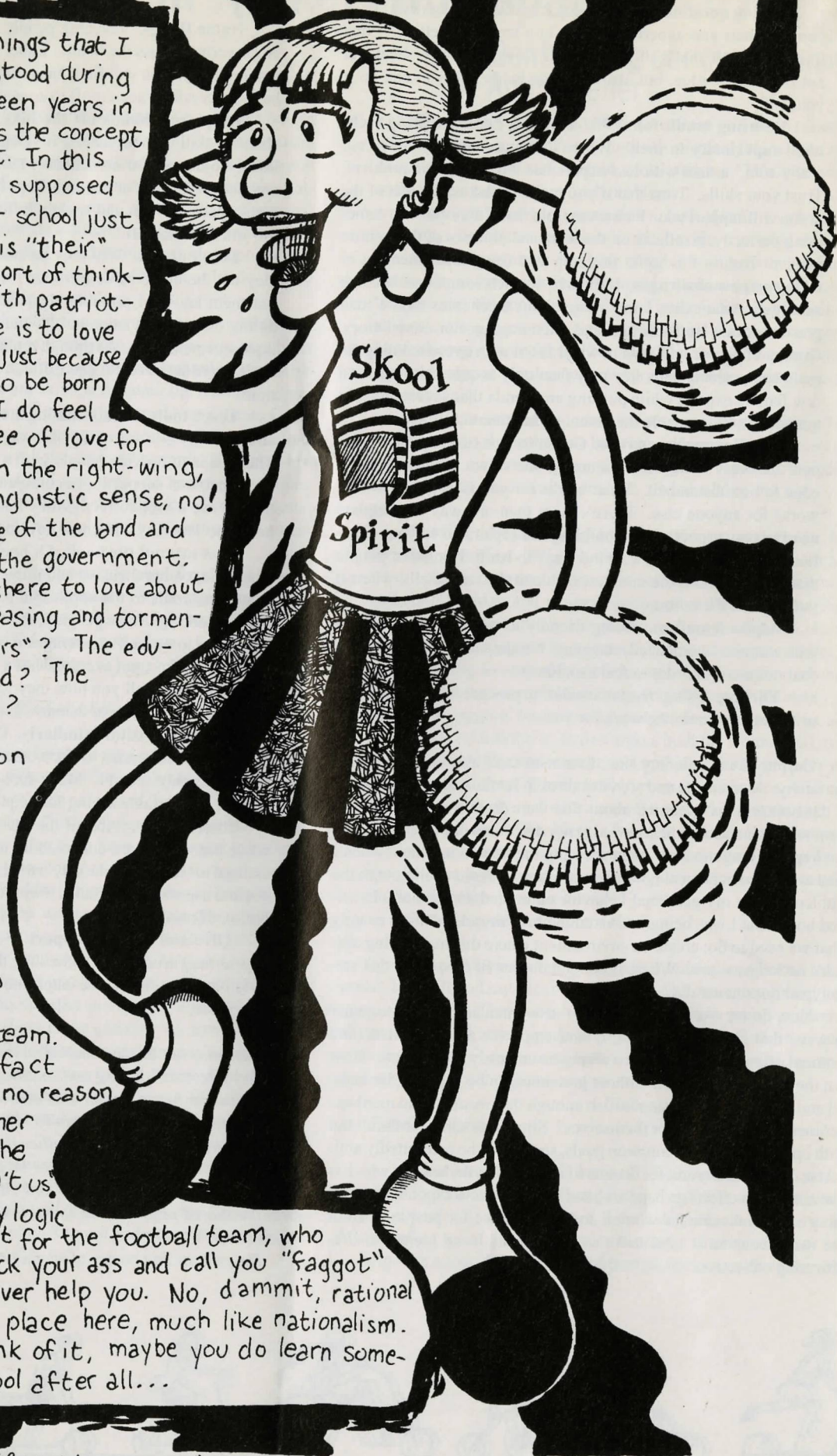
*The politics and poetry of why we ride (and build) bikes.*





One of the things that I never understood during my entire thirteen years in public schools is the concept of school spirit. In this concept, one is supposed to "love" his/her school just for the fact it is "their" school. This sort of thinking is in line with patriotism, in which one is to love their country just because they happened to be born there. Now, I do feel a certain degree of love for the U.S. - not in the right-wing, flag-waving, jingoistic sense, no! It's more a love of the land and the people, not the government. But what was there to love about school? The teasing and tormenting of my "peers"? The education I received? The years of misery?

The culmination of school spirit was, of course, the annual high school pep rally. We were supposed to cheer on the football team to go "destroy" the other school's team. Never mind the fact that there was no reason to hate the other school besides the reason "they ain't us." Nor was there any logic to show support for the football team, who would rather kick your ass and call you "faggot" before they'd ever help you. No, dammit, rational thinking has no place here, much like nationalism. Hey, come to think of it, maybe you do learn something from school after all...







# TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS!

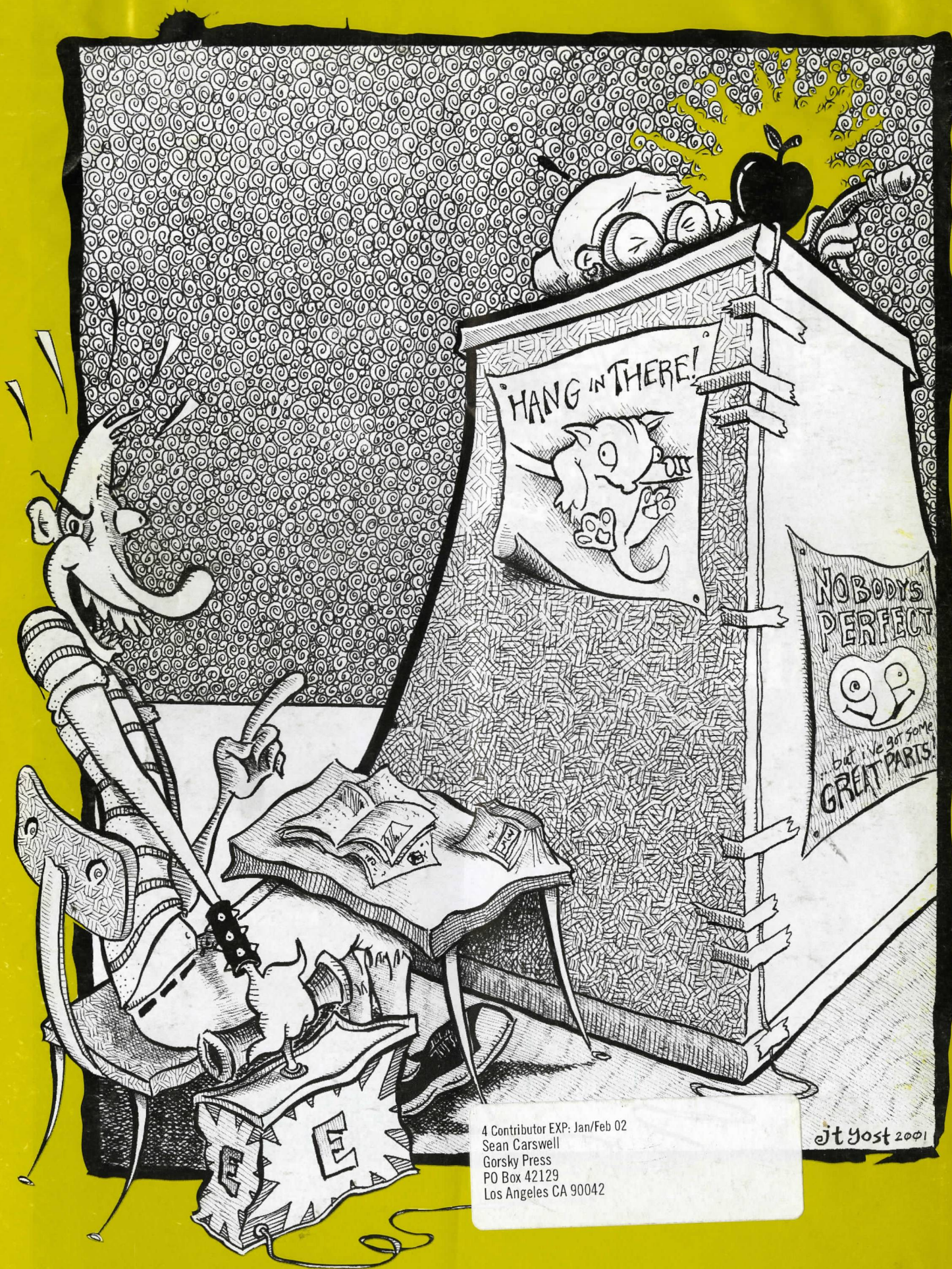
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