

clamor

The Revolution of Everyday Life

★ SPECIAL EDITION ★

FIVE YEARS OF CLAMOR INTERVIEWS:

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Studs Terkel • Dead Prez • Boots Riley

Laura Flanders • Elizabeth Martinez

Christian Parenti • Derrick Jensen

John K. Samson • Carol Leigh

5 years of interviews

Fall 2005 • Issue 33.5

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new interviews with
**Ian MacKaye &
Todd Solondz**



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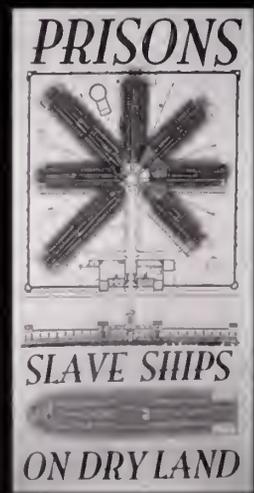


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from your editors

We thought that the best way to celebrate Clamor's first five years was to look back to some of the gems you may have forgotten or missed. We knew in the first 30 issues, we've had a lot of interesting people making an appearance in Clamor, but it wasn't until we sat down and made a list of all the interviews that we realized we were going to have a hard time picking which ones to feature in this special edition. We settled on twelve of our favorites to complement two new interviews exclusive to this special edition — bonus tracks, if you will.

Clamor, as a rule, features individuals who are brilliant, who are trying to carve out a better present and future, and who inspire us. From usual suspects like Laura Flanders and Howard Zinn, to not-so-well known artists and activists like Betita Martinez and John K. Samson, these are individuals we have learned from and hope that you will too.

Musician and activist Ian MacKaye graces the cover, and we've featured a new interview with him among all of the old favorites. We thought it was particularly fitting because this year is also a milestone for Ian and his record label, Dischord Records. They are celebrating 25 years of making music, creating community, and bringing people together. It is inspiring to us to know that others share our vision and that they are steadfast in their faith. It is absolutely the whole point of Clamor to foster this same community, to lead by example, and to encourage others.

All this self-reflection has helped us see that our path for the future is clear, that we are needed now more than ever to bring you these stories of how people are making their own paths in the world. But we also know that there are challenges ahead. Selecting these interviews led our editorial staff into serious discussions about diversity and representation, how we make selections for interview subjects and interviewers, who our artists and authors are and what perspectives we are trying to present. This can only mean better things for us in the future, but we hope that you, the reader, will let us know how you think we are doing. Five years of work have taught us a lot about change and growth, and we know we have a long road ahead of us.

Please keep in mind that all independent media needs you to survive. Elsewhere in this issue you'll find information on how to contribute articles and interviews, and how to support us through your subscriptions. We hope that you take this opportunity to subscribe or renew your subscription.

Thanks for reading,



PS: In putting together this issue, we decided to leave all the interviews unedited to retain the historic context in which they were originally printed.

mission

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

clamor

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ian mackaye

interview **Eric Zassenhaus**

photos **Amy Farina**

an exclusive special edition interview

Digging into Ian Mackaye's history is somewhat like running through a chronology of punk music in America—with all its incarnations and factions, and its longstanding commitment to down-to-earth sound and attitude. From his beginnings in the early DC punk band the Teen Idles to the birth of the straightedge movement in Minor Threat, to the emergence of emocore, heavily influenced by his short-lived project, Embrace, Mackaye has been on the forefront of US indie music and culture. In more recent years, Fugazi—the band he began in 1987—has set the standard for political bands the world over. With their considered lyrics and gritty, sophisticated sound, and their penchant to use their fame to benefit local charities and community efforts, they are one of the few bands of their era to replace angry invective with on-the-ground action. His most recent project with drummer and vocalist Amy Farina, The Evens, is yet another departure—a spare, sometimes narcotic collection of melodies that skirt the boundaries between punk and folk.

More than his music, though, Mackaye has come to stand for an ethical strain in American music and DIY culture that remains committed to changing both the structure of the music industry, and American society at large. He's been roundly criticized and lauded for his principled (some have said "puritanical") stances on sex, drugs, rock and roll, politics, stage antics, etc. You name it, he's probably been both attacked and applauded for it. Throughout, he's maintained an image of gruff, hardworking commitment to his ideals, and with over 25 years in the punk movement, he's managed to rack up a series of legends and lore that put some John Henry stories to shame.

Dischord Records, the label he helped found in the early '80s, remains one of the longest-standing, truly independent labels out there, and has had an influence on music extending far beyond its resources. And unlike most labels, Dischord operates on a model antithetical to the majority of conglomerate-owned recording companies, sharing costs and profits equally with the artists it produces, and eschewing contracts in favor of an open and equal agreements. Dischord's now sailing towards its 25th anniversary. For a label up against the monoliths of the modern recording industry, who control much of the distribution and have tremendous weight in determining what listeners hear, such a thing is a major distinction. It wouldn't at all be a stretch to say that many companies covet the label's rep for authentic, down-to-earth sound and style. As if to highlight Dischord's underdog status, and their own position as a multinational wholly above-the-law, Nike recently launched an ad campaign blatantly ripping off the cover of the Minor Threat's 1983 Discography without bothering to ask permission. As we went to press, Nike had just rescinded the campaign and issued an apology.

I met up with Mackaye at a bar within a bookstore in downtown DC, amid the chatter of shoppers and the barking of a PA system, at what I initially thought was an ironic place to be meeting one of the principal founders of the anti-alcohol straightedge movement. What I came to realize quickly is that Mackaye's ideas are far more elastic and more nuanced than they're often given credit for. At 43, with a backlog of history that threatens to overwhelm his current projects, Mackaye continues to experiment with the boundaries between music, social action, and community, rethinking the ways in which they interact and their possibilities for the future.

One thing I've always been curious about is how Dischord differs from major label producers in terms of how they deal with artists.

I'm not intimately acquainted with how anybody else runs their operation, so I can't really give you a comparative analysis. What I can tell you is that Dischord continues to operate using no contracts. Artists are not bound by contracts. Artists continue to own their own music. We don't possess the tapes; we don't own them. A lot of labels actually, it's common practice that they'll own them, or those versions. Our royalties are 50/50 split of the profits. So profit-sharing. Most labels, or many labels, certainly the bigger ones — yeah, I think all labels — operate on a royalty-based payments. So every record that gets sold at a certain percentage of blah blah, there's a royalty. So if you sell so many records you get per-record, this much. But it's a little bit, it's more complicated because there's sort of 'discount records' and 'promo records'. All these different levels- it's very complicated. The way that we approach it is straight profit-sharing. In other words, if a record costs \$1000 — no record costs \$1000 to make. Let's say it costs \$5000 to make. That means the recording and the pressing, everything, all in, it's \$5000 — which is still a very low figure now. Let's say we sell records and the total income from the sales of that record are \$10000. If we get \$5000, half of it goes to the artist. Straight profit sharing.

So it's kind of like you're being contracted to do production and distribution ...

In a sense, yeah. Although distro is consignment usually. They usually work on a consignment deal; they don't work on a profit-share. In other words, distro usually they're buying stuff — I'm actually not sure how these other operations work, so I can't actually say. What I can say is that, if a record goes into a loss, we generally assume 100% of the loss. So there's no risk to the band. They're not going to pay us. But it also means that the record is being made. That we obviously know how things work, and we're not going to let a band spend \$20,000 on a record that's only going to generate \$10,000 of income. It's just so clear. I think that— I don't know if you know this. If you look in this week's City Paper, there's a piece in there about one of the bands on Dischord who've tried to apply to the Art's Council of DC for a grant to pay for the recording. I haven't read the piece, but as I understand it, they're somewhat critical, saying that labels never give bands enough money to record. The fact is, we understand the economy of records. And how much, if you sell records, how much it costs to make, how much you're selling them for, and the money they're generating. It's insane to make something, to spend money, like, \$10000 on a record that's only going to make \$3000. It doesn't make any sense.

So if you get one hit a year, it pays for all the rest?

Well, that's the way the major labels operate. I'm talking about the way we operate. We have a budget in terms of how bands, when they record, it's about 3500 to 4000 dollars recording budget. And what that means — and this is what I think makes us unique to many other labels — is that most labels, as I understand it, the origination — which is the recording, the artwork, that stuff — they may put the money up for it, but it's entirely recuperable. In other words, all of that money comes off the top of the artist royalties, so the artists spend say \$5000 recording. The won't see royalties until they've made \$5000 in royalties. See what I'm saying? The money may be fronted by the label, but it's coming out of the artist's pocket. In our case, we put in an overhead on the project. We'll say okay, \$4000 for the recording. That means \$2000 we're paying for, and \$2000 you're paying. It's 50/50. We put the cost against the project. So that \$4000 goes into the project, so when the project breaks even, then we go into profit. So we share the cost of recording, and we share the cost of the art, and

all that stuff. So I think what makes us unique — I think most labels, actually, charge all of that back to the artist. But because we do this, we have to keep control over the prices of what we're spending on things, because the band will spend way too much money. There's a trend, a kind of conceit, that you can't make a good record for less than \$10,000. It's insane. It's totally insane. Some of the greatest records ever made were made for \$100.

So do you think yours is a more sustainable model than most other labels?

I don't know. I'm not a comparative guy. What I can tell you is that in December it will be the twenty-fifth anniversary of the label. You tell me if it's sustainable. We never had a year that was deeply in the red. We had a couple kind of sketchy years. I have four relatively full-time employees and one or two part time employees. The full time employees all have health care, they all get benefits. They're not getting rich off of us, but it's well more than minimum wage and it's a straight up deal. In my mind, it's a totally workable model. One of the ways that we've operated that has made this possible is that we don't have lawyers and we don't use contracts. If you don't use contracts, you don't need lawyers.

You've never gotten into a legal battle before?

No. Actually, there was one time we got into a legal battle. You have to understand something about me personally. The only time a lawyer is relevant or when a contract becomes relevant as a piece of paper becomes a point of order is when someone goes to court. I would never go to court over money, because from my point of view, at that point, it's like, "Have it. Just take it. Whatever you want you can have." If somebody's that unhappy, or they feel that distrusting of me, or the label, I don't want them to feel that way. I'd want them to go somewhere else. Straight up. I gotta say that, at this point, if there ever was any kind of legal situation where we were to loose, let's say, a lawsuit, the amount of money — in my mind — the most amount of money I can imagine somebody suing us for, would already have been saved by not having a lawyer on retainer for the last twenty years. I'm just not interested in any of that. I'm not interested in litigation, and I'm definitely not attracted to the kind of energy that goes behind litigation. The one legal situation we had came in the mid-90s. We reissued a band called Scream — an early DC hardcore band from 1982 — we put their records out. Two or three records. In the early 90s we started to release the vinyl on CD. It was just a reissue, basically making those records available in a different format. The drummer of Scream was Dave Grohl. He was one of the two drummers for the band, and he was later the drummer for Nirvana.

Somehow, the major labels got whiff of this. It turned out that a label called Hollywood records had been getting ready to release a band that they'd signed to their label called "The Scream," so they sent us a cease and desist saying "hey, you can't put this record out." We'd already made the CD. It was already made. I said, "well it's already made. We're putting it out." This is just a reissue of a band that has only sold a couple thousand copies. It's nothing. They said, "Yeah, but you have to understand, we spend half a million dollars on promotions, all this kind of stuff. There's going to be confusion to the consumer." I said, "Well, I don't think it's going to be that confusing. We're at Dischord; we don't have any access to any of the chain stores. You're records are chain store records. There just isn't going to be an issue." The guy said, "Well, it's going to be an issue, and really, I think you should seriously consider putting a sticker on your records saying 'Scream from DC.'" And I said, "Well, first off, we've already made the records. I'm not going to re-do it or pay to have a sticker put on." I said, "We're not concerned about the confusion, and we don't mind the fact that you have basically named a band that people

may get confused with our band. That's fine with us. But if you're concerned, then I feel like, you can go ahead and put a sticker on yours saying 'This is The Scream from LA.' He says, "I really think you should reconsider." And I said, "Frankly, since our band predated your band by a decade, and this is a reissue of a band that's not even together anymore, if anything, therefore the onus is on you." He said, "You might be right about that, but let me explain something to you. Hollywood Records is a division of Disney. Disney has a huge legal wing." He says, "We will sue you. And you may be right, but you'll never be proved right, because you'll be bankrupt before you ever get there." I said, "Alrighty then." And I called up a friend of mine who's a lawyer-dude and I say, "what should I do?" He wanted to threaten to sue them for triple damages. I said, "Whoa whoa whoa. I'm not going to get into this." Because lawyers like to fight. Are you a lawyer?

Me? No.

They love to fight. So I said, "No no no." We did some research. It turned out that not only did they not have the right to say that to us, obviously, but they didn't have the copyright or the trademark to the name. They applied for it, but someone else already had it. In any event, it all went away. In doing the research, it ended up costing me like \$500, because the band The Scream ended up changing their name, and then they broke up. The record never even came out. After that I was like, you know what, I'm just not going to get into it. I've just never had a legal issue. 'Cause if a band's unhappy, as I said, they can have their record.

So it seems like, obviously, it's more about maintaining a community...

Of course. I mean the idea is if you do something organically, then you continue to do it organically. The American business model seems to be totally based on growth — you always have to grow. I disagree with that. The American business model holds that you should charge what the market will bear. I don't agree with that. It's just so clear to me. And people can say what they want... I may not be filthy rich, but I'm well-off. I'm fine, and I feel like the label has been solvent for over two decades. It just goes on. I used to think that, say if I was a baker, you make a recipe for bread. You start baking it. People like it, they'll keep buying it. You keep making it, they keep buying. You're nurturing a community, right? It never occurred to me that you're supposed to sell the bakery. It just didn't occur to me. I didn't know. I never went to college, so I don't think I ever got the poison. Seriously, I don't think I ever got that poison that everything is for sale. For me, Dischord has never been for sale.

I think there's developed this sort of mystique around Ian MacKaye — a kind of mythology. I know it's something you're conscious of. Is it what you want it to be?

I don't have any control over it. And I don't know if you want me to "set the record straight." The record can never be set straight because my work all the sudden becomes fodder for other people's agendas. For instance, before there was ever a straightedge movement, there was a bent-edge movement. In 1983, when Minor Threat was on tour,



there was no straightedge movement. I never used that term, but we played other cities around the country, and people would come and say they were part of the 'bent-edge' movement. Reactionaries.

Bent edge?

B-E-N-T. Bent. Straightedge/ bentedge — round-edge, curved-edge. All these kind of 'edges'. They were oppositional movements to a movement that didn't exist. So the point being that — I feel it's pointless to try to set the record straight. It's insane. It got to a point in my life also when I was in my late thirties, and I had all these people asking me if I was still 'straight'. The real question is 'what if I wasn't?' That's what I want to know. It's irrelevant, ultimately, what I do with my life. What's relevant is what people do with their lives. People have to learn how to trust themselves, and not to be so concerned with my affairs, to be more concerned with theirs. In terms of the mythology about me, I'm very aware of it. But I can't let it distract me too much from my work.

How do you think your opinions have evolved. It sounds like you've gone through all these grand changes, aesthetic movements, whatever, that have gelled into these musical and kind of life philosophies. What do you —

I don't know. I guess I don't see it that way. I just make music. I don't understand. When I think about emocore and so forth, that kind of stuff, I have no idea what that is. I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but from my point of view, it was always just punk rock. And even though people often cited Embrace or Rites of Spring or bands from that era as being inspirational or kind of the progenitors of that movement, I've never thought about it like that. I just made songs. That's what we were doing that day. I am committed to fucking with the form. I think that's what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to think about stuff, you want people to engage in stuff, real time. We're trying to create something people will gather around. I have thoughts about that gathering, but I do think that this society now, what has gone into deep decline in the last twenty or thirty years, is that people don't congregate. Increasingly I think we've become more and more isolated. Because of that, it makes organization and organizing much more difficult. I think most people in this country — in fact, I would say everyone — is opposed to war, period. It's just that they don't know what war is because something hasn't blown up in their backyard. I think if something blew up in their backyard they'd be like, "we don't want that." I think everyone in this country really is opposed to war. Even them dudes who are making all the money, if they dropped one of their bombs on their house, they'd be opposed to it. But beyond that, I think by and large, people who live in this particular designated nation — what I mean by that is the line that has been drawn around us that somehow makes us into a nation — the people in this country do not want to be killing other human beings. Period. All it means is that we've been divided in a way that it makes it very difficult to get enough of a consensus, so in what we can we regularly gather? In what ways can we do it? Well, one idea, one place that people do gather, is for music. One of the few regular community-kind of gatherings. So the idea is to make music where people will gather, and they can talk to each other — it's not blaring the whole time — to make them feel like they're part of something. It's not a coincidence that many, many radically politically minded people come out of music scenes. It's not a coincidence. It's because they have been made in a community that allows for communication outside of what the media makes room for. Straight up. Music is a gathering point. That's my point. You fuck with the form, to get people's focus back on music.

But is that enough? Especially right now. Is it enough to create a community of people into the same sounds when the Right wing is so adept at actually, radically altering things?

Well, they have churches. Is it enough? Well, it's more than nothing. I don't know. Imagine if there were ten thousand people starving, and let's say that you and I were like, "alright, we're going to make bread." So we make some bread. Is it enough for 10000 starving people? No. But goddamn, if a few other people would come join us, we might be able to help out, and we'd certainly be able to feed somebody. I'm just doing a part. I have to say, one thing about the political situation right now: It's weather.

It's weather?

You almost can't avoid it. The machinery's so huge. It's weather. We're in a storm, we're in a flood, we're in a draught. We're in a destructive time. But, it's gonna go away. It has to go away. They're going to snuff themselves out. They have to. You know that don't you? Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Historically, I think any despotic leadership has ended their own reign in some way. They always snuff themselves out. Always. From my mind, that doesn't mean that people should sit back at all. It just means that you shouldn't feel like there's no point in working because if you don't do something big enough to knock them out it's not worth doing. Of course, anything that we do is good. The fact that you're writing for this magazine is good. The fact that you think about it — I assume you think about it — the fact that anybody even thinks about the political situation already puts them well ahead of most of society, in terms of work. Just thinking about it. Am I directly feeding somebody? No. By making music and celebrating and supporting the people who do? Yes. It's linkage. I'm just doing my work. I think that Fugazi was always clear about that. In this city, in Washington DC, every gig from 1989 on, we played either a benefit or a free show. We never got paid ever for a show we played in this city. Our thought was, either we're making music for people to celebrate for free, outdoor shows, or we're doing benefits to raise money for people who're on the front lines of organizations doing good work. That's our work. That's how we can contribute.

I was listening to this NPR interview I did earlier this morning, and I was just laughing out loud at some of it. The interviewer was saying "All These Governors" is a song about ineffective government. It's not a song about ineffective government at all. It's a song about overly effective government. On a car, you have a governor, and that keeps the car from going beyond a certain speed. And I was thinking about that fact that essentially, that's what governments do. They keep the population from progressing beyond a certain point. They tamp us down, they keep control. That's what a government is. They govern. It's effective. It's extremely effective. She heard the lyric, "When things that should work don't work that's the word of all these governors". She was hearing it like, they weren't doing a good job getting these things to work. What I'm saying is, that things that obviously should work like community involvement, benevolence, generosity, political correctness — things that should work but don't work. If they're not working, it's because the government doesn't want it to work.

So essentially there's a beanocracy to keep things not working?

Right. I'm not saying that there's a boardroom where all these guys sitting around making these things up. But I am saying is that within the nature of our society, we've allowed this to happen. Think about the term 'political correctness'. 'Correct' as I understand it meant 'right'. But yet it's considered an insult. To be politically correct is a bad thing to be. That's insanity. That was the Reagan revolution at its purest essence.

I feel like we're going through a Reagan revolution on steroids. Their grabbing of language and twisting it in a way that has been helped and honed by advertising campaigns and the PR



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about what you care about, it might become subject to examination. And then maybe you'd be ridiculed since it's uncool to care. But I fucking care.

So it's really just about creating that's for community and furthering, for lack of a better word, an activist community... Do you feel it's more about supporting these various organizations than in actually creating music?

For me music is central. Music is sacred. I don't have a choice in the matter; I have to make it. It's music I wake up with and I go to bed with everyday of my life. I'm inspired by it. It goes on and on. I understand that there are those who think music is trite, but I think that their outlook has been heavily colored by the way the music industry works. The music industry is very interested in people thinking of music as trite or just entertainment, because they're in the business of selling it. And if something is sacred, and they're selling it, you wouldn't need to buy two. If you could buy a record that means so much to you that's all you want to hear, you're not going to buy the record that comes out the next day.

Music was around before anything else practically. How could it be entertainment? Do you think that the initial musicians were *entertaining* people? I don't think so. They were communicating. Have you ever seen Bruce Springsteen or somebody say something political, and someone else will critique him going, "What does he know about politics. He's just a musician."? I would counter by saying, "What the fuck does the White House know? They're just businessmen. They're not politicians." They're businessmen. It's clear. It's so interesting that musicians are ridiculed. But people who are clearly, solely interested in profit, and profit for themselves, are taken seriously when they start talking about issues of the public health and will. It's insane. Music is no fucking joke.

There must be a little bit of a clash between making this music and also running a pretty well established label that is basically concerned with the mechanics of the production...

To some degree, yeah. People say, "well, if you hate it so much, why do you have a label?" Well, I have a label *because* I hate it so much. It's so obvious. Making records is not an evil thing. I have records. I listen to music all the time. But how it's being sold, who's selling it, all these kind of things, I am thoughtful about that. I understand that it's

for? Who doesn't want to do something? It's insanity. And everyone just wants to go golfing or something? I don't understand it at all. I'm not trying to say nothing bad about golfing. I think it's crazy that people have this reward system in their minds. This idea that we work hard and then we get rewarded. My thinking is, work for free, get paid for nothing. Be at peace with being happy to do stuff. I'm happy to do stuff, so I guess I don't think "I wish my lifestyle was different. I think a lot of people think it's easy for me to talk this way because I make a living from my music. Correct me if I'm wrong, I'm not playing music right now am I? No, I'm not, I'm sitting here talking to you. I work all the time on the label, on the band. That is not my music. I do that work so that I can play music. I'll go weeks without playing music, and that is very difficult for me, because that's the kind of commitment I have to my music.

It's almost like, music-playing as a metaphor for living your life...

It is. It definitely is. I have to say, I'm emphatic about music, but I don't want people to think that I think that everyone should play music. I don't think that. I think everyone should follow their heart, think about whatever calls them, and do it. There are so many people that think, "I wanna be an artist, but I can't make a living at it." Don't make art for a living. Make art because you have to. Figure out other ways to make a living. When I play a show, I'm not thinking, "Oh, good, now I can pay my rent." I'm thinking, "God damn, we're all here. And we're gonna make some music together. Me, Amy, and all the people in this room. We're gonna some music together. What a great way to spend time." Chuck Dukowsky at Black Flag did an interview in 1980 where he said he'd rather work a day job for the rest of his life than ever become solely dependent on his music to live. When I read that article I felt, "that is exactly the way I feel, too." And that's why I work. Straight up. ☆

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at the Gap or somebody like that control the initial salvo, the spirit of the spirit in which the record was made. If I had signed to another label, I don't know if I have a label.

...balancing a label and simultaneously trying to figure out how you balance having a bunch of responsibilities. It would seem like it's not a very easy lifestyle if you wanted.

lifestyle. I just do what I do. I'm not doing it as leisure. I actually like to be busy. I like to be around people. I don't have a press schedule. I'm interested in that. It's a production. I like it. I don't want to be in places where I have a reason to leave. Maybe in my lifetime I'll change. Here I say, "you know, I'm tired of this. I think that people have been largely uninterested in a bunch of money and then you can't do anything else is life but *doing something* that's supposed to be here on the planet





todd solondz

INTERVIEW **Tony DuShane**
an exclusive special edition interview

You want to be a talk show host like David Letterman. You teach English to Russian immigrants. You have a fantasy of being raped. You drug your son's friend and have sex with him. You're a character in a Todd Solondz film.

Todd Solondz has created unique feature films with vibrant characters that don't fit so well into normal society. His current film, "Palindromes," follows Aviva, a 13-year-old girl bent on getting pregnant and having a baby at any cost. Aviva is played by seven different actors including Jennifer Jason Leigh. It's a fairy tale ala Gulliver's Travels with abortion, pedophilia, a Christian rock band, and a beautiful girl with no arms who can sing her guts out.

I met Todd Solondz in his hotel room the day before he was appearing at the San Francisco International Film Festival last May as part of an indie filmmaking seminar and screening of "Palindromes" co-presented by 826 Valencia, a writing lab for young students headed by writer Dave Eggers.

What lessons have you learned regarding filmmaking or things you've done differently as you've progressed with each film?

It's a good question. It's a problematic one to answer though. There are no real lessons that I've learned that I feel I can communicate or convey to others. It's hard to articulate what exactly you've absorbed from any of this. You do grow with each film that you make and you have a better understanding, a grasp, a sense of storytelling and of what moviemaking is about. But it's the kind of experience that in some sense is almost subconsciously understood, so therefore, if it's to be understood at all, it's not something that I have any lessons that I can pass onto others. I'm still figuring it all out myself. The process of filmmaking is both one of discovery and self-discovery. It's a mystery what makes one put pen to paper. It's not exactly fun. And, so what I find happens, I write a first draft, I have a sense of what it is. Of course I really don't know what it is. When I start shooting, I have the actors in the locations and it takes on a different life and I say, "Ah, so this is what it is." But then you get into the cutting room and yet again it shifts in meaning, you find from shaving away, from distilling, from finding the

right form, you get at what you think is the meaning of this movie.

What are the joys and frustrations you've found working with child actors?

Well, generally speaking, children are easier to direct than adults. They respond more readily to direction. But, there are all kinds of kids, some that are truly gifted, and need little in the way of modification, and others that need a lot more attention and even line readings. I've dealt with children in all of my movies that have contained delicate material, and I've always involved the families, the parents, so it becomes a much more lengthy process. The casting process with children, you have to be very open and straight-forward with them, so they can feel and have a sense of what you're about. Because what's of paramount importance is that their child will take pride and have a sense of dignity in their participation in this project. The parents are always there on set, and so far, they're also proud of the work that they have done. I've been very fortunate that way. I can say I don't have children, but if I did have a child and my child were clamoring to act, I certainly would permit my child to act in one of my movies where I

feel a certain dignity is accorded to the actor. Whereas I would never permit my child to act in a commercial for AT&T or The Gap, or detergent, or some sort of consumer good where they're functioning as a shell. For consumer goods or some sort of corporate entity, that would be for me the obscenity.

That's great you haven't run into any conflicts.

No, no, so long as I don't have any trouble with people who read the material and say, "I'm sorry it's not for us," and I say thank you and I respect that decision. The only problem that would happen is if they say, "Yes, we'll do this," and then they get on the set and they change their mind. That's never happened, but that would be the one terrible nightmare that could take place.

Let's move onto Storytelling and the sex scene in Storytelling, the box covering the teacher and the pupil having sex. Was that an artistic decision?

It takes on a few meanings here. When I shoot a movie, I don't want to have to alter the way I shoot a scene because of the way I imagine the way the [Motion Picture Association of America] would respond to the material. I shoot them the way I want to shoot them and if the MPAA does not take to it, then I would put it in my contract with the studio, in order to procure an R-rating I would be allowed to incorporate boxes and/or beeps to satisfy the demands. I knew this was unlikely to get an R-rating, just from the script itself. So I negotiated that point, then when

the movie was finished and the head of the studio was not pleased to see a big red box, they wanted of course to take scissors and cut things out. If I had cut it out, then the audience would never know and never seen and would've assumed that this is what the director had intended. And, in the context of this scene between the professor and this student on a number of levels that the censorship box, so to speak, added even an extra layer of meaning that I found really

a kind of bonus. You could say it's really only in this country, the only country in the world where you get to see the big red box. It's the only studio film ever made with a big red box. I do take pride in that achievement, and I would certainly do it again if it were required of me to get an R-rating, especially knowing that the rest of the world gets to see it without the red box. If you do rent or you buy the DVD, you can press a button and see the family version or press another button and see the Todd version.

But with the red box, as our human mind has a vivid imagination, do you feel like it has more impact in the scene?

In some ways, yes, look I have to tell you, I'm a little bit squeamish myself. When we were shooting that scene I had to look away

it was pretty frightening. I hand it to those actors, they really were troopers. All I had to do was say, "uh, let's do it one more time." And, I could then look away.

During Palindromes pre-production, how much rehearsal was there with the actors?

Same as on every other movie, meaning, none. Auditions always function as rehearsal. That's when I evaluate the actor before me, the limitations and what the actor can bring as well, that's where I figure it all out. So that, when I see the actor, one, two, three months later on set, it's clear in my head and the actor's head what the aim and what it is I'm looking for.

It sounds like you have a real strong way of letting go, knowing that you've cast the right person.

Casting, it's true, casting is everything. If you cast the right actors, they make you look good, they make you look like you know what you're doing.

Writing Palindromes, or even some of your other scripts, how long does it usually take?

Thirty years. I don't know. It's just everything takes a lifetime. You use your whole life experience, understanding and reading and so forth to put together these concoctions. The actual writing doesn't take so long. If

you wrote three pages a day for a whole year, you'd have four feature scripts but it just doesn't work that way. So, I have no advice to any writers on how to do this, except you just have to do it. How do you become a better writer? By writing. How do you become a better filmmaker? By actually making movies.

When you're writing, do you bang it out, or do you ruminate over it, put it in the drawer for a while?

With each one it's somewhat different.

some I just plow through from beginning to end and others it's a little bit more elliptical to process. I have something now mostly written, but I haven't had a chance to really get to it because these last two months I've just been touring and promoting this movie [*Palindromes*]. When this is over I hope to be able to finish up this other script.

How many shooting days were on Palindromes?

We got about 40, which is a good amount. But I don't know how we could've done it otherwise with all these children and so forth. I have good producers. I don't know how we did this, under a million [dollars] and getting that many days. I don't know, but we did it. You need to work with smart good people, very pleasant people. And it's amazing how much good will you can generate.



Alexander Brickel as Peter Paul and Sharon Wilkins as Aviva in Palindromes. photo by Macall Polay

Do you work with the same producers?

I've worked with only people I've liked, but they have changed for different reasons. There's some I may work with again. It depends on the projects; whoever's appropriate for the material I have at hand.

Regarding your first feature, *Fear, Anxiety, and Depression*, I've read, I'm not sure if this is true, that it was kind of a horrific experience for you?

Yeah, it's a painful experience. It's not even the title that I wanted, so I prefer not to dwell on it.

After that, what helped you get the fire again to go into *Welcome to the Dollhouse*?

I actually wrote the script for *Welcome to the Dollhouse* before I even finished that movie, to really just to redeem myself from the horror of it all. But then I just needed a lot of time and space to be away from this business. Which I didn't think at the time I'd even return to. Ultimately, I suppose I didn't want that movie to have the last word.

What are your inspirations, outside of filmmaking, what inspires you?

Everything you live and breathe, it is all material. Even as we speak now, it is all material. To the writer, the filmmaker, the artist, what have you, is to access the moment so that nothing is lost upon you, that you can know how to identify and transform moments into something that can take on larger meaning. Really, everything, it's all material.

Who are some of your favorite writers?

You're talking movie writers, you're talking novelists?

Actually both, I was thinking novelist-wise, but whatever you like.

There are so many great writers who are living today, from Phillip Roth to Michel Houellebecq to... I enjoy David Sedaris. There are just so many really.

Outside of filmmaking, what other ways do you express your creativity?

[laughing] Well, there's so many ways. I always think, just by virtue of being a filmmaker doesn't make you necessarily such a creative person. In this business in fact, as many people know, the most creative profession is the accounting one. It's really what you bring to it, it's what you bring to everything that you do.

If you weren't a filmmaker, what do you think your profession would be?

I don't know. There are all sorts of things that interest me. Film is not the center of the universe. I've always thought of working in India or some place like that. I applied to the Peace Corps many years ago, but I was rejected, so nothing happened. That sort of thing has always appealed to me. I have no skills and that's one of my difficulties. I don't have anything to offer anyone.

[laughing] I think there's a world out there that would beg to differ.

Certainly, if I go to another country and I'm trying to help a village, what can I do? I can help them speak English, I suppose, but I'm not sure that's much of a priority. ★

Tony DuShane edits *Cherry Bleeds* (www.cherrybleeds.com) and hosts the radio show *Drinks with Tony* (www.drinkswithtony.com), where you can hear the broadcast of this interview. He lives in San Francisco.

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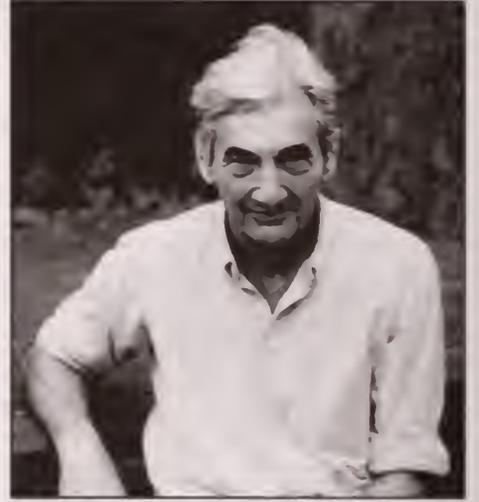
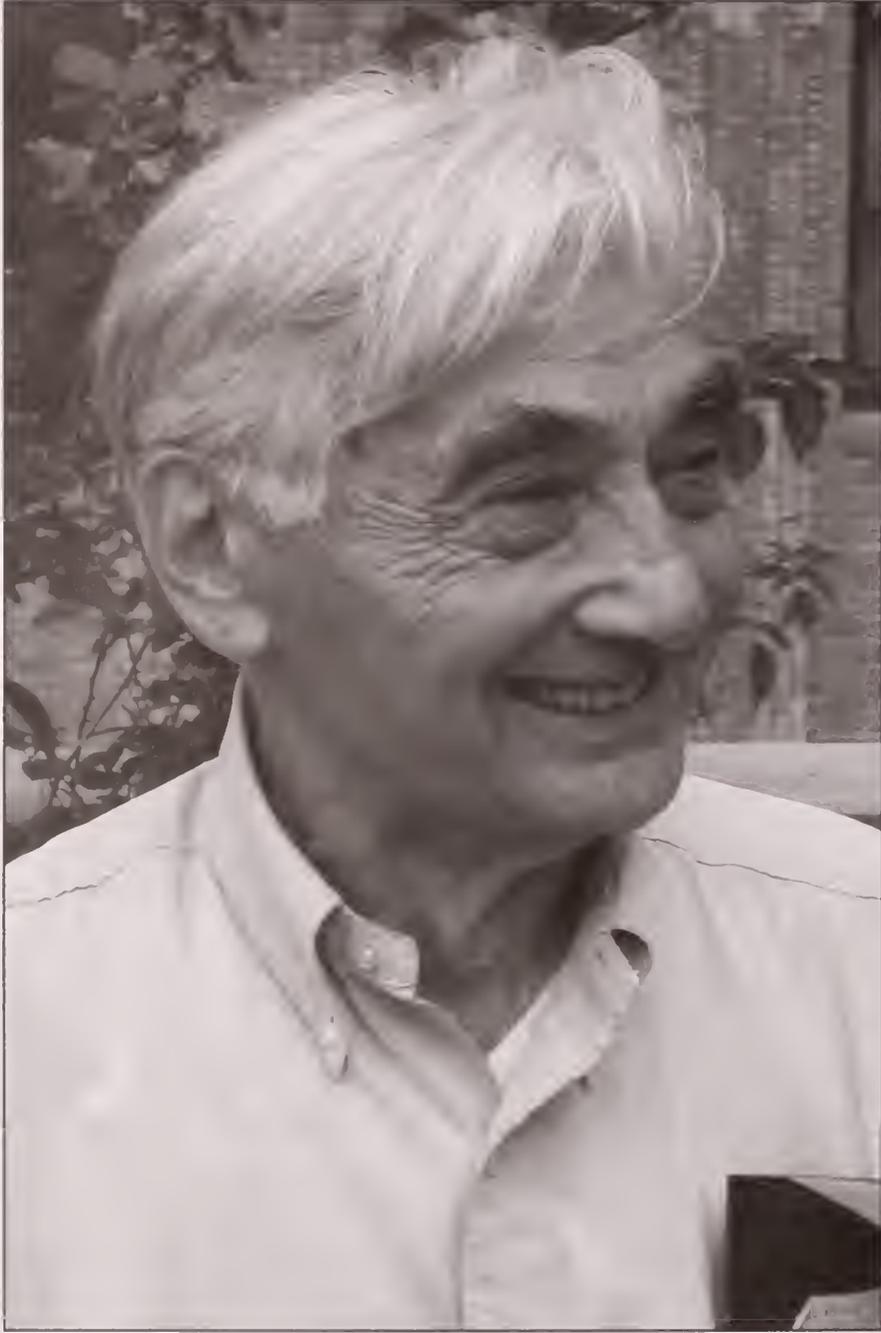
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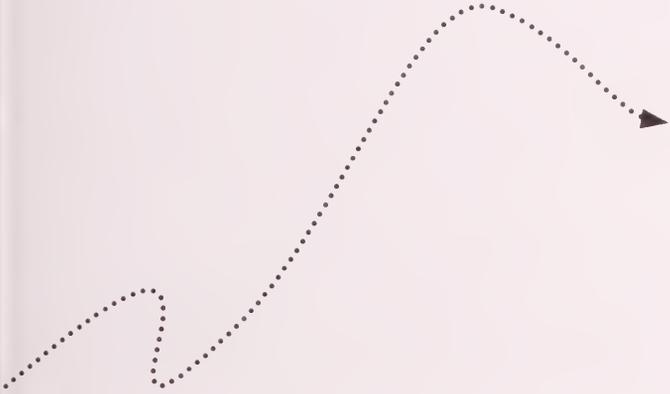
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howard zinn

interview Peter Werbe
photos Seven Stories Press
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When Matt Damon and Robin Williams, in the Academy Award winning *Good Will Hunting*, begin trying to one-up each other by naming radical writers they have read, Damon trumps Williams' mention of MIT social critic Noam Chomsky by suggesting Boston University historian Howard Zinn's book, *A People's History of the United States, 1492-Present*.

This notice in a Hollywood film translated into additional sales of 100,000 copies for Zinn's already wildly selling radical history text, first published in 1980 by Harper Perennial. With a twentieth anniversary edition in the works, the book has sold over 650,000 copies in the last two decades and has become a bible of sorts for numerous media stars and social activists.

Its unprecedented sales recently prompted Fox Television to put up \$12 million for a new mini-series based on the book. The series is scheduled to air some time in 2000.

The book has spun off a series of teaching editions, wall charts, and abridged versions. The 79-year-old Zinn is also author of several personal memoirs including, *Declarations of Independence* (HarperCollins, 1991), and *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train* (Beacon Press, 1995) which include his experiences as a World War II bombardier and activist in the civil rights and anti-war movements.

His latest book is *The Future of History* (Common Courage Press, 1999), which records a series of interviews done with David Barsamian over the last ten years.

He spoke to *Clamor* from Cape Cod.

In the book you've done with David Barsamian, he says you're fond of quoting George Orwell's dictum from 1984 that, "who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past." Does that speak to the title of the book?

I suppose so in that what Orwell was saying and what I am repeating approvingly is that history is controlled. So much of the information in our culture is controlled and if you control our past, then you can control our future. In that sense our future history, the future of the human race, depends on who tells the story about the past.

As an example, if American history is told as a series of great military adventures, that will tell young people militarism is something to be valued; that military heroism is the highest representation of good character. And that will insure our future will consist of more military adventures. So by presenting that kind of a past, you create a self-fulfilling prophecy about the future.

On the other hand, if you do what I think we ought to do when we tell history, without ignoring the fact that we fought wars, you emphasize not the heroism of military leaders or people in battle, but those people who have always struggled against war. Those people who believed in peace. The people who opposed the Mexican War

because they saw it as a fabricated war designed to simply amass more territory, take territory away from Mexico. Those people who opposed World War I. Those people who opposed the Spanish-American War. The people who opposed the Vietnam War. I think of the anarchist and feminist, Emma Goldman, as one of those people. She went to prison during World War I for opposing the war.

I think the most neglected story of the Vietnam war is the resistance to it. Not just on the part of civilians here at home, but on the part of GIs and the movement of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War organization. There has been so much talk about the military side—should we have done this, should we have done that, could we have won, did we win the Tet offensive, did we lose the Tet offensive? If the story of the resistance is told to generations of young people, I think it would imbue them with a very strong feeling that it's a good idea to oppose war.

How does one know when to oppose war? You pointedly left World War II out of that series of wars you listed in which you were a combat flyer.

I did pointedly leave it out because it was the most ambiguous of situations. In the question of just and unjust wars, some wars are so obviously unjust and so obviously done for profit and power and expansion—the Mexican war, the Spanish American war, World War I, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, the Gulf War. Some wars are obviously wrong. Maybe I should leave out the Korean war since there is still a lot of uncertainty among the American population about the Korean War.

World War II is called the "good war." "Saving Private Ryan," Steven Spielberg's movie, exalts the war as a good war, even while showing the horrors of D-Day. Still, the horrors had a context of being in the end necessary because it was a good war.

Having been a bombardier in the Air Force in World War II and dropped bombs, even though I had been an enthusiastic volunteer and had been persuaded that it was a just war, I came out of that experience persuaded that war simply doesn't solve the fundamental problems we face as a human race. That we have to find solutions other than war. That even though the cause may be just, and I distinguish between a just cause and a just war, even though the cause may be just, like fighting against and resisting fascism, but doing it via war, the mass slaughter of people, 40-50 million people killed in World War II, I don't think is the best way to solve that problem, the best way to support that just cause. I think the human race has to find more imaginative, more ingenious ways of dealing with tyranny and aggression than simply indiscriminately killing large numbers of people which is what war is all about.

When we are talking about history, we are talking about national histories. All national histories are triumphal in nature, even when they are the history of great losses, for instance, like the Serbian myth about Kosovo. As a historian you are interested in portraying accurately what happened, but nation states have a different intent.

You are absolutely right. Nation states are determined to exalt what that nation has done, especially in war, and to turn every situation into a triumph, as you pointed out in the case of the Serbs, so that even in defeat it is looked upon as a heroic moment in history. But I think it is the responsibility of citizens in a democracy to think independently of the nation state. There is a mistaken notion about patriotism which is encouraged in our educational system and in our culture because the nation state has a lot of power over the cultural and educational systems. It says that to be patriotic, which is a good thing, means to support your government in the sense of "my country, right or wrong."

You hear that in young people who are going off to enlist, "I

have to fight for my country." My point is that the nation state, the government here and anywhere in the world, is not the country, it is not the people. To be patriotic in the best sense in the United States is not to support whatever the government does, but to support whatever the best principles of our society are. Very often, the government acts against those principles.

I see the principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence as being noble and good principles. That is, the Declaration of Independence says government is an artificial creation. Government is not the supreme order of things in this society. According to the Declaration of Independence the government is an artificial entity set up by the people to achieve certain ends—life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, equality. And when the government, as the Declaration says, becomes destructive of those ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish the government.

That's a very revolutionary statement made at a time when the United States was breaking away from the nation state of England. Then, when the United States was itself a nation state, it forgot about that principle of the Declaration of Independence and the document was consigned to being displayed on classroom walls but not paid attention to. To me, being patriotic means to think independently, to support the principles of life and liberty and equality, and, as I see the history of nation states, including the history of the United States, most nation states act against the principles of liberty and equality. They act on behalf of a relatively small group of wealthy and powerful people who are in charge of the nation state. We know that's true of countries which we call totalitarian or tyrannical; there it is obvious. In the U.S. it is not so obvious because we have three branches of government and we have elections and we have a certain amount of freedom of the press and free speech. Because of that we are deluded into thinking the government represents us, but I don't think it does.

I mentioned earlier that as an historian, you are interested in finding out what actually happened, but I posed the question as if historians are people in the physical sciences, as if you were looking at bacteria under a microscope. Like all the social sciences, history is very politicized. I think people have a legitimate skepticism these days. They are not buying the official myths as they did in other periods, but how does one know who to believe? How can you do a reality check between what Howard Zinn is writing and another interpretation?

I recently interviewed the conservative, William F. Buckley Jr., about the Cold War. How does someone reading an interpretation by Buckley of this period and then reading Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States and getting a 180 degree opposite view reconcile two contradictory versions?

It's not easy to answer the question, how do you really get the truth when it is so complex and historical reality has an infinite amount of information in it. The only advice I would give to somebody who is trying to sort things out is to say, get as much information as you can. Get as many diverse viewpoints as you can and see what makes more sense to you.

Listen to Buckley, listen to me, listen to Gar Alperovitz who writes the history of the atomic bomb or listen to Marilyn Young who writes the history of the Vietnam war and listen to the official histories of the Vietnam war and the official line and decide on what makes sense. Ultimately, it is an individual decision, but the important thing is to have the diverse viewpoints to choose from. The problem with history and with information in the press is that too often we do not get a full spectrum of views to choose from.

Take the recent situation in Kosovo where we did get a full picture of the horrors inflicted by the Serbs on the people of Kosovo, the Albanians, who were searching for independence. It was a horrible story, but there is another set of facts that has to be paid attention to and I don't think the media really played this up. Most of the refu-

gees streaming out of Kosovo. most of the terrible things done by the Serbs, happened after we started bombing. In other words, our bombing intensified and worsened what was happening, five-fold, ten-fold. This is a very important fact and there are also other very important facts to consider which were completely ignored by the press and by television.

If you just listened to the Administration's side you would say, well, this is a humanitarian effort. We care about what is happening. The people in Kosovo are being mistreated. But there is other information you need. You need to know that at the same time the people in Kosovo are being subjected to terrible things by the Serbs, the people of Iraq are suffering and dying by the hundreds of thousands as a result of the sanction policies of the U.S.. You have to know that the ethnic cleansing that has been going on for years in Turkey—people uprooted from their homes, from their villages, thousands of people killed, and that Turkey is a U.S. ally and has done these things to the Kurds in Turkey with American military equipment.

Now, if you added that to the picture, not forgetting what the Serbs did in Kosovo, it wouldn't be a simple affirmation of, "Oh, we are doing good things there because our government is concerned with what happens to people." Then you would be skeptical of whether, in fact, our government cares about what happens to human beings and you would wonder what other motives there are for the bombing of Yugoslavia.

Let's return to alternate versions of history, for instance, the Cold War. The official version is that after World War II and the defeat of the Nazis, the U.S. found itself in a confrontation with another hostile power—the Soviet Union—which, like the Nazis, was equally bent on world domination. We had to defend Europe from imminent Soviet aggression, and at home there was an internal subversion threat from people who were loyal not to the U.S. government but to the Soviet Union and its plans for world domination. Although there may have been some excesses in the zeal in which internal communism was combatted (such as McCarthyism), ultimately it was an important cause.

Hmm, the business of the Cold War and its origins. There have been dozens of volumes about that, and who started the Cold War. Did it start because the U.S., this kindly nation, saw the Soviet Union, this evil empire, bent on world domination, so we built up our forces? That doesn't make sense. It doesn't conform to the historical record.

There is no evidence that the Soviet Union was bent on world domination. American intelligence experts have said since then, the Soviet Union had no intention of invading Western Europe. The Soviet Union did want to control Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union was expansionist with regard to Eastern Europe. I am not trying to paint the Soviet Union as a nice power. All that I am saying is that the Soviet Union had designs on Eastern Europe to influence and control Eastern Europe just as the U.S. had designs on control and influence of Latin America.

In other words, they saw Eastern Europe as their sphere of influence. The U.S. has always seen Latin America as its sphere of influence. Both powers have been expansionist, both powers have been ambitious, both powers have wanted to have more and more influence in the world. Both are imperial powers. The U.S. was always ahead in the arms race. The U.S. was the first to build and use the atomic bomb. The U.S. had a huge arsenal of nuclear bombs and the Soviet Union was constantly trying to catch up. So, it's not a matter of one being a hero and one being a villain, one being good and one being bad. I see it as two empires vying for power in the world.

Internally, the U.S. government used the hysteria of the Soviets as a basis for destroying whatever atmosphere of freedom existed, through the U.S. House un-American Activities Committee, the FBI keeping files on millions of people. And, it was not just McCarthy,

but democrats and republicans alike; Truman also. The loyalty oaths he instituted in 1947, and Hubert Humphrey with his sponsorship of the Communist Control Act.

Was there ever an authentic internal threat from communism?

That was a figment of J. Edgar Hoover's imagination.

Why the hysteria? Was there any economic or political gain for anybody to create this hysteria in the late '40s and early '50s?

I think there were political gains for both parties. It's always a political plus for a party when it can create an internal enemy. First, you artificially create an enemy. After all, the Communist Party in the U.S. was not in a position to overthrow the government or do anything important. The Communist Party was really quite weak and what the government was really after was not communists, but anybody who had anti-government views, or was critical of American foreign policy.

The FBI kept files on white people who met with black people. There was stuff in their files on so-and-so who attended a Paul Robeson concert. The major victims of McCarthyism and the Cold War at home were not Communists. The major victims were ordinary Americans who were dissenters from the establishment. People in Hollywood, who were not about to overthrow the government. Writers and directors who were liberals, progressives, maybe some of them were members of the Communist Party; I don't know. But it was an effective way for both major parties to gain political credits with the American people.

Also, and this is very important, it became the Soviet Union abroad and the so-called communist menace at home that was the excuse for building up a huge military machine. We spent trillions and trillions of dollars since World War II, on the basis of an over-blown, over-inflated threat of world domination, money which could have been used to make this an ideal society, to wipe out poverty, wipe out homelessness, create universal free health care for everyone. The amount of money which has been wasted, and continues to be wasted in building up a huge military apparatus, is based on threats that are more imagined than real.

You see it today. Now that the Soviet Union is gone, they don't have that reason for a military machine, so you invent other reasons. You take little pip-squeak nations around the world and say North Korea is a threat. Iraq is a threat, Serbia is a threat. On that basis, you waste \$200-300 billion dollars worth of the taxpayers' money annually on military apparatus.

*I know in your book *People's History of the United States*, you show evidence that after World War II there was a fear in the ruling circles that the economy could collapse since the U.S. was suddenly left without an enemy to justify large war expenditures. Does the U.S. operate on a permanent military economy?*

No doubt about it. The military budget has absorbed a huge, huge amount of the wealth of the nation. On the one hand, you might say it has staved off an economic crisis. On the other, it has wasted our wealth. We could stave off an economic crisis by having huge public works programs in which we used the money spent for nuclear submarines and jet aircraft, and use that money to build our cities, clear up our lakes and rivers and take care of our people. ☆

Peter Werbe is a long-time staff member of the Fifth Estate, the longest running, English language, anti-authoritarian publication in North American history. He has also hosted Detroit's Nightcall talk show for 35 years on WRIF-FM. Peter's web site is peterwerbe.com.





elizabeth martinez

interview **Chris Crass**

interview published in
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“Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez is a national and international treasure. Her life and work provide a model of internationalism and solidarity, as well as local organizing. “Think globally, act locally” was her practice long before the slogan was created. “From work for decolonization at the United Nations, to the Civil Rights Movement, to pioneering the women’s liberation movement, to local organizing in New Mexico and California, to top-rate journalism and political theory, Betita continues to blaze trails and create priceless legacies, mentoring countless social activists, young and old, male and female, people of all colors, gay and straight, always with astonishing patience and intelligence.” This is how Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz describes her friend of 30 years. Dunbar-Ortiz has been involved in radical politics and activism since the sixties. She founded one of the first groups of the Women’s Liberation Movement, Cell 16 and helped edit their journal, “No More Fun and Games.” She is the author of *Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie* and she’s a regular reader at the Anarchist Cafe nights in San Francisco.

Betita Martinez lives in the Mission District of San Francisco, where she is involved in many different projects and campaigns. Her main project is the Institute for MultiRacial Justice, which she co-founded in 1997. She serves as the co-chair of the Institute and edits the Institute’s publication, *Shades of Power*.

The Institute aims to “serve as a resource center that will strengthen the struggle against White Supremacy by combating the tactics of divide-and-control and advancing solidarity among people of color” (from the group’s Mission Statement).

The Institute serves as a clearinghouse of information about joint work done by communities of color locally, regionally and eventually on a national basis. The Institute provides educational materials to help build greater understanding and respect between people of color. Working to build solidarity between communities of color, the Institute holds educational forums on topics and issues that are not only important to communities of color, but that have divided people of color. Forum topics have included immigrant rights and bilingual education and these events bring together organizers from various groups to have a dialogue about the issues. These forums and other work done by the Institute try to provide a site for people from different communities of color to meet with each other and find ways to support one another.

In October of 1999, Martinez and the Institute put together the Shades of Power Festival: Alliance Building With Film and Video. The festival’s program stated, “the movies show how different peoples of color in the U.S. have related and worked together in common struggles for social justice. A few of the videos focus on a single group whose struggle continues today and needs support from other people of color.” The festival featured movies about Ethnic Studies student strikes in ‘68-’69, the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, Angela Davis, June Jordan, Yuri Kochiyama, the Japanese Internment Camps during WWII, housing struggles by Latinos, Filipinos, African-Americans, repression and resistance at the U.S. Mexico border, labor organizing and environmental justice campaigns. In all, about 20 films were viewed. Between movies, there were four discussion panels with organizers from various groups on gentrification in San Francisco, immigrant rights and environmental justice. Hundreds of people went to the festival.

The other main project of the Institute is publishing *Shades of Power*. It is published as a step in the direction of creating an anti-racist, anti-capitalist ideological climate. *Shades of Power*, which is currently on its 6th issue, is full of articles on organizing around environmental justice issues, police brutality, violence in public schools, workers’ rights, immigration and incarceration — to name a few. All of the

articles focus on pro-active campaigns and positive activism with special attention paid to alliance building among people of color.

Shades of Power helps the Institute work towards their long-term goals. According to their mission statement, the Institute is “committed to linking the struggle of Third World unity with struggles to build a new society free of class relations, sexism, homophobia, environmental abuse, and the other diseases of our times.”

Working with women’s groups is a special focus of the Institute, “because women have often taken the lead in building alliances among people of color.” Organizing with youth is also a major focus of the Institute with the goal of developing autonomous youth initiatives. The Institute was active in the youth led campaign against Proposition 21 in California. Prop 21, the juvenile crime initiative, makes it easier to prosecute children as adults, broadly defines gangs and gang membership to include most aspects of hip-hop culture and criminalizes it and plays on social fears of crime committed by young people of color — regardless of the fact that violent youth crime has declined significantly in the last few years. When youth organizations like Third Eye Movement, Homey Network, and the Critical Resistance Youth Task Force mobilized and organized thousands of young people, the Institute offered support and solidarity. As Roxanne stated earlier, Betita is a mentor to countless activists and organizers. Her years of experience, her firm dedication to radical social change and her wisdom and insights into organizing have influenced and inspired many who are active today, especially young women of color organizers.

In addition to the Institute, Martinez is also involved with many different organizations in the Bay Area, such as the Women of Color Resource Center and Media Alliance. Betita is also the author of the book *De Colores Means All Of Us: Latina Views of a Multi-Colored Century*, published by South End Press in 1998.

Betita’s book, *De Colores Means “All Of Us*, which hit the shelves last year, is a chronicle of organizing and alliance building throughout her years of work. The book is a collection of essays that range from discussions on attacks against immigrant rights and affirmative action to contemporary struggles for Ethnic Studies led by Latina/o youth. Betita’s book is full of essays that develop a radical Chicana perspective and analysis on society, race relations, history, dynamics between men and women in past and present activism and on the future of building a multiracial, anti-racist, queer liberationist, feminist, anti-capitalist movement. The essays are packed with stories, examples of past activism, models of past and present organizing and inspiration to implement lessons in the book into our organizing efforts.

Elizabeth Martinez traces her political consciousness back to her childhood. Her father had moved from Mexico into the US and after quite a few years of financial hardship ended up working in Washington DC as a secretary in the Mexican Embassy. She remembers growing up with stories of the Mexican Revolution, Zapata and US imperialism. Also, Martinez grew up in a middle-class white suburb of DC and was the only person of color in school, which made her painfully aware of racism and white supremacy. After WWII, Martinez went to work at the United Nations as a researcher on colonialism decolonization efforts and strategies. During the McCarthy Era, her section chief and other co-workers at the UN were fired for having past or present connections with Communism. In 1959, three months after the Cuban Revolution claimed victory, Martinez went to Cuba to witness a successful anti-colonial, socialist struggle. This trip to Cuba had a profound impact on her.

In addition to Cuba, Martinez later traveled to the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Vietnam (during the war) and China to witness how people were implementing socialism.

When the sit-in movement swept across the South in 1960, a new and exciting form of direct action organizing was taking shape which soon led to the formation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating

Committee. SNCC was one of the most important organizations of the 1960s as it successfully experimented with various forms of community organizing, direct action tactics, radically democratic decision-making and an egalitarian vision that inspired and influenced countless other groups and projects in that ‘60s and into today. While SNCC, along with the Southern Civil Rights Movement, is generally remembered as a Black led struggle with the involvement of whites — Betita was one of two Chicanas working full-time for SNCC; Maria Varela was also a SNCC organizer. Martinez originally served as the director of SNCC’s office in New York. Betita edited the photo history book, *The Movement*, which not only raised funds for SNCC, but also brought graphic images of the Civil Rights movement into homes across the United States. Martinez was an organizer with SNCC in 1964 during the Mississippi Summer project (often referred to as Freedom Summer).

In 1968, a year of revolution and repression around the world, she moved to New Mexico to work in the land grant movement of Chicanos/as struggling to recover lands lost when the US took over half of Mexico with the 1846-48 war. There she launched an important movement newspaper, *El Grito del Norte* (The Cry of the North), and continued publishing it for 5 years along with other activism. *El Grito* reported on international activism and sought to show connections between different struggles. At the Chicano Communications Center, which she co-founded in Albuquerque, she edited the bilingual pictorial volume *500 Years of Chicano History* at a time when almost no books existed on the subject. The pictorial became the basis of her educational video *Viva La Causa!* which has been shown at film festivals and classrooms across the country. In all of this activism, she worked with and trained many young Chicanas/os.

In the late ‘60s when the Women’s Liberation Movement exploded across the country with feminist groups, publications, protest actions, manifestos and speakers everywhere, Elizabeth Martinez was in New Mexico helping shape the newly developing movement. In her essay, “History Makes Us, We Make History” from the anthology, *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices From Women’s Liberation*, Betita talks about developing a Chicana feminism that confronts race, class and gender inequality. In that essay she writes about the whiteness of the Women’s Liberation Movement and the sexism in the Chicano Movement and the need to struggle against all forms of oppression. During this time, Betita was made an honorary member of WITCH (Women’s International Conspiracy from Hell).

Since 1976 she has been living in the Bay Area. Betita became deeply involved in leftist party building politics for 10 years. In 1982 she ran for Governor of California on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket; the first Chicana on the ballot for that office. She has also taught courses in Ethnic Studies and Women Studies at Hayward State University. Martinez has traveled all across the United States speaking on colleges and in classrooms about race, class, gender issues and organizing. She has teamed up with longtime activist Elena Featherston, also a co-founder of the Institute, and they have done joint speaking tours called “Black and Brown—Get Down”, which aim at building alliances between people of color. She has consistently been a mentor over the years to new and long-time activists and organizers helping transfer skills, knowledge and experience in effort to build our movements. In addition to editing *Shades of Power*, she is also a regular contributor to *Z Magazine* and other publications.

The Institute for MultiRacial Justice is just the latest project in a long list of efforts to make the world a better place. Like her other projects, the Institute works to develop long-range goals and vision to guide activists from one struggle to the next. As we move from one crisis to the next — from welfare reform, to the ending of affirmative action, to the bombing of Kosovo, to Mumia’s execution — we become worn-down and burned-out. Betita reminds us that we must remember that we are part of a movement, we are part of something much bigger than ourselves and we are not alone in the struggle. She reminds us

that while we confront budget cuts in Ethnic Studies programs or new attacks against the civil rights of homeless people, that we must hold onto our goals — solidarity, community, revolution, egalitarianism, a new world. She reminds us that as activists, as organizers, we have a responsibility to teach and train others — that we have a responsibility to actively build a new world.

Martinez also has much to say to us about how we build movements for social change. After the massive resistance to the World Trade Organization in Seattle, Martinez wrote the widely distributed and highly influential essay, "Where Was the Color in Seattle? Looking for reasons why the Great Battle was so white." She writes, "Understanding the reasons for the low level of color, and what can be learned from it, is crucial if we are to make Seattle's promise of a new, international movement against imperialist globalization come true." Through interviews and observations she writes about the lessons that organizers — people of color and white — must learn. We must connect the issues of imperialist globalization to local community issues. White radicals need to develop and put forward an analysis of corporate domination that understands racial oppression in the third world and in the United States. She writes that radicals of color need to be networking and connecting their work with a global framework. White radicals need to go beyond their familiar circles and form coalitions with people of color with an understanding of how white activists in the past have betrayed people of color. White radicals need a strong race, class and gender analysis and it should be central to their political world view. It must be remembered that white radicals have a responsibility to develop anti-racist politics and actively confront white privilege. As radicals of color organize in

communities of color, white radicals interested in movement building must strengthen the anti-racist politics of predominately white groups and activist communities.

Martinez also has much to say in her writings about the day-to-day organizing work that we engage in. She stresses that we must take education and training folks seriously. If we are to become a participatory, radically democratic, feminist, multi-racial, anti-capitalist, queer liberationist, internationalist movement — then we need to work at it. We need to teach each other skills, tactics, and political analysis so that we can all be leaders in a movement for our collective liberation.

Martinez and other radicals of her generation have much to teach the younger generation of today. It is critical that we listen, learn and develop relationships based on common respect. ☆

For more information about the Institute for MultiRacial Justice or to receive *Shades of Power* write: 522 Valencia St., San Francisco, CA 94110. For an inspiring read pick-up *De Colores Means All Of Us*.

Chris Crass is the coordinator of the Catalyst Project, a center for political education and movement building. They prioritize anti-racist work with mostly white sections of the global justice and anti-war movements with the goal of deepening anti-racist commitment in white communities and building multiracial left movements for liberation. His essays on collective liberation politics, anti-authoritarian leadership, organizing strategy and movement building have been published widely in Left Turn, Clamor and on ZNet and Infoshop.org.

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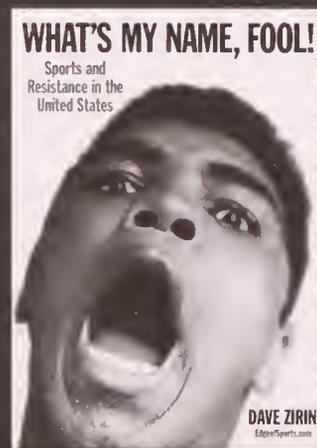
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christian parenti

Interview: Freja Joslin
originally printed in
CLAMOR 23, Winter 2005

Christian Parenti, radical political economist and professor at San Francisco's New College, offered the prison abolitionist movement a much-needed resource last year with his powerful book, *Lockdown America*. Accessible and comprehensive, Parenti has accomplished a work exhaustive in its research and descriptive in its accounts of police and prison terror. Detailing the historical roots of our current criminal justice crisis, *Lockdown America* reflects a thoroughly researched radical critique of the criminal justice system build-up. Activists in Prescott, Arizona, brought Parenti to the Grand Canyon State for a speaking tour in early November 2000. In Prescott his talk began with a horrifying statistic — the United States has four percent of the world's population, yet 25 percent of the world's prisoners. In a talk that spanned the course of contemporary U.S. history, Parenti began with the political crisis of the 1960s, followed by the economic recession of the 1970s and the War on Drugs in the '80s and '90s. Unlike the prison industrial complex model, which examines specific and direct profit motives behind the build-up, Parenti argued for a model that examines the class system as well as white supremacy.

The story goes like this: During the social unrest in the '60s, law enforcement struggles with its project of repression (cases in point — the Watts riot and the Democratic National Convention of 1968 in Chicago). So Johnson creates the Omnibus Act of 1968 which establishes the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) to provide \$1 billion per year for technical support and training (SWAT) to local law enforcement agencies. In the '70s and early '80s, labor is attacked by the ruling class as the economy is restructured (Reagonomics) and a forced recession increases poverty and concentrates it mostly in cities. In the early '80s we see imprisonment and prison construction surge astronomically. Parenti proposes that the current crisis (nearly two million imprisoned in the United States) is rooted in "the transformation of the class and occupational structure of American society." Instead of the "counterinsurgency by other means" crackdown on the rebellious '60s, '80s-style anti-crime repression was borne from a different sort of threat. Reagonomics had increased poverty and created the social breakdown which accompanies the disempowerment of working class communities. The destabilizing effect of inequality needed to be countered

by a containment policy for those "cast-off classes." Add this to the right-wing's love affair with scapegoating — whether it's immigrants, the poor, people of color or youth — and you've got the recipe for a nation where one in three African-American men in their 20s are currently entangled in the criminal justice system.

The War on Drugs, as a racialized war on the poor, also gets going in the '80s with a slew of crime bills increasing funding and power of police and the FBI. In response to the LA riots in 1992 and growing fear of violent criminals, prison spending skyrockets as Clinton's 1994 Prison Reform Act forces longer sentences and more prisoners. By the early '90s, politicians are using "tough on crime" rhetoric to win elections as "crime-baiting" appeals to the middle class's anxiety about instability of jobs, quality of education and life. This policy by-product has a momentum of its own, one with deadly consequences.

Parenti focused his talk on the prison industrial complex, arguing that the traditional analysis of this complex—which relies on the interplay of economic stimulus by prison construction, privatization and exploitation of prison labor — offers little explanation for the kind

of build-up we are witnessing. He stresses that we currently have a "lockdown economy, one based not on *direct* and *specific* corporate interests, but rather on an analysis of punishment and terror as class struggle from above." Throughout *Lockdown America*, Parenti returns to a discussion of contradictions, the most fundamental being the fact that capitalism needs and creates poverty and surplus populations, yet faces the threat of "political, aesthetic, and cultural disruption" from these same poor and surplus populations. He ends this discussion with a brief but all-encompassing thesis; "Prison and criminal justice are about managing these irreconcilable contradictions."

I sat down to talk with Christian Parenti during his November 2000 speaking tour through Arizona. The following is a portion of that interview.

How did you first get involved and become interested in police and prison issues?

I think it flowed from a more generalized interest in violence. I've always been aware of the ubiquity of violence in our society, so as a young person in the early '90s living in San Francisco, in what at that time was considered a rough neighborhood, there was a lot of police activity and violence, gang violence. The state was involved in a big project of policing, not necessarily political because there wasn't a rebellion. Before that, I was interested in the same fundamental question of the U.S. involvement in Central America and the role of state violence in reproducing society, the centrality of state violence in producing the every day world. Even though we don't see violence all the time, I really think that in many ways everyday life is a product of state violence. That it's hidden, ever present, and in a way ideologically with us all — all the time. I see it as normal that Americans are really fascinated with violence, and college students want to take classes on serial killers and everyone is trying to process violence. Of course they are, because even though we don't think critically about it, we all know through a sort of intellectual background noise that this whole society is predicated on massive genocide and land theft and continued violence all the time. So that led to my interest in the criminal justice system.

During your talk you mentioned that Clinton has done more to increase the criminal justice system build-up than any other president has. What is some specific legislation attributed to Clinton?

Clinton's 1994 Crime Bill was the beginning of the really horrible federal crime bills. It made 30 billion dollars available for grants for policing and prison construction. The material impact of that bill was far greater than any other; the amount of money in absolute relative terms was enormous. The federal Anti-terrorism and Death Penalty Act greased the wheels of the federal death penalty in a way that no republican bill had.

There was also the Prison Litigation Reform Act, a little known piece of legislation that completely overhauled prisoners access to civil courts in really, really bad ways. It has a three strikes provision so that if a prisoner has three court cases thrown out of court as frivolous, then they lose forever their right to file another case. And you have to remember that a lot of people enter prison functionally illiterate. And then they have to teach themselves how to read, and then they have to teach themselves the law using inadequate law libraries and inadequate office supplies. So they are submitting briefs that are technically pretty shabby and can be thrown out on a technicality. So it's not that prisoners are filing frivolous briefs often. They are frequently filing briefs because they are autodidacts that get thrown out. So that is a really, really bad provision of the law because it frees prison administrators to abuse prisoners and not be held accountable. Another thing that it does is it eliminates attorney fees so lawyers can't get paid for taking prison cases, so there is a fundamental point there: The sort

of quality control aspect of the law has been removed. Whatever you want to say about the United States justice system, at least there were these nominally built in quality controls so that at least the people who are subject to the law have recourse to question the law and point out its failures. That's been rolled back by the Prison Litigation Reform Act.

The essential argument in your book Lockdown America is that capitalism contains contradiction: it both needs poverty and is threatened by it. My question is how does the War on Drugs play into the containment of this threatening lower class?

The War on Drugs contains the lower classes by justifying repression of the poor in seemingly apolitical, technical terms. It takes it out of the realm of racial and class control and puts it into the discursive realm of public safety. It is a massive ideological justification for coming down on those classes which do or could potentially threaten the system. So, fundamentally that's how the War on Drugs fits into the larger project of social control, that is to say the larger project of having poverty while containing the deleterious side effects of poverty, such as rebellion. That's what it's about. How it does that, as everybody knows, is through an ideological campaign that constructs drug dealers and drug users as poor people of color and it constructs the drugs used in inner cities as the more dangerous drugs. There is a long history of that.

The first War on Drugs started in San Francisco in the 1870s against Chinese laborers. There were laws against smoking opium, which is what the Chinese laborers did, whereas everyone else was drinking opium tonics sold over the counter. The issue wasn't opium addiction, it was Chinese laborers being in California, settling down and starting to think that perhaps they had some right to own property and make some decisions for themselves and question their treatment. There was a very racist worker's movement at that time, The Workingman's Party, and simultaneously at that time, you get the first anti-drug laws in the U.S.

The following War on Drugs was in the 1930s during the Depression when Harry Anslinger came down on marijuana, which was really about coming down on Mexican and African-American migrant laborers. Mexican migrant laborers were coming into work in the fields of the South and California. African-Americans were increasingly moving North into industrial areas. Marijuana, which was previously known as hemp, was used more often by Mexicans and African-Americans than by the white industrial working class in the North. So Harry Anslinger really focuses on that and actually gets the name changed to marijuana because it gives the drug a more foreign ambience and associates it more directly with Mexicans because it is a Spanish name. He launches a war on marijuana attributing it with all sorts of crazy properties which you can see in movies like *Reefer Madness* — things like it makes proper white girls want to have sex.

So that was really about controlling a certain racialized class of people, and so too now we see the media constructing crack cocaine as this super horrible drug ... and crack is a bad drug, but so is alcohol. I mean alcohol is heavy-duty stuff. One of my first jobs out of high school was working in a homeless shelter for alcoholics. Alcohol makes people do really crazy violent stuff and it destroys you physically. The effect that alcohol has on fetuses is unparalleled. They now know that so-called "crack babies" recover fully. You can't say the same for children born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. So it's not about the actual nature of the drug, not to minimize the fact that all drugs can be damaging. Even benign little marijuana can mess up your lungs and turn you into a mushy headed slacker. Alcohol can kill you, heroine can kill you, cocaine can drive you crazy and kill you. All these drugs when abused become problematic. The point is that how they get constructed in the media has more to do with the



way that the story can be utilized by law enforcement to control the poor, particularly poor people of color.

Lockdown America makes the case that poor people of color particularly suffer in the restructuring of the economy and therefore make up the bulk of America's prisoners. How would you say this affects communities of color in general?

The War on Drugs affects them in horrible ways. There is a special aspect to that as well. The War on Drugs and criminal justice doesn't take place evenly over space. It takes place unevenly because capitalism has an uneven geography and produces spaces unevenly. You have the overdevelopment of some areas and the underdevelopment of others, exploitation in some areas, the accumulation of intense capital in certain places such as cities and the extraction of capital from other places. So too do state policies take place unevenly because there is a geographic aspect to it. So most criminal justice takes place in cities, though there's a War on Drugs in the country like the big anti-marijuana campaigns throughout Appalachia and the Northwest. But a lot of this is about controlling places ... cities, where the poor of color live. Criminal justice creates deviancy; it damages people. You send young people to prison and they come out screwed up and more likely to commit violent crimes. They will also be shut out of the labor market because employers don't want to hire felons. So this helps increase unemployment which increases interpersonal violence, all of which then seems natural and justifies greater use of policing and incarceration. It

opens these communities up to police surveillance and it divides these communities by helping to create a crisis of violence and crime. Many people in poor inner city communities really want the police to be there. They want more repression and they're in favor of having the cops come in and do whatever "needs to be done." So, it affects these communities by putting them under occupation and dividing them, demoralizing the people there and siphoning off the youth. I've had community organizers talk about how they compete for personnel with the drug trade. The young don't get involved in organizing because they either get involved in the drug trade or end up in prison. So, it removes a demographic slice of the population, the young, who are frequently crucial to any project of political organizing.

Could you tell me a little bit about the War on Youth?

John DiIulio, the right-wing criminologist who first wrote about "super-predators" is in many ways responsible for the ideological climate behind the War on Youth. There's this fear that youth are out of control and different from youth of the past, which is in fact a perennial fear. Every generation has the idea that the youth this time around are profoundly damaged and different from other people, and to some extent I think this is borne out of capitalism and the rapid rate of change that always occurs under industrialized capitalism. It's an expression about people's deeper anxieties about how society is constantly destroying and inventing, then destroying and reinventing traditions and geographic patterns and psychological patterns. The whole culture of

late industrial capitalism is marked by creative destruction producing tastes, places, cultures and belief systems — all of which are also commodities and forms of production. So that concern and fear about youth is perennial. You can find the same kind of discourse going back a hundred years. More specifically, the War on Youth part of it has to do with the fact that we've run out of ways to come down on adults. There are just so many laws they can pass.

There is one thing I would say about the War on Youth that activists sometimes miss the point. The real thing oppressing youth in California for example is not the fact that they are youth, although they are oppressed as youth because they have these curfew laws. Their schools are being militarized, they can't skateboard, etc. The facets of youth culture are increasingly criminalized simply for being youth. But the main thing that's criminalizing youth is the fact that they are working class and people of color. And I think there is some fetishization of youth that goes on sometimes on the Left. People need to think a little more critically about that because youth are also some of the most privileged people in this society, and that youth is as much a source of privilege as a source of oppression. This whole society is youth identified. Consumer culture is based around images of youth, and youth have a certain cultural cache and a certain cultural capital that works for them in capitalism. The real fundamental issues are ultimately questions of gender location, class and race. That's not to say that there aren't laws that target youth, but sometimes people fetishize youth when the fact is it's not their youthfulness, it's their other qualities that are really the reason the cops are coming down on them.

What would you say to someone who thinks that prison labor is a good use of prisoners and is in fact a form of rehabilitation because it provides them with job skills?

All of that can be true. The more fundamental issue is who's in prison and do they need to be rehabilitated? Do people who have been busted for growing a little bit of marijuana need rehabilitation and job skills? I doubt it. The fundamental issue before you even get to the question of could there be good prison labor or not is the fact that there are way too many people in prison that don't need to be there. Thirty percent of people who enter prison enter for violent crimes; the rest enter for nonviolent property offenses, nonviolent drug offenses and public order offenses. In my opinion, the majority of those people should not be going to prison. So, that's the trump card in that argument.

The other night you mentioned that even some of the most "tough on crime" lawmakers are now calling for a stabilizing of the prison building momentum. How do you see this "elite rethink," as you called it, affecting the prison industry?

It's hard to predict the future. Maybe we'll just see a slowing in the rate of growth of incarceration. We're already seeing a slowing compared to the '90s. Maybe we'll see the whole project of repression plateau and stabilize. The middle class might decide that they don't want to pay for this. Or maybe, if there's enough pressure from below and if there's enough constituencies in society that address criminal justice — for example if the labor movement gets involved and sees this as an issue of their future membership base being robbed, we might see a positive rollback against the criminal justice system build-up. But I don't know. It's all a question of how much people organize, how creatively people organize, and when they do organize, how broadly they talk about and think about the problem. I think it's important to see organizing always as a medium or platform for education as well; and the more sophisticated our narrative I think the more people will understand the whole society and get involved, and the more creative forms of organization we'll find. So if we can keep doing the job and increasingly do it better,

if we can be less single-issue oriented, less moralistic, think more structurally, think about capitalism more; less about bad corporations and more about the corporate system, i.e. capitalism, and how the capitalistic society constructs everything from space to people's psychology, and then keep plugging away wherever possible; then it's not inconceivable that we could create some real victories.

I think people are interested in your vision of a criminal justice system and the role of prisons in a just society. Can you elaborate?

That's such a hard question because ideally there wouldn't be repression, but that's pretty utopian. I think that there is a place for groups of people to decide how to punish and deal with elements of that group that go against it. I think to deny that question and let yourself drift off into some totally utopian position is just silly. The fact of the matter is that people have always done bad stuff and even in a utopia there would have to be some system for dealing with people who kill and rape and all that. Presumably, there would be much less of that. We have evidence that the more egalitarian and just a society, the less interpersonal violence there is. So, it becomes a kind of esoteric question if not that many people are harming others. But there still, nonetheless, would have to be a system. Even very egalitarian indigenous societies had systems of banishment and that sort of stuff. So, it's an ugly fact that groups do protect themselves through shaming and forms of basically what you'd have to call repression. When a hunting and gathering society banishes because they've committed murder, that's a form of repression. The individual is being driven from their society. Basically, I don't think that's a relevant question, ultimately because it's completely academic. It's completely scholastic because it's not on the agenda. We are so far from there being a just society and thus actually having to work out a system of restorative justice that I don't think it's relevant. I think it's O.K. to not answer that question. There are all sorts of questions that are O.K. to not answer because they don't have any material bearing on the current movement. What we have to deal with now is a creep towards fascism in the U.S. An increasingly punitive, increasingly racist state that is ever more invasive in terms of surveillance and the types of formal and informal social control it exercises over all of us. And, frighteningly, this system of repression has broad support among the people of America. People of all classes and races are unfortunately supportive of this. So, that's the real issue. These questions are academic whereas the questions of how we deal with the prison-industrial-complex and the criminal justice build-up is not academic. It's very real, it's very immediate and it may seem vague but it's a really practical question whereas the other is not. ★

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The Coup has been around from the days of conscious hip hop through gangsta rap and the co-opted ©rap that currently passes for culture, and has lived to tell a story of the streets, survival and socialism. For The Coup, revolution is rap and resistance, but never rhetoric. In their music, they talk about life and liberation and all those other little things that usually slip through the collective cracks of our commercialized consciousness. The Coup wanna kill their landlord and the CEO and encourage you to steal their album while you're sippin' on that ghetto glass of genocide and juice. Yeah, they're real, and they believe in armed struggle too, but it's a war against who stole the soul and ripped off the rhyme. I met with Boots Riley, the leader of the Coup, in some posh apartment somewhere in downtown New York/Babylon where neither of us seemed to belong to preach politics for the people and play a little party music.

The Coup has existed for over 10 years so you've essentially seen everyone from Chuck D and BDP to the X-Clan and Wu-Tang Clan, but I think when it comes to hip hop, a lot of folks' memories only go as far as MTV and Eminem. So who stole the soul?

I think the whole way that the history of hip hop is being told to people right now is a kind of cooptation or theft in and of itself. They've essentially taken hip hop away from the source that it came from and whitewashed it so it no longer has a clear history and origin, so we become almost stripped of our collective memory, but hip hop is not just a series of accidental occurrences where somebody moved from here to there and put the peanut butter in the chocolate and then you had hip hop. When I was in Detroit, the thing was hamboning before I ever heard anybody rap — this was in '75, '76 — so when I first heard Sugar Hill Gang, I was like, "Hey, they got a hambone record on the radio," but nobody ever talks about things like that. Hip hop is not just a series of things that happened with a few people. It's not just what you see on TV. For what hip hop is today, you have to give props to those people that helped it to become what it is.

So what would be the reason for blurring the history of hip hop?

It's an attempt to commodify the art or culture so that they can sell it, like anything else. It's much easier to sell a simplified, watered-down

version of anything than to deal with the real history and the complications and questions that may exist. Even the idea that the four elements are all that drove and comprised hip hop is basically a way to commodify it. To be able to separate something in such rigid categories is in keeping with the way that they sell anything.

In terms of the history of hip hop and artists like Public Enemy or KRS who helped to pioneered political hip hop, I don't see an awful lot of politicking these days. What happened to "I'm a rebel so I rebel"?

I think right now with the lack of a Black mass movement out there, and with the fact that things are just getting worse economically for people, we're more and more — outside and inside of hip hop — being taught to embrace everything that is wrong with this capitalist system. We're essentially being told that it's cool to have a poster of Bill Gates on our ceiling and jerk off to him every night and we are being convinced that Donald Trump and his type are some kind of soeial superhero, so for many people, images in hip hop of someone that has a million dollars are the only liberating images that they've ever seen in their lifetime. It's the only image they've seen of someone that's free from oppression. A lot of people are latching onto that simply because there is no movement that they see, so they are believing in the American dream that anybody can become a millionaire and that's what some of that hip hop that exists today is there to affirm, but it's really just telling of the fact that there is

no movement out there. When they see that someone has a mansion and a big car, it's almost like they're witnessing power that they've never seen and never had access to. It's not a real image but they think that it's a liberating image. That's liberation as far as they're concerned.

There was a time when some of us thought that the Hip Hop Nation itself could be that new revolutionary movement, but now we're saying that there's no movement that can move hip hop in a politically conscious or revolutionary direction.

Hip hop is not a movement in and of itself. Hip hop is not separate from the people. Hip hop was and has always been an outgrowth of people's struggles. It's an outgrowth of where the people are. The idea that they were putting out there that there's a separate Hip Hop Nation or whatever, and inside this Hip Hop Nation everything is politically perfect and The Nation will go this way or that way and lead the people, is an outgrowth of the fact that they tried to make hip hop seem like it wasn't an outgrowth of the people.

Within the underground punk culture, there is this idea that you are automatically a sell out if you go to a major label but within hip hop, that never really existed and, in fact, the underground is often simply perceived as a kind of minor league from where you will one day get signed and step off into the majors, and many hip hop artists will say that they are simply trying to get by or find a way to survive, and so the majors are just another way to get paid. Do you feel there's a need for hip hop to try to become more independent?

I look at it like this — we're inside capitalism already so we have to deal realistically with what we've got. The difference between indie as opposed to major mostly has to do with the fact that if you own that indie label then you'll get more money from what you are putting out. You may also initially have greater control over what you do, but the markets are still ruled by the major labels who control the gatekeepers of the industry so if you're an indie and you pose a threat, you can still be easily shut down by the majors, but definitely, it would be better if hip hop artists had more control of what they create. It would also be better if Black people had more control over what they create, but owning your own indie label is not necessarily a revolutionary concept in and of itself. It's really just a matter of tactics as opposed to being this great liberating thing. Certainly I don't like the monopoly that the corporations have, but I think it's kind of a false idea that because it's an indie label, it's somehow a more progressive label.

Talking about The Coup, who have been back and forth between major and indie labels, or Dead Prez, for instance, who are on a major label, you definitely have a question of access. Although Dead Prez are still not being heard as much as, say, Jay Z or Puff Daddy, they still have a relationship with the big boys who essentially control the radio, TV and, potentially, billions of dollars in advertising. So the question is, would Dead Prez, who are getting some above ground recognition, be a total obscurity if they were on an indie label that didn't have all that corporate power and if they were on an indie label, would that mean that there's that many less people who could hear what they are trying to do and the vital message that they're trying to put forth in terms of the movement and the struggle?

Of course there's a lot of irrelevant music being put out by the majors, but is what's being put out by the indies automatically more progressive than the shit the majors are putting out? If we're talking strictly capitalism or entrepreneurial enterprises, then yeah, the indies are it, but if we're talking about the real struggle and the fact that our people have historically been denied access then the question becomes "What are you doing with that extra money you're making with that no sell out indie label?" Are you using it to finance the revolution? Are you using it

to create food, shelter and clothing for people besides yourself? Are you using it to educate the masses on the streets? And what is your overall message, anyway? Is it revolutionary? Or is it the same old shit? Truth is, many times indie labels are just aspiring to be major labels and they don't necessarily give a damn what they're putting out and putting forth as long as it sells, so being part of an indie label is not in and of itself some sort of revolutionary act.

By the time The Coup came into existence in the early '90s, many of the so-called conscious hip hop artists were no longer selling and so-called gangsta rap ruled the roost.

Yeah, there weren't too many people doing politically-minded music on a nationwide basis, but the way we looked at it was that we were coming at it from the same angle as artists who were being called gangsta rap. If you really looked at it, we were all just talking about our surroundings although we may have had a deeper analysis of what was going on in our surroundings. If you really listen to a lot of music that people don't classify as conscious or call gangsta, it's simply saying that these are the problems we're having in our lives. The real difference is not the content but in their analysis as to why the problems are happening, but the general feel of most of it is that I'm giving you some game or advice as to how to deal with the problems and they're all coming with that, whether they are called gangsta or conscious. I think the only difference is that we may just have had a little better understanding of what was really going on in this world from a revolutionary point of view.

Do you think that what's being given to us by the major labels, as far as what we hear on the radio or see on TV, is an attempt at an analysis of what's going on or is it simply an exaggeration of ghetto life, not unlike what you might see in a cheap horror flick?

There are a lot of things that are not even attempting to pretend to be any kind of real analysis of what's going on and, in many cases, they are simply a saleable product like a horror movie, but in many cases, what people — artists — are still saying is that this is what's happening, this is our reality, like it or not, and in the case of stuff that gets called gangsta rap and gets written off as nothing more than a felon fairytale, they are actually trying to tell you that these are the problems that exist and these are the ways to survive them, like it or not. It just happens that The Coup's way to survive them and solve our problems is to change the system from top to bottom.

Do you think that people have been getting that message?

Yeah, but it's really not just a matter of them truly understanding what we're saying. To really understand it, you have to get involved in the struggle around something that deals with you and your life. A lot of times, the mistake of the movement is that we try to make the struggle nothing but a bunch of pie in the sky rhetoric. You know, "When the revolution comes in 50 years, this is how we'll change the world," and what this does is isolate the movement from the fact that the struggle for revolution is a material struggle. It's not something that's based on an emotion, an intangible freedom, or anything like that. The fact is that people need food, people need clothes, they need healthcare, they need shelter and those are material things and we need to struggle around those material things. We can't just struggle only around world trade policies and things like that because we need people involved in the struggle and many people are just trying to survive day to day. We need to get involved in those day to day struggles as well, so that means we need to get more money per hour. We need to keep people from being evicted from their homes. We need to show the people that there are victories coming from the movement and then people will connect it to. "Hey, these ideas about revolution do mean something," so when they hear a Coup song or a Dead Prez song or Public Enemy, they're not just hearing these nice ideas that don't mean anything to them.

So the music becomes a kind of bridge between the day to day struggle, and revolutionary goals and ideas and ideals?

Yes. We need to connect the larger struggle with actual campaigns in the community and music can help provide the analysis as to what these struggles are all about. You really understand what's going on once you get involved in the struggle but right now we're giving people the choice to either pledge allegiance to the revolution or blah blah blah. It ends up being almost like a religion instead of about anything real so that's why people gravitate towards songs that say, "OK, you need to sell dope to solve your problems," because you can sell some crack for \$10 and have \$10 in your pocket and that's a material thing. The movement is separating itself from that reality.

So why has the political movement in the U.S. separated itself from the real grassroots struggle in the streets?

I think there is an aesthetic about the movement right now that has to do with the fact that there are a lot of students that came into it in the 1960s and although that's not necessarily a bad thing — because in other parts of the world it helped to motivate and energize the movement — in the U.S., the student movement was very different than the movements all over the world and whereas all over the world the student movements embraced struggles that had to do with everyday working people, here the nature of what people were struggling around ended up being almost a more intellectual endeavor, things that didn't have to do with everyday people, whereas if you look back into the '20s and '30s, or even like the labor movement in the United States, it tended to deal with real day to day issues. If you can get 50, 60 people to show up at an eviction and, as they move a family's furniture out, those 50 or 60 people move it back in, you're dealing with real world struggles, real people's struggles, and then people see that the movement and the revolution is something that is material. It's not just something that sounds like a good idea but something that can work.

So the question is how does talking about and fighting for possessions or material things or eating or survival or paying your rent lead to an understanding that maybe the system that exists now is what's keeping you hungry or homeless? How do we make it understood that after all is said and done, we still need to dismantle and destroy the system that is trying to destroy us?

It's just like learning scales on the piano. You don't just tell someone this is how the piano works inside and that's it because odds are they're not going to be interested at all. Even if I'm curious about how the sound vibrates and all that, I'm still not going to be interested enough to absorb that information, but when they're trying to figure out how to play the piano and then they're learning about that, then you really start to take in that information. It's all about theory and practice. The only way people learn the theory is to practice and, in terms of the revolution, that practice is the struggle to get something to eat, to survive, to live. Through practice you figure out how the system works and that's how you will eventually figure out that it has to be destroyed, otherwise it becomes theoretical and not connected to you in any way that you can really see, so the job of the revolutionary to sum up these things that are happening, to make it clear just what and why this is happening. This is what the struggle is about.

To take it out of the classrooms and into the streets.

And to teach through actual action. Otherwise it becomes something where you just hand people books and they're supposed to read Marx, Lenin, and Mao and ingest that and decide whether they agree with this or that based on something that they're not involved in, but all they're really doing is reading a book. For me, just from personal experience, I

was in study groups that read those books before I really was involved in the struggle in a more concrete way. It really didn't start mattering to me enough to really look closely at the ideas in these books until I was involved with things that had to do with people's everyday lives, but once I did get involved, I also began to better understand the general concepts. It's then that the questions start sprouting in your head and you're compelled to go back into history to put things into context.

We hear a lot of talk about how you don't see as many black and brown faces in the streets when you look at the movements that exist today against, say, the WTO or the G8. Do you feel that this is because the activists haven't found a way to connect it to the real world struggle of just surviving day to day?

I think that people and communities of color are active around a lot of different things but it's just that sometimes Black people have to be more practical as to what they will get out and fight for. For instance, the WTO demonstrations, which are very important, would easily be supported by the people on the bottom rung if it were explained to them in a way that made practical sense. They'll be like, "Yeah, I'm against what the WTO is doing," but the question is, do they feel motivated enough to feel that they can change things? Has it been explained to them in such a way that they feel like they can make a difference? I don't think people feel that. When you talk about struggles that are more practical with the day to day battles, when you tie it into that, then people will understand why you're out there fighting the WTO.

And then support that aspect of the movement?

Realistically, I think that poor people are more likely to first get involved in something else that feels closer to home, but that's not saying that those demonstrations aren't necessary or vitally important, because they do expose a lot of realities to people, but I think right now we need more community-based reforms. I think the fact that we are not more clearly focusing on grassroots actions is one of the reason why the numbers are dwindling in the movement.

But there seems to be this political dividing line between fighting the big corporate machine or fighting for basic needs.

So there ends up being this false question that's come up in the last 20 years between reform or revolution, as if they can't go hand in hand. That was never a question until very recently. It was always a battle for reform and revolution.

What is The Coup trying to do musically and lyrically in terms of your message to create the link between reform, or changing shit in the streets and the eventual dismantling of the system?

The music we make, our party music, is a kind of platform for me to talk about what I believe needs to happen, but the way that I talk about or try to get a message across is through personal trials and tribulations, things that I go through and the things that I have to deal with. I try to discuss the things that I feel are important to me and I have to just trust that these are things that everyone's going through. Hopefully, through my analysis of my own personal situation, people can see how the day to day struggle connects with the bigger issue ... which is the fact that the system needs to be destroyed. ☆

Not4Prophet is the lyricist and vocalist of the political punk/hip hop/be bop/salsa/reggae band known as RICANSTRUCTION. He is also the voice of the "spoken noise" group RENEGADES OF PUNK, and fronts his solo anti-hip hop project where he spits rhymes about life, liberty and the pursuit of poverty. And every now and then he interviews people that he likes.



a d o l p h e



derrick jensen

interviewed by Sera Bilezikyan

illustration by Joe Adolphe

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Derrick Jensen is a writer and an activist on behalf of forests, salmon, and domestic violence survivors. He is the author of *Listening to the Land* and *Railroads and Clearcuts*, and a regular contributor to *The Sun*. His most recent book, *A Language Older Than Words*, has become a common sight in the hands of activists and anarchists everywhere. It is a beautiful, cyclical narrative combining memoir, politics, and philosophy concerning the relationship of humans to the land and to other species as well as the dangers of an economic system that dehumanizes everything in its path. Jensen has been an inspiration to radical environmental activists for years, as well as to indigenous people and survivors of violence. A survivor of family violence himself, he has been described as one who has “looked evil in the face yet not lost his capacity to love.” I cannot recommend his writings enough, to anyone who cares about what it means to rediscover what it is to be a human inextricably connected to the land, in a society which has done everything to destroy that connection, to make the decimation of all communities, ecological and social, all the more possible.

This interview was conducted on the beach near Jensen’s home in Crescent City, California, where he is working on a new book, helping to restore the historic salmon runs, and teaching writing to inmates at Pelican Bay State Prison. He recently did a benefit in Eugene, Oregon, for imprisoned eco-activists Free and Critter. This is just a small portion of the interview, and Jensen’s website, www.derrickjensen.org, can give further background on his work and current projects.

Is writing a personal outlet for internal ideas and creativity or is it a necessity, a contribution to the larger struggle?

Writing is definitely how I contribute and communicate. I write to bring about social change and if my writing doesn’t achieve it then I am going to attempt to achieve social change through other means. It’s all aimed towards bringing down civilization.

When did you start writing?

I dedicated my life to writing in about 1987. By that time I knew that everything in the culture was fucked up, but I didn’t have an outlet for it. Then I met John Osborn, the heart and soul of the Spokane, Washington environmental community. He really helped

channel my energy. I had this huge amount of pent-up energy, and I didn’t know where to take it and what to do with it ... and I will be forever thankful to him for helping me find direction. So, I really started writing when I was about 26. And I’ve been writing more and more ever since. These days it’s pretty much all I do.

When I wrote *Language*, I had this Madison Avenue agent. I sent her the first 70 pages, and she hated it. She told me, “if you take out the social criticism and the stuff about your family, I think you’ll have a book.” She told me this on April 22, 1997, the day US-backed troops in Peru slaughtered the Tupacamaristas. I emailed her, “if they are going to give their lives, the least I can do is tell the truth. You’re fired.” She also said that I was a nihilist.

There’s nothing wrong with that.

At the time, I didn't even know what it meant. I looked it up in the dictionary. The first definition is somebody that hates life, which is obviously not me. The second definition is somebody who thinks society is so rotten that it needs to be taken down to its core, which is definitely me. What all of this means is that I really want to write for the people who have thought about it all for a long time, and I want to push them further. Push them harder, push the analysis harder. For whatever reason, the universe, plus my family, plus everything else have made it so I have the capacity to look at these things and analyze them; so goddamnit, I have to.

Do you consider yourself an anarchist?

That depends on how we define it. I like John Zerzan's definition of anarchist: someone who wants to eradicate all forms of oppression. In that definition, yes. But then I saw this article the other day in *Green Anarchy* saying that the Zapatistas aren't anarchists.

That has come up in every conversation I have had this week.

You know what? I don't care whether the Zapatistas are anarchists. There is definitely a strain of anarchism that can get kind of convoluted and silly. But I think that's true of any "ism." Am I an anarchist? Sure. Am I an anarchist? No. It took me years to even call myself a writer. I'm happy to publicly associate myself with anarchists, and speak out in support of the ELF (Earth Liberation Front) and the ALF (Animal Liberation Front).

Speaking of the ELF, do you believe in the power of economic sabotage as a tactic to slow down the machine?

Yes, I think that is a wonderful tactic and should be used far more often. The problem I have with it is that, and I will talk about this in my next book I'm going to write this fall, I think it needs to go to a whole other level. What we do far too often is *endpoint* sabotage. Destroying the SUV or the house at the *end*. So is tree spiking, which I think is a really good idea. We need to take offensive. We need to begin dismantling the entire economic infrastructure. Which includes changing people's hearts, education—everything. I mean, I'm a writer. Of course, I have no problem with that. There is another level that needs to be happening. We need to recognize that ours is a government of occupation. How do you disable the infrastructure of this country? I don't know. That's why I have to write the new book. Another way to say this is that I perceive a lot of the activities of the ELF as "propaganda by deed." I think that's incredibly important, but I would also like to see us systematically dismantle the economic and physical infrastructure of this civilization. To tell the truth, I don't think it would take that many people.

Albert Speer, the armaments minister for the Nazis, wrote that the American and British carpet bombers were not as effective as they could have been because they would target, for example, a tractor factory which would make it so the Nazis couldn't build engines for their tanks and airplanes. But they didn't hit the ball-bearing factory, which would have made it so they couldn't rebuild the tractor factory. If they had gone for the bottlenecks, they would have been more effective. What I want to do in this book is figure out where the bottlenecks are.

What about on a more local, immediate scale?

If I could do one thing, immediately, I would stop international trade. Most of the countries where people are starving are food exporters. In India, at least a couple of states that used to be granaries now export dog food and tulips to Europe. So the point is, I would like to see it escalate fast. I am saying this in full cognizance of the fact that the repression

will be increased exponentially. I wish somebody would have acted 100 years ago.

So tell me about your new book.

It's called *The Other Side of Darkness*, or maybe *The Culture of Make-Believe*, or maybe *The Culture of Contempt*, or maybe *Being Not-Human, Being Human*. In other words, we don't yet have a title. It starts out as an exploration of hate groups, and then spreads out from there to examine how these things arise, and it really goes after the main causes of atrocity, which are economics and the economic system. About halfway through the book, my publisher said, "Well you've got to talk about the Nazis," and I thought, what can I say which hasn't already been said? Then I remembered something a friend said years ago, which was that Hitler's big mistake was that he was about 100 years ahead of his time. Assembly-line mass murder is the endpoint of civilization. One of the things I say near the end, is just think about how much Hitler would have accomplished with face-recognition software ... DNA testing ... social security numbers — what if he had the capacity to destroy the planet, which he did not have, but which we do.

The salmon are dying. We're changing the climate. Earthworm populations in the Midwest are disappearing. I picture people coming 20, 30 years later, after civilization collapses, and they'll be reading some old book anywhere in this region, up the coast, and they'll say, "there were so many salmon that people were afraid to put their boats in the water for fear they'd capsizize ... and I'm fucking starving to death."

We don't have to wait for collapse; we have to actualize it now. That doesn't mean timber sale appeals are worthless. An image I use for that a lot is Hammer and Anvil, a military term describing what Robert E. Lee used at the battle of Chancellorsville, where the anvil is a defensive force, and the hammer is an offensive force. The purpose is to smash the enemy in between. I view timber sale appeals, working at rape crisis centers, and so on as the anvil—the solidity—and attacks on the system through writing or blowing up dams or whatever as the hammer.

From working in the forest defense movement, it seems like there is a lot of deceit. There is the Forest Service selling off the old-growth forests (on public lands) at subsidized prices to the timber corporations. And then this media-sensationalized conflict between environmentalists and local people. And then the harsh reality of just 4 percent of old-growth, ancient forest stands remaining, and an economic system which victimizes rural, poor, logging and mill towns. What is the solution to this impervious forest dilemma?

I don't think there are solutions. Civilization creates no-win situations, and the sooner we realize that, the sooner we can get it out of our minds and hearts and begin the task of dismantling it. It specializes in false promises and destructive bargains. We have been on this continent for less than 500 years, and we have rendered a good portion of the water undrinkable. We are in the process of rendering the air unbreathable for those with pollution-induced asthma, cancer, or any other such diseases we already have. We sign on the dotted line for aluminum cans and find that salmon are stolen in the bargain. We take jobs in the forest and the forests are destroyed. We turn on the lights and find that we have been handed poisons that last a thousand human lifetimes. How is it possible to make human and humane choices—choices that benefit ourselves and others as beings — when each time we sign a contract we find ourselves further enslaved?

Yes, local people need jobs. But what is physical reality? The old growth is gone. Let's talk about that. Let's at least be honest. I don't want to hear any phony jobs-versus-spotted-owls arguments ... we have to talk about automation ... we have to talk about raw log exports. If we're not going to speak honestly about those things, I've got nothing to say to you, even if you're some local guy. If you are going to be honest, well, then let's figure out what the hell we're going to do

about it. I totally support local farmers. I support family farmers, independent loggers in their struggles against the agriculture corporations, but if they are going to abuse the land, I will not support them. All that said, I think we need to choose our targets. It's clearly a huge waste of time to fight some guy who, by hand, clearcuts 200 acres a year.

Do you think it is a viable thing to work with rural people who are also being exploited by corporations - to say, look, Plum Creek Timber Corporation is not saving the land, it's not saving your life?

We've got nothing to teach them. They've been put out of business by Plum Creek. They know it already. I am all in favor of local economies, but what local economy ends up meaning in our culture, is corporate control. It's all a big excuse. If it's really a local economy, that would be better. But even so we have to remember that our entire economic system causes people, rewards people, constrains people, and forces people to destroy their own backyards, and then move on somewhere else. I worked with a farmer years ago who said "Cargill gives me two choices, I can cut my own throat or they'll do it for me...." These people know what's going on. That's why when I talk about violence to family farmers they understand, they've experienced this in their own bodies. They've sat there with a shotgun across their lap and an empty bottle of Jack Daniel's on the floor and thought about whether or not to put the shotgun in their mouth. For many environmentalists, it's a game.

It's a luxury too. A privilege.

Yes, so many of us talk about how we feel the death of the salmon in our bones but I don't see me taking out a dam. I don't see you taking out a dam. I have no patience for mainstream environmentalists who say it's so horrible to even think about violence. I mean, what does the mother grizzly do?

As you address in Language, do you think society is in a serious state of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

That's the fundamental unstated thesis of *Language*. We have it, individually and collectively. In my new book, I talk about the rules of a dysfunctional family, which are also the rules of a dysfunctional society, according to R.D. Laing. Rule A is: *Don't*. Rule A1 is: *Rule A does not exist*, and Rule A2 is *never discuss the existence or nonexistence of Rules A, A1 and A2*. We can spend all this time talking about everything in the world but that which is important, it is simply the case that we aren't seeing the damage.

Or we see it too much; you show someone a forest clear-cut, an animal in a lab, and they get shocked.

That's another level of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The "the problem is so big, what am I supposed to do?" level.

It is necessary to look at it, and then go through it. The real problem is not so much the sorrow or the pain, it's our avoidance of it.

You talk about civilization a lot and its implications for both society and the environment. What roles do religion and civilization play in the alienation of humans to the land?

It seems pretty clear to me that everything comes from the land. You've heard the argument that since humans are natural, and humans invented chainsaws, then chainsaws are natural? I thought about that for years. Because we are *imbedded in and part of* the natural world, anything that helps to understand and reinforce our understanding of

our imbeddedness is natural — any institution, any artifact, any religion. And if it doesn't do that, it is unnatural to the degree that it doesn't. A chainsaw is unnatural because it helps us to forget that we are imbedded in the natural world. Let's presume for a second that Christianity or Judeo-Christianity made sense in the Middle East—to move it from there to here, means by definition that it is a religion that is separated from the land. And it is thus not going to articulate and help one to realize a right relationship with the land.

What is the point of civilization? The point of civilization is for the rich to acquire more — it is for the comforts and elegancies of the few. I've been reading some of the main rationales for slavery in pre-Civil War America, and a lot of them were refreshingly honest. They say our way of life is based on the comforts and elegancies of the few based on the sweat of those who are less refined than we are. That is the point of civilization. To make it so that the few can stand on the backs of the poor and the non-human, who are also less refined.

It emerges from this damaged mindset we discussed earlier. It is a manifestation of and a reinforcer of the damaged mindset that is not capable of entering fully mutual relationships, and perceives that all relationships are based on power. Civilization is a social organization that is based on the flawed belief that all relationships are based on power, and it is a social organization that maximizes the capacity for those on the inside to utilize that power for physical comfort. Religion often (although not all religion) is used as a way to get through the misery of this culture, because *someday* you'll be connected. I want to be connected *now*.

With PTSD, the fundamental fear is relationship. This God is really like an abusive father. I love looking at the bible in terms of abusive family dynamics; the comparisons are straight one-to-one. No wonder: they are manifestations on different levels of the same thing. Fear of relationship. Fear of our own feelings. Fear of what it would actually mean if we were to engage another being, human or other. It has been reinforced over time so that we have forgotten that there is even any other way to be.

What do you think is going to happen in the next 40 or 50 years?

An increase in grinding away at whatever natural and human diversity is left. People will lead increasingly miserable lives, not paying attention as long as they've got a television. I think about all of these people who sit in front of their TVs: they might as well be in SHU (isolation unit at Pelican Bay). Their world consists of the space between the couch and the TV. I do not see us having a transformation to a sustainable way of living that is either voluntary or that maintains capitalism or industrialism. I see the next 100 years being pretty nasty, no matter how you look at it.

What hope do you have for the future? That's kind of a bleak way to look at it.

I don't think it's my perspective that is bleak. I think that the reality is bleak and it remains bleak whether or not we choose to look at it. I don't take it personally. This is what doesn't paralyze me. My hope is that salmon survive. My hope is that salmon forgive us. My hope is that [gesturing to the sky] this family of brown pelicans survives, and I have hope for that. I hope that people survive and that people remember, relearn what it means to live on the land. So, my hope is that I have hope in the particular. ☆

Activist, traveler, musician, and one of the best goddamned writers around, Sera lost the good fight on January 12, 2002 when she took her own life. (excerpted from her obituary in Slingshot newspaper)



photo by Tracy Mostovoy



carol leigh

interview **Mary Christmas**
originally printed in
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Carol Leigh and I met when she was in Philadelphia this past winter. By some stroke of miracle, she received word of my newly formed organization, SWAT (Sex Workers Action Team). Naturally, this founder of the sex workers' rights movement contacted us (currently the only union in town), to ask if we would join her at the debate she was taping for National Public Radio. In turn, SWAT invited Carol to our biweekly meeting, where we were graced with photographs of her trips around the world and a miniature lesson in movement herstory.

Reinventing herself under the title "Scarlet Harlot," Carol Leigh has appeared in films and performances for years, as well as on the steps of many City Halls, with the intent of using her experiences in prostitution to empower others. As a writer and organizer, Carol gives voice and presence to the millions of people in the sex industry who can't afford to "come out of the dressing room." By coining "sex work," now a widely used term encompassing all sex industry fields, Carol Leigh gave us a collective identity, and, for the first time, a hope of unity.

Instead of preparing specific interview questions for Carol, we shared an informal conversation over margaritas in West Philly.

So, Carol, you started talking about how your sex work was more nerve-racking and frustrating when you were doing it, and how now, in retrospect, it seems more rosy and glorified. Do you think that has to do with the fact that when you're in it, there's the threat of something bad happening, some danger — even if there's no apparent physical danger?

That's interesting. Right, yeah, that's true . . . the sense of danger. And even my regular client — I could imagine that maybe he'd turn dangerous. In some ways, if I'd seen somebody for a few years, I pretty much felt safe — as safe as I could. I mean, I feel nervous when I get on an airplane. There are a lot of risks in my life. When I drive a car, I feel unsafe. But something about prostitution dates when I didn't know a guy, or one of those first-time dates, I was alone in the apartment with them so there was a lot of fear. The compromise I made was to see regulars and to see men that I knew, but it was in my apartment, so I had a little vulnerability there. It was unpleasant, not necessarily

because of the danger, but because of the compromises I had to make trying to avoid the danger. I always felt like the next trick I didn't know could be the police, it could be a rapist, so I was better off trying to make sure that my regulars kept coming back. I put so much energy into so many compromises, giving them a little more time or a little more of this or a little more of that, and negotiating around condoms was very stressful (at the cusp of the AIDS crisis) so it was a constant frustration for me. I was frustrated that I had to take these risks because I couldn't easily accrue other clients.

It's rosy in retrospect because I think that when we look back at our lives anyway we kind of eliminate the worst parts. I'm definitely in touch with the fact that, in retrospect, it all looks good, and I remember the sweet times and the gentle times, and the rituals with flattery that we have with clients. It's very interesting. I remember the times that I was just so proud. I was just happy that I had made someone so happy. I definitely get off on that. And just the wisdom that I've gotten from this, from seeing men when they're at their most vulner-

able and understanding the hypocrisies that punish women for being involved in prostitution. So in retrospect, I've gotten so much out of this work and learned so much, and that's almost funny to say because there's sort of a taboo about being too positive about it. And in being one of the lucky ones — the way it came into my life, as an artist, and being able to work with activists who were becoming involved in the prostitutes' rights movement — it was really very special.

Speaking of the movement, I wonder about the possibility, in the future, of prostitution and all sex work being normalized, less in the dark, less dangerous, and more out in the open. I wonder if that would make it less appealing for so many people. I wonder, myself, how much of the appeal is about the secret of it, the underground — because repression really turns people on! Religious repression, legal repression, all kinds of repression can be exciting. What do you think?

Well, I think that a lot is changing, in terms of strippers being out and people working at Hooters, and there are so many young college women stripping, so I think normalization has happened to a large extent. Sex workers are coming out and in some ways are more integrated in the community. But still it's funny how in the closet some young women who strip are. Some people really are still in the closet, but it's out a lot more than it was. It may be integrated in some other way into their lives instead of having such separate lives, instead of leading double lives. But really, we're talking about a different society. If it was so accepted that it wouldn't be shameful, then it would be a totally different culture than ours where sex is a source of shame. And it's about sexual fantasies. I mean, that's like the realm of science fiction I think!

Can you talk about some of the connections between globalization, or global capitalism, and sex workers rights?

Well, you know, capital can move freely across borders but people can't. So that means that there are more people working in the informal labor sector, and of course prostitution is a big part of that sector. Countries all over Europe now report that the immigrant population has doubled, tripled, even quadrupled in some countries! This has seriously affected sex workers. And also, this disturbs the balance there was in these communities before immigration. There are sex workers from these cities who are antagonistic towards the migrant workers, and a lot of the response from European countries is, again, to regulate more. Sometimes legalize and sometimes create regulations to guarantee more rights, but only for the legal workers. If you're in the European Union, you actually have the right to work as a prostitute in other countries in the Union. I'm not quite sure if that's true in every single country, but it is for some. There was a recent decision in the Netherlands about the right to work as a prostitute if you come from a European Union country. But there are huge populations of people

from outside the European Union: when prostitution is legalized and more severely regulated, migrants from Latin America and Southeast Asia, are left out in the cold. So there's kind of a rift between migrant and native sex workers. And the reality is that only two percent of people on the globe are actually working outside their country of origin. It is a small population. But in the sex industry it's a larger population, again, because it's part of the informal economy.

And because we can assume that there are no statistics to reflect migrant sex workers.

One of the problematic parts of this regulation system is that, in Holland although there are some very advanced laws guaranteeing health benefits for sex workers, bringing the business above ground, and ensuring workers rights, the flip side is that prostitution is the only business where you actually have to carry ID with you to prove who you are. They're so afraid of protecting people from the immigrants and so many people want to close the borders. They're scared to death about the changes that are happening.

This is interesting because of the whole visa thing. I know that people can apply for work visas with mainstream jobs. Is there any kind of work visa in countries where prostitution is legal?

That's what I'm saying. You're not afforded a work visa unless you're coming from a specific European Union country, for example. You can't apply for a work visa to work as a sex worker if you're coming, say, from Thailand. But, there are other rubrics: people apply for entertainment licenses, as entertainers, as dancers, and you can get certain licensing. I know that people are supporting a UN resolution that hasn't yet been ratified by too many countries. It's about the protection of the rights of immigrant workers. It basically sets up a structure so that migrant workers are guaranteed their rights, and some want sex workers to be guaranteed rights under that too, but nobody's ratified it.

Who wants that inclusion?

The sex workers' rights advocates, migrant advocates. At this point there's a huge movement of organizations working for the rights of migrant women workers.

So that could be one of the places where the anti-globalization movement is intersecting with the sex workers movement. Because people who are out to ensure the human rights of sweatshop workers are also working for this UN treaty, right?

There's a lot of collaboration in terms of supporting it. But it's very far off. This is a big pie in the sky, just because it's one of the least ratified proposals. Also, Anti-Slavery International is an organization that basically addresses issues of slavery and exploitation in various work contexts, and they've been brave enough to address issues for sex workers, so there's some crossover in that context. But quite often, people organizing against globalization may draw the line when it comes to sex work, and are hesitant to advocate for sex work as work. They're hesitant sometimes to define it as work and to promote unionization and workers' rights.

I'm coming from an anti-globalization community that really doesn't address sex work on the global scale. To me, and probably to you, it's really obvious that US imperialism and globalization, the way that the global economy is changing, really affects women; it affects sex workers and populations of people who would do sex work. There are a lot of changes going on right now. How can we bring these movements together?



photo by Layne Winkleback

I think there's that simple idea, that capital can move but workers can't. Why is it that a white man from America can go to any country he wants, but if you're a young woman from Thailand, you can't go anywhere and you can't get a visa? Basically these are laws that prohibit women in general from traveling just on the suspicion that they might be prostitutes, because they're at the age of being prostitutes. So laws that affect women and migration, laws that prevent women from getting visas, are laws that are directly related to prostitution. That affects all women's migration in general.

It's interesting that you bring up the ways that non-prostitute and non-sex worker women can also be hurt by laws that criminalize sex workers. Do you have more examples of that?

That's the one I'm most familiar with. There's also a movement that is anti-globalization which sees all migration for prostitution as trafficking and slavery and doesn't believe there are any issues in terms of labor rights. They see prostitution across borders always as slavery, and so they're asking countries to further criminalize. This is problematic especially because it means that police are conducting surveillance activities around prostitution businesses, ostensibly for the reason that they want to find immigrants. But the reality is that the industry is criminalized anyway, so that the women they're dealing with are now criminals and particularly vulnerable. The way that the approaches to globalization have affected prostitution have been very, very hard on the prostitutes.

There was recently legislation, a bill by Senator Paul Wellstone that prescribed penalties and redress for victims of trafficking and forced prostitution. But somehow, in that bill, they managed to stigmatize prostitution in general, and encouraged certain expenditures by the police and the department of justice that would, again, place the police in the position of overseeing businesses where immigrant prostitutes often work. That kind of surveillance has been bad for the communities and the anti-prostitution feminist perspectives have been encouraging these sorts "interventions:" when the police are given huge budgets to go into the massage parlors and make sure that there's no prostitution. It's quite a conflict and very problematic for immigrant women.

Of course, the US exports the legislation; we export the priorities; we tell other countries that unless you go along with our emphasis against trafficking and prostitution, we're not going to give you any money. We pressure countries around the world to adopt our stand on prostitution and we export the increased criminalization. There's been a huge movement amongst women for years trying to influence the agenda at the UN to define all prostitution as a violation of women's rights, and basically encouraging all countries to criminalize aspects of the business like clients and services as opposed to the prostitutes themselves. So criminalization is escalating and this is attached to a movement that is concerned about the effects of globalization.

I think that people in the anti-capitalist movement right now have a limited view of what the effects of globalization are. It's seen as sweatshops moving to other countries, US corporations going to other countries and lowering the economy there so much that women are economically forced to do work like sex work. It's either sex or sweatshops, which there is some truth to!

I would go along with that analysis. The problem is that people think that the new economy is leading to more forced prostitution and that most of the prostitution you see is forced, not just by economic coercion, but by kidnapping and other kinds of force. This is the portrait of the prostitution phenomenon in regard to globalization, as opposed to recognizing that globalization has created many migrant sex workers who are especially deprived of their rights. For example, in many countries you can't enter as a refugee or an immigrant if you've

worked for the past several years as a prostitute, even if you worked legally. If you're a young woman, you can't migrate because you're suspected of being a prostitute and if you are a prostitute, you basically have to say that you were forced in order to get by the police. So that also makes the issue confusing in terms of how much force there is, and what's really going on in the industry. People are forced to say they're forced in order to be redeemed or excused in any way!

And then you have statistics that don't add up.

The statistics don't reflect the realities. Huge numbers of women certainly are in most abusive conditions. But it ranges from trafficking arrangements that are exploitative to actual slavery — there's a big range. And I don't know any other way to migrate to a country; you have to depend on traffickers, you can't get a working visa, so there's no other way. So the progressive arm of the movement has come up with a new definition of trafficking: they're saying trafficking means forced labor.

The original criminalization of prostitution was born out of the white slavery scare. That contributed vastly to the anti-prostitution fervor! In retrospect, I think it's been shown that some of the statistics around white slavery were not at all correct and that everyone would have had to be a slave for them to be true. And now we see somewhat of a rebirth of that. It's focused only on the forced aspect — stereotyping all prostitution as slavery, only talking about trafficking, and not talking about sex work migration. So we talk about all of it: forced prostitution, services for victims, and also the rights of migrant sex workers. ☆

Mary Christmas is an editor at Spread Magazine, the only magazine in the U.S. by, for, and about sex industry workers. Her short video Cheer Up!, a documentary about radical cheerleaders co-produced with Jen Nedbalsky, is currently touring film festivals internationally. Check www.nycradicalcheerleaders.org for a screening near you, or contact her at mary@spreadmagazine.org.







chuck d

interview **Mark Dowding**
photos **John Nikolai**
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It's easy to argue that Public Enemy changed the face of hip-hop forever. Taking their cue from the conscious street rhymes of groups like The Last Poets, PE and The Bomb Squad crafted albums that were simply the best in hip-hop and among the best in any genre. Flavor Flav's comic antics offset Chuck's politics, creating records that made people dance as well as think. Terminator X's sampling and turntablist skills made everything sound like an air raid siren; immediate, hectic, menacing. They appealed to hip-hop heads and skate punks alike. They sampled Slayer, effectively created rap-rock with Anthrax (Run DMC's and The Beastie Boys' contributions notwithstanding) and made millions of parents nervous about their children's growing awareness of racial politics in America at the end of the millennium. In short, Public Enemy is not only a rap band, they are a rock and roll band in every way that matters. In recent years, the band has expanded to online radio stations, labels, and web sites (www.btn.com, www.slamjamz.com, www.rapstation.com, and www.publicenemy.com), in addition to various side projects. Clamor recently caught up with Chuck D to discuss Public Enemy's new record, *Revolverlution*, as well as other events in the PE world.

Public Enemy is renowned for albums which have a concept. Is "Revolverlution" mostly a format and packaging concept or is there a musical/lyrical concept too?

Since 2000, I no longer believe in the purpose of albums, at least those consisting of 12 or more new tracks. This belief is based on the amount of available product in the marketplace, the music industry basically promoting one song off an album at a very high promotional and marketing cost, and the fact that more and more people have the ability to assemble and compile their own albums off the Net. Since PE has a worldwide fan base, I've complied to this offline option by instituting "a trilogy within a trilogy" – three blends of music at once. New tracks, live takes, and remixes of classic cuts by producers across the earth via the Web will institute a new way that rap artists with 10 years' experience can still be a part of the current field without this unnecessary pop pressure, so the format of the record might be more revolutionary than the music itself.

What can we expect from Revolverlution with regard to the production?

Perhaps the different feel on this record reflects the diversity that's overlooked when it comes to this genre. So many genres like techno, trip, drum and bass, spoken word have been triggered by hip-hop, thus it's reflected in the works of the producers at hand. The selection is always experimental. Whereas today's producers try to aim for what they think is a hit sound, I try to encourage them to do as they feel. This is different from the overdone go-for-hot approach. All the studios involved brought something to the sonic table.

DJ Johnny Juice is working on a track for the album. For those who don't know, break down the role Juice has played in past PE projects.

Juice is such a scholar of the music from all aspects. From the very beginning, he was a part of the original PE Bomb Squad sound as a turntablist. On "Rightstarter" on "Yo! Bum Rush the Show," his cuts,

using a recorded bass kick, are the whole backing track of the song. He provided much of the rhythm scratching on "Yo" and "Millions," all this as a teenager. After that he went west to the Navy, but over the years he's gained a production philosophy that helps him today. I think his approach can help many of these artists today, whereas I don't understand how these companies choose the same producers time and time again with less than ground breaking results.

You have 4 remixes by competition winners on the new album. What was it about them that led to the final selections?

Each submission was judged by a then-virtual staff of about 15 heads who would take the 462 submitted mixes and evaluate them. They were judged by however that producer could make the new mix different from the original but close to some semblance to the hip-hop genre. It was very difficult because there were so many incredible, diverse examples, but the virtual staff – which, by the way, is the first of its kind – has made us confident.

I read a review recently of the new Cypress Hill album "Stoned Raiders" and it was more concerned with their age, saying they were too old to still be doing albums.

I think there's unfair bias when it comes to rap artists on the longevity tip. It could be racial as black folk are taught to dis-acknowledge history, future, and give it a right-here-right-now mentality, but as an artist you have little choice but to try different approaches. Whoever said that about Cypress just doesn't get it, by limiting them to having to satisfy an infantile limited circumstance by pop standards. This narrowed view will never grow artistry to the respect level of Bob Dylan, Beatles, Stones, Miles, Cash, Franklin, etc. With PE, the problem is one where PE just adds to catalogue and presents something new, memorable and memorably new as in the remixes. As with the Stones, show-wise the songs from the past are the into to some new ones. To compete with today's current crop is definitely not the idea ... we have two different goals.

For a group that has continuously stressed the importance of the DJ, don't you find it ironic that you have an MP3 label – a format which might eventually make it final for the vinyl?

I've always said technology giveth and taketh away. These CD turntables such as the Pioneer DJ1000 are basically the same technique and this will be the same with MP3s. The DJ can still orchestrate all this. I'm not a loyalist to equipment and props; the 4 elements can still be upheld yet upgraded and music, objective, visuals, and entertainment quality can still be maintained.

It seems that hip-hop is fanatical about artists remaining constant to a message or to statements made on wax (take the last question as example 1) The term contradictory is often leveled at artists who grow within their music and change their viewpoint (KRS being the prime example). Why do you think it is that rap fans/media can't accept that change?

As long the media outlets continue to make it commercially impulsive and infantile, its older fans will drop off at a certain age and make younger ones ignorant to its roots. Any company would love to continue selling the same product but having a new audience accepting it as the new thing under the sun. Thus, change is not accepted and growth is not focused upon.

When you set up www.publicenemy.com did you even imagine the amount of talent that would gravitate to the enemy board? How does it feel to see how it has developed?

I knew that if we can build a giant communication connection, I figured that the next discovery would be the talent across the planet who are

now able to record, mix, and distribute out of their own homes without mass loot or the middleman involved on them shining.

You have said several times you always wanted to be the man behind the scenes, do you think that is finally happening for you? Or can it never really happen because of who you are?

It's a little difficult because structures are built today with a gang of corporate money, something that has been kept away from me for various reasons. However, at heart, I am a behind the scenes head and there's not two of me and often I have to be a front person to attract business. Sometimes I wish for three of me or at least 500 days in a year. For example it took a whole day to do this interview but for you it's a pleasure and I'm thankful.

Do you think that there is still the potential in hip-hop for change: i.e., the sound, content, etc., in the way PE, Wu-Tang, Rakim, Run DMC, and even Hammer changed it? Or has it run its course?

Change is always inevitable ... the biggest change in music in the past three years however is not what but how they get it. It was totally unexpected. Inside the music it's harder to maximize musical change because of the vast amounts of hip-hop artists, whereas 10 years and further ago, there were only a handful of groups out, period, so change was reorganized early in the rap game.

In your book, you made comments that the aim for rap should be to get as big as U2 and rock with regards to the level of organization and structure. Do you think that it is there yet or is there still a long way to go?

Yes we have miles to go, for every record company staffing there should be a management component that preserves yet builds upon the art.

Do you think the way hip-hop is represented by the media is a very limited view? They seem determined to define what it is and what we should and shouldn't like and listen to.

Yes, acceptance can be stifling. In the past, the media considered all rap as bad. Now it selects a certain stereotype and therefore puts a stamp on it. This definition blurs the overall perception.

You have worked with the best MCs and producers in the game and you have worked with people yet to make a name for themselves in rap. Do you see it as an even playing field as far as the excitement and challenge of working with each goes?

If this was sports, I would be a coach – even cats I coached like Johnny Juice would be coaches now – but this is not exactly sports, so therefore these qualities are not noticed, but there's no better joy than in mentoring and giving someone advice on the rap game and hip-hop. Excitement in seeing cats get into the game at ground level is rewarding where before I couldn't offer that platform. Understanding of this business is far and few, so in our online ventures, these services reward us when people use them for themselves.

Since the beginning you have been involved in bringing new artists talent to the rap game. Is that something you see as essential to the survival of hip-hop, or is it more of a personal satisfaction to see if someone else can achieve the things PE did?

It's impossible to bring back the era, although cats can bring back a certain sound, but that's not enough so achieving the things PE did is a bit much. New artists and talents always stretch the art and that's what I'm encouraging. Slam is doing an alliance with the newly retooled Napster. Bringthenoise.com radio, hopefully, will be alongside and within

the XM satellite system, and Rapstation.com will be powered further with an alliance thru Artistdirect.com. Each of these partnerships should bring a vast audience to the circle of online music services we have. After all, our philosophy will be based on getting people music instead of looking for consumers first and pressuring them to buy. We would like to believe that if we have an elaborate program that can land a song on one million computer desktops, that will be the introduction to an artistry that they might be loyal to and invest in. This is the opposite of companies today who develop the song instead of artist development. No wonder today people would rather download a song ...

There are a number of rap's founding fathers beginning to make moves again in the industry (most recently Grandmaster Flash). What do you think has sparked this interest in the roots of the culture? Do you see a point in time where these legends will finally see a financial reward that matches the ground breaking work that they have done for hip-hop?

We would hope so but strangely, those who have profited are the same names closest to the top of the corporate circles. Those names, Simmons, Cohen, Combs, La Reid, Harrell, Rhone, and Flex have been granted positions from the Clives, Motollas, Iovines, Mayses, as well as the radio corps, that have dictated how and what music heads the streets. There's so much finance at the top that how much of it is trickling down after the lawyers and execs get theirs can be considered minuscule. My answer to this one-sidedness is my contribution in becoming a "Bin Laden" to that structure, in hoping to undermine the corporate dominance and circle in record industry, radio, retail, TV, and video outlets. It's my belief that this corporate lock has suffocated the growth of grassroots business through hip-hop in the hood from where it's taken yet projected back into. The fact that LA and NY have these mega-businesses suffocating all outside attempts that don't go thru that circle can be considered blasphemous; thus, my attitude in Web-blasting this playing field flat.

Looking back on the last few years, it seems to me that you have been building foundations and trying out ideas through your various sites with the final goal being www.slamjamz.com, for example, the MP3 section of Rapstation. How much was part of a plan?

The ability for anyone in the world to upload to Rapstation, and have it submitted or checked out by a 50-person virtual A&R staff and possibly released online, midline (mail order by demand), and offline is a model prototype that the majors should look at. This is unprecedented. When Remixplanet launches, almost any a cappella will not be safe. Remixers will converge and a pipeline will be headed back into these companies, possibly embarrassing a remix they might have spent \$100,000 on to some name who lazily couldn't compare to some hungry Hungarian cat who is yet to be discovered.

How is the book publishing project going? Are we looking at another online project (e-books) or offline?

Offda Books is a small on-demand book imprint that will center around hip-hop and I do believe there is a revolution in reading about the music that is the heartbeat of the young world. Next is getting it to the "heartbeat" of the young world as well.

The whole idea of producing albums in the traditional sense doesn't appeal to you anymore, yet you managed to get in a studio and do 10 tracks for the Fine Arts Militia album. Was that a case of FAM being logistically easier to work on or a refreshing change that got the creative juices flowing?

It was a combination of things that helped create that project. Number one, Brian Hardgroove made it easy to do, giving me a skeleton to work with. Number two, the studio is next door and three, since I do 40 lectures a year, it was a concept where I would take my subjects and titles of my

lectures and break them down into songs. After I wrote lyrics for three weeks, it was amazing to myself that I recorded them all in a one-night session, almost how they did it in the 1950s and '60s.

The Slamjamz name has been around for a while. I remember reading that you wanted to develop artists in a similar way Motown did. That was when it was a traditional label, now it is online. It seems to be the case that part of the freedom the artists have is the right to develop their careers how they feel is right and to the level they are happy in achieving. Is that intentional or just an unavoidable factor of being online and having a roster of international artists?

I think that those original ideas fit the future of the record industry, which in this case moves like the record biz of 30-50 years ago where recording and releases were not far apart from each other.

As well as being business moves, are the things you have done on the Web answers to some of the problems you have highlighted within your lyrics: i.e., you have a problem with radio stations so you set up BTN, similarly with record labels and Slamjamz?

Yes, of course. I also try to set a prototype in the process.

In-house production teams on labels like those of No Limit and Bad Boy have become the norm in rap. You have gone more for creating studios than a set team of producers. Does that allow for a greater flexibility of who you work with and allow you to record when ideas are still fresh?

Yes, it does plus allows for apprentices in the waiting and fresh ideas are best to record immediately and released as soon as possible. Treat the music as you would bread, keep it fresh. When it can't be released quickly then you have to add plenty of artificial preservatives - marketing gimmicks, promotion - which can be bad for the overall health of the project at hand.

Has it ever got to the point where you felt like you were banging your head against a wall?

Quite often as it goes with pioneering things, but nothing compared to Edison, Alexander Bell, George Carver, and other real inventors.

Have you ever thought "Bugger this, I have a family to feed, I am just gonna get jiggy with it for a while and make some money"? Or is the thought of wearing those shiny suits what prevented you?

Quiet as it's kept, my background is rocking the hell out of parties. It's the music we've built upon, so in a way I do like the rhythms currently in the clubs; however, the adult themes have no place in broadcasting to an under-18 audience for the sole purpose of company bottom line padding consumption. As an adult for over 24 years, I can handle anything but I wouldn't suggest that thing for kids. In the future, the idea is doing a vast amount of recordings looking at myself as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Sly Stone, Isaac Hayes looked at music. I'm gonna make a Mistachuck club extended 12" 5 cut album called Chuck D rhymes 5 hip-hop dance joints about nothing! Also on MP3 on Slam, probably in 2003. Also I wouldn't be opposed to wearing mohair suits in the case of performing with the Fine Arts Militia. ☆

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above Stic (left) with his son Etwila and M.I.



dead prez

interview **Rosa Clemente**
photos **Emilia Wiles**
originally printed in
Clamor #19 Mar/Apr 2003

Dead Prez blazed into hip hop in 1998 with the politically-charged single, "It's Bigger Than Hip Hop." Their *Let's Get Free* album spoke about Black self-determination in a way no one else was doing at the time, in hip hop or out. They were signed to Loud Records, but got screwed when Loud closed its doors and DP's contract was commandeered by Columbia Records, a subsidiary of Sony. Their planned studio album, *Walk Like A Warrior*, was shelved. After many delays, the studio album will hit the streets on May 20, 2003.

In November, 2002, despite the restrictive terms of their contract, an independent album, *Turn Off The Radio*, was put out on Holla Black Records under the name DPZ.

If you get the chance to see DP perform, do it, because they bring an amazing show. DP is made up of Stic and Mutulu "MI" Olugabala, and is part of People's Army, a larger musical and political collective. Rosa Clemente sat down with Stic at his home in Brooklyn to break down the message in the music.

You guys have shirts that say "Pimp The System." What do you mean by that?

There's a lot of movements that are building for community or self-determination, community control over all aspects of our lives, from the land all the way to the education, etcetera. But we're not there yet, because that's a campaign that's building. You've got to win masses of people to really make it work. So in the meantime... people are forced to work 40 hours a week, people are forced to do all kinds of shit, people selling pussy, people pimping pussy, people doing all kind of shit to survive. So the mentality that I see as progressive, that we try to put forth is, when you're in these situations, understand these relationships and that it's a pimp situation, and seek out ways to sabotage that pimping relationship. Seek out ways where you can abuse — if they put you on the register, you can get some extra change for your family. If they put you on guard duty, you can let us come get some TVs. You got to pimp the system. And that's the mentality, not just in theory, but really that's what we found ourselves doing to survive because the jobs and shit like that that they give us aren't really for us

to survive, it's for them to survive. So in order for us to survive, until we get full independence, and self-determination, we got to pimp their shit, and milk it and use it. If you go to school, you can't go to school so you can work to brainwash your people. You got to go to school so you can learn certain information, certain skills and use it to empower your community.

Do you think the government of the United States is failing?

I think it depends on what you think their job is. I think the government is on point with what they set out to do — set up a capitalist organization. I think the government, this system, fails black people, it fails oppressed people, the brown people, the red people. But I think this government works in the interest of the majority of white people. I think that's a failure to human rights; that's a failure to social development. In the end, that's going to cause and has caused war and conflict and all of the daily shit we up against as far as poverty, drug abuse, trumped up incarceration, political imprisonment. All this shit is caused by what this system is designed to do. And it's working.

You put out an album recently, Turn Off That Radio, on your own label. Is that album and releasing it that way part of a resistance to that system?

I hope that it can be helpful. At the bottom of all our struggles is the need for economics, so we got to do this music. I don't think everybody has to use their musical talent, or whatever talent to say the same thing. I think there are people who've shown that they can be empowered financially or economically without talking about black self determination. They can demonstrate it, but their rap might be about shaking your ass — you know. Shit, that's not the worst thing on the planet to do. For us, Turn Off The Radio is a sentiment and it's really saying, they're trying to program us with what to think, what's cool, based off this system. And when we're saying turn off the radio, it's cause it's reflected in the music, in the entertainment, and that's a big weapon the oppressor uses on us. Whether you do that literally or not is not really the mission. But the mission is that you would recognize why somebody would say that, and where that sentiment is coming from.

Dead Prez and your crew, People's Army, seems to be able to bridge the brothers and sisters in the hood struggling for basic food and shelter and the black middle class and college students. What makes you able to bring those communities together that sometimes because of class issues are divided

Most of these things are responses to repression. Some people's response to oppression is you got to go to school, you got to get a diploma, you got to get a degree, that's going to put you in a better position so you're not at the bottom of this shit. That's some people's response, like the bourgeoisie. Some people's response is the white man is the fucking devil 'cause look how he been doing everybody on the whole planet; we need our own language, we need our own culture. I ain't wearing no Calvin Klein, I'm wearing a dashiki, whoop-de-woo, I'm celebrating Kwanzaa, fuck Christmas. That's their response. Some people in the hood it's like, I ain't got no options, the motherfuckin' police dropped this dope over here, I'm gonna sell this dope. I'm a bc a thug. And these women got all the jobs and nigger ain't got no job, so I'm gonna be a pimp. That's somebody's response to oppression. So, with DPZ, I understand that it's all related to like Malcolm says, to the response; these are different attempts to survive. So instead of separating ourselves, it seem like we can pull each other together by understanding that that's all we trying to do. I have a belief in political education in

the sense that if we can get a firm understanding of how we got in this social situation, it will unify people to change it.

But I'm drawn to the hood for a lot of reasons: how I was brought up, the environment I was brought up in. I didn't never go to college. I was kicked out of high school. So I relate to what's going on in the street, just from my uncles, brothers, whoop-de-woo — shit I was doing. I have more experiences than I have in a college setting, but I also have cultural experiences. I been exposed to Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, being healthy, training in the martial arts, you know. With Dead Prez, we want to be something that black people can find as a link, instead of another attack on black people. We want black people to feel like, I'm being represented. When I listen and whatever these guys try and promote and put out here, they're trying to include everyone's concerns as best as they can, as two motherfuckers. And I want people to know that it's bigger than me and M because, because of our experiences, we're limited. And M, M1 — that nigger is from the hood and the nigger went to college, so he has a balance. That's what enables him to relate and to recognize the significance of that sector of the population and be able to communicate.

Dead Prez's music, especially your rhymes, is very up front: it talks about conflicts with your wife, it talks about your drinking, what you were doing as a kid. What gives you the ability to be so honest and personal?

There was a time in hip hop where I used to write brag rhymes, you know: I'm the best MC don't test me, whoop-de-woo, all that. And then people started saying, keep it real. That became a popular phrase. And I started saying yeah, I like that, I like that real shit. I started thinking about people, I don't know if they were keeping it real, but things that was real life stories and occurrences — that shit made me say, yeah, if I'm gonna do this shit, that answers, that fulfills what I'm trying to do. I gotta write about the stress I'm going through. I'm inspired by people like 2Pac, his honesty with his mom on crack, whoop-de-woo. He putting that out there, that shit is therapy for him, and it let other people know that it's not a skeleton in your closet, this is life. The ruling class wanna make a fantasy, but we're dealing with conflicts and shit all day and if I'm trying to hide it, then I'm not trying to fix it. If I put it out there, I can probably get some answers and move forward. So it's a strength. I'm not saying in no funny way, but it's a strength to say what's really poppin'. Put it out there so people don't have no illusion. People think because you talk about be healthy you some guru on health — nah. It's because I've been unhealthy a lot and I can appreciate being healthy. I don't want to just start talking about health, I want to start talking about how unhealthy I done lived, so it can relate. That's the whole thing. I'm trying to talk to real people about some real shit so I got to be honest enough with myself so you know that's what I'm really doing. ☆

Rosa Clemente is a Black Puerto Rican grassroots organizer, journalist, and entrepreneur. She is currently a radio host and producer with WBAI (99.5 FM NYC) and with Air America Radio, an organizer with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, coordinator of the State of the Black world forums and a freelance hip hop journalist. She is on the boards of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, The Brecht Forum, and The Institute of the Black World





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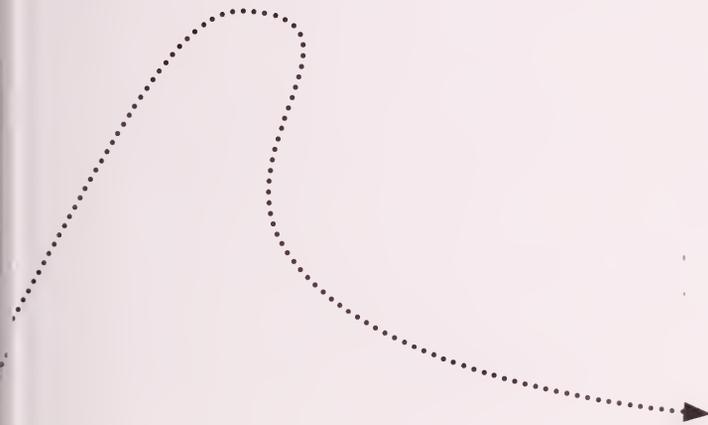
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studs terkel

interview and photos Catherine Komp

originally printed in

Clamor #25, Mar/Apr 2004

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

Why a book about hope?

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

There is such despair now, considering the Administration. With Bush, the nature of him, Cheney, Rumsfeld, of preemptive strikes, of utter disdain for the intelligence of people. So I feel there’s been an assault far more serious than September 11. September 11 was a wake-up call. We are part of the world. Do you realize that during World War II we were the only major participant who was neither bombed nor invaded? Every member of the allies, every member of the axis powers, one way or another. So war to us happens elsewhere, when we talk of war it’s always been elsewhere. And one of the people in this book *Hope Dies Last*, appeared in a previous book. Admiral Gene LaRoque, he’s one of the heroes of World War

II, young commander of a ship. He also founded the Center for Defense Information that monitors the Pentagon. He says the United States, since the Cold War began, since the end of World War II, has engaged in more military adventures overseas than any empire in the history of the human species. He starts naming them, Guatemala, Panama, Granada! We never even heard of Granada until President Ronnie Reagan says it was a danger to us. We thought Granada was a place in Spain or a little variation of a folk song heard in supermarkets on the muzak. But no, it’s our enemy. Finally it’s come to the time, such disdain and contempt for the intelligence of the American people. So, hope dies last, a lot of people lost hope.

And so, now I’m addressing the young people and why I want to be in the *Clamor* magazine, that I know has young readers. In 1932, now I’m 91 going to be 92, I was unable to vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or it might have been the socialists or the communists for that matter (I would have voted for Roosevelt). But I was 20 years old. I was underage, because 21 was the minimum age. And then when the voting age became 18, I said there’s hope, my god it’s fantastic! And then I learned to discover that only 16 percent of young people voted in the last election. Sixteen, that’s one-six, percent voted which of course was Bush’s in. So, I want to say this as a preface, I want to say to young people who say “I’m not going to vote, it doesn’t matter,”

you are voting! When you stay home and don't vote, you are voting for Bush. Bush hopes for you to say, I will not vote. That's a vote for him. And that's why he won, because you didn't vote. So, this is your time. And you've got to vote. The reason they didn't vote is because of hopelessness, call it cynicism. And these are the two enemies we face.

What about apathy?

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

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

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

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

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

What does this prophetic minority look like?

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

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

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

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

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

To read the full interview, visit www.clamormagazine.org, click on "issues," and look for the feature in issue 25.

Catherine Komp is Clamor's Media section editor, and a radio news producer and reporter based in Syracuse, NY.

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Philip Pearlstein, Two Female Figures, 1981, oil on canvas, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, with funds from the Libbey Foundation, Toledo, Ohio, 1982. Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, Toledo, Ohio, 1932.

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interview **Todd Steven Burroughs**

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It's been easy to ignore Laura Flanders. Yes, she's been on CNN, Fox News Channel and "To The Contrary," a national PBS chat show from the wide-ranging perspectives of different women, but only occasionally. "I'm interviewed once in a blue moon to twice in a blue moon," Flanders said of the cacophony of initials. She's a dying breed — a longtime progressive radio host (Air America, "Democracy Now," "CounterSpin") who has actually earned the right to be on radio and television by doing reporting. She's an interesting media personality — a pundit who smiles like a human being and not a snarling tiger. She's an anomaly: a strong person and personality unafraid of being nice, and a public debater who actually thinks before she speaks. Flanders is proud to be strongly to the Left of the camera in the Land of The Talking Heads.

Her colleagues join her in pride. "Her credential for being on the radio is not having a lot of opinions," said Janine Jackson, program director of Fairness And Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), a progressive media watchdog group based in New York City. Flanders was the founder of FAIR's Women's Desk, and co-hosted "CounterSpin," FAIR's nationally syndicated weekly radio show, for several years, at least three of which with current co-host Jackson. Flanders is first a journalist who earned her pundit stripes through reporting, Jackson reminded. But Flanders embraces analytical opinion. "She's not going to muzzle herself and muzzle her brain," said Nicole Sawaya, Flanders's boss at KALW-FM, a public radio station in San Francisco. KALW's "Your Call" has been hosted by Flanders since 2001. (It's now hosted on alternate days by Flanders and Farai Chideya, a Black woman who made waves a decade ago as a 20-something *Newsweek* correspondent, first-time author, and CNN pundit.) But Flanders, 42, has been on-air since the mid-1980s, working her way up the Pacifica Radio/alternative radio circuit.

Flanders is not a kook like Ann Coulter, but she takes punditry very seriously. "To me, it's not a game, it's not a show." She explains that it's really about continuing a tradition of dissent — George Seldes,

I.F. Stone, Ida B. Wells, et. al. But does she ever pal around with her fellow talking heads? "We get friendly with each other a little bit [but] I can't imagine going out to dinner with any of them, it wouldn't be a relaxing dinner anyway. It's not like we're all buddies, anyway."

And if they were, it's not like she has a lot of time to do that sort of thing. From her plugged-in New York City loft, she prepares for "The Laura Flanders Show" — her weekend program on Air America, the embryonic liberal news-talk answer to the Right's collective hate-radio roar — and does KALW's "Your Call" two days during the week. And then there's writing for publications like *The Nation* and *CounterPunch* and websites like workingforchange.com. And then there's all those meetings. And then there's...well, a life. "Compare me to [Pacifica Radio's] Amy Goodman and I'm a loafer," she said, laughing.

"I see Laura as one of the all-too-rare intellectuals ... and truly progressive voices," says Jackson. She can field many perspectives, "but at the same time she's not a boring egghead. I'm thankful that she has the platform that she does. I just wish it was bigger."

Flanders does, too. But in the meantime, she's learning. From call-in talk radio ("Most of the experts are in the audience and if you

speak to them not in the lowest common denominator, but the highest common denominator, they will respond”) and from television’s power to represent opinions of people not heard and seen otherwise.

As a rare progressive voice in the media wilderness, the London native is in for the fight of her life, and she’s in good company. The Left, she argued, is building its own forums to counteract the Heritage Foundation and the army of Right-wing syndicated broadcast and print pundits who, in her view, get their public policy agenda implemented before the rest of the country even figures out what’s happening. These new forums, she said, include: The Progressive Media Project; the Institute For Public Advocacy, and Pacifica Radio’s “Democracy Now,” which, in its eight-year history has become the closest thing progressives have to a “60 Minutes.”

And books. *Bushwomen: Tales Of A Cynical Species* is Flanders’s second (and heavily footnoted) book, with a third, the anthology *The W Effect: Sexual Politics In The Bush Years And Beyond*, just arriving in bookstores this past June. *The W Effect*’s contributors include feminist writing stars as Jill Nelson, Vandana Shiva and Barbara Ehrenreich.

But how much does Flanders’ work really matter in a nation whose Establishment considers Bill Clinton a progressive and George W. Bush a moderate? “I’m grateful she’s out there,” said Jackson of Flanders. “But I worry that she’s lonely.”

It’s been easy to ignore Laura Flanders, but *Bushwomen* is making a mark. It is a deft blend of well-documented reporting, instant history and media criticism, with just the right dashes of humor. It tells the story of how the Bush administration redefined feminism and civil rights to fit its own reactionary purposes. The work profiles the Right’s top female leaders and how they got to power. Very familiar names — Laura Bush, Christine Todd Whitman, Condoleeza Rice,

Elaine Chao, Lynne Cheney and Karen Hughes, among others — get a critical evaluation, and are found wanting, to say the least.

In the Bizzaro feminism world Flanders has thoroughly documented, women in the Bush administration are “invaluable to the President, [but] under-scrutinized in the press.” This allows them to wreak public policy havoc on environmental regulations, pervert memories of the Civil Rights Movement, help steal Presidential elections, and just plain lie. Flanders defines the Bushwomen — the females who serve either as cabinet members or sub-cabinet members — as “an extremist administration’s female front. Cast in the public mind as maverick, or moderate, or irrelevant, laughable or benign, their well-spun image taps into convenient stereotypes, while the reality remains out of sight. If women were taken more seriously, the Bushwomen con job wouldn’t stand a chance, but in the contemporary United States, it just might.”

Included in *Bushwomen* are stories of Katherine Harris, Christine Todd Whitman and Gale Ann Norton. Harris was the Florida Secretary of State who was so openly partisan that Republican Party staffers used her offices and its computers during the 2000 Presidential election recount. She’s the one that got thousands of Blacks purged from the voting rolls in Florida. (Remember: Bush “won” that state in 2000 by just 537 votes.) Todd Whitman was the Environmental Protection Agency head who had declared Ground Zero fit for breathing (and profit) less than one week after 9-11. Secretary of the Interior Norton never met a corporation she didn’t like — and, seemingly, didn’t help secure mineral-rich land without worrying about pesky things like clean air.

Flanders’s own profession does not escape her author’s stern gaze. The nation’s elite news media, particularly *The Washington Post*, have a lot to apologize for in their handling of these women, argues Flanders. *The Post*, she reminded, devoted a whole article on Katherine Harris’ makeup (albeit done by the newspaper’s fashion reporter). And, she adds, the fight on the Bush-era Civil Rights Commission between conservative Abigail Thernstrom and liberal Mary Frances Berry was described by *The Post* as a “catfight” instead of a serious dispute over alleged rug-sweeping over the Florida debacle. *The New York Times*, in a profile of Rice, talked about her hair and clothes (“She is always impeccably dressed, usually in a classic suit with a modest hemline, comfortable pumps and conservative jewelry”). There have been other articles in *The Post* and other elite media on these personalities and issues. But the fact remains that these articles, or their particular emphases, wouldn’t exist if their subjects had penises.

Bushwomen is powerful enough on race to straighten Huey Freeman’s hair. It catalogues virtually every move Bush has made using race and gender. It documents how, as women of color, Rice (“[S]he had the advantage of not looking like an oilman”) and Chao would use their personal histories as media shields against criticism, subtly playing on the paternalism of the white men who run America’s nearly all-white newsrooms. (Rice, a member of Birmingham’s light-skinned elite, remembered well the 16th Street Baptist Church explosion in 1963 that killed four little Black girls. Another young Black girl who grew up there would be diametrically opposed to Rice as an adult. Her name is Angela Davis.) Rice’s long road to arch-conservatism is paved with grants and access to political power and corporate boards, making it a typical Bushwoman story. Flanders correctly wrote that Rice has played into America’s self-sustained “fuzzy” memories about race. Freeman — the fictional everyman activist of “The Boondocks,” the syndicated comic strip — is wrong about helping Rice by getting her a blind date; Rice doesn’t need a man as much as she needs a conscience.



photo by Theodore Hennessy

"By their individual accomplishments," wrote Flanders, Bush's top women "are supposed to prove that opportunity exists for all." But it's all myth, reveals the author: virtually all of the Bushwomen are heavily funded by foundations and corporations — and, ironically, are now direct beneficiaries of the feminism they now symbolically represent and actually disdain. And always nearby, *Roe v. Wade* swings on the margins of public debate like Edgar Allan Poe's pendulum.

Until now, it's been easy to ignore Laura Flanders. *Bushwomen* has already penetrated *The New York Times* bestseller list. But still, her watchdog could be barking in vain, since its masters have taken out their hearing aids for anyone Left of the Democratic Leadership Council. She is using fact-checked words during a period in which televised images plaster over what is left (and Left?) of the American consciousness. Anyone grinding his or her teeth watching the Establishment Media's wall-to-wall coverage of the Reagan death and funeral got a painful reminder of that. So starting from scratch seems to be the progressive's stock in trade.

So, then, why do all this work when "flyover country" — loudly represented by those very angry people who call C-SPAN's "Washington Journal" every morning and ditto Rush and his clones on the radio every weekday afternoon — is converted by a certain mythological view of America, not facts? (After all, generating sales worthy of *The Times*' acknowledgement was no shoo-in in 2004, even if you do have a radio show.) Flanders and Co. hope their collective effort will turn a Confederate Gray — er, Red — state a comfortable shade of Blue this November, but that isn't the point. It's to remain sanc.

"She truly wants people to change," says Sawaya of Flanders. "She truly wants people to think." Flanders projects a level of intensity that some might see as intimidating, according to Sawaya, but some would also see it as being alive.

Jackson said that if media critics judged success and failure by institutional change, they would have packed their bags and gone home long ago. "It would be hard to get out of bed in the morning." But there has been a major shift in public opinion over the last 20 years, she maintained: before FAIR, most Americans saw their news media as sacrosanct; now, thanks to people like Flanders, media are seen by public as a large and powerful collective political interest, capable of being pushed by activism. People like Flanders, she explained, promote sanity. They inform the Left, she asserted, while taking that perspective into the Reagan Republican-Soccer Mom mainstream. "I think there is a value in that," Jackson added.

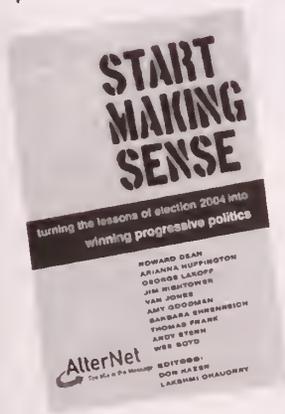
Flanders said that just educating would be enough. "What we're trying to do is to keep alive almost a language of dissent," she says. "I don't think I'm advocating a solution." The days of worldwide Liberate have faded like old tie-dye, becoming as nostalgic as the Afro Pick. "I think we're involved in a very, very, long term project. I don't know if we'll see it. I'm not as sure." But she's happy about her goal: generating progressive, feminist media criticism that goes beyond the conventional wisdom. ☆

Todd Steven Burroughs, Ph.D. (tburroughs@jmail.umd.edu) is an independent researcher/writer based in Hyattsville, Md. He is a primary author of Civil Rights Chronicle (Legacy), a history of the Civil Rights Movement, and a contributor to Putting The Movement Back Into Civil Rights Teaching (Teaching For Change/Poverty & Race Research Action Council), a K-12 teaching guide of the Civil Rights Movement. He is writing a biography of Death Row writer Mumia Abu-Jamal.

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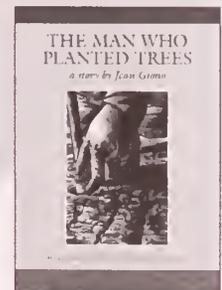
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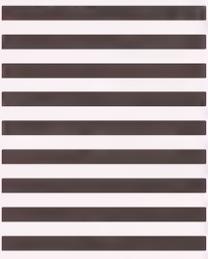
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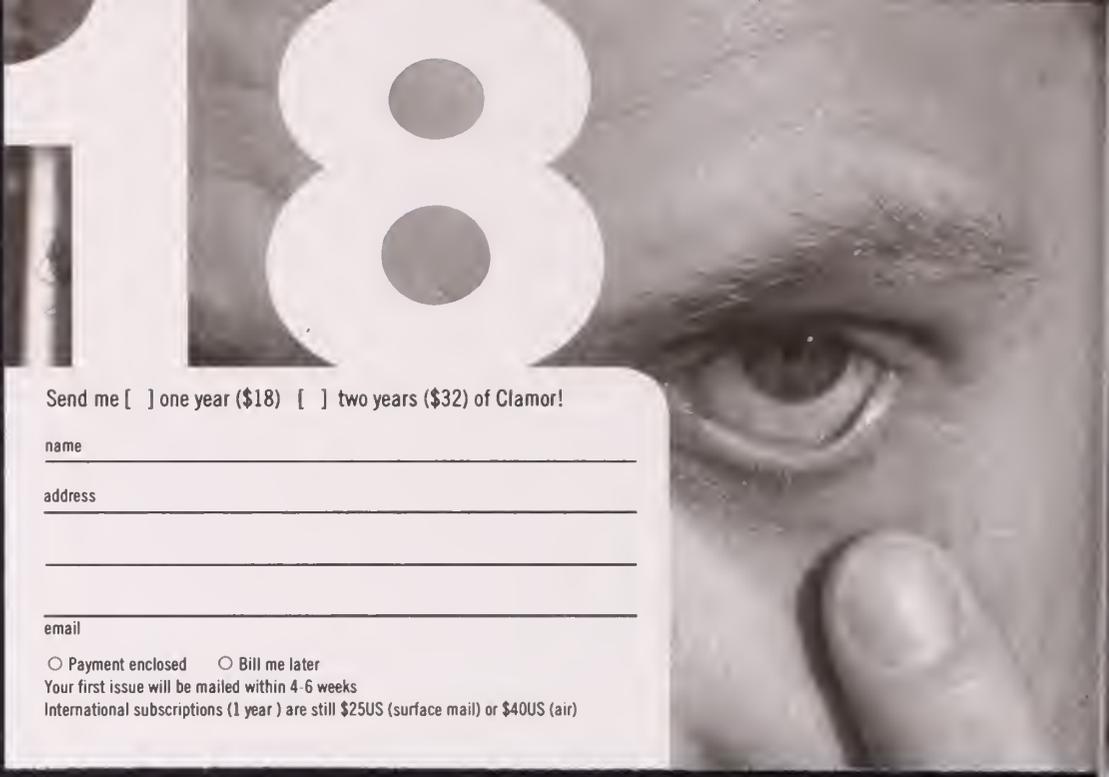


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john k. samson

interview **George B. Sanchez**
photos **Jon Shledewitz**
originally printed in
Clamor #28, November 2004

It's hard to separate John K. Samson from where he's from; as the singer for the Weakerthans, that guy from Propagandhi, a Canadian outsider in the world of punk & pop. Maybe that's why his music is so endearing — it has place, it has history, and comes from somewhere outside the recording studio, far from the vapid center that most popular music tends to stream out of. One night I had the opportunity to meet up with John after a show at San Francisco's Bottom of the Hill club and talk about his relationship to music, place, and politics.

In an interview with a Canadian music magazine, you said that you thought the role of the artist is to point out how complicated the world is.

Sounds about right.

Is there a fine line between sloganeering and being heartfelt?

I think my point was that the world is very complicated and just full of voices. I think the role of the artist is to express or illuminate those voices and add them to the mix. If you listen and try to understand another person, you immediately invest that person with dignity and that's a very political thing. You can't oppress someone whose dignity you respect, so I think it's a liberal and radicalizing idea, to try and understand another person. That's what great music does and what great art strives for.

Is that something you strive for through your music and your songwriting?

Yeah, I think so. I think I've tried to take the specific details of the life I see around me and the way I fit into it and the way I think other people fit into it, in my community — and try to express that through music. That's how I think of what I do, in a political sense.

One debate, one statement I've never really understood is "art for arts sake."

Me neither. I don't think art can exist in a vacuum. It has to be received by someone in order to exist. It has to do something in the world. Art for arts sake is never — I don't think it can be true. If someone says that their art is not political, that's a political statement in itself.

I always think about that John Berger quote: the art of any period serves the status quo of that period. The mainstream art we see around us is definitely selling something, selling the status quo, selling things as they are, not things as they should be. You know, so that's why art is important. It's important to get up there and express yourself if you've got something to say.

I have a statement that I think leads into a question. I differentiate between punk and "punk rock" because I think there's a separation between punk as an ideology and punk rock as a musical sound. Punk rock, politically and musically, is often categorized for its urgency. You left a band, Propagandhi, that had a much more urgent sound, I would say, than the music you're making with the Weakerthans. So, I guess my question is: has the change in medium affected your message at all?

That's a good question, I haven't really thought of it that way. But, I think there's still an immediacy to what we do. I mean, frankly, it's the only music I know how to write, first off. The kind of songs we write, they're certainly not rhetorically political, they're not stridently political in any sense of the idea of propaganda.

Is there a place for propaganda within popular music?

Absolutely. I'm just not the person to do it. I can't be that person. It's important, politically, for people to figure out what they love to do. I think once you figure out what you love to do, then you can figure out how to harness that into some kind of action that makes a mark in the world. So, this, for better or for worse, is what I've figured out how to do.

Why is geography so important to you as a song writer?

I guess I've always been attracted to what people think of as regional writers. I think of novelists like Paul Auster, who writes about New York and he creates this New York that doesn't really exist but seems quite alive to me. It's his New York, you know, but it gives you a new way of looking at the world.

I think I'm also interested in margins. I'm from a geographically marginal place. It's a good metaphor for me. I'm interested in people that are marginalized and places that are marginalized have the same character as marginalized people.

That being said, would you ever think about leaving the place that you're from?

Oh yeah, absolutely. I think about it all the time. I think about it every other day.

So what keeps you in Winnipeg?

I don't know. It's the place I understand best. I love it and I hate it. It just seems that I should stay. And I want to stay. I think there will be a time when I'll go away but I'm always going to come back there. It's always the place I'm going to return to. It's home and even if I don't physically return there, I'm always going to be writing about that place. It's just the place I've figured out, I want to try and express what I feel about it and I haven't been able to do that yet. I've still got some work to do on it. You know, I'm never going to be satisfied and that's what keeps me going.

Do you think in general though, within popular music, there's a loss of a sense of place? And how does that fit into a homogenous, market culture?

I think it's really hard to locate yourself anywhere in the world because history seems to be moving so quickly. We're in this trough of history that we can't see out of. Anything that's created is devoured and spat out by the market within twenty minutes of its creation. It doesn't have time to kind of grow and to exist, which is another reason why I'm interested in places that are isolated, like small towns, small cities. But you're right. It's a strange time to be alive. It seems really odd to me.

Is it ever really not a strange time though?

No, it's not. Yeah, you're right, but we have our specific strangeness and pop music is a reflection of that. I think the great kind of flashes of truth emerge from people expressing what may be mundane things, you know, details, the kind of nuts and bolts of life.

Doesn't it drive you nuts that those "isolated" places are also striving to be like the homogenized city centers?

In the city I'm from, the focus is entirely that life is elsewhere, that life is going on somewhere else. Toronto is the cultural center of Canada. I always think of people in Winnipeg staring towards Toronto as people in Toronto stare towards New York; no one is ever really looking at themselves, you know, or looking at each other. It's a weird feature in a sped-up culture, in a culture that has become more and less mediated at the same time.

As a songwriter, I think with this record, you experimented more with narrative. "Plea From a Cat Named Virtue," "Dinner with Foucault," What prompted that?

The narrative?

Yeah — was it a conscious experiment?

Yeah, it was a conscious kind of experiment. I think the last record was fictional too, but these ones are kind of, more blatantly fictional. I really wanted to kind of try that. You know, pop music is a very emotional genre.

Emotionally driven as opposed to technically, like classical?

It's all emotional. Another John Berger quote is that music began as a howl, became a prayer, and then a lament and it still contains elements of all three. That's a quote I always come back to and I think it's really true. It's inescapable and great. Part of the great thing about music is that it has these elements that are just there and they're always going to be there for you, you just walk into them.

With a title like "Ernest Shackleton," you expect something pretentious, but it's sort of this bouncy, sort of a — it's a fun song.

Yeah. People have been accusing me lately of being a bit pretentious. I always say, well, I'd rather err on the side of pretension than pretending to be stupid. I think that's a real problem in the life of the American intellectual. There's a real desire from people —

To plead ignorance.

Yeah, to just pretend that they don't read books. All these college kids in rock bands pretending that they haven't been to college and I'm like, well — I never went to college, I haven't been to a university, I'm interested in this stuff. I'm not a very intellectual person, but I'd like to be. That's what I aspire to be.

The Weakerthans, would you say they are an experiment in the greater potential of pop music?

I wouldn't go that far. I mean, in my fantasy world, sure, but that's not for me to say. There's a real impulsive thing behind creation too that you can't, that I can't, don't know how to intellectualize and wouldn't want to. It's just that impulse to make noise.

Maybe that sort of leads back to, again, academic debates about authenticity within music, which, I mean, ultimately, you just go around in circles again.

That's true. It's like when people go up to a novelist and get mad at them for their stories not being true. It's like, well, that's not what we're trying to do. There's an authenticity to distortion, you know. I think — I keep coming back to the word reconstruction. A reconstruction of reality is not necessarily any less real than reality. It's always — it's useful in a way, to kind of reinvent the world. ★

George B. Sanchez is a staff writer for the Monterey Herald in Salinas, California. A contributing editor to the latest incarnation of El Andar magazine, Sanchez's work has appeared in Narco News, Mother Jones, and Punk Planet. An advisor at the 2004 Narco News School of Authentic Journalism in Bolivia, Sanchez is also the guitarist and vocalist for the Salinas band Rum & Rebellion. He can be reached at gbernardsanchez@aol.com.

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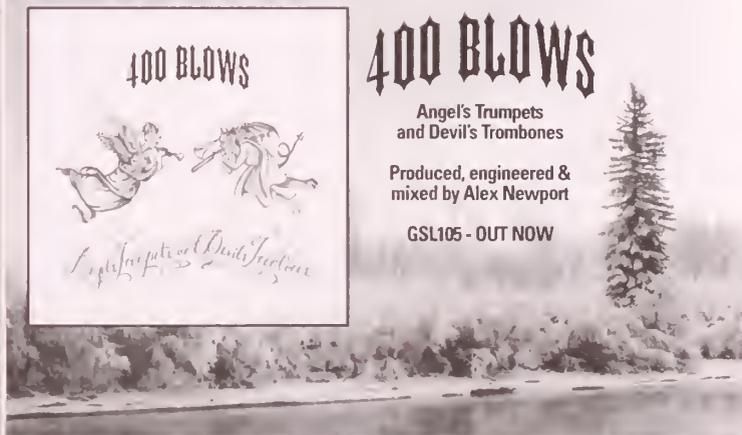
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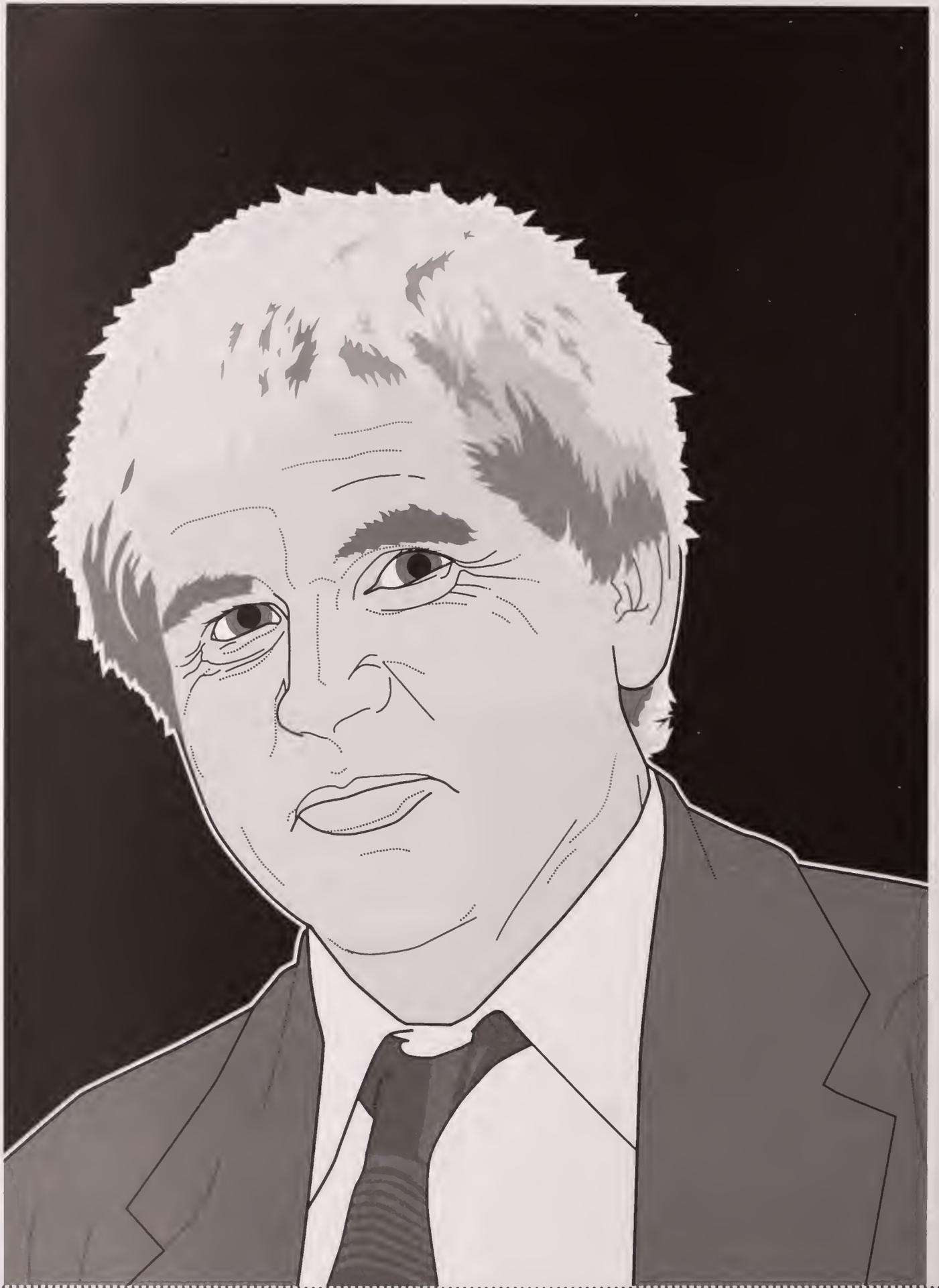


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mike davis

interview **Jim Straub**

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Historian Mike Davis is one of America's best known social critics — a position he does not exactly relish. He once favorably compared his first job, as a meat cutter, to his current position as a tenured professor at the University of California-Irvine. "Being a butcher was skilled and socially useful labor — unlike so much of academia," he said. Davis first gained notoriety when his book about Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*, predicted riots and unrest in the city's near future. When the Rodney King riots broke out barely a year later, Davis became a left-wing prophet of urban American catastrophe — an image stoked by his next book (*Ecology of Fear*), a political history of disaster in Los Angeles.

Since then, Davis has broadened his range. His published work includes books about everything from San Diego and Las Vegas to famines caused by imperialism and drought in the 19th-century Third World. Recently, Davis expanded his portfolio even further, writing a trilogy of young adult books about a team of young scientists who get embroiled in political adventures — co-written with Davis' young son, and edited by peace activist Viggo Mortensen (better known as Aragorn in the *Lord of the Rings*). Next year, back in Davis' original field of radical urban studies, Verso will publish his book *Planet of Slums* — an investigation of the global rise of slum-cities in the Third World that sees Davis studying Islamic civil society in the Middle East, street gangs and religious populists in Africa and Asia, and Pentecostal Christianity and radical leftists in Latin America.

So how did a meat-cutter from San Diego come to write radical adventures about young scientists with King Aragorn as an editor? Davis attributes his life's course to being politicized by the civil rights movement in the Sixties. After that, he worked as an organizer for Students for a Democratic Society and the Communist Party, as a Teamster trucker and tour bus driver, and eventually as an editor at New Left Review and Verso books. This background, as a working-class southern Californian and committed radical, has given him the drive to study and publish so broadly — and has also fueled his critics. Davis has gained a small army of conservative fact-checkers who comb his books' thousands of footnotes searching for errors to justify their red-baiting. For his part, Davis proudly admits, "I am a socialist in the same sense that Billy Graham is a Baptist." A willingness to continue championing radical causes unfashionable in Patriot Act-era America has brought him to his current project: researching the history of left-wing terrorism in the century stretching from the 1870s to 1970s.

Clamor: Can you tell us about this book, Heroes of Hell?

Mike Davis: *Heroes of Hell* is a history of revolutionary terrorism from the 1870s to the 1970s, covering groups ranging from the Peoples' Will in Russia to the Tupamaros of Uruguay in the '70s. I anticipate that the sympathies of this book (toward those who killed tyrants and exploiters, not innocents) will probably violate the Patriot Act.

Ever since the broken glass in the streets of Seattle during the 1999 protests against the WTO, there has been a series of debates about things like property destruction in the global justice movement. What were the debates about violence in radical movements of the past?

Well I don't know I'd call trashing a McDonald's "revolutionary

Their most formidable critic on the Left was Trotsky. He attacked the SRs, not on moral grounds (who could feel sorry for the butchers of the people?), but for their substitution of the individual heroic act for the self-activity of the working class. He was extremely skeptical of revolutionary strategies that envision heroic small-group actions as "motors" for uprisings, as attempts to short-circuit the arduous work of mass organization. At the same time, he considered "working class anger" to be a noble and essentially creative force.

What are your own personal feelings, on the debates about violence and protest today?

My position will undoubtedly anger all sides. Of course I believe in property destruction, theft and (counter-) violence: in some

Give me a break. Our internationalist duty in 1969 was to go into the plants and schools and help organize rebellion, not blow up non-coms and post offices. The Weather Underground were a narcissistic, authoritarian cult, with contempt for ordinary people and ordinary leftists, who hallucinated on comic-book politics and the usual American quest for celebrity ...

violence," first off. But to look at the past: Setting aside the ultimate questions of insurrection and protracted armed struggle, the classical debates about revolutionary violence concerned three major issues: self-defense, retaliation and the catalytic or instigatory deed.

To take self-defense first. Except perhaps in England, strikers and protestors everywhere faced universal police and employer violence, and all factions of the Left and the working-class public routinely supported the right of self-defense in the extreme. Industrial unionism only triumphed in the 1930s because it was able to come up with a tactic that neutralized employer violence: the sit-down strike and the potential destruction of the bosses' property. Sometimes, however, as during the Minneapolis General Strike of 1934 [when a truck drivers' strike faced such employer opposition that only a general strike and serious street-fighting was able to secure the workers' union rights] the issue had to be settled militarily in the streets. It was also essential, of course, that there were pro-labor governors in the state houses in Michigan and Minnesota who, in the last instance, refused the bosses' pleas to give the National Guard the order to fire. Otherwise we would be talking today about the great Flint and Minneapolis massacres.

The second issue of an "eye for an eye," however, split the Left and the labor movement. In the United States, acts like anarchist [Alexander] Berkman's shooting of Henry Frick [in return for Frick's killing of striking steelworkers] evoked sympathy. But a moral economy of revenge was almost always impractical and suicidal. The IWW, which owed nothing to bourgeois morality, strictly eschewed terrorism, although, when pushed to the wall, like [union organizer] Wesley Everest during the [1919] siege of the Centralia, Washington IWW headquarters, they shot back (in his case with deadly accuracy).

The third case concerns the classic "propaganda of the deed": the advocacy of heroic, usually suicidal attacks on the very summits of power, in belief that either the repressive state could be broken by the decimation of its cadre, or, more commonly, that such acts would inspire the masses to insurrection. The greatest revolutionary terrorists, of course, were the Peoples' Will and their descendants, the Military Organization of the Russian Social Revolutionary Party. Very rarely injuring innocents or bystanders, they attacked the czarist state with extraordinary courage and constant ingenuity: assassinating (if I recall correctly) a czar, a crown prince, two prime ministers and scores of generals, police chiefs and ministers. They practiced mass-production terrorism

circumstances and as mass actions. The hungry have the right to loot supermarkets. Strikers and demonstrators have a right to defend themselves. If the teacher slaps you, slap him back. At times, it insufficient to protest the power, you must actually fight it. And so on.

But some of what now calls itself the "black bloc" or "anarchism" is just a selfish gentrification of working-class anger. [IWW leader] Big Bill Haywood or [legendary Spanish anarchist Buenaventura] Durruti would scoff at such minor street theatrics. I've always hated the types, whatever their politics, who like to throw rocks from the back of a crowd, then let the mass of demonstrators take the charge. Or macho actors in balaclavas who disdain any democratic discipline. It is simply impermissible to hijack other peoples' protests or make them the involuntary targets for police retaliation.

At the same time, however, I resent overly-organized demonstrations without any dimension of spontaneity or free association, the kind of actions that are more like mass safety-values (or funerals) than authentic contestations. Or a protest politics that plays simply to the mass media and the sound bite, with no regard for the on-going organization of protestors or their involvement in the actual elaboration of policy and strategic direction.

Both "black bloc" types and movement bureaucrats have a similar contempt for protests as social processes with unpredictable grassroots dynamics. One fetishizes the "deed," the other "legality." One always wants to break through the fence, the other, never. Neither pays any attention to the actual mood or the expressed opinions of the mass of demonstrators.

So, smashing McDonald's may be good fun (and in some circumstances, a good tactic) but it isn't the same as smashing the state, or, for that matter, of organizing a movement. On the other hand, such infantilism is far less of a problem than the tendency of some leaders and coalitions to accede to the constantly tighter circumscription of protest by police and the homeland security state. If the right to protest is to survive, it must be aggressively asserted in all circumstances.

Wasn't Heroes of Hell originally planned to end in the '30s? What inspired you to extend your narrative to the most recent wave of worldwide revolutionary terrorism in the '60s and '70s? As an organizer with SDS back then, you must have had plenty of personal experience with Weathermen and others who went underground and declared war on the U.S. government as the Vietnam War ground on.

Originally I believed that there was little connection between "classical" revolutionary terrorism in its Mediterranean and Slavic incarnations, and the new urban guerrilla or terrorist groups of the 1970s. So I decided that *Heroes of Hell* should logically end with the Spanish Civil War and the failure of the Italian anarchists to assassinate Mussolini. Then I discovered that there were, in fact, decisive human and ideological linkages between the generation of Durutti and the first New Left urban guerrilla groups in Spain and Argentina.

And, yes, I have personal recollections of the Weathermen and similar types. In 1969 there were incredible opportunities on every hand to expand and deepen the social base of the anti-war and New Left movements. Wildcat strikes were breaking out across the country, the women's movement was exploding, high-school kids and gays were rebelling, GIs were fragging their officers, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was setting Detroit on its ear. Yet at precisely this moment of maximum popular energy and Left opportunity, the Weather cadre decided to go underground.

After a few silly attempts to cajole blue-collar kids to support the Viet Cong, the Weather leaders (mostly scions of ruling-class families)

... and it kills me today that young sincere radicals, who have never heard of real heroes like James Forman, Dave Dellinger, Nelson Peery, Carl Boggs, Fannie Lou Hamer or Hal Draper, believe that [Weathermen leaders] Mark Rudd or Bernadine Dorhn were somehow the very conscience of the Left in 1969.

decided the white working class was a lost cause and turned instead to orgies and bombs.

Recall the plot that ended prematurely with the tragic Townhouse explosion. Who were they planning to kill? Not General Westmoreland, the butcher of Saigon, but rather some enlisted men and their wives at a dance. The rest of the Left, according to them, were punks and cowards, because we preferred to organize against the war at union meetings rather than put on clever disguises and plant bombs. Were they "frustrated radicals"? Revolutionaries in an American desert with nothing left but their own desperation and a debt of solidarity to the Vietnamese?

Give me a break. Our internationalist duty in 1969 was to go into the plants and schools and help organize rebellion, not blow up non-coms and post offices. The Weather Underground were a narcissistic, authoritarian cult, with contempt for ordinary people and ordinary leftists, who hallucinated on comic-book politics and the usual American quest for celebrity. And it kills me today that young sincere radicals, who have never heard of real heroes like James Forman, Dave Dellinger, Nelson Peery, Carl Boggs, Fannie Lou Hamer or Hal Draper, believe that [Weathermen leaders] Mark Rudd or Bernadine Dorhn were somehow the very conscience of the Left in 1969.

I understand you've had firsthand experience with difficult issues of self-defense and violence, in your earlier career as Teamster trucker and bus driver

Well, yes. After driving trucks for a long time, I wanted to get a union scholarship and go to college. I decided I needed the time, discipline and luxury of school in order to learn to write — even composing a personal letter gave me problems then. So I switched jobs and started driving a tour bus in Los Angeles, with the idea that I'd work there for awhile, build up some seniority so I could work part-time while going to UCLA. That was the plan, but after I'd been there just a couple months a strike broke out and quickly got violent. I got in trouble supposedly for beating up one of the scabs who'd driven a bus through our picket line and hurt one of us. Things were going crazy, so next thing you know my co-workers called a secret union meeting and someone proposed we each put up 400 bucks and hire a mob hit man to kill the leader of the strikebreakers. I was totally against this. So I got up and made the best speech of my life, and was out-voted 40 to 1. In the end the hit men who were hired were arrested for drunk-driving while on their way to do the deed, and so we avoided charges of criminal conspiracy and I got to go to UCLA instead of prison.

What that all taught me is that ordinary American workers may often be conservative people, but when pushed against the wall and threatened with the loss of 20, 30 years of job seniority and violence from

the boss, they will not hesitate to get violent, too. And there's a place for that. The issue is it has to be a strategic thing, not some kind of crazy thing like what we almost did. ☆

Jim Straub spent the past year as an organizer for a hospital workers' union in Ohio. He is currently making a cross-country tour of historical sites of America's labor wars and native uprisings — and if he can stay on your couch in your town, email jimstraub@riseup.net.



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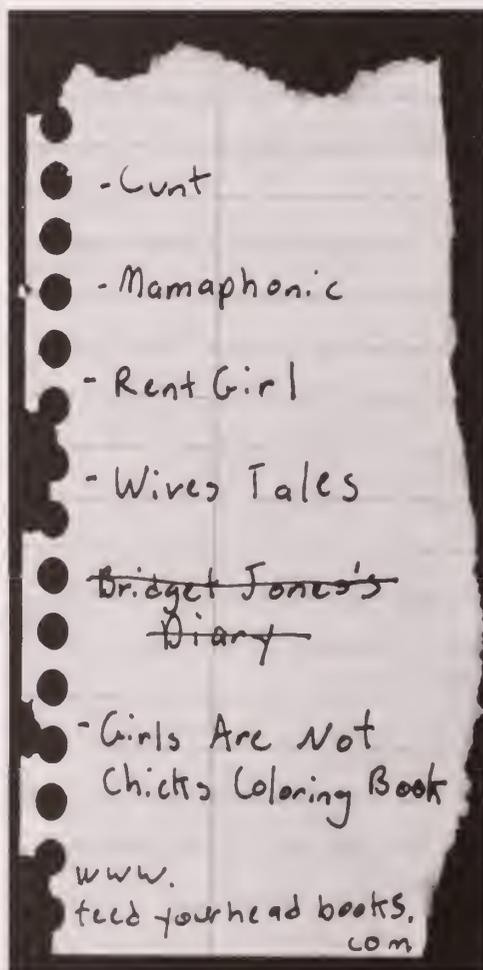
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