

NOVEMBER 2006

IN THESE TIMES

**BEYONCÉ'S
BOOTYFUL BIRTHDAY**

**HOW A LITTLE ECON IS
A DANGEROUS THING**

**A POEM BY
KURT VONNEGUT**



STUNNING REVELATIONS

**THE UNTOLD STORY OF TASER-
RELATED DEATHS** SILJA J.A. TALVI INVESTIGATES

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A Nation Is Not a Plate

BACK IN APRIL 2004, when the political breeze was blowing rightward, kite-cum-journalist Bob Woodward gave readers of his then-new book, *Plan of Attack*, an “inside” account of the Bush administration during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. Among its treasure trove of conventional wisdom nuggets, the most alluring to the mainstream press was Woodward’s discussion of the “Pottery Barn Rule.”

As reported by Woodward, Colin Powell evoked the rule when explaining to President Bush the consequences of invading Iraq. “You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people,” Powell told him. And according to the dictates of the rule, first coined by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman in 2003, if you break Iraq, you own it.

Despite the rule’s august centrist origins, one could plausibly argue that the analogy is utterly inane, the kind of simulacrum of analysis offered up by a culture whose social imagination is limited to the confines of a television screen. Its aim is not to provoke thinking, but stop it, as even the gentlest critical prod makes the whole thing fall to shambles.

For starters, there’s the mundane point that Pottery Barn has no such policy. When accidental breaks do occur, the company simply writes them off as losses. (It’s one of this administration’s lesser casualties of truth, but there nonetheless.)

More on the analogy’s terms: How, one might ask, can a nation of 25 million citizens, brutalized for decades by a sadistic dictator, be seriously equated with an inanimate piece of hardened clay? Similarly, what do you do when you now “own” a piece of pottery that has shattered into a thousand tiny shards? You don’t hold onto the shards. You throw them away.

But such criticisms, however valid, are strictly negative. They tear down the Pottery Barn Rule without putting anything else in its place. Perhaps, despite its flaws, the rule can be resurrected,

made more conducive to reality, by adding some imaginative nuances.

Many analysts have suggested that the United States’ actions in Iraq have been incredibly incompetent, akin to a man who walks into Pottery Barn, breaks something but hopes to pay for it. However, on his way to the cashier, he bumps into a shelf, sending an array of earthenware plates and mugs crashing to the ground. Apologizing profusely, he then backs into another shelf, toppling it over and creating another mess. At this point, the fed-up employees simply look at the man and tell him to go, now, before he breaks anything else. (And in fact, according to a September poll by the U.S. State Department, 65 percent of Iraqis favor an immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces.)

Unfortunately, this analogy too fails, in that it absolves the United States of the responsibility for its actions, which have been not only incompetent, but criminal. By torturing Iraqi prisoners, indiscriminately using banned chemical weapons like white phosphorus and, indeed, breaching the U.N. Charter by invading in the first place, the United States has behaved more like a disgruntled ex-employee with a grievance, who seeks redress by walking into Pottery Barn and going postal.

But this analogy should not end there. Once a crime is committed, civilized societies hold the perpetrators responsible. And if those responsible are rich enough, they are made to pay for the destruction they have caused.

That Iraq has been broken is now so self-evident that even our faith-based president appears to have become vaguely cognizant of the painful fact. To put it in terms that he might understand, all of our cruise missiles and all of our men will not be able to put it back together again. We should leave now, and use the millions we’ve been spending militarily as reparations for the unforgivable harm we have done the Iraqi people.

—Brian Cook

IN THESE TIMES

“With liberty and justice for all...”

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mixed reaction

QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

In June 2005, Gary Aguirre, an attorney at the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), was investigating whether John Mack, then head of Credit Suisse Group, may have given inside information to one of his good friends at the investment firm Pequot Capital Management, resulting in a profit of \$18 million. Though Aguirre's immediate supervisor was enthusiastic at first, after it was announced that Mack was being considered to head Morgan Stanley, he wouldn't allow Aguirre to question Mack. Aguirre complained to Paul Berger, the associate director of the SEC's enforcement division, who promptly joined Aguirre's supervisor in recommending that he be fired, which he was, only days after he had received a merit-based pay increase.

THE QUO:

What called off the watchdogs? Mack was a big-time fundraiser for George W. Bush in 2004, reaching the elite "Ranger" status by bundling at least \$200,000 in \$2,000 contributions.

The Senate Judiciary and Finance committees are currently investigating the incident.

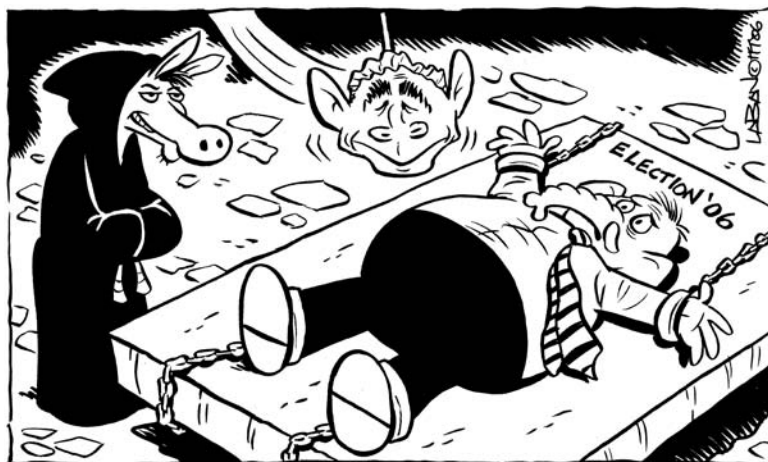
“

Bush told the truth. Hell froze.

”

— WILLIAM GIBSON, A SUBMISSION TO WIRED MAGAZINE'S SIX-WORD-LONG SCIENCE FICTION STORY CONTEST FROM THE WELL-KNOWN CYBERPUNK AUTHOR.

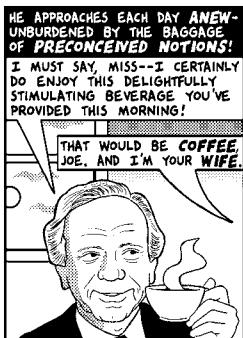
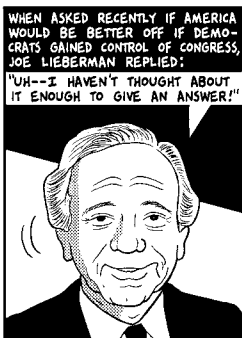
LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



the lexicon

moral idiocy: n.

The systematic failure on the part of an individual to understand basic moral precepts.

Last month, the British medical journal *Lancet* published a study estimating the number of all civilian casualties in the three-plus years since the U.S. invasion of Iraq at 650,000. In *Slate*, Christopher Hitchens called the study a mixture of "epidemiology" and "moral idiocy," arguing that two-thirds of the deaths were due to the insurgency—thus justifying the continued U.S. presence.

Hitchens' piece on moral idiocy was a useful marriage of form and content.

letters



Don't Forget Florida

As someone who spent 15 years volunteering on election campaigns when I lived in Florida, I feel compelled to respond to Joel Bleifuss' article, "The Importance of Not Getting Over It" (October). Bleifuss' only mention of 2000 was the illegal purge of thousands of legally registered and mostly black Democratic voters by Jeb Bush and Katherine Harris. This is but the tip of the iceberg. A coup d'état in broad daylight by the Bush election stealers is a more accurate description. There's a solid paper trail that proves beyond all reasonable doubt that Bush illegally stole Al Gore's victory in Florida in 2000. No such paper trail exists for 2004. The evidence for 2004 is based on a statistical projection and not actual votes. The evidence for 2000 is based on the actual votes and Florida's election laws in 2000. There's no disputing what happened in 2000 in Florida and we must never forget!

Nancy Kuhn
Via e-mail

What's the Matter With Starbucks?

There was a curious omission in Mischa Gaus' piece on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and Starbucks that raises suspicions about the fairness ("Starbucks Gets Wobbly," October). What were the unmet modest demands that motivated the workers joining up with the IWW? I have asked workers at Starbucks at many locations in the United States and other countries if they are satisfied with their jobs and have been met with unanimous reports of satisfaction. Many of the benefits that Starbucks provides to workers are unique in this country and Starbucks owner Howard Schultz's commitment to bringing everybody along with him seems sincere to me. (I know the Brooklyn project where he grew up.) So omission of this highly pertinent data makes me quite suspicious of Brother Gaus' objectivity and, of course, without that key data it is impossible to form a fair judgment of what's going on. Indeed, this kind of selective reporting is what I expect from Fox News. I am very sorry to see it in your pages.

Sam Abrams
Authors Guild member,
former member ILUNA 976
Rochester, N.Y.

MISCHA GAUS RESPONDS

Brother Abrams should read more carefully, and then check out www.starbucks-union.org. Starbucks workers start at \$7.75, except in the two cities with active IWW organizing, where barista wages have coincidentally

risen about 25 percent. That's still not much to live on, especially since no line workers are guaranteed a set number of hours per week. Wal-Mart enrolls a higher percentage of its workers (46 percent) in its health plan than Starbucks does (42 percent). As for Schultz's commitment to the working class, isn't CEO hagiography so late-'90s pre-tech crash? Logan Square's baristas wanted a stepladder and advance notice of their schedules, both secured after they organized. Good thing they and others are working to challenge the yawning class gulf that no feel-good marketing blitz is going to close.

Mistakes Were Made

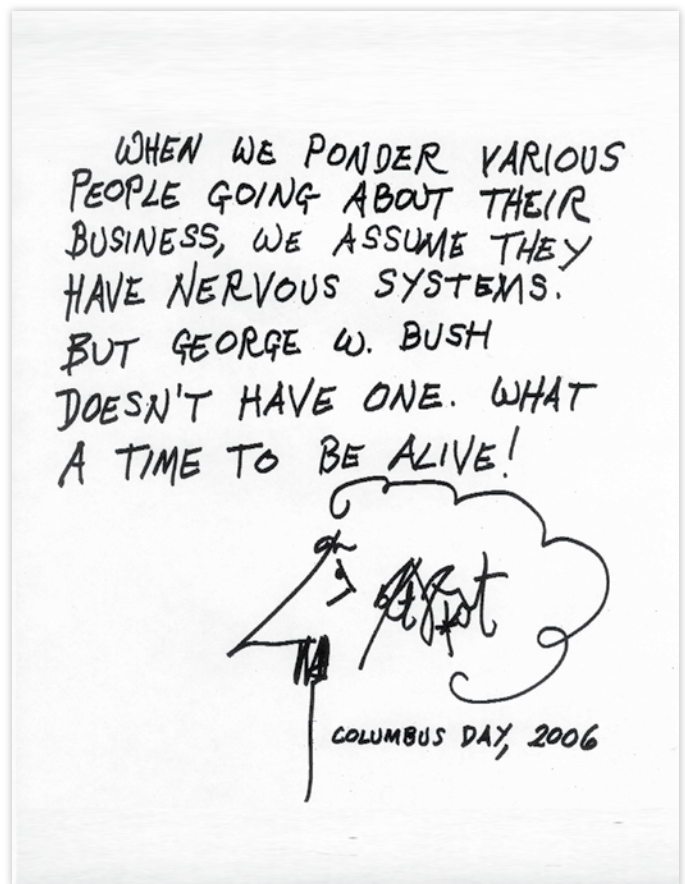
Terry J. Allen's "Counterfeit Drugs: Infected with Greed" contained two errors (October). The beetroot-pushing Minister of Health in South Africa has not resigned and is very much still in charge. Also, she is a female, not a male, although she certainly has the arrogance of a male and looks like one too!

Anton de Waal
Via e-mail

THE EDITORS RESPOND

We introduced these errors during our editorial process. We apologize to Terry J. Allen and our readers.

And now a word from Kurt Vonnegut:



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WHAT ARE YOUR PASSIONS?

WHAT MAKES YOU ACT?

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Russian right-wing protesters from Russia's Liberal-Democratic Party stand in front of the Georgian embassy in Moscow.

Ethnic Cleansing in Russia

Putin stokes the flames of xenophobia

BY FRED WEIR

MOSCOW—IT STARTED OUT AS geopolitical bullying, with the Kremlin applying an economic headlock to pressure an obstreperous little neighbor, Georgia, to return to Moscow's fold. But a related campaign against "Georgian interests" in Russia, involving mass arrests of alleged illegal immigrants and a crack-down on Georgian-owned businesses, has dangerously fuelled xenophobia in Russia's streets and buoyed the country's rising neo-fascist movement.

President Vladimir Putin personally triggered the anti-Georgian frenzy by complaining, in a televised meeting, that non-Slavs from the Caucasus region dominate farmer's markets in most cities, incurring the wrath of native Russians.

"The indignation of citizens is right," Putin said. "(We must) protect the interests of Russian manufacturers and Russia's native population." Putin may have been trying to gather support for his tough policy against Georgia, which includes

a complete cutoff of trade, transport and even postal links. But in targeting Georgian businesses, he handed a gift to the outright racist Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), which calls for expelling all non-Slavs from Russian cities, whether they are Russian citizens or not.

Though Slavs make up about 80 percent of the population, there are millions of darker-skinned citizens from Russia's north Caucasus, Volga regions and Siberia. Added to that are an estimated 10 million "guest workers" from former Soviet central Asia and Caucasus countries. There are about 1 million Georgians working in Russia, sending home some \$2 billion annually, a major component of Georgia's GDP.

Hatred of non-Slavs is a combustible political issue in Russia. "Russians are the most discriminated-against group in Russia, and we help them to find their voice," says Alexander Belov, chief ideologue of DPNI, Russia's fastest-growing grassroots organization. Lately many Russians have been mobilizing, with Belov's encouragement.

Six days of rioting in the northern town of Kondopoga in late August left at least three people dead and forced hundreds of Caucasians to flee. "The local people want them to go back where they came from," says Belov. "That's democracy. The rights of the majority should be respected." Similar upheavals have been reported over the past six months, hitting far-flung Russian towns in Saratov, Chita, Rostov, Astrakhan and Irkutsk regions. A September poll conducted by the independent Levada Center found that 57 percent of Russians thought Kondopoga-style violence could break out in their town, while 52 percent said they agreed with DPNI's main slogan: "Russia for the Russians."

Within days of Putin's remarks, police descended on markets around the country, rounding up thousands of Caucasians—not only Georgians—whose documents showed any discrepancies. (Endemic corruption virtually ensures discrepancies in peoples' official documents.) Moscow schools were ordered to report children with Georgian-sounding names to police, so their parents could be investigated. By late October, about 100 Georgian "illegal immigrants" were being deported to Tbilisi on special daily military flights.

Dozens of Georgian-owned companies have been closed down, on pretexts ranging from sanitary violations to tax evasion. The campaign even reached prominent Russians of Georgian heritage. Sculptor Zurab Tsereteli, creator of several well-known Moscow monuments, found himself accused of "misappropriating" 2.1 million rubles (about \$80,000) from the Russian Arts Academy that he heads. Georgian-born Grigory Chkhartishvili, who writes some of Russia's most beloved detective fiction under the pen name Boris Akunin, was targeted by the tax police.

"It is no longer safe to be a dark-haired person in Russia," says Chkhartishvili. "What's happening to Georgians today is ethnic cleansing. The Russian state is sick with the virus of xenophobia."

Georgia has been the scene of intense rivalry between Russia and the West since it broke from the USSR in 1991. Seeking levers of influence, Moscow backed successful early '90s rebellions in two ethnically different Georgian territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose de facto independence is protected by Russian peace-

keeping troops to this day. Washington scored points by persuading Georgia to host the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which opened this year, to carry newly-flowing Caspian crude to Western markets, bypassing Russia's pipeline network. Russo-Georgian relations went into total freefall after the 2003 "Rose Revolution" ousted the cautious ex-Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze and brought a young U.S.-trained lawyer and fiery Georgian nationalist, Mikhael Saakashvili, to power in Tbilisi. Saakashvili has vowed to re-unite his fractured country and lead it into NATO before his term of office expires in 2009. In early October, NATO agreed to enter into an "intensified dialogue" with Georgia about membership.

In late September, Georgian police arrested four Russian officers and charged them with spying. After a furious reaction from the Kremlin, the men were released to European mediators, but the die was already cast in Moscow. Putin launched a full economic embargo, ordered the Russian Black Sea Fleet to hold war games off Georgia's coast and authorized the domestic crackdown against resident Georgians.

Georgia's two breakaway statelets, Ab-

khazia and South Ossetia, have used the crisis to appeal to Moscow to unilaterally recognize their independence, a move that Georgians fear could lead to the irreversible division of their country.

"This is the biggest fear in Tbilisi today, that Russia will formalize those (statelets) by making them Russian protectorates with permanent Russian military bases," says Archil Gegeshidze, an expert with the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in Tbilisi. Russia insists it has no such intentions, but Putin has repeatedly warned that this could change if the West recognizes the independence of Kosovo, the Albanian-populated Serbian province seized by NATO in a 1999 war.

Meanwhile, the escalating campaign against Georgians is driving internal Russian politics down dark and uncharted avenues. "The Kremlin is appealing to Russian society's nationalistic moods, and that's very dangerous," says Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of the foreign policy journal *Russia in Global Affairs*. "This kind of device is easy to use, but very hard to control." ■

FRED WEIR reports regularly from Russia for *In These Times*.

Barricade Nights in Oaxaca

OAXACA CITY, MEXICO—IN the hours after nightfall, a shifting labyrinth rises from the streets of Oaxaca City. Men and women step into an emptied street pulling chain-link fencing, barbed wire, sandbags and old doors behind them. The hoarse roar of a diesel motor breaks the silence, as insurgents guide a commandeered city bus riddled with graffiti that calls for the ouster of Oaxaca state Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz into an the intersection, shutting off the street like a clamp.

Every night since late August, protesters with the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) build and stand guard over a thousand barricades throughout the city—a mass, decentralized effort to thwart the ever-rumored crackdown by federal police. Around piles of burning wood in the center of the blockaded intersections, middle-aged men and women talk in low voices, watching for approaching vehicles. College-aged youths, their faces covered

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JOHN GIBLER

Indigenous teachers guard one of the barricades in Oaxaca.

with bandanas and shawls, fill shopping carts with Molotov cocktails.

“If they want to try to come in here, let’s just see how it goes for them,” says a man in his fifties as he leans on an old wooden ax handle, entrenched behind five blocks of barricades that protect one of the APPO’s encampments outside an occupied commercial radio station.

The conflict in Oaxaca began as a teachers strike on May 22, but exploded into a massive uprising after a failed June 14 attempt to violently break up the teachers’ protest camps in the town square. (See “Teacher Rebellion in Oaxaca,” September). Tens of thousands of local residents took to the streets to fight alongside the teachers and join their call for the immediate ouster of Ulises Ruiz—now their sole, non-negotiable demand.

Within weeks, the APPO effectively shut down the state government and forced the governor into exile by stepping up their civil disobedience tactics—building camps around government buildings and sending “mobile brigades” to hound state government officials appearing in the city. But as the APPO’s grip on the city solidified, gunmen linked to local and state police forces began to apprehend movement leaders and open fire on protesters.

During an August 10 APPO march to demand the release of two leaders—Catarino Torres Pereda and Germán Mendoza Nube—who had been arrested, gunmen fired into the crowd from the second story of a house, killing Jose Colmenares, a 50-year-old mechanic marching to support his wife, a member of the striking teachers union.

Less than two weeks later, on the night of August 22, a convoy of some 40 cars and pickup trucks carrying heavily armed men, some in police uniform and others in civilian clothes and ski masks, attacked protest camps, killing 52-year-old Lorenzo San Pablo Cervantes. The gunmen also attacked TV reporters, stealing their tapes of the shootings, and opened fire on photographers from the national newspapers *Milenio* and *Reforma*. The photographers published photos the following day showing the men aiming their machine guns from the backs of pick-up trucks. A Reuters cameraman who filmed the convoy compared it to “the death squads in Africa or Haiti.” Televisa, a national television station, aired footage of the convoy returning to the municipal police headquarters just before dawn.

The day after the death squad attacks, Antonio, a member of the APPO’s provisional leadership, told the press: “We are going to respond with organization, not with guns.” That night the APPO set up over 500 guarded barricades throughout the city. The convoy did not return.

The following week, teachers’ union and APPO representatives traveled to Mexico City to initiate a series of talks with the

Minister of the Interior, Carlos Abascal. Abascal made offers to address education and social equity issues in Oaxaca, but the APPO turned them all down, maintaining their single demand that Ulises Ruiz resign or be removed from office before any discussion of reforms. The talks stalled on September 20, with tension and rumors of a crackdown immediately filling the void. On September 25, President Vicente Fox’s spokesperson Ruben Aguilar said the Fox had vowed to solve the conflict before his term ends on November 30, fueling speculation that a major federal police operation is in the works.

Senators from the governor’s party—the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the discredited dinosaur of Mexican politics—warned that if Ulises Ruiz were to fall at the hands of the protesters, president-elect Felipe Calderón would be next. Calderon—who won the presidency by less than a percentage point over his rival Andrés Manuel López Obrador amid widespread allegations of electoral fraud—and his conservative National Action Party will need the PRI votes to pass any major legislation.

On September 21, 4,000 members of the teachers’ union and the APPO began

act now



HOW DO YOU LIKE THEM APPLES NOW?

Apple, renowned for their sleekly designed computers and electronics, just got a big fat “F” on Greenpeace’s first annual Electronics Report Card, which ranks the earth-friendly practices of the top 14 technology manufacturers. To encourage Apple to clean up its act, Greenpeace has launched the “Green My Apple” campaign, which recruits Apple’s biggest demographic—artists and graphic designers—to craft their own t-shirts, videos, stickers and posters to protest the company’s use of toxic chemicals and substandard recycling policies. To see highlights from the campaign, or to submit your own design, visit www.greenmyapple.org/procreate

—Erin Polgreen

a march to Mexico City to set up a protest camp outside of Congress. The protesters walked more than 300 miles through four states, arriving in Mexico City on October 9, where they set up a protest camp outside the Mexican Senate. On October 16, 21 marchers from the APPO began a hunger strike to demand Ruiz's ouster.

Since Wednesday, September 27, the barricade guards in Oaxaca have been on red alert. Three days in a row, military helicopters and airplanes flew over Oaxaca City, in surveillance. Eight miles outside of town, at least 2,000 state police were training for a possible raid on the protesters' barricades.

Then, on October 19, the Senate refused the APPO's request to dissolve the state government, thus closing the only door to legally force Ruiz from office.

At 2 a.m. on a recent night, a handful of teachers smoked cigarettes and slowly fed cardboard and scavenged wood scraps to the barricade fire in a middle-class residential part of town. Three well-dressed people approached cautiously, and one woman said: "If anything happens, we live around the corner, behind the notary. We'll open up." Her husband added: "I've got piles of rocks ready."

—John Gibler

Immigrants Sue to Retrieve Funds Seized in Arizona

WHEN ILLINOIS TRUCK driver Javier Torres sent \$1,000 via Western Union to a friend in Arizona to pay for a car he'd purchased from her, it seemed like the money just disappeared. The same thing happened to North Carolina resident Alma Santiago when she sent \$2,000 to her cousin in Arizona so he could visit family. Likewise for Lia Rivadeneyra, who sent \$500 to her brother when he was visiting Sonora, Mexico, from his home in Peru.

Several weeks after each sent their money, they found out it had been seized by Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard, on suspicion that it was intended for "coyotes," human or drug smugglers. While smuggling across the Arizona border has certainly become an increasingly profitable and violent trade, the only "evidence" Goddard's office had linking the monies

sent by Torres, Santiago and Rivadeneyra to these crimes was that the amounts were over \$500 and came from one of 26 states identified in a broad search warrant targeting wire transfers through Western Union and other companies.

"They said they think I sent money for illegal drugs or a coyote," says Torres. "They were treating me like a criminal."

His money was among the \$17 million seized by Goddard's office in recent years under similar circumstances. On October 18, Torres, Santiago and Rivadeneyra filed a class action lawsuit in federal court in Arizona, alleging that Goddard and his staffer Cameron Holmes violated constitutional protections against unlawful search and seizure. The lawsuit also charges that the attorney general violated the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution by interfering with interstate and international commerce; the office had also seized funds destined for Sonora, Mexico, and funds transferred between other states by people who had previously made transfers involving Arizona.

For many of the victims, the lawsuit is the only chance they have of getting their money back. When Rivadeneyra talked to Arizona state police, they told her she couldn't recover the money unless they interviewed her brother, which was impossible since he lives in a rural village without a phone. Officers told Torres he would need to show the car title and registration to recoup his funds, also impossible since he had already sold the car for some extra cash. He ended up having to send another \$1,000 to his friend, this time through the postal service.

The lawsuit resulted from an investigation launched by the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) and the Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago. Among the allegations in the lawsuit are that the state of Arizona never adequately notified senders or receivers that the money had been seized, or advised them of their right to challenge the seizure. The investigation turned up 400 specific individuals who had lost money by setting up a toll-free number. There are believed to be up to 15,000 potential plaintiffs.

Meanwhile, Western Union also has a lawsuit pending, which has resulted in a temporary freeze on seizures. A statement from Goddard on the Arizona Attorney General Web site says that coyotes have made \$1.7 billion on smuggling monies through Western Union and other wire

ON A BRIDGE 22" X 28":

18 Cuban and 18 American artists collaborated over the Internet to create a series of posters promoting



TRAVEL 90 MILES

peace. The result, "Shared Dreams", runs now through November 12th.



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services, but doesn't say how it was proven that all this money was meant for coyotes, and his office declined to comment further. Doubtless a significant amount of money is sent to Arizona to pay coyotes; under the current immigration system, they are often the only way for Latin American immigrants to come to the United States.

Goddard's Web site says the office has worked with community groups to help innocent people get their money back. According to Hoyt, the Attorney General's office told the ICIRR that only 9 percent have had their money returned.

Many see the seizures as a shocking abuse of power against an extremely vulnerable population: non-English speakers and undocumented immigrants who are wary of any contact with authorities and therefore more likely to absorb the loss than complain. "He can get away with it because the last names are Salgados and Lopezes, and he makes sure people are intimidated enough that they don't take the next step," says ICIRR board president Juan Salgado.

Remittances sent from immigrants in the United States are a staple of the economies of many Latin American countries,

including Mexico, where they are considered the second largest foreign source of income after oil exports. Since undocumented or transient people in the United States or poor people in Latin America are unlikely to have regular bank accounts, wire transfers are often the only secure option for sending money. And the \$500 Rivadeneyra sent to her brother in Peru is a lot there; it could be one man's livelihood for months.

Robin Hoover, a Tucson pastor who runs the Humane Borders program which places water in the desert for migrants, says he is appalled at the attorney general's conduct. "This is unlawful government seizure," Hoover says. "We fought a revolutionary war over that!"

Matthew Piers, the plaintiff's attorney, says his clients agree that the monetary flow to drug smugglers must be stopped. However, he notes that "the government must always act within the bounds of the Constitution, otherwise it creates rather than prevents lawlessness. This is the equivalent of knowing a bank was robbed, seeing the robber run into the Daley Center, and arresting everyone there."

—Kari Lydersen

DoJ Quashes Wiretapping Inquiries

THOUGH MAINE RESIDENT Doug Cowie just celebrated his 75th birthday in October, it was only this past January that he retired from the Maine Public Utility Commission (PUC) where he worked for 18 years. It would be easy to think of Cowie as an innocuous grandfatherly type—particularly after his response when I told him some of his e-mails ended up in my spam folder: "Your *what* folder?"—but he is one of a growing number of Americans who are acting, in lieu of Congress, as the only check and balance on the Bush administration's domestic spying program.

When *USA Today* published an article on May 11 alleging that the National Security Agency (NSA) had teamed up with major telecommunications companies to obtain access to Americans' communication records, Cowie sent an e-mail to Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg, asking if the company

appall-o-meter

6.7 Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Values

Sure, the Republicans have filled the airwaves with campaign ads portraying at least one Democratic Senate contender as a priapic Negro with a taste for white women. But do not conclude that the GOP wishes to slight brethren of color. In fact, as radio ads broadcast in 10 states reveal, the party's tent is big enough to accommodate Americans in all their diversity—even the pimp community.

As the *New York Sun* reports, an ad sponsored by the Republican group America's PAC features two black men discussing the abortion issue with characteristic brio:

VOICE ONE: If you make a little mistake with one of your hoes, you'll want to dispose of that problem tout suite, no questions asked.

VOICE TWO: That's too cold. I don't snuff my own seed.

VOICE ONE: Maybe you do have a reason to vote Republican.

America's PAC is bankrolled largely by J. Patrick Rooney, 78, of Indianapolis, former chairman of Golden Rule Insur-

ance and apparently a fan of '70s blaxploitation comic Rudy Ray Moore. A spokesman for America's PAC maintains that its efforts have been key to drawing African-American voters to the Republican Party.

2.2 Truth In Electioneering

If you dosed George W. Bush with Sodium Pentothal, he might behave like a certain deranged Penn State junior. A few days after Jay Bundy was elected president of his university's student government, reports *Inside Higher Ed*, he gave a bracingly frank interview to the school newspaper. "If the students are stupid enough to vote for someone as inappropriate and retarded as I am, then they deserve a president who is going to give the worst performance to the best of his ability," he said, adding, "You voted for me, bitches. That was a bad idea."

Shortly after the interview was published, election commissioners disqualified Bundy and running mate Christopher Brink for campaign irregularities. After a



meeting with university officials a few days later, Bundy drove to a convenience store and stole a candy bar and an energy drink. He then assaulted a clerk who pursued him into the parking lot. He maintains his innocence, and has not been heard from since being released on bail.

1.6 The Hanging Prosecutor

To the roll of miscreants serving Ohio, add Scott Blauvelt. According to the AP, this Hamilton city prosecutor has twice been captured on security videotape strolling around a government building buck naked. As Buckeye politicians go these days, that's only mildly eccentric behavior, but Blauvelt has been charged with indecency and placed on paid leave.

His lawyer has tried to shift blame to drugs the prosecutor was prescribed after an auto accident last year. "Scott Blauvelt," he offered gamely, "is an American with a disability."

—Dave Mulcahey

was taking part in this program. After ambiguous responses from Verizon, Cowie filed a complaint with the Maine PUC. According to Cowie, the “PUC is supposed to determine whether the complaint has merit and if it does, it’s supposed to open an investigation and have a hearing.” (He would know—part of his former position there was managing these very complaints.) After two months of silence, the PUC finally acted, asking Verizon to swear under oath to the veracity of a May press release the company issued in response to the *USA Today* allegations.

That release claimed that Verizon was not providing records to the government, but was ambiguous enough to leave room for doubt. A deadline was set for Verizon to respond and about an hour after the deadline passed, a response was received—a Justice Department announcement that it was suing the state of Maine.

The department invoked the state secrets privilege and claimed that for Verizon to even affirm that their previous statement was true would endanger the country. That’s ridiculous, says Cowie. “[If] Verizon’s public statements had classified information in them, they would have gone to jail.”

Minutes after receiving notice of the Justice Department suit, Verizon submitted their filing, which stated that it could not verify its previous press statement because of the lawsuit that had just been announced. At that point, the Maine Civil Liberties Union (MCLU) got involved. The MCLU maintains that the Justice Department has no legal basis to sue the state of Maine for enforcing state law. Shenna Bellows, executive director of the MCLU, says that the department’s claim that forcing Verizon to verify its previous statements would threaten national security “doesn’t pass the straight-face test.”

The Justice Department has sued four other states that launched similar inquiries: Missouri, Connecticut, Vermont and New Jersey—where the DoJ sued the attorney general for subpoenaing telecommunications companies within the state.

Doug Cowie’s call for an investigation in Maine has now been backed up by some 400 other Mainers. That the PUC has yet to be assertive in its investigation confuses him. “I honest to God

snapshot



Two men ride a bicycle past a village north of the town of Sinuiju, North Korea, on Oct. 16—the same day that the White House urged China to honor its “responsibilities and obligations” under the UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on North Korea for its apparent nuclear test. (Photo by Liu Jin/AFP/Getty Images)

don’t understand it,” he says. “I’m so disappointed. The PUC should have tried to do the investigation based on unclassified data. I’ve been basically told that the staff has been told not to talk to anybody about this.” Because the PUC refuses to pursue Cowie’s complaint, legal remedy can’t be sought.

While the legality of the NSA program has been challenged, the Bush administration has been pushing Congress to keep the cases out of the courts. Bills sponsored by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Rep. Heather Wilson (R-N.M.) would redefine electronic surveillance and force the cases against the NSA and telecommunications companies into the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court of Review, effectively keeping the cases, and any judicial remedy, from public eyes.

Regardless of the outcome, Cowie intends to spend his retirement making sure Americans’ constitutional rights aren’t violated. “Who the hell wants to take up all your time doing stuff like this?” asks Cowie. “But something has to be done. You just gotta do it.”

—Onnesha Roychoudhuri

Lawyers Fight for Habeas Rights

INSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE, President George W. Bush sat at a small desk. Surrounded by generals, congressmen and members of his administration, he signed the Military Commissions Act (MCA) into law. “It is a rare occasion when a president can sign a bill he knows will save American lives,” he declared.

Outside the White House, it was raining. More than 100 religious leaders, survivors of torture and concerned citizens gathered to mourn the passing of a cornerstone of American law. Many of the marchers wore soggy orange jumpsuits and black hoods over their faces, representing the more than 400 men who remain imprisoned at Guantánamo. The gap between the Bush administration’s agenda and the concerns of the activists outside could not have been greater.

The MCA establishes new rules for interrogating and trying suspected terrorists. It also suspends habeas corpus for any foreign citizen determined to be an “unlawful enemy combatant engaged in



KAREN BLEIER/AP/GETTY IMAGES

Protesting the suspension of habeas corpus, a demonstrator poses in front of the entrance to the White House.

hostilities or having supported hostilities against the United States.” While President Bush called the law, “a way to deliver justice to the terrorists we have captured,” the majority of those held at Guantánamo do not fit under even this exceptionally broad definition of unlawful enemy combatant. A Seton Hall Law School analysis of the Pentagon’s own findings reveals that the U.S. government considers only 8 percent of 507 Guantánamo detainees to be al-Qaeda fighters. Of the remaining detainees, 40 percent have no definitive connection to al-Qaeda or Taliban.

If, to paraphrase Ambrose Bierce, wars teach Americans geography, are they also

how we now learn Latin? “Habeas Corpus”—part of a longer English Common Law phrase that means “you shall produce the body”—dates to the Magna Carta. In 1215, that foundational legal document guaranteed suspects the right to challenge their imprisonment. The “writ of habeas corpus” is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution: it “shall not be suspended unless when in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety may require it.”

Though Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez insists that “the new law should not be understood to ‘suspend’ the writ of habeas corpus for enemy combatants,” there is no other way to interpret it. “This new law is a clear suspension and we are mounting a substantial court challenge,” says Bill Goodman, legal director of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR).

Between Congress’ passage of the MCA in September and Bush’s signing on Oct. 17, the CCR continued to file writs of habeas corpus. On Oct. 2, they filed on behalf of 25 men imprisoned at the U.S. military’s Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan. The next day, the group filed for Majid Khan—one of the “ghost detainees” recently transferred to Guantánamo after being held in the Central Intelligence Agency’s secret detention facilities for three-and-a-half years as a “high-value” terrorist suspect. The 26-year-old Pakistani national came to the United States in 1996, and went to high school in suburban Maryland, working at his family’s gas station after classes.

Khan returned to Karachi to get married, but was soon arrested by Pakistani security forces and disappeared in 2003. The next news his family heard of him was on September 6, 2006, when President Bush publicly accused him of delivering money to an al Qaeda operative.

Khan has not been charged with a crime, and was subjected to what the CIA delicately calls “alternative interrogation techniques” while in their custody. His lawyer, Vincent Warren, insists “Majid Khan had nothing to do with 9/11. Any allegations should be made in open court where he has the chance to defend himself against evidence obtained through torture.”

Khan and the hundreds of other prisoners at Guantánamo, Bagram and other detention facilities have filed more than 500 habeas suits individually and in groups to insist that they be granted their day in open court. As the ink dried on the MCA, the Justice Department began dismissing these habeas claims, issuing notice to the U.S. District Court for D.C. and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit that they do not have “jurisdiction to hear or consider any claim or cause of action.”

Goodman and the CCR say such moves do effectively suspend the writ of habeas corpus, and point out that the United States is not threatened by “rebellion or invasion,” the only conditions under which the Constitution warrants suspension. Consequently, the CCR is launching a “strong opposition based on the ‘suspension clause’” that Goodman anticipates will go to the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, lawyers like Goodman and Warren will continue to pursue justice for Guantánamo inmates. One of the first steps is hearings before the D.C. U.S. Court of Appeals on the “significance of the MCA” to the cases the Justice Department maintain are no longer under the courts’ purview. The hearings began Nov. 1 and will continue through the month.

And what about regular people horrified at the trampling of law? Matthew W. Daloisio, a Catholic Worker, emphasizes the need for public education, moral challenge and widespread protest. “As we approach the fifth anniversary of the first war on terrorism prisoners’ arrival at Guantánamo, civil action must intensify,” he says. “January 11, 2007 should be a day of national shame but can also be an opportunity to for citizens to insist on the reintegration of law and justice.”

—Frida Berrigan



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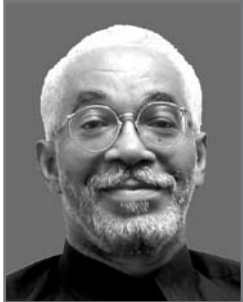


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BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

Farrakhan Steps Back



MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN failed to deliver the keynote address at the 11th anniversary celebration of the 1995 Million Man March. Complications from cancer treatments forced the Nation of Islam (NOI) leader to cancel the first major address he has missed in his 29 years of leadership.

The 73-year-old Farrakhan was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1991 and in 2000 underwent a surgical procedure that

implanted radiated ‘seeds’ rather than traditional radiation treatments. In a Sept. 11 letter to NOI members and supporters, published in the group’s *Final Call* newspaper, Farrakhan said the implanted seeds “indeed killed the cancer cells that had broken the prostate capsule.” But, he added, “over time, these seeds have done severe internal damage.”

Farrakhan’s withdrawal from all NOI business has sparked much speculation about the group’s future should he die. Many analysts doubt the group would survive Farrakhan’s absence.

The prospect of no Farrakhan also comes at a time when debate is growing within the black community about the need for new leaders as well as new leadership paradigms. The Nation of Islam’s messianic and authoritarian mold of leadership seems particularly antiquated as African Americans gain prominence in so many areas of American life.

The group has exemplified that leadership style from its murky founding in the ’30s by the mysterious W.D. Fard, who members later deified. Elijah Muhammad took over as God’s “messenger” when Fard disappeared.

When the eloquent and charismatic Malcolm X (Little) emerged from prison in 1952, he soon became Muhammad’s chief aide and the Nation of Islam’s best recruiter. They parted company in 1963 when an increasingly popular Malcolm defied “the Messenger.”

Members of the NOI murdered Malcolm in 1965 and sectarian violence scarred much of the black nationalist community. Many analysts wrongly predicted that Malcolm’s assassination would also kill the NOI. Farrakhan eventually got Malcolm’s job as head of the group’s Harlem Mosque and as Elijah’s representative.

In his recent letter to the flock, Farrakhan said his absence would be “a period of testing” that could “prove to the world that the Nation of Islam is more than the charisma, eloquence and personality of Louis Farrakhan.” This was

not a boast but an implicit acknowledgment that the NOI has become too dependent on his charisma.

Were it not for that dependence, however, the group may well have splintered into several warring factions. Farrakhan is noted for his powerful oratory and amiable personality, but his deft political instincts are what helped sooth a cauldron of sectarian animosity.

When Elijah died in 1975, his son, Wallace D. Mohammad (now known as Imam Warithduddine Mohamed), took over and changed the name and Black Nationalist focus of the group. Farrakhan initially pledged fealty to the new leader’s more “orthodox” vision of Islam, but broke away in 1977 to resurrect Elijah’s race-focused version.

While Farrakhan is often credited (or blamed) for sustaining the link between Islam and Black Nationalism, his role in

While Farrakhan is often credited (or blamed) for sustaining the link between Islam and Black Nationalism, his role in maintaining peace between rival factions has been overlooked.

maintaining peace among rival groups with a history of violence is often overlooked. Many analysts predicted a blood-bath—an escalation of the kind of violence that followed Malcolm X’s assassination. That chaos never occurred but few acknowledge Farrakhan’s role

in corralling those dissident energies.

Farrakhan customarily is described as a race-baiting anti-Semite and his rhetoric occasionally justifies that description. But there’s little attention paid to the major changes he’s made in a doctrine that once deemed whites the seed of Satan and black people inherently divine. While not exactly rejecting that black supremacist catechism—taught as gospel for 40-odd years by Elijah Muhammad—he has transformed it into a metaphor. Satan no longer has a genetic identity; the mentality of white supremacy is the real devil.

He is regularly charged with inciting anti-Jewish sentiments among African-Americans, but few realize that Farrakhan’s voice is a relatively conciliatory one in the Black Nationalist community. He can’t be too conciliatory, however, lest the NOI chief alienates the fire-breathing militants who comprise a major part of his base—and, more importantly, still fall under his influence.

Through an artful combination of outrageous rhetoric and mollifying gestures, Farrakhan has managed to maintain his radical base without undermining his mainstream credibility. His dominance of the radical fringe also has served to limit the appeal of Islamist radicalism among those African Americans most vulnerable to its lure.

Those who welcome Farrakhan’s retreat from the national stage may not have fully considered the implications of his absence. ■

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Fear and Voting in the USA



I LISTENED AS HIS voice cracked. At a major national conference, a colleague from another university—an eminent historian—could barely contain his anguish as he referred to the recent detention bill and its gutting of habeas corpus. A few hours later I listened to two young people who work in the film industry talk about how they fully expected this election to be stolen. Driving through Oakland, Calif., I saw a movie marquee urging people to

demand paper ballots from electronic voting machines so there's a record of their votes. In my classes I have been asking my students why they don't follow the news, and they say, "Why bother—it's all spin and you can't believe it."

As the news media finally begins to turn its attention to the congressional elections, we are getting a focus on the trees, but not the forest. Will Rick Santorum win or lose? Will the Republicans pay for the public's opposition to the war in Iraq? But when you talk to a range of everyday people, it's the forest they're concerned about: Will our system of constitutional democracy survive? And for many, this election is a crucial, desperate test. Because the evidence is that this administration and its allies will do anything—*anything*—to stay in power.

Can you remember a time when people were so terrified (not an overstatement) about the future of the republic? Everywhere they look they see collapse. The legitimacy of the entire infrastructure—Congress, the presidency, the news media, the electoral process—is in question. When can you remember an onslaught of so many books, issued almost weekly now, that seek to save the nation by documenting the incompetence and duplicity of Team Bush and its various arrogant, power-grabbing, anti-democratic adventures? *Fiasco* by Thomas Ricks, *The One Percent Doctrine* by Ron Suskind, *How Bush Rules* by Sidney Blumenthal, *The Looming Tower* by Lawrence Wright, *The Greatest Story Ever Sold* by Frank Rich, *Hubris* by Michael Isikoff and David Corn, the list goes on and on. Even Bob Woodward, sensing a change in the atmosphere (and his fortunes), has produced the mea culpa *State of Denial*. Most of these books have been or are best-sellers. Yet there is a disconnect between acknowledgement (finally!) of the Bush crowd's past deceits, along with the lax journalistic scrutiny of them, and outrage about what they are up to right now, today, in further abrogating our rights.

There have been times when the news media have been

ahead of the public, bringing the civil rights movement or the women's movement into people's living rooms and playing a central role in changing their minds about race and gender relations in the country. Today, still trapped in old new routines—just look at the huge play given to the Foley scandal—they are behind a rather large sector of the population. The news media seems to be reporting on the dots—breakdown of voting machines here, increased carnage in Iraq there—without connecting them. They are missing possibly one of the biggest stories of our time: widespread outrage, despair and fear over the subversion of a host of democratic processes.

People aren't fools. Many know, without using the term "neoliberalism," that the government and the press have been in the hands (and service) of elites for a long time. But

The news media are missing one of the biggest stories of our time: widespread outrage, despair and fear over the subversion of our democracy.

it is the determined and very public turn from neoliberalism to naked autocratic power that has so many of us freaked out. People sense that the country is veering toward some horrid hybrid that exhibits the repression of a fascist state and

the incompetence of a banana republic. They see a defining turn that is shaping what kind of a country the United States will be for the next five, 10, 25 years, and it is a very dispiriting picture.

The 300-pound gorilla in the room is widespread anxiety over the integrity of the election, which is a proxy for the future of the country. Few of us are reassured by the public opinion polls showing Congress, Bush and the Republicans in the ratings toilet, because we've read *Foiled Again* by Mark Crispin Miller, *Was the 2004 Election Stolen?* by *In These Times'* Joel Bleifuss and Steve Freeman, and the articles in *Rolling Stone* by Robert Kennedy Jr. We know about the various Diebold disasters, including the latest in Maryland, in which the supposedly secret computer codes that run the machines appeared in a former legislator's mailbox. A recent poll conducted in Pennsylvania found that nearly two-thirds of the voters there do not fully trust these machines to accurately count their votes.

Yet the possible (probable?) upcoming voting booth malfunctions, the widespread alarm throughout the land about that and all the other Team Bush assaults on the constitution, have not been captured, reported or framed by the news media. In the second week in October, Cory Lidle's plane crash into a New York high rise got three times as much coverage as the looming congressional elections. But the dread is out there, all over the place, holding its breath, waiting to see what happens. ■

LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Make Democrats Earn Black Votes



SINCE THE NEW Deal, the black American electorate has voted overwhelmingly Democratic. Since the 1960s, no Democrat has won the White House without the black vote. Our voting behavior has been so lopsided that it could lead one to question our collective intelligence, or lack of it.

After Lyndon B. Johnson proposed and got the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965, African Americans' commitment to the

Democratic Party made sense. But what has the Democratic Party done for us lately? Are black Americans well served by our slavish devotion to the party? Are our elected officials wise to dance in this one-party minuet? Are we cutting out own throats by cutting our connections to Republicans and third party movements?

Have we sold ourselves too cheap?

Difficult and complex questions, all. Let me propose a suggestion, not a conclusion.

Try this baby out: A couple is in a very heavy and promising relationship, but one of them still isn't getting the goods. If the sex is good, but you've still got issues, what does a mature couple do? Do you split up and assume the next time around will be more fruitful? Does a woman move on, figuring, "Well, maybe the next guy will do a better job of trimming his nose hairs, and make more money to boot?"

Absolutely not! You work it out. Black political leaders can't afford to be feckless or irresolute. They must instead communicate to a flinty Democratic leadership and apply pressure.

We have the power to extract specific policy initiatives and legislation. African Americans will be a key element in the coming Democratic revival in Washington. It's time for them to extract their pound of flesh.

John Conyers, forget about impeachment. Here's one simple, concrete proposal we can shove down the throats of both parties: It's time to revive the call for Statehood for the District of Columbia. The U.S. Census estimates that there are 550,521 residents of Washington, D.C. About 60 percent are African American. That means D.C. has a larger constituency than Wyoming (are you listening, Dick Cheney?). Yet D.C. is muzzled when it comes to having a full-throated voice in the nation's capital.

The District of Columbia does elect a representative, cur-

rently Eleanor Holmes Norton, but has no advocate in the U.S. Senate. If D.C. achieved full statehood, it would elect two senators—most likely black, most likely Democratic. That would be an excellent thing. Sen. Barack Obama needs both the comfort and the competition. U.S. Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.) may well be on his way there—but can you imagine the attention and clout that *four* black senators would draw?

It doesn't hurt that it was Barack Obama who co-sponsored the No Taxation Without Representation Act of 2005. The proposal, which calls for D.C. statehood, notes that D.C. residents are the only Americans who pay federal income taxes and who have fought and died in every American war but are denied voting representation in the Senate.

Senators can corral more power and respect than just about anyone else in either Washington or the heartland. Black folks need that juice.

It won't be easy. No one believes the Republicans will quietly abdicate on statehood. If black leaders really push this one, even Democrats will pri-

vately scoff and admonish us to be realistic.

Is it realistic to think we can continue to disenfranchise a half million voters? By golly, would our founding fathers have tolerated such a scenario? Of course, if our founding fathers knew those people were black, they would have gleefully shut the door on D.C. statehood. Back in the day, only property owners could vote—and blacks and women were chattel (so maybe we shouldn't go there).

Fortunately, the founding fathers' concept is constantly being updated and revised.

D.C. Statehood could be a litmus test for the Democratic Party's loyalty to African American voters. Candidates could be screened on where they stand on the question. Hardly a revolutionary concept, but a worthy one.

The perennial conundrum faced by black political leaders is moving past lofty rhetoric and turning it into actual deeds. Again, not easy.

Only a united political front will get us there. It will call for some serious horse trading. Some will be accused of sectarianism. Black elected officials continually confront this charge because of the nature of their struggle and a lack of resources. They generally represent poorer districts that produce less prosperous war chests.

Still, it's time. Black folks have vainly supported Democratic Party blunders and charades for half a century. After Nov. 7, the marching orders of the Democratic Party must be in tune with the color of its soul. ■

African Americans will be a key element in the coming Democratic revival in Washington. It's time for them to extract their pound of flesh.

THE FIRST STONE

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

The E. coli Free Market



SINCE THE ADVENT of giant industrial enterprises in the late 19th century, corporate capitalism in the United States has been defined by its use of economies of scale to increase profits—profits further enhanced by the die-off of those business-

es unable to compete.

Today, vast corporate enterprises—protected by a legal system that defines corporations as persons endowed with the same constitutional rights as flesh-and-blood people—control whole sectors of the U.S. economy, the three branches of government and the Fourth Estate (the mass media through which the public gets its information). The end result: an interconnected, self-reinforcing system of political power—Corporate America—that operates outside human control. (Of course, the machine is oiled by a class in thrall to their six, seven and eight figure paychecks.)

Concerns about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness aside, the problem with this system is that it is, ultimately, unsustainable. Not only does this corporate behemoth chew up and spit out the people it employs as wage slaves, it gorges on resources of the natural world, disrupting the balance of life on Earth.

And when humans fuck with Mother Nature, she extracts revenge. Look no further than the Arctic's drowning polar bears or the Sahara's creeping deserts.

One could also look closer to home, to the 199 people fell who ill and the three who died after eating spinach contaminated with E. coli 157 bacteria. E. coli 157 was discovered in 1982, and now, on average, is responsible for some 20,000 infec-

tions and 200 deaths per year in the United States. Today, infection from E. coli 157 is the single greatest cause of kidney failure in children.

The origin of the recent outbreak is thought to be cattle that are fed a grain-based diet—more precisely the manure they produce. As researchers at Cornell University discovered in 1998, cows that graze or eat hay, as nature intended, do not produce the pathogen in their stomach.

The real culprit, in this case, is corporate agriculture, which uses economies of scale to mass produce food. And while the consumer may benefit in the form of lower prices, America's agricultural communities bear the brunt of this consolidation. Consider these statistics. According to the Department of Agriculture, in 2001, 5 percent of U.S. farms, both corporate and family, raised 54 percent of the nation's beef and dairy cattle, hogs and poultry. Ten percent of farm owners received 63 percent of the \$27 billion in federal farm subsidies paid out in 2000. Between 1994 and 1996, about 25 percent of hog farmers, 10 percent of grain farmers and 10 percent of dairy farmers went out of business. Of the 50 poorest counties in the United States, all but one are rural and agriculturally dependent. The United States today has more people in prison than people farming. And, thanks to the war on drugs, more of those people in prison come from farm families, as crystal meth does to rural America what crack did to America's inner cities.

Big concentrated farming operations also produce a lot of manure. Each year, factory farms generate some 500 million tons of manure. That waste is held in lagoons and then applied to fields from which it runs off into streams or seeps into underground water supplies, polluting the water with viruses, bacteria,

pesticides, antibiotics, hormones and fertilizers.

Abby Rockefeller, a leading critic of the sewage industry and a proponent of human-scale agriculture, says factory farming has given manure, once a staple of agriculture, a bad name. "The excreta of factory farm animals, produced in vast quantities in the concentration pens and laced with antibiotics to combat the disease created in these horrific conditions, is indeed rightly called 'waste.' Stored in massive lagoons and stinking not of manure but of putrefaction, too repulsive to use, it has become a liability to the water, not a source of fertility that manure has always been."

One of the defining aspects of corporate capitalism is its uncanny ability to profit from adversity. E. coli 157-contaminated spinach presents such an opportunity.

Into the breach stepped the nation's sewage treatment industry, which wants to treat manure the same way it does municipal sewage. In the early '90s, the industry convinced the Environmental Protection Agency to reclassify the sludge produced by nation's sewer plants as a fertilizer to be spread across the land. To better sell this idea to the public, the sludge industry hired a PR firm, which invented the term "biosolids." This attempt at linguistic detoxification succeeded. Today "biosolids" can be found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

So, where others see a mountain of E-coli 157 contaminated, factory farm cow shit, the sludge industry—which lobbies under the National Biosolids Partnership (a joint venture of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, the Water Environment Federation and EPA)—sees opportunity: Tons upon tons of cattle feces waiting to be processed.

Representatives of the sewage treatment industry began calling for

manure to be transformed into biosolids. Alan Rubin, the godfather of biosolids during his tenure at the EPA, lobbied the prominent environmental group National Resources Defense Council, praising the virtues of waste treatment as a solution to E-coli 157.

On September 26, Rubin sent “smoking gun” information on E. coli to Melanie Shepherdson, an NRDC staff attorney, via an e-mail obtained by *In These Times*. She replied, “Thanks for this AI. We put out a press release today related to the E. coli outbreak and I am meeting with the EPA [Office of Science and Technology] folks this afternoon ... and I plan to tie in the E. coli outbreak.”

That press release, issued jointly by the Sierra Club, the Environmental Integrity Project and the NRDC, parroted the sludge industry line: “There are technologies available today that can reduce those pathogens by more than 99 percent.” The technology Sheperdson was referring to is the one that creates biosolid fertilizer out of municipal sewage sludge.

Rubin was ecstatic. He sent Maureen Reilly, a leader of the anti-sludge movement, a gloating e-mail: “THE RIGHT MATERIAL IS FINALLY GOING TO BE REGULATED!!!! Life is good!!!”

Of course the biosolid industry has a public perception problem. Who wants to eat food fertilized by everything that we put down the sewer? As the Sierra Club

described them back in 2002, “Urban sludges are a highly complex, unpredictable biologically active mixture of organic material and human pathogens that contain thousands of industrial waste products, including dozens of carcinogens, hormone disrupting chemicals, toxic metals, dioxins, radionuclides and other persistent bioaccumulative poisons.”

In Monterey County, where the E. coli 157 contaminated spinach was grown, treated sewage water (the liquid remaining once sewage is turned into biosolids) from the Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency (a nice name for a sewage treatment plant) is used to irrigate 12,000 acres of Monterey vegetable fields.

The industry claims that what it calls “recycled water” is free from pathogens. And Monterey Regional’s General Manager Keith Israel says E. coli 157 has never been found in the treatment plant’s wastewater. Up in Seattle, public health authorities are more realistic, but just as dismissive. According to the King County Public Health Web site: “Recycled biosolids may contain E. coli bacteria, but most strains of these bacteria do not cause disease. ... Since [E. coli 157] is rare, only very tiny amounts of this strain would ever make it to sewage treatment plants.”

However, sewage treatment plants fail. And cattle manure enters municipal sewer systems in a variety of ways.

While it is not known whether the fields from which the contaminated spinach came were among the 12,000 irrigated with Monterey’s treated sewage water, E-coli 157 contamination from such a source is not out of the question.

In an October 14 story titled “E. Coli’s Spread Is Still A Mystery,” the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Alejandro Castillo, a Texas A&M professor of food microbiology, as saying he thought it likely that “something, such as the irrigation system, magnified the effect” spreading the E.coli 157 from spinach leaf to spinach leaf.

In the end, Corporate America provides us with our choice of poison: Municipal sewage sludge or shit from factory farms.

Lost in the debate is the fact that the real solution lies in going back to a more nature-friendly, human-scale form of agriculture. The kind of agriculture that can support rural communities and provide healthy food for your table. But, hey, where is the corporate profit in that? ■

Requiem

By Kurt Vonnegut

The crucified planet Earth,
should it find a voice
and a sense of irony,
might now well say
o our abuse of it,
“Forgive them, Father,
They know not what they do.”

The irony would be
that we know what
we are doing.

When the last living thing
has died on account of us,
how poetical it would be
if Earth could say,
in a voice floating up
perhaps
from the floor
of the Grand Canyon,
“It is done.”

This poem by In These Times Senior Editor Kurt Vonnegut was published in his 2005 best seller, A Man Without A Country (Seven Stories Press).



Workers at a Earthbound Organic Farm/Natural Selection Foods farm in San Juan Bautista, Calif.

DAVID PAUL MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES

TASER International Inc. maintains that its stun-guns are “changing the world and saving lives everyday.” There is no question that they changed Jack Wilson’s life. On Aug. 4, in Lafayette, Colo., policemen on a stakeout approached Jack’s son Ryan as he entered a field of a dozen young marijuana plants. When Ryan took off running, officer John Harris pursued the 22-year-old for a half-mile and then shot him once with an X-26 Taser. Ryan fell to the ground and began to convulse. The officer attempted cardiopulmonary resuscitation, but Ryan died.

According to his family and friends, Ryan was in very good physical shape. The county coroner found no evidence of alcohol or drugs in his system and ruled that Ryan’s death could be attributed to the Taser shock, physical exertion from the chase and the fact that one of his heart arteries was unusually small.

In October, an internal investigation cleared Officer Harris of any wrongdoing and concluded that he had used appropriate force.

Wilson says that while his son had had brushes with the law as a juvenile and struggled financially, he was a gentle and sensitive young man who always looked out for his disabled younger brother’s welfare, and was trying to better his job prospects by becoming a plumber’s apprentice.

“Ryan was not a defiant kid,” says his father. “I don’t understand why the cop would chase him for a half-mile, and then ‘Tase’ him while he had an elevated heart rate. If [the officer] hadn’t done that, we know that he would still be alive today.”

Ryan is one of nearly 200 people who have died in the last five years after being shot by a Taser stun gun. In June, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it would review these deaths.

Over the same period, Taser has developed a near-monopoly in the market for non-lethal weaponry. Increasingly, law enforcement officials use such weapons to subdue society’s most vulnerable members: prisoners, drug addicts and the mentally ill, along with “passive resisters,” like the protesters demonstrating against Florida Governor Jeb Bush’s attendance of a Rick Santorum fundraiser in Pittsburgh on Oct. 9. (See sidebar, “Passive Resisters.”)

Taser has built this monopoly through influence peddling, savvy public relations and by hiring former law enforcement and military officers—including one-time Homeland Security chief hopeful, Bernard Kerik. And now that questions are being raised about the safety of Taser weaponry, the company is fighting back with legal and marketing campaigns.

Birth of a Taser

In 1974, a NASA scientist named Jack Cover invented the first stun gun, which he named the TASER, or “Thomas A. Swift Electric Rifle,” after Tom Swift, a fictional young inventor who was

the hero of a series of early 20th century adventure novels. Because it relied on gunpowder, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms classified Tasers as registered firearms.

That changed in the early ’90s. According to Taser’s corporate creation story, co-founder Rick Smith became interested in the device after friends of his “were brutally murdered by an angry motorist.” Smith contacted Cover in the hopes of bringing the Taser as a self-defense weapon to a larger market. In 1993, with money from Smith’s brother Tom, they created Air Taser Inc., which would later become Taser International Inc. When Tasers were re-engineered to work with a nitrogen propellant rather than gunpowder, the weapon was no longer categorized as a firearm. The Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department adopted the guns, but they were not widely embraced by other departments.

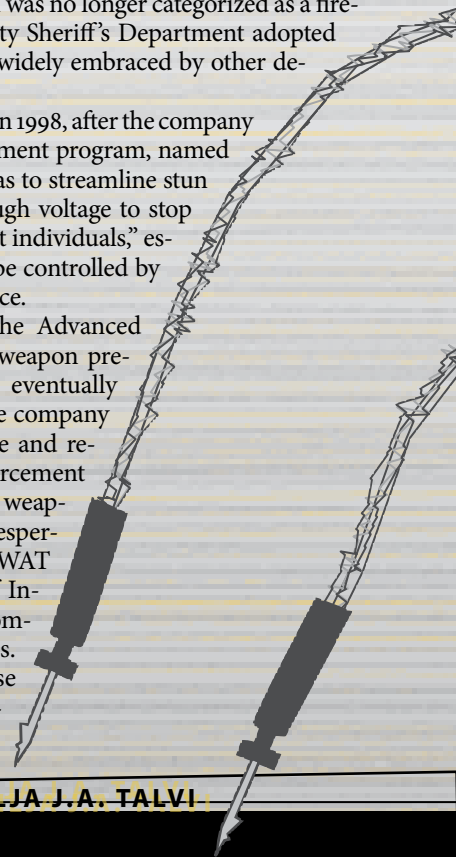
Taser’s fortunes improved in 1998, after the company embarked on a new development program, named “Project Stealth.” The goal was to streamline stun gun design and deliver enough voltage to stop “extremely combative, violent individuals,” especially those who couldn’t be controlled by non-lethal chemicals like mace.

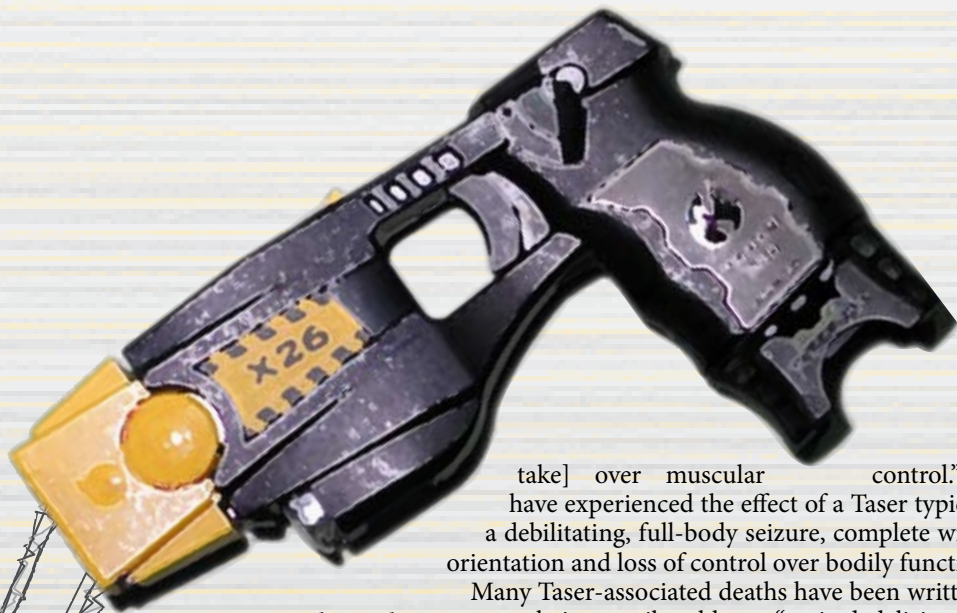
Out of Project Stealth, the Advanced Taser was born. When the weapon premiered in 2000—a model eventually redesigned as the M-26—the company brought on a cadre of active and retired military and law enforcement personnel to vouch for the weapon’s efficacy. The new spokespersons ranged from Arizona SWAT members to a former Chief Instructor of hand-to-hand combat for the U.S. Marine Corps.

Taser began to showcase the Advanced Taser at technology-related conventions

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

STUNNING REVELATIONS





take] over muscular control.” People who have experienced the effect of a Taser typically liken it to a debilitating, full-body seizure, complete with mental disorientation and loss of control over bodily functions.

Many Taser-associated deaths have been written up by coroners as being attributable to “excited delirium,” a condition that includes frenzied or aggressive behavior, rapid heart rate and aggravating factors related to an acute mental state and/or drug-related psychosis. When such suspects are stunned, especially while already being held down or hogtied, deaths seem to occur after a period of “sudden tranquility,” as Taser explains in its CD-ROM training material entitled, “Sudden Custody

Death: Who’s Right and Who’s Wrong.” In that same material, the company warns officers to “try to minimize the appearance of mishandling suspects.”

Taser did not respond to requests for an interview. But its press and business-related statements have consistently echoed the company’s official position: “TASER devices use proprietary technology to quickly incapacitate dangerous, combative or high-risk subjects who pose a risk to law enforcement officers, innocent citizens or themselves.”

Another brochure, specifically designed for

law enforcement, clearly states that the X26 has “no after effects.”

Ryan Wilson’s family can attest otherwise, as can many others.



Ryan Wilson (L), Officer John Harris (R) who Tased Wilson.

through-
out North America
and Europe, billing it as a
non-lethal weapon that could
take down even the toughest
adversary. Soon to be among
those “dangerous” opponents
were the protesters
assembling in Philadelphia
for the 2000 Republican
National Convention.

By the following year,
750 law enforcement
agencies had either tested or
deployed the weapon. Today,
more than 9,500 law enforcement,
correctional and military
agencies in 43 countries use Taser
weaponry. In the past eight years,
more than 184,000 Tasers have been
sold to law enforcement agencies,
with another 115,000 to citizens in
the 43 states where it is legal to
possess a stun gun.

When the electricity hits

Taser’s stun guns are designed to shoot a maximum of 50,000 volts into a person’s body through two compressed nitrogen-fueled probes, thereby disrupting the target’s electromuscular system. The probes are connected to the Taser gun by insulated wires, and can deliver repeat shocks in quick succession. The probes can pierce clothing and skin from a distance or be directly applied to a person’s body—a process known as “dry stunning”—for an ostensibly less-incapacitating, cattle-prod effect.

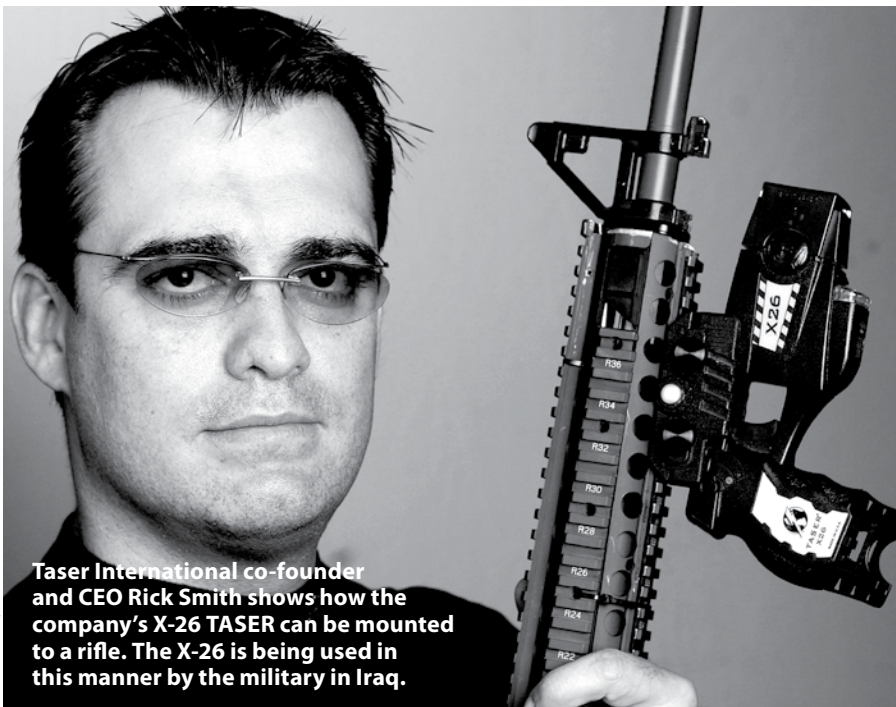
“The impetus for Tasers came from the often community-led search for ‘less-than-lethal’ police weapons,” explains Norm Stamper, former chief of the Seattle Police Department and author of *Breaking Rank*. “[There were] too many questionable or bad police shootings, and cops saying, correctly, that there are many ambiguous situations where a moment’s hesitation could lead to their own deaths or the death of an innocent other.”

According to Taser’s promotional materials, its stun guns are designed to “temporarily override the nervous system [and

Casualties and cruelties

In the span of three months—July, August and September—Wilson’s Taser-related death was only one among several. Larry Noles, 52, died after being stunned three times on his body (and finally on his neck) after walking around naked and “behaving erratically.” An autopsy found no drugs or alcohol in his system. Mark L. Lee, 30, was suffering from an inoperable brain tumor and having a seizure when a Rochester, N.Y., police officer stunned him. In Cookeville, Ala., 31-year-old Jason Dockery was stunned because police maintain he was being combative while on hallucinogenic mushrooms. Family members believe he was having an aneurysm. And Nickolos Cyrus, a 29-year-old man diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, was shocked 12 times with a Taser stun gun after a Mukwonago, Wis., police officer caught him trespassing on a home under construction. An inquest jury has already ruled that the officer who shot Cyrus—who was delusional and naked from the waist down when he was stunned—was within his rights to act as he did.

Although the company spins it otherwise, Taser-associated



Taser International co-founder and CEO Rick Smith shows how the company's X-26 TASER can be mounted to a rifle. The X-26 is being used in this manner by the military in Iraq.

deaths are definitely on the rise. In 2001, Amnesty International documented three Taser-associated deaths. The number has steadily increased each year, peaking at 61 in 2005. So far almost 50 deaths have occurred in 2006, for an approximate total of 200 deaths in the last five years.

Amnesty International and other human rights groups have also drawn attention to the use of Tasers on captive populations in hospitals, jails and prisons.

In fact, the first field tests relating to the

efficacy of the "Advanced Taser" model in North America were conducted on incarcerated men. In December 1999, the weapon was used, with "success," against a Clackamas County (Ore.) Jail inmate. The following year, the first-ever Canadian use of an Advanced Taser was by the Victoria Police, on an inmate in psychiatric lockdown. Since that time, Taser deployment in jails and prisons has become increasingly commonplace, raising concerns about violations of 8th Amendment pro-

hibitions against cruel and unusual punishment.

This summer, the ACLU of Colorado filed a class action suit on behalf of prisoners in the Garfield County Jail, where jail staff have allegedly used Tasers and electroshock belts, restraint chairs, pepper spray and pepperball guns as methods of torture. According to Mark Silverstein, legal director for ACLU of Colorado, inmates have told him that Tasers are pulled out and "displayed" by officers on a daily basis, either as a form of intimidation and threat compliance, or to shock the inmates for disobeying orders.

A recent report from the ACLU's National Prison Project (NPP), "Abandoned and Abused: Orleans Parish Prisoners in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina," concerns the plight of the estimated 6,500 New Orleans prisoners left to fend for themselves in the days after the monumental New Orleans flood. The NPP's Tom Jawetz says that the organization has been looking into abuses at Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) since 1999, but that the incidents that took place in jails and prisons in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina were unprecedented.

Take the case of New Orleans resident Ivy Gisclair. Held at OPP for unpaid parking tickets, Gisclair was about to be released on his own recognizance when Hurricane Katrina hit. After languishing with thousands of other prisoners in a flooded jail, Gisclair was sent to the Bossier Parish Maximum Security Prison. Once

Passive Resisters

Things turned ugly at an Oct. 9 protest in Pittsburgh, when demonstrators converged to protest Florida Governor Jeb Bush's attendance at a fundraiser for Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) Protesters cornered Bush, chanting, "We don't want you here." Though the protesters were entirely nonviolent, police responded by using Tasers on two of them.

While Taser's materials have always focused on the need for "less-than-lethal" weapons to take down even the most violent, intoxicated and determined of assailants, the company also advocates use of their weapons on far less dangerous populations.

"Crowd Control: Passive Resisters," a CD-ROM Taser distributed to law

enforcement agencies, intersperses footage of protesters at various demonstrations with instruction on how Taser stun gun probes can be used "to separate linked protesters."

The CD explains that probes delivering the 50,000 volts can be taped to the backs of "subjects," ostensibly to prevent removal by the protesters. The stun guns can also be used directly against pressure points on the skin (in "drive mode") to "gain access to hands when subjects are not linked to others."

The materials also include suggestions on how to shape department policy if your local police department is currently prohibited from using Tasers on passive resisters. The "factors for affecting policy



changes" include working on the "perception" of the stun guns; "defensibility" of the use of the weapons; and seeking "supervisory approval."

there, Gisclair apparently had the nerve to inquire about being held past his release date. Gisclair has testified that he was then restrained and stunned repeatedly with a Taser, before being thrown, naked and unconscious, into solitary confinement.

"I can't imagine any justification for that," says Jawetz. "[Prison guards] were kicking, beating and 'Tasing' him until

the Research Forum, an influential police research and advocacy group, recommended that law enforcement only be allowed to use Tasers on people aggressively resisting arrest. The organization also recommended that law enforcement officers needed to step back and evaluate the condition of suspects after they had been shocked once. Similar recommen-

Fogg, who also serves on the board of Amnesty International USA, says that too many members of law enforcement seem to be using them as compliance mechanisms. "It's something along the lines of, 'If I don't like you, I can torture you,'" he says.

Some law enforcement agencies have already implemented careful use policies, including the San Francisco Sheriff's Depart-

'We are seeing far too many cases where Tasers are not being used for their intended purposes. And many of these cases don't end up getting reported or properly investigated.'

he lost consciousness. A line was crossed that should never have been crossed."

In March, Reuben Heath, a handcuffed and subdued Montana inmate, was shocked while lying prone in his bed. The deputy involved—a one-time candidate for sheriff—now faces felony charges.

Gisclair and Heath are among the inmates who have survived in-custody incidents involving the abuse of Tasers. Others haven't been as fortunate. This year alone, those who have died in custody in the aftermath of being stunned by Tasers include Arapahoe County Jail (Colorado) inmate Raul Gallegos-Reyes, 34, who was strapped to a restraint chair and stunned; Jerry Preyer, 45, who suffered from a severe mental illness in an Escambia County, Fla., jail and was shocked twice by a Taser; and Karl Marshall, 32, who died in Kansas City police custody two hours after he was stunned with PCP and crack cocaine in his system.

Appropriate uses

"We are seeing far too many cases where Tasers are not being used for their intended purposes," says Sheley Secrest, president of NAACP Seattle. "And many of these cases don't end up getting reported or properly investigated because people are so humiliated by the experience."

Former U.S. Marshal Matthew Fogg, a long-time SWAT specialist and vice president of Blacks in Government, says that if stun guns are going to be used by law enforcement, training on their use should be extensive, and that the weapons should also be placed high up on what police officers call the "use-of-force continuum."

Fogg isn't alone in calling for such measures. In October 2005, the Police Execu-

tive Research Forum, an influential police research and advocacy group, recommended that law enforcement only be allowed to use Tasers on people aggressively resisting arrest. The organization also recommended that law enforcement officers needed to step back and evaluate the condition of suspects after they had been shocked once. Similar recommen-

dations were included in an April 2005 report from the International Association of Chiefs of Police. That report also urged police departments to evaluate whether certain vulnerable groups—including the mentally ill—should be excluded altogether from being shot with Tasers. Although Fogg's organization has called for an outright ban of Tasers until further research can be conducted, Fogg says that he knows responsible members of law enforcement are perfectly capable of using the weapons effectively. Officers who are willing to put their lives on the line for the sake of the community, he emphasizes, must be given the tools and training to be able to minimize harm to themselves and to others.

ment, which selectively hands out Tasers to carefully trained deputies. The department also prohibits use of Tasers on subjects already "under control." According to Sheriff Michael Hennessey, deputies are not allowed to use stun guns in response to minor ineffectual threats, as a form of punishment, or on juveniles or pregnant women. Within the department, stun guns are purposely set to turn off after five seconds. Additionally, every use of the weapon in a jail facility must be videotaped.

"I authorize Tasers to be used on people who are at high risk of hurting themselves or deputies," Sheriff Hennessey emphasizes. "Without options like these, the inmate and the deputies are much more likely to get seriously hurt."

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community's viewpoints.

But when stun guns are used on people who don't fit that criteria, Secrest says, the public should be asking serious questions about the efficacy of Taser use, particularly because of the emotional trauma related to Taser-related take-downs.

"When a person comes into our office after they've been [Tased], it's not as much the physical pain they talk about as much as the humiliation, the disrespect," she says. "The people [who are stunned by these guns] talk about not being able to move, and thinking that they were going to die."

As for actual Taser-associated deaths, Secrest believes that they should be investigated just as thoroughly as deaths involving firearms. Instead, Taser injuries and deaths are typically justified because officers report that the suspect was resisting an arrest.

"That's the magic word: 'resisted,'" says Secrest. "Any kind of police oversight investigation tends to end right there."

Capitalizing on 9/11

Despite these concerns, Taser International Inc. has thrived. The 9/11 terrorist attacks sent the company's profits soaring. Many domestic and international airlines—as well a variety of major law enforcement agencies—were eager to acquire a new arsenal of weapons. Homeland Security money flooded into both state and federal-level departments, many of which were gung-ho to acquire a new arsenal of high-tech gadgets.

In 2002, Taser brought on former New York police commissioner Bernard Kerik as the company's director. Kerik had attained popularity in the wake of 9/11 as a law-and-order-minded hero; the company had seemingly picked one of the best spokespersons imaginable.

With Kerik's help, company's profits grew to \$68 million in 2004, up from just under \$7 million in 2001, and stockhold-



Virginia Allen cries while embracing Monique van Rhyn during a funeral visitation for Ryan Wilson. Allen was Wilson's girlfriend, and van Rhyn was his stepmother.

ers were able to cash in, including the Smith family, who raked in \$91.5 million in just one fiscal quarter in 2004.

Unbeknownst to most stockholders, however, sales have been helped along by police officers who have received payments and/or stock options from Taser to serve as instructors and trainers. (The exact number of officers on the payroll is unknown because the company declines to identify active-duty officers who have received stock options.)

The recruitment of law enforcement has been crucial to fostering market penetration. For instance, Sgt. Jim Halsted of the Chandler, Ariz., Police Department, joined Taser President Rick Smith in making a presentation to the Chandler city council in March 2003. He made the case for arming the entire police patrol squad with M-26 Tasers. According to the Associated Press, Halsted said, "No deaths are

attributed to the M-26 at all."

The council approved a \$193,000 deal later that day.

As it turned out, Halsted was already being rewarded with Taser stock options as a member of the company's "Master Instructor Board." Two months after the sale, Halsted became Taser's Southwest regional sales manager.


In addition, Taser has developed a potent gimmick to sell its futuristic line of weapons. In 2003, Taser premiered the X-26. According to Taser's promotional materials, the X-26 features an enhanced dataport to help "save officer's careers from false allegations" by recording discharge date and time, number and length and date of discharges, and the optional ability to record the event with the Taser webcam. The X-26 also boasts a more powerful incapacitation rating of 105 "Muscular Disruption Units", up from 100 MDU's for the M-26.

The X-26 is apparently far more pleasing to the eye. As Taser spokesperson Steve Tuttle told a law enforcement trade journal, "It's a much sexier-looking product."

Lawsuits jolt Taser

As increasing numbers of police departments obtained Taser stun guns, the weapons started to be deployed against civilians with greater frequency.

Many of the civilian Taser-associated incidents have resulted in lawsuits, most of which have either been dismissed or



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settled out of court. But there have been a few exceptions.

In late September, Kevin Alexander, 29, was awarded \$82,500 to settle an excessive force federal lawsuit after being shocked 17 times with a Taser by a New Orleans Parish police officer. The department's explanation: the shocks were intended to make him cough up drugs he had allegedly swallowed.

One recently settled Colorado case involved Christopher Nielsen, 37, who was "acting strangely" and was not responsive to police orders after he crashed his car. For his disobedience, he was stunned five times. When it was revealed that Nielsen was suffering from seizures, the county settled the case for \$90,000.

An Akron, Ohio, man also recently accepted a \$35,000 city settlement. One day in May 2005, he had gone into diabetic shock and police found him slumped over his steering wheel. Two officers proceeded to physically beat, Mace and Taser him after he did not respond to orders to get out of the car.

Taser's lack of response to the misuse of the company's weapons is troubling. The company relentlessly puts a positive spin on Taser use, most recently with a "The Truth is Undeniable" Web ad campaign, which contrasts mock courtroom scenes with the fictionalized, violent antics of civilians that prompt police to stun them.

The campaign involves print ads, direct mail DVDs and online commercials that "draw attention to a rampant problem in

this country: false allegations against law enforcement officers," according to Steve Ward, Taser's vice president of marketing.

"We're going to win"

The lawsuits have scared off some investors, making Taser's stock extremely volatile over the years. But press coverage of the company this past summer largely centered around Taser's "successes" in the courtroom. In addition to settling a \$21.8 million shareholder lawsuit revolving around allegations that the company had exaggerated the safety of their product (they admitted no wrongdoing), Taser has triumphed in more than 20 liability dismissals and judgments in favor of the company. And the company's finances are on the upswing: Third-quarter 2006 revenues increased nearly 60 percent.

Regardless, CEO Rick Smith claims his company is target of a witchhunt. "We're waiting for people to dunk me in water and see if I float," is how he put it during a March 2005 debate with William Schulz, the executive director of Amnesty International USA.

Last year, with 40 new lawsuits filed against it, Taser dedicated \$7 million in its budget to defending the company's reputation and "brand equity." The company has also gone on the offense, hiring two full-time, in-house litigators.

At one point, Taser hinted that it might sue Amnesty International for taking a critical position regarding Taser-associated injuries and deaths. In November

2004 Smith announced that the company's legal team had begun a "comprehensive review of AI's disparaging and unsupported public statements [to] advise me as to various means to protect our company's good name."

In one of the company's brashest legal maneuvers to date, Taser sued Gannett Newspapers for libel in 2005. The lawsuit alleged *USA Today* "sensationalized" the power of Taser guns by inaccurately reporting that the electrical output of the gun was more than 100 times that of the electric chair. This past January, a judge threw the case out, saying that the error in the article was not malicious, and that the story was protected by the First Amendment.

The company remains unwavering and aggressively protective, even as Taser-associated deaths mount each month. As Smith told the Associated Press in February, "If you're coming to sue Taser, bring your game face, strap it on and let's go. We're gonna win."

From Jack Wilson's standpoint, citizens are the real losers. His son Ryan lost his life in a situation that could have been handled any number of other ways, and no amount of legal posturing can bring Ryan back.

"I still can't believe my son is gone," he says. "The fact is that these Tasers can be lethal. No matter how they're categorized, Tasers shouldn't be treated as toys." ■

Thanks to the Nation Institute's Investigative Fund for research support, and to David Burnett for research assistance.

Going after the civilian market

Police officers aren't the only people toting Tasers.

For a decade, Taser stun guns have been available to civilian buyers in 43 states. And in the last couple of years, the company has stepped up its marketing to make sure that the \$999 Taser X-26C Citizen Defense System becomes the home defense weapon of choice. Toward that end, Taser has demonstrated the civilian model in cities across the country.

The X-26C doesn't differ significantly from the one used by law enforcement. Instead of a 21-foot range, the civilian model has a 15-foot range. It can shock someone for up to 30 seconds.

Early concerns about civilian misuse were pooh-poohed by Taser executives.

Douglas Cote, manager of citizen sales, told the AP: "[W]e make the device. We don't tell everybody how to use it."

They certainly don't. In August, two men armed with Tasers robbed two women outside of San Antonio shopping malls. In Pasadena, a man appropriately named the "Taser Bandit" is on the loose after robbing a bank in October, armed only with his stun gun.

In June, Clark David Thomas, 43, kidnapped his 21-year-old estranged wife, and held her captive in a North Charleston, S.C., hotel room for two days. Thomas bound the woman and then repeatedly stunned her with his Taser until she was able to make an escape.

And, it appears violent predators have caught on to a new way to torture



TASER can help you fight off real-world bad guys

their prey. In August, in Modesto, Calif., a serial rapist kidnapped and brutally raped a 27-year-old woman after stunning her with a Taser.

What We Learn

When We Learn About Economics

Is a little economics a dangerous thing?

BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES

THERE'S A CASE TO be made that the single most intellectually and politically influential neighborhood in the United States is Chicago's Hyde Park. Integrated, affluent and quiet, the 1.6 square-mile enclave on the city's south side is like a tiny company town, where the company happens to be the august, gothic, eminently serious University of Chicago. Students at the U. of C. sell T-shirts that read "Where Fun Goes To Die," and the same could be said of the neighborhood, which until very recently had a bookstore-to-bar ratio of 5:2.

But the university is probably best known for the school of economic thought it has produced. When the Chicago School first emerged in the '50s, its zealous support of free markets and critique of government intervention were considered reactionary and extreme. Among elites in economics and politics the consensus was, as John Maynard Keynes had argued, that capital-

ism could only function with regular and robust government management. Indeed, so total was this consensus that in 1971 Richard Nixon announced a plan to impose wage and price caps in order to curb inflation, declaring, "We are all Keynesians now." Just 25 years later, however, Bill Clinton, the first Democratic president to be re-elected since FDR, announced that the "era of big government is over." He might as well have said, "We are all Chicagoans now."

Neoclassical economics, as the Chicago School of thought is now called, has become an international elite consensus, one that provides the foundation for the entire global political economy. In the United States, young members of the middle and upper-middle class first learn its precepts in the academy. Polls routinely show that economists and the general public have widely divergent views on the economy, but among the well-educated that gap is far narrower. A 2001 study published in

the U. of C.'s *Journal of Law and Economics* showed that those with college degrees are more likely to subscribe to the views of neoclassical economists than the general public. This isn't surprising. At elite colleges, economics is consistently one of the most popular majors (nearly a quarter of undergrads at the U. of C.), and across all schools, introductory economics, often a required course, has been one of the 10 most popular classes for the last 30 years. Graduate schools—from business to public policy to political science to, most notably, law—are now suffused with economic paradigms for understanding not only financial interactions but all human behavior.

Conservatives have long critiqued academia for the ways professors use their position to indoctrinate students with left-wing ideology, but the left has largely ignored the political impact of the way people learn economics, though its influence is likely far more profound. So in

order to find out just what students learn when they learn economics, I headed down to Hyde Park, where the University generously let me enroll in “Principles of Macroeconomics” for a quarter.

ALLEN SANDERSON, 62, has been teaching the intro macro and micro courses at the university for the last 18 years and though he initially appears somewhat grave and understated, it is quickly apparent that he is a master of technique. His lectures skip along, propelled by a series of wry, contrarian quips, each punctuated with a visual rimshot: a slight pause and a thrust jaw. “When you hear, ‘The economics department at U. of C.,’ one’s free association is ‘pro-business, greedy bastards,’” says Sanderson (pause, jaw thrust) in the first lecture. “I tend to think that’s not the case. Greedy bastards we may be, but we’re not pro-business. Republicans tend to be very pro-business. It’s a genetic defect of Republicans. Democrats tend to be anti-business, another genetic defect. We are not anti-business; we are not pro-business. We are pro-choice in the ultimate sense of pro-market. Based on empirical work, macro and micro solutions are probably better worked out by private markets than government intervention.”

His second lecture begins with a thought experiment. Noting that there are only 26 spots left in the class for the 52 students who would still like to enroll, he asks, “How should we figure out who gets to go into the class?” The students—eager, studious and serious—shoot their hands up and offer a variety of ideas: Seniority? First-come, first-serve? Ask prospective students to write an essay? It takes about a minute for a confident young man to give the answer Sanderson’s looking for: “auction by price.”

“As a reasonable indication of how much you want something, how much you’re willing to pay is a pretty good means of measuring,” Sanderson says. “A lot of things in economics will turn in one way or another on price. Price has a lot going for it as a generalized expression of commitment. The thing we don’t like about, say, first-come, first-serve, is that if someone really wants to get in, they could start lining up now. But the problem is that I don’t really benefit from your

expression of interest, whereas if you pay me, we both are benefiting.”

This makes sense, but I’m uneasy. Wouldn’t giving a place in class to the highest bidder result in the rich students getting in and the financial-aid kids being left out? And since people don’t have equal amounts of money to spend, how good a measure of desire is price in this situation?

“Random and first-come have the benefit of being fair,” Sanderson says, anticipating the objection. “There’s an interesting dichotomy of fair vs. efficient.” But, Sanderson asks, what, really, is fair? If we think some kind of random lottery drawing was a fair way of getting into the class, would that be a fair way of awarding grades? “Obviously not!” I think. Why? Sanderson lets us mull that over, but the answer floats up immediately: because I work *hard* for my grades and I deserve them. In other words, those who work hard and get good grades are like those who work hard and have a lot of money to win spots that are auctioned by price.

“We’re trying to balance these things out,” Sanderson continues. “What’s efficient? What’s fair? Often they are in tension.”

EFFICIENCY IS THE Chicago School’s defining value. The free market economists who came before—most notably Austrian Friedrich Hayek—offered a philosophical critique of the political consequences of state regulation and control of the economy. But Milton Friedman, his colleague George Stigler and the entire Chicago School focused on the actual *economic* problems of state control, namely, inefficiency. They rejected Keynes’ contention that markets function best with routine government intervention and instead harkened back to Adam Smith’s classical conceptions of equilibrium. Chicago School theories gained popularity when global capitalism hit a major funk in the ’70s—a period of slow growth and high inflation. Friedman argued, plausibly, that it was too much government that had caused the problems.

What may seem a subtle rhetorical shift had major consequences. It transformed what had been conservatism’s *moral* argument about capitalism bestowing the

most benefits on those who worked the hardest—and the inherent injustice of a coercive state forcibly redistributing capital—into a *technical* argument about the inefficiencies associated with non-free-market solutions and the perverse incentives that made any social programs destined to fail. Thus, arguments about the way the world *should be* were converted into assertions about how the world *actually was*. Or, to put in terms that economists favor, normative arguments became positive ones.

In the textbook Sanderson uses, author Michael Parkin defines the difference this way: positive statements are about “what is” and they “might be right or wrong.” Normative statements are about “what ought to be” and because they depend on values, they can’t be tested. “Be on the lookout,” Parkin warns, “for normative propositions dressed up as positive propositions.”

Parkin’s warning, however, turns out to be surprisingly difficult to heed. Neoclassical economics smuggles a great many normative wares underneath its positive trenchcoat, both in its assumptions about how humans operate—as individuals rationally maximizing their utility—and its implied preference for “markets in everything.” Because neoclassical economics always presents itself as a value-neutral description of the world, its ideological commitments can be adopted by those who learn it without any recognition that they *are* ideological. This is the source of some very spirited debate within the field itself. A growing global movement of “heterodox” economists has criticized the ideological confines and blindspots of the neoclassical approach. As Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz put it, the dominance of the neoclassical model is a “triumph of ideology over science.”

In the popular press, however, such dissent is almost entirely absent. When protesters disrupted the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, WTO officials, mainstream economists and the *New York Times*’ Thomas Friedman ignored the fact that in much of the world neoclassical reforms had failed to produce the promised growth. Friedman went so far as to dismiss the protesters as “flat-earthers.” For Thomas Friedman (and, indeed, Allen Sander-

son), people can't "disagree" with neo-classical economics. They can only fail to understand it.

AS A STANDARD part of his first lecture in both his macro and micro-economics class, Sanderson reads a David Barry quote: "Democrats seem to be basically nicer people, but they have demonstrated the management skills of celery. Republicans would know how to fix your tire, but they wouldn't stop."

In the wake of Katrina and Iraq, this might seem quaint, but what Sanderson is doing makes sense. Temperamentally, it reflects his own, libertarian-inflected, "pox-on-both-their-houses" centrism, but his insistence on political equanimity is also crucial to his pedagogical success. Students are most likely to have been exposed to macroeconomic issues within the context of political debates about free trade, the size of the budget deficit, tax rates, etc. In order to assure students that they aren't just learning a set of political talking points, he must go out of his way to hammer home the fact that what he's offering is unbiased and nonpartisan: positive not normative, facts not opinion. "I don't have a dog in this fight," Sanderson tells the students. So every joke about George Bush is followed by a joke about Hillary Clinton, every shot at a Democrat quickly balanced by a shot at Republicans.

The effect, intentional or not, is that Sanderson appears to represent the exact

center of the political spectrum, and that can leave students with a strange perception of just where the center lies. During a discussion of flat, progressive and regressive tax structures, a student asked about the argument against the flat tax. "What's wrong with the flat rate tax?" Sanderson replies. "Well, the bad thing was that Steve Forbes was the spokesman. It's not obvious that there's that much wrong with it. There's sort of a movement out there

percentage of their income in taxes is deeply embedded in American political culture, even during years of Republican domination. The students sitting around me, I start to fear, are going to walk out of the lecture thinking that the flat tax is a sensible, centrist idea. And as thousands of students pass through classes like Sanderson's every year, I worry that it will become a sensible, centrist idea.

Sanderson's politics aren't one-dimen-

'A little economics can be a dangerous thing,' warned a friend. 'An intro econ course is necessarily going to be superficial. You deal with highly stylized models that are robbed of context.'

for a flat rate tax. Because it strikes some people: What could be fairer than that? It also doesn't distort incentives. It has a lot going for it."

It's true that there's "sort of a movement" for a flat tax, but those in favor of what would be the single most regressive redistribution of wealth in American history are not located in the political center. Far-right Republicans like former House Majority Leader Dick Armey have long pushed the idea, as have conservative think tanks like American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation. But politically, it's a non-starter. The basic notion of fairness that those who get more out of our economy should pay a greater

sional, and he certainly isn't a propagandist. But the fact remains that he has the predispositions of someone who "learned economics from Milton Friedman." First, there's a tendency to see trade-offs between equity and efficiency even where they might not exist. Dean Baker, an economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research and author of the book *The Conservative Nanny State*, points out that policies can be both fairer and more efficient. For instance, Baker told me, "it is not clear that a flat tax is more efficient than a progressive income tax. This is entirely an empirical question. It is entirely possible that taxing middle-income workers and Bill Gates at a 25 percent rate will create more distortions than taxing middle-income workers at a 15 percent rate and Bill Gates at a 40 percent rate. ... They want liberals to say that we care about fairness and they care about efficiency. This is crap. They find ways to justify redistributing income upward and proclaim it to be efficient. The reality is it is not fair and generally not efficient either."

But when equity and efficiency trade-offs do arise, economists like Sanderson are systematically biased in favor of efficiency because *that's what they are experts on*. Efficiency they can measure and analyze. Fairness? That's the turf of philosophers and politicians. This tendency is most pronounced in discussions of economic growth, and how the benefits of that growth should be distributed. Sanderson paraphrases his Nobel Laureate colleague Bob Lucas, who says that "once you start to think about the benefits of high growth, it's hard

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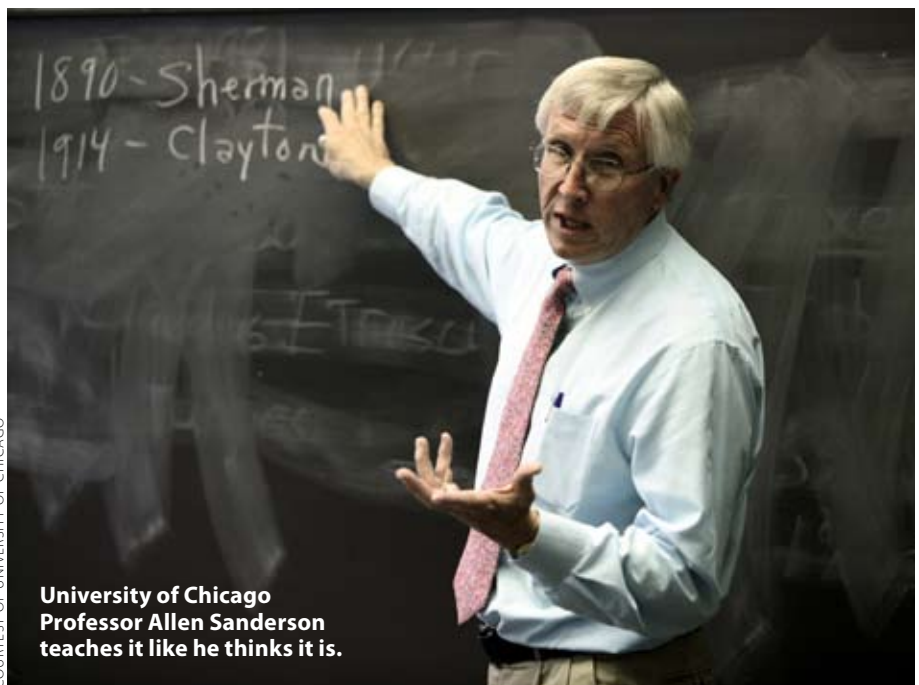


to think about anything else.” In other words, first worry about how best to grow the pie, then how to slice it up. Let efficiency trump equity, create wealth, and then you can use the extra wealth you’ve created to alleviate inequality.

This makes a certain amount of sense. But when this rhetoric comes to dominate our politics, the problem of inequality is never addressed. *Now* is always the time for growing, *later* is always the time to address concerns about equity. The result is predictable: In countries that have adopted the neoclassical policy prescriptions (including the United States), there has been an ever-widening gap between rich and poor.

AS TAUGHT BY Sanderson, economics is a satisfyingly neat machine: complicated enough to warrant curiosity and discovery, but not so complicated as to bewilder. Like a bicycle, input matches output (wind the crank and the wheel moves), and once you’ve got the basics of the model down, everything seems to make sense. As the weeks go by, and I trek down to Hyde Park, fight for a parking space and slip in between the hundred-plus students into the lecture hall, I come to love the class. The more reading I do, the more sense the op-eds in the *Wall Street Journal* make. The NPR program “Marketplace” becomes interesting. I even know what exactly the Fed rate *is*. A part of the world that was blurry and obscure begins to come into focus. My classmates seem to feel the same way. “I never thought I’d be interested in economics,” one sophomore told me. “Sanderson convinced me I was.”

The simple models have an explanatory power that is thrilling. Once you’ve grasped the aggregate supply/aggregate demand model, you understand *why* stimulating demand may lead, in the short run, to growth, but will also produce inflation. But the content of that understanding turns out to be a bit thin. Inflation happens because, well, that’s where the lines intersect. “A little economics can be a dangerous thing,” a friend working on her Ph.D in public policy at the U. of C. told me. “An intro econ course is necessarily going to be superficial. You deal with highly stylized models that are robbed of context, that take place in a world unmediated by norms and institutions. Much of the most interesting work in economics right now calls into question the Econ 101 as-



University of Chicago
Professor Allen Sanderson
teaches it like he thinks it is.

sumptions of rationality, individualism, maximizing behavior, etc. But, of course, if you don’t go any further than Econ 101, you won’t know that the textbook models are not the way the world really works, and that there are tons of empirical studies out there that demonstrate this.”

Take, for instance, the minimum wage. In Sanderson’s intro micro class, he uses a simple supply and demand model of a labor market to show why a minimum wage will cause unemployment, and therefore be self-defeating. “Most economists, myself included, are opposed to living wage ordinances and minimum wage laws period,” he says. But a series of empirical studies has established that the most recent increase of minimum wage in 1997 had essentially no impact on unemployment. In fact, in October, 650 economists, including five Nobel Laureates, signed a letter advocating an increase in the U.S. minimum wage to \$8 an hour.

Of course, some elision and simplification is unavoidable. Sanderson’s not trying to create future economists, but rather give students “some sort of cultural literacy” about how the economy works. He often starts class by leading us through a kind of Socratic deconstruction of a newspaper article that commits some egregious economic sin. About midway through the semester, during the unit we spend learning about how the gross domestic product is computed, he

reads to the class from an article in the *Chicago Tribune* with the headline, “Corporate Giants Dwarf Many Nations.” The piece compares the annual sales of large corporations like Wal-Mart with that of small countries, like Israel, showing that many of the world’s 200 largest corporations are as large as entire national economies, and therefore have a great deal of political and economic clout. After quoting at length, Sanderson points out how implausible it is that 200 companies, with one third of one percent of the world’s workforce, could produce 28 percent of the world’s economic activity. “There’s a word for it,” Sanderson says. “Two words, actually. The first is ‘Horse.’”

The problem, Sanderson notes, is that “sales” is a terrible measurement for the economic output of a company like Wal-Mart, because it only produces a very small percentage of the value of any product it sells. When you buy pistachios at Wal-Mart, it’s not like those nuts were grown on a Wal-Mart farm. Wal-Mart bought them from someone and then resold them for a profit. “If we were counting GDP, we just want to count what’s the net contribution, what’s the value added?” he explains. “Last year, worldwide Wal-Mart sold \$285 billion worth of goods and services, but paid manufacturers \$220.” Sanderson’s point is pretty obvious, if you think about it. And yet the article gets it wrong over and over, which nearly sends



In 2001, Argentinian protesters extracted their own revenge against the IMF's market reforms.

Sanderson around the bend. “This happens to be the political rhetoric: ‘These 200 corporations dominate the world.’ They don’t. They’re a very small percentage of GDP,” Sanderson says. “Those who are criticizing very large multinational corporations are doing a disservice if they don’t get the math right.”

This contrarian approach is central to Sanderson’s worldview: It’s the counter-intuitive, “everyone-says-x-but-really-what-matters-is-y” formulation that has become the staple of magazines like the *New Republic* and *Slate*. (A headline from *Slate*’s October 14 “Underground Economist” column: “Charity is Selfish.”) But as with any counterintuitive rhetoric, what matters is how you define the conventional “intuition” that you’re skewering. And with Sanderson, the target is almost always statist, regulatory and liberal: The idea that you can, indeed, get a free lunch, by, for instance, mandating better incomes for workers by raising the minimum wage. Thinking of economic policy as a series of trade-offs and opportunity costs and, most importantly, unintended consequences is a hallmark of the Chicago School, and it was a constant theme throughout the course: Whenever you try to alter the market, the market extracts its revenge.

In Sanderson’s zeal to play ‘gotcha’ with the press, he too can slant the pure data. That evening, I went online and found that Wal-Mart’s \$65 billion of net

revenue was still larger than the GDP of 132 countries, including Bangladesh, which has a population of 144 million people. I wrote an e-mail to Sanderson, who promptly wrote back, saying the bigger point was to drive home the problem with inappropriate comparisons and double counting. “I tried to point out that these apples v. oranges comparisons are all over the place,” he wrote, and added that the double-counting error could be found everywhere from the *Wall Street Journal* to some introductory textbooks. “Thanks,” he wrote, “for continuing the out-of-class dialogue.”

SANDERSON IS SO likeable and masterful that the entire semester goes by with the class eating out of his hand: They take careful notes, class attendance is almost perfect every day and each pre-exam study session is packed. But the final unit of the class is devoted to free trade, and suddenly things change.

Sanderson begins the class by telling us that “in trade, there’s an enormous amount of agreement between economists about what constitutes the truth. The disagreements are between economists and everybody else.” His central contention is that allowing any two given countries to trade their goods freely will necessarily make both countries better off. It’s the same logic, he says, that we use everyday. When you decide to have someone do your dry cleaning or fix

your car, you’re deciding to specialize in what you do best, and trade for the other things you need. Specialize and trade: That was Adam Smith’s central insight into the nature of the “wealth of nations,” and, Sanderson says, it remains as true today as it was then.

But when lecturing on trade, Sanderson’s tone is noticeably different. His agenda and ideology are more up front, such that the classes felt for the first time almost—almost—like propaganda. And during these lectures, something incredible happens. The class rebels. Whereas for the duration of the quarter Sanderson had made the students feel as if he was their guide in seeing through the Matrix, suddenly Sanderson morphs from being Laurence Fishburne to the FBI agent in a suit. The class prods and pushes back as if they are being fed spin. As Sanderson talks about the importance of nations specializing in whatever they have a comparative advantage in, a student raises his hand: “Isn’t there a problem if you put all your eggs into one basket, and then if there’s a problem with that sector you’re in trouble?”

That ends that day’s class, but it continues in the next. Sanderson argues that liberalized trade creates more jobs than it destroys. “Free trade creates winners and it also creates losers. It turns out that winners are quantitatively larger than the losers.” A student asks, flat out, “Why are we to believe that?” Sanderson restates his point, but the student holds his ground, saying he’s read that there simply doesn’t exist an accurate measure to figure out how many jobs are being created and destroyed. Sanderson concedes that this is true, but insists it “must” be a net positive.

You can hear papers rustling and side conversations breaking out. Hands begin to shoot up and Sanderson began to sweat noticeably as the mutiny spreads. One student asks about attaching labor or environmental protections to trade deals. Sanderson replies that such stipulations (like requiring workers be paid \$14 an hour) simply operate like tariffs, raising the price of goods and “saving jobs in the U.S., union jobs that are relatively high paid, and taking people in developing countries who are not well off and making them poorer. I tend to be against laws that make poor people poorer.”

“OK,” responds the student, who with a beard and long hair looks a bit like the

student radical who's been missing all quarter. "Let's say the standards are not ridiculous. The workers have a right to organize, or we can't pollute the only source of the village's water supply."

"How do we define what's ridiculous?," Sanderson shoots back. "Once you start, it's very difficult to draw the line, in terms of what workers have. Should other countries not trade with the U.S. because we have capital punishment? Should we not trade with countries that don't allow abortion? My problem with sweatshops is, quite frankly, the only potential definition is people who work long hours for low wages, and that's what the U.S. was 120 years ago. A lot of what economics is about is how to increase the world's income, and not for Bill Gates and Oprah, but for the world's poor. Unions don't like trade agreements. They've never seen one they like, and they want to find a reason in environmental standards or things like that."

"We do draw the line every day," the student responds, not bothering to raise his hand this time. There are hands up all over and the class has now devolved into a free-for-all. "We don't trade with Burma. We didn't trade with Iraq. We do trade with Saudi Arabia. It's not impossible to re-imagine how to draw the line." Sanderson is not winning this argument. "These are tough issues," he says, and the class ends.

It occurs to me that Sanderson's problem is that he's been too honest about his biases. It's far more effective to communicate a worldview through subtext than to argue for it explicitly. For eight weeks, Sanderson had been the model of equanimity, the centrist arbiter of competing factions, and because of this students seemed to accept his word without question. But on the very first day of class he'd tipped his hand that he was an "ardent free-trader," and his clear desire to have students come away believing, as he does, in the benefits of free trade, was backfiring.

By the next class, Sanderson has regrouped, and calmly and methodically leads the class through a Socratic dialogue. Tobacco farmers have lost their jobs because we smoke less: Does that mean we should have the government do something about it? People lose their jobs all the time because the work they do—whether opening envelopes for

magazine subscriptions or wrapping Hershey's Kisses—becomes automated. Trade works the same way as technological progress: While it might put some people out of work, in the end, it makes everyone better off. The class is nodding, attentive and silent.

Furthermore, free trade is a moral imperative because it makes poorer countries better off. "I don't want to sound

a long mop of brown hair. I remember a conversation we'd had at the beginning of the semester: "I hope it doesn't all end up to be wrong," he'd said, referring to the Chicago School theories he was about to learn. "Like in Latin America. That worries me a bit."

Six months after the class ended, I e-mailed him to ask whether he was still worried. "I got this e-mail right after

The contrarian approach is central to Sanderson's worldview: It's the counterintuitive, 'everyone-says-x-but-really-what-matters-is-y' formulation that has become the staple of magazines like *Slate*.

like Miss America," Sanderson says as he wraps up the final class of the quarter. "I think world poverty is where it's at in terms of where you try to place resources. My sense is that significant redistribution of wealth is probably not the answer. Part of it is that there is not enough wealth to redistribute. There's not a lot of rich people and too many poor people. And the gap between rich and poor is too vast. It comes down to economic growth, how fast we can make economies grow. Economic growth does tend to raise all boats."

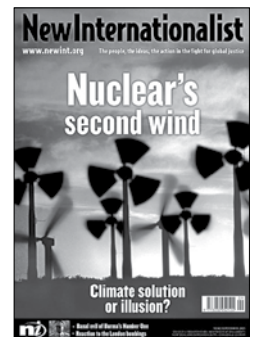
As the class files out, I see a student I'd talked with a few times over the course of the semester, an unassuming kid with

my Econ 201 class, the intermediate sequence for the major requirement," he wrote back. "So it looks like I'm no longer worried that what I'm learning is 'wrong.' Actually, the conversation we had doesn't really make sense to me anymore. I now understand that any one school of economics can't explain and predict all the intricacies of human economies."

What he'd come to realize, he wrote, was that "it isn't a question of correct theory or incorrect theory, but whether or not the results of the implementation of that theory are right or wrong in a moral sense."

In other words, it's a question that economics alone can't answer. ■

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Semper Fi: The Way to Win

Lane Evans' career in Congress provides a lasting lesson for progressive Democrats

BY DAVID MOBERG



IN THE DEPTHS OF the 1982 Reagan recession, when rustbelt manufacturing towns like Rock Island and the surrounding western Illinois farm country convulsed with deep economic pain, a young legal services attorney set off on what seemed like a quixotic quest—campaigning as a Democrat for a congressional seat that, outside one brief hiatus, had been held by Republicans for more than a century.

But Republicans were divided by a scandal involving the incumbent, who was defeated in the primary by a right-wing social conservative. That set the stage for Lane Evans, only 31 years old and even more youthful-looking, to win with a combination of diligent organizing, earnest populism and plain-spoken personal integrity. Republicans were convinced his victory was a fluke, especially when in his first term Evans voted against Reagan more consistently than anyone else in Congress.

“I always said that voting against Reagan was one of the things I’m most proud of,” Evans told *In These Times* recently. “But my mother once said she didn’t like my few votes that were for Reagan because he was such a terrible president.”

Despite many hard-fought elections over the 24 years since then, Republicans never took Evans out. But the steady pro-

gression of Parkinson’s disease over the past decade finally did. In the spring of 2006, he announced that he was retiring from Congress. But the man who seems poised to succeed him is cut from much the same political cloth. Phil Hare, a former garment worker and union leader, worked for Evans’ first campaign and has served as the congressman’s district director ever since, heading up a constituent service program that even Republicans grudgingly admire.

Hare has several advantages as he scrambles to make voters more aware of who he is in a race against a well-known Republican candidate, Andrea Zinga, a former Rock Island TV news anchor who ran against Evans two years ago. President Bush is as unpopular here as elsewhere. And the district has been trending Democratic, even before a bipartisan remap in 2002 gave Democrats a much more secure, if strangely gerrymandered, district.

Most of all, Hare has inherited the goodwill that Evans developed over a career that demonstrates how unstinting progressive politics can succeed in parts of the country written off as irredeemably “red.” Evans succeeded partly by staying in close touch with the residents of his district and partly by being so likeable—the rare politician who supporters,

staff and even colleagues in Congress unashamedly talk about loving.

“They literally just love Lane Evans,” says Dino Leone, vice-president of the area’s central labor council, discussing union members’ support for Evans. “They know he has never betrayed them on any issue for working families. It’s hard to say that about other politicians. And the nice thing is we know we’ve got the same commitment from Phil Hare.”

“I think part of his success was personality,” says John Cameron, political director of the Illinois council of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. “Part of it was smart politics. Lane just came across as a genuinely likeable, sincere, honest person.” But what Cameron calls his “pragmatic populism”—like that of Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa)—was broad enough to encompass both kitchen-table economics and progressive social views. His constituents could count on Evans for solidarity with labor unions, opposition to NAFTA-style trade agreements, fighting on behalf of veterans, and defending Social Security and other welfare state programs. But he was equally ardent in his crusades against land mines, support for rights of gays, women, and minorities, and resistance to overseas military adventures.

“He had to fight every time to get re-

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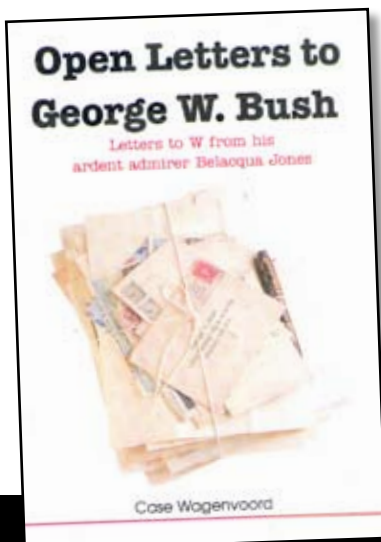


PHOTO COURTESY OF PHIL HARE FOR CONGRESS
Phil Hare and Sen. Barack Obama speak to the press at a campaign rally.

ected," Cameron recalls, "but he never wavered. He never trimmed. He never said it would be easier to get re-elected if I went with the Chamber of Commerce," (or pulled punches on the hot-button cultural issues). John Ayers, who worked with Evans on Sen. Fred Harris' failed populist presidential bid in 1976 and later served on his staff, recalls, "Lane said, 'I'm not going to put my finger in the air to see where I'm going. I believe people believe in a believer.' He developed an almost personal trust with different constituencies. Even if they didn't agree with him, they saw him as a man of honor."

But Evans credits his success to the fact that he was able to inspire people to act politically. "The secret to success from a progressive point of view is to bring in people who've never been involved before and not cave in to special interests that are more represented than they are in politics," says Evans, as he reflects back on his career in his modest district office near a shopping mall. "It's important to bring in all the people who feel left out, to pay attention to individuals and organized groups. We redeem their hopes, and it pays off politically."

A Vietnam-era Marine veteran, Evans was a champion for veterans. He argued that conservatives celebrate veterans but fail to deliver on programs that help them. Evans crusaded for better veteran health care, including aid for victims of Agent Orange and for those suffering

post-traumatic stress disorder. Veteran programs were doubly important to him because they delivered needed government services to working class families. And his service to vets helped to politically neutralize attacks on his progressive military and foreign policy positions, such as opposition to Reagan's policies in Central America. He believes that principles and politics ultimately complement each other. "We go after people who are left out and redeem their hopes," Evans says, "and it pays off politically."

Evans formed coalitions based on such principles, not simple electoral arithmetic. For example, although African-Americans make up only seven percent of his district, Evans cultivated close relationships with the black community and was an early supporter of the 1983 Chicago mayoral campaign of Harold Washington, who campaigned for him in 1982. Two years ago, after inviting all the Democratic hopefuls for U.S. Senate to travel with him through his district, Evans became one of the first prominent Democrats to endorse Barack Obama. "This guy is authentic," Evans recalls thinking as he watched Obama campaign.

He also never backed down from taking stands that caused him political grief. For example, despite the moderate to conservative social views of many of his constituents, he supported gun control legislation (such as the Brady Bill), opposed bans on flag-burning and defended

the rights of gays in the military. "You've got to take these issues on right away, as early as possible," he says. "You should not try to be too cute, but you can't be strident either. I could win over conservative blue-collar Democrats because they know I respected their opinions." Ultimately, he believes, his willingness to stand up for his beliefs paid off. "The reason we won tough elections and carried the ball forward is that we weren't willing to cower," he says.

Never a dynamic public speaker, Evans was nevertheless very effective in small-group settings. Although he considered running for Senate and nearly won an unusual challenge to an entrenched conservative Democrat to chair the veterans' committee, he was never a high-profile national leader. And as much as he forged a strong, loyal Congressional district operation, he was not able to put his populist stamp on the local Democratic Party.

What he lacked in flash he made up for with persistence. It took many years for him to win some of his crusades, such as aid for Agent Orange victims, and he leaves Congress with a long list of goals only partly realized at best—fairer funding for women's health research, improved

federal programs for native Americans, elimination of antipersonnel landmines. "You just have to keep pounding," he says. "But you wonder if you did enough. It's like *Schindler's List*: If I only had more time, I could have done more."

sides," for legislation that rewards "patriot corporations" that create jobs in the United States, for reform of the Medicare prescription drug plan and for universal, single-payer health insurance. He also thinks Democrats can make the case that

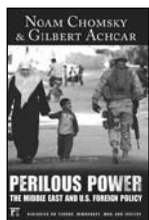
Lane Evans succeeded in politics by being 'always faithful' to his principles, to his constituents and to himself. It was, and still is, a winning strategy.

The 57-year old Hare seems likely to carry on Evans' battles, even if he is still adjusting to stepping out of the shadows and into the spotlight. "I still look for Lane to come in when I'm doing events," says Hare. "As people are applauding, I think, 'Where is he?'" The lesson he learned from Evans, he says, is to "absolutely be true to yourself on issues. Lane went in with a core set of values and never faltered. I think these jobs [in political office] are about helping everyday people, and I could see legislation both helping and hurting." So Hare hopes to push for trade agreements "that are fair for both

they can protect the country from terrorists better than Republicans while at the same time getting troops out of Iraq "as safely and quickly as possible."

Evans is clearly sad that he cannot continue his work but he is happy that at least his longtime aide and friend will be carrying on the same fight. As I get up to leave his office, Evans smiles, salutes and says crisply, "Semper Fi." For Evans, it is much more than a Marine Corps salutation. He has succeeded in politics by being "always faithful" to his principles, to his constituents and to himself. It was, and still is, a winning strategy. ■

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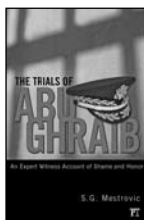
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BY AARON SARVER

Witnessing Extraordinary Rendition

In early October, 30 people gathered at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago for a screening of *Outlawed: Extraordinary Rendition, Torture and the Disappearances in the "War on Terror."* As the credits rolled, a few audience

members timidly clapped. "I understand if you don't want to applaud what you just saw," said Gillian Caldwell, executive director of Witness and a producer of the film.

Outlawed is the latest film by Witness, a nonprofit group based in Brooklyn, N.Y., that has documented human rights abuses since 1992, when it was founded by musician Peter Gabriel.

Caldwell hopes that the unease that emerges after watching Witness' videos will translate into awareness. Partnering with Global Voices, a nonprofit citizens' media project, Witness is in the process of creating a Human Rights Video Hub—a YouTube for human rights. To view their test site, visit www.globalvoicesonline.org/witness. Current videos on the site document union protest beatings in Zimbabwe, Iraqi testimony of torture at the hands of the Iraq Security Force, and more.

Witness, which has worked with human rights groups in more than 60 countries, used to provide video cameras and the training needed to record abuses taking place. With the advent of surveillance cameras and camera phones, the strategies for documenting human rights abuses are changing.

In These Times sat down with Caldwell to learn more about this shift, and the organization's plans for the future.

What initially led you into working with human rights campaigns?

I got involved in human rights-related

work when I was about 12 and my high school teacher introduced me to the languishing school chapter of Amnesty International. The big debate for me was always, "Do I want to focus on human and civil rights issues here at home, or do I want to work in an international context?" I've felt somewhat divided about that, but always very much like a citizen of the planet.

What specifically drew you to working with Witness?

I was in Washington, D.C., in 1995 and a friend approached me and said that he was investigating the trade in Siberian tiger pelts and that the traders had offered to sell him women. He was using undercover video technology, and thought that we could develop a really powerful film about the sex trade, and wondered if I'd have some spare time to help him develop a grant proposal to do it. I was working as a civil rights attorney in D.C. at the time, and two weeks later I resigned from that job to get that campaign off the ground.

By January 1996, we were on a plane to Moscow. We had formed a dummy company, called International Liaisons, specializing in foreign models, escorts and entertainers. At undercover meetings with the Russian Mafia we were posing—mostly Steve, my colleague—as foreign buyers, interested in purchasing women and bringing them into the United States. So by the fall of 1997 we had a film, *Bought and Sold*, and it was in the process of that investigation that I got connected to Witness and in 1998 I became its first full-time director.

Why use video, as opposed to print or radio, to document human rights abuses?

Because visual imagery is so powerfully evocative. To wind the clock back, the other influential force in my life was visual imagery. I grew up in the back of an art gallery. My mother represented an artist who died recently, Leon Golub. He had these enormous prints, which were in my living room, of CIA-trained mercenaries urinating on political prisoners. Those were demanding images, demanding a response. I was hard-wired to be affected by visual imagery, and I think we all are on some level.

Many human rights abuses take place in the Third World, and video doesn't seem to be an accessible format for people to see what's happening in their own country. Is that a worry or consideration?

That becomes a challenge in the context of a situation when you want to do a local awareness-building campaign. For example, we worked with Bukeni Beck of the organization AJEDI-Ka in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The first video we produced with them, *On the Front Lines*, was intended to promote dialogue and awareness in the eastern region, where children were at risk for recruitment into the armed forces as child soldiers. Specifically, we wanted to provoke a conversation about voluntary recruitment, since a significant number of the children in the armed forces were recruited with their families' consent. To make those screenings happen in villages and refugee camps that were off the grid, we had to provide the technology.

More often than not the primary audience is outside of the country, or inside of the country with key decision-makers who have access to the technology. So we develop a strategy to ensure that visual media makes its way to the minister of justice, or the parliamentary assembly or



Directing Justice:
Witness' Gillian Caldwell
says online video
will highlight global
human rights abuses.

the president himself.

You said you wanted to create a YouTube for human rights. Can you talk about how you envision that happening?

We're in the midst of developing a portal called something like, We Witness or You Witness. It will be a Web site to which anyone can upload content, create communities around issues that matter to them and mobilize, suggesting both online and offline advocacy. With cell phones having video-enabled technology and Web access, there's a tremendous opportunity to capture abuse as it's happening. If there was broader awareness about such a site, it could be enormously popular, whether you're a concerned citizen, a human rights defender or a journalist.

Do you envision the videos having a viral quality? If so, how will that mesh with the entertainment-value of what gets pushed around the Web, which for the most part is either humorous or politically one-sided?

Some of the things that concern us from an editorial perspective are graphic or gratuitous violence, which tends to have a lot of viral interest. What do we do, for example, if al-Qaeda posts a beheading? What do we do if someone

posts imagery of a child soldier assassinating several village members? What do we do if someone posts imagery of a woman being raped by a security-force operative? What about people's dignity?

We are trying to contend with so many complex issues. But I don't see how we can avoid stepping into this territory, because if we don't, we're a dinosaur. Everybody's a media maker and a media distributor. How can we take advantage of that to make an even greater difference in terms of human rights issues?

In *Outlawed*, you document the stories of Khaled El-Masri and Binyam Mohamed. What drew you to their stories?

Both Khaled El-Masri and Binyam Mohamed are victims of extraordinary rendition, torture and disappearances, all of which are unlawful practices that the Bush administration and the Clinton administration prior to that have been involved in. Both of them were picked up, interrogated, tortured and effectively disappeared: Khaled El-Masri for over four months, Binyam Mohamed for over four years. Binyam is still held at Guantánamo. We're trying to highlight the illegality of the system, to highlight the broad-based collusion by European, Asian and African govern-

ments. Not only is it unlawful, it's deeply unproductive to approach the war on terror through these means, because it gives other countries carte-blanche to behave similarly and it fans the flames of that jihad that we're seeing in the Middle East.

What's the most disturbing aspect of the extraordinary rendition?

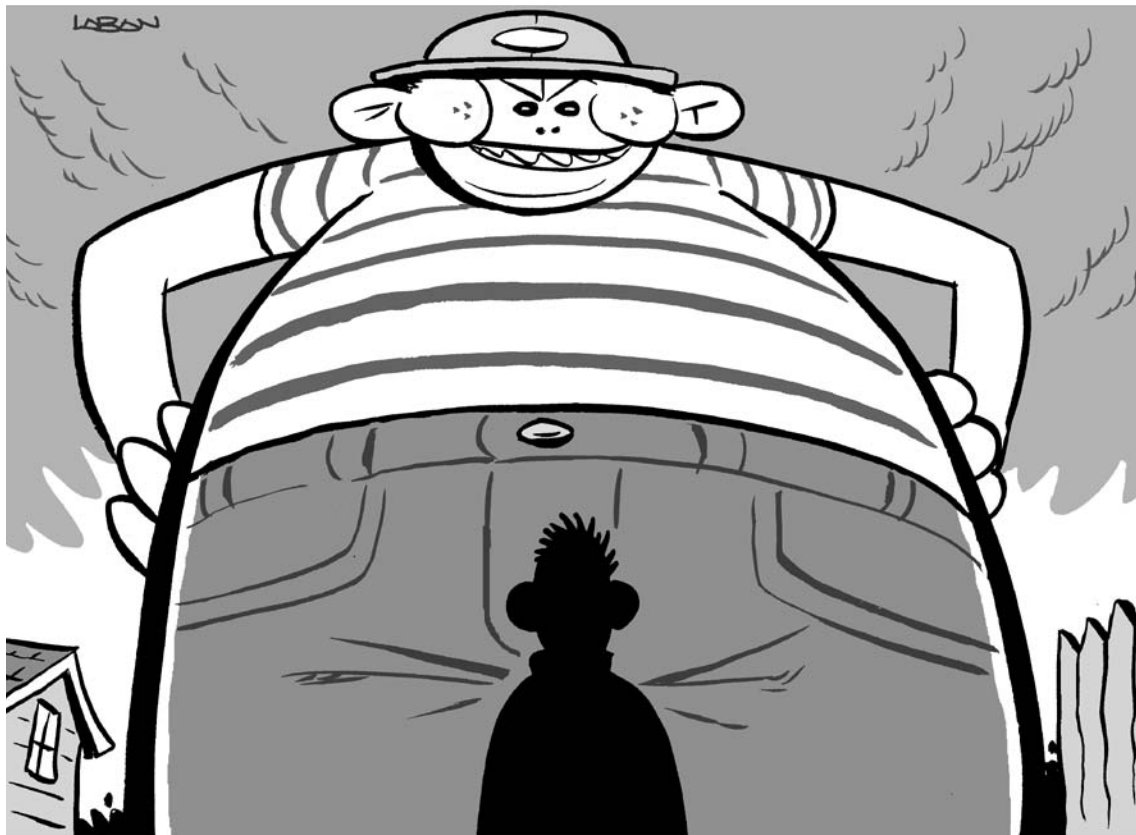
What happened to both men—and what's happened to the several hundred, if not more than a thousand people, who've been victims of extraordinary rendition—is remarkable. Basically, people are picked up off the street. They are surrounded by five to six men, all dressed completely in black, who do not say a word; they pull out razors and cut the clothing off these people's bodies; they administer a tranquilizer via an enema; they put these people in diapers, throw a jump-suit on them and, in the case of Binyam and El-Masri, transport them to a far-away prison where they're interrogated and tortured. The system is so well-designed, so explicitly executed, that clearly it's controlled by a central command. The fact that President Bush only recently, on September 6, admitted to the existence of the secret prisons, which has been reported for years, indicates how disingenuous this administration has been.

What do you hope Witness will achieve next?

In the past few years we've had substantial impact. Our goal with the campaign on child soldiers in the Congo was to convince the International Criminal Court to indict people for the use and recruitment of child soldiers; it's now a war crime covered under the Rome Statute.

In the context of our work on femicide in Mexico, a goal was to secure the release of David Mesa, who was tortured into confessing to the rape and murder of his cousin. We secured his release and got a resolution from the Mexican Congress to cease and desist from the practice of fabricating culprits through torture.

In our new campaign on slavery in rural Brazil, we hope to help ensure the enforcement of existing legislation that makes slavery illegal, and to modify the legislation to allow for land confiscation by repeat offenders. In each campaign, we have both incremental goals and long-term goals. We seem to be achieving what we set out to, so let's hope for the best. ■



BY LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY

The Power of Mean

A nine-year-old girl in England feels ugly and wants to kill herself because her schoolmates call her “Blackie.” A legal assistant in Oregon is terrorized by an autocratic boss who screams obscenities in her face and refuses to give her time

off for surgery. An 80-year-old man finds himself at the mercy of abusive nurses at a convalescent home. A teenager is molested by his parish priest.

Each of these are examples of what author Robert Fuller calls “rankism,” which he defines as “discrimination or exploitation based on rank.” All around us, he says, a powerful “somebody” is bullying a “nobody.”

In his latest book, *All Rise: Somebodies, Nobodies, and the Politics of Dignity*, Fuller explores how rankism offers a powerful opportunity to organize around social justice and equality. Given “the diminishing returns of identity-based politics,” Fuller argues that the concept of rankism is more inclusive and appealing:

Someone can hold a high rank in one setting (for example, at home) and simultaneously be low on the totem pole in another (at work). Likewise we can feel powerful at one time and powerless at another, as when we ... experience the loss of a job, a partner, or our health. As a result, most of us have been victims and perpetrators of discrimination based on rank.

Such dynamics offer the potential for identification that can be transformed, he writes, into a movement to create a dignitarian society where “the dignity of all people is honored and protected.”

On its face, Fuller’s thesis is hard to fault. We all know something about being victimized simply because we were on the wrong end of a power relationship. And isn’t giving our common experience a name

the first step toward raising consciousness of its insidious and destructive effects?

Yet Fuller's concept of rankism—which invokes our capacity for empathy as individual human beings—fails to address the darker side of our relationship to authority. Our everyday responses to abuses of power within the hierarchies that structure our lives, from the schoolyard to the workplace, are far more complex and muddled than Fuller acknowledges.

Take, for example, the success of reality television, premised on the recognition that we nobodies enjoy seeing our fellow nobodies humiliated by a somebody. The popularity of Simon Cowell on "American Idol" or Donald Trump on "The Apprentice" reveals our willingness to accept, even relish, the cruelty of authority figures when it is targeted at others. We instinctively condone mean, bullying behavior as part and parcel of the exercise of legitimate power.

Learning to respect and accede to the power of mean starts early in life. It begins on the playground, where children learn quickly to use violence and fear to enhance their social status. In the June 2005 issue of *Scientific American Mind*, German researcher Mechthild Shafer described the typical elementary school bully: "Bullies are usually very dominant children who have learned early on that they can become the leader of a group by being aggressive. Their modus operandi is to humiliate a student who is physically or psychologically susceptible to rise to the top of the social order."

More depressing—and telling—is Schaffer's finding that children become more supportive of cruelty over time. After six years, she writes, "In contrast to the bullies' relative lower standing during elementary school, they had actually become very popular with their classmates." Meanwhile, the victims "got few sympathy points. ... Their peers acted as if they were not there or responded with outright rejection and whispered behind their backs. The bullies escalated this game, insulting and making fun of them. Many of the target children came to identify with the underdog role." The longer this went on, she notes, the more isolated the victims became.

The trend is no different in Canada, where psychologist Debra Pepler found 60 percent of the so-called "neutral" stu-

dents were friends of the bullies, and half of the observers of bullying behaviors eventually became active participants and supporters. And UCLA psychologist Jaana Juvonen discovered that bullies were consistently among the most liked

toward someone else (another coworker perhaps)," says Tepper. And when faced with a flagrant abuse of power, a combination of fear, ambition and even schadenfreude makes other employees more likely to blame the victim than come to his aid.

The concept of rankism fails to address the darker side of our relationship to authority. We instinctively condone bullying as part of the legitimate exercise of power.

and respected kids among 2,000 sixth-graders in the Los Angeles area.

Juvonen's research should hardly surprise liberals, for whom politics has come to resemble a bad high school flashback, especially under the aegis of the Bush administration. Recent election years simply replayed the locker-room dynamic: Nasty Republican operatives beat up on craven Democratic "pussies" for the benefit of an appreciative "objective" media, and an acquiescent American public, that seems more likely to punish the GOP for incompetence than its dirty tricks.

Kids will be kids, but as it turns out, so will adults—both in politics and in the workplace. Bullying is as common on the job as in the schoolyard. According to Bennett Tepper, a professor of managerial sciences at Georgia State University, 50 percent of workers say they've had an abusive boss at some point in their working career. Women may be more likely to be targets, but they are just as likely to be bullies.

Contrary to Fuller's claim that rankism is bad for the corporate bottom line, the research on its effects on employees shows that it may not hurt productivity. Like schoolchildren, workers are more likely to appease a bully than to confront him. "Many abused subordinates continue to perform at high levels," Tepper writes in an e-mail interview. "They do so because they believe that they have no choice (i.e., they have little mobility and believe that low performance will elicit further abuse or, possibly, termination)."

High performance may also be part of "an impression management strategy—trying to create a favorable impression in the mind of the abuser, thinking that doing so might deflect the supervisor's abuse

Worse, a bullying boss is likely to make her subordinates just as mean. Experiments conducted by Leigh Thompson, an organizational psychologist at Northwestern University, and Cameron Anderson, a business professor at the University of California, Berkeley, found that a middle-level manager is likely to reproduce the behavior of his punitive boss in order to please her, irrespective of his own temperament. "If the person in charge is high energy, aggressive, mean, the classic bully type," Thompson told the *New York Times*, "then over time, that's the way the No. 2 person begins to act."

Cruelty, then, is a communicable disease. Moreover, it requires the participation of the entire community, since the exercise of power—legitimate or otherwise—requires social recognition. While discussions of bullying tend to focus on the perpetrator and the victim, Juvonen notes that bullying requires the presence of an appreciative audience. The primary reward of bullying in schools is not so much the terror of the victim, but the opportunity for the bully to assert his higher social status in the larger community.

"Bullies would not bully someone without an audience," Juvonen says. "Even when these incidents of physical intimidation take place in the privacy of a bathroom, it's to ensure privacy from adults. But they know that rumors get around quickly about what so-and-so did to so-and-so, etc. So there is always an audience, whether visible or invisible."

All Rise simply sidesteps the psychosocial roots of rankism, resorting instead to social history. Fuller envisions a dignitarian movement that follows the arc of civil rights movements: People become con-

Stilettoes, leashes, alligators ... what more could a girl want for her B'Day?

PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.BEYONCEONLINE.COM



scious of injustice, recognize its “negative consequences” and then organize themselves into a movement for change.

But, as he himself concedes, “When it comes to familiar varieties of discrimination, the victims and the victimizers are, for the most part, distinguishable and separate groups: black and white; female and male, gay and straight, and so on. The same thing that makes it easy to identify potential victims of these familiar isms ... facilitates the formation of a solidarity group to confront the perpetrators.”

However, he fails to recognize the enormous challenge this lack of identification poses for a dignitarian movement. While, a number of, say, African Americans may internalize racism or participate in a racist culture, their role can hardly be compared to the so-called “neutral” nobodies who actively enable the abuse of power within an organization or community.

Dividing the world into somebodies and nobodies does little to capture the complex dynamics of power within social groups. Unlike racism or homophobia, the underlying causes of rankism are rooted in the ancient hardwiring of our brain that associates aggression with status. It is why so many of us instinctively kowtow to our bullying boss, partner, peer, or even our president. In this, we are no different than our fellow primates.

Unlike chimps or gorillas, however, we do possess the ability to overcome our most primal impulse. “Is it natural?” Juvonen asks. “Yes. Is it inevitable? Absolutely not.” Moral principles can indeed override the basic instinct for cruelty, but we first have to be willing to acknowledge the power of mean. ■

MUSIC

Beyoncé's Bootyful B'Day

By Natalie Y. Moore

SHE SCREAMS AT the top of her lungs. A look of bewilderment dances across her honey-colored face. She whips her blond-streaked mane in a ferocious rage.

R&B singer Beyoncé is in the foul throes of a Quarterlife Crisis. That's the angst twenty-somethings feel about life and the future. The pressures of careers, finances and relationships give its victims whiplash as they ponder choices. In *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties*, Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner write, “While at its heart the quarterlife crisis is an identity crisis, it causes twenty-somethings' conflicting emotions to show up in different ways. Sometimes they reach a state of panic sparked by a feeling of loss and uncertainty.”

The beautiful and talented Beyoncé turned 25 this fall, and she's having her crisis in the spotlight. Sony BMG released her second solo album, *B'Day*, on her quarterlife birthday. And she stars in the movie *Dreamgirls*, a remake of the Broadway musical about a three-member girl group, scheduled for release in December. Performing in the public eye since she was a teen, Beyoncé is trying to shed the teeny-bopper image like a skunk-funked fur coat. Let's hope that journey of self-discovery ends soon.

The singer's coming-of-age has come complete with a personality split. The

October issue of *Blender* describes Beyoncé's relationship to her onstage alter-ego, “Sasha.”

Through pain, disappointment, tears and a lawsuit or two, she says, the good girl has grown a lot savvier. Sasha, who had first proved useful in helping Beyoncé cure her shyness, has become an indispensable shield. “Sometimes when Beyoncé slips through, I'm like, ‘Hold up, come back!’” she says. “Sasha protects me. It's a good way to keep sane.”

In *B'Day*, she sounds like a young woman going off the deep end. Two music videos off this album show her strutting her sexuality. “Déjà Vu” displays Beyoncé draped over her equally famous rapper boyfriend Jay-Z, 12 years her senior. It looks as if any minute now she'll give him fellatio. As Beyoncé molests the gum in her mouth, at one point she stops looking at the camera and becomes a prop. These moments are uncomfortable. For the second single, “Ring the Alarm,” she copies the infamous scene from *Basic Instinct*. Dressed in white like Sharon Stone and posing in a chair before a group of interrogating men, Beyoncé crosses her legs in between angry choruses about being damned if she sees another chick on her beau's arm. There's no overexposure of skin—but there's no satire either.

Before going solo, Beyoncé was lead singer of Destiny's Child, the girl group that her father managed. The trio hit pay dirt in the late '90s, but the group was really designed to nurture the blossoming career of its front-woman. Beyoncé has never marketed herself as a schoolmarm, but the singer is getting racier, edgier—and not in a sophisticated way. Her supersexualization started last year with songs about catering to men and looking for a thug-like “soldier” boyfriend.

This virgin-to-Madonna routine has played out with other teen-to-woman pop stars: Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears. It's sad to see Beyoncé giving in to these hypersexual—and hypercommercial—images. Gone is the clever champion for “independent women” or “survivors,” that some of her earlier songs portrayed, replaced with the submissive female selling sex.

Unlike her peers, Beyoncé can actually sing. That talent saddles her with the burden of being a role model. Fans have complained about their beloved Beyoncé's transformation. An online petition (www.petitiononline.com/dejavuo6/) pleads for

the record company to have Beyoncé reshoot the “Déjà Vu” video. Among their requests are less gyrating, more choreography and fewer sexual scenes between her and Jay-Z. As one post puts it, “The overall feel of the video leaves a sense of much to be desired.”

Caricatures of black female sexuality have long been on display—the sassy black girl, the waddling mammy and now the barely clad, hip-hop video girl. These clichés interlock with the hypermasculine depictions of black men. “Many people have difficulty appreciating black women as we are because of eagerness to impose an identity upon us based on any number of negative stereotypes,” scholar bell hooks noted in *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*.

Twenty years ago Madonna shook up feminism and the pop music world with her overt sexuality. She created and broke a mold simultaneously. Madonna has constantly reinvented herself, but from the beginning she never shied from embracing her sexual power, an example that has trickled down to throngs of young female

singers. Sexual power can be powerful, but with Beyoncé and these other young singers, there is no mystery. Everything is displayed like a buffet, leaving no room for future growth or artistic evolution.

The industry is crowded with wannabes, has-beens and ingénues longing for their MTV rotation. And that competition has forced Beyoncé to work to stand out. Of course, Beyoncé has the right to evolve as an artist and push the envelope. Still, the pressure is evident—hence the crisis. All she has to do is look at other black singers who never made the crossover because they didn’t flaunt their sexuality. If they had, the Jill Scotts, Lizz Wrights and Jean Graes—all successful and lauded in their own right—might be elevated to a different standard, or at least a different chart position.

Beyoncé is often compared to (or accused of mimicking) Diana Ross and Tina Turner, with her Supremes-inspired role in *Dreamgirls* and her leggy dance performances. But if she wants to bask in the same career longevity, she should remember life is a marathon, not a strip tease. ■

BOOKS

Women and Their Boxes

By Phoebe Connelly

MY MOTHER AND I have a long-standing disagreement about an impromptu gift I gave my teenage sister. After reading Rachel Fudge’s “Everything You Wanted to Know About Feminism (But Were Afraid to Ask),” I promptly went online and bought my sister a two-year subscription to *Bitch* magazine. The moment my mother (who raised us on *Our Bodies, Ourselves*) saw a copy, she blanched, “You’re encouraging your sister to read this trash?” No amount of reassurance about fresh, feminist writing will change her mind; my mother can’t get past the title.

She’s not alone. In her new book, *The Female Thing*, Laura Kipnis, professor of media studies at Northwestern University, offers up “a catalog of fetters, a chronicle of impasses—including those

[art space]



“May Chicago always have a love for art and beauty to nourish its spirit,” writes an anonymous contributor to the **Chicago Prayer Wheel Project**, a traveling exhibit that encourages Chicagoans to share their hopes and dreams through Tibetan prayer wheels. Traditionally, prayer wheels are hollow cylinders that contain a scroll with a prayer inscribed upon it. According to Buddhist dogma, spinning the wheel sends prayers out into the world. Artist Renee Prisable Una has decorated 10 cylinders with maps of Chicago and mounted them on a bike trailer. Participants write their prayers on a piece of paper, which is then inserted into the wheel of their choice and spun. Prisable Una posts the prayers on the projects’ Web site: <http://una-love.com/renee-prayer.html>

within feminism itself.” Kipnis argues that the traditional notions of what it means to be a woman, even in these supposed post-post-post-feminist days, are still causing trouble.

The book is divided into four essays, “Envy,” “Sex,” “Dirt” and “Vulnerability,” which question what second-wave feminism has wrought. “Did empowerment feminism end up playing the unwitting shill for the scorched-earth labor practices of the new global economy?” she asks in “Envy.” She notes that pay equality still doesn’t mean a living wage, and that women entering the workforce face a new set of strictures, “shifting the dependency from husbands to the vagaries of the job market: to bosses, customers, and time clocks.”

In “Vulnerability,” she takes up the question of rape. How, she asks, are women “supposed to negotiate the psychological terrain of vulnerability [...] when it’s a bodily fact that sexual violation and sexual pleasure share the same ... venue.” Kipnis notes that women’s fear of rape is disproportionate to reported rape rates, and that current rape discourse ignores the fact that men’s risk of rape may now be equal to women—for incarcerated men, that is. She also casts a skeptical eye toward the gains made by expanding the definition of “sexual assault.”

“Being flashed may be unpleasant (or it may be laughable, depending on your sense of humor), but the emotional seriousness is going to depend on how finely honed your sense of vulnerability is,” she writes. That feeling of imperilment, she continues, “you’re likely to absorb by reading rape-activist literature.” Arguing about why we shouldn’t feel vulnerable—fine, but really, what do we achieve by once again making sexual violence against women a subject for debate?

Kipnis’ nimble, smart writing reinvigorates many a tired discourse. But I’d guess that for many women, *The Female Thing* will still feel like terrain we’ve spent far too long wandering. Her contrarian approach worked better in her last book, *Against Love*, which dealt with adultery, a topic usually handled with either hushed morality or screaming sensationalism. But here, her knowing retread just serves to push women back into the same old boxes. One can agree with her argument that women are women’s own worst enemy—look



For too long, women have dwelled on the categories and impasses that box them in.

no further than the blogger-on-blogger attack of law professor Ann Althouse calling out Jessica Valenti of *Feministing.com* for appearing too breasty and attractive in a recent photo with former President Clinton. But at some point we should step off this well-trod path to see what women are doing to stake out territory beyond the impasses.

For this reason two books now out in paperback feel much fresher. E. Kay Trimberger’s *The New Single Woman* is the result of her study on how single women between 30 and 60 live. Trimberger conducted her first set of interviews in the mid ’90s, and did a second set in the early ’00s. Contrary to right-wing rhetoric, Trimberger sees increased levels of singleness as “compatible with stronger and more stable marriages.” She also notes how the terms by which we judge women’s choices have changed. As one of her subjects says, “I was looking at [...] a big ad for diamonds for your right hand geared to the single woman who wants to indulge herself. You can tell you’ve made the grade when you become a marketing tool.”

These women’s accounts of coming to terms with the realities of single life

are not the usual treacle—they offer an alternative and grounded account that contradicts the standard woman-seeking-man caricature.

Kipnis charts the rise of ever-changing commercial frontiers for women’s sexuality. “Not foreseen,” she writes in a footnote, “was how easily commodified hot, unfettered female sexuality could be, packaged and sold back to women in the form of pricy accoutrements [...] the fuck-me heels, and the regular bikini waxes.” In contrast, while many women in Trimberger’s study did not go into details about their sexuality, those who did told of reinterpreting sex and celibacy in terms of what they wanted.

“For a while I thought I shouldn’t go to bed with anyone unless they were a serious candidate for marriage,” says Dorothy, a woman in her 50s. “But soon I said to hell with that; there may never be a serious candidate.” She goes on to recount her affairs, speaking of the importance of her own sexual fulfillment, refusing, for example, to go on an extended European trip with a man until they had slept together. We’ve had endless discussions of how our sexuality is being sold back to us—how about

some conversation about the ways we're claiming it for ourselves?

Meanwhile, *Confessions of the Other Mother: Nonbiological Lesbian Moms Tell All!* examines new models of motherhood. Edited by Harlyn Aizley, it may appear to be a niche title, but its writers offer interesting takes on the complexity of navigating motherhood and its social expectations when you're not actually the one who's given birth. Faith Soloway, on observing her partner nursing their child, put it this way: "Basically, I am insanely jealous of their flesh-on-flesh, boundaryless, nurturing, complicated relationship [...] it constantly reminds me of my third-wheel status."

And, in one of the strongest essays in the book, Suzanne M. Johnson describes wrestling with her desire for biological motherhood after spending a lifetime rejecting it. Having spent her childhood hoping to grow up to be an idealized '50s sitcom dad, she found herself not just jealous of her partner's physical ties to their daughter, but troubled by her own rejection of the "male" role of caretaker. "I was their mama. I didn't want to be *daddy*, in the traditional sense of

the word. Surprisingly, I wanted to be the mommy, without staying home." Her account of struggling to secure legal acknowledgement for her child, and battling the barriers to healthcare coverage and adequate work-leave, offers a heartbreaking critique of how little our society does for actual mothers, even as current rhetoric exalts motherhood.

Both *Confessions* and *The New Single Woman* show how the strongest arguments for different conceptions of women's roles are found in the daily details. Instead of mulling over the constraints of femininity, Trimmerger and Aizley give us women who are living their lives—impasses be damned. In *Confessions*, Dawn Beckman describes how an evangelical co-worker defended Beckman's choice to leave her job. "Don't give Dawn a hard time," the co-worker said, "she's leaving so she can spend more time with her family, and they're what's most important to her."

"My presence in the world as a lesbian mother," Beckman writes, "seemed at that moment a small, but potent, example of parenting as a subversive activity." ■

BOOKS

Blumenthal's First Draft of History

By Rick Perlstein

JOURNALISTIC COMPILATIONS ARE a crucial part of America's literary, intellectual and political heritage. They enjoyed a golden age in '60s and '70s trade publishing: Gazing over the library of books I am using to write my own history of the years 1965 to 1972, I see collections by Joan Didion, Garry Wills, Jack Newfield, Steven V. Roberts, Jonathan Schell, J. Anthony Lukas, Tom Wolfe and Michael Herr, compiled from *Esquire* and the *Nation*, *National Review* and the *New Republic*. Without them, our understanding of postwar America would be much the poorer.

Well, we are without them now. Trade publishers today rarely print such compilations—and our understanding of the years we are now living through has suffered for it. Thus it is altogether fitting and proper—though, in the grand scheme of things, a little sad—that university presses should pick up the slack.

It fell to Princeton University Press to publish *How Bush Rules: Chronicles of a*

spin cycle

BY JESSICA CLARK AND TRACY VAN SLYKE

The Two Faces of Keith Olbermann

"The leading terrorist group in this world right now is al-Qaeda," says MSNBC's Keith Olbermann, "but the leading terrorist group in this country right now is the Republican Party."

Olbermann is on a roll, delivering a series of "Special Comments" that have hoisted ratings for his cable news show "Countdown" by nearly 70 percent since late August.

The cable news host has certainly raised the stakes with these commentaries, which break sharply from the quick-change routines of typical cable news. No

tickers or blinking graphics distract viewers from Olbermann's impassioned and hard-hitting anti-Bush regime diatribes, delivered head-on into the camera. Viewers are hooked: tens of thousands have watched the commentaries on YouTube.

An October 8 *LA Times* article notes that "Olbermann has become a hero to Bush opponents." And yet a number of female commentators aren't as enamored of the self-aggrandizing host.

Take his reporting on a recent celebrity dust-up; the tagline for the segment: "A Slut and Battery."

"Keith Olbermann stays classy by reporting that Paris Hilton has 'had worse things

happen to her face' than being punched," blogs Jessica Valenti of Feministing.com on October 11. "And you know exactly what he means."

Rebecca Traister, a columnist for Salon.com's "Broad-sheet," put it this way via e-mail:

"I don't like Paris Hilton any more than the next sentient human, but Olbermann's segment on her was depressing, mostly because it demonstrated that trashing women for being sexual is still OK no matter what your professional or journalistic sensibilities are supposed to be. It was low, it was offensive, and it was pathetic."

This latest gaffe piles on to

a mountain of other insulting references the host has made to women. He seems to have it in for blondes in particular, calling colleague Rita Cosby "dumber than a suitcase of rocks," and smashing an Ann Coulter doll to pieces on air.

Now, we are not making the argument that Ann Coulter is a decent human being. But Olbermann, given the high standards you're setting for others, we expect more from you.

Radical Regime, a compilation of articles from the (London) *Guardian* and *Salon* by the great Sidney Blumenthal, a former Clinton aide and a longtime journalist who did some of his important early work for *In These Times*. The best of the classic journalistic compilations draw out common threads that lie scattered across occasional pieces, often tied together in an introductory essay. This gives the compilation a twofold purpose, as both a document of an era and an argument about that era. In this regard, *How Bush Rules* is exemplary, convincingly arguing that George W. Bush is “the most willfully radical president of the United States,” by documenting in real-time the episodes that have made up his presidency.

Equally impressive is how Blumenthal’s columns stand the test of time. Even the oldest pieces aren’t dated: Developments that other journalists, in their will to innocence towards the regime in power, were either ignoring or downplaying at the time, Blumenthal was reporting as outrages. Colin Powell knew much of what he was spewing to the United Nations back in January of 2003 was crap. Bob Woodward, apparently, has recently just learned this. Sidney Blumenthal wrote about it two-and-a-half years ago.

Speaking as a historian of political culture in the age of Richard Nixon, I can testify that one of the biggest challenges is answering this question: What did the public know and when did they know it? It won’t be hard for historians of the Bush regime—they can just pick up this book. They’ll find out, for example, that a year ago at least *someone* was reporting on the highly relevant fact that Susan Ralston, the aide who fell on her sword and resigned in October after FOIA revelations of close ties between Jack Abramoff and the White House, had worked as Abramoff’s assistant before she became Karl Rove’s.

Also worth noting is the erudition with which Blumenthal contextualizes and sustains several of his key themes. One of those themes, which I’m convinced more and more historians will be converging upon, is the “Oedipal” interpretation of the Bush presidency. Everyone knows Bush Jr.’s re-invasion of Iraq has much to do with manfully completing the job Bush Sr. was supposedly too girlish too stomach. But Blumenthal has the depth to go beyond the frequent banality of such comparisons. He notes, for example, “Just as the elder Bush picked someone [as vice

excerpt



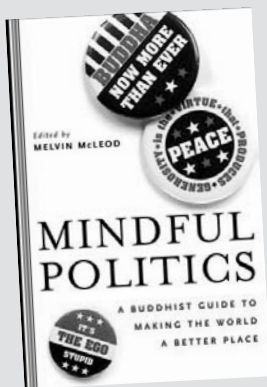
Mindful Politics: A Buddhist Guide for Making the World a Better Place

In this collection of essays compiled by Shambhala Sun editor Melvin McLeod, contributors explore how Buddhist precepts can be applied to the unquiet world of politics. An essay by Sam Harris, author of The End of Faith, argues that while Buddhist philosophy provides powerful tools, placing trust in any religion can prove dangerous.

One of the greatest challenges facing civilization in the twenty-first century is for human beings to learn to speak about their deepest personal concerns—about ethics, spiritual experience, and the inevitability of human suffering—in ways that are not flagrantly irrational. Nothing stands in the way of this project more than the respect we accord religious faith. ... [I]t seems profoundly unlikely that we will heal the divisions in our world simply by multiplying the occasions for inter-faith dialogue. The end game for civilization cannot be mutual tolerance of patent irrationality. Generally, parties to ecumenical discourse have agreed to tread lightly over those points where

their worldviews would otherwise collide, while these very points remain perpetual sources of fascination and violence for their coreligionists.

If religious war is ever to become unthinkable for us, in the way that slavery and cannibalism are, it will be a matter of our having dispensed with the dogma of faith—the idea that beliefs can be sanctified by something other than evidence and rational argument. ... Where we have reasons for what we believe, we have no need of faith; where we have no reasons, we have lost both our connection to the world and to one another.



president] who might have been one of his sons, young Bush chose a version of his father.” I’d never thought about that. Now, when I look at Dick Cheney, I can think of little else. Not only has our sad, neurotic president punished his father by disdaining his policies; he’s twisted in the knife by palling around with such an ostentatiously manly *surrogate* father.

Another key theme here is the role of Catholicism in American political coalitions. Making working-class Catholic immigrants into Democrats was one of FDR’s key political accomplishments in constructing his New Deal majority. Blumenthal has the erudition to understand how self-consciously Karl Rove stripped their Catholic progeny *from* the Democrats to cement a permanent Republican majority. His framing of the Catholic Hierarchy’s motivations in all this—“Politics in Red Robes”—is particularly fine. It is “part of a crusade against their own declining moral

authority,” he writes, in the context of the pedophilia scandals and the rejection of church teaching on abortion and stem-cell research, and I am thoroughly convinced.

Blumenthal is also original and illuminating—again owing to his lively grasp of the psychological transit between the old and new Bush regimes—in his account of the bureaucratic battle between the neoconservatives and Colin Powell. Likewise his point that Reagan owes his place in history to his rejection of his foreign policy hardliners. Few journalists have the historical incisiveness to make these kinds of arguments.

Too bad for all the trade presses: it’s Princeton that’s first out of the gate with a comprehensive and convincing interpretation of the meaning of George W. Bush’s presidency. *How Bush Rules* is a book comprised of timely interventions that is destined to stand the test of time. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Corporate Secrecy Spreads Pharmafakes



THE SUFFERING OF millions could be eased by issuing public health warnings from available information that is currently kept confidential by the pharmaceutical industry," reporter Robert Cockburn told the

Global Forum on Pharmaceutical Anti-Counterfeiting.

The secrecy concerns the flood of pharmafakes that may comprise 50 percent of drugs in some developing countries and 10 percent worldwide. Some experts put the annual toll at 1 million dead and rising.

But the real numbers are hidden.

"Why does the [pharmaceutical] industry continue to shy away from developing the infrastructure needed to assess the size of the global problem?" asks PharmaManufacturing.com editor Agnes Shanley in a 2005 editorial. "The answer is simple: fears of bad publicity and impacts on stock prices."

The building blocks of that infrastructure exist in the separate and secret data banks each of the big pharmaceutical companies maintains on fakes and counterfeiting operations. But opening those records, they contend, threatens security and could create panic. Underlying that caution is a stone-cold business decision. According to Nicholas White, a Thailand-based doctor who has seen the casualties firsthand, "Their marketing people must have made the calculations that they are likely to make more profits by not publicizing than by publicizing."

Indeed, although most people know about Gucci knock-offs, few—even those whose lives depend on it—know that purportedly life-saving drugs may be useless at best, poison at worst. While BigPharma conceals "trade secrets," impoverished people buy bogus

diabetes, malaria and HIV treatments; hospitals drip contaminants into the veins of the desperately ill.

With counterfeits reaping an estimated \$35 billion a year, drug manufacturers would seem to have a straightforward financial interest in exposing and stopping the illicit trade. But that interest clashes with another business consideration: reluctance to damage brand reputation and drive patients to rivals. "There is a serious conflict of interest within the pharmaceutical industry, concerned that making information on specific counterfeits public will reduce public confidence in the product and reduce sales," Paul Newton, et al., wrote in U.K. medical journal *The Lancet*.

The number of times that companies have issued public alerts "is tiny compared with the racket's size," says Cockburn.

The closest thing to a centralized database is the Pharmaceutical Security Institute, a members-only trade group supported by almost \$640,000 in dues and assessments (2004). PSI analyst Peter York describes the non-profit as "central intelligence for counterfeit, diversion, and theft." When PSI learns that a member company's drug has been faked, it strategizes with the affected manufacturer. Only when the company is not a member does PSI contact authorities directly. So if Novartis or GlaxoSmithKline or any other of PSI's 23 paying members decides to delay reporting or to hush up a problem, PSI does not inform government agencies, law enforcement, or the public. York says he knows of no instance when a PSI member company withheld information from law enforcement "regarding a confirmed counterfeit medicine."

PSI investigators' "main concern is to progress the information," said an industry insider who requested anonymity because he was not authorized

to talk to media. "And if by releasing information you would hurt the investigation, investigators may recommend [keeping quiet]. PSI urges companies to work with local law enforcement, and it's not its place to recommend action."

Loath to share proprietary or commercially sensitive information, large companies typically rely on in-house security departments staffed by private investigators bound by confidentiality agreements.

"By using covert means, the industry avoids any assessment of its efforts and is accountable to no one," writes Cockburn.

Pfizer spokesperson Bryant Haskins says his company always reports counterfeiting to authorities and promotes tagging all packaging with radiofrequency identification (RFID). "There is a huge illicit distribution network, especially in the third world, and companies can't know everyone who claims to be distributing their products," says Shanley, adding that "track and trace" technologies make it harder to mimic packaging and easier to identify fakes.

While such technical fixes raise the cost to counterfeiters—who will inevitably counterfeit the anti-counterfeiting devices—they are largely irrelevant in the developing world, which faces the least oversight and the greatest need. The FDA, which begins mandating limited RFID this December, admits "there is no single 'magic bullet' technology."

Rather than depending on technical fixes, pharmaceutical companies must reduce the price of life-saving drugs to impoverished populations and cooperate with researchers, international law enforcement and each other to create an independent, open database, and to support a centralized, rapid-response system of mandatory reporting and public alerts. ■

CONTACT Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org

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JOHN NICHOLS OF *The Nation* will lecture on "Between the Election of 2006 and the End of the Bush Presidency: Reflections on the Road to the Next America" on Sunday, November 19, 11AM at Third Unitarian Church of Chicago near Austin Blvd. and Lake Street. www.thirdunitarianchurch.org, (773) 626 9385.

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Praise the Pause

Continued from backpage

continue the “game” of life as if we are still girls. We are not girls. And to continue to act as though we are robs the world and the coming generations of our insights—insights readily available to us during this particular time, which is a highly significant universal moment of reflection.

I am convinced that in earlier times women during menopause drifted naturally to the edge of the village, constructed for themselves a very small hut, and with perhaps one animal for company—and one that didn’t talk!—gave themselves over to a time without form, without boundaries. They were fishing in deep waters, reflecting on a lifetime of activity and calling up, without consciously attempting to do so, knowledge that would mean survival and progression of the tribe.

DURING THE PAUSE is the ideal time to listen to stories. But only after you have inhabited Silence for long enough to find it comfortable. Even blissful. There are stories coming to us now from every part of the earth; and they are capable of teaching us things we all used to know. For instance, I listened to a CD called “Shamanic Navigation” by John Perkins. In it he talks about the Swa people of the Amazon. These are indigent people who’ve lived in the Amazon rain forest for thousands of years. They tell us that in their society men and women are considered equal but very different. Man, they say, has a destructive nature: it is his job therefore to cut down trees when firewood or canoes are needed. His job also to hunt down and kill animals when there is need for more protein. His job to make war, when that becomes a necessity. The woman’s nature is thought to be nurturing and conserving. Therefore her role is to care for the home and garden, the domesticated animals and the children. She inspires the men. But perhaps her most important duty is to tell the men when to stop.

It is the woman who says: Stop. We have enough firewood and canoes, don’t cut down any more trees. Stop. We have enough meat; don’t kill any more animals. Stop. This war is stupid and using up too many of our resources. Stop. Perkins says that when the Swa are brought to this culture they observe that it is almost com-

pletely masculine. That the men have cut down so many trees and built so many excessively tall buildings that the forest itself is dying; they have built roads without end and killed animals without number. When, ask the Swa, are the women going to say Stop?

Indeed. When are the women, and the Feminine within women and men, going to say Stop?

During the pause is the ideal time to listen to stories. But only after you have inhabited Silence for long enough to find it comfortable.

IUSED TO BE suicidal. I grew up in the white supremacist, fascist South, where the life of a person of color was in danger every minute. For many years I thought of suicide on an almost daily basis. Other than this, and severe depression caused by the inevitable childhood traumas and initiations, I am not a person innately given to despair. However, it has been despairing to see the ease with which women, after over thirty intense years of Feminism, have chosen to erase their gender in language by calling each other, and themselves, “guys.” *This is the kind of thing one can reflect on during a pause.* Are we saying we’re content to be something most of us don’t respect? *Conjure up an image of a guy.* What attributes does it have? Is that really you? Is this a label you gave yourself?

What does being called “guys” do to young women? To little girls?

Isn’t the media responsible for making it “cute” to be a guy, as if that’s all the Women’s Movement was about, turning us into neutered men, into guys? For guys don’t have *cojones*, you know. They are men, but neutered, somehow. So if you’ve turned in your breasts and ovaries for guyness, you’ve really lost out.

And does this make you remember that when we were trying to get the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment, passed, which would have assured equal rights to women, suddenly the market and our television screens were flooded with a new dishwashing liquid called, you remember, Era. A not-so-subtle message that equal rights for women was still associated mainly with the

kitchen and a sink full of dirty dishes. And it must have been in the ’60s, when women were claiming their freedom to have a good time, that the dishwashing liquid magnates came up with a concoction called Joy.

The intuitive part of us, the deep feminine, whether in male or female, knows when we are being ridiculed, laughed at, told to forget about being women, or

having a Feminine, being wild, or being free; led to sleep if not to the slaughter. In those small areas where we do have some control, the words coming out of our mouths, for instance:

When are we going to say Stop? ■

ALICE WALKER is the author, most recently, of *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Light in a Time of Darkness* (The New Press), from which this essay was adapted. © Alice Walker.

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All Praises to the Pause

BY ALICE WALKER

ONE OF THE MANY gifts I received from strangers after writing *The Color Purple* 24 years ago was a bright yellow volume of the *I Ching*. It opened to the 63rd hexagram: "After Completion." This is a time when a major transition from confusion to order has been completed and everything is (at last!) in its proper place even in particulars. Interestingly, according to the *I Ching*, this is a time not of relaxation, but of caution.

The *I Ching* is a compass of great value. Uncanny in its ability to share its Wisdom at just the moment it is required. How many friends, even best and closest friends, can do that?

What it is referring to in this hexagram is something that I am going to call "the pause." The moment when something major is accomplished and we are so relieved to finally be done with it that we are already rushing, at least mentally, into The Future. Wisdom, however, requests a pause. If we cannot give ourselves such a pause, the Universe will likely give it to us. In the form of illness, in the form of a massive Mercury in retrograde, in the form of our car breaking down, our roof starting to leak, our garden starting to dry up. Our government collapsing. And we find ourselves required to stop, to sit down, to reflect. This is the time of "the pause," the universal place of stopping. The universal moment of reflection.

I encourage you not to fear it. And why is it important not to fear the pause? Because some of the most courageous people on earth are scared of it, as I have been myself. Why is this? It is because the pause has nothing in it; it feels empty. It feels like we have been jettisoned into wide open, empty space. We can not see an end to it. Not seeing an end to it, or for that matter, not even understanding a beginning or a need for it, we panic. We may decide to make war, for instance, in the moment the Universe has given us to reflect. By the time we recover from our hasty activity a thousand small children may be lying dead at our feet.

Sometimes there is a feeling of not being able to continue. That, in this pause, whichever one it is, there is no movement. No encouragement to move, at all.

AS A CULTURE we are not in the habit of respecting, honoring, or even acknowledging the pause. (Culturally the most common reference to the pause was given over to Coca-Cola, which promised "The pause that refreshes." In other words, whenever there is a moment you are not bus-



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ily doing something, *Eat. Drink.* And here's what we want you to eat or drink.) Women know this very well. At menopause, a time of extremely high power and shapeshifting, we are told to behave as though nothing is happening. To

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