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Welfare?**

**Media and
Obama's "Liberal"
Agenda**

**San Onofre
Showdown**

**Gun
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NUMBER 3
VOLUME 17



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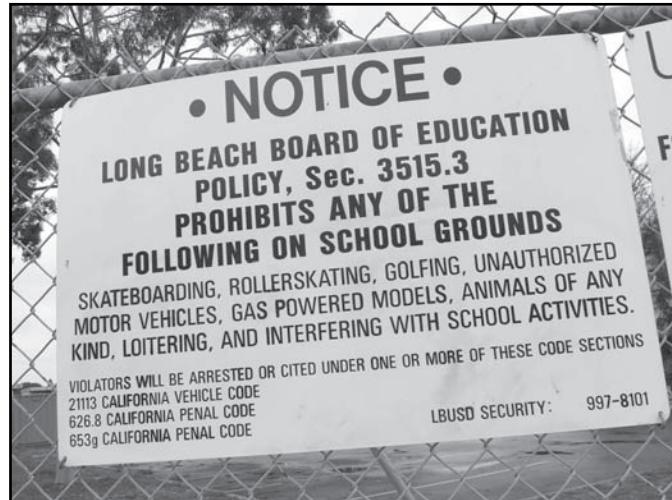


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EDITOR:

JOHN O'KANE

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT:

MELINA PARIS

ASSISTANT EDITORS:

DAVID GORDON
DELIA URBANEZ

DESIGNER:

KAITE PRICE

INTERN:

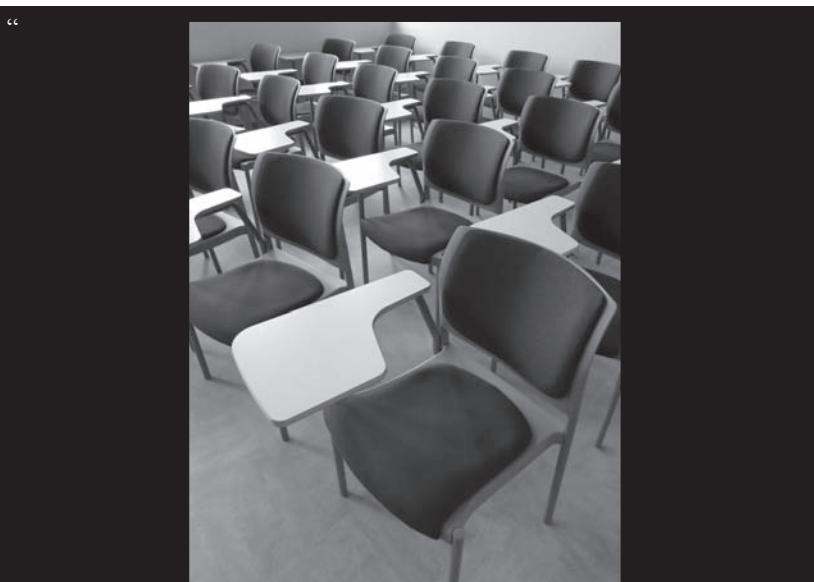
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CONTRIBUTORS:

WILLIAM BLUM
MARK BREZA
NOAM CHOMSKY
ROBBIE CONAL
MARC COOPER
CANDICE GAWNE
ARIANNA HUFFINGTON
JAMES KUNSTLER
DOREEN LE
JASON LEOPOLD
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SANDRA TSING-LOH
DAVE VAN PATTEN
RENEE VAN WINKLE
DAVE ZIRIN

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by Slobodan Dimitrov

Slobodan Dimitrov is a photographer based in the Long Beach/Los Angeles Harbors. His 20 year long project on the Piledrivers can currently be seen in the lobby of Local 2375, Wilmington CA. He was selected for the Los Angeles Public Library Neighborhood Project to document the community of San Pedro for the public archives in 2000. In 2008 he received another commission from the Los Angeles Public Library to document industrial Los Angeles in the Port of LA. In July 2010, the Artist Portrait series was exhibited at Angels Gate Cultural Center. To date he has had over 130 exhibits, nationally and internationally. He has been a contributing photographer for *The Dispatcher*, *LA Weekly*, *The Building Trades News*, *Random Lengths*. His work has appeared in *The Nation*, *Carpenter*, *Solidarity*, *SEIU*, *UNITE*, *Machinists Int.*, *America at Work*, *The Progressive*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, and *The Economist*, among many labor publications and newspapers. sdimitrovphoto.com

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MEDIA AND OBAMA'S "LIBERAL AGENDA"

THOMAS BISHOP
ANDY NEWBOLD

The right-wing media are claiming that the "liberal agenda" President Obama outlined in his second inaugural address is out of the mainstream, even though polling has shown that the majority of Americans agree with Obama's stances on marriage equality, sustainable energy, and other issues.

Charles Krauthammer Suggests Opposing Cuts To Social Security, Medicare, And Medicaid Is Part Of Obama's "Liberal Agenda." During Fox News' coverage of Obama's inauguration, Fox contributor Charles Krauthammer suggested Obama's speech about supporting federal benefits, and expanding green energy and civil rights was an "ode to big government" and an outline of his "liberal agenda." Krauthammer later claimed that Obama's speech was evidence that the president wants to "change the ideological trajectory of the country." [Fox News, 1/21/13 via FoxNews.com]

Peter Johnson Jr. Suggested Obama Gave A "Hard-Left Manifesto" By

Pointing To "Phantom Arguments" In Terms Of Civil Rights And Global Warming. Fox News legal analyst Peter Johnson Jr. appeared on *Fox & Friends* to attack the issues raised during Obama's second inaugural address as a "hard-left manifesto." Johnson went on to claim that political moderates would react to the speech by asking "is this president in touch with the realities of America?"

JOHNSON: What we heard was a far-left manifesto from the president of the United States yesterday at the inauguration. It was not so much about populism as it was about pandering, and it was a very bizarre, disordered priority of what our national interests were. Where was the debt? Where was the deficit? Where was the unemployment? Where was the issue of poverty in America, which has increased under his watch? Where is the hopelessness? Where is the fear that so many Americans have that they

are going to lose their house? Where are the solutions for those problems? Instead, we got this catalog of false premises, phantom arguments in terms of civil rights, in terms of global warming, in terms of long lines at the polls. [Fox News, *Fox & Friends*, 1/22/13]

WSJ Suggests Obama's Agenda Is "Favored By Liberals" But Not Mainstream Voters. In a January 22 article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Carol Lee described the policies listed by President Obama during his second inaugural address as "a list of domestic goals favored by liberals." Lee pointed to "equal pay for women, expanded voting rights and a shift to sustainable energy sources."

Mr. Obama, who took office facing two wars, made scant mention of foreign policy, a contrast from his first inaugural address, which was largely a repudiation of former-President George W. Bush's handling of foreign affairs. Instead, Mr. Obama promoted a list of domestic goals favored by liberals, including equal pay for women, expanded voting rights and a shift to sustainable energy sources. He also became the first president to explicitly promote gay rights during an inaugural address. [*The Wall Street Journal*, 1/22/13]

Byron York Suggests Obama Was Strictly Appealing To His Base With Messages Like Immigration Reform, Gay Rights, Global Warming, And Expanding Green Energy Projects. In a piece in *The Washington Examiner*, columnist Byron York attacked Obama for focusing on issues only his "loyalists and activists" base would support:

That is a desperately bad situation. People know it. In poll after poll, Americans list jobs and the economy as the issue most important to the country. They've been saying the same thing every day Barack Obama has been in office. And yet, in his inaugural address the president said essentially nothing about the nation's most pressing problem. Why?

Because he didn't have to. His base supporters -- loyalists and activists who would declare war on a Republican president with a similar unemployment rate -- continue to give Obama a pass on joblessness. There are other issues, like immigration reform, climate change and raising taxes, that excite them more than economic recovery...

There's no doubt they all greatly admire Obama and would truly like to see the economy improve. But when Obama's core supporters put no pressure on him to

-- Thomas Bishop and Andy Newbold

Carol Lee described the policies listed by President Obama during his second inaugural address as "a list of domestic goals favored by liberals."

produce results on jobs, when they make excuses for him and blame his political adversaries, the result is a president who doesn't feel bound to address the nation's core problem. So he doesn't.

There were plenty of messages in Obama's speech. He will push for immigration reform. He will push for gay rights. (Obama used the words "equal" or "equality" seven times in his speech, versus just once in his first inaugural address.) He will push on global warming. And he will keep pouring billions of taxpayer dollars into "green energy" projects that have so far yielded little energy and fewer jobs.

But the economy? Other than declaring, "An economic recovery has begun," Obama had nearly nothing to say. [The Washington Examiner, 1/21/13, emphasis added]

Pew: More Americans Favor Gay Marriage Than Those Who Oppose It. A Pew Research Center poll that has measured support for marriage equality since 1996 found that "the public has gradually become more supportive of granting legal recognition to same-sex marriages over the past 15 years." Their poll found 48 percent favor marriage equality while 43 percent oppose it.

Politico Poll Shows That A Plurality Supports Gay Marriage. A poll conducted by Politico and George Washington University found that 64 percent of Americans supported same-sex marriage or civil unions while only 24 percent of respondents thought that they should not be allowed to have any type of legal union. [Politico, 12/9/12]

Gallup: 53% Of Americans Favor Legalized Same-Sex Marriage. Gallup poll conducted in December 2012 found "53% of Americans believe same-sex marriages should be recognized by law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages."

Yale University: 92% of Americans Say Developing Sources Of Clean Energy Should Be A Priority. A Yale University study on public support for climate and energy policies also found that "A large majority of Americans (77%) say global warming should be a "very high" (18%), "high" (25%), or "medium" priority (34%) for the president and Congress." The study added:

A large majority of Americans (77%) say global warming should be a "very high" (18%), "high" (25%), or "medium" priority (34%) for the president and Congress. One in four (23%) say it should be a low priority.

Nearly all Americans (92%) say the president and the Congress should make developing sources of clean energy a "very high" (31%), "high" (38%), or "medium" priority (23%). Very few say it should be a low priority (8%). [Yale University, 9/13/12]

Study: Voters In Four Swing States Found That A High Majority Want To Transition To More Sustainable Energy. A survey released by the American Council on Renewable Energy and the Advanced Energy Economy Ohio Institute found broad support for candidates who wanted to transition away from fossil fuels to cleaner sources of energy:

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A post-election energy survey released by the American Council on Renewable Energy (ACORE) and Advanced Energy Economy Ohio Institute (AEE Ohio Institute) confirmed that energy was a “very important” issue to the majority of voters in Virginia (60%), Ohio (57%), Iowa (58%), and Colorado (66%) in their vote decision:

These same voters also overwhelmingly expressed more support for candidates who want to move their states away from consuming coal and toward the production of cleaner sources of energy such as wind, solar, and natural gas. According to the survey, 75% of voters in Iowa, 72% of voters in Colorado and Virginia, and 69% of voters in Ohio said they wanted to transition away from fossil fuels. [American Council on Renewable Energy and Advanced Energy Economy Ohio Institute, 11/8/12, via Think Progress]

Study: Americans Support Increased Funding For Clean Energy And Tax Cuts For Renewable Energy. A national survey by the Institute for Science, Technology and Public Policy (ISTPP) at the Texas A&M Bush School of Government and Public Service in cooperation with the Texas A&M Energy Institute found broad support for increased funding for clean energy research and tax cuts for renewable energy companies:

According to the national survey, conducted by the Institute for Science, Technology and Public Policy (ISTPP) at the Texas A&M Bush School of Government and Public Service in cooperation with the Texas A&M Energy Institute, 59 percent of Americans support in-

creased funding for research and development of renewable energy sources and 60 percent support tax cuts for companies to develop renewable energy technologies. Additionally, 78 percent of the public strongly favors better fuel efficiency for cars and trucks. [Texas A&M University, 11/9/12]

Paycheck Fairness Act Coalition: New Polling Data Shows Voters Overwhelmingly Support The Paycheck Fairness Act. Study conducted by the Paycheck Fairness Act Coalition found that 86 percent of registered voters supported a law that would provide women more tools to get fair pay in the workplace. The study found strong support (72 percent) for “law will also make it harder for employers to justify paying different wages for the same work and ensure that businesses that break the law compensate women fairly.” [National Women’s Law Center, 6/9/10]

SEIU Poll: Strong Bipartisan Support For Immigration Reform That Includes Earned Citizenship. A Service Employees International Union poll found that 87 percent of Americans favored citizenship for undocumented immigrants at some point. The poll showed strong support of more than 80 percent in favor of earned citizenship with only 7 percent responding that undocumented immigrants should not be given a chance to earn citizenship. [Service Employees International Union, 1/18/13]

Pew: 72% Of Americans Support A Path To Citizenship For Unauthorized Immigrants. A 2011 Pew poll found that 71 percent of Americans in favor of a path



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to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. The study found even stronger support among Hispanics, with 86 percent approving the establishment of a path to citizenship. [Pew Research Center, 5/4/11]

National Journal: Majority Believe Social Security And Medicare Should Not Be Cut At All. In a poll conducted by *National Journal*, 77 percent of respondents believed that Social Security should not be cut. Medicare found even more support with 79 percent of respondents saying they did not want any cuts at all to the program. [National Journal, 12/3/12]

Pew Research Center Found A Majority Opposed To Cutting Social Security And Medicare To Reduce The Debt. An October 2012 Pew Research Center survey found that two-thirds of Americans support increasing taxes on Americans making more than \$250,000, but do not support cutting popular programs like Social Security and Medicare:

There also is resistance to making changes in Social Security and Medicare to reduce the debt and deficit: 57% oppose raising the amount Medicare recipients contribute to their health care, while 56% disapprove of gradually raising the Social Security retirement age. About as many disapprove (47%) as approve (49%) of reducing Medicare benefits for higher-income seniors. [Pew Research Center, 10/12/12]

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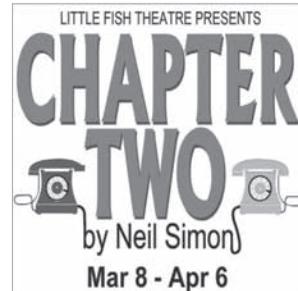
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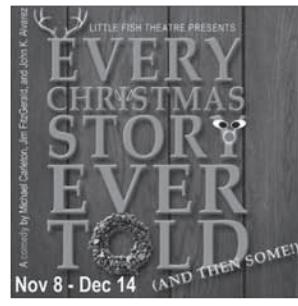
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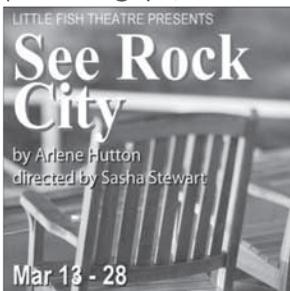
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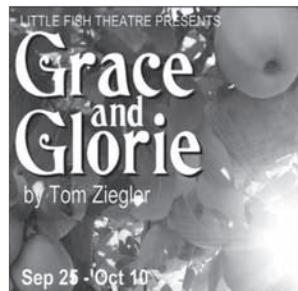
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WHY GUN CONTROL IS CERTAIN TO BE EFFECTIVE

F R E D R E E D

I'm going to explain why gun-control is not only entirely reasonable but also certain to be effective. Only the ignorant can deny this.

First, some orientation. Cement-headed NRA types need to recognize, and state manfully, that the legalization of guns is in fact perfectly practical. History has shown this repeatedly. When the government outlaws something that huge numbers of people very much want, the outlawed items immediately disappear from society. This has been shown countless times.

When Washington outlawed alcohol, booze vanished overnight and everyone stopped drinking. Can anyone deny this? When Washington banned the use of cannabis, all of us made insane by *Reefer Madness* quit smoking dope, and today there is probably not a town in America in which one might buy a joint. Similarly, Washington made illegal the downloading of copyrighted music--which also stopped immediately. No one now has illegal music. Ask your adolescent daughter.

So with guns. They are small, easily smuggled, of high value to criminals and will be of higher value when only criminals have them, so it is virtually certain that they will vanish when the government says so.

Mexico, where I live, has stringent laws against guns, which have proved at least a partial success. Criminals have AKs, RPGs, and grenades, while nobody else has anything. That's a partial success, isn't it?

While I am in favor of illegalizing guns and thus ending crime, I think the principle should be democratically applied. Let us begin by disarming the Pentagon. If this seems unreasonable, ask yourself: who kills more children in a month, Ritalin-addled little boys in America, or the US Air Force in every Muslim country it has heard of? All I ask is an honest body count. I will accept your numbers.

But let's ask the question which, being critical, isn't asked. I suppose it makes no sense to confuse our-

selves with the essentials of things. Anyway, why have American school boys, who in my rural Virginia high-school of 1964 were armed to the eyeballs with deer guns and varmint rifles, and never shot anybody intentionally or accidentally, or had the idea pass through their whirring libido-crazed minds, if any--suddenly start shooting their friends in school? Why now?

We who wended our strange ways through the Sixties know that lengthy use of psychoactive stimulants produces...wild ideas and worse behavior. For example, Ritalin, the first drug I ever tried, in Istanbul--or dex, or others--produces crashes as we called them, ferocious depressions accompanied by inability to sleep, anger, and irrationality. We're talking serious psychosis in a bottle. I've known speed freaks to consistently ignore stop lights, not bothering to look to either side. And what do they give little boys bored with schools run by intellectual termites?

But let's look at the question from a different angle. Perhaps the problem is that we don't have anything worthwhile to do. It used to be that almost everybody worked on farms, because they wanted to eat. Being males, the males killed each other, neighboring tribes, and all reachable nationalities, but they generally did not murder their own children--though anyone who has been a parent can understand the temptation. People were too busy making stuff that mattered--food, clothes, roofs.

Then farming got automated, so people started making other things that were sensible. Refrigerators. Penicillin. Actual glass for windows. Electricity.

As time went by, nearly everything people really had any use for was made, mostly

through automation. This meant two things. First, consumerism became essential to keep the economy going. Nobody much needed designer water, or Farrumcoochie boots, or SUVs, or McMansions with enough space for a large colony of Barbary apes, which typically they contained. These things were kinda fun, like Corvettes and iPads and whoopee cushions, but hardly vital. Mostly nobody would have thought of buying them if not beaten about the head and shoulders with advertising campaigns subtle as a sock full of hog kidneys.

The second part of the bog of consumerism was that all of this deplorable nonsense was rolling off automated assembly lines. Consequently, people didn't have anything to do that needed doing. Yet they still wanted to eat. So there were two solutions: The Democratic, which

-- Fred Reed

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applied. Let us begin
by disarming the
Pentagon.**

was to give everybody everything they wanted as an entitlement; and the Republican, which was to have people work their lives away in meaningless jobs that allowed them to buy the unnecessary things advertising told them they wanted. This required the creation of huge numbers of meaningless jobs. Of course, it was politically wiser not to describe them just this way.

An obvious and expandable source of unwork was the government. Conservatives always say that they don't like big government, but their choice is to pay federal drones to occupy offices pointlessly or else to fire them and put them on obvious welfare. Being decayed Calvinists, they choose the former.

Consider this seriously. The United States has no military enemies, or only those of its own manufacture. Suppose it simply fired the entire force. Whole towns would die overnight with the bases that they support, the troops would go on unemployment, and the vast discreet industries that make unnecessary weapons would unemployed uncounted families.

For that matter, do you really believe that the Departments of Education, Commerce, HUD, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs do anything worth doing? But we can't just fire them because there is nothing for them to do other than the nothing that they are already doing.

But even government couldn't supply the demand for JAI (Job-Appearing Indolence). However, the inexhaustible fertility of the American uneconomy welled up to fill the gap. Nail parlors popped up. Bureaucracies in public schools grew to outnumber the students. Enormous

school systems in places like DC and Detroit hired edocrats like the sands of the sea who taught nothing to anyone, reasonably enough since they didn't know anything.

Universities decided that all children needed to go to college, though a maximum of fifteen percent had the intelligence or the desire. This produced a mother lode of Job-Appearing Indolence as professors of low grade churned out grammatically frightening attempts at research whose chief virtue was that no one read it.

So, panting, we come to murder as economic fly-wheel.

Suburbia contains a lot of unpleasantly nice people, in particular effeminate men and bored housewives with a Mussolini complex, who want power, money, and something to fill the empty hours. Enter psychotherapy. This is quietly a very big industry. Anybody who is mildly unhappy--and who wouldn't be, working in a pointless unjob?--is urged to Seek Professional Help. The Helpers--they are usually but not always female--will establish a vaguely sadomasochist relationship with you in which you, or your teenage daughter, will be forced to reveal the most intimate and embarrassing details of your inner head. The Helpers will then prescribe at least one and perhaps several forms of suburban soma--prozac, Depakote, Welbutrin, Ritalin--which frequently have unpredictable but documentably awful effects on brain chemistry. These drugs are heavily-promoted by Big Pharma, which is the supply arm of the business of compulsory doping of American children, just as Lockheed-Martin is the supply arm of the Pentagon's burning of Asian children. There's



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Fred, a keyboard mercenary with a disorganized past, has worked on staff for *Army Times*, *The Washingtonian*, *Soldier of Fortune*, *Federal Computer Week*, and *The Washington Times*. www.fredoneverything.net.



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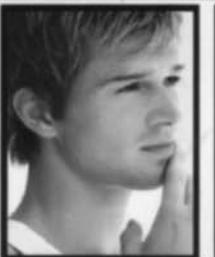
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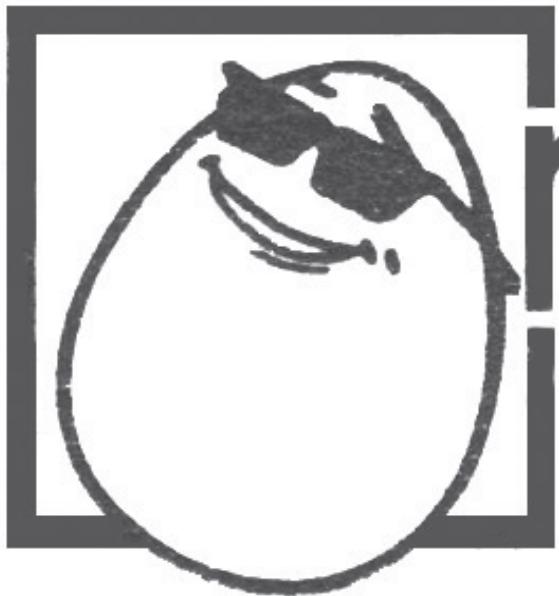
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BIRTH OF AN ECONOMIC LIE

JOSHUA HOLLAND

There's a new economic myth that's now being amplified by the conservative media. It demonizes vital public services and suggests that the poor are doing just fine thanks to the largesse of the country's "makers." Conservatives are being told that the United States is now spending vast fortunes combatting poverty—more than we dedicate to national defense, Social Security and Medicare.

This new spin is notable not for its mendacity—although it is completely divorced from reality—but because its origins are easily traced, allowing us to see how these kinds of distortions come to be. This one originated with the work of an analyst at the Heritage Foundation who is well known for his intellectual dishonesty. It was then picked up by Republican staffers on Capitol Hill, who lent the claim credibility by requesting a Congressional Research Service report on the analysis. They then further distorted the narrative before distributing it to friendly writers at conservative media outlets, who dutifully reported the falsehood. It will soon become conventional wisdom on the Right, further distorting conservatives' view of taxes and spending.

Several conservative outlets had the story before Daniel Halper at the *Weekly Standard*, but his piece is the one that's been cited by hundreds of conservative blogs, right-wing radio talkers and Fox News. Halper, citing "the minority side of the Senate Budget Committee," framed the story like this: "[W]elfare spending per day per household in poverty is \$168, which is higher than the \$137 median income per day. When broken down per hour, welfare spending per hour per household in poverty is \$30.60, which is higher than the \$25.03 median income per hour."

For fiscal year 2011, CRS identified roughly 80 overlapping federal means-tested welfare programs that together represented the single largest budget item in 2011—more than the nation spends on Social Security, Medicare, or national defense. The total amount spent on these federal programs, when taken together with approximately \$280 billion in state contributions, amounted to roughly \$1 trillion.

Common sense should tell you that this is a ridiculous claim. Given that the United States has one of the weakest social safety nets in the world, it's pretty obvious that we're not spending more on each family in poverty than the median income—or more on the poor than we spend on defense, Social Security and Medicare. But let's dig into the details.

The first problem with this claim is mathematical rather than ideological. The story is that we spend \$168 per day for each family in poverty. But the eligibility cut-offs for most of the 80 or so programs identified by Senate Republicans are higher than the poverty line; in many cases, significantly higher.

Given that there are around 600 different eligibility requirements for these programs, most determined by the states, it's difficult to calculate an average without a staff. But in Colorado, which I chose because it tends to be ideologically middle-of-the-road, the average eligibility cut-off for the 10 means-tested federal benefits listed here is \$18,075, or 62 percent above the federal poverty line.

The myth can be expressed mathematically like this: **Total Spending On "Welfare"/Families in poverty = \$168 per day.** But these services benefit many more people than those struggling under the poverty line—one may as well divide those costs by the total number of rabbits or blue cars in the U.S. The reality, expressed mathematically, is: **Total Spending On "Welfare"/Those who receive benefits = \$24.77 per day.**

That's a *lot* less than \$168. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "welfare" as aid in the form of money or necessities for those in need; and an agency or program through which such aid

Fifty years of political science tells us that Americans hold a very favorable view of most programs that help the poor, especially educational and job training programs which, in theory at least, help them lift themselves out of poverty. But there is one exception: Americans don't like "welfare."

-- Joshua Holland

is distributed. But that definition represents only a small share of the programs identified by the Republican staffers. Many, or most, are things no reasonable person would ever call "welfare." There's aid to communities recovering from natural disasters; a number of job training programs; education grants—from Head Start for pre-schoolers to Pell Grants for low-income college students; money to enforce child support orders; programs that improve teachers' skills; and even screening programs to detect breast and cervical cancer in low-income communities.

Halper writes that the programs provide "direct or indirect financial support," but "indirect" is a key sleight-of-hand. A number of the programs identified by the Republican staffers provide money to institutions and communities rather than individuals in need. Included is a program that gives money to "eligible colleges and universities to strengthen their management and fiscal operations," funding for Americorps—which trains and places teachers in low-income communities—and another that gives rural communities assistance upgrading their water and sewage systems.

I asked an economist and budget expert—who didn't want to be named—how a grant for community projects can be considered "means-tested." He explained that they aren't. Instead, they're awarded according to "a variety of considerations, including the median income of a jurisdiction's residents." He added: "If you want to call that means-testing you are welcome to do so, since in America we are all entitled to our own definitions."

The important takeaway here is that many of the programs that serve these communities provide benefits

to people who aren't poor. When the federal government helps a rural community upgrade its water system, it may well help a lot of poor people, but clean water will come out of the taps of everyone in that community, rich, poor or somewhere in between. Aid to universities that serve a lot of low-income students will also help that university's middle-income students. And when you help a town with a lot of low-income residents rebuild after a natural disaster, the richest person in town will also benefit.

Another example. According to the Congressional Research Service, a number of the education programs included on the list result in "students from relatively well-off families receiving assistance, as there is no absolute income ceiling on eligibility."

Fifty years of political science tells us that Americans hold a very favorable view of most programs that help the poor, especially educational and job training programs which, in theory at least, help them lift themselves out of poverty. But there is one exception: Americans don't like "welfare."

In his classic book, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, sociologist Martin Gilens found that significant majorities of Americans told pollsters that they wanted to increase public spending to fight poverty at the same time that majorities said they were opposed to welfare. Gilens concluded that this disconnect was driven by a widespread belief that "most welfare recipients don't really need it," and by racial animus—"perceptions that welfare recipients are undeserving and blacks are lazy."

This is all very well understood by everyone who had a hand in creating and amplifying this new falsehood. If you take programs that offer low-income people job training or adult literacy or legal services—or programs that fund community health centers and improvements in public works—and call them "welfare," you can instantly turn very popular programs into something else: handouts for the "undeserving" poor. And that's just what they're trying to do.

Many conservative economic views are shaped by myths. Think about the fact-free narrative that slashing tax rates for the wealthy will result in more revenues coming into the government's coffers, the common claim that half of the country pays no taxes, or the idea that increasing domestic oil production can lower global oil prices enough to bring down the price of a gallon of gas here at home.

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So it will be with the idea that the federal government spends a trillion on “welfare.” But this particular myth is interesting in that we can trace its provenance, see where it came from, how it was amplified, and how it was shaped along the way.

In May, Robert Rector, the Heritage Foundation’s “senior research fellow on family and welfare studies,” testified before the House Budget Committee. He identified 79 of what he described as “means-tested welfare” programs, with a total price tag of \$927 billion (in combined costs to the federal government and the states).

Who is Robert Rector? He’s an analyst with a long and storied history of suggesting that the poorest Americans are living quite well. Andy Kroll profiled him for Mother Jones when it was reported that Rector had been the source of Mitt Romney’s universally debunked claim that Obama had “gutted” the work requirements of Bill Clinton’s welfare “reforms.”

Rector, wrote Kroll, is “a man who holds controversial, and in some cases inaccurate, views of poverty and economics. Rector has claimed that poverty doesn’t impact children, that you’re not really poor if you have air conditioning or a car, and that the very idea of welfare lifting Americans out of poverty is ‘idiotic.’” In 2011, “he questioned the government’s assertion that more than 30 million people were poor by pointing to different ‘modern amenities’ they owned. The people the government calls poor, he wrote, ‘are not poor in any ordinary sense of the term,’ while the real poor ‘are a minority within the overall poverty population.’”

In calling all manner of programs “welfare,” Rector’s testimony was intellectually dishonest. But his math was accurate. Instead of dividing the money spent on these programs by the number of families living in poverty, Rector noted that “some means-tested assistance goes to individuals who are low-income but not poor.”

The result of doing the math right is that, rather than spending \$61,320 per year for every family living under the poverty line, as Senate Republicans claim—and Daniel Halper and others parrot—the real number is, according to Rector’s own testimony, “\$9,040 for each lower-income American (i.e., persons in the lowest-income third of the population).”

Regardless of the number, at this point the claim was being made only by a Heritage Foundation fellow of dubious distinction. But Rector’s testimony before the House Budget Committee so impressed Jeff Sessions’ staff, that they asked the Congressional Research Service to prepare a report examining the total cost of programs that help low-income Americans, either directly or indirectly.

The report they got back from CRS—which identified four more programs than Rector had—gave added credibility to Rector’s original claim. But the authors were careful to note that their analysis didn’t look only at “welfare.” And they noted that it included programs that aren’t in fact means-tested at all. Programs were included, according to the report, if “they (1) had provisions that base an individual’s eligibility or priority for service on a

measure (or proxy) of low or limited income; or (2) target resources in some way (e.g., through allocation formulas, variable matching rates) using a measure (or proxy) of low or limited income.”

The authors added: “A few programs without an explicit low-income provision were included because either their target population is disproportionately poor or their purpose clearly indicates a presumption that participants will be low-income.”

The CRS report looked only at federal spending. Jeff Sessions’ staff added the states’ contributions as well to the big lie. It seems they decided to divide total spending on what they call “welfare” by the number of families in poverty rather than the number of people who benefit from these programs, in the process turning \$9,000 in spending per household into \$61,000.

The CRS report is dated October 16. The National Review ran an item two days later, when Jeff Sessions issued a press release, and Fox News amplified the claim two days after that. Both reports mentioned the total price tag for these programs—close to \$1 trillion—but neither cited the \$168 per day claimed by Sessions’ staffers. It was that framing, featured in the headline of Daniel Halper’s Weekly Standard article, that appears to have driven the myth to the larger conservative media.

The end result is that a lot of Americans are woefully misinformed about what we spend on anti-poverty programs, and what those programs look like. Traditional welfare—now known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families—costs the federal government just \$16.5 billion, a fraction of what’s now claimed by the Right. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, even when one uses a very expansive definition of “welfare,” only “13 percent of the federal budget in 2011, or \$466 billion, went to support programs that provide aid (other than health insurance or Social Security benefits) to individuals and families facing hardship.”

So we have another gap between what is “true” in the conservative media bubble and the objective facts. In the real world, we spend about \$25 per day on the needy. But, according to Fox News, the figure is \$168.

Joshua Holland is an editor and senior writer at AlterNet. He’s the author of *The 15 Biggest Lies About the Economy*.

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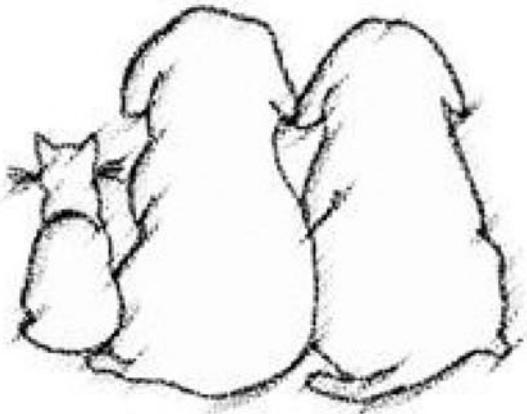
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RICH PARENT, POOR PARENT: INEQUALITY IN LONG BEACH EDUCATION

PETER MATHEWS

An American child's chance of acquiring a quality education depends more on the parents' income than on almost anything else, including ethnicity and sometimes even public funding.

A few months ago I was walking my infant daughter in her stroller in our Long Beach Belmont Heights neighborhood. As I turned the corner, I saw a lemonade stand run by a mother, her children, and their friends. I thought mom was teaching the kids how to become successful entrepreneurs!

Then I read the sign that said, "Lemonade for Fremont Elementary. Please support our fabulous science and computer labs!!" Another sign said, "Thank you Mrs. Phelps for your donations of lemons!!" I wanted to help in a small way, so I bought a couple of glasses.

As I sipped the lemonade, the mother told me that for the last several years the parents in the Fremont Elementary neighborhood had raised approximately \$100,000 annually to help keep the labs open. They had been threatened with closure because of state-wide budget cuts. I wondered how many lemons it takes to raise \$100,000 to keep two labs open? Not enough, and that's why the parents from this affluent neighborhood had to raise and donate their own money; parents like Keith and Karen Vescial, whose son Evan

attends Fremont Elementary. Keith called this "a hybrid form of private/public education." Keith went on to tell me "in communities that can't or won't raise or donate private money, the kids suffer." Keith corroborated the lemonade mom's story and said that he got the details at a PTA meeting.

This got me thinking. How many parents in the low-income neighborhoods of Long Beach can raise or donate \$100,000 annually to save their school's science lab, if they even have one? With the median household income in most of these areas lower than the national median of \$50,054 per year, I would venture to say, not many of those parents, if any, can. As I walked my daughter back home, it occurred to me that something had to be done about the lack of resources in low-income neighborhoods.

The problem isn't just a lack of government funding. Property taxes of course are a key source for funding K-12 schools, and this is why schools in affluent areas have had more to spend on education: their assessed property base is much higher.

Inner-city schools have had a difficult time paying competitive teacher salaries and providing the resources and facilities necessary to help their students achieve equality. This is due to the inadequacy of monies from the state and federal governments, which have tried to cover the disparities in various school districts. In California there has been some success in funding certain school districts to equalize these disparities, but this hasn't always led to a greater equality of results.

The differences between low-income neighborhoods and high-income neighborhoods are clear when we compare two Long Beach High Schools. Because Long Beach's Jordan High School and Wilson High School are both in the LBUSD, they both receive similar levels of per pupil funding. In fact, in 2009-2010, Jordan's per pupil funding was \$7248 and Wilson's was \$6078. Yet the majority of Wilson students' academic achievement levels were higher than Jordan's. In this case, the students' academic achievement rates were correlated with the parents' income levels. Gener-



photo by Slobodan Dimitrov

ally, the higher income levels of Wilson parents produce the social environment which enables their children to do better in school. Although Jordan's per pupil funding is slightly higher than Wilson's, the majority of Jordan students' academic achievement scores were far lower than those for the majority of Wilson students.

Jordan High School is located in a low to moderate income area of northern Long Beach. Five percent of parents in the area make over \$125,000 annually, and 75 percent of students are classified as socio-economically disadvantaged. Wilson High School is located in the middle-to-high income area of southern Long Beach, where 15 percent of the parents make over \$125,000 annually, and 48 percent of students are classified as socio-economically disadvantaged. This is why, despite the similar per pupil funding level, test scores at Wilson High school far surpass those at Jordan high school (lbschools.net). Measuring academic performance for 2010-2011 by the percent of students who are proficient or advanced on standardized tests, Jordan's scores are less than half of Wilson's: 22% in English/Language Arts, 9% in Math, 23% in Science, and 23% in History/Social Science. In comparison, Wilson's numbers are 50% in English/Language Arts, 22% in Math, 56% in Science and 49% in History/Social Science (lbschools.net).

Jordan's numbers are much lower than Wilson's in other ways. For every 100 students in 9th grade enrolled in Jordan, 48 go on to graduate four years later, and only 13 pass the courses required to enter the CSU and UC systems. In contrast, for every 100 students in 9th grade enrolled in Wilson, 67 go on to graduate, and 36 pass the courses required (California Education Opportunity Report, 2011, idea.gseis.ucla.edu/educational-opportunity-report).

This suggests that the problem of inequality in education is more complex than just the decrease in funding. The austerity budgets that just keep coming have eliminated resources and classes across the districts. But it is low income districts that have been hit the hardest, even if

the per pupil funding has been maintained in certain cases, because the parents in them don't have the time and resources to compensate for the overall decrease in funding. And they're the victims of our endless recession, suffering greater levels of unemployment than the rest of the population, making it even worse.

So it's even more important than ever to make sure these disparities don't continue to get worse, which means not only working to change the priorities in Sacramento to get more funding,

but also working for better policies to improve inequality in income so that families can provide the environment to help their children perform better. What we need from the Brown administration now is an extra funding boost to schools in poor areas that can help overcome the wealthy parental factor.

This is a tall order. Policies have been stacked against low-income Americans for nearly forty years. The gap in income and wealth between top and bottom has been widening due to the stagnation of wages, and tax policies that benefit elite individuals and corporations. Those at the bottom have had to pay a bigger share of the tax burden with ever diminishing income. Because those at the top, individuals and corporations, have had to pay less and less percentage-wise of the tax pie, there have been endless budget crises in the state. And every time education gets

photo by Slobodan Dimitrov hit hard since legislators refuse to change the tax structure. So it's no surprise why California is near the bottom nationally for K-12 education!

Perhaps the real tragedy is that education has traditionally been the vehicle for escaping the lack of opportunity by those left behind. The recession-driven cuts and declining economic fortunes we are witnessing, and which certainly haven't escaped Long Beach, are denying too many the tools to break free from the poverty trap.

Peter Mathews teaches political science at Cypress College and is an analyst on radio and television.



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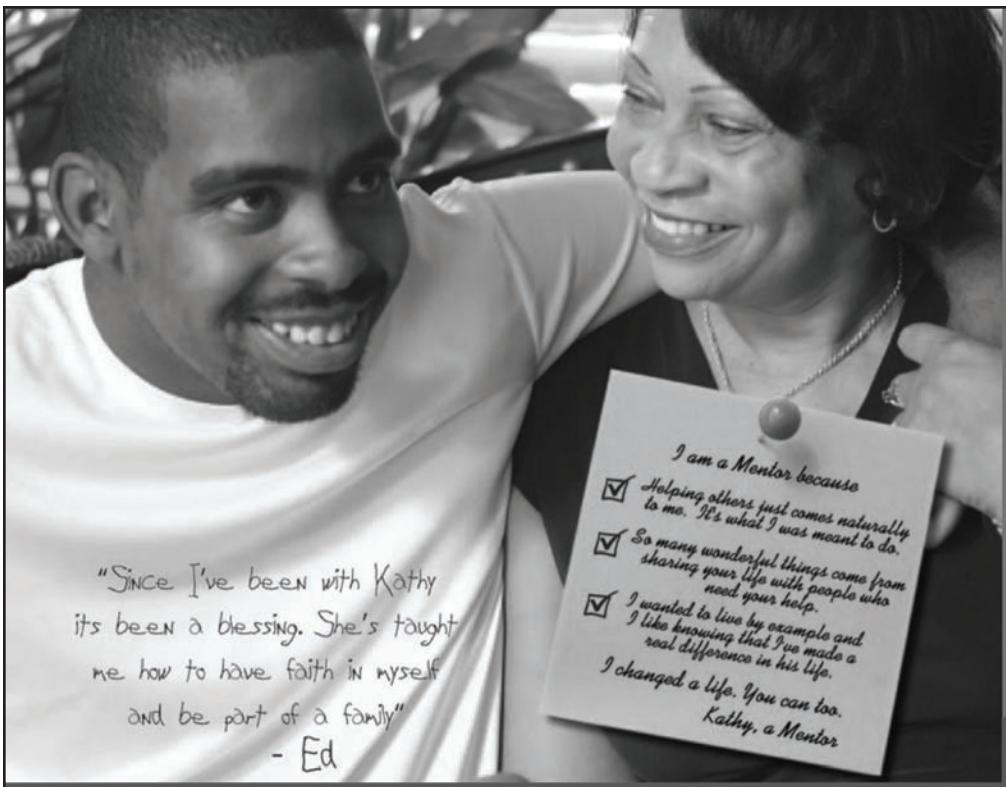
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INTERNET SPELLS DOOM FOR ORGANIZED RELIGION?

VALERIE TARICO

As we head into a new year, the guardians of traditional religion are ramping up efforts to keep their flocks—or in crass economic terms, to retain market share. Some Christians have turned to soul searching while others have turned to marketing. Last fall, the LDS church spent millions on billboards, bus banners and Facebook ads touting “I’m a Mormon.” In Canada, the Catholic Church has launched a “Come Home” marketing campaign. The Southern Baptists Convention voted to rebrand itself. A hipster mega-church in Seattle combines smart advertising with sales force training for members and a strategy the Catholics have emphasized for centuries: competitive breeding.

In October 2012 the Pew Research Center announced that for the first time ever Protestant Christians had fallen below 50 percent of the American population. Atheists cheered while evangelicals beat their breasts and lamented the end of the world as we know it. Historian of religion Molly Worthen has since offered big-picture insights that may dampen the most extreme hopes and allay the fears. Anthropologist Jennifer James, on the other hand, has called fundamentalism the “death rattle” of the Abrahamic traditions.

In all of the frenzy, few seem to give any recognition to the player that I see as the primary hero, or if you prefer, culprit—and I’m not talking about science popularizer and atheist superstar Neil deGrasse Tyson. Then again, maybe I am talking about Tyson in a sense, because in his vari-

ous viral guises—as a talk show host and tweeter, and as the face of scores of smartass Facebook memes—Tyson is an incarnation of the biggest threat organized religion has ever faced: the Internet.

A traditional religion, one built on “right belief,” requires a closed information system. That is why the Catholic Church put an official seal of approval on some ancient texts and banned or burned others. It is why some Bible-believing Christians are forbidden to marry nonbelievers. It is why Quiverfull moms home-school their kids with carefully screened textbooks. It is why, when you get sucked into conversations with your fundamentalist Uncle George from Florida, you sometimes wonder if he has some superpower that allows him to magically close down all avenues into his mind. (He does!)

Religions have spent eons honing defenses that keep outside information away from insiders. The innermost ring wall is a set of certainties and associated emotions like anxiety and disgust and righteous indignation that block curiosity. The outer wall is a set of behaviors aimed at insulating believers from contradictory evidence and from heretics who are potential transmitters of dangerous ideas. These behaviors range from memorizing sacred texts to wearing distinctive undergarments to killing infidels. Such defenses worked beautifully during humanity’s infancy. But they weren’t really designed for the current information age.

Tech-savvy mega-churches may have Twitter missionaries, and Calvinist cuties may make viral videos about how Jesus worship isn’t a religion, it’s a relationship, but that doesn’t change the facts: the free flow of information is really, really bad for the product they are selling.

Here are six kinds of web content that are like, well, electrolysis on religion’s hairy toes.

Tech-savvy mega-churches may have Twitter missionaries, and Calvinist cuties may make viral videos about how Jesus worship isn’t a religion, it’s a relationship, but that doesn’t change the facts: the free flow of information is really, really bad for the product they are selling.

-- Valerie Tarico

1. Radically cool science videos and articles.

Religion evokes some of our most deeply satisfying emotions: joy, for example, and transcendence, and wonder. This is what Einstein was talking about when he said that “science without religion is lame.” If scientific inquiry doesn’t fill us at times with delight and even speechless awe at new discoveries or the mysteries that remain, then we are missing out on the richest part of the experience. Fortunately, science can provide all of the above, and certain masters of the trade and sectors of the Internet are remarkably effective at evoking the wonder—the spirituality if you will—of the natural world unveiled. Some of my own favorites include Symphony of Science, NOVA, TED, RSA Animate, and Birdnote.

It should be no surprise that so many fundamentalists are determined to take down the whole scientific endeavor. They see in science not only a critique of their outdated theories but a competitor for their very best product, a sense of transcendent exuberance. For millennia, each religion has made an exclusive claim, that it alone had the power to draw people into a grand vision worth a lifetime of devotion. Each offered the assurance that our brief lives matter and that, in some small way, we might live on. Now we are getting glimpses of a reality so beautiful and intricate that it offers some of the same promise.

2. Curated collections of ridiculous beliefs.

Religious beliefs that aren’t yours often sound silly, and the later in life you encounter them the more

laughable they are likely to sound. Web writers are after eyeballs, which means that if there’s something ridiculous to showcase, one is guaranteed to write about it. It may be a nuanced exposé or a snarky list or a flaming meme, but the point, invariably, is to call attention to the stuff that makes you roll your eyes, shake your head in disbelief, laugh, and then hit Share.

3. The kinky, exploitative, oppressive, opportunistic and violent sides of religion.

Of course, the case against religion doesn’t stop at weird and wacky. It gets nasty, sometimes in ways that are titillating and sometimes in ways that are simply dark. The Bible is full of sex slavery, polygamy and incest, and these are catalogued at places like EviBible.com. Alternately, a student writing about holidays can find a proclamation in which Puritans give thanks to God for the burning of Indian villages or an interview on the mythic origins of the Christmas story. And if the Catholic come-home plea sounds a little desperate, it may well be because the sins of the bishops are getting hard to cover up. On the net, whatever the story may be, someone will be more than willing to expose it.

4. Supportive communities for people coming out of religion.

With or without the net (but especially with it) believers sometimes find their worldview in pieces. Before the Internet existed most people who lost their faith kept

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their doubts to themselves. There was no way to figure out who else might be thinking forbidden thoughts. In some sects, a doubting member may be shunned, excommunicated, or “disfellowshipped” to ensure that doubts don’t spread. So, doubters used to keep silent and then disappear into the surrounding culture. Now they can create Web sites, and today there are as many communities of former believers as there are kinds of belief. These communities range from therapeutic to political, and they cover the range of sects: Evangelical, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, and Muslim. There’s even a web home for recovering clergy. Heaven help the unsuspecting believer who wanders into one of these sites and tries to tell members in recovery that they’re all bound for hell.

5. Lifestyles of the fine and faithless.

When they emerge from the recovery process former Christians and Muslims and what not find that there’s a whole secular world waiting for them on the web. This can be a lifesaver, literally, for folks who are trapped in closed religious communities on the outside. On the web, they can explore lifestyles in which people stay surprisingly decent and kind without a sacred text or authority figures telling them what to do. In actuality, since so much of religion is about social support (and social control) lots of people skip the intellectual arguments and exposes, and go straight to building a new identity based in a new social network. Some web resources are specifically aimed at creating alternatives to theism, like Good without God, Parenting Beyond Belief or the Foundation Beyond Belief.

6. Interspiritual okayness.

This might sound odd, but one of the threats to traditional religion is interfaith communities that focus on shared spiritual values. Many religions make exclusive truth claims and see other religions as competitors. Without such claims, there is no need for evangelism, missionaries or a set of doctrines that I call donkey motivators (i.e. carrots and sticks) like heaven and hell. The web showcases the fact that humanity’s bad and good qualities are universal, spread across cultures and regions, across both secular and religious wisdom traditions. It offers reassurance that we won’t lose the moral or spiritual dimension of life if we outgrow religion, while at the same time providing the means to glean what is truly timeless and wise from old traditions. In doing so, it inevitably reveals the limitations of any single tradition alone.

The Dalai Lama, who has led interspiritual dialogue for many years made waves recently by saying as much: “All the world’s major religions, with their emphasis on love, compassion, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness can and do promote inner values. But the reality of the world today is that grounding ethics in religion is no longer adequate. This is why I am increasingly convinced that the time has come to find a way of thinking about spirituality and ethics beyond religion altogether.”

The power of interspiritual dialogue is analogous to the broader power of the web in that, at the very heart

it is about people finding common ground, exchanging information, and breaking through walls to find a bigger community waiting outside. Last year, Jim Gilliam, founder of Nationbuilder, gave a talk titled, “The Internet is My Religion.” Gilliam is a former fundamentalist who has survived two bouts of cancer, thanks to the power of science and the Internet. His existence today has required a bone marrow transplant and a double lung transplant organized in part through social media. Looking back on the experience, he speaks with the same passion that drove him when he was on fire for Jesus:

I owed every moment of my life to countless people I would never meet. Tomorrow, that interconnectedness would be represented in my own physical body. Three different DNAs. Individually they were useless, but together they would equal one functioning human. What an incredible debt to repay. I didn’t even know where to start. And that’s when I truly found God. God is just what happens when humanity is connected. Humanity connected is God.

The Vatican, and the Mormon Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Southern Baptist Convention should be very worried.

Valerie Tarico is a psychologist and writer living in Seattle, and founder of Wisdom Commons. She is the author of *Trusting Doubt: A Former Evangelical Looks at Old Beliefs in a New Light*. Her articles can be found at Awaypoint.Wordpress.com.



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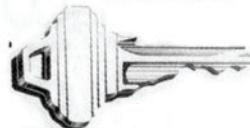
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DESIREE'S PLACE

JOHN O' KANE

There are lights on in the cottage, but Wyatt sees no one moving inside. He edges carefully to the side window where the blinds are drawn and sees only two startled yellow cat's eyes retreat to the corner of the room. He looks around for some activity and then returns to the front, ringing the bell for good measure as he passes down the alley.

He shuffles toward Speedway, not sure of a destination, passing a few pockets of bivouacking eyeballs. The alley is mostly deserted, except for an occasional passing car and a few meandering zombies on their way to wherever. As he slips south across Navy there's a loud screech, which he thinks is the work of an accidental convergence of seagulls acting out their fantasies, but realizes otherwise once the sound ceases and returns as similar, but different. He can't place it but decides it must be coming from the senior citizen residence on the west side of the alley. He'd hung in this stretch for a few weeks once, not long after he hit the street. Seemed there were always piercing sounds of some sort no matter what the time of day. Seniors seeing a glimpse of the not-very-pretty pearly portals, or just letting something hang out that was never meant to be in the first place, or flashing on the faces of all their blown ducks in a row?

He hears it again and now decides it's coming from up on Ozone. He's not sure. Standing on this narrow strip between tall structures is like being in a canyon when a coyote's howl careens off the mounds.

The silence persists. He walks to Dudley and sees that Henry's Market is closed. There's a disturbance beyond the Boardwalk, not far from the edge of the sand. He sees a crowd dispersing and officers apparently trying to shepherd its members into formation. Dudley is completely abandoned, like this activity has sent residents scampering for safety.

Wyatt notices a faint light in the building down from Henry's. It's Desiree's place, a hangout for those

who've sniffed enough fumes from the spiritual runoff in the godless universe to find a groove in it; and those spiritually savvy but materially scarred who've seen the light from above and below ground, and passed ever more easily between. They were all kindred spirits taste-testing their way through the apocalypse toward whatever might be left of a promised land.

Desiree has had this place for as long as folks can remember. It's a fixture in the community, and many things to many members: gallery space for up-and-coming artists; café with exclusively off-menu items; psychic clinic offering star-gazing therapies to tranquilize body and soul; soap box for those who have what it takes to get their messages out about whatever; brothel to beaten libidos scored from success in the rat race; and shelter to the many who need refuge from their demons.

Wyatt knocks on the door as softly as he can, wanting to get only Desiree's attention. No one answers so he knocks again. Still no response. Perhaps she left the light on. He decides to go around the back. There's a car parked at the alley's edge, with someone in it who's hunkered down in the passenger's seat. He tiptoes past, not recognizing the car or the person inside. He looks through the back door to shadows reflected from a series of burning candles ranged along the edge of a table. He realizes the door is slightly ajar, and enters.

"Desireeee," Wyatt utters, getting no answer. But he senses she's there and looks up and around at the loft behind him. "Desireeee," he repeats, "you here?" He thinks he hears a rustling sound in the loft, but there's still no response. Perhaps it's one of those famous ghosts rumored to populate this space, which is the former site of a famous 50s coffee house.

After several silent seconds Desiree appears above the lip of the loft in a purplish haze, caressing a small book. She seems in a pleasant stupor, smiling to herself like a priestess who's found a plateau of serenity.

"Who is it?" she says, the sounds audible but barely more than whispers. "Who's down there?"

"It's Wyatt...saw your light on, and the door was

**It's Desiree's place, a
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who've seen the light from
above and below ground,
and passed ever more
easily between.**

-- John O'Kane

open...interrupt anything?"

"Wyatt!...back for nourishment?...that last dose didn't keep you?"

She begins descending the steps before Wyatt can manage a retort, landing at floor level with open arms and a glint in her eyes that says all questions are answered.

It's this quality of being a step ahead that intrigued Wyatt and others about Desiree, but it also somewhat frightened him. At times she seemed like a spirit in transit between states, able to alter her surroundings, even reconfigure the objects and people in them. Her dreamy emerald eyes could gaze through them. It was more than a cannabis concatenation of loose ends. And it was then when he sensed she knew more about him than he did himself.

At other times she trafficked in suboptimal zones, passing through syrupy segues that erupted in silliness. During these moments she was prone to giving unreliable advice, reaching into a grab bag of mystical potions and ointments for whatever you want. And if you didn't know for sure what you wanted, well...

But who knew what they wanted? A case could be made that many long-timers often felt summoned by nature, and one of the most natural forces here was the tide, its predictable incoming and outgoing motion. For those married to the beach culture it could become a kind of language that controlled their muscles, or even their synapses, so that wafting in and out of various states at will became normal. But sometimes your actions gave way to unpredictable movements and you had a hard time synthesizing the grams of meaning.

Desiree spent so many years in this space, the town, that perhaps at some point her impressions started to zigzag through her mind at cross-purposes, one botching or qualifying another. And like a good medium, you had to catch her at the right time.

She came to town in the 70s after a lengthy visit to Venice, Italy. Her college years were spent obsessed with utopias while working on a business degree to please her parents. Eventually she dropped out and traveled around America for a while, but became disillusioned and decided to check out Europe, making her way eventually to Italy in search of experimental communities she'd heard and read about. It was in Venice where she picked up a book about the 50s Beat generation in its American namesake and came here almost immediately, getting a place above a garage on Clubhouse.

She gorged every facet of the town, living on the edge with many different folks and groups, even tasting the streets for a while, working at a variety of different jobs: translator, waitress, palm reader, script consultant, librarian, model and many more.

Rumor was she'd been a call girl for a while, tempted by the fashions of the time to cross over and do what men do. And she had the qualifications. She was in excellent physical shape, and used to turning heads, even though her long strawberry blonde hair was beginning to gray.

Though driven to overuse her endowments at a time when soma splurges were a market correction to the soul, she mostly skinny-dipped through the hedonist life-

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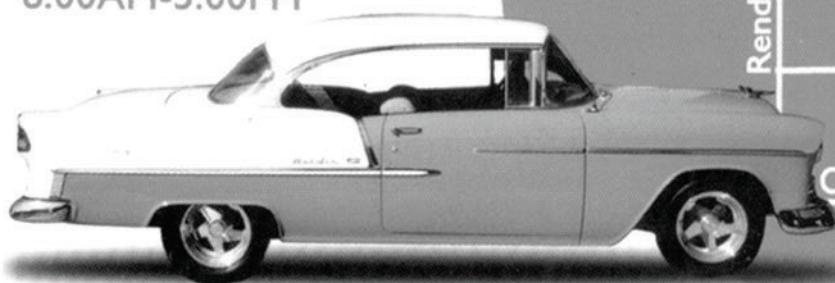
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style, did what helped her develop better ways of relating to people and building an alternative community. Recently she had refined her spiritual sense and began meditating at water's edge most afternoons just before sunset. Her frozen, black-draped, ponytailed figure would absorb the final rays before they raced toward the disappearing orb on the horizon in twilight's last streaming. At times, when the light was just right, she could resemble a holy person.

"Yeah!...could sure use a little something to keep me goin," Wyatt responds, overwhelmed with emotion at finally making contact with someone. "Can't member what happened the last time!...was it right after the...?"

"...what's important is you're here now...what lovely pictures of the human condition have you been seeing these days?" she interrupts, while stretching her arms toward him, and finding the nape of his neck all in one movement.

"Can't say...loveliness is not in my vocabulary these days but...well, I'd say I've found some specks of light out there...but somethin's goin on that I..."

His string of words dissolves in the caresses of her hands that slip up around his head and work it with patient resolve, her long fingers finding and stroking patches of scalp as if creating a head-massage concerto.

"Some specks of somethin for sure in this mop!...you need a shower my sweet," she returns, without breaking form.

"I neeeeed," Wyatt belches, while swooning into a semi-conscious state. The events of the past few days pass through his mind as if some savvy editor has taken charge and put them into a different order. But as the images loop by his connecting powers weaken from the massage. He wants the stream to cohere; a message to appear. But her soothing strokes shrink-wrap his sense-making. He sees only images floating through space.

She stops and he stirs briefly, his cells recharged. But he doesn't want to come out of it. He resists the power of his awakening body.

"Wyatt, Wyatt," Desiree beckons, "snap out of it...come back to us!"

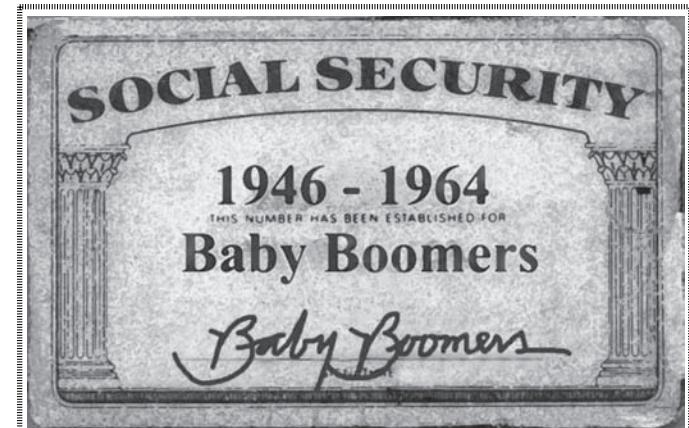
He ever so slowly opens one eye, then the other, looks at Desiree as if he's seen a ghost.

"Where am I?" he asks. "Who?...how did I get here?"

Desiree says nothing, just backs away from him and reclines on the couch, waiting out the inevitable in muffled sighs.

Wyatt fully surfaces after a minute or so, locking looks with Desiree for another ten seconds, and erupts in laughter, his face morphing through a series of contortions that return to blankness. He sheepishly fades toward the shower as someone taps at the front door. In one quick swoosh he looks at the door and turns left, moving to the back door. He looks around briefly into Desiree's startled gaze and swiftly exits to a red-white-yellow-and-blue light show painting the darkness...

Excerpted from *The Easy Rider Fan Club*.



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SHOWDOWN AT SAN ONOFRE

HARVEY WASSERMAN

Two stricken California reactors may soon redefine a global movement aimed at eradicating nuclear power. They sit in a seismic zone vulnerable to tsunamis. Faulty steam generators have forced them shut for nearly a year. A powerful "No Nukes" movement wants them to stay that way. If they win, the shutdown of America's 104 licensed reactors will seriously accelerate.

The story of San Onofre Units 2 & 3 is one of atomic idiocy. Perched on an ocean cliff between Los Angeles and San Diego, the reactors' owners cut unconscionable corners in replacing their multi-million-dollar steam generators. According to Russell Hoffman, one of California's leading experts on San Onofre, inferior metals and major design failures turned what was meant to be an upgrade into an utter fiasco.

Installed by Mitsubishi, the generators simply did not work. When they were shut nearly a year ago, tubes were leaking, banging together and overall rendering further operations impossible. Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric have unofficially thrown in the towel on Unit 3. But they're lobbying hard to get at least Unit 2 back up and running. Their technical problems are so serious that they've asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to let them run Unit 2 at 70% capacity. In essence, they want to "see what happens" without daring to take the reactor to full power.

The NRC has expressed serious doubts. On December 26 it demanded answers to more than 30 questions about the plant's technical

realities. There have been assertions that unless San Onofre can be shown as operable at full power, its license should be negated. San Onofre's owners are desperate to get at least Unit 2 back on line so they can gouge the ratepayers for their failed expenditures. If the California Public Utilities Commission refuses the request, there's no way San Onofre can reopen.

So nuclear opponents can now fight restart both at the federal level and with the state PUC. The state regulators have opened an in-depth

The fiasco at San Onofre is being replayed at rust bucket reactors throughout the US. Progress Energy poked some major new holes into the containment at the Crystal River reactor it was allegedly fixing. Nebraska's Ft. Calhoun has been flooded. An earthquake hit Virginia's reactors with seismic forces that exceeded design specifications. In Wisconsin, Kewaunee's owners will shut it for economic reasons. A new study shows Vermont Yankee, under intense attack from a grassroots citizens' upheaval, has major economic benefits to gain from shutting down. Elsewhere around the US, technical and economic pressures have the industry on the brink.

Meanwhile, the conversion to green power in Germany is booming. When 8 reactors were shut and the conversion to wind, solar and biomass became official policy, "experts" predicted energy shortages and soaring prices. But the opposite has happened as supply has boomed and prices have dropped.

The same things will happen in California and elsewhere as these radioactive jalopies begin to shut. The effectiveness of citizen activism in California is now vastly multiplied as these two decrepit reactors become increasingly obsolete, inoperable and economically insupportable. As Kewaunee shuts, as Crystal River heads toward salvage, as No Nukes citizen action escalates, and as renewables and efficiency soar in performance and plummet in price, a green-powered era is dawning.

But as Fukushima Unit 4's spent fuel pool teeters 100 feet in the air, we are reminded that the danger from the failed nuclear power experiment is far from over. The two reactors at San Onofre linger on atop major earthquake fault lines, just steps away from an ocean that could wash

According to Russell Hoffman, one of California's leading experts on San Onofre, inferior metals and major design failures turned what was meant to be an upgrade into an utter fiasco.

-- Harvey Wasserman

investigation into what's happened at San Onofre, and the picture is not expected to be pretty. Economic analyses show the reactors to be uneconomical anyway. "Experts" warned California would suffer blackouts and brownouts without them, but nothing of the sort has happened. The only real reason San Onofre's owners want to get it back up is to charge the ratepayers for their failed repairs.

over them as sure as it did at Fukushima. The California No Nukes movement may indeed be on the brink of a major victory. But we had better get these reactors buried before disaster strikes yet again.

Harvey Wasserman is the author of *SOLARTOPIA!*

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BANKS WIN FRAUD SETTLEMENT, BORROWERS LOSE

PRATAP CHATTERJEE

Ten major U.S. banks settled charges of illegally kicking people out of their homes for pennies on the dollar, under two agreements with the government. The biggest beneficiary is Bank of America which will win a get-out-of-jail free card for selling fraudulent loans to two government-sponsored mortgage finance companies.

Bank of America sold bad mortgages that led to numerous foreclosures via subprime mortgage lenders Countrywide Financial Corporation and Countrywide Home Loans, Inc. that it acquired in 2008. "Through a program aptly named 'the Hustle,' Countrywide and Bank of America made disastrously bad loans and stuck taxpayers with the bill," said Preet Bharara, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York when he sued the company for \$1 billion on behalf of the government last October.

Under the new settlement Bank of America will buy back \$6.75 billion in residential mortgage loans sold to the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and give the government an additional \$3.6 billion in cash. The other banks - which include Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo - will pay out \$3.3 billion in direct payments to people who lost their homes plus another \$5.2 billion to others who are threatened with possible eviction for not being able to

pay their loans. This is in addition to the \$26 billion that many of the same banks agreed to pay out last February under a separate deal with 49 state attorneys general, the Justice Department and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Despite the large sums involved, most consumer advocates say that the settlements are far too little for those who lost the most. "Communities of color were particularly hard hit by abusive mortgage practices," said Debby Goldberg, special project director at the National Fair Housing Alliance. "The \$8.5 billion and other settlements are not comparable to the

cal of the effort that was widely perceived as biased towards the lenders. They were probably not wrong – the consultants running the program were billing as much as \$250 an hour for 20 hours for each case, according to the *New York Times*.

"It has become clear that carrying the process through to its conclusion would divert money away from the impacted homeowners and also needlessly delay the dispensation of compensation to affected borrowers," said Thomas Curry, the federal Comptroller of the Currency. "Our new course of action will get more money to more people more quickly."

But the activists say that the government had bungled the whole process. "If the reviews had been done right the first time, banks would have been on the hook to pay far more to homeowners," said Aly Cohen, staff attorney for the National Consumer Law Center.

David Lazarus of the *Los Angeles Times* put the numbers in context – he estimates that the average amount that most borrowers will get is just \$2,000. On the other hand, Lazarus notes that the banks have done quite a bit better in 2011 - the year covered by the settlement: "Citigroup pocketed \$11.3 billion in profit. JPMorgan Chase saw record profit of \$19 billion. Wells Fargo posted almost \$16 billion in profit. Bank of America was the poor relation of the family. It earned only \$1.4 billion in profit."

Originally posted at CorpWatchBlog.

Despite the large sums involved, most consumer advocates say that the settlements are far too little for those who lost the most.

-- Pratap Chatterjee

trillions of dollars in wealth sucked from communities," added Sasha Werblin, senior program manager at the Greenlining Institute.

The two new settlements were drawn up after the effective failure of the Independent Foreclosure Review – a 2011 program set up by the banks to review bad mortgages and compensate those who were eligible. Only about one in ten of the potential 3.8 million beneficiaries signed up for the program because they were skepti-

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DARK ZERO-FEMINISM

ZILLAH EISENSTEIN

The film starts with a black blank screen and the voices from people stuck in the trade towers on that fateful day, September 11, 2001. I thought to myself: this is a set up to make sure we are lost to the saddened memory of that day, and the stance that we were wronged—and that this film will right this wrong.

This did not work for me so the film did not work. I thought the story and its telling were corrupt. I thought it exposed U.S. thuggery with no critique of it. I thought it screamed the revenge narrative of post- 9/11/2001 with no regret, or hesitation, or ambiguity.

Much of the controversy about the film has centered on the illegality of torture and the U.S. government and CIA complicity in it. Film Director Kathryn Bigelow says the film merely sets out the record and does not condone or condemn. But this is not as it seemed to me. Critics like Jane Mayer of the *New Yorker* who has tracked torture memos forever begs to differ as well. She says the film normalizes the use of terror in American culture. Others have argued that the film misrepresents the success of getting information from the practice.

I agree with Mayer but my take is also a bit different. I actually think that the film presents torture but does so in a very careful and limited fashion. I had prepared myself for the scenes and was ready to divert my eyes when I could bear no more. But I never had to divert my eyes. The audience was treated too kindly. We were not made to see the horrors of

torture. There were glimpses and the rest was left for us to imagine, or not. We did not see the destruction of the human soul nor the horror of a broken human being. Torture leaves one no space to breathe. The fear is unrelenting. The humiliation is uncontrolled. If the film had been brave enough to really show us torture and its aftermath there would be no condoning or normalizing of it.

So, for me, the real problem with *ZDT* is that it lets the audience

sort, or if Al Qaeda remained viably intact or a threat, the need for revenge, and to kill Osama had its own justifiability.

Enter Maya. I wrote at the start of the Iraq and Afghan wars that Bush's war room should not use women's rights rhetoric to wrap the bombs in. Do not justify these wars and killing in the name of Afghan women's rights against the Taliban. You do not drop bombs on the women you are supposedly trying to save. Do

not now cleanse the wars of/on terror with the face of a white blonde female. Do not detract from the heinous aspects of the terror war by making it look gender neutral.

That is, do not justify or explain U.S. war revenge with a pretty blond white woman with an "obsession" to catch the mastermind of 9/11. This film is not to be made seemingly progressive or feminist because it presents a female CIA agent as central to the demise of Osama. Nor should any of us think that it is "good" that Maya is female, or that several females had an important hand in the murder of Osama. There is nothing feminist in revenge. We can learn from the Indian feminists who say they do not seek the death penalty for the brutal death and rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey. Kavita Krishnan says: "Gender justice needs to be brought

and kept in the centre stage of the debate, not the death penalty."

Maya is not believable to me. She is an awful stereotype: a driven, obsessive woman, alone with no friends. She has no depth. She is all surface. She says she prefers to drop a bomb rather than use the Seal team. She says she's absolutely sure that Osama is in the building. She says she is the "mother-fucker" who found the safe house in the first place. She

So, for me, the real problem with *ZDT* is that it lets the audience and the American public think that terrible things are allowable because they are doable. A courageous telling of the U.S. anti-terror narrative would demand critique and defiance.

-- Zillah Eisenstein

and the American public think that terrible things are allowable because they are doable. A courageous telling of the U.S. anti-terror narrative would demand critique and defiance.

Do not confuse imperial arrogance for courage. The U.S. does what it wants with impudence. It single handedly invaded Pakistan in order to kill Osama bin Laden. Even though it was no longer clear whether bin Laden was still a player of any

assures the men of the Seal team that Osama is there and that they must kill him for her.

I was thinking through the film—if they hate us they do so because we are hateful. I am sad to know that this film will be seen across the globe. It will be read as another story of imperial empire with a (white) female twist. How unfair to all the people in the U.S. who do not choose revenge and murder. How unfair to my Pakistani friends who are also U.S. citizens. How unfair to most of us across the globe.

I was hoping that maybe no nods would be given to Jessica Chastain for her role as Maya at the Golden Globes. I was hoping that no one would give a feminist nod to Kathryn Bigelow for directing ZDT. I was just hoping that maybe feminism would not get mucked up in the conversation about torture and the murder of Osama. But that was not to happen.

Chastain calls Maya an “unsung hero” and I think this is deeply troubling. But it got worse for me when Chastain accepted the Golden Globe Award for best actress and

thanked Bigelow for putting forward “powerful, fearless women” who disobey and make a difference.

I do not like the film or the way that Bigelow and Chastain choose to depict it. Given both, and the way each bleeds into the other, there is no neutral ground here. I think it is important to reject the imperial feminism that is embedded.

It would be good to remember that there is no worthy feminism without justice and if there is NO JUSTICE, there is NO PEACE.

Written one day after the nation-wide launch of *ZERO DARK THIRTY*, and one day after the Golden Globe Awards. Zillah teaches at Ithaca College. www.zilla-heisenstein.wordpress.com.

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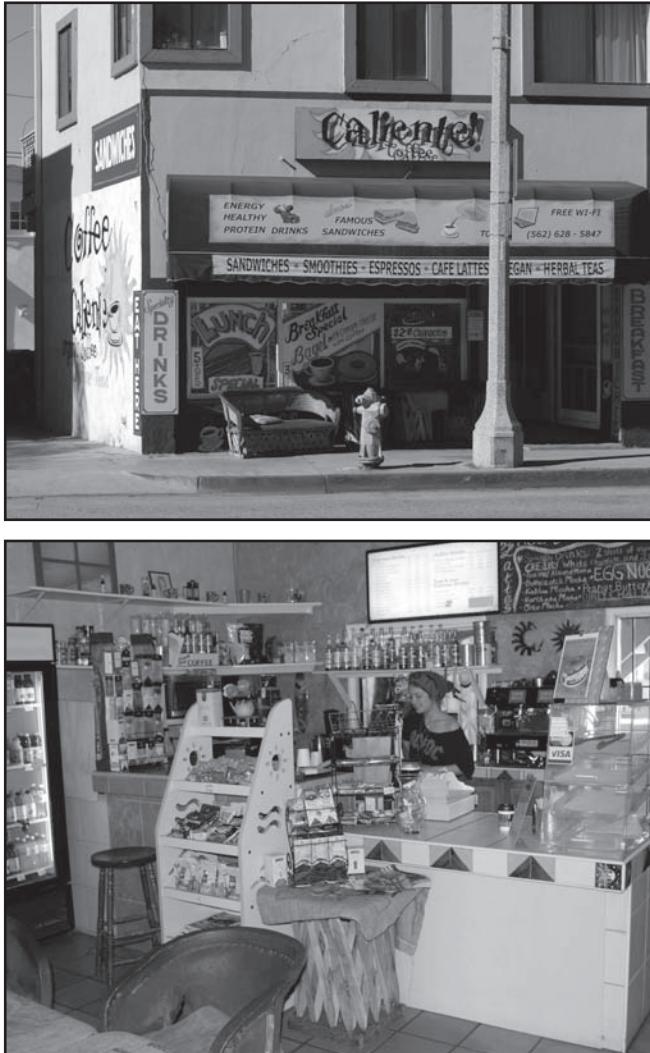
I've often strolled through the Arts District to attend an event, or just experience some leisurely moments, not paying much attention to its many art galleries, consignment stores and other small businesses. I rarely venture too far toward Alamitos and Ocean, so when a friend suggested we meet at Coffee Caliente, located at the southeastern edge of the District, I was eager to expand my wandering area. I soon realized that my strolls will never be the same.

The café is not exactly an undiscovered treasure, since it's very popular among locals as well as those who pass through the area on one of the major arteries. But it doesn't draw the waves of trendy followers like some of the larger corporate cafes in the District's hub, which I found to be a blessing. As is the fact that it includes only a handful of tables inside a fairly small space, and a few more huddling the front of the building. This and the casual Beat café ambiance that conjures someone's living room, encourage you to linger, take in the good vibes and have stimulating chats. It's the sort of place where you expect someone to be reading *On the Road*, or perhaps even Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. Its décor is also reminiscent of a quaint Cuban coffee shop. Burlap covers the tables, a wooden leaf-shaped fan turns slowly to suggest a time long past, and granite tile graces the walls.

Florencio and Lorenzo Perez have owned this café for three years. They purchased it from a man named Manuel who owned a little Mexican furniture store next door and his customers could enjoy a cup of hot java while browsing his goods. It's been transformed since those days, however.

One of the first things I noticed when I arrived was a group of

young guys talking not about ideas or the state of society, but the "Breakfast Bagel!" It turns out it is a customer's favorite at Caliente. Luke Mabry, a frequent customer who lives around the corner, devours it at least once a week. One needs good nourishment after all to face-off with the world properly. This delicacy consists of eggs, turkey, pesto, cheese, and a few other hidden ingredients, not exactly an exotic mix of materials. But the



photos by John O'Kane

secret lies in Florencio's sleight of hand. I highly recommend it.

I am not a big coffee drinker but I do appreciate a well-made cup once in a while, so I decided to venture out of my comfort zone and try an iced Horchata Mocha. Big Mistake! My relationship with this drink began after the first sip. I can't describe the feeling after such decadence.

If this is all that Caliente of-

fered, it would still be worth becoming a regular here. But it offers a truly special menu. Florencio is aware of how limited his menu is compared to some of the other cafes in the District. Like a lot of small business owners these days, he is battling to keep his profit margin, which has been shrinking of late. And this means doing whatever works to compete with the chains, but he believes in competing in his own way, not struggling to become like them. When 7/11 and Starbucks opened in the area he felt the pressure to change his menu, make it simpler and more attractive. He has become passionate about making his food offerings "stand out," trying many different options to see what the customer responds to best.

He feels these three sandwiches do that: the Tango, with hummus, greens, mayo-mustard dressing, American Swiss cheese and pepper; the Veggie, with hummus, greens, sun-dried tomato, pesto, American Swiss cheese and pepper; and the Madrid, with cream cheese, greens, sun-dried tomato, pesto, American Swiss cheese and pepper.

The signs so far are good. Hopefully the District will stabilize and keep its small business flavor, since I get the feeling that Florencio doesn't want to keep playing the competition game. He's the type of person who supports the community and other small businesses, and he's proud of this. He sells items from local businesses, and purchases cookies and granola bars from local manufacturers. He believes in the value of small business and when he visits another town or city he makes it a point to scope out other local coffee shops and businesses.

Hopefully Caliente's contin-

ued presence and Florencio's inspiration will become contagious and help revitalize the District. As we're seeing all over the country in this recession that won't quit, it's this small business model that offers the best hope for bringing its many victims back into the game. Throwing more and more money at the big banks and corporations has only given us a stagnant new normal.

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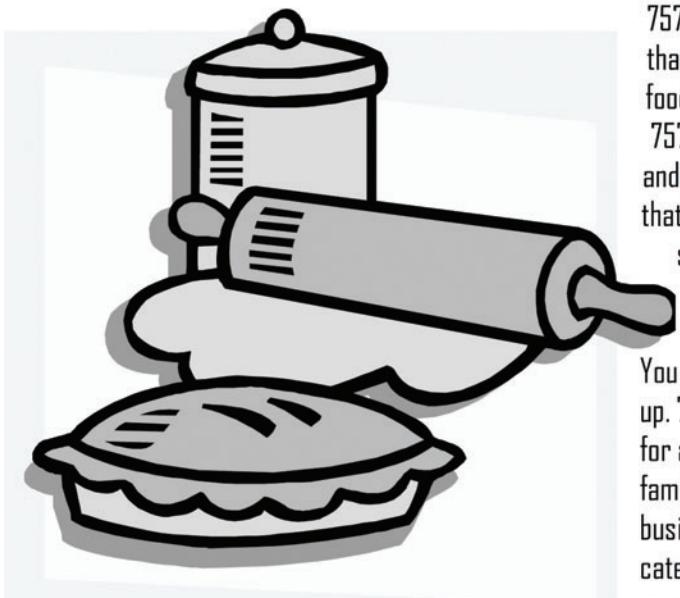


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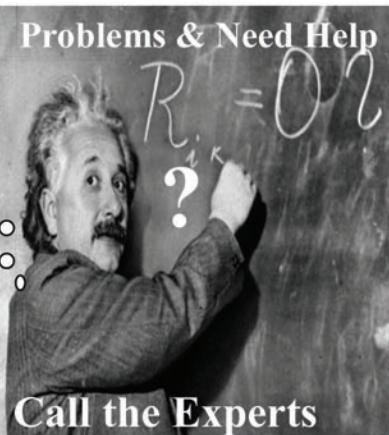
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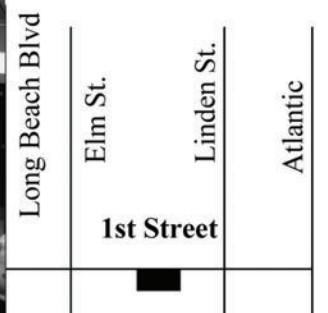
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