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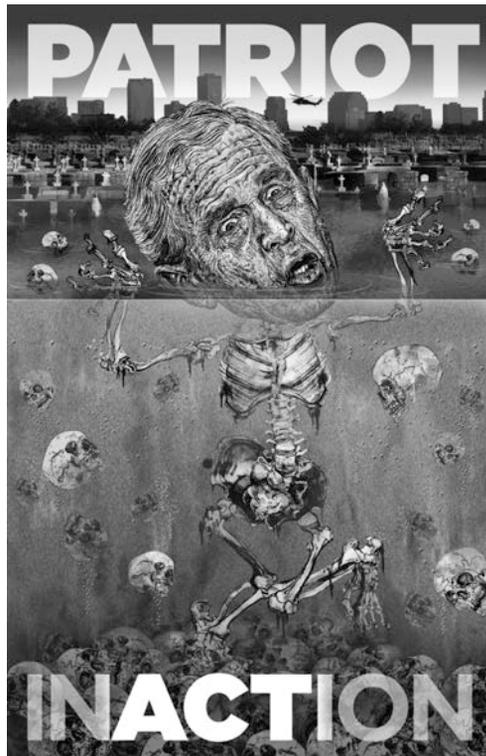
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WHY ISN'T IRAQ IN THE 2008 ELECTION?

Noam Chomsky

Not very long ago it was taken for granted that the Iraq war would be the central issue in the 2008 election, as it was in the midterm election two years ago. However, it's virtually disappeared off the radar screen, which has solicited some puzzlement among the punditry.

Actually, the reason is not very obscure. It was cogently explained forty years ago, when the US invasion of South Vietnam was in its fourth year and the surge of that day was about to add another 100,000 troops to the 175,000 already there, while South Vietnam was being bombed to shreds at triple the level of the bombing of the north and the war was expanding to the rest of Indochina. However, the war was not going very well, so the former hawks were shifting towards doubts, among them the distinguished historian Arthur Schlesinger, maybe the most distinguished historian of his generation, a Kennedy adviser who, along with Kennedy and other liberals, were reluctantly beginning to shift from a dedication to victory to a more dovish position.

And Schlesinger explained the reasons. "Of course, we all pray that the hawks are right in thinking that the surge of that day will work. And if it does, we may all be saluting the wisdom and statesmanship of the American government in winning a victory in a land that we have turned to wreck and ruin. But the surge probably won't work, at an acceptable cost to us, so perhaps strategy should be rethought."

Well, the reasoning and the underlying attitudes carry over with almost no change to the critical commentary on the US invasion of Iraq today. And it is a land of wreck and ruin. I don't have to review the facts. The highly regarded British polling agency, Oxford Research Bureau, has just updated its estimate of deaths. Their new estimate from a couple of days ago is 1.3 million. That's excluding two of the most violent provinces, Karbala and Anbar. It's kind of intriguing to observe the ferocity of the debate over the actual number of deaths. There's an assumption on the part of the hawks that if we only killed a couple hundred thousand people, it would be OK, so we shouldn't accept the higher estimates. You can go along with that if you like.

Uncontroversially, there are over two million displaced within Iraq. Thanks to the generosity of Jordan and

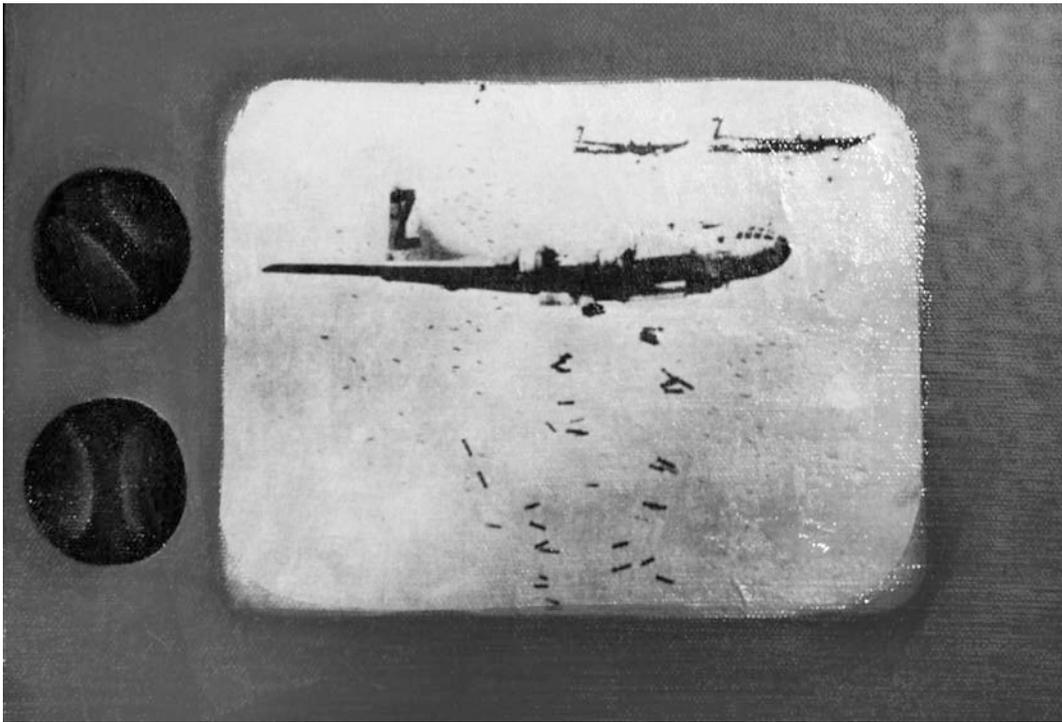
Syria, the millions of refugees who have fled the wreckage of Iraq aren't totally wiped out. That includes most of the professional classes. But that welcome is fading because Jordan and Syria receive no support from the perpetrators of the crimes in Washington and London, and therefore they cannot accept that huge burden for very long. It's going to leave those two-and-a-half million refugees who fled in even more desperate straits.

The sectarian warfare created by the invasion has devastated the country. Nothing like this has existed before. Much of the country has been subjected to quite brutal ethnic cleansing and left in the hands of warlords and militias. That's the primary thrust of the current counterinsurgency strategy developed by the revered "Lord Petraeus," I guess we should describe him, considering the way he's treated. He won his fame by pacifying Mosul a couple of years ago. It's now the scene of some of the most extreme violence in the country.

One of the most dedicated and informed journalists who has been immersed in the ongoing tragedy, Nir Rosen, has just written an epitaph entitled "The Death of Iraq" in the very mainstream and quite important journal *Current History*. He writes that "Iraq has been killed, never to rise again. The American occupation has been more disastrous than that of the Mongols, who sacked Baghdad in the thirteenth century," which has been the perception of many Iraqis as well. "Only fools talk of 'solutions' now," he went on. "There is no solution. The only hope is that perhaps the damage can be contained."

But Iraq is, in fact, the marginal issue, and the reasons are the traditional ones, the traditional reasoning and attitudes of the liberal doves who all pray now, as they did forty years ago, that the hawks will be right and that the US will win a victory in this land of wreck and ruin. And they're either encouraged or silenced by the good news about Iraq.

And there is good news. The US occupying army in Iraq, euphemistically called the Multi-National Force-Iraq, carries out extensive studies of popular attitudes. It's an important part of counterinsurgency or any form of domination. You want to know what your subjects are thinking. And it released a report last December. It was a study of focus groups, and it was uncharacteristically up-



Artwork by Evan Senn

beat. The report concluded that the survey of focus groups “provides very strong evidence” that national reconciliation is possible and anticipated, contrary to what’s being claimed. The survey found that a sense of “optimistic possibility permeated all focus groups and far more commonalities than differences are found among these seemingly diverse groups of Iraqis” from all over the country and all walks of life. This discovery of “shared beliefs” among Iraqis throughout the country is “good news, according to a military analysis of the results,” Karen de Young reported in the *Washington Post* a couple of weeks ago.

Well, the “shared beliefs” are identified in the report. I’ll quote de Young: “Iraqis of all sectarian and ethnic groups believe that the US military invasion is the primary root of the violent differences among them, and see the departure of [what they call] ‘occupying forces’ as the key to national reconciliation.” So those are the “shared beliefs.” According to the Iraqis then, there’s hope of national reconciliation if the invaders, who are responsible for the internal violence and the other atrocities, withdraw and leave Iraq to Iraqis. That’s pretty much the same as what’s been found in earlier polls, so it’s not all that surprising. Well, that’s the good news: “shared beliefs.”

The report didn’t mention some other good news. Iraqis, it appears, accept the highest values of Americans. That ought to be good news. Specifically, they accept the principles of the Nuremberg Tribunal that sentenced Nazi war criminals to hanging for such crimes as supporting

aggression and preemptive war. It was the main charge against von Ribbentrop, for example, whose position was the equivalent in the Nazi regime to those of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. The Tribunal defined aggression very straightforwardly: aggression is the “invasion” of armed forces from one state into the “territory of another state.” That’s simple. Obviously, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan are textbook examples of aggression. And the Tribunal, as I’m sure you know, went on to characterize aggression as “the supreme international crime differing

only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself all the accumulated evil of the whole.” So everything that follows from the aggression is part of the evil of the aggression.

Well, the good news from the US military survey of focus groups is that Iraqis do accept the Nuremberg principles. They understand that sectarian violence and the other postwar horrors are contained within the supreme international crime committed by the invaders. I think they were not asked whether their acceptance of American values extends to the

conclusion of Justice Robert Jackson, chief prosecutor for the United States at Nuremberg. He forcefully insisted that the Tribunal would be mere farce if we do not apply the principles to ourselves.

Well, needless to say, US opinion, shared with the West generally, flatly rejects the lofty American values that were professed at Nuremberg, indeed regards them as bordering on obscene, as you could quickly discover if you

...we never count
our crimes.
Victors don’t
do that; only the
defeated.



Artwork by Evan Senn

try an experiment by suggesting that these values should be observed, as Iraqis insist. It's an interesting illustration of the reality, some of the reality that lies behind the famous "clash of civilizations." Maybe not exactly the way we like to look at it.

There was a really major poll just released which found that 75 percent of Americans believe US foreign policy is driving the dissatisfaction with America abroad, and more than 60 percent believe that dislike of American values and of the American people are also to blame. Dissatisfaction is kind of an understatement. The United States has become increasingly the most feared and often hated country in the world. Well, that perception is in fact incorrect. It's fed by propaganda. There's very little dislike of Americans in the world, shown by repeated polls, and the dissatisfaction, the hatred and the anger, come from the acceptance of American values, not a rejection of them, but also the recognition that they're rejected by the US government and by US elites, which does lead to hatred and anger.

There's other "good news" that was reported by General Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker during the extravaganza staged last September 11th. You might ask why the timing? Well, a cynic might imagine that the timing was intended to insinuate the Bush-Cheney claims of links between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. They can't come out and say it straight out, so therefore you sort of insinuate it by devices like this.

It's intended to indicate something they used to say outright but are now too embarrassed to say, except maybe Cheney, that in committing their supreme international crime they were defending the world against terror,

but which in fact increased sevenfold as a result of the invasion, according to a recent analysis by terrorism specialists Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank.

Petraeus and Crocker provided figures to explain the good news. The figures they provided on September 11th showed that the Iraqi government was greatly accelerating spending on reconstruction, which is good news indeed and remained so until it was investigated by the Government Accounting Office, which found that the actual figure was one-sixth of what Petraeus and Crocker reported and, in fact, declined 50 percent from the previous year.

Well, more good news is the decline in sectarian violence, that's attributable in part to the murderous ethnic cleansing that Iraqis blame on the invasion. The result of it though is there are simply fewer people to kill. It's also attributable to the new counterinsurgency doctrine, Washington's decision to support the tribal groups that had already organized to drive out Iraqi al-Qaeda, to an increase in US troops, and to the decision of Sadr's Mahdi army to consolidate its gains to stop direct fighting. And politically, that's what the press calls "halting aggression" by the Mahdi army. Notice that only Iraqis can commit aggression in Iraq, or Iranians, of course, but no one else.

Well, it's possible that Petraeus's strategy may approach the success of the Russians in Chechnya where, to quote *The New York Times* a couple of weeks ago, the fighting is now "limited and sporadic, and Grozny is in the midst of a building boom" after having been reduced to rubble by the Russian attack. Well, maybe some day Baghdad and Fallujah also will enjoy, to continue the quote, "electricity restored in many neighborhoods, new

businesses opening and the city's main streets repaved," as in booming Grozny. Possible, but dubious, in the light of the likely consequence of creating warlord armies that may be the seeds of even greater sectarian violence, adding to the "accumulated evil" of the aggression. Well, if Russians share the beliefs and attitudes of elite liberal intellectuals in the West, then they must be praising Putin's "wisdom and statesmanship" for his achievements in Chechnya, a former land they had turned into wreck and ruin and are now rebuilding. Great achievement.

A few days ago the military and Iraq expert of *The New York Times*, Michael Gordon, wrote a first-page comprehensive review of the options for Iraq that are being faced by the candidates. And he went through them in detail, described the pluses and minuses and so on, interviewing political leaders, the candidates, experts, etc. There was one voice missing: Iraqis. Their preference is not rejected; rather, it's not mentioned. And it seems that there was no notice of that fact, which makes sense, because it's typical. It makes sense on the tacit assumption that underlies almost all discourse on international affairs. The tacit assumption, without which none of it makes any sense, is that we own the world. So, what does it matter what others think? They're "unpeople," nice term invented by British diplomatic historian Mark Curtis, based on a series of outstanding volumes on Britain's crimes of empire, outstanding, therefore deeply hidden. So there are the "unpeople" out there, and then there are the owners -- that's us -- and we don't have to listen to the "unpeople."

Last month, Panama declared a Day of Mourning to commemorate the US invasion under George Bush 1 that killed thousands of poor Panamanians when the US bombed the El Chorillo slums and other poor areas, according to Panamanian human rights organizations. We don't actually know, because we never count our crimes. Victors don't do that; only the defeated. It aroused no interest here; there's barely a mention of the Day of Mourning. And there's also no interest in the fact that Bush 1's invasion of Panama was a clear case of aggression, to which the Nuremberg principles apply, and it was apparently more deadly, in fact possibly much more deadly, than Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait which happened a few months later. But it makes sense that there would be no interest in that, because we own the world, and Saddam didn't, so the acts are quite different.

It's also of no interest that at the time of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the greatest fear in Washington was that Saddam would imitate what the United States had just done in Panama, namely install a client government and then leave. That's the main reason why Washington blocked diplomacy in quite interesting ways, with almost complete media cooperation. There's actually one excep-

tion in the US media. But none of this gets any commentary. However, it does merit a lead story a few days later, when the Panamanian National Assembly was opened by President Pedro Gonzalez, who's charged by Washington with killing two American soldiers during a protest against President Bush 1 against his visit two years after the invasion. The charges were dismissed by Panamanian courts, but they're upheld by the owner of the world, and that got a story.

Well, to take just one last illustration of the depth of the imperial mentality, *New York Times* veteran correspondent Elaine Sciolino writes that "Iran's intransigence [about nuclear enrichment] appears to be defeating attempts by the rest of the world to curtail Tehran's nuclear ambitions." Well, the phrase "the rest of the world" is an interesting one. The rest of the world happens to exclude the vast majority of the world, namely the non-aligned movement, which forcefully endorses Iran's right to enrich uranium in accordance with the rights granted by its being a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. But they're not part of the world, even though they're the large majority, because they don't reflexively accept US orders, and commentary like that is unremarkable and unnoticed. You're part of the world if you do what we say. Otherwise, you're "unpeople."

Well, since we're on Iran we might tarry for a moment and ask whether there's any solution to the US-Iran confrontation over nuclear weapons, which is extremely dangerous. Here's an idea. First, Iran should be permitted to develop nuclear energy, but not nuclear weapons, as the Non-Proliferation Treaty determines. Second, there should be a nuclear weapons-free zone in the entire region, Iran to Israel, including

any US forces that are present there. Actually, though it's never reported, the United States is committed to that position. When the US invaded Iraq in 2003, it appealed to a UN resolution, Resolution 687, which called upon Iraq to eliminate its weapons of mass destruction. That was the flimsy legal principle invoked to justify the invasion. And if you look at Resolution 687 you discover that one of its provisions is that the US and other powers must work to develop a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East, including that entire region. So we're committed to it.

The third element of the proposal is that the United States should accept the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a position which happens to be supported by 82 percent of Americans, namely that it should accept the requirement, in fact the legal requirement, as the World Court determined, to move to make good-faith efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons altogether.

And a fourth proposal is that the US should turn to diplomacy, and it should end any threats against Iran. The threats are themselves crimes. They're in violation of

You're part
of the world
if you do
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Otherwise,
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"unpeople."

the UN Charter, which bars the threat or use of force.

Well, of course, these four proposals are almost unmentionable in the United States. Not a single candidate would endorse any part of them, and they're never discussed.

However, the proposals are not original. They happen to be the position of the overwhelming majority of the American population. And interestingly, that's also true in Iran; roughly the same overwhelming majority accepts all of these proposals. These results come from the world's most prestigious polling agency, but are not reported as far as I could discover, and certainly not considered. If they were ever mentioned, they would be dismissed with the phrase "politically impossible," which is probably correct. It's only the position of the large majority of the population, kind of like with national health care, but not of the people that count. So there are plenty of "unpeople" here too, in fact the large majority. Americans share this property of being "unpeople" with most of the rest of the world. In fact, if the United States and Iran were functioning, not merely formal, democracies, then this dangerous crisis might be readily resolved by a system in which public opinion plays some role in determining policy, rather than being excluded and unmentioned.

While we're on Iran I guess I might as well turn to the third member of the famous Axis of Evil: North Korea. There is an official story which I just read that after having been compelled to accept an agreement on dismantling its nuclear weapons facilities North Korea is again trying to evade its commitments in its usually devious way. So *The New York Times* headline reads: "The United States Sees Stalling by North Korea on Nuclear Pact." And the article then details the charges of how North Korea is not going through with its responsibility. It's not releasing information that it's promised to release. If you read the story to the last paragraph, always a good idea since that's where the interesting news usually is, you discover that it's the United States that has backed down on the pledges made in the agreement. It's supplied only 85 percent of the fuel that it promised. And it was supposed to improve diplomatic relations. Well, that's quite normal.

If you want to find out what's going on in the US-North Korea nuclear standoff you have to go to the specialist literature which is uniform on this. Nothing is hidden. What you find is that while North Korea is alleged to be the most hideous state in the world, its position has been pretty pragmatic. It's kind of tit-for-tat. The United States gets more aggressive, they get more aggressive. The United States moves towards diplomacy and negotiations, they do the same.

So when President Bush came in there was an agreement from 1994 called the Framework Agreement that neither the US nor North Korea was quite living up to. But it was more or less functioning. At that time, North Korea, under the Framework Agreement, had stopped any testing of long-range missiles. It had maybe one or two bombs worth of plutonium, and it was verifiably not making more. Now, that was when George Bush entered the scene. And now it has eight to ten bombs, long-range mis-

siles, and it's developing plutonium.

And there's a reason. The Bush regime immediately moved to a very aggressive stance. The Axis of Evil speech was one example. Intelligence was released claiming that North Korea was cheating, had clandestine programs. It's rather interesting that these intelligence reports, five years later, have been quietly rescinded as probably inadequate. The reason presumably is that if an agreement is reached, there will be inspectors in North Korea, and they'll find that this intelligence had as much validity as the claims about Iraq, so they're being withdrawn. Well, North Korea responded to all of this by ratcheting up its missile and weapons development.

In September 2005, under pressure, the United States did agree to negotiations, and there was an outcome. North Korea agreed to abandon "all nuclear weapons and existing weapons programs" and to allow international inspection. That was in return for international aid, mainly from the United States, and a non-aggression pledge from the US and an agreement that the two sides would "respect each other's sovereignty, exist peacefully together and take steps to normalize relations."

Well, the United States, the Bush administration, had an instant reaction. It renewed the threat of force. It froze North Korean funds in foreign banks. It disbanded the consortium that was supposed to meet to provide North Korea with a light-water reactor. So North Korea returned to its weapons and missile development, carried out a weapons test, and confrontation escalated. Well, again, under international pressure and with its foreign policy collapsing, Washington returned to negotiations. That led to an agreement, which Washington is now scuttling.

There's an earlier history, an interesting one. You recall a couple of weeks ago, there was a mysterious Israeli bombing in northern Syria, never explained, but it suggested this had something to do with Syria building nuclear facilities with the help of North Korea. Pretty unlikely, but whether it's true or not, there's an interesting history which wasn't mentioned. In 1993 Israel and North Korea were on the verge of an agreement, in which Israel would recognize North Korea and in return North Korea would agree to terminate any weapons-related activity in the Middle East. That would have been an enormous boon to Israel's security. But the owner of the world stepped in. Clinton ordered them to refuse. Of course, you have to listen to the master's voice. So that ended that. And it may be that there are North Korean activities in the Middle East that we don't know about.

Well, let me finally return to the first member of the Axis of Evil: Iraq. Washington does have expectations, and they're explicit. They are outlined in a Declaration of Principles that was agreed upon, if you can call it that, between the United States and the US-backed, US-installed Iraqi government, a government under military occupation. The two of them issued the Declaration of Principles. It allows US forces to remain indefinitely in Iraq in order to "deter foreign aggression" -- the only aggression in sight is from the United States, but that's not aggression by definition -- and to facilitate and encourage "the flow of

foreign investments [to] Iraq, especially American investments.” That’s an unusually brazen expression of imperial will.

In fact, it was heightened a few days ago when George Bush issued another one of his statements declaring that he will reject crucial provisions of congressional legislation that he had just signed, including the provision that forbids spending taxpayer money “to establish any military installation or base for the purpose of providing for the permanent stationing of [United States] Armed Forces in Iraq” or “to exercise [United States] control of the oil resources of Iraq.” Shortly after, the *New York Times* reported that Washington “insists” -- if you own the world, you insist -- “that the Baghdad government give the

United States broad authority to conduct combat operations,” a demand that “faces a potential buzz saw of opposition from Iraq, with its deep sensitivities about being seen as a dependent state.”

So the United States is now insisting that Iraq must agree to allow permanent US military installations, grant the United States the right to conduct combat operations freely, and to guarantee US control over the oil resources of Iraq. It’s all very explicit, on the table. It’s kind of interesting that these reports do not elicit any reflection on the reasons why the United States invaded Iraq. You’ve heard those reasons offered, but they were dismissed with ridicule. Now they’re openly conceded to be accurate without any retraction!

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IRAQ AND 9/11: THE TRUTH IS OUT

Jason Leopold

Two weeks before 9/11, national security wasn't even a top priority for the Bush administration. Job security and health security were the top two major issues Bush planned to deal with in the fall of 2001, according to a transcript of a speech Bush gave on August 31, 2001, to celebrate the launch of the White House's new web site.

But 9/11 gave the Bush administration the excuse it needed to execute a long-planned military strike against Iraq. President Bush and his cabinet duped Congress and the American people into believing the country had ties to al-Qaeda, and helped the terrorist organization plan the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon five years ago.

Now, lawmakers have finally released a report debunking those assertions. For a majority of Americans, that's now old news.

Yet forty percent of Americans are still under the impression that the Iraq war is directly linked to 9/11. A January 11, 2001, article in the New York Times, "Iraq Is Focal Point as Bush Meets With Joint Chiefs," should finally put an end to that debate and prove that the Iraq war was planned out just days after Bush was sworn into office.

"George W. Bush, the nation's commander in chief to be, went to the Pentagon today for a top-secret session with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to review hot spots around the world where he might have to send American forces into harm's way," reads the first paragraph of the Times article. Bush was joined at the Pentagon meeting by Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice.

The Times reported that "about half of the 75-minute meeting ... focused on a discussion about Iraq and the Persian Gulf, two participants said. Iraq was the first topic briefed because 'it's the most visible and most risky area' Mr. Bush will confront after he takes office, one senior officer said."

"Iraqi policy is very much on his mind," one senior Pentagon official told the Times. "Saddam was clearly a discussion point."

As early as January 2000, Rice was trying to sell a war with Iraq. It was then that she wrote an article for

Foreign Affairs titled "Campaign 2000 - Promoting the National Interest," in which she advocates a policy of regime change in Iraq, but fails to mention threats from Islamic fundamentalist groups such as al-Qaeda.

"As history marches toward markets and democracy, some states have been left by the side of the road. Iraq is the prototype. Saddam Hussein's regime is isolated, his conventional military power has been severely weakened, his people live in poverty and terror, and he has no useful place in international politics. He is therefore determined to develop WMD. Nothing will change until Saddam is gone, so the United States must mobilize whatever resources it can, including support from his opposition, to remove him. These regimes are living on borrowed time, so there need be no sense of panic about them."

She echoed that line in August 2000, during an interview with the Council on Foreign Relations, when Rice said Iraq posed the gravest threat to the US and the world.

"The containment of Iraq should be aimed ultimately at regime change because as long as Saddam is there no one in the region is safe - most especially his own people," she said during the August 9, 2000 interview. "If Saddam gives you a reason to use force against him, then use decisive force, not just a pinprick." Rice was interviewed by dozens of print and broadcast journalists between January and September 2001. An extensive search of more than 400 news stories available on Lexis Nexis between January 1, 2001, and September 10, 2001, show that Rice never once spoke about the threat posed by al-Qaeda or its leader Osama bin Laden.

When Rice discussed terrorism in public speeches and in interviews in 2001, she uttered the word to describe rogue nations such as Iraq and then followed it up by promoting President Bush's National Missile Defense strategy. The White House wanted to build a missile defense system to defend the United States against small-scale missile attacks by so-called rogue states like North Korea, Iraq and Iran. Al-Qaeda, which the administration says it dealt with seriously, is never mentioned.

On July 29, 2001, Rice was interviewed by CNN's John King. She was asked how the United States would respond to missiles Iraq fired at US war planes patrolling the

no-fly zones. She didn't mince words with her response.

"Well, the president has made very clear that he considers Saddam Hussein to be a threat to his neighbors, a threat to security in the region, in fact a threat to international security more broadly," Rice said. "And he has reserved the right to respond when that threat becomes one that he wishes no longer to tolerate."

"But I can be certain of this, and the world can be certain of this: Saddam Hussein is on the radar screen for the administration. The administration is working hard with a number of our friends and allies to have a policy that is broad; that does look at the sanctions as something that should be restructured so that we have smart sanctions that go after the regime, not after the Iraqi people; that does look at the role of opposition in creating an environment and a regime in Baghdad that the people of Iraq deserve, rather than the one that they have; and one that looks at use of military force in a more resolute manner, and not just a manner of tit-for-tat with him every day."

The question of whether the Bush administration targeted Iraq prior to 9/11 has long been the center of heated debate between Democrats and Republicans. The Bush administration says Iraq was not in its crosshairs prior to 9/11. In *The Price of Loyalty*, Bush's former treasury secretary, Paul O'Neill, said that the Iraq war was planned just days after the president was sworn into office.

"From the very beginning, there was a conviction that Saddam Hussein was a bad person and that he needed to go," O'Neill said, adding that going after Saddam Hussein was a priority 10 days after the Bush's inauguration and eight months before September 11.

"From the very first instance, it was about Iraq. It was about what we can do to change this regime. Day one, these things were laid and sealed."

As treasury secretary, O'Neill was a permanent member of the National Security Council. He says in the book that he was surprised that at the meeting questions like "Why Saddam?" and "Why now?" were never asked.

In his inaugural address on January 20, 2001, President Bush also alluded to the possibility of war, although he did not mention Iraq by name.

"We will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors," Bush said. "The enemies of liberty and our country should make no mistake ... We will defend our allies and our interests."

Further evidence suggests that when the Bush administration took office it was worried that the US was losing international support for the sanctions it placed on Iraq ten years earlier, leaving the door open to the possibil-

ity that Saddam Hussein would be let out of his proverbial box. President Bush sent Powell on a trip to the Middle East in late February 2001 to study the situation in Iraq to decide whether the administration should keep the sanctions in place or whether it should start to lay the groundwork for a pre-emptive strike.

But Powell returned and championed the sanctions, saying Iraq posed absolutely no threat to the US, during testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 8, 2001, much to the dismay of Vice President Cheney, Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, all of whom believed in using military force to oust Saddam Hussein.

"When we took over on the 20th of January, I discovered that we had an Iraq policy that was in disarray, and the sanctions part of that policy was not just in disarray; it was falling apart," Powell said during his Senate testimony.

Bush's former treasury secretary, Paul O'Neill, said that the Iraq war was planned just days after the president was sworn into office.

"We were losing support for the sanctions regime that had served so well over the last ten years, with all of the ups and downs and with all of the difficulties that are associated with that regime, it was falling apart. It had been successful. Saddam Hussein has not been able to rebuild his army, notwithstanding claims that he has. He has fewer tanks in his inventory today than he had 10 years ago. Even though we know he is working on weapons of mass destruction, we know he has things squirreled away, at the same time we have not seen that capacity emerge to present a full-fledged threat to us."

Moreover, claims by O'Neill that the US and Britain were operating from murky intelligence during the buildup to war came six days after Bush's inaugu-

ration. It was then that British intelligence communicated to the CIA, the Pentagon, and National Security Adviser Rice's office that an Iraqi defector had told British intelligence officials that Saddam Hussein had two fully operational nuclear bombs, according to two senior Bush advisers. *The London Telegraph* reported the defector's claims on January 28, 2001.

"According to the defector, who cannot be named for security reasons, bombs are being built in Hemrin in north-eastern Iraq, near the Iranian border," according to the *Telegraph* report. The defector said: "There are at least two nuclear bombs which are ready for use. Before the UN inspectors came, there were 47 factories involved in the project. Now there are 64."

That information turned out to be grossly inaccurate, but it was cited by Vice President Dick Cheney during a speech in 2002 as a means to build the case for war.

O'Neill's allegations that Bush planned an Iraq



Art by Robbie Conal

invasion prior to 9/11 are backed up by dozens of on-the-record statements and speeches made by the president's senior advisers, including Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, during Bush's first four months in office.

In dozens of transcripts posted on the Defense Department's web site between January and May 2001, Rumsfeld said the United States needed to be prepared for surprises, such as launching pre-emptive wars against countries like Iraq.

"If you think about it, Dick Cheney's (Secretary of Defense) confirmation hearing in 1989 - not one United States senator mentioned a word about Iraq," Rumsfeld said in a May 25, 2001, interview with PBS's *NewsHour*. "The word 'Iraq' was never mentioned in his entire confirmation hearing. One year later we're at war with Iraq. Now, what does that tell you? Well, it tells you that you'd best be flexible; you'd best expect the unexpected."

In fact, Rumsfeld discusses the above scenario in a half-dozen other interviews in May 2001 and appears to suggest, by specifically mentioning Iraq, that history would eventually repeat itself.

Responding to a reporter's question on January 26, 2001, about the Bush administration's policy toward

Saddam Hussein's regime days after his Senate confirmation hearing, Rumsfeld said "I think that the policy of the country is that it is not helpful to have Saddam Hussein's regime in office."

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POLITICS AND THE THOUGHT POLICE

Marianne Williamson

The thought police are an insidious lot. Their headquarters aren't in some bright shiny building. Or perhaps it's more accurate to say that their headquarters are in many shiny buildings.

And they don't announce themselves as the thought police. Who needs to get into the messy work of actually policing people when it's so easy just to fool them? They're more like a Bureau of Thought Manipulation. This being an election season, they're particularly active now throughout the media, the government, the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee. They, not the President, as much as he might like to think, are the "deciders."

We Liberals like to think our thoughts aren't controlled. We pride ourselves on our independent thinking. We know we shouldn't believe everything we read. We realize the media is skewed, we know it's owned by a small group of people, we realize it's biased, etc. So given all that, one has to ask oneself, why are Democrats buying so much prevailing b.s. hook, line, and sinker, allowing ourselves to be led down the same path that led us to defeat in the last two presidential elections?

Remember Howard Dean, the anti-war candidate? As much as a lot of us liked him, we were led to believe we'd have to be more mature about this. We couldn't just indulge our passion. We had to be smart here; no just going with our gut, or--God forbid--our principles. We were pressured by the official thought manipulators to go with someone "electable," like John Kerry. It's as though some Democratic "wisdom council"--the same guys who told Gore he'd never be elected if he just spoke from his heart, and clearly must have told John Kerry the same thing--decide not just the political strategy that will supposedly win the White House, but even the thoughts that the rest of us have to buy into in order to give them permission to determine the strategy.

No one ever stops to ask, "Who are these guys?"

(Interestingly, George Washington warned us in his farewell address about "the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally.") We always just assume they know what they're talking about. We figure they're the ones who understand politics. Right!

So after Kerry lost, for at least a day or two we saw through the fog. Those guys needed to be run out of town, we all shouted! Their strategy had led to defeat! Next time, we were going to go with our gut, stand on our principles! In retrospect, we could see that Gore and Kerry would have been better off if they had come across like genuine alternatives to the Republicans, not just Republican lites! We got it! 2008 would be different!

Oh yeah? Look again. That same crowd is still clearly in charge, because you can tell their thought patterns a mile away. Today, their chosen candidate has a hyphenated name: Clinton-Obama-Edwards. This tri-candidate has all the markings of DNC thought manipulator approval: Just enough illusion of real difference from the Republicans to keep the not-yet-resisting-thought-manipulation Democrat happy; and just enough similarity to the prevailing establishment that the American people should buy it. This has been

our strategy for the last three presidential elections, has it not? And just like Bush regarding his policy in Iraq, we seem to be in complete denial that our policy is a failed one. It didn't work last time or even the time before that. And I don't think we should assume it will work in 2008.

For those of us who actually think we should bring the troops home now, tell me again why we didn't support Kucinich? Silly me! Because he could never win, of course! He's not electable! Didn't I get the memo?

I've known Dennis Kucinich for a long time, and I don't think I have illusions about him. Sometimes I find him pompous, male chauvinistic, intellectually unbending. But he is a good man, and a serious one. Some sort of clown? No. New Age woo woo? No way (of course,

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the thought manipulators have labeled me that as well, so some people would say something here about the pot and the kettle). His banishment to the margins of our political dialogue, his mockery by the media-DNC elite special forces, has less to do with who he is, and what he stands for, than it has to do with the anti-Democratic forces that have hijacked our politics on both sides of the aisle.

Why didn't we take Dennis Kucinich more seriously as our candidate in 2008? Because Tim Russert took twenty minutes to even get around to asking him a question in the last debate. Because Russert's idea of a real question--after a couple of times when Kucinich inconveniently hit the ball out of the park with his answers--was to query him about seeing a UFO, then throwing in Shirley McLaine's name just to confirm the kill. It didn't matter that Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan had both spoken publicly about seeing UFO's. What mattered was how the image could be used to make Kucinich appear ridiculous, serving the strategy of the elite machine still running things and for whom Kucinich is not an acceptable candidate.

In 2004, Kucinich was the only Presidential candidate who warned that a war in Iraq would be completely disastrous. I remember how mocked he was when he predicted hand-to-hand combat in Baghdad. I remember Candy Crowley, and other reporters as well, treating his views on the impending war as ridiculous, out there, almost insane. I remember Democratic strategists rolling

their eyes then, as they do about him now. But in fact, Dennis Kucinich was the one who turned out to be right. I have to ask you: Who's zoomin' who?

Something very dark, almost Orwellian, is afoot here, and the issue is much bigger than whether or not Dennis Kucinich gets a shot at the Presidency. It's about whether or not we do. Or whether the thought manipulators have it all sewn up.

Sitting at a party recently, among some powerful liberals ringing their hands about Hillary appearing heartless, Obama appearing weak, and Edwards appearing--well, no one can quite put their finger on it--I said, "The only question any real progressive should be asking right now is, 'Tell me again why we're not supporting Kucinich?'" The room grew silent. There was no, "Awe, come on, be serious!" No one good-naturedly shouted me down, as they would have two or three months ago. Rather I was met by silence. I saw people around me slowly nodding their heads.

I feel a shift. Subtle. But there. People are starting to wake up to the fact that a media/political party-complex basically decide our candidate then create the illusion for the rest of us that in fact we're the ones who did the deciding. But the only thing we're truly free to decide now--and which we should decide now--is whether we'll put up with all this thought manipulation for one minute more. Tell me again, why didn't we support Kucinich?

LEFT CURVE No. 32

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A MORE PERFECT UNION

Barack Obama

“We the people, in order to form a more perfect union.”

Two hundred and twenty one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America’s improbable experiment in democracy. Farmers and scholars; statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.

The document they produced was eventually signed but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by this nation’s original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least twenty more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations.

Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution – a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part – through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk - to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign – to continue the long march of

those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together – unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – towards a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own American story.

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton’s Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I’ve gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world’s poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners – an

inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.

It’s a story that hasn’t made me the most conventional candidate. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts – that out of many, we are truly one.

Throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hun-



Photo by Amelia Mulkey

gry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate Flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African Americans and white Americans.

This is not to say that race has not been an issue in the campaign. At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either “too black” or “not black enough.” We saw racial tensions bubble to the surface during the week before the South Carolina primary. The press has scoured every exit poll for the latest evidence of racial polarization, not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.

And yet, it has only been in the last couple of weeks that the discussion of race in this campaign has taken a particularly divisive turn.

On one end of the spectrum, we’ve heard the implication that my candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it’s based solely on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap. On the other end, we’ve heard my former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, use incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation; that rightly offend white and black alike.

I have already condemned, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Reverend Wright that have caused such controversy. For some, nagging questions remain. Did I know him to be an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic and foreign policy? Of course. Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely – just as I’m sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed.

But the remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren’t simply controversial. They weren’t simply a religious leader’s effort to speak out against perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country – a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of ema-

nating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.

As such, Reverend Wright’s comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems – two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change; problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

Given my background, my politics, and my professed values and ideals, there will no doubt be those for whom my statements of condemnation are not enough. Why associate myself with Reverend Wright in the first place, they may ask? Why not join another church? And

I confess that if all that I knew of Reverend Wright were the snippets of those sermons that have run in an endless loop on the television and You Tube, or if Trinity United Church of Christ conformed to the caricatures being peddled by some commentators, there is no doubt that I would react in much the same way.

But the truth is, that isn’t all that I know of the man. The man I met more than twenty years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another; to care for the sick and lift up the poor. He is a man who served his country as a U.S. Marine; who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and

who for over thirty years led a church that serves the community by doing God’s work here on Earth – by housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

In my first book, *Dreams From My Father*, I described the experience of my first service at Trinity:

“People began to shout, to rise from their seats and clap and cry out, a forceful wind carrying the reverend’s voice up into the rafters... And in that single note – hope! – I heard something else; at the foot of that cross, inside the thousands of churches across the city, I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion’s den, Ezekiel’s field of dry bones. Those stories – of survival, and freedom, and hope – became our story, my story; the blood that had spilled was our blood, the tears our tears; until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a

“I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.”

people into future generations and into a larger world. Our trials and triumphs became at once unique and universal, black and more than black; in chronicling our journey, the stories and songs gave us a means to reclaim memories that we didn't need to feel shame about...memories that all people might study and cherish – and with which we could start to rebuild.”

That has been my experience at Trinity. Like other predominantly black churches across the country, Trinity embodies the black community in its entirety – the doctor and the welfare mom, the model student and the former gang-banger. Like other black churches, Trinity's services are full of raucous laughter and sometimes bawdy humor. They are full of dancing, clapping, screaming and shouting that may seem jarring to the untrained ear. The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and yes, the bitterness and bias that make up the black experience in America.

And this helps explain, perhaps, my relationship with Reverend Wright. As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me. He strengthened my faith, officiated my wedding, and baptized my children. Not once in my conversations with him have I heard him talk about any ethnic group in derogatory terms, or treat whites with whom he interacted with anything but courtesy and respect. He contains within him the contradictions – the good and the bad – of the community that he has served diligently for so many years.

I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother – a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe.

These people are a part of me. And they are a part of America, this country that I love.

Some will see this as an attempt to justify or excuse comments that are simply inexcusable. I can assure you it is not. I suppose the politically safe thing would be to move on from this episode and just hope that it fades into the woodwork. We can dismiss Reverend Wright as a crank or a demagogue, just as some have dismissed Geraldine Ferraro, in the aftermath of her recent statements, as harboring some deep-seated racial bias.

But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America – to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality.

The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through – a part of our union that we have yet to perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never

be able to come together and solve challenges like health care, or education, or the need to find good jobs for every American.

Understanding this reality requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point. As William Faulkner once wrote, “The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past.” We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist in the African-American community today can be directly traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students.

Legalized discrimination – where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions, or the police force, or fire departments – meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations. That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between black and white, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persists in so many of today's urban and rural communities.

A lack of economic opportunity among black men, and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family, contributed to the erosion of black families – a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods – parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pick-up and building code enforcement – all helped create a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continue to haunt us.

This is the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late fifties and early sixties, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted. What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but rather how many men and women overcame the odds; how many were able to make a way out of no way for those like me who would come after them.

But for all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream, there were many who didn't make it – those who were ultimately defeated, in one way or another, by discrimination. That legacy of defeat was passed on to future generations – those young men and increasingly young women who we see standing on street corners or languishing in our prisons, without hope or prospects for the future. Even for those blacks who did make it, questions of race, and racism, continue to define their worldview in fundamental ways. For the men and women of Reverend Wright's generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away;

nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years. That anger may not get expressed in public, in front of white co-workers or white friends. But it does find voice in the barbershop or around the kitchen table. At times, that anger is exploited by politicians, to gin up votes along racial lines, or to make up for a politician's own failings.

And occasionally it finds voice in the church on Sunday morning, in the pulpit and in the pews. The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Reverend Wright's sermons simply reminds us of the old truism that the most segregated hour in American life occurs on Sunday morning. That anger is not always productive; indeed, all too often it distracts attention from solving real problems; it keeps us from squarely facing our own complicity in our condition, and prevents the African-American community from forging the alliances it needs to bring about real change. But the anger is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.

In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience – as far as they're concerned, no one's handed them anything, they've built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped after a lifetime of labor. They are anxious about their futures, and feel their dreams slipping away; in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense. So when they are told to bus their children to a school across town; when they hear that an African American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced, resentment builds over time.

Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren't always expressed in polite company. But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation. Anger over welfare and affirmative action helped forge the Reagan Coalition. Politicians routinely exploited fears of crime for their own electoral ends. Talk show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism.

Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze – a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns – this too widens the ra-

cial divide, and blocks the path to understanding.

This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy – particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own.

But I have asserted a firm conviction – a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people – that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.

For the African-American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances – for better health care, and better schools, and better jobs – to the larger aspirations of all Americans -- the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man who's been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. And it means taking full responsibility for our lives – by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny.

Ironically, this quintessentially American – and yes, conservative – notion of self-help found frequent expression in Reverend Wright's sermons. But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change.

The profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress has been made; as if this country – a country that has made it possible for one of his own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black; Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old -- is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know -- what we have seen – is that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope – the audacity to hope – for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

In the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination – and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past – are real and must be addressed. Not just with words, but with deeds – by investing in our schools and our communities; by enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system; by providing this generation with ladders of opportunity that were unavailable for previous generations. It requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come

at the expense of my dreams; that investing in the health, welfare, and education of black and brown and white children will ultimately help all of America prosper.

In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more, and nothing less, than what all the world's great religions demand – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister's keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.

For we have a choice in this country. We can accept a politics that breeds division, and conflict, and cynicism. We can tackle race only as spectacle – as we did in the OJ trial – or in the wake of tragedy, as we did in the aftermath of Katrina - or as fodder for the nightly news. We can play Reverend Wright's sermons on every channel, every day and talk about them from now until the election, and make the only question in this campaign whether or not the American people think that I somehow believe or sympathize with his most offensive words. We can pounce on some gaffe by a Hillary supporter as evidence that she's playing the race card, or we can speculate on whether white men will all flock to John McCain in the general election regardless of his policies.

We can do that.

But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we'll be talking about some other distraction. And then another one. And then another one. And nothing will change.

That is one option. Or, at this moment, in this election, we can come together and say, "Not this time." This time we want to talk about the crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children and Asian children and Hispanic children and Native American children. This time we want to reject the cynicism that tells us that these kids can't learn; that those kids who don't look like us are somebody else's problem. The children of America are not those kids, they are our kids, and we will not let them fall behind in a 21st century economy. Not this time.

This time we want to talk about how the lines in the Emergency Room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care; who don't have the power on their own to overcome the special interests in Washington, but who can take them on if we do it together.

This time we want to talk about the shuttered mills that once provided a decent life for men and women of every race, and the homes for sale that once belonged to Americans from every religion, every region, every walk of life. This time we want to talk about the fact that the real problem is not that someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the corporation you work for

will ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit.

This time we want to talk about the men and women of every color and creed who serve together, and fight together, and bleed together under the same proud flag. We want to talk about how to bring them home from a war that never should've been authorized and never should've been waged, and we want to talk about how we'll show our patriotism by caring for them, and their families, and giving them the benefits they have earned.

I would not be running for President if I didn't believe with all my heart that this is what the vast majority of Americans want for this country. This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected. And today, whenever I find myself feeling doubtful or cynical about this possibility, what gives me the most hope is the next generation – the young people whose attitudes and beliefs and openness to change have already made history in this election.

There is one story in particular that I'd like to leave you with today – a story I told when I had the great honor of speaking on Dr. King's birthday at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist, in Atlanta.

There is a young, twenty-three year old white woman named Ashley Baia who organized for our campaign in Florence, South Carolina. She had been working to organize a mostly African-American community since the beginning of this campaign, and one day she was at a roundtable discussion where everyone went around telling their story and why they were there.

And Ashley said that when she was nine years old, her mother got cancer. And because she had to miss days of work, she was let go and lost her health care. They had to file for bankruptcy, and that's when Ashley decided that she had to do something to help her mom.

She knew that food was one of their most expensive costs, and so Ashley convinced her mother that what she really liked and really wanted to eat more than anything else was mustard and relish sandwiches. Because that was the cheapest way to eat.

She did this for a year until her mom got better, and she told everyone at the roundtable that the reason she joined our campaign was so that she could help the millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents too.

Now Ashley might have made a different choice. Perhaps somebody told her along the way that the source of her mother's problems were blacks who were on welfare and too lazy to work, or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally. But she didn't. She sought out allies in her fight against injustice.

Anyway, Ashley finishes her story and then goes

“Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race... as far as they're concerned, no one's handed them anything...”

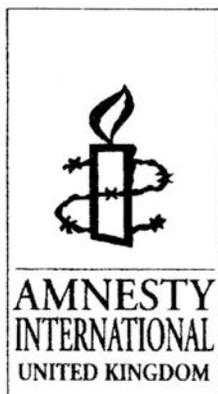
around the room and asks everyone else why they're supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and reasons. Many bring up a specific issue. And finally they come to this elderly black man who's been sitting there quietly the entire time. And Ashley asks him why he's there. And he does not bring up a specific issue. He does not say health care or the economy. He does not say education or the war. He does not say that he was there because of Barack Obama. He simply says to everyone in the room, "I am here because of Ashley."

"I'm here because of Ashley." By itself, that single

moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man is not enough. It is not enough to give health care to the sick, or jobs to the jobless, or education to our children.

But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger. And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the two-hundred and twenty one years since a band of patriots signed that document in Philadelphia, that is where the perfection begins."

Speech given by Barack Obama



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SPITZER AND THE BAIL-OUT FOR PREDATOR BANKS

Greg Palast

While New York Governor Eliot Spitzer was paying an 'escort' \$4,300 in a hotel room in Washington, just down the road, George Bush's new Federal Reserve Board Chairman, Ben Bernanke, was secretly handing over \$200 billion in a tryst with mortgage bank industry speculators.

Both acts were wanton, wicked and lewd. But there's a BIG difference. The Governor was using his own checkbook. Bush's man Bernanke was using ours.

This week, Bernanke's Fed, for the first time in its history, loaned a selected coterie of banks one-fifth of a trillion dollars to guarantee these banks' mortgage-backed junk bonds. The deluge of public loot was an eye-popping windfall to the very banking predators who have brought two million families to the brink of foreclosure.

Up until Wednesday, there was one single, lonely politician who stood in the way of this creepy little assignation at the bankers' bordello: Eliot Spitzer.

Who are they kidding? Spitzer's lynching and the bankers' enriching are intimately tied.

How? Follow the money.

The press has swallowed Wall Street's line that millions of US families are about to lose their homes because they bought homes they couldn't afford or took loans too big for their wallets.

Ba-LON-ey. That's blaming the victim.

Here's what happened. Since the Bush regime came to power, a new species of loan became the norm, the 'sub-prime' mortgage and its variants including loans with teeny "introductory" interest rates. From out of nowhere, a company called 'Countrywide' became America's top mortgage lender, accounting for one in five home loans, a large chunk of these sub-prime'.

Here's how it worked: The Grinning Family, with

US average household income, gets a \$200,000 mortgage at four percent for two years. Their \$955 monthly payment is 25% of their income. No problem. Their banker promises them a new mortgage, again at the cheap rate, in two years.

But in two years, the promise ain't worth a can of spam and the Grinnings are told to scam - because their house is now worth less than the mortgage. Now, the mortgage hits nine percent or \$1,609 plus fees to recover the "discount" they had for two years. Suddenly, payments equal 42% to fifty percent of pre-tax income. The Grinnings move into their Toyota.

Now, what kind of American is 'sub-prime'. Guess. No peeking. Here's a hint: 73% of HIGH INCOME Black and Hispanic borrowers were given sub-prime loans versus seventeen percent of similar-income Whites. Dark-skinned borrowers aren't stupid - they had no choice. They were 'steered' as it's called in the mortgage sharking business.

'Steering', sub-prime loans with usurious kickers, fake inducements to over-borrow, called 'fraudulent conveyance' or 'predatory lending' under US law, were almost completely forbidden in the olden days (Clinton Administration and earlier) by federal regulators and state laws

as nothing more than fancy loan-sharking.

But when the Bush regime took over, Countrywide and its banking brethren were told to party hearty - it was OK now to steer'm, fake'm, charge'm and take'm.

But there was this annoying party-poopier. The Attorney General of New York, Eliot Spitzer, who sued these guys to a fare-thee-well. Or tried to.

Instead of regulating the banks that had run amok, Bush's regulators went on the warpath against Spitzer and states attempting to stop predatory practices. Making an

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unprecedented use of the legal power of “federal pre-emption”, Bush-bots ordered the states to NOT enforce their consumer protection laws.

Indeed, the feds actually filed a lawsuit to block Spitzer’s investigation of ugly racial mortgage steering. Bush’s banking buddies were especially steamed that Spitzer hammered bank practices across the nation using New York State laws.

Spitzer not only took on Countrywide, he took on their predatory enablers in the investment banking community. Behind Countrywide was the Mother Shark, its funder and now owner, Bank of America. Others joined the sharkfest: Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch and Citigroup’s Citibank made mortgage usury their major profit centers. They did this through a bit of financial legerdemain called “securitization”.

What that means is that they took a bunch of junk mortgages, like the Grinning’s, loans about to go down the toilet and repackaged them into “tranches” of bonds which were stamped “AAA” - top grade - by bond rating agencies. These gold-painted turds were sold as sparkling safe investments to US school district pension funds and town governments in Finland (really).

When the housing bubble burst and the paint flaked off, investors were left with the poop and the bankers were left with bonuses. Countrywide’s top man, Angelo Mozilo, will ‘earn’ a \$77 million buy-out bonus this year on top of the \$656 million - over half a billion dollars – he pulled in from 1998 through 2007.

But there were rumblings that the party would soon be over. Angry regulators, burned investors and the weight of millions of homes about to be boarded up were causing the sharks to sink. Countrywide’s stock was down fifty percent, and Citigroup was off 38%, not pleasing to the Gulf sheiks who now control its biggest share blocks.

Then, on Wednesday of this week, the unthinkable happened. Carlyle Capital went bankrupt. Who? That’s Carlyle as in Carlyle Group. James Baker, Senior Counsel. Notable partners, former and past: George Bush, the Bin Laden family and more dictators, potentates, pirates and

presidents than you can count.

The Fed had to act. Bernanke opened the vault and dumped \$200 billion on the poor little suffering bankers. They got the public treasure – *and* got to keep the Grinning’s house. There was no ‘quid’ of a foreclosure moratorium for the ‘pro quo’ of public bailout. Not one family was saved - but not one banker was left behind.

Every mortgage sharking operation shot up in value. Mozilo’s Countrywide stock rose seventeen percent in one day. The Citi sheiks saw their company’s stock rise \$10 billion in an afternoon.

And that very same day the bail-out was decided - what a coinkydink! - the man called, ‘The Sheriff of Wall Street’ was cuffed. Spitzer was silenced.

Do I believe the banks called Justice and said, “Take him down today!” Naw, that’s not how the system works. But the big players knew that unless Spitzer was taken out, he would create enough ruckus to spoil the party. Headlines in the financial press - one was “Wall Street Declares War on Spitzer” - made clear to Bush’s enforcers at Justice who their number one target should be. And it wasn’t Bin Laden.

It was the night of February 13 when Spitzer made the bone-headed choice to order take-out in his Washington Hotel room. He had just finished signing these words for

the *Washington Post* about predatory loans:

“Not only did the Bush administration do nothing to protect consumers, it embarked on an aggressive and unprecedented campaign to prevent states from protecting their residents from the very problems to which the federal government was turning a blind eye”.

Bush, Spitzer said right in the headline, was the “Predator Lenders’ Partner in Crime”. The President, said Spitzer, was a fugitive from justice. And Spitzer was in Washington to launch a campaign to take on the Bush regime and the biggest financial powers on the planet.

Spitzer wrote, “When history tells the story of the subprime lending crisis and recounts its devastating effects on the lives of so many innocent homeowners the Bush administration will not be judged favorably”.

But now, the Administration can rest assured that this love story – of Bush and his bankers - will not be told

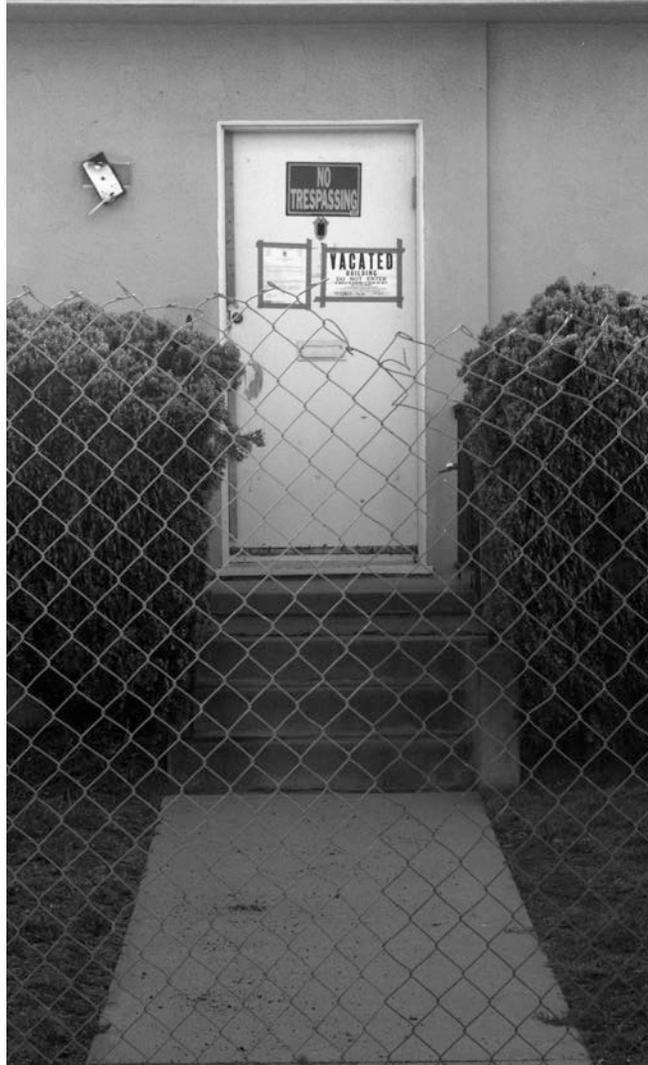


Photo By Amelia Mulkey

by history at all - now that the Sheriff of Wall Street has fallen on his own gun.

A note on "Prosecutorial Indiscretion".

Back in the day when I was an investigator of racketeers for government, the federal prosecutor I was assisting was deciding whether to launch a case based on his negotiations for airtime with Sixty Minutes. I'm not allowed to tell you the prosecutor's name, but I want to mention he was recently seen shouting, "Florida is Rudi country! Florida is Rudi country!"

Not all crimes lead to federal bust or even public exposure. It's up to something called "prosecutorial discretion". Funny thing, this 'discretion'. For example, Senator David Vitter, Republican of Louisiana, paid Washington DC prostitutes to put him in diapers (ewww!), yet the Senator was not exposed by the US prosecutors busting the pimp-ring that pampered him.

Naming and shaming and ruining Spitzer - rarely done in these cases - was made at the 'discretion' of Bush's Justice Department.

Or maybe we should say, 'indiscretion'.



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INTERVIEW WITH BILL ROSENDAHL

Jeff Hirsch

Jeff Hirsch: Let me start by asking what you've enjoyed most so far in your work as Councilman?

Bill Rosendahl: Jeff, the people. I've met so many interesting people: rich ones, poor ones, gay ones, straight ones, old ones, young ones. All over the district there's an energy of people who want to be heard, want to be listened to, and want to make a difference with their lives. I've found it fascinating. Like yesterday, I started meeting with the tenants of Lincoln Place who might be on the street by Thursday. I then met a fellow by the name of Arnold Schwab who's 83 and was donating a million dollars to the Archives, which is a preservation house for gay, lesbian, transsexual and bisexual literature. Then I went over to Rick Caruso's home where the local Brentwood homeowners group was meeting and I challenged them to get involved. Then I went over to a Chabad celebration. So there is an energy everywhere I go within the district. But it's really the people. I look at them, they look at me: we hug, we respond, we talk. So the most exciting part is to be the representative for 250,000 people.

JH: I'm a progressive and I voted for you and Mayor Villaraigosa. You're the first mainstream politician who won that I voted for in a long time. So that makes me feel good, too.

BR: Great, great. Well it's very nice that you say that. I mean I am so progressive...if you saw the LA Times a week ago Sunday, in the section where the Sheriff and the former Seattle chief of police talked about the bad laws of the 80s, especially the legalizing of drugs. I read that on the Council floor into the public record. The reason I ran for office was because it's time that people who are citizens first and are fed up with the present system of government jump in and see if they can make a difference. You know if we had the kind of power and energy in Washington that Bobby Kennedy, George McGovern, and Fred Harris had working for them, we would have national healthcare for our people. We would not have allowed the insurance companies and the drug companies to manipulate the process.

We shouldn't have 2 million people in prison, a

million of whom are there for the bad laws of the eighties. Look, I am not for people getting addicted to drugs or alcohol. That's a health issue. But people shouldn't be put in the criminal justice system for laws that have created a prison-industrial complex. We spend more on prisons than we do on people. You know, one out of three young black men go through the criminal justice system and their lives are ruined. Why do we have 2 million in prison? So anyhow, a true progressive is going to make these comments about the healthcare system, about the war on drugs and affordable housing. He's going to talk about a strong union movement which means a strong middle-class and a strong America. What's happened to American politics is that winning is the story. It isn't about standing for anything anymore. So frankly, when I decided to run for office I figured I could get elected and the people would put me in power. I'm going to do everything I can.

Last week I put a motion before the Council to create an ad hoc committee on homelessness. I worked the room, I talked to the Mayor, I talked to my colleagues, and I put a motion through. It's going to be considered by the Council and we will do it. This committee will consist of five Council members. Our first job will be to look at Prop 63 money to see how the city can use it. Then we will look at plans across the country dealing with homelessness and come up with a plan for LA. I'm tired of the homeless issue being talked about and nothing being done.

I also looked at the issue of re-development and zoning. The CRA controls all of the re-development issues and zone areas. They take them off the tax rolls for redevelopment. There have been 34 projects sitting there for over twenty years and they haven't come back on the tax rolls. So I'm trying to turn some of these CRA projects into revenue for the city.

JH: What is the CRA?

BR: The CRA is the group that decides a piece of land is blighted so it can be zoned for redevelopment. They take it off the tax rolls for that period so it can be redeveloped, and they never put it back on. A lot of folks involved in creating real estate, big developers and financiers, benefit from this. They won't get hit up for taxes! So I put a mo-

tion before the Council to look into the status of these parcels to see if some can be “sunsetting” and put back on the tax rolls.

When I was in Westchester one day campaigning for the Council I banged on a door, it was a non-partisan race you know, and there was a Republican. He said: “Bill, I’ve got some advice for you. I know how you can get more money into the general fund. You’ve had these big projects sitting there off the tax rolls. You should bring them back on and bring more money into the general treasury.” I never forgot that.

JH: Give us a concrete example.

BR: We’ll look at those 34 projects and see if there are any options besides what this guy was talking about. But the interesting thing is that when I brought it up in the Council, both Greg Smith, my Republican colleague, and Ed Reyes, my Democrat colleague, looked at me and said: “That’s very interesting. We really should look into seeing if some of them could be sunsetted.” So just the idea of checking out these big projects that have been off the tax rolls for years, and maybe putting them on the tax rolls, is worth considering.

JH: What are the different pressures you face as an elected public official versus the media person you were at Adelphia Cable for many years?

BR: Oh yeah! You know, it’s a big difference. It’s a different world. I had a lens that I looked into and said “Hello” to people for sixteen years. It was Century Cable and Adelphia Cable, and before that I worked for Group W. I did 3000 shows with everybody around the table while I played moderator. I let people finish their sentences and finish their thoughts. So I could empower people who were watching TV to get the tools to function in a democracy.

JH: So now you’re empowered!

BR: Well, now I’m on the other side of the lens.

JH: What’s the difference?

BR: The big difference is that I spend more time than ever working. I’ve never worked harder in my life...24/7 now. On weekends, you’re meeting the people, you’re pressing the flesh, you’re looking them in the eye. In the evenings you’re meeting people at community events. During the day you’re actually sitting at a desk where the rubber hits the road, no more talk, just solving problems like the gridlock!

JH: What are the major concerns of your constituents?

BR: Traffic, gridlock and development issues. On the gridlock of the past twenty years I’ve said publicly that our leadership has dropped the ball.

JH: Local, state or national?

BR: It’s a combination of federal, state, county and city. There should have been an Expo Line to the beach 10 or 15 years ago through Santa Monica. There should have been a Green Line along Lincoln to the Expo Line and the airport. They should have done the Red Line under Wilshire. They should do bus lanes and get everybody on the same

paths. The NIMBYism of the 88 cities in LA county and the 5 surrounding counties stalled things. So West LA is now in gridlock. It became that way gradually but now it’s over the top.

The second major transportation issue has to do with LAX. To put everything in one little airport in a highly residential area in Westchester when you have 16 to 18 million people in the region is insanity. New York has 5 airports. We should have at least 3 to 5 regional airports. We lost El Toro in

Orange County because we didn’t have a regional airport authority that would say to Orange County: “God bless you, but you have 3 million people. You have to have an airport and El Toro makes sense.” The Ontario Airport has to be tooled up and Palmdale should have an airport and we should have a bullet train between these airports. This airport regionalism has gridlocked the southern part of my district. The 10 and 405 freeways are a nightmare.

And Santa Monica hasn’t helped much. They reduced their housing stock, going from 96,000 residents ten years ago to 86,000 today. They created all the jobs that bring everybody into the gridlock. It has 9% of the jobs but only makes up 3% of the population of LA County. Santa Monica and LA didn’t sit down and say: okay, if you’re going to provide the jobs who’s gonna build the housing? And who’s the guy who’s going to build the transportation infrastructure? I’ve inherited a problem. We have to create regionalism. We have to create our transportation infrastructures and do it based on a mix between residential and commercial interests.

JH: Could you be more specific?

BR: Well, on the transportation issue, it’s simple. The Green Line goes to LAX but it needs a sprint that goes down Lincoln to the Expo Line. The Expo Line has to go through Santa Monica to the beach. The Red Line has to go under Wilshire so we can take the congestion off the streets. We need to do that! We need to commit ourselves!

Set up the timetables to get the federal and state dollars and make it happen! A lot of us are tapping into a lot of frustration, including the mayor and even Zev Yaroslavsky. When the mayor decided to be chair of the MTA he'd just come from being chair of the transportation committee on the LA City Council. So he understands it, and he's going to take that leadership. I'm very hopeful, especially since he appointed Lydia Canard, that we'll have a lot of enthusiasm about expansion through the regional model, which means Ontario, Palmdale, and Orange County. We'll have a regional airport authority if the Mayor can exert influence over other counties. We're going to stay stagnant with gridlock in the air, at LAX, or gridlock on the ground, with no mass transit corridors.

When it comes to development issues what strikes me is that 58% of the people in this district are renters and they are all threatened by the right of developers to come in and tear down their buildings and build high-end condos. So the people I represent are being pushed out of this district and I'm fighting for their survival. Lincoln Place is a perfect example.

JH: Let me talk to you about Lincoln Place and the bus yard off Main in Venice. I understand there is pressure to convert them into luxury apartments. A more egalitarian solution would be to make the bus space an area for low and moderate income people. Another solution would be to keep Lincoln Place solely for low income people.

BR: The problem is that we are dealing with the economics of America that gives developers the right to take land and do what they want with it. When you talk to a developer he says: "Well, it doesn't pencil out. How do you make moderate and low income housing on land that is so valuable? The only thing that we can make a buck on is high end condos." That's the problem.

JH: Without mincing words, what's your view about how profits throughout the business community take such priority over the welfare of ordinary people?

BR: This is why I'm in politics. The progressive agenda has been thrown away and nobody wants to talk about it. That's why the social contract between the people and the government is at its lowest ebb in ages.

JH: I've been very interested in this question. As an elect-

ed official what do you specifically do to achieve these goals?

BR: Get in there and roll up your sleeves, avoid the ideologies, see where the rubber hits the road.

JH: Can you be more specific?

BR: What I say to developers is: come up with a formula that makes a certain percentage of housing affordable, and don't build it somewhere else, build it on the complex. Let's see if we can work together, even if that means getting the community to go for variances. For those variances I want more parking spaces. For those variances I want more affordable housing. I think we can negotiate with the corporate world and say: "People come first."

And then use that commitment to people to force the developers to go forward and compromise.

JH: Of all the pressing issues facing us as a city, state and nation, I see the private versus the public as the most important.

BR: And we represent the public.

JH: The private is part of the public. I think we both know some of the worst attributes of private enterprise are simply the greed and maldistribution of power and wealth. How do you as a Council member of Los Angeles fight this everyday? Do you take it issue by issue? Like how can moderate and low income people be helped, and how can the rich be made to be not so greedy?

BR: There are many ways you go about it. One is you play the role of enforcer of the common will to the powerful people, for the ones that need your support to get their projects approved. People put an initiative

on the ballot last year called Prop 63 that said those making a million dollars a year or more should have to give one percent of it to a special mental health fund. And now what I'm doing with this committee on the Council I'm forming on homelessness, is we're going to track this money and see where it is going in order to see how many hundreds of millions of dollars we can get for LA and not let it disappear somewhere in the ether, but use it for concrete programs. So we're taking a public mandate and we're working it. The devil's in the details. When it comes to affordable housing you have to confront the developers. Negotiate from a position of commitment to the public and make it happen. If we don't get a national or a state healthcare plan in the next year or two, I'm going to



Bill Rosehdahl leaning on what is left of the famous Venice Beach Graffiti Pit

see if we can incorporate the city of Los Angeles into an organization of 4 million and get it that way.

JH: I think that's a great idea!

BR: You see we have to grab the power at the level we're at. You also have to be joined at the hip with those other elected officials in that district, and from other levels of government. For instance, Deborah Bolin, Jane Harman and Henry Waxman and I talk all the time. Sheila Kuehl, who's in the northern part of our district, is keyed to environmental concerns and she's sponsored a bill on health care.

JH: So you're battling in several arenas all the time.

BR: Yes! We have to be battling all the time at the federal, state and county levels.

JH: So more specifically, let's take the veteran's hospital. Who would you negotiate with to have it protected?

BR: There's several levels. First of all you've got to get the community around that area, which is west LA and Brentwood, to buy into it. If you can get the community to appreciate it and the veterans to appreciate it, that's the first step. I'm a veteran, I happen to have been...

JH: Which war?

BR: Vietnam. I was drafted. In my first year I was a psychoanalyst in a mental hygiene clinic, serving 89 vets a day. And now these vets are the walking wounded out there eating from garbage cans, and so I have a personal stake in wanting the veteran's property to be for veterans only. There's a group set up by the secretary of veteran's affairs and they've been holding meetings. We all went to one of their meetings and spoke. Even Dick Reardon. I'm non-partisan and non-ideological. I'm a progressive and just want to get things done. So Dick spoke with some others and a commission recommended to the Secretary of Veteran's Affairs that property should be set aside for veterans. I talked about renovating three of the buildings and making a space for six hundred homeless vets. But this will require a meeting of minds across governmental levels. They all have to agree. But we must keep pushing it since we have a president who wants to sell off public land for big profits.

JH: What are the most difficult and the most enjoyable parts of your job?

BR: The most difficult is I'm in gridlock all the time! I used to go from my office to my home and it was just three miles away. The biggest challenge is to build consensus.

You know I listen to everybody, I'm open to everybody. I don't have a hidden agenda. But the challenge is in pulling it all together and getting people to come up with a compromise, because you have to compromise to get things done.

JH: How can an ordinary citizen of LA make a difference?

BR: Well, in many ways. First of all, being engaged in the community at every level. And the more people who get involved in the problems of their communities the better chance of success. Form neighborhood watches. Form community organizations, especially for powerless renters. Become an active part of the Neighborhood Council system. If you're a parent you need to bang on the school door. Get engaged in the community at the levels where the issues are that matter to you.

JH: If you were President of the United States how would you get us out of this miserable mistake and quagmire that is now Iraq?

BR: First of all, if I were President, we would have never been there. But now we have to get an international force to resolve things. We can't walk out and leave a bloodbath. We have to keep the parties separate. Defuse the animosity and create a democracy. It's a tough spot we've created. I regret the state of affairs we're in. My prayer is that we can get some support from other countries.

JH: Do you have anything you would like to add, Bill?

BR: No Jeff, I appreciate this interview. My bottom line to everybody is: get involved! It's still our country, our state, our city. And the more you roll up your sleeves and get involved the better it will become. Because it's about all of us taking charge of our own community to solve our mutual problems.

“The progressive agenda has been thrown away and nobody wants to talk about it. That's why the social contract between the people and the government is at its lowest ebb in ages.”

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THE WAR AT HOME: INTERVIEW WITH MIKE DAVIS

Dan Tsang

Dan Tsang: I understand you recently returned from New Orleans...

Mike Davis: Yes, I spent four days in New Orleans and also four days in southwestern Louisiana. I actually got trapped there when Hurricane Rita hit the coast.

DT: Was the situation worse than you expected?

MD: Well, within New Orleans itself the situation was very strange because the government was claiming, for instance, that the Army Corps of Engineers was working night and day to repair levees. But the city was largely deserted except for little survival communities, soup kitchens and some very interesting community-based efforts. In terms of the government role, apart from attempts to restore electricity, I saw almost nothing going on. There was of course a surplus of heavily armed federal police agencies, most of whom ended up hanging out in the French Quarter where they got free jumbalaya and beer. But you couldn't really say the federal government, the state or anybody else was working night and day to restore the vital infrastructures in the city. This was particularly true in the worst hit mid-city areas, eastern New Orleans, and of course the 9th ward.

DT: Is there a class pattern in their reconstruction? Are they going to rebuild the richer areas first?

MD: Well, New Orleans has been in the midst of a huge social struggle over redevelopment for almost a generation now with a business elite, one of the most traditionally powerful and secretive in the country, in charge. Anybody who's read John Barry's bestselling book, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*, has an image of how powerful this elite has traditionally been. They operate through something called the New Orleans Business Council and they're basically the power behind the throne of the current Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin. But for decades they've been fighting to create a continuous area of gentrified housing and tourist attractions running from the French Quarter, along the Mississippi River's East Bank, all the way through the

Garden District to the Tulane campus area. And they've been fighting essentially to reduce the number of poor people in the city.

One of the most outrageous examples is the destruction of the St. Thomas public housing project, located in an area now known as the Warehouse District, to make way for gentrified housing and Wal-Mart. So this gentrification design for the city, reducing the number of poor black people and expanding the tourist infrastructure, has been a master plan now for at least a generation. And it isn't surprising in the aftermath of this disaster that leadership should immediately be assumed by these groups.

There's also an important political dimension here too. Louisiana is one of the five deep southern states. It isn't exactly a blue state, but it has the most competitive politics, unlike Mississippi, which is now solidly Republican. Louisiana for instance still has a Democratic senator and a Democratic governor. This is almost solely due to the African American Democratic vote in New Orleans. For instance Mary Landrieu, who's the Democratic senator, won a tight race in 1996 with only a six thousand vote margin and she got that because she carried New Orleans by 100,000 votes.

Obviously Karl Rove and other Republican strategists understand that if you somehow lose 10 or 15 thousand active black voters in New Orleans, you utterly shift the balance of power within Louisiana. The Republicans immediately gain another senator and you turn what's a kind of pinkish, or some people would call a purple state, into a red state, like Alabama and Mississippi. So the stakes are very high in New Orleans, both for local elites who've had this redevelopment vision for many years, and for the Republican Party.

DT: In a piece for *Le Monde Diplomatique*, "The Predators of New Orleans," you wrote about the transfer of corporate involvement from Iraq to New Orleans that's happening with all the reconstruction. Can you elaborate?

MD: First of all let me say that when you go to New Orleans you are constantly running into people desperately looking for work, small businessmen, manual laborers, people trying to cling to the city, to keep their stake in



Photo by Craig Morse

the city. But so far there has been no effort to re-employ people. And there has been no real debate about employing locals to rebuild New Orleans. Most of the people who come are skilled workers, some of whom are housed on hugely expensive cruise ships moored in the city, and are from out of state. There's a recent example of local unionized workers being fired by the employer who brought in non-union workers from Texas. So the crucial issue for the recovery here is providing jobs for people. That would ensure people can stay in the area. And of course the mayor had to lay off half the city workforce because the city's basically bankrupt.

All this contrasts in a most dramatic and shocking way with the fact that the federal government immediately gave hundreds of millions of dollars of prime contracts without bidding in a non-competitive process to Halliburton, the Shah Group, which is the biggest corporation based in New Orleans, and various security firms, all of whom are familiar to us from their disastrous and piratical role in Iraq. Not only that, but the person who now directs the Army Corps of Engineers is the same guy who was initially in charge of bidding reconstruction in Iraq. The former head of Homeland Security before Brown, the guy who actually appointed Brown, is all over Baton Rouge. He's now a lobbyist. And his role was to get these contracts to big private corporations as quickly as possible. So you've seen a kind of Baghdad syndrome emerging in New Orleans.

Just to give another example. One of the mainstays

of the business community in New Orleans, particularly in the black community, is small restaurants. And the *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans' paper, estimated that a third of all restaurants in the city have now collapsed and would not be reopened. So the government has rushed to reward its political base, huge contractors and old families based in Texas and the South, while allowing New Orleans to go without jobs, allowing a huge amount of small business to become extinct, and for city government to virtually collapse.

DT: Do you believe FEMA should have been kept separate from Homeland Security at the beginning of all this?

MD: FEMA was really the showcase of the Clinton administration, directed by James DeWitt who had cabinet rank. And of course now we see that homeland security has been a huge blanket for awarding, with minimum public scrutiny or oversight, million-dollar contracts to all kinds of people, generally Republican contributors, while at the same time weakening, rather than increasing, the safety of Americans in the face of natural disasters, or for that matter terrorism.

Related to what happened to FEMA is the Bio-shield Program. Washington has given billions of dollars in contracts for the development of vaccines and treatments for hypothetical bioterrorist plots like Anthrax. In the beginning some well-meaning people thought this had to trickle down to public health agencies for infectious

diseases like influenza and tuberculosis. The opposite is happening. Tuberculosis researchers have gone to where the money is!

DT: How about the media? There was a picture of this white couple with food and they were described as “innocent” victims, whatever...and then there was this black person with food and he or she was described as a “looter.”

MD: I actually spoke to a police officer, relative of a friend of mine, who was in the city. He explained that the police--and he called them the good police, there are a lot of bad police in New Orleans--did the obvious rational thing. They told people to go into stores to take food and water and vital supplies, just like the police themselves opened up an auto dealership to get cars because their cars were flooded. And although there was certainly real looting, some by the police themselves, almost all of what was depicted in the press, including people carrying cans of beer, was...I don't know what culture some of these newscasters come out of. In the culture I came out of beer is sheer survival when the temperature reaches 100 degrees...Almost all of this had to do with the fact that the population was abandoned.

For four days the only people who stayed to rescue people were volunteers. Many of them Cajun fishermen, hundreds from southern Louisiana, hundreds of whom, answering a television appeal, spent days saving people. FEMA's now taking credit for saving the majority of the people and it's simply not true. People were left to die for four days. What you saw on TV was largely people coping as best they could. And we now understand that these "Night of the Living Dead" scenes in central New Orleans--there may have been a few incidents or two--are largely the products of the imaginations of politicians and the media. One of the most disturbing things is the claims by the Pentagon and FEMA that they waited so long to respond because they were fearful of the violence, this imaginary violence in the city.

So there is no question that the media that reported these stories, the politicians, including Mayor Nagin, who endorsed them, are at least indirectly responsible for the death of people who weren't saved or relieved in a punctual way.

DT: So do you see the creation of self-help groups to take care of things when the government fails, as what happened here? This is what anarchism....

MD: Oh yes, the story of Hurricane Katrina in many ways is the worst possible conspiracy of money and power...a

deliberate forcing of people from the city. And anybody who has any doubts about ordinary blue collar people in this country can only come back from southern Louisiana greatly inspired by the many examples...Like the older women in the community who stayed behind to care for the even older and infirm. The many accounts of gang members who became rescuers. Artists and bohemians who either didn't leave or came back to the city. The Green Party which set up its own relief operations, far more effective than the Red Cross.

The most inspiring story of all is simply how hundreds of Louisiana fishermen, hunters, people that other people might regard as “rednecks,” took their boats in the city and spent days, sometimes at the risk of their own lives, rescuing people where the state failed. And how for every white suburb like Gretna, across the river from New Orleans, which turned its back on the tragedy, actually the

police barred the bridge and fired over the heads of people, for every example of racism like that you have the example of Ville Platte, a French-speaking white and black community in south-central Louisiana which took in thousands of evacuees without regard for skin color.

So you've seen the worst of human nature in terms of racism and selfishness but also you've seen the best. You've seen the capacity among ordinary working class southern Louisianans to help themselves and fight for a way of life and culture, which I must say

is a different way of life from what most of us have. What poor people in New Orleans or in the parishes or the bayous share together is a way of life that values community and family and celebration more highly than it does acquisitive individualism or consumption, in some ways the opposite of the culture we live in here.

DT: As a historian is this the first time a disaster of this magnitude has happened in American history? How would you compare this to previous ones?

MD: It's hard to think of a truly natural disaster in American history. Destructive natural forces have nearly almost always followed the grain of poverty and inequality. In some cases they've been directly caused by wealth. And the responses to disasters have always been based on issues of race and class. What's different about this disaster is not just the magnitude, the suffering and forced abandonment of a city. That's actually happened before in San Francisco and Galveston. The social forces of inequality, the federal neglect of inner cities, racial redlining and the environmental crisis converge in New Orleans. The result could be hundreds of thousands of people forced to leave the region, the destruction of a whole way of life. And New Orleans, to the extent it is rebuilt, could become a

“...anybody who has any doubts about ordinary blue collar people in this country can only come back from southern Louisiana greatly inspired by the many examples...”

caricature of itself with theme parks, where jazz and Cajun music are still played, replacing the root cultures that gave birth to this music. They've been dispersed or exiled. This is what the stakes are in southern Louisiana.

DT: It'll be like a new Disneyland?

MD: Well, New Orleans to some extent already is a Disneyland. If you've spent time on Bourbon Street or watched the tourists in the Garden District this is obvious. But the point is that the city has depended on the very neighborhoods, the very people that are despised and criminalized by police and civic leaders. That is, the working class and black neighborhoods, like the 8th and 9th wards in mid-city. They're the soul of the city. They generated the culture that people come to see. But it's now clear, unless something drastic is done, that this will disappear. There really is a tremendous national solidarity to support the reconstruction of these neighborhoods and the return of these people. And they don't find life better in Salt Lake City or Houston. That's not the point. Every day that goes by without a policy to provide shelter near or within New Orleans and offer jobs, forces more people to live elsewhere...

Photographer's Bio

Since 1998, Craig Morse has pursued a career as a fine art and documentary photographer. He currently lives in Louisiana to document post-Katrina New Orleans. For more information, please visit www.flickr.com/people/culturesubculture

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EMBRACE THE CONTRADICTIONS!

INTERVIEW WITH ROBBIE CONAL

Van Every

Van Every: Since we both live in Venice, I guess you're a few blocks outside the border, I'd like to ask you what your reactions are to the recently celebrated centennial? Venice is an alternative community after all, at least it hasn't been gentrified out of existence yet. So in terms of your political motivations and work as an artist here, did you get charged up about the events?

Robbie Conal: No. Venice is doing quite well without me. I do get a kick out of thinking of the hood as real estate, however. Billions worth of beachy property consisting of a few walled compounds and camouflaged bungalows tucked into claustrophobic walk streets—medieval mini-city states—surrounded by hostile serfs. Driving through what could easily pass for Burroughs' "Interzone," I can't stop myself from counting the number of un-insured rust bucket clunkers battling gleaming monster SUVs to a noxious rolling stop at death trap intersections on Rose and 7th, Sunset and 4th, Indiana and 5th, and the obscenely overbuilt canals (those mansions are actually docked Princess Cruise Line ships). And we still in Ghost Town, baby! Z Boys, indeed. How about Black Z boyees? Have we returned to claim the Pyramids?

NO. We're still slaves, buildin' em for the Pharaoh. Brown Z Homies? Los Zapatistas del Norte? **NO.** Leaf blowers, kitchen workers, housekeepers and child care *mijas contra La Migra* anonymous.

Embrace the contradictions. Squeeze the life out of 'em ! Now *that* gets me charged up. Ahhh, but Abbot Kinney! Trying to eat a quiet dinner at *Joe's*. Trying to get through lunch at *Hal's* without running into all of Alan Shaffer's acquaintances. Impossible.

The too-hip-to-call an axe an axe crowd at *Axe*. Good, though. Hanging out with Ed Hamilton, the Zen Cowboy Master of lithography at Hamilton Press. Priceless!

The best traffic light switching box location in all of LA: at California and Abbot Kinney.

Home Plate.

VE: What does it mean to embrace these contradictions? They're striking indeed in these first months of Venice's second century! What are we to do? Some famous German philosopher I think said that contradictory opposites are always temporary, ready to transform into another pair... They're always unstable and mobile because they depend on the mass in the middle that's mostly invisible and in contrast to both extremes. But isn't this middling matter where the potential lies to force change in either direction? This energy, when it comes to Venice, could be alternative residents in the mid-range, a silent but sizable number hanging out, still giving the community some ballast, who could be ready to assume control again once these contradictions dissolve. You don't agree, do you, with those who say that we're destined to become a seamless beach resort like Miami? After all, we were once an upscale resort back in 1905, when Abbot Kinney founded this city. But then we became a slum in the 40s and 50s and it metamorphosed into a haven for Paul Goodman's rebel children by late decade. Don't you see serfers some day squatting in empty Venice mansions, just like hippies did in the mid-60s when Kinney's buildings lay fallow? And what about the Lincoln Place displacement of long-time residents by AIMCO this past December, another conglomerate absentee landlord taking it to the mid-rangers? If our inspired citizens band together and win that battle, and of course if the national scene alters, could it spread like prairie fire and reverse course, fertilizing another boho utopia for our grandchildren?

RC: No. Not until the Apocalypse of Capitalism. (For starters: How about Dubya and Condi doing the "Apocalypse Tango"—she leads—while the Middle East burns?) Or a major earthquake. Tsunami. Alien fleet of spaceships landing on Venice Circle to reclaim the Robert Graham sculpture. Of course, the latter might BE our grandchildren (not the sculpture, the alien hordes...

they'd be the ones with heads). In a bubble-bursting minute there'll be NO mass (*no mas*) in the middle. In Venice or anywhere else in Cali. Just the tippy-top and the bottom. As for Miami, it's got its own festering class and race problems. And worms. Show me the seamlessness of that time bomb and I'll show you an optometrist. Lincoln Place now officially sucks. In the Haight in '67 ("Summer of Love" my ass), a true Hippie Princess friend of mine whispered a bong hit's worth of wisdom into my ear, "If it can suck, it will suck." It does.

On the other hand, there'll always be arty creative scenes in the greater LA area (it's so fucking big and there are so many—too many—kids making art). If I were a young artster in Lalaland today, I'd go to a go-go Gardena. El Segundo. Torrance. Great Japanese food. Square foot-simolean ratio is copacetic. No posers, no tourists. You can't go home again. Venice R.I.P.

VE: I see what you're saying. But it seems Venice still has a special something these other standard bedroom communities don't! As gone as the old-bohemian Venice surely is, it still has traces of a creative community. Does the whole system have to collapse before Venice can change? Sounds like left-wing anti-capitalist cynicism! Don't the kind of conditions you describe, and I think you're mostly on the mark, breed insurgencies? Just a few months ago a Llama herder by the name of Evo Morales got elected president down in Bolivia, a man of the people who rode to power on exactly these kinds of conditions. Admittedly the peasantry are baling fast here in Kinneytown, but perhaps there's a sleeping mass of sympathizers who've cash-cropped the soil for many years now and are ready to join an insurgency?

RC: *Insurgent Venetians!* You're so cute. We'd all like to think it could happen. The true peasantry in Venice is not baling. Hunkering down in Ghost Town is more like it. The property is so valuable every real estate speculator on the planet covets that turf. *So why can't somebody just make somebody an offer they can't refuse?* I don't know if it's those pesky rent control statutes that keep the Ghosts in Ghost Town or that the grandchildren of the original tenants now *own* those buildings. I think the families do own them and somehow—amazingly—they haven't sold out yet for beaucoup bucks. So, NO, not until a Katrina-like

tsunami wipes out the poor peeps of Venice and venture capital, someone like Eli Broad (he's always hovering around the west side somewhere, dropping dimes, right?) and local bureaucrats have the excuse—"re-building" will do; "eminent domain," anybody?—to collude their way to a brand new, \$queaky-clean "Fantasia Village." Oh, just pick any So-Cal town with the word *Beach* in it for a paradigm.

Just a matter of cultural priorities, baby! Does our society place a premium on housing **all its citizens** or is our shelter left to market forces (including the cumulative G force of toiling in the *popular culture production capital of the universe* that's twisted a chromosome in our captains of The Industry, compelling them to drive their Porsche Cayenne Turbos to the very edge of the continent and hunker down on the sandy shore of an eroding, mudsliding, earthquake prone desert by the sea...to lay their eggs). Is Venice's local government—along with **ANTONIOOOO's** municipal government and **AHHHnold's** government and **DUBYA's** government, of course—dedicated to the health, education and welfare (in the real sense of the word) of all its citizens, including the working poor and its large homeless population? Well, the Venice Family Clinic is cool. Every neighborhood should have one. Is it a city agency? NO. State? NO. Federal? Heavens, NO.

Our "special" problem—yours and mine—is that the art peasantry—your "*special something*" other than crack— can't get into Venice. I agree with you that Venice has something special: its history. Now, that welcome sign reads, "It's History, Baby!" When a creative community is geographically defined by the real estate market, your sleeping mass of sympathizers is sleeping in another hood. Not by choice, either. Young Artists and Real Estate 101A: **How much space can you get for how little money? For how long?**

[Y'know, UCLA has had the hottest graduate Fine Arts program in the country for the past few years. Cool beans! And I mean that. Those kids are great! So, where are the UCLA graduate art studios? In a festering warehouse we like to call "The Rabbit Hutch" in Culver City. Those kids like Venice. After stopping at India Sweets & Spices to pick up the best, cheapest samosas in LA, they might even venture out to Abbot Kinney.... nah. Too far. Too expensive. Anyway, they gotta get back to work. Somebody in El Segundo might be gaining on'em.]



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BEATRESS BEATTITUDE

John O’Kane

Getting to the Venice that matters these days is no easy chore. The area is nearing the point when it might become just another upscale beach resort, far from the special bohemian preserve it once was. Many remaining sites and structures have already been penciled in for action in some broker’s sketchbook. The layers of improvement over the past few decades from the efforts of investment-savvy gentry threaten to bury this past. All the rehabbed A-frames and condo-boxes are about the future. Their inhabitants look back mostly for images to refurbish the present or grab a little nostalgia.

Perhaps the biggest cause for concern is that these leftover spaces help us commune with a worthy past. They’re populated with spirits who refuse to rest because they have something to tell us. And though these conversations are not always clear they can become reliable links to a valued history.

Those dozed structures don’t just vanish. They can leave rent-free hotspots for lingering spirits to reach out and touch someone. Though not just anyone! Ghosts speak in tongues becoming ever more difficult to translate in a world where languages with no links in the chain of Wal-Mart lingo are disappearing nearly as fast as the ozone, or natural species since Bush’s dumping of Kyoto. You have to be sensitive to their needs. The problem is that the clues are not exactly piling up. But as the demolition permits breed like Santa Ana termite swarms you can occasionally hear some droning discomfort that’s starting to make sense.

We could use a high-tech boost, some variant of those 3D glasses from the 50s that played with reality. These might expose spectacles and throw clues into relief for us. And if just one vendor on the east side of the Boardwalk could start selling them, instead of those cheap sunglasses, all the skeletal traces that matter might begin to reveal themselves.

A few steps southeast from the backside of the Cadillac Hotel, just across Speedway, are some not very conspicuous ciphers. At first glance they seem like little more than smatterings of gray paint that some carefree handyman let drip when doing a smidgen of improvement on the building, the Ellison. They’re concentrated on the narrow cement strip that runs along the building and sepa-

rates it from Speedway, but spill over onto this alley. And they’re directly below Philomene Long’s cupboard, which fortunately nurtures more skeletal species per square inch than any other remaining Beat enclave in the city.

These splats are clues to a haunting. They’re actually weathered dollops of pigeon doo-doo. These birds flock to Philomene’s second-story ledge like strafed fighter pilots who’ve spotted the carrier, finding ample nutrients to get them through the day in this loving environment. Over the years she’s given them sanctuary in a climate that’s becoming increasingly hostile to feces-specific species, those whose very existence gets the goad of the vigilante clean-up committees. Their latest vendetta is against the homeless hanging around Henry’s Market. In fact it seems seagulls and other fairer fowl are making the grade better these days. Though no wimpy wasters themselves, they’re more photogenic and, as expected in a hood so close to Hollywood, get more respect. Their size and mannerisms dwarf their droppings and even create the impression they’re on a higher link in the chain of being.

Evolution may force pigeons to form a counter-culture. For Philomene they’re already well on their way! She loves these birds because they’re beaten, often exhibiting the same behavioral quirks and value differences as their human counterparts. They’re decidedly down on the nuclear family. And their breeding and appearance are a plus. She sees them as low-grade doves, sort of underbirds with the power to give peace a chance and scatter our ranking privileges.

There’s a deeper link to the dead past at this site. Pigeons were some of Venice’s first residents. Abbot Kinney, who founded the city in 1905, brought many with him from Italy and set them free along the shores. And they homed in on this street where the Ellison is located. Kinney was no Beat but he believed in culture and creativity. His European replica attracted artists, writers and intellectuals and seeded the resort’s identity so well that when the post-WWII era arrived, a slummy one that severely tarnished this image, the emerging beaten creators could feel part of the family. So perhaps the worst that can be said about this concentration of fowl around Philomene’s pad is that the pigeons might not be all that clear about the definitions of culture.

Philomene's the only survivor of the original Venice West literary world living here. Frankie Rios, the other, currently lives in Hollywood. Fitting she lives a short block from the site synonymous with Venice West, the Dudley corridor. This is where the Venice West Café was located, at 7 Dudley, the birthplace of alternative Venice in the mid-to-late 50s. It's been Sponto Art Gallery since 1986 but the owner, Mark Sponto, keeps it abuzz with activity to homage the spirit of Venice West.

She's actually lived in this sector of Venice since arriving in 1963, even over on Park for a while near Larry Lipton's original house. He's the author of *The Holy Barbarians*, the 1959 book that first documented this bohemian experiment. In fact his salons helped produce it. So it's no surprise she's hysterically devoted to the history that breathes through this blessed stretch, believing the muse is rooted here. We often ramble into the wee hours about whether this power will survive the haunted folks and spaces. She's hopeful.

"...Venice!!!!...it's been a special place for artists and writers ever since Abbot Kinney created it from the swamp...no matter what's happened, the crash, all the demolitions and changes in population, it survives...the rich people and condos will always be around, we can't stop it, we're helpless...the inspiration's out there for us, all we need to do is...let it happen!"

"But what if the time comes when no one knows what's happening?"

She hesitates, overwhelmed with passion...

"There'll still be hotspots bursting through the ignorance...it's in the land!....but if it does pass I accept it...we're all just passing through."

Philomene's existence is enmeshed with Venice's. What remains of the Beat literary institution here stays alive to a great extent because of her devoted discoveries and continued creativity. She was named Venice's Poet Laureate by Councilman Bill Rosendahl during the city's 2005 Centennial. Her acceptance, printed in the *Beachhead*, is a manifesto for poetry as a power to see better and live committed to what really matters, but especially as the power for keeping a healthy slant on Venice's past and present. And she's used this title to push poetry's cause, even getting political on occasion to help secure funding for *Beyond Baroque* where she teaches.

I'm walking to Philomene's along Speedway, eager to launch into the weekend with stimulating conversation. I've come prepared for all contingencies. My mental notes are in decent order. I've even swung by Henry's Market

for Shyla's veggie burger special for ballast in case the language gets liquefied. I approach the final steps below her window, carefully arc my way around the gray splats while paying close attention to traffic on the right.

When I turn left at Paloma there's a lineup already plugging the intercom so I just follow the crowd into the Ellison. Surprising Philomene has advantages. Sometimes I even lie in wait across from the entrance, in front of Eric Clapton's condo, to hitch a code-free pass up the stairs. Dropping in on neighbors is becoming a vanishing art

form here. The new residents are transplants whose neighborly vectors point toward gated ghettos in Malibu or other sanctuaries reachable by auto. Though Philomene relishes small-town spontaneity, she does prefer advance notice. It gives her a chance to make sure the closets are closed and all conspicuous cultural paraphernalia removed.

She's always apologizing about how messy her place is.

A real enough embarrassment that prompted her son, an exemplary member of Gen Y, to ameliorate the situation with lots of method and fixit savvy while staying with her for several weeks. Perhaps overcompensating for the fallout from their anti-nuclear experiment, he repaid the favor by finding a slot for everything, leaving a waste-free folder-rich sheen that appears to have set her writing schedule back several weeks. I'm not sure since she won't discuss it, just mumbles ..."Boys will be boys...he means well!"

Anyway, it seems that while Philomene could surely benefit from some method in the madness, this was just too much.

I'm walking to Philomene's along Speedway...



Photo by Pegarty Long

I enter the Ellison and walk slowly toward the stairs. I never take the elevator when I'm in the surprise mode since the sound might tip her off. Plus a detour up the stairs offers another angle on this architectural wonder, one of the city's first structures. I've learned that keeping the spirit of early Venice close helps access Philomene's mental state and prepare to process her free associations. I knock on the door and visualize her synaptic panic from trying to do many things at once leaving her motionless. I hear rushing footsteps overlaid with a sonorous "Who is it!"

Philomene's at her best when her surroundings approximate a natural condition. Now Rousseau likely overstated the case about a state of nature where pre-civilized but noble savages commune in relative harmony and freedom from rent control boards and credit checks, all the licensing bureaus that get us envious and uptight these days. But refusing the rules and regs of a state eons removed from nature, or doing your best impression of what those savages were once like, can be a good way to register dis-

satisfaction with society if not kickstarting a revolution. Philomene's lifestyle is a steady barometer of refusal. She rejects domesticity and the related values of "normal" society because they impair her creativity.

Though she proactively models a better one, practicing alternatives through a sort of micro-community-outreach program housed in this magic abode. And her everyday activities are so purely different from what the ignoble savages in power want and understand that she's virtually untouchable. There's nothing they can say that matters because she can silence them with word power and completely avoid their games. She has a raging disregard for the holier-than-thou who see barbarians everywhere whenever the human adventure gets interesting again.

"Guess who!"

She opens the door with a look that says she just woke from a pleasant dream, irked by the interruption but eager for company. Philomene thrives on good conversation and moments of creative solitude, normal enough for any writer but a difficult task indeed. It requires a virtually religious commitment to maintain sanity. Philomene has gotten collateral damage over the years from transiting between states. So she's become quite adept these days at shifting in and out of moods and situations and managing the energy to face contingencies.

Her look changes slightly in the next few seconds. Perhaps the rush of light and surprise takes the edge off the violation and gives her a welcome excuse to engage in wholesome conversation. But she's angled in the door frame like it could go either way, needing an extra push from outside to make the complete conversion. Her hair prophesies the dilemma. Like an unkempt eucalyptus ready for the gentrifying shears, her locks are flowing everywhere, tracing a curious non-Euclidian design.

"Are you ready for some..."

"...thought you were coming after you ran...I've got this deadline, some literary mag in Spain wants me to go on and on about sex and orgies here in the 60s...my sister's been...Orange County, I'm so tired of going down there!!!!...my Aunt lying in that...didn't have a chance to get any more wine...Illuminate's at it again!!!!!"

"...I brought what you left at my place...want me to come back later?"

Her quick gestures say certainly not. I cross the threshold smack into the light streaming through the beach-facing windows, stop and look at the illumined array of memorabilia. It's so pleasing to the eye, and fragrantly evocative of the past. Not packrat musty. More like the sweet reminiscence of an archive that gets plenty of love.

"It's such a transformative experience to come here. I can't imagine you'll ever leave this place!"

"The muse is here! Sarah Bernhardt once lived

here. Many creative people in Venice's history have spent time..."

"It reminds me of the Sailhouse Lofts over on Main and Marine they just put up...those balconies facing inward to the courtyard...some architects are trying to keep the look of early Venice alive anyway!"

"The look maybe but...creativity needs sacrifice and struggle...."

"Are you saying the muse can't be accommodated in million-dollar closets?"

"....no, it's not....rich people are welcome in Venice too, it's just that to create you must be in touch with the spirit and...what's really meaningful gets deadened by the material possessions and lifestyles you have to maintain to keep them...."

"Isn't that an outmoded idea? Don't you also get deadened by not having enough, from always having to do survival things to stay even with the game?"

".....nowadays yes, it's becoming like that..... this is one of the tragedies of what's happened here in Venice....but still, without the inward-turning, the sense of caring about so many things, and people, that we get from

not being slaves to objects, and from just living a simple life.....not being deprived exactly, just some restraint, maybe a little fasting here and there....'Blessed are the poor and meek for they shall inherit the earth', one of my favorite beatitudes...."

The final syllable leaves her temperament transformed, like she'd gotten

back the flow my surprise canceled. The room even seemed to glow at that very instant. Perhaps the muse winked approval. Appropriate it seems in this shrine for the preservation of the past, this renewal space for so many who've never stopped believing the beaten faith. The words of Sappho on the near wall are mere garnish: "The sounds of mourning do not suit a house that serves the muse; they are not wanted here."

"...if you adopt a good attitude and hang with the humble masses, get your head straight about what really matters in the everyday scheme, know what to avoid and gorge in, then you're home free and rich in spirit?"

"It's dedicated poverty....."

"...sounds like religion without ritual, spiritual inspiration without having to hit the Sunday sermon with those who haven't a clue about what all this means...the good people of society who wanna get out of poverty...."

"....yes!!!...it is, and of course Christianity gets to this...just that the institution made things very confusing with the power and material riches and...but so many poor people were in its clutches, sort of accepting their deprived state and loving their masters!!!!.....there's a more open spirituality that....they didn't have to be bound to all that...."

She was named Venice's Poet Laureate by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Councilman Bill Rosendahl....



Artwork by Evan Senn

“.....bloated, suspect spirituality?”

“...well, yes, every once in a while there’s a break-away, some want to bring things down to earth and practice those great ideas in the gospels, turn their attention to this life but not deny the other one either...Liberation Theology, the rage around the time I went into the convent in 1958...Pope John and his Encyclicals.”

“....do you see any big meaning in the fact that he died in 1963, the same year as JFK, a catholic president who was telling youth to help others and serve their country, and also the year you dropped out of the convent?!.... those must’ve been fertile times for the ethic of dedicated poverty...”

“...only in hindsight.....I...you know, I think there was so much going on then that escaped our ability to grasp it...”

“...but it was then, right, when altruism was the natural gospel, not greed and me-first, the artificial gospel of now....community and sharing and betterment in spiritual terms seemed...almost erotic!!!....without all that it’s hard to imagine the alternative culture getting....”

“.....unmistakable!!!...yes, yes...looking back it’s hard to imagine how that happened and....compared to now it’s like, well...this seems like another planet!...and I hope it’s a bad dream we’ll all wake up from soon and start to get things....”

“...that idea about the poor having the right stuff

and so all you needed to do was mingle with them and... Kerouac’s love of hobos and ‘negroes’ becoming quite popular even for the less-endowed through the 60s...had to be something in that...even if they didn’t want to break bread with the proles they could at least begin to grasp their takes on the world?....”

“.....it worked, it was right, it was.....”

“...the last gasp?...now the poor seem to buy into the system because they believe they’ll be rich too someday!...but dedicated poverty and the rage against consumers and capitalism that went with it was happening when so many wanted to shop and could in good economic times that gave the sacrificing WWII folks a new lease on life... and alternative folks did buy stuff, they were just more aesthetic about it...”

“...but the messages got quickly confused back then....the media found beatniks and hippies everywhere and made them but...there was a core who couldn’t be bought...they refused the philosophies about all of that and did their best to ignore all the false signs and practiced....that’s where zen came in...get your own house in order, let it happen, don’t force anything that...”

“...didn’t this become a fad too, a license for cool, a way to drop out and stroke your ego, the hell with what was happening in society?”

“.....yes, everything got fashionable fast but.... but that’s the point!....the energy through the practice of

living in NOW produced a smile of direct experience and understanding, sudden intuition, a wordless transmission that showed the world both the problem and the solution!!....”

I imagine the power this must involve and then see another quote on the wall. It’s over by the calligraphy made by zen master Maezumi Roshi for her marriage to John Thomas. From Tan Taigi: “Many mosquitoes bloated with blood during zen meditation.”

I picture waves of energy radiating from a squinting monk whose contentment caricatures Norman Vincent Peale’s smile. These can’t be confined to the mind. They spread out everywhere and empower all subjects eager to strive for the purity of resolution...

“...but doesn’t the world stay as screwed up as ever...the caring mind just gets a reprieve from the whole mess that society....”

“...if you care it shows and your attitude will urge others to follow...the right course comes from just accepting...you’ll possess the truth and it can’t be violated.”

You do feel possessed when you enter this space. Not exactly like entering church, a tempting comparison from all the catholic icons, the hand carved image of Mary, a large wooden cross, nuns everywhere. My favorite is the little one in the bathroom above the stool that stares at you with Julie Andrews innocence. But when you cross the threshold for Sunday mass you know what’s there, your head’s familiar with the ritual and you’re willing to endure another version of last year’s sermon.

Here you face refreshing liturgies, so many thought strains that hardly seem ready for the rolodex, even if this technology was welcome. The journals and binders of poems arrayed in every room, the hundreds of papers strewn every which way, more poems layered in with flyers and yellowing newspaper articles, the innumerable books yet to find their final resting place, all occupying every available niche. The experience incenses you with a eucharistic power to transform the unexpected into meaningfully passionate patterns that are potentially familiar.

It’s a temple flush with the energy of discovery. Those who cross this threshold succumb to conversational rapture, the desire for interminable syntactic rushes that expire with grace. They can’t avoid the vibes from the great conversations that took place here. Like those between Philomene and her husband, John Thomas, who died in 2002. He was a brilliant philosopher-poet who arrived here in the heyday of Venice West and could never leave. His ghostly voice is still on the message machine, fielding calls from the tribe of visionaries who refuse to pass. Are those his brain stains on the wall over the bed, or

just random traces of sooted sea breezes?

Possessed by this space you feel it’s bigger, like all the late night polemics and yearnings have stretched it out, played with your perceptions, jujitsu’d the actual cubic volume into a cathedral.

“Isn’t this also the catholic philosophy? That example-setting attitude at least....Is it fair to say your practicing philosophy is a mix of zen and catholicism, similar to Kerouac’s?...you have a strong admiration for him, right?”

“...I’d like to believe that...yes, Kerouac was a catholic and spent his life devoted to certain ideals but was also always running from it, toward...he embodied the positive spirituality of catholicism and its concern for ordinary people but also wanted something else...catholics, the real faithful ones, they’re driven beyond, inspired to do things we usually don’t consider unless...but then

they fall back in on themselves, not sure what’s up, maybe it’s the guilt... Kerouac let it all go but seemed bound to a force that brought him back..... to Lowell...he loved his mother!!!!... maybe transcendence gets confused in a philosophy that’s really mostly conservative and after a while you need to find something that lets you get a perspective on what this means while not actually moving too far away from it... so go toward the East and leave most of your baggage behind, for a while!!...”

“...seems like your proportions are different than Kerouac’s...”

“...I think I had less baggage because I experienced Catholicism in the convent and...I did leave in 1963 because I just couldn’t take the brainwash that there’s only one way to be saved and all that...but I’ve carried with me many positives from it and...well, I’d like to believe I’ve married East and

West successfully but, then again I’m definitely more zen....”

“...more than the Beats as a group or...just Kerouac?”

“...he was a special case!”

“So do you see yourself then as a member of the Beat family, or do you have serious issues with...”

“...as far as the values and philosophy...yes, for the most part...the poetry is a different...I write about many of the same things and in a similar style but they were a womanizing boys club...and the Venice clan was...Bob Alexander, the high priest at the Temple of Man over on Cabrillo during the 70s was the worst...he used to...well the scene was full of men taking advantage of women... like property and...not many could get up the confidence to....”

She suddenly looks exhausted, the energy of the

“...rich people are welcome in Venice too, it’s just that to create you must be in touch with the spirit and...what’s really meaningful gets deadened by the material possessions...”

space evaporating with the final syllable, like she couldn't avoid bearing the burdens of that entire experience that preceded and guided her...

Variances notwithstanding, Philomene's a Beat poet. Many of her poems are passionate oral gushers like those her male mentors made famous, especially Ginsberg whom she knew well and used to drop in here from time to time. And her love affair with Emily Dickinson helps. Not exactly a Beat but a fine muse for Beatresses everywhere when it comes to dodging literary rules in a burning flip-off of male privilege. It's poetic justice that she's the only

survivor of Venice West. The last word from a woman who can shed some light on the indiscretions of the past.

I'm trying to think of a question to restore her energy when I hear a tap, tap, tap on the kitchen window facing Speedway that does it for me. Philomene turns around to welcome a surprise visitor.

"It's Illuminate!!!!!!"

Her most sensitive underbird at the moment...

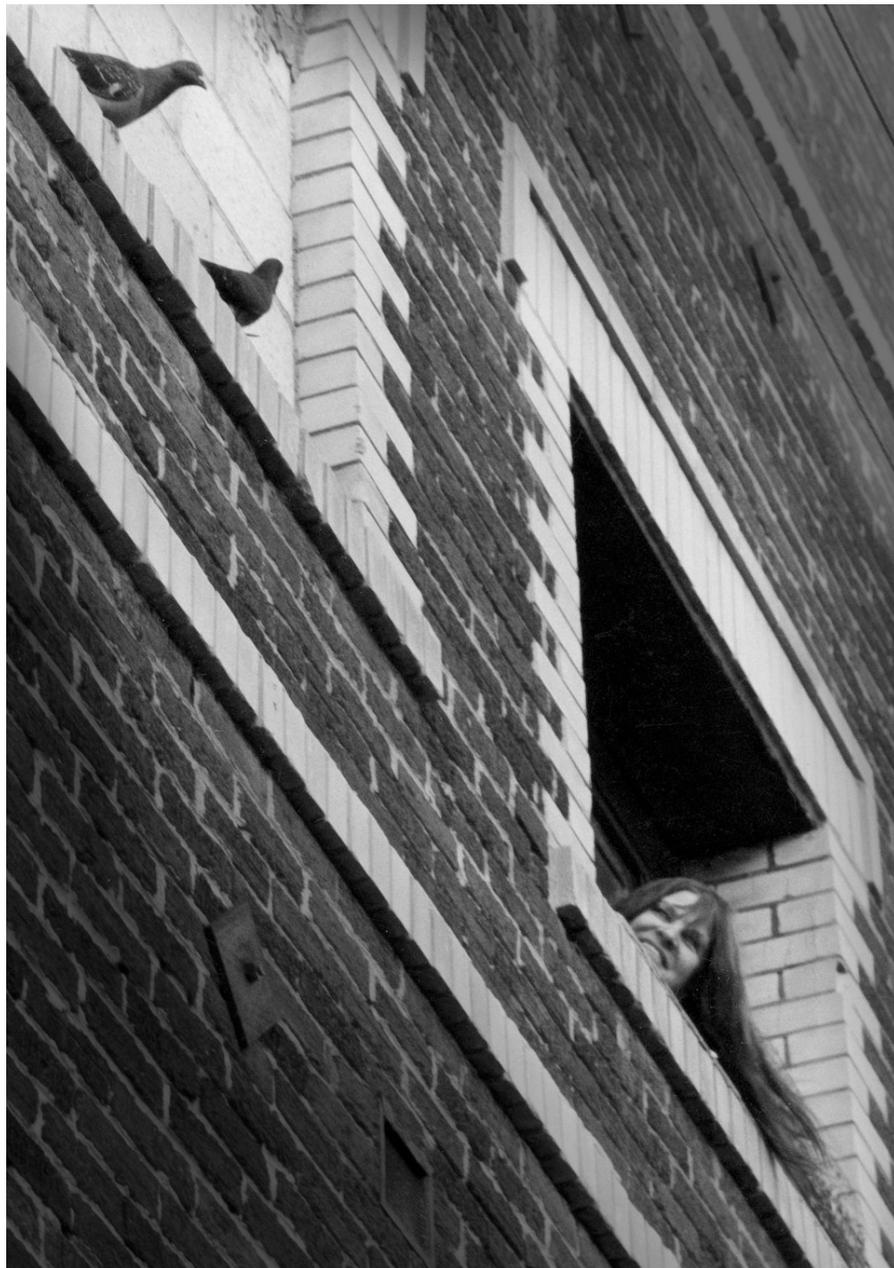


Photo by John O'Kane

Philomene Long passed in her magic temple during the late evening hours of August 21st 2007. She was discovered in the afternoon of the 23rd.

PACIFICA IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

Jay Kugelman

The inspiration for Pacifica Radio emerged with Lew Hill from the C.O. camps after WWII and by 1949 KPFA was on the air in the Bay Area as a counter culture to the commercial mainstream on the one hand and Academe on the other. The tone was often professorial and the programming quite “serious” as the station’s founders felt the Cold War spreading around them and the bomb casting an ever-lengthening shadow.

Taking some cues from *Partisan Review* on the East Coast and the rugged independence of Westerners like Carey McWilliams, who by 1951 had left California to work on and then edit *The Nation*, KPFA attracted the likes of Kenneth Rexroth and Pauline Kael. With Midwestern roots, he was drawn to the Bay Area by its Bohemian tradition. She was a UC Berkeley grad with a passion for film that bridged the gap between high art and popular entertainment. Both reveled in the independence the Bay Area provoked, its not New York ambience, its openness to the cultures of Asia as opposed to the East Coast’s tilt toward Europe.

Throughout the 1950’s, as Korea heated up, colonial liberation movements spread through Asia and Africa and the fear of HUAC and Joe McCarthy took its toll on American Arts and Letters, Pacifica Radio defied the long arm of the Government and Wall Street by fiercely depending on its listener sponsors alone to keep the signal alive. But while the FM audience was growing in San Francisco and Berkeley, factions that had arisen within the station coupled with Lew Hill’s multiple health problems drove him to take his own life in 1957. Hill thus joined the godly number of vic-

tims of those dark times who were, in Rexroth’s words, referring to the death of Dylan Thomas, a voice oft heard on Pacifica, “suicide by society.” But the desire for democratic alternatives to “business as usual” was growing and by 1959 KPFA in Los Angeles would be birthed by progressives at the Center for Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara. New York’s WBAI joined the network in 1961.

Now what does all this mean for the state of our “media” landscape

Simply stated,
Pacifica Radio is
the sole alternative
to overtly
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today? Simply stated, Pacifica Radio is the sole alternative to overtly “commercial” outlets or those like NPR, which are compromised by corporate underwriting. The country is awash in advertising. It plays the same role as propaganda in authoritarian states. The effects of advertising and consumer culture are almost incalculable, since they insidiously worm their way into every area of human affairs:

education, civic and religious institutions, recreation and the Arts. Young people are particularly susceptible to creeping commercialism to the extent that brands have replaced most values and ideas in their world. The idea that “cool” or “hip” would be defined by a label or a gadget would be enough to make Kerouac, James Dean or Charlie Parker turn over in their graves.

The failure of the 60’s counterculture to create an alternative to “the market” has left us with factionalized protests but no vehicle for real social, political or economic change. Mirroring this poverty of channels for experimentation, our two party monopoly more or less assures the “establishment” that there will be no real challenge to business or politics as usual. And while optimistic lovers of new technology assure us that the Internet will keep us free (as if cyberspace were some kind of promised land where dreams and visions for free expression and experimentation come true), the truth is that the Internet is actually a high speed postal and library system. What’s at our fingertips is a lot of stuff and information but not much that foments justice or better values. Youthful rebellion against the tyrannies of uptight elders has been replaced by a “virtual” revolution of flash and dash, not much in the way of visions about a different kind of world.

The culprit is our faith in measurement as an index to value. It’s a numbers game. And it goes back to William Blake’s railing against Newton and the poet’s call for the primacy of the imagination against the deadening force of quantification. Materialism is the villain of the piece. The rage of traditional societies against



the trivialization and standardization of "MacWorld," the replacement of a sense of awe and wonder by Disney's mass-produced products. The triumph of kids' stuff and kids' food is enough

to make anyone "mad as Hell."

And it's prophetic that Howard Beale's rage came at the end of 1976, an anniversary year of sorts that saw the hopes of the sixties go up in smoke as the Nixon/Ford years became the Carter ones and the failure to end the Cold War forced this country into doing business with bozos like the Shah, who'd been seated on the Peacock Throne by Kermit

Roosevelt in a CIA engineered coup against the democratically elected leader of Iran, Mohammed Mossadeq, because British and American oil companies feared their "property" would be nationalized by the Iranians. God forbid the same should happen in Saudi Arabia.

So Carter found himself held hostage while Reagan/Bush and Oliver North engineered a deal and a "neat" exchange. It's been all downhill from there as the "Iran Contra" Hearings, which offered the possibility of some real housecleaning, came to almost "naught." Now all of this connects with the growth of the alternative media and Pacifica Radio in particular because 1970 saw the creation of KPFT in Houston and, low and behold, WPFW in the belly of the beast itself in 1977. No longer the voice of just Left Coast flakes or East Coast pinkos, now there were stations in Texas and Washington, D.C. The Texas Klan responded by twice bomb-

ing the transmitter while the Capitol attempted to merely marginalize the message of the Anarchist/Pacifist inspired network.

The failure to create a world without war, the failure of nations and governments to eliminate hunger, poverty and ecological blight is a failure of the imagination to resolve conflicts in a non-coercive manner. The tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King has been proven more effective than the use of force in the creation of justice and peace among people with different belief systems. What it will take to replace the use of force in human affairs is a massive reeducation project on a worldwide scale, a new kind of universal public square where people of good will can speak out, sing out and act out a vision of a world transformed by a radically new yet somehow familiar ancient prophesy.

NEOCON JOB

Keith Olbermann

Finally, as promised, a special comment about the president's cataclysmic deception about Iran. There are few choices more terrifying than the one Mr. Bush has left us with. We have either a president who is too dishonest to restrain himself, from invoking World War Three over Iran at least six weeks after he had to have known that the analogy would be fantastic, irresponsible hyperbole; or we have a president too transcendently stupid not to have asked--at what now appears to have been a series of opportunities to do so--whether the fairy tales he either created or was fed, were still even remotely plausible.

A pathological presidential liar, or an idiot-in-chief. It is the nightmare scenario of political science fiction: A critical juncture in our his-

tory and, contained in either answer, a president manifestly unfit to serve, and behind him in the vice-presidency an unapologetic war-monger who has long been seeing a world visible only to himself.

After Ms. Perino's announcement from the White House late last night, the timeline is inescapable and clear. In August the president was told by his hand-picked Major Domo of intelligence Mike McConnell, a flinty, high-strung-looking, worrying-warrior who will always see more clouds than silver linings, that what "everybody thought" about Iran might be, in essence, crap.

Yet on October 17th Mr. Bush said of Iran and Ahmadinejad: "I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding World War Three, it seems

like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge to make a nuclear weapon."

And as he said that, Mr. Bush knew that at bare minimum there was a strong chance that his rhetoric was nothing more than words with which to scare the Iranians. Or was it, Sir, to scare the Americans? Does Iran not really fit into the equation here? Have you just scribbled it into the fill-in-the-blank on the same template you used, to scare us about Iraq?

In August, any commander-in-chief still able-minded or uncorrupted or both, Sir, would have invoked the quality the job most requires: mental flexibility. A bright man, or an honest man, would have realized no later than the McConnell briefing that the only true danger

about Iran was the damage that could be done by an unhinged, irrational Chicken Little of a president, shooting his mouth off, backed up by only his own hysteria and his own delusions of omniscience.

Not Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mr. Bush. The Chicken Little of presidents is the one, Sir, that you see in the mirror. And the mind reels at the thought of a vice-president fully briefed on the revised Intel as long as two weeks ago--briefed on the fact that Iran abandoned its pursuit of this imminent threat four years ago--who never bothered to mention it to his boss.

It is nearly forgotten today, but throughout much of Ronald Reagan's presidency it was widely believed that he was little more than a front-man for some never-viewed, behind-the-scenes, string-puller. Today, as evidenced by this latest remarkable, historic malfeasance, it is inescapable that Dick Cheney is either this president's evil ventriloquist, or he thinks he is.

What servant of any of the 42 previous presidents could possibly withhold information of this urgency and gravity, and wind up back at his desk the next morning, instead of winding up before a Congressional investigation, or a criminal one?

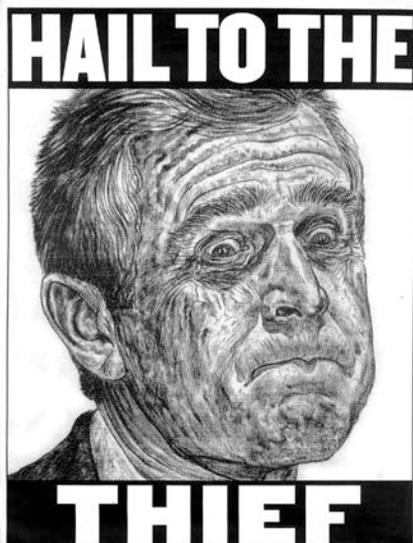
Mr. Bush, if you can still hear us, if you did not previously agree to this scenario in which Dick Cheney is the actual detective and you're Remington Steele, you must disentrail yourself. Mr. Cheney has usurped your constitutional powers, cut you out of the information loop, and led you down the path to an unprecedented presidency in which the facts are optional, the Intel is valued less than the hunch, and the assistant runs the store.

The problem is, Sir, your assistant is robbing you and your country blind. Not merely in monetary terms, Mr. Bush, but more importantly of the traditions and righteousness for which we have stood, at great risk, for centuries: Honesty, Law, Moral Force. Mr. Cheney has helped to make your Administration into the kind our ancestors saw in the 1860's and 1870's and 1880's, the ones that

abandoned Reconstruction and sent this country marching backwards into the pit of American Apartheid.

Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland...Presidents who will be remembered only in a blur of failure, Mr. Bush. Presidents who will be remembered only as functions of those who opposed them, the opponents whom history proved right. Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland... Bush.

The Chicken Little of presidents is the one, Sir, that you see in the mirror.



Art by Robbie Conal

Would that we could let this president off the hook by seeing him only as marionette or moron. But a study of the mutation of his language about Iran proves that though he may not be very good at it, he is, himself, still a manipulative, Machiavellian, snake-oil salesman. The Bushian etymology was tracked by Dan Froomkin at the *Washington Post's* website. It is staggering.

March 31st: "Iran is trying to develop a nuclear weapon..."

June 5th: "Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons..."

June 19th: "Consequences to the Iranian government if they continue to pursue a nuclear weapon..."

July 12th: "The same regime in Iran that is pursuing nuclear weapons..."

August 6th: "This is a government that has proclaimed its desire to build a nuclear weapon..."

Notice a pattern? Trying to develop, build or pursue a nuclear weapon. Then, sometime between August 6th and August 9th, those terms are suddenly swapped out, so subtly that only in retrospect can we see that somebody has warned the president, not only that he has gone out too far on the limb of terror, there may not even be a tree there... McConnell, or someone, must have briefed him then.

August 9th: "They have expressed their desire to be able to enrich uranium, which we believe is a step toward having a nuclear weapons program..."

August 28th: "Iran's active pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons..."

October 4th: "You should not have the know-how on how to make a (nuclear) weapon..."

October 17th: "Until they suspend and/or make it clear that they, that their statements aren't real, yeah, I believe they want to have the capacity, the knowledge, in order to make a nuclear weapon."

Before August 9th, it's: Trying to develop, build or pursue a nuclear weapon. After August 9th, it's: Desire, pursuit, want ... knowledge, technology, know-how to enrich uranium.

And we are to believe, Mr. Bush, that the National Intelligence Estimate this week talks of the Iranians suspending their nuclear weapons program in 2003 And you talked of the Iranians suspending their nuclear weapons program on October 17th. And that's just a coincidence?

And we are to believe, Mr. Bush, that nobody told you any of this until last week? Your insistence that you were not briefed on the NIE until last week might be legally true, something like “what the definition of is is,” but with the subject matter being not interns but the threat of nuclear war...

Legally, it might save you from some war crimes trial... but ethically, it is a lie. It is indefensible. You have been yelling threats into a phone for nearly four months, after the guy on the other end had already hung up. You, Mr. Bush, are a bald-faced liar.

And moreover, you have just revealed that John Bolton, and Nor-

man Podhoretz, and the *Wall Street Journal* Editorial board, are also bald-faced liars. We are to believe that the Intel community, or maybe the State Department, cooked the raw intelligence about Iran, falsely diminished the Iranian nuclear threat, to make you look bad? And you proceeded to let them make you look bad?

You not only knew all of this about Iran in early August, you also knew it was ... accurate! And instead of sharing this good news with the people, you have obviously forgotten you represent them. You merely fine-tuned your terrorizing

of those people to legally cover your own backside while you filled the factual gap with sadistic visions of, as you phrased it on August 28th, “nuclear holocaust,” and, as you phrased it on October 17th, “World War Three.”

My comments, Mr. Bush, are often dismissed as simple repetitions of the phrase “George Bush has no business being president.” Well, guess what? Tonight you’re hanged by your own words, convicted by your own deliberate lies...

You, sir, have no business being president. Good night, and good luck.

JUST SEEMS TOO OBVIOUS

James Preston Allen

Is it only obvious to me and the window clerk at the local Post Office that the closer we got to the November election, the lower the gas prices went? While buying stamps the other day the good-humored clerk didn’t even break pace when he posited the question, “Gee do you suppose [\$2.69 per gallon gas] has something to do with Prop. 87?”

“No... do you suppose they’d do that?” I smiled.

It has since of course gone even lower, bottoming out about November 7. But the fact is that California is the third largest oil producing state in the Union (behind Alaska and Texas) with some 230 million barrels a year produced. According to the Legislative Analyst statement in the voter guide—*California oil production supplied approximately 37 percent of the state’s oil demand... Alaska production supplied approximately 21 percent.* The real issue is that California is the number one target market.

We have more cars per capita than any state and most nations. We are either the fourth or fifth largest economy in the world and still growing with the huge Pacific Rim imports from China and Singapore. All of this growth is dependent on an oil-based economy, which as we’ve seen in the last few years is leading us to a slow collective suicide by air pollution. An estimated 1,200 deaths per year are attributed to what is called “goods movement” in this state. Meaning the diesel emissions from the transport of imports into our ports, the vast majority of that in Southern California. Even President Bush admits that *we are addicted to oil!* He should know something about both oil *and* addiction.

Is it any wonder that the mega-oil-opolies spent hundreds of millions of their windfall profits to defeat prop. 87? It doesn’t slip past the comprehension of the average commuter filling his tank to drive to work that declining pump prices were

strategically linked to getting voters to capitulate on election day. But wait! If the declining price of gasoline is so easily manageable as to be used to influence the electorate, do you suppose it is just as “manageable” in boosting oil company profits when there is no election?

Petroleum industry experts deny this to be true, pointing to hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico or reduced refinery capacity, but the truth is that manipulating the supply of oil to eek out the highest profits from the demand is the oldest play in the “free market” game-book. That *our friends* the Saudis and other OPEC nations play along is just par for the course. That is until you get to Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, who recently made a big deal offering heating oil to impoverished New York residents this winter at a reduced price. I don’t recall *our friends* the Saudis ever doing something this magnanimous. Chavez, of course, is one of those “anti-American leftists”

who would have been overthrown had it not been for Bush being distracted with his ongoing fiasco in Iraq.

Needless to say, the stakes are very high for the oil shieks and their Texas relatives who should've been woken up to Al Gore's global reality with an overwhelming vote supporting prop 87. If the Neocon-Bushites won't admit to the scientific proof of global warming—even as Green Land glaciers melt into the Atlantic, and ratify the Kyoto Protocols—then California voters will have to lead them by the snouts in this direction.

What is not so obvious is who Chevron-Texaco-BP et al used as front men to fight this proposition. I mean at this point there have been so many mergers in the oil industry over the past decade that it's almost as though it's one giant monopoly—I remember something in the history books about the break up of Standard Oil a century ago. Well the oil companies, like the phone companies, have just congealed back together, sort of like Schwarzenegger's character in *The Terminator*. Every time you break them apart they mercurially flow back into a new creature that looks amazingly like the last menacing one.

Throughout his campaign, Governor Ahronld has been up to his own stealthy attack to preserve the prominence of the oil economy by silently vetoing Senator Alan Lowenthal's container fee bill, which passed both houses of the Legislature this year. SB 927 was killed with pressure by some of the same opponents of prop 87. Significantly Alan Zaremberg, who signed the rebuttal argument in the Voter Guide, lists his position as President of Californians Against Higher Taxes, is actually president of the California State Chamber of Commerce. The State Chamber is sponsored mightily by those big corporate brand names that we have all learned to distrust.

One last note, if you go to the movies check out Sean Penn's latest *All the King's Men*, the fictional work about the notorious Governor of Louisiana, Huey P. Long (1924-1932). Huey Long will long be remembered for taking on Standard Oil and extracting a severance tax that built Louisiana's schools, roads (when there were none) and purchasing school books for the poor. Three decades later, under Governor Edmund Brown, the California tidelands oil revenues were used in a similar fashion to

build this state's college and university system into the nation's finest. Later the oil companies sued the State over the tidelands oil revenue being used outside of the tidelands and won in a landmark California Supreme Court decision. Since then, California's higher education has declined, suffering budget cuts first initiated by Governor Ronald Reagan, another fictional character in state politics and Hollywood.

Oil in this state as elsewhere holds the key to great wealth for those who control it, it just seems too obvious that it's time to tax those companies who control this wealth and who do not reinvest it in the states and countries from which it comes. Yes the oil companies will show you how they've donated a few thousand here or there, it may even amount to several million in charitable giving, but when your quarterly profits are two or three billion then there is something terribly askew. It only takes a good look at the poor neighborhoods surrounding the sixteen refineries in the Los Angeles Harbor area before you realize that it looks like some neighborhood in Nigeria. The term "third world" definitely comes to mind.



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APE & ESSENCE AND THE DEATH OF ALDOUS HUXLEY'S WIDOW

Lionel Rolfe

When a friend told me this week that Laura Huxley had died, I realized that it had been maybe five years since I last saw her.

But I wasn't surprised at the news. The self-help author and New Age activist was 96 and although she aged well, she definitely had been slowing down as of late.

Once or twice in the last year or so I drove by her home on Mulholland Highway, a mountain valley away from the Hollywood sign. Her Subaru was so dusty it didn't look like it was being used. I even knocked on the door, but no one answered.

Although I had known Laura for years, ever since I met her and her husband Aldous Huxley shortly before he died—the same day President John Kennedy was assassinated—I had my doubts about her.

I had met the Huxleys at a concert in Hollywood where my uncle and aunt, violinist Yehudi Menuhin and Hephzibah Menuhin, were performing. Laura and Yehudi had developed a close bond, because both had been violin prodigies. Yehudi had been the most famous musical prodigy since Mozart. She had come from Italy to play at Carnegie Hall, and then came to Los Angeles to perform with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She later went to work as a film editor at RKO and by happenstance and perhaps design became Aldous' second wife.

Yehudi was good friends of both of them. He played the Bach Chaconne at the memorial gathering for Aldous in London.

My biggest doubt about Laura was that she had been responsible for turning a great English writer who had been a spokesman for science

and the enlightenment into a mystic, and worse, his writing lost a lot.

Huxley's grandfather was Thomas Huxley, a biologist and celebrated agnostic who had been a major influence on Charles Darwin. Aldous came from an illustrious English family of intellectuals and scientists. His brother, Sir Julian Huxley, was also a prominent scientist and the founder of UNESCO.

Aldous was born in 1894. His dystopian novel *Brave New World* was published in 1932, five years before he moved to the New World.

Despite his drift toward mysticism, he wrote another important book while in the mountains and high desert north of the Los Angeles basin in 1948 called *Ape & Essence*. The vision it propounded was so horrifying perhaps that is why the author chose to flee in the maelstrom of mysticism and Laura didn't deserve all the blame.

Aldous and Maria, his first wife, lived on the grounds of a former Utopian colony, Llano del Rio, during much of World War II. This is from where the novel germinated.

Aldous had the scientist's eye for the detail of flora and fauna. And he was able to drive on back dirt roads in the desert without known mishap despite the fact he was practically blind. His wide knowledge of nature stood him in good stead during his many hikes and drives in the desert.

Because of his blindness, he loved the light he could see living on the edge of the desert. When an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima it produced the most blinding light of all, setting off some chemical or perhaps psychological metamorphosis in him.

The grimness of *Ape & Es-*

sence may have come from the fact that life on the high desert was sometimes too secluded, and too full of the joys of nature. It was during World War II, and Huxley's royalty checks from England were gone, and gas, tires and spare parts were hard to come by. Eventually he would have to abandon the desert because he was finding more and more of his income in the studios. Certainly no city ever had a more gloomy prophecy created for it than the one Huxley wrote in *Ape & Essence*.

He was so affected by his circumstances that when his wife Maria offered to allow him to have lovers to inspire him to write more, he declined.

But he loved the Joshua trees, the wildflowers and the rattlesnakes. And after the horrors of the second war in Europe, where Huxley still had many friends and family members, the Nuclear Age thoroughly horrified him. In 1945 he wrote a friend, "Thank God we are to have peace soon," but went on to suggest it would be a disquieting peace at best, since atomic bombs would be hanging overhead.

"National states armed by science with superhuman military powers always remind me of (Jonathan) Swift's description of Gulliver being carried up onto the roof of the King of Brobdingnag's palace by a gigantic monkey; reason, human decency and spirituality, which are strictly individual matters, are themselves in the clutches of the collective will, which has the mentality of a delinquent boy of fourteen in conjunction with the physical powers of God," he wrote.

Huxley's obsession with the blinding light of Hiroshima turned

to a terrible pessimism—not to be ended until his attraction to LSD and the other psychedelics of the '50s and some novels that definitely were not up to par.

That pessimism dates from the advent of the atom bomb. The idea of the book was a post-atomic-war society in which the chief effect of the gamma radiation had been to produce a race of men and women who didn't make love all the year around, but had a brief mating season. The effect of this on politics, religion, ethics, was interesting and amusing, he said.

Ape & Essence is not an easy novel to call amusing, unless, of course, one is amused by torture, brutality, degradation and other unspeakable horrors. Huxley wrote *Ape & Essence* with his considerable wit and satire, however, so it is not totally without humor.

The survivors in the book were all mutants. The original inhabitants of L.A. had been killed long ago. In three bright summer days the Third World War began. The physical city still stood; the wars had not yet scored a direct hit on L.A., but the radiation had destroyed most of the crops as well as finishing off the human population. Thus the handful of mutants, few thousands at best, lived in and among various familiar Southern California landmarks -- the County Museum and Coliseum in Exposition Park, Pershing Square and the Biltmore Hotel across the way, USC and UCLA, and so on. The outlying neighborhoods were still there, too, only they were not inhabited. The gas stations were rusting.

The community center of the mutant survivors of L.A. was in Pershing Square. The mutants were oddly dressed, because their clothes came from corpses dug up from nearby graveyards. They drank from the skulls of the corpses, which had been fashioned into cups. Heat for the communal baking ovens in Pershing Square was provided by burning the books in the nearby public library. Water was carried in goatskins to be stored in earthenware jars kept in Pershing Square. Between two rusty posts hung the carcass of a nearly

slaughtered ox and in a cloud of flies a man was cleaning out the entrails.

Across the way from this charming scene in Pershing Square was the mutant's temple -- in the old Biltmore Hotel. In the book, the clergy lived there, chief of whom was His Eminence the Arch-Vicar of Belial, Lord of the Earth, Primate of California, Servant of the Proletariat, Bishop of Hollywood. His aides included the Patriarch of Pasadena and the Three-



My instructions
from my uncle were
to put my life in
Laura's hands, and
she supposedly would
mold me according to
Huxleyan holiness
of some kind.

Horned Inquisitor.

The main event of the year, which was held in the Biltmore Hotel, was a two-week period of wild, enforced, orgiastic copulating, for sex was outlawed the rest of the year. The women wore flaps over strategic parts of their bodies that had the word "No" emblazoned on them. Nine months after the orgy there was a corollary

event: Belial Day, a mass, sacrificial slaughter of the deformed offspring born from the main event. Women were called vessels to signify their uncleanness. In the book, most of the children from the vessels had were offered to the sacrificial fires of Belial Day.

Maria died in 1955, and he married her friend, Laura Archera, an Italian prodigy violinist the following year. He had, with Maria's support, already been moving in more mystical directions. In 1953, he had written *The Doors of Perception*, which sang the praises of LSD. More than a decade later, as he lay dying, Laura convinced him to go out while under the influence of the drug.

Nonetheless, when I was writing my own book *Literary L.A.*, I remembered a snapshot on a table of Aldous and Laura looking languorous on a patio against a background of the Hollywood Hills.

It was obviously taken from their home.

I asked Laura if I could borrow the snapshot to be used in the book. The publishers, Chronicle Books, put it on the cover, turning the black-and-white snapshot into a wildly psychedelic colorful cover that was a great success.

Laura came to some of my parties and I became a more frequent visitor to her house, especially after my mother Yaltah, like her sister Hephzibah, a pianist, came to visit me in Los Angeles in the early 1981.

Yaltah had moved to London where she spent the last 40 years of her life.

My mother had never liked Los Angeles. So when Laura asked me to bring Yaltah up to her Hollywood Hills home, I jumped at the chance. Although her brother and sister knew Laura and had known Aldous well, she had not met them.

My mom was homesick for Europe from the moment she landed in Los Angeles, just as she was homesick for Europe for the 18 years she was married to my dad and lived here. My decision to take her to Laura's house was a good one. She felt wonderfully at home. She described

it as “an oasis of Europe,” she said.

We all sat in Laura’s wonderful, high-ceilinged, light-and-airy, whitewashed Mediterranean villa, high above the rest of Los Angeles. Laura was talking about how much she wanted to go home to Italy, if only for a visit. Yaltah nodded approvingly as we drove down the hill from her house. “She was very nice,” Yaltah said, “and still very European,” which she obviously meant as a crowning glory.

Not too long after that, Yehudi wrote me and told me to go see Laura and put my life in her hands.

Yehudi remained on close terms with Laura throughout the years. Laura had dedicated her life to carrying out the mystical prescriptions by which her husband wanted ultimately to be remembered. My instructions from my uncle were to put my life in Laura’s hands, and she supposedly would mold me according to Huxleyan holiness of some kind.

Laura introduced me to Janice Seaman, a yoga guru who lived in nearby Glendale, and animal activist. I told her that I was only talking to her to make my uncle happy.

She said that was fine. Then she called me a couple of days later and asked if I could come with her to the desert where I got involved in a strange yarn involving lions and tigers and murder. I wrote an article, at one point almost losing my life when a cement truck tried to run me off the road. None of this seemed to have much to do with obtaining the ancient higher wisdom, which I think was Yehudi and Laura’s intent.

I continued my friendship with Laura, once even meeting Baba Ram Dass in Malibu as a result of her invitation. Ram Dass was the “Holy Man” also known as Dr. Richard Alpert, LSD guru Timothy Leary’s associate.

I didn’t drive her out. She came with George Dicaprio, the actor Leonardo’s father, who often drove her on various outings and errands.

I don’t think it was just coincidence that a few weeks before Yehudi entrusted me to Laura, her husband had been the topic of a strange conversation.

It started early one evening and ran well into the next morning in the Den-

ny’s coffeeshop on Highway 14, right where the Mojave Desert really begins.

Along with my ex-wife Nigey Lennon, we were joined by Don Van Vliet, best known as the rock cult hero Captain Beefheart. We had been discussing drugs, the ‘60s and the high desert. Beefheart was talking about how people who live in the desert (where he was reared) are often far more eccentric than those who live on the L.A. side of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Once, as a young lad growing up in the desert, Beefheart had a part-time job selling Electrolux vacuum cleaners in Pearblossom, which was not very far from Llano and Wrightwood, the desert and mountain communities that Huxley lived in. Beefheart explained it was known that the author lived in the desert, so when a tall, gangly customer came into the store where Beefheart was working, Beefheart recognized him immediately.

Van Vliet remembered being impressed by how down-to-earth Huxley was. Huxley explained that his wife Maria had sent him out to look for a vacuum cleaner. Huxley asked Van Vliet if he could recommend one. Since Beefheart was selling Electroluxes, it was, of course, an Electrolux that Huxley purchased. Then they talked a bit.

During the conversation at Denny’s, Beefheart said that Huxley had seemed to him a man who was

looking for something, that he was an eccentric among the eccentrics who inhabited the desert.

About five years ago I brought my friend Paul Anderson to Laura’s home. He was writing about her for one of the suburban sections of the *Los Angeles Times*.

The first thing Laura did was invite us to sit on some large, inflatable balls.

“It’s like being in water, so like being in a mother’s womb,” she said, explaining why she preferred to sit on a children’s toy she had ordered over the Web.

“You have to sit upright or you’ll fall off,” she explained. “Recently, I saw these in a catalog that said they were good for office chairs.”

Laura explained to Anderson why she was not fond of *Ape & Essence*.

“Oh, don’t mention that book. It’s too dreadful,” she began.

But she agreed with me that Huxley’s use of bright light in the book was inspired both by his vision becoming better and clearer in the desert coinciding with the news from Hiroshima.

Laura had given me one of those balls; was it still in its package? I wondered, hearing the news of her death.

I checked if it was still in my bedroom closet.

I never found it to be a good substitute for an office chair. But I couldn’t bring myself to throw it out.

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Moondog- The Viking of 6th Avenue

by Robert Scotto

BOOK REVIEW

Hammond Guthrie

Born in Marysville, Kansas in 1916, the son of an Episcopal minister, Louis Hardin Jr. lived a relatively simple life in America's heartland until the age of 16 when he was permanently blinded when he mistakenly toyed with a blasting cap. A life-altering event for anyone, but from out of this tragedy Louis would find the resolve to become a classical composer, "as though a new person emerged out of the experience and a second life struck out on its own, carrying only vestiges of what went before." And in so doing he evolved into a voracious student of music, literature, history and philosophy, developing a somewhat exotic worldview that embraced Norse mythology and Viking culture as the pinnacles of European civilization.

Not exactly an "Outsider" musician, Louis (having renamed himself "Moondog"), would prove to be an autodidact at heart, first learning Braille, and then music in Braille before adapting himself to transcription and the ability to write down what he was hearing in his head. Much in the vein of his contemporary Harry Partch, in order to hear his music played Moondog invented several musical instruments, including a small triangular-shaped harp known as the "Oo," and perhaps his most well-known, the "Trimba," a triangular percussion instrument.

From the late 1940s until 1974, Moondog lived (often homeless) as a street musician/poet and performer in New York City, partially supporting himself by selling copies of his poetry and his musical philosophy. He quickly became known for the distinctive Viking garb that he wore, which included a horned

helmet. These carefully hand-tooled togs were not part of an eccentric act, but living emblems of his philosophic convictions. Moondog's adopted street corner for performance was close to the famed 52nd Street nightclubs, and he became well known to many jazz musicians of the time. An impressive list of admirers indeed – among them Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Charlie Parker, Leonard Feather, Pete Seeger, Phillip Glass, Walter Winchell, Cassius Clay and Marlon Brando.

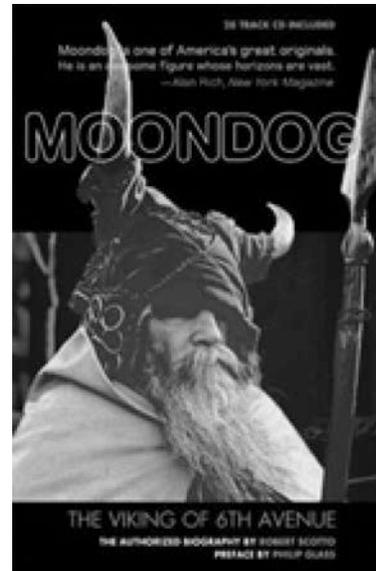
As the author notes: "... everybody had his own Moondog."

This I can vouch for, as my one meeting with Moondog evoked in me a glimmer of a new manner of 'seeing' the world, and more importantly hearing the world as music.

Working in Braille on a punchboard and composing under his leather cloak in all manner of weather, Moondog wrote prolifically in a wide range of styles including avant-garde jazz, madrigals, canons for chamber orchestra, and symphonies for full orchestra. Included with this book is a well-produced CD collection that is an added joy offering readers a sampling of his recordings, among them, "All Is Loneliness" and "Be a Hobo" – accompanied by minimalist composer Phillip Glass.

Anecdotally humorous throughout - one of my favorite bits was Moondog kissing the hand of Arturo Toscanini upon meeting the maestro, who then pulled it away, however, observing wryly that he was "not a beautiful woman."

A succinct word-



smith, like "a feather on a drum" he spoke prophetically. "Before we humans quit the Stage of Life we should consider just how nice it's been and will be till this place is covered by a mile or more of ice."

And when once asked: What do you draw inspiration from for your work? Moondog replied: "Silence mostly."

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retreats, hypochondrial hide-and-seeks when the
ions of belief in all things good could generate
the current for redirecting her sectarian swoons

when the reaper winked she ravished all morsels
of miseration in refusing to eat, sending the dry-
eyed priests off to the buttresses to exorcize their
pubescent burdens, fissioning the threads of an
enchanted existence into the fusion of an ecstatic
resistance, fueled by a messimanic will to fight
the fertilizer invading her turf for four years, the
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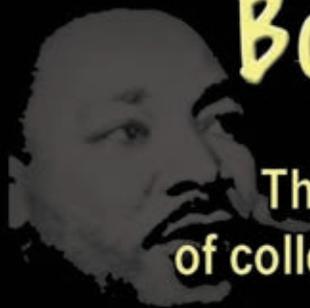
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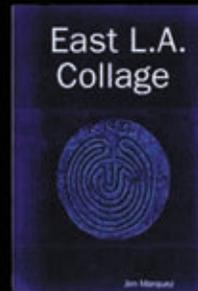
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