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- *Behind the Scenes at the Elian Gonzalez Fiasco*
- *The Secret Life of George W. Bush*
- *The Foreskin Conspiracy*

The Realist

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Phone Home . . .

COURT JESTER

Sex, Drugs and the Twinkie Murders

Well, this is the next-to-last issue of *The Realist*. The final issue will be published in December for subscribers only. (You can subscribe to that issue for \$2. Our mailing list has never been rented and is not for sale.) Meanwhile, a 362-page anthology of my countercultural journalism and columns (1959-99), *Sex, Drugs and the Twinkie Murders*, will be published in July by Loompanics, a small but dynamic publisher. If you can't get a copy in your bookstore or via the Internet, you can get one directly from *The Realist* — Box 1230, Venice CA 90294 — for \$22 (including postage) with an inscription of your choice. I will gladly sign my name to anything you decide to submit.

Also available: my *Impolite Interviews* (with Ken Kesey, Norman Mailer, Arianna Huffington, Woody Allen, Dick Gregory, Hugh Hefner, Tim Leary and Ram Dass among others), \$19; *The Winner of the Slow Bicycle Race: The Satirical Writings of Paul Krassner* (foreword by Kurt Vonnegut), \$14; and *The (Almost) Unpublished Lenny Bruce* (a collection of his articles, stories, bits and pieces), \$10.

Plus: my *Pot Stories For the Soul* (foreword by Harlan Ellison), \$15 — which has just received a Firecracker Alternative Book Award and will actually be a Book of the Month Club selection. A sequel, *Psychedelic Trips for the Soul*, will be published in December, but you can reserve a copy directly from *The Realist* now for \$15.

John McCain

My favorite moment during John McCain's brief reign in the primaries occurred during one of the Republican so-called debates. George W. promised a big tax cut, adding, "So help me God," a much stronger underscoring than his father's "Read my lips." Then McCain said that *he*, McCain, had promised a *bigger* tax cut. Flashing his combination smile-and-snarl, McCain said to Bush, "Mine is bigger than yours." This was a blatant dick joke from a presidential candidate whose own dick was being sucked dry by reporters eager to swallow his every premature ejaculation.

George W. Bush

When Dan Quayle endorsed George W. Bush for president, he also passed on to him the torch representing America's Dumb Guy Icon. Bush intended to say about John McCain: "He's riding his high horse by taking the low road." Instead it came out, "He can't take the high horse and then claim the low road." And when a newscaster asked him what his father said when he lost the New Hampshire primary, Bush replied, "He said, 'It doesn't matter whether you won or lost, I love you, I'm your father and I love you like a son.'" Why, some day, he might even love him as much as if he were adopted.

Al Gore

The lesser of two evils describes himself as "an imperfect messenger" for campaign finance reform. Moreover, he insists that he wasn't present every moment at a certain important meeting because he had been drinking a lot of iced tea and needed a bathroom break or two. Yessirree, ma'am, Al Gore is resorting to the old full-bladder defense. Now I will always have an image of him standing at a urinal and peeing all over his Alpha Male boots because, he will explain, there was no controlling legal authority. Of course, I've just described an upcoming Republican commercial.

Moral Paradox

On the perhaps false assumption that my vote in the presidential election will count, I am torn between voting for Al Gore — or, rather, against George W. — and voting for Ralph Nader. For the last few decades, the Green Party candidate has been fighting for public safety and health. Or, for that matter, I could vote for David

McReynolds. Not only is he a Democratic Socialist, but he's also come out both as gay and as a pot-smoker; his story about the relationship between marijuana and communication is included in my book, *Pot Stories For the Soul*. Or Harry Browne, candidate of the Libertarian Party. But the point is, if I were to vote for Nader, I would in effect be taking a vote away from Gore — who would push for gun control and appoint Supreme Court justices that wouldn't overturn *Roe vs. Wade* — whereas George W. would do just the opposite. Then why have I decided to not be pragmatic but to vote for Nader? Because I once was talking with a crazy person, and when I used the phrase "survival games," he corrected me and said, "Idealism is the only survival game."

Moral Paradox: The Sequel

I faxed my voting dilemma to my friend, Nick Kazan, and he replied: "Isn't the question: When your idealistic action is not seen by others, is it just a hand raised in the forest? Does it mean anything? Your action would seem to have value, because it is seen. You write about it in *The Realist* and others read it, but for others? It would seem like a vote for Ralph Nader is an action without consequence, or, to frame it more properly, this action (this vote) would not seem to have the potential to have a consequence. And the question then is: Does the action still have moral value? Of course. But as much value as a vote which could do some good? I'm not sure. Is there value inherent in its idealism? Yes. But then: Is one to never be practical? Again, I'm not sure. Besides, you have freed me because I was also vacillating between Gore and Nader, and if you're voting for Ralph, I am now freed up to go practical with Al. [My wife] Robin is more succinct: She wrote at the bottom of your fax, 'Your goals are the only survival game.'" I responded, "Your process is the only survival game," but what actually *was* my goal? When is idealism simply self-righteousness with a moral spin? Now maybe I'll vote for Al Gore after all. But does that mean Nick Kazan would vote for Ralph Nader just to keep the balance going?

America and Elian

While Abbie Hoffman was on the lam as Barry Freed, his 4-year-old son, America, visited him. He was called Alan. Mayer Vishner, cornerstone of Abbie's overground support group, was on the roof, ready to nail in some tiles. Abbie was preparing to toss a hammer to him, carefully gauging the weight of the hammer and the distance to the roof. When he finally felt he had it right, he aimed and started the motion, first backward for leverage and then — just as America happened to run by — forward, the hammer hitting the boy in the chin on its upward swing. Pain! Shock! Crying! Panic! As an anguished Abbie picked him up, America said, "I'm sorry, Barry." So profoundly significant was this simple utterance: "I'm sorry," taking the blame for an act of a loving authority figure on whom a child is dependent; and "Barry," a revelation of how together and responsible this 4-year-old was, protecting his father's real identity in the midst of his own agony. It helps me understand how Elian Gonzales adapted so easily from testily waving his finger on home video — scolding "Papa!" in the role reversal of his life — to later, having been kidnapped from his kidnappers, smiling and snuggling in Papa's lap.

Jay Leno Meets Bart Simpson

It used to be, as Steve Allen said, that "comedy is tragedy plus time." But now there's instant irreverence. One night, while the flames were still spreading utter devastation across Los Alamos, Jay Leno suggested that fire extinguishers would be a good Mother's Day gift if your mother lived in Los Alamos. It wasn't funny, but it sure was topical. On *The Simpsons* a couple of nights later, Marge Simpson had just been taken to an insane asylum, and on the Simpsons' TV — just the way Jay Leno once presented the Dancing Itos during the O.J. Simpson trial — Krusty the Clown was now presenting the Dancing Marges. "Too soon," muttered Bart Simpson. See, Jay, even an animated professional brat can recognize appropriate limitations.

The Deification of Elian Gonzalez

by Roberto Santiago

When an out-of-town news story becomes too juicy for a big circulation newspaper like the *New York Daily News* to just run wire stories, staff reporters like me get to travel. So when the Elian Gonzalez story gained international attention last January I got the call to hop on the next plane. I wasn't complaining. I was going to spend winter in Miami to report on the most talked about six-year-old since JonBenet Ramsey, the little murdered beauty queen who, unlike Elian, didn't survive the holidays with her mother.

Elian was lucky. He was found floating in an inner tube off the coast of Fort Lauderdale on Thanksgiving morning by two bickering cousins who had taken their fishing boat out 35 miles off shore, their lines cast for dolphin fish. Instead, in those rough waters, they reeled in a Cuban refugee named Elian Gonzalez, one of the three survivors of a group of 14 Cuban nationals who had boarded a makeshift raft in hopes of getting to South Florida.

Elian took the trip with his mother and her hustler boyfriend, much to the shock of the boy's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, a man whose devotion to the Cuban communist party enabled his little son to have luxuries most Latino children in the United States (including this Spanish Harlem-bred author) could only dream about. The brat had his own air-conditioned bedroom! The latest toys! He lived in a neighborhood free of crime, guns, and junkies! He even had catered birthday parties that featured a clown for entertainment.

But that didn't stop the political leaders of Miami's Cuban-American community from immediately anointing Elian as a divine liberation symbol. Yes! Here was a child whose mother escaped communist oppression and died trying to bring her only son to the land of liberty. Elian's survival was deemed miraculous: Although 11 adults died, Elian had survived two days out in the ocean, yet was only sunburned and dehydrated. Legend had it that angels of the sea, dolphins, had saved Elian, scaring away sharks.

And given that the patron saint of Cuba, the Virgin of Charity, is said to have appeared to and saved three fishermen who, Catholic lore has it, had their fishing boat near where Elian was rescued, you had the makings of a *bona fide* icon. The miracle child was soon taken in by his distant Miami relatives: his great uncles Lazaro and Delfin Gonzalez and his great-looking great cousin, Marisleydis Gonzalez, a screeching community-college dropout who was later to confuse five months worth of babysitting with motherhood.

Prior to January, Miami public relations guru Armando Gutierrez, who had donated his services to the Elian cause as an unpaid family spokesman, had no need to make Elian

into a media sensation. It seemed that Elian, who had spent his sixth birthday in Disneyworld with only a dozen or so reporters, would likely remain in the United States. That was until the INS declared that Elian's father was the one who had the right to speak for the child. Elian would be sent back to Cuba.

As far as the right-wing, anti-Castro Cuban-American political leaders were concerned, there was no way that Castro was going to snatch a Cuban refugee from the heart of Miami's exile community. They would use the courts to stall the inevitable and rally the world media to cover it like O.J. Crowds and Cuban political leaders mobilized, TV, radio and print media started to stake out the Little Havana house where Elian lived with his Miami relatives, and thus Camp Elian was born.

At first it was a friendly little camp of 30 news representatives from all over the world. The scene resembled a low-budget film set with directors' chairs, and a handful of police keeping watch on everything. The mood was festive. Print, TV and radio journalists hung out and exchanged information, food and sun-block. Gutierrez gave every reporter his cell-phone number, never turned down an interview, fed reporters the latest facts and off-the-record gossip, and allowed media access to all of the Miami relatives except Elian, who was not allowed to speak to the media.

"We will grant the media access to Elian only as a last resort, if we think it might help in his cause to stay in the States. But that is only after everything else has failed," Gutierrez told me. Months later, when all else had failed, a rehearsed video featuring Elian saying he did not want to go back to Cuba was aired on Spanish-language news. In the meantime, still photographers and TV cameramen were allowed to get their photo-ops for 15-minute intervals when Elian was taken outside to play in the yard, an event that some reporters like myself dubbed the kid's 15-minute run.

And the photo ops were delightful: See Elian play with his new puppy! See old Cuban ladies make the sign of the cross whenever Elian appears. See Elian ignore questions from reporters like a Hollywood pro. See mothers bring their star-struck 5-, 6- and 7-year-old daughters to the house to have the opportunity to spend ten minutes playing with Elian! There were even offers to have Elian model children's clothing or to make guest spots in TV sit-coms or Hollywood films.

"We have turned down all offers," Gutierrez said. "We are not here to exploit Elian in the media."

Earlier that day, Elian had been the guest of honor in the annual Three King's Day Parade. He sat in the grandstand surrounded by rela-

tives and bodyguards. The child held a can of Silly String in one hand and a giant cup of soda in the other. The photographers and TV cameramen took pictures of every politician who would make Elian hold a little Cuban or American flag. What they did not photograph was Elian immediately putting down those flags in order to spray everyone with Silly String.

Although he was the guest of honor, Elian never had the chance to see the elaborate float that was built in his honor. For security reasons he was driven back home before the parade ended. Just as he arrived back at the little Havana home, holding his fingers high in a V-for-Victory sign, looking like little Tricky Dickie himself (Elian had been trained to do that by his great uncle Delfin), a giant blue float decorated with plastic dolphins and giant agua-blue cardboard waves came up the street. In the foreground was a picture of Elian.

And on the float were several children, chanting in unison — "Elian! Our Friend! Miami Is With You!" — as the man dubbed the Kato Kaelin of the Elian saga, Donato Dalrymple, one of the two cousins who saved Elian, stood with the children and waved to the crowd. By this time some of the crowd who hung around Elian's house were handing me proof as to Elian's divinity. They would give me handwritten xeroxed papers proving that Elian was divine. It was a gonzo mixture of Christianity, West African religion and *Star Wars*, promoted by people who behaved like the mobs of individuals in Monty Python's *Life of Brian*.

"As you know, Fidel Castro believes in *santeria*," said a woman who gave me copies of the documents. "Years ago, a *santero* warned Fidel that his reign would be destroyed by a Cuban child who, like Moses, would come across the seas. And that child, protected by aquatic angels, would live to see Fidel die on a holiday and rise to defeat Cuban communism." She said Fidel was told that, like Herod or Pharaoh, he must get Elian back to Cuba, force him to "embrace the dark side" to ensure the survival of Cuban communism. "The Holidays are the days to watch out for," she warned. "That is why I am so concerned about Easter. During Easter, a divine child must be united with his father. But I do not know if it will be God, the Holy father, Juan Miguel the birth father, or Fidel the communist father."

Easter, shmeester. What a nut!

Soon after, Juan Miguel announced that he had no intention of ever coming to the United States. Negotiations were underway to have Elian's grandmothers come from Cuba and pick him up. Two weeks later, I was standing yards away from the Miami Beach home of a nun was hosting a private meeting of Elian and his two grandmothers. World media crammed every inch in front of the house. Police helicopters circled overhead. Police, some bearing automatic weapons, blocked off roads. I walked over to a corner store to get a

bottle of water. A bewildered German tourist approached me.

"What is going on here?" he asked me.

"Two grandmothers are visiting their grandchild," I yawned, turning into the store.

Throughout all of the Elian mania, a handful of Cuban protesters were constantly announcing that they were on hunger strikes, and that they would remain on hunger strike until justice for Elian was served. But unlike the Irish in Northern Ireland, Cubans aren't meant for hunger strikes — fasting gets them too hungry. They usually give up after two days and, from what I saw, always started it off wrong: sipping from bottles of water and smoking cigars.

The Elian mantra — coming from the Miami relatives, the protesters, politicians and the relatives' lawyers — was that they were doing what was "in the best interests of the child." One of the most comical was New Hampshire senator Bob Smith, the portly senator who once called President Clinton a "scumbag." Smith came to the Little Havana home and met with Elian. When he faced reporters, he detailed a conversation that he had with Elian, where the six-year-old had told him that he did not want to go back to Cuba.

"Senator," I asked, "did he say that in English or in Spanish?"

The Senator paused a beat, turned to an aide, then nodded and stated, "He said it in Spanish."

"Do you speak Spanish, Senator?" I asked. "Because Elian doesn't speak or understand English."

Senator Smith ignored my question and quickly walked away. Everyone, except Elian, was claiming that the boy said that he did not want to go back to Cuba. Everything Elian allegedly said was filtered through the words of knuckleheads like Smith, never a member of the press. The only time that Elian spoke was when he was standing in the front yard of his home, the day after his grandmothers had visited. He was upset and agitated. The crowd of Elian worshippers ignored Elian's agitation and beckoned him to come to him.

At that, Elian shouted, in Spanish, "Leave me alone!"

It was also the only time I actually saw the media put down their cameras and walk away, visibly taken aback by a child's plea for privacy. But by late March, all that had changed. The crowd of 30 media members had grown to 200. The entire length in front of the Miami relatives' house was taken up by TV news crews, leaving print and radio people to scramble amid endless lines of cable. TV satellite trucks and generators were parked in the backyards of numerous neighbors who would charge upwards of \$1,000 a day for that privilege.

The more TV media that arrived, the less they obeyed the rules. The mood was ugly. They would crowd around the front fence of the Little Havana home, even when Elian was not there. They ignored Gutierrez's pleas to

back off. So he got the police to put the press and the protesters behind barricades. They had it coming. They behaved like thugs. Camp Elian now looked like a military base camp. There were three checkpoints that media or residents had to go through to get near the house.

The media were situated in front of the house behind metal police barricades. You had to show press credentials to get in that section. To the left of the media section, behind its own metal barricades, was where 300 or so of the protesters would congregate. TV media and their arrogance dominated the scene. The air constantly smelled of hair spray as talking heads readied themselves to get on camera. Twentysomething female TV producers with squeaky voices, when not flirting with the people they wanted to appear on their shows, would sit around sipping diet sodas. And pot-bellied sound and camera men would act as if they owned the sidewalk, mouthing off to radio and print reporters who dared enter their roped-off space.

My rule when dealing with TV media is: "As long as I do not block your shot or sit on your wires, then there is no problem. You don't own the streets and you are not celebrities. And, above all, you don't tell me when and where not to sit or stand. "But one camera crew, which was set up nearest to the protesters, also happened to be closest to the spot where the Miami family and the protest leaders would give impromptu press conferences. After one pot-bellied loser tried to shoo me away, I warned him that if he did not shut up or stop directing the F-word at me, I would make him go black. He moved toward me. I pulled his wires and stood up ready to punch him out. He backed down and scrambled to reconnect.

The pot-bellied TV rednecks talked tough, but would back down when challenged by a man. Women were another story. One soundman from NBC actually hit Marty Rosen, a newspaperwoman from the *Daily News* who had come down to Miami to back me up. For the first time, I agreed with critics that TV does promote violence. The NBC guy was upset that Marty had dared enter his space in order to cover a press conference. Marty pressed charges against the NBC guy.

A few days later, I was in Washington, D.C., trying to score an interview with Juan Miguel, who had traveled there to plead with Janet Reno for the immediate return of his son, shocking many who thought he would never come to the U.S.

Meanwhile, a reporter from the *New York Post*, Maria Alvarez, stabbed another NBC guy with her ball-point pen after he tried to block her from getting an interview with a protest leader. Maria was arrested, but charges were dropped when attorneys representing the *Daily News*, the *New York Post* and NBC made a deal: If the *News* dropped its charges against NBC, then NBC would drop its charges against the *Post*. Although

the *Post* and the *News* are competitors, we stood united against television media thugs.

Tempers were flaring behind the barricades, especially those among us who had been camped outside of that house for the last few months, under the hot sun, listening to protesters sing the Cuban national anthem out of key over and over again. And when newspaper reporters weren't fighting with TV people, they were fighting with their editors, who were sitting in cool offices, reading wire copy and watching often inaccurate TV broadcasts, thinking they knew the story better than their staff. What reporters screamed at editors around the country often sounded like this:

"You're asking me why the story I am feeding you isn't on the wires?" yelled newspaper reporters covering Elian. "That's because Millie, who is the wires, otherwise known as the Associated Press, is on her cell phone right now feeding her editor the same story I am feeding you! Do you want me to call back a half hour later when Millie's story runs on the wires, or would you rather take the chance of trusting your own staff for a change?"

Newspaper editors who trust the wires over their own staff perplex me. Do they believe that the wires are some floating satellite that hovers above news events, soaking up material and magically transmitting it into their computers? Some editors seemed to forget that "the wires" was just another reporter, chasing down the same story, and often standing a few feet away from you. They also forgot that TV cameras, by their mere presence, manipulate the images they see, and none were more manipulated than when the cameras were trained on the protesters at Camp Elian.

One evening sitting high atop a still photographer's ladder, several feet in the air, looking down at a sea of mostly silent protesters, I suddenly heard everyone in the crowd erupt in chants. The television crews had turned on their lights for their 11 p.m. broadcasts and were panning their cameras across the protesters. Again, chants of "Elian! Our Friend! Miami Is With You!" thundered over and over. I caught myself waving my arms like a conductor. A photographer climbed up the ladder and handed me a margarita.

"This helps when dealing with media manipulation," said the photographer, who by this time had earplugs to drown out the TV-pumped crowds.

To its credit, TV did help stimulate creativity among the protesters. My favorite was a couple who came to the protests dressed like Bill Clinton and Fidel Castro. A person dressed like Janet Reno — with bolts on the side of her neck — trailed them. Reno officiated over the mock wedding of Clinton and Fidel, as the crowd chanted, "Clinton and Fidel! Husband and wife!" Then Reno applauded in glee as the couple consummated the wedding: Fidel was dry-humping Clinton

from the backside, holding onto the president's hips, simulating anal intercourse.

And then there was the woman who had a dummy of Fidel wearing a huge bra. "Reno gave Fidel this bra as a gift because he is the only man who has ever fucked her," said the little old lady who made the dummy. She then grabbed an umbrella and started poking Fidel in his balls. "Oh! I hate this man so much! I hate him!" Soon a small line gathered to take their turns poking the umbrella into Fidel's balls and into his eyes. And through all of this madness, Elian would play in his yard, seemingly oblivious to all of the hysteria his presence inspired.

The protesters were not fans of the 1st Amendment. If you disagreed with them and

felt the boy should go back to Cuba with his father, you were a communist or an agent of Castro. They constantly called Clinton and Reno communists. When I pointed out that the rest of the country might view those McCarthy-like sentiments as absurd, they accused me of being a communist. The end was foretold by an elderly man who, since the beginning, was hawking Elian T-shirts (\$6 for one, four for \$20) in front of the Little Havana home. Toward the end of April, he was having a liquidation sale. There was no need to make any more T-shirts.

"The family defied the Attorney General in refusing to unite Elian with his father," the man said to me. "If I was Reno and I traveled all the way to Miami Beach to meet with the

family and they gave the finger to my demands, I'd get mad. She'll send troops here like she did in Waco."

The T-shirt peddler's prediction came to pass the day before Easter. Federal agents swooped down at 5 a.m., tear-gassed and pepper-sprayed the crowd, and took Elian in less than three minutes. And, proving that God was once a newspaperman, one of the Feds punched an NBC crew member during the raid. On Easter Sunday, images of a smiling Elian with his father were in newspapers all over the world. The woman who gave me copies of her handwritten, xeroxed proof of Elian's divinity was not only right, she was the only person I had met in Miami who made any sense.

After the tear gas had cleared, and Elian was gone, the protesters did not know what to do. They attacked a CNN press tent, chanting that they were Castro's news network. Police in riot gear began regularly clearing out the worst trouble makers. By nightfall, the world press was packing it up at Camp Elian. All that was left behind was garbage, old wires and crumpled signs that depicted Elian's face with the caption: "Elian Knew Christ. But the Foolish Deny It."

Lost in trying to get the umpteenth photograph of Elian playing in his yard, the press somehow ignored the real story: that the Cuban American National Foundation and its supporters had lost its political stranglehold over how United States foreign policy over Cuba would be dictated. CANF leader Jorge Mas Santos needed the Elian victory to prove that he was as efficient a leader as Jorge Mas Canosa, his late father. Santos failed. The CANF and the protest leaders could not rally support in its cause from the Haitian community, the African American community, and from the other Hispanic groups that it had shunned and ridiculed over the last 40 years.

Now, to the horror of the CANF, many Americans, thanks to the Elian lunacy in Miami, are talking about having diplomatic relations with Cuba. Worse, the Elian saga pumped up nationalism in Cuba, even among its dissident groups, who, politics aside, supported a father's right to be united with his child. And now that Cuba was no longer a national security threat to the United States, everyday white folks were questioning how a small group of exiles ever managed to have so much power dictating U.S. foreign policy over Cuba. The great Miami Cuban American media manipulation had backfired. Big time.

After eight months in the United States (most of them spent in Miami, a city where protesters pelted City Hall with bananas), Elian is going back home, to Cuba, with his "birth father." But this made-for-TV media mystery is not over: Will Elian fulfill his gonzo Biblical destiny in Cuba and embrace the "dark side"? Or will he come across the seas again, returning, this time, as a baseball player?



Foreskins 'R' Us

by Danielle Sarasohn-Reppert

For my husband and me, the decision not to circumcise our infant son was an easy one. It hurts tremendously, has no proven medical benefits and should have gone the way of other ancient practices such as bloodletting and applying leeches. I wondered why it hadn't, and for that reason I began to look into the practice of routine circumcision and why it is still being performed today.

My journey took me first to a 1997 back issue of *Mothering* magazine and a piece by the renowned pediatrician and anti-circumcision advocate Paul Fleiss:

"Parents should be wary of anyone who tries to retract their child's foreskin and especially wary of anyone who tries to cut it off. Human foreskins are in great demand for a number of commercial enterprises, and the marketing of purloined baby foreskins is a multi-million dollar-a-year industry."

I was shocked. Upon further research through the organization Noharm (which asserts that an intact body is a basic human right), I discovered that since the 1980s private hospitals have been supplying baby foreskins to pharmaceutical companies and research labs that require human flesh as research material.

There is a very disturbing photo on the website, Noharm.org, of a nurse dressing a baby's wounded penis as he lay crying. There is a huge sign on the wall behind her that reads "Save The Foreskins." Now we know why — huge profit.

The after-market for foreskins is big money. Biochemical companies use them in the manufacturing of insulin. They are also packaged and then sold to research companies for biochemical analysis. Corporations such as Advanced Tissue Sciences and Biosurface Technology (to name just two) use amputated foreskins in the creation of artificial skin.

One product developed using human foreskin tissue is Dergraft-TC, which sells for \$3,000 a square foot and is used as wound-covering for burn patients. Could adult skin cells be grown and used for this purpose? Sure, but one baby foreskin contains enough genetic material to grow 250,000 square feet of skin. At \$3,000 a square foot — well, you do the math.

What is referred to by many in the medical establishment as a "snip" of penile skin after a circumcision, is actually a cut-off foreskin the size of a 3" by 5" card.

Advanced Tissue Sciences alone has sold about one million dollars worth of cultured dermis to Procter & Gamble and Helene Curtis for pre-market testing. They boasted a \$32 million stock offering in the beginning of 1992 (as recorded in *Forbes* magazine in May 1993). The annual market for dermis is estimated between \$1 and \$2 billion.

There is also evidence of a cover-up. An example of this was contained in Advance Tissue Sciences' 1997 annual report in which foreskins are never mentioned. Instead the word *Fibroblasts* is used. If this were an ethical practice, why would they avoid telling the public what they really mean?

The hoarding and selling of baby foreskins is supported by such people as Dr. Tania Phillips (professor of dermatology at Boston University) who calls the practice scientifically and technologically "very promising."

Other companies involved in using foreskins to make replacement skin products are Biosurface Technology of Cambridge and LifeCell Corporation, as reported by Jane Hicks of Noharm. Ms. Hicks also reports being told by a nurse from a major San Antonio hospital that nurses are expected to save baby foreskins for use by the hospital's Department of Oral Surgery for reconstructive surgery of the mouth — once again a profit source.

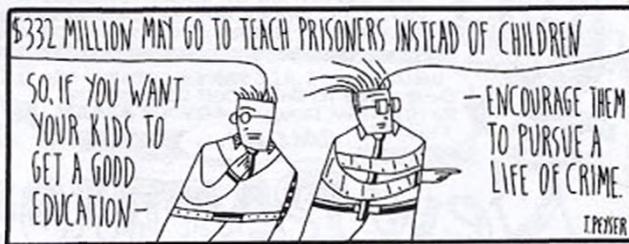
Even though it is now widely acknowledged (even by The American Pediatric Association) that circumcision has no medical benefits whatsoever, it is still marketed by hospitals in much the same way as newborn baby pictures. Doctors are not allowed to express their own views within their hospital concerning circumcision. They are forced

to talk around hospital policy when advising parents about the procedure. Consent forms are volunteered to parents, whether or not the parents request circumcision for the newborn.

Looking at the facts, it seems hospitals have not let go of routine circumcision (the way they have with routine tonsillectomy) because the procedure itself provides income for the hospital (charges range from \$300 to \$400 for a circumcision), income from surgical uses of foreskins within the hospital (i.e. oral surgery) and income from the selling of foreskins to companies for research and product development.

The procedure is painful (babies still cannot be anesthetized safely), potentially dangerous, and interferes with the mother-infant bonding. It is medically unnecessary, violates the civil liberties of the child and does not profit him financially, although it seems to profit everyone else involved.

There is only one group that doesn't profit from this situation — the circumcised child and his parents. Routine hospital circumcision exists in America today because foreskin harvesting is a booming industry and for no other reason.



Why America Is a Violent Nation

Check out www.violence.de — the resource web site of Dr. James Prescott, director of the Institute of Humanistic Science — to understand:

- Why homicides & suicides are the 2nd and 3rd leading causes of death in 15-24-year-olds which has not changed for over twenty years.
- Why depression and suicides have doubled in 5-14-year-olds from 1979 to 1998 and why the suicide/homicide ratio has increased from 36% to 73% from 1979 to 1998 in this age group.
- Why highly affectionately bonded children/youth do not commit suicide or homicide.
- What is wrong with America that our children and youth prefer suicidal death to living in America and why the epidemic of psychiatric medication of our children and youth is unknown in the G-7 nations.
- Why theistic/patristic cultures are significant contributing factors to violence against women and children and to homicide and suicide.
- Why the Clinton-Gore-Shalala Administration have knowingly failed to implement national health policies that are known to be effective in the prevention of depression and suicide with the unnecessary loss of life of children and youth to suicidal death.
- Why this Republican Congress — the "Family Values" congress — has failed to act on this information which demands a national debate in this election year.
- Why the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), National Institutes of Health (NIH), unlawfully abandoned its agency responsibility to continue to support research on the causes and consequences of child abuse and neglect and its prevention in the late 1970s. These NICHD/NIH actions have led to the current epidemics of depression, drug abuse and violence, a generation later.
- How Larry Flynt precipitated these NICHD/NIH actions that have resulted in loss of children's lives and refuses to take personal responsibility for his actions, as well as the suppression of these facts by the NICHD/NIH/DHHS and the White House.

Was George W. Bush a Party Animal?

[Editor's note: It is a common practice for political candidates to hire private investigators to delve into the backgrounds, not only of their opponents, but also of themselves, for the purpose of beating their opponents' investigators to the punch with damage control. In the last campaign for governor of California, all three candidates had themselves investigated — by the same detective agency. Likewise, both presidential candidates in the current campaign had themselves investigated. George W. Bush went even beyond that and hired a special consultant to analyze the report of the private investigator who delved into his background. The following was sent to *The Realist* by a source high in the Bush campaign who, of course, must remain anonymous.]

Dear Governor Bush:

As you requested, I have handled the following matter personally and consulted no other members of our team. I suggest you destroy this document after reading. If you wish to keep it to consider possible courses of action, I suggest you place it in the most secure possible location.

The Private Investigator was at first reluctant to go back into certain areas and "dig further." He required repeated assurances that I was acting directly on your behalf and that all relevant information would be shared amongst the three of us and would go no further.

Having read his initial report, you will find some of what follows repetitive. I have, as you will see, broken the relevant aspects of his investigation down into categories, ending with a personal assessment by me as to its potential harm should the information become public knowledge.

In terms of over-all assessment, my initial response still stands: The simplest and most effective way to avoid substantial damage is through a personal version of M.A.D., "mutually assured destruction." Unfortunately, as you know, we don't have much so far on AG [Al Gore], but there's still plenty of time, and even if we never get anything, there's always the veiled threat possibility. Tell him we know something, and hope we scare him into paralysis. Even he couldn't have led a perfect life.

I suggest we dialog this ASAP. If you want to talk to JA [Joe Albaugh, Bush's former chief of staff] or KR [Karl Rove, a trusted aide] or even LB [presumably Bush's wife, Laura], please alert me first. They'll be sensitive if they find out I've done this behind their backs — even at your direct bidding.

As you suggested, I spoke to the P.I. at length, and he both: (a) filled me in on gaps in the written report, and (b) told me confidentially about the material he did not include. Some of this, as you know, he considered "too speculative" (he was unable to find corroboration or the original source was "questionable to some degree"). The other stuff was corroborated, but the material itself was "too sensitive to put on paper." (This was, of course, what prompted his call to you in the first place, and your calling me in on this.)

Regarding the question you asked the other day: The P.I. seems absolutely trustworthy in all respects. While he has had to "act and think like a Democrat" in fulfilling this assignment, he assures me that in real life he's "an elephant, tusks and all."

Begging your pardon for one indulgence. For simplicity's sake, I will follow the Investigator's lead in referring to the subject of his research as W.

Plagiarism

A couple of fellow Yalies suggested W got "more than the usual help" from fellow students on his papers. One classmate, XXXXXXX, says that he was paid \$125 (a hefty sum for the late '60s) to write a paper for W's English class, and added, "The task was more difficult because I had to look at his previous papers and write this one more or less in the same 'style' — 'style' being a primitive butchery of the mother tongue. Apparently the notion that subject and verb should agree was — and still is, I gather — a novel one to Mr. Bush."

Analysis: Call me crazy, but look at the latest polls on how many kids cheat in high school. I think that this kind of admission could actually help us. We could even leak this if we need to and get a little sympathy.

Hazing

There's one report that W took particularly sadistic pleasure in torturing one inductee to the "Skull and Bones" club, and that the recruit had to be taken to a local hospital for treatment. The P.I. spoke to the man in question, now an officer with a New York credit firm, who refused to confirm or deny the story and would only say, "I always liked George. He sure knew how to drink."

Analysis: I think this falls under the heading of "boys will be boys, and Yalies will be Yalies," and one way or another the public won't get excited.

Public Drunkenness

There are more than a few instances of falling down in public, vomiting, etc., including one incident where W flew a Coast Guard plane over East Texas in a state of complete inebriation and started to dive-bomb a radio tower.

Analysis: One or two stories like this do us no damage. If, however, the public fixes in its mind an image of W as a fall-down puking drunk, that isn't exactly great. If this does come out, I suggest we admit everything, but explain it all took place when he was "under the age of 25." This is, of course, stretching the truth by a good ten years, but the subject matter is disgusting and I think the press will let it go.

Drunken Driving

There is no question that on several occasions W was stopped by police and released on account of his family. Two former Texas state troopers, XXXXX XXXXXXX and XXXXXXX XXXX, spoke to our Investigator only after he showed them our letter saying he was acting on your behalf. It seems unlikely that they'll talk to the media or the Democrats.

Analysis: If this comes out, we should limit this to two occasions. Beyond that, it starts to get sticky.

Sexual Escapades

The report contains, as you know, several instances of W being involved, usually just for a single evening (though in two cases for 24 hours) with more than one woman at the same time. In one instance, both women were Negro, and on another occasion, one of the women was, reportedly, part Eskimo.

Analysis: Clinton paved a broad path here; we should be able to follow him down it without much consequence.

More Escapades

Of more concern are two instances, neither of which were included in the written report (due to sensitivity) where a threesome or foursome may have included another male. One alleged participant says, "Junior was so far gone in my opinion that he probably doesn't even remember it. In fact, I'd guess he didn't have the faintest idea who was in the room or what he was doing — but believe me, he did it!"

Analysis: This is the sort of thing that wouldn't really do any politician outside of San Francisco much good. The path Clinton paved isn't this wide. On the other hand, my conversations with the P.I. suggest that the people allegedly involved would not "stand up to much public scrutiny, and they know it, so they're very unlikely to seek out their 15 minutes." If they do, we should be ready to quickly discredit them with arrest records, evidence of blackmail attempts, the usual. R.T. [identity unclear] can take care of this.

Add More Escapades

There are clearly instances where W paid for it. The Investigator was concerned something "kinky" might have been requested, but as far as he could determine (not all of these women were willing to talk; there are apparently some things they won't do for money), only the

most traditional requests were made. "I could've done it in my sleep. In fact, I may have," said one Brazilian girl.

Analysis: This is a tricky one to gauge. It might actually help us with men, but it could hurt with some women. The risk here would seem to be that something "kinky" might eventually emerge which would stick in the public imagination. Only W himself knows whether any such "information" might possibly come out.

Cocaine

There were several published reports that W was arrested for cocaine in 1972, and was taken to county jail but released without any formal charges being filed. According to this scenario, he was given a clandestine sentence of one year of community service. It is clear that he worked at a center for troubled youths in Houston. "Before and after this period of public service," stated one bitter source, "he was a playboy pure and simple. And he has shown no other inclination, other than being Governor of Texas, to serve the public need."

The 1972 incident has been mentioned in the press without lingering or doing much damage. The P.I. found further confirmation, but "purely at an anecdotal level," including one former friend who W apparently discussed the matter with in some detail. This person would definitely not go public, since he himself fears federal indictment and needs as much government help as he can get.

Analysis: it seems we're out of the woods on this one.

Add Cocaine

As you know, the P.I. found further evidence of cocaine use. Statements by drug dealers are, fortunately, of no real concern to us, but there are also ex-classmates, Houston high rollers, oil men, oil hucksters, and so on.

Analysis: Let's hope W's cocaine use is like Clinton's messing around with Monica: The public knows about it, believes it, and doesn't really care because it means W is a "sinner like us." The danger, of course, is that if the Democrats spin this the wrong way they may be able to fix an unfortunate image into the public mind.

Heroin

Obviously this didn't make it into the written report. There was, in the words of three separate sources, what one called "experimentation in this area." The first time, it was completely inadvertent: He snorted heroin thinking it was cocaine. Subsequent use was apparently intentional.

Analysis: For whatever reasons (I guess we have Hollywood to thank for this, or Wall Street), the public has always seen heroin as a far more dangerous drug than cocaine, so there's danger here for the campaign as well. Fortunately, anyone who could substantiate this charge is, himself (or herself), experienced with this drug — and therefore of little value as a witness in a public political debate. Of course the most troubling incident in this area is:

The "Andrews" Incident

As you know, "Sarah Andrews" (not her real name) is being held in her family's compound in New England. To review: Sarah is the sister of "Biff Andrews," who was a Deke at Yale. She came through Houston in the late '70s and looked up W. One thing led to another. Shortly after the relationship began, or so she claims, she started to purchase drugs from W on a casual basis: "He was clearly not what you'd normally call a dealer, but he was providing me with what I needed, and sometimes when I was over there, other people would drop by — not a lot, but a few — and they'd go into the other room. It was pretty obvious what was happening."

Analysis: None of this is good, but it seems containable. Sarah is unlikely to talk, especially when she's under house guard. Her family is happy to cooperate with us. Her uncle claims in fact to be a good friend of George Sr. Unfortunately, as you know, there is more:

"Toby"

"Sarah" claims that in the spring of 1980 (though we believe it was 1981, see below), she purchased some "bad shit" from W, and she and

her girlfriend ("Toby") were poisoned, and her girlfriend had to be taken to a local hospital where she almost died. Fortunately, "Toby" recovered, but this was, "Sarah" says, the end of her relationship with W. "He didn't believe me when I told him what happened, he didn't believe the drugs were bad. He acted like I was just a big hassle and, as he put it, 'another colossal bitch' who I have to get out of my life." At this point, "Sarah" took the hint. She has subsequently been married a number of times, but is still, when she's on good behavior, an accepted member of Polite Society.

"Sarah" and "Toby" had one friend who can corroborate parts of this story, but the friend ("Betsy") has been made aware of the implications of going public, and seems suitably concerned. "Tell everybody I'm not a blabbermouth." She has also had a problem with the electrical system of her car, which caught fire without warning. While we (obviously) had nothing to do with this, she considers it a warning and we think she will keep quiet.

Analysis: The P.I. investigated the incident and found evidence of an admission into a Houston hospital in March of 1981 for the girl known as "Toby." After this, she pretty much drops out of sight. Apparently she went to Europe sometime in the mid-'80s and married a French businessman, but was divorced a few years later after she moved in with a Spanish sculptor. Her family does not know her present whereabouts.

What most worries the P.I. is that there are three separate strands to this story. While all seem contained at the moment, if one strand should start to unravel, the others might follow suit.

Ties to Business, Texas Rangers, and Terms as Governor

This also didn't make it to the written report. There are two areas that are troubling.

One says W used his contacts from his playboy days to set up "parties" for other investors in the Texas Rangers ballclub. The P.I. said, "The implication is that W functioned as a pimp for these guys, and that it was partially as payback for these 'services' that he got such a big payday when his shares were sold. The further suggestion is that he had evidence that could've been used for blackmail. He knew where the condoms were buried."

W had invested \$600,000 in the Rangers and sold his share for around \$14 million, most of it as a "bonus for putting together the investment team," something which, according to a few sources, he didn't really do.

The second report is that whatever public interactions have come to light (businessmen who've been kindly treated by the administration in Austin, etc.) are only the tip of the iceberg. No one would really go on record here. One man said, "You have to realize there's a tradition down in Austin. Lyndon Johnson was not the cleanest hound dog on the hunt, and Junior has followed in his footsteps. Think Spiro Agnew."

[Agnew, Vice President under Richard Nixon, had to resign after it was revealed that he received money in a paper bag when he was governor of Maryland.]

Analysis: In the absence of hard information, this stuff is hard to judge. Is there something concrete that could do us damage? If so, would the people involved ever speak out? It seems doubtful. But what about the cronies, the servants, the hangers-on? Remember it was the Arkansas State Troopers who got Clinton in trouble. Presumably there are no secretaries or Assistant Vice-Presidents who'll feel the urge to become famous, but one never knows. The real danger which the P.I. expressed to me, is that "There's someone out there I didn't find. Not all of these people connect easily to one another. My fear is the Democrats already have someone, and they're just waiting for the last week in August to let it fly."

Overall Analysis

In casual conversation at the end of our talk, the P.I. mentioned that he'd done "three or four" previous reports on other politicians because "everybody wants to know what the other side will find out." He went on to say that what he'd dug up here "wasn't much more than what he saw in similar cases."

Attack of the Mumiacs

by Marc Cooper

When earlier this year I wrote an editorial harshly criticizing the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal movement, I knew I was going to get some negative reaction. Indeed, I went out of my way, employing a sarcastic tone and some embroidered rhetoric. I wanted to be provocative. I wanted to stick a pin in the consciousness of my fellow lefties. Actually, I wanted to climb into their collective ear, fire up a megaphone, and shout, at the top of my lungs, "What the fuck's a matter with you?"

That's why the piece I published in the *New York Press*, and later in *Mother Jones Online*, called for a year "free of Mumia." I didn't hesitate to brand Mumia for what he is: "a flaky cult member" whose politics were "tissue-thin." I conceded that, while probably guilty for the shooting of a cop two decades ago, Mumia, in fact, deserved a new trial.

But the central point of my essay wasn't to just trash Mumia or to poke fun at those who genuflect to his silly political pontifications; instead it was to argue that, as a death penalty abolitionist, I was appalled at the glorification granted to Mumia while hundreds, thousands of other unknowns languish on Death Row. Of 3500 such convicts, I noted, a full third have no legal representation at all.

And, I argued, an authentic abolitionist opposes execution for the innocent and the guilty—for mother-rapers and serial killers, not just politically-cuddly, deadlocked poseurs like Mumia who have the temerity to proclaim themselves "political prisoners." In short, I was making a passionate, if controversial, plea for a more serious, more strategic, and more effective movement to roll back the death penalty.

So as I said, I knew I would catch some flak. But after 35 years on the American Left, nothing could have prepared me for the tidal wave of vitriol, character assassination, and attempts at censorship that washed my way. Some of the details of that campaign against me bear repeating, not out of any penchant for self-pity (I rather relished the fight anyway) but because in them reside some valuable political conclusions and lessons.

It all started kind of quietly. An editor of *Against The Current*—a small theoretical magazine, supposedly of the anti-authoritarian Left, to which over the years I have granted permission a couple of times to reprint my work—wrote another editor suggesting that, in light of my Mumia column, I no longer be solicited for any future contributions. Considering that this mag is the only publication in which my work appeared in 20 years that has never paid me a dime, I shrugged off that amateur act of blacklisting.

But then an organized campaign took off, thanks mostly to the Internet. From Boston, *Z Magazine*, a scantily-read (and mostly unreadable) journal of the Anarcho-Green left,

published a scathing editorial condemning me. In itself, no problem. But the comrades at Z couldn't help suggesting that I had some dark motive—lucre. Just how I would economically benefit from arguing an abolitionist position was never explained.

But, here was the first lesson I learned from this experience: the propensity on the Left to rebut challenging concepts not with reasoned argument, but with unfounded suggestions of selling-out, literally. "As to Marc Cooper," thundered the Z commissars, "his *New York Press* essay is beneath contempt. Whether Cooper is running to the right looking for lucre or just confused doesn't matter a lot. We have a simple plea: Let's make 2000 a year free of Cooper's kind of garbage."

Buried in that paragraph was another little gem. Running to the right, it was stated, means automatically looking for lucre. By inversion, moving to the left must mean seeking poverty. Easy enough to understand, given that Z is another magazine that never pays its writers.

After the salvo from Z, with traces of my blood in the water, the attack picked up full speed. It had two command and control centers. The Refuse and Resist network, a pro-Mumia outfit run by Maoists of the Revolutionary Communist Party, posted attacks on me on literally dozens of websites. Those posting accused me of practicing what was called "Snuff Journalism." My arguing that Mumia should get a new trial and that he, and everyone else on Death Row, should be spared execution apparently wasn't good enough. I really wanted Mumia dead.

But it was from Berkeley where the nastiest jabs were launched. I had already earned the disdain of countless Berkelyoids because, last summer, I had written a few pieces dissenting from their view of what was going on at Pacifica Radio (but *that's* for another article). The Berkeley zealots got together and cooked up a coordinated e-mail crusade against me. First, they started with me—some 250 or more e-mails sent to my address—none of them bothering to refute my arguments, but only condemning my person.

Most were laughable crap. Here's a sad sample from Lynn Gerry, a poor thing who has seemingly dedicated her life to chasing the demons from Pacifica Radio. Once again she speculated on my motives: "Maybe its professional jealousy—people are a lot more interested in Mumia's analysis pieces than in Cooper's."

To the credit of the editors of *Mother Jones Online*, they organized an interactive debate with me on my Mumia column and tried their best to filter out the *ad hominem* and stick to the issues. The most marvelous item surfaced during that exercise. To bolster my argument, I decided to do some superficial research on Maoist honcho C. Clark Kissinger, the head poobah of the Free Mumia campaign.

My instincts paid off big time: Kissinger (no relation to Henry, at least I think) was, in

fact, *not* opposed to capital punishment in general, but only for Mumia. In the archives of the rag published by the Revolutionary Communist Party, I found this little ditty written by Comrade Kissinger, extolling the methods that Mao used in his own drug war:

"A different approach was taken toward the big-time drug traffickers who got rich off the suffering of the people. They were classified 'Enemies of the People.' These big-time criminals were put on trial in front of thousands of people. People whose lives were ruined by drugs testified against them. These big-time oppressors got *cold hard justice* [Kissinger's emphasis]: life in prison or public execution. There weren't many such executions—only five or ten in the largest cities."

Of the hundreds lobbed my way, I have to admit that two of the e-mailed stink bombs really stung me. One called me the "son of Goebbels"—a characterization I found both stupefying and sickening. Clark Kissinger could applaud executions carried out in front of jeering stadium crowds and be accepted as leader of a supposedly anti-death penalty movement. But, I, in contrast, was a Nazi, for suggesting that Mumia gets in the way of abolition.

And the other—which was sent to me in multiple forms, thereby revealing its coordinated character—referred to my time spent in Chile. In the early 1970s I lived in Chile and had the enormous privilege at age 22 of serving as personal translator to President Salvador Allende. Socialist Allende came to power in 1970 and was overthrown three years later in a CIA-backed coup. I narrowly escaped the military regime eight days after the coup—evacuated from Chile as a UN refugee. I lost countless friends to prison, torture, exile and death.

And now, my Berkeley antagonists were sending me these messages: "Marc, did your friends in the intelligence community tip you off so you were not at Allendes side the day they killed him?" Or: "Where were you exactly the moment that Allende died? How is it that you survived?"

But I had little time to be nauseated by this execrable stuff. The e-mail campaign escalated into an attempt to have my principal employer, *The Nation* magazine, fire me for my impure thoughts. Evan Davis, a True Believer from Ohio, posted a message on several Mumia cyber-bulletin boards, and encouraged readers to send letters to *The Nation* demanding that my work no longer be published. Judging from the letter he wrote to *The Nation*, he showed no hesitation in demanding I be censored, even though he wasn't sure it was the same Cooper who had written the Mumia piece. His letter:

"Subject: Sick of Marc Cooper

"Dear Nation folks,

"Although I have not received definite confirmation that your Marc Cooper wrote the following article I wanted to let you know

that his sloppy and egotistical reporting was the reason I let my subscription lapse. His position on the Pacifica struggle was unsupported, his continuing opposition to the democratization of Pacifica is inexcusable, his reference to the anti-WTO protests in Seattle as "phantasmagorical" was unprofessional and your continuing to offer this bum a forum either in print or on the air is incomprehensible and embarrassing.

"If he indeed did write the article below it is no surprise to me given his apparent contempt for his audience(s) and while I didn't subscribe to *The Nation* expecting to agree across the board with every contributor I find the pseudo-intellectual and sophomoric [sic] Cooper just too offensive to ignore. Here's the article he is alleged to have written. . . ."

Another defender of free speech, Jonathan T. Nack, joined the fray, spamming around his own incitement to my being gagged and fired: "I strongly encourage replies to Cooper's extremely poor and politically backwards arguments. I also encourage letters to both *The Nation* and Pacifica which ask: Who the hell is Mr. Cooper and whose interests is he serving? Does he deserve to have his opinions published and aired by progressive media outlets?"

Apparently not, in the minds of about 35 protestors who, last February, picketed me and my daily radio show on Pacifica in Los Angeles. Now, here's a wonderful irony. Thanks to the editorial freedom granted by Pacifica's principle of listener-sponsorship, there I was on the air in Los Angeles, backed up by 112,000 watts—doing a show that afternoon on why the Cuban embargo should be lifted; on the legacy of Vietnam Veterans Against the War; and a critical view of the NATO intervention in Kosovo—and outside my studio window a couple of dozen dunderheads are marching around in a circle chanting, "Free Mumia! Dump Cooper!"

The campaign against me petered out, but it has hardly died. My wife asked me recently if, in retrospect, I regret having written the Mumia pieces and having been subjected to the ensuing shitstorms. I didn't hesitate in answering that I'd do it all over again.

I am actually grateful. Because, at a cynical age 49, I thought there was little left to learn about, at least, that part of existence and the world nearest to me. And I was wrong. This past year has been rich in education. It forced me to think hard. Why, I kept asking myself, were the rebuttals on this issue so damn personal? Why, instead of political debate, was the lowest sort of personal attack being used against me?

Eventually, an answer began to emerge—one that has helped me clarify a discomfort I have often felt as a partisan of the left. Truth is, most American leftists are not victims of oppression. Their ideological position is a choice, a luxury—certainly not a necessity born of real experience. This leads to two problems: The first is a need to recognize and

Waiting For Al

by Matt Neuman

[April 22, 1970, Washington, D.C., late afternoon. Five men have gathered in a four-room suite in the old, elegant Fairfax Hotel. They are: William F. Buckley, Jr., founder of the conservative journal, *National Review*; Louis Armstrong, the legendary jazz trumpeter; Rodney Dangerfield, the standup comic; Carl Sagan, a professor of Astrophysics at Cornell University; and Tommy Chong, half of the comedy team of Cheech and Chong. Sagan stands by the window admiring the view while Dangerfield paces nervously. Armstrong is lying on the couch. Chong has just returned from the bathroom. Buckley is reading a book at the dining room table.]

then assimilate, to actually *feel* the oppression of others. Enter Mumia.

Second, for all their blathering about saving others, or even saving the world, many on the left adopt the positions they do in a quest for pure personal and individual self-realization and self-validation. Indeed, much like their counterparts on the Christian Right, they feel morally redeemed by their ideological posture.

If one supports Mumia, for example, he or she is *ipso facto* a Morally Superior Person. Hence, when someone questions one of their icons—as I did Mumia—it is really *their* personal integrity and faith that is being questioned. Anyone who has spent a year or two in Catholic School getting whacked around by the nuns probably would have understood back then what it took me my bushwhacking by the Mumiacs to fully comprehend.

In what better context to fully understand the slur leveled against me by the Council of Political Bishops who run *Z Magazine*. Once again, "running to the right" by their definition automatically means moral corruption and seduction by lucre. Inversely, running to the left *must* mean self-denying moral purity. And you wonder, sometimes, why the American left remains so ineffective?

In the meantime, I have wondered if I should persist in my propagandizing around Mumia. Writing another, more in-depth column on Mumia's lunatic politics, is a temptation. I've also gotten a hankering to print some T-shirts. I would design them with a hard-nosed political message on the back, written in German. On the front, a picture of Mumia and the two-word slogan, "Frei Mumia!" But I'm afraid no one would get the joke.

Marc Cooper is an award-winning journalist; his book, *Pinochet and Me: An Anti-Memoir*, will be published by Verso in October. Mumia Abu-Jamal is also an award-winning journalist; his book, *All Things Censored*, has just been published by Seven Stories Press.

Dangerfield: Man, it's hot in here.

Sagan: Hard to believe it's snowing right now in Ithaca.

Dangerfield: Then I say we go to Ithaca. Hey, Tommy, you think they have any cold ginger ale?

Chong: I'll take a look. [*Goes into the kitchen.*]

Armstrong: Could you get me one, too? I'd appreciate it.

Chong: Sure.

Dangerfield: They got air conditioning in this dump?

Sagan: They must. This is Washington. Usually by the door there's a — there we go.

Armstrong: I heard the click. It's on.

Dangerfield: Thank you.

Armstrong: It's always like this in Washington.

Dangerfield: Really? They should share the humidity with some of the other cities.

Armstrong: Just wait until summer.

Dangerfield: Not me. I'm moving to Ithaca. Right, doc?

Sagan: What?

Chong [*returning from the kitchen*]: Two ginger ales.

Armstrong: Thanks. Hey, you got an opener?

Chong: Here, give it to me. [*Removes the bottle cap with his teeth.*]

Dangerfield: I'd hate to have his dental bills.

Buckley: Did he say when he would be here?

Chong: He didn't say, exactly. He just said "soon."

Dangerfield: That could be next Tuesday.

Chong: He's pretty reliable.

Sagan: You know, with the light this way on the Potomac, it resembles the vaporous surface of Venus.

Armstrong: Man, you study the stars and all that stuff, don't you, doc? That is some heavy shit, man. It spooks me, all those stars out there. Just how many stars are there?

Sagan: Billions.

Dangerfield: Billions and billions.

Buckley: So, you think he might be here by dinnertime?

Chong: Maybe. No way of knowing. What's that you're reading?

Buckley: Marlowe. The only playwright of his time comparable to Shakespeare, although there is speculation that he was, in fact, the Bard.

Sagan: I have heard that. I've also heard Francis Bacon.

Armstrong: What did you say your friend's name was?

Chong: Al.

Armstrong: And you're sure he's not with the cops, or the FBI?

Chong: Hey, don't worry. His dad's a senator.

Buckley: An institution of higher crime if ever there was one.

Sagan: You know what? I think it's getting

a little too cold in here. I'm going to turn the air conditioning down.

Chong: Tell me — what do you like about smoking pot? You're not exactly the person I think of when I think of potheads, you know what I mean?

Buckley: Ah, well, let's see. It relaxes, without deadening the senses. Bach on the harpsichord takes on an entirely new meaning. And listening to the great Mr. Armstrong play is positively ethereal.

Armstrong: Hey, thanks man, whatever it is you said.

Buckley: And if you're out sailing, and a storm rears up and you're facing 20-foot waves off the coast of Maine — it beats Dramamine hands down.

Chong: Wow.

Sagan: You know, I have an Earth Day dinner to attend at seven. Do you think —

Dangerfield: Earth Day?

Sagan: Earth Day.

Dangerfield: That's a new one on me.

Sagan: Really? It's been in every newspaper, magazine, on TV —

Dangerfield: It wasn't in *Variety*.

Sagan: Well, it's the first time that we, as temporary residents of this planet, are actually doing something on a massive scale to raise public awareness about the great dangers the earth faces if we don't limit our use of fossil fuels, recycle our waste, and protect our natural resources.

Buckley: A naive pipe dream, and a nightmare for the free-market economy.

Armstrong: Hey, I think it's a good thing, what they're doing.

Dangerfield: Okay if I smoke?

Sagan: Just open a window, please, if you don't mind.

Dangerfield: Not at all. You got a cigarette?

Sagan: I don't smoke — cigarettes.

Armstrong: Here.

Dangerfield: Thanks, Satch. I owe you a Lucky.

[The phone rings.]

Buckley: Shouldn't someone answer it?

Armstrong: Maybe it's him — what's-his-name.

Dangerfield: Here, I'll get it. [He picks up the phone.] Hello? Who? No, he's not. Me? I'm Ed McMahon. [He hangs up.]

Armstrong: You're a funny guy.

Dangerfield: Yeah, then why ain't I rich?

Sagan: Excuse me, where's the bathroom?

Chong: Down the hall, first door on the right.

Sagan: Thanks. [He walks out of the room.]

Buckley: What time is it?

Dangerfield: Twenty to.

Buckley: Twenty to what?

Dangerfield: Six.

Chong: Hey, you know what? I think I've got a joint in one of the pockets of my jacket.

Armstrong: Then go get it, baby.

[Chong goes into the hallway.]

Dangerfield: Hey, Satch, you ever play the Ruby Room in Detroit?

Armstrong: Never heard of it. But that doesn't mean I never played there.

Dangerfield: Good jazz club. Lenny Bruce played there.

Armstrong: Never heard of it, but like I said —

[Chong re-enters the room, holding a lit joint.]

Chong [inhaling]: Lit a doobie. Here. [He hands it to Buckley, who takes a long slow drag, then passes it to Armstrong.]

Armstrong: Thanks, man.

Buckley: I remember when you performed at Yale. 1948. You played an old Kid Ory tune.

[Armstrong hands it to Dangerfield, who takes a quick hit, then passes it to Chong.]

Armstrong: That's one good memory you got. Where'd you say you saw me?

Buckley: Yale.

Sagan [re-entering]: You know what? I've got to go. I really do.

Chong [passing the joint to Sagan]: Here.

Sagan: Thanks. [Takes a long drag on the joint.]

Chong: Good shit, eh?

Sagan [holding his breath]: Yeah.

Dangerfield: Don't bogart that joint, my friend, pass it over to Rodney. [Sagan passes it to Dangerfield.]

Sagan [exhaling]: I really should go.

[There's a soft knock on the door. They all freeze.]

Armstrong: You think it's him?

Chong: Could be. I'll check. [He goes over to the door as the others, getting more stoned by the second, observe.] Who is it?

Voice [whispering]: Al.

Chong: Who?

Voice: Al.

Chong: Who?

Voice: Al.

Chong: Al?

Voice: Yeah, Al.

Chong: Al's not here, man.

Voice: No, I'm Al.

Chong: Who?

Voice: Al.

Chong: You're looking for Al?

Voice: No, I am Al.

Chong: Al's not here, man, I keep telling you.

Voice: Let me in, I don't have a key.

Chong: You what?

Voice: I don't have a key. A key.

Chong: You've got a key? [to others] He's got a key.

Voice: Open up.

Chong: Okay, man. [He opens the door, revealing Al Gore.] Al, it's you.

Gore: Yes. Sorry I'm so late. There's a demonstration on H Street that's got traffic backed up for — hey, has someone been smoking in here?

Buckley: Nobody but us chickens. [He starts giggling uncontrollably.]

Gore: Gee, I wish you hadn't done that.

Chong: Hey, sorry, man. I thought your folks were away.

Gore: They are. But the smell gets in the curtains.

Sagan: I better go. Do you, uh, have my little package?

Gore: Yeah, sure . . . here. It's Panamanian Red. No seeds. Thirty-five a lid. [He hands him a small brown paper bag with a rubber-band wrapped around it.]

Sagan: Thank you.

Buckley: Panama. My kind of country.

[Gore hands out similar bags to the others.]

Sagan: I'd like to stay, but I'm already a little late to this big Earth Day dinner.

Dangerfield: You going by the Hilton? We can share a cab.

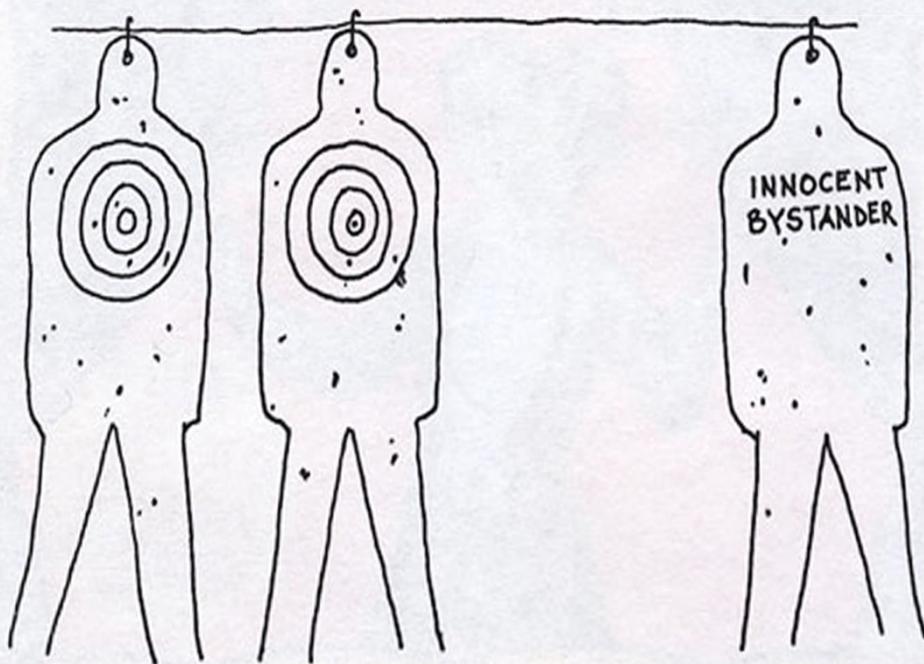
Buckley: Mr. Armstrong, allow me to drive you home.

Armstrong: Thanks, but I'm staying in this hotel. You can walk me to the elevator.

Chong: Here's your money, man. One seventy-five. [He hands Gore a fistful of money and heads out the door with the others, who are all stoned and giggling at this point.]

Gore: Uh, great, thanks. Hey, be careful you guys. Seriously.

[The elevator arrives. They all get on. Gore closes the door.]



D. Barstow

MEDIA FREAK

Filler Items

• From *Month* magazine, "Voice of the Disability Nation": "Christopher Reeve, a former Superman who is today paralyzed from the politically correct lobe down, followed the Superbowl debut of his first rent-a-head endorsement with the announcement that he will now rent his head for feature-length films."

• James R. Kincaid in *Salon*: "Several speakers at an L.A. police seminar I attended a few years back laughingly admitted that the largest collection of child porn in the country is in the hands of cops, who edit and publish it in sting operations. There is at most, they say, a small cottage industry among civilians in which pictures (most of them vintage) are traded."

• Classified ad in *N.Y. Press*: "Having trouble whipping your lover without breaking a light fixture? Attend Mistress Midori's 'Flogging for New Yorkers' workshop..."

• In San Antonio, a heroin addict was caught using a fake penis while being urine tested for drugs by his parole officers. The telltale signs were evident by the bleached pink appearance of the penis and the fact that his urine came out in a sprinkler-like fashion. The final giveaway came when he fumbled his organ and it fell on the floor.

• Michael Musto in the *Village Voice*: "What Academy Awards host was once about to announce, 'Richard Gere was going to present an award with Fievel the mouse, but Fievel backed out' — until he spotted Gere in the crowd and decided it would be inadvisable? Free answer: Billy Crystal. Oscars writer Bruce Vilanch tells the story in his stage show. What other amusingly tasteless crack did Crystal and Vilanch consider, but summarily reject? It was colonoscopy-related: 'Katie Couric had two favorite movies last year — *Rear Window* and *The Whole Nine Yards*.'"

• Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, recently diagnosed with prostate cancer, had previously called for the elimination of a \$750,000 program to provide free prostate cancer screening for uninsured New Yorkers.

• E-mail from Robert Anton Wilson: "This virus works on the honor system. Now that you have received this message, please forward it to everyone in your address book and delete a bunch of your own files at random."

• A radio station in Oakland took down billboards captioned "morning sickness" featuring pregnant women with the heads of two male morning disc jockeys. One woman who collected signatures against the ads said they promoted homosexuality and complained that she had to "reprogram" her granddaughter about pregnancy.

• The pharmaceutical division of Japan Tobacco, the world's third largest cigarette company, bought the rights to lung-cancer vaccines under development by U.S. firms

Cell Genesys and Corixa. Now under one roof are the cause, treatment and potential prevention of lung cancer.

• A 54-year-old administrative assistant at Quantum Chemical Corp. was awarded \$178,168 in an age-discrimination case after being told she was "chronologically challenged."

• The technique of pubic hair transplants was a topic at a conference of the International Society of Hair Restoration Surgery. Dr. Tom Rosanelli said that many Asian women are opting to have extra pubic hair placed on their private parts to increase their sexual allure. The procedure involves taking hair from the back of the woman's head, but the new hair must be trimmed constantly or it will grow as long as two feet, which "could be difficult if you're wearing a mini-skirt."

• Pencils with the slogan "Too Cool to Do Drugs" have been sharpened by students, turning the message into "Cool to Do Drugs" and then simply "Do Drugs."

• Reverend D. Johnston: "In building our Christian Amusement Park, we will provide a ministry to the saved. Unserved people will not be welcome in the park, they will not feel comfortable there. People that are not Christians will not be allowed to enter the park. We will make the park the envy of all secular amusement parks, worldwide. Since it is to be built outside of New York City, we will be

allowing Hispanic Christians into some sections of the park. Once again, the park is going to be just like Heaven. Unserved people will be turned away at the gate."

• From Lyle Stuart's *Hot News*: "At long last, L. Ron Hubbard's terrible novel, *Battlefield Earth*, was made into a terrible film starring Scientology sucker John Travolta. To insure its success, followers of Scientology were directed to go to theater box offices and buy six and eight admission tickets at a time. The plan was to buy enough tickets to make the film #1 for the week. At least two million dollars worth of tickets were bought under this directive from cult leader David Miscavige. It didn't work. The film was a distant #2 as movie-house owners tried to understand how they could have sold so many tickets and have such sparsely filled theaters."

• T-shirts with attitude: Seen on the back of a passing motorcyclist: "If You Can Read This, My Wife Fell Off." On a jogger: "I Am a Bomb Technician — If You See Me Running, Try to Keep Up." And on a young skinhead punk dressed in black, multiple piercings, tattoos and heavy stompin' boots: "Be Warned! The Nature of Your Oppression Is the Aesthetic of Our Anger!"

• Astronomers seem to have found proof that the universe is asymmetrical and therefore very unlikely to collapse again in the cosmological near future.



This CD will be released by Artemis Records in August.