

**AN ESSAY BY DAVID RUBINSON**



PHOTO: GARRIE ROUSE

# SEVEN DAYS IN NEW YORK CITY

*On the Outside at the  
Republic National Convention*

**ColdType**

# SEVEN DAYS IN NEW YORK

## *On the Outside at the Republic National Convention*

Members of the Human Race of every size, shape, color, gender, odor, stance, agenda and world view, came together in September in Bloom's Burg demanding to be – at lon-n-n-n-ng last – HEARD.

HEARD – despite being muzzled, repressed, marginalized, demonized, ignored, misrepresented and demeaned by the pimp media, whose bread is spread thick with oleo of an entirely different nature.

HEARD – despite the initial threats of arrest, tasers, and pepper spray, and the ultimate reality of unindicted detention and filthy imprisonment under the new working definition of treason as drafted by UberPutz Ashcroft, and implemented with unmistakable enthusiasm by Mayor Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Kelly.

On the streets – hundreds of thousands of people, many there every day from 6am to 3am, doing just about everything to get the message out: marching, singing, chanting, lying down, biking, praying and crying. Inside Madison Square Garden they had the real demonstration – a week-long parade of public hostility, venality, sheer unadorned mendacity, and unmitigated personal vilification.

Our efforts were met with grudging, uninspired, cowardly and decidedly imperceptive coverage by the major media. The Republican national Convention was covered 24/7, in sycophantic, voluminous, minute detail and largely absent any sense of journalistic inquiry. The overwhelmingly dominant voice was that of FOX News.

This is a selective retrospect.

## **SEVEN DAYS IN NEW YORK CITY**

### **FRIDAY, AUGUST 27**

**F**or eight years, on the last Friday of every month, bicycle riders in New York gather and ride through the city. This evening there were 2,000 of them, meeting as usual at Union Square. The NY police had seen this all before, and were cheerful and unfazed, and bicycle cops accompanied the peaceriders slowly uptown toward Madison Square Garden. All seemed peaceful, well-organized, good-spirited, business as usual, and I walked with the group for a while, before I went on my way. However, a few blocks uptown, orange netting (portable pens) was spread across the path, fire trucks suddenly arrived to block the cross streets, and cops viciously corralled and cracked down on the hapless bike riders caught in the middle. Hundreds were beaten, arrested en masse, and their bikes taken.

This was a tragic foreshadowing of the week to come.

Throughout the week, the Police were out in overwhelming numbers, but they were disorganized and poorly led. Individual cops sometimes seemed supportive, and if not sympathetic, were rarely antagonistic. But, time after time, a superior officer would change the drill, a previously negotiated protocol would disintegrate, and the cops would suddenly be ordered to change tactics. In the bikers' case, all was going fine, until the cops did a 180, and without provocation and with no warning, commenced mass arrests.

I was to witness this pattern repeated daily.

The bikers were taken to the abandoned Maritime Pier 57 which the NY Health Department had closed as uninhabitable due to asbestos and chemical pollution. Pier 57 was to become known as Guantanamo on the Hudson. It had been declared unfit for humans, and for the old buses, trucks and snowplows that were previously housed there. But the City of New York deemed it perfect for their detainees.

Hundreds of prisoners were held there, in intolerable and inhuman conditions, refused access to lawyers, food, water, toilets, beds and medical treatment. There they remained – some for days – without being read their rights, arraigned, or indicted, and uninformed of the charges against them. They had no choice but to sleep on the concrete floors in the filthy detritus of oil, soot, battery acid and rat droppings, denied the basic rights guaranteed in what used to be called the US Constitution.

For weeks preceding the RNC, Bloomberg and Kelly and the New York Pimp Press had trumpeted the preparedness of the police team and facilities. They were, they said, totally ready and fully expecting 1000 arrests a DAY. Pier 57 was chosen for a reason. It is inconceivable that they were unaware of conditions there. They could not have been uninformed.

Numerous detainees told me stories of the actions of the police staff at Pier 57. Some prisoners had their pictures and prints done three or four times, because the wrong picture was placed in the wrong file or the fingerprints lost. Some detainees ended up on line for hours, just to be made to repeat the identical process. This was no display of pathetic ineptitude, or inefficiency. This was not incompetence; this was the NY police,

## DAVID RUBINSON

obviously under orders to do anything they could to make life miserable for the prisoners. The police deliberately delayed arraignments for days, and shifted detainees to other facilities, and then back to Pier 57, for no discernible reason.

In one sense, the prisoners were lucky. It was only Guantanamo on the Hudson, and not Abu Ghraib, as it is in so many American jails. Finally, under extreme pressure, a NY state judge ordered the prisoners freed. Even after this, the police did not comply, and the judge found them in contempt of court, and fined the NY Police Dept. \$1000 per prisoner. All the prisoners save a very few, were ultimately freed, some having been incarcerated for days.

### **SATURDAY, AUGUST 28**

**O**f all the various groups participating in the week of protests, Code Pink, led by Mea Benjamin and Judith Evans, rose above the rest, with wit, unrelenting boldness, tenacity, courage and creativity, in venues as varied as Strawberry Fields and the floor of the RNC itself.

On Saturday night, Code Pink presented Women Against War, filling historic Riverside Church with 2,000 pink-clad and costumed women and a scattering of sympathetic men. We heard erudition and soulfulness from Amy Goodman and Aya de Leon and others, that stood out in clear contrast to the teleprompted pre-digested orations that were to come at the RNC. But we also heard that we had to vote for Kerry. You would think that Mea Benjamin would know better by now. She got thrown out of the Democratic Convention in Boston for protesting the lack of an anti-war platform, just as she, Evans, and others were to be evicted and jailed later in the week for the same offense at the RNC.

Mea knows that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans are listening to anything we are saying. So why was Eve Ensler (Vagina Monologues) haranguing us to take the L.O.T.E.? Ensler talked passionately about rape and incest, vividly evoking the profound sense of the victim's violation. But what is a choice between Bush and Kerry if not a rape? We are being violated against our will, deprived of our fundamental humanity, our ability to choose taken from us by force. We get seduced into the voting booth, and find ourselves bereft of choice. At that moment, our humanity and our dignity are stolen from us. We are being raped. What Ensler seems to be saying is – relax, lie back and enjoy it as much as possible.

### **SUNDAY, AUGUST 29**

**T**he good news is – we did NOT get another Miami. Despite the ever-helpful input of Miami Police Chief Timoney, the mass march in New York did not turn into a police riot. After weeks and months of Miami Model-style Orange Alerts, terrorist warnings, frightening proclamations from the mayor, and visions of doom from the chief of police, it was instead an energized and high spirited event of deeply held feelings, passion, beliefs. The defining millisecond of this dismal exercise in

## SEVEN DAYS IN NEW YORK CITY

political onanism we are laughably calling an election was when Bush proudly proclaimed that he woulda done the same thing again, even knowing what he knows now – and asked Kerry if he would have voted the same way then, knowing what he knows now.

Here was the moment for Kerry to rediscover the balls that have somehow disappeared into his nicely pressed khaki pants. All he had to say was: *"Like tens of millions of Americans, I was duped, manipulated, and fooled into supporting a needless massacre. Like most Americans, I supported giving emergency power to the Office of The Presidency, to use wisely and prudently in what we were told was a desperate national emergency, under potential Nuclear Attack. But all of us were lied to. Knowing the truth – what we all know now, there is no way we should have invaded Iraq."*

Well, you all know that Kerry did not say any of that, and instead came out waving his dick around, swaggering in his purple-hearted war hero outfit, sixguns blazing.

In front of Madison Square Garden, next to the coffins, and stretching back throughout the hundreds of thousands, for the five hours it took for the mass to complete its march, John Kerry lived not. Oh, there were Kerry buttons, and half-hearted signs here and there. But Kerry only existed as Not Bush. He had no life of his own, inspired no passion. He is, after all, one of THEM. Many of the coffins were accompanied by surviving family members, often with pictures of their dead. This is what the RNC delegates needed to see, not some over-budgeted and irrelevant Broadway so-called musical with lotsa chuckles and a happy ending.

After the police riot and debacle of February and March 2003, United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) had applied for a permit a year early – in June 2003 for a march up 8th Avenue, past the Gardens, and straight up to Central Park for a rally on the lawn. They never heard from the City until months later, when they negotiated with the police dept, and seemed to be reaching a mutually acceptable compromise, but the parks dept. stepped in at the last minute, to refuse the permit for Central Park, and offered an isolated and unsafe part of the West Side Highway.

When the City refused to budge, UFPJ felt compelled to accept the offer, or risk having no time to organize the event. To be sure, many UFPJ members and supporters, and many affiliated groups, disagreed vehemently with this tactic, but UFPJ proceeded. Then, under pressure, they changed course, refused the WSH site, and a week before the March sued NYC in state court, and lost.

Many, including myself, were concerned that there would be a violent confrontation between those who refused to accept the City ban on the park rally, and the police. That this never occurred is due to the flexibility of the NY police and testament to the desire on the part of the demonstrators and organizers to have a peaceful event if at all possible. When we reached Union Square, the termination point of the march, people gathered, and shared experiences, and dispersed peacefully. Thousands showed up at Central Park, but they were unimpeded and never threatened. The dialogue over who owns the Park, and who gets to use it, has just begun.

While I understand and support this style of demonstration of feelings, and

## DAVID RUBINSON

manifestation of dissent, I fail to see any future for it. The Busheviks are not playing by the rules, and those who continue to placate and cooperate with the powers that be are ultimately strengthening the status quo, and legitimizing the usurpation of our fundamental rights in the name of pragmatism. What exactly did we prove by accepting the ban on using Central Park, acceding to police dept. strictures, or behaving ourselves? That we are good little boys and girls and can do as we are told and go quietly to bed? As the events of the next day were to prove – there is no deal-making with the devil, and no reward for good behavior.

The test will be what happens NEXT? Do we all go home, and pat ourselves on the back for a nice protest, quiescently to slink into the fetid voting booths and pull Kerry's pork? Do we continue to demonize Bush? Make it his fault? As if! As if it makes any difference who the front man is as long as the strings are being pulled by the same people? As if getting rid of Bush will do a damn thing as long as They are left.

There are plenty more where he came from.

Are we or are we not willing truly to sacrifice so that our children and their children will have air to breathe and water to drink, and hopes and dreams? Or will we be satisfied with complaining, protesting, marching, every few years or months, and accept the same marginalized treatment we got this time, to go quietly into that good night of Bush vs. Kerry.

If we are to make changes, it will take much more than a weeks worth of marches, and a lot more than 2,000 prisoners.

### **MONDAY, AUGUST 30**

If the UFPJ march on August 29 was relatively peaceful, and all the nice mellow righteous liberal white people and police and mayor and New York Times writers, and compromising "official" protest leaders could perpetuate the illusion that, well OK, NY is a great place, and we all came through this pretty well, we can breathe a sigh of relief, go back to business as usual – which is to say rich getting extremely richer, the poor getting extremely poorer, and everyone else waving their arms – the illusion was broken into small jagged dangerous pieces in the next few days.

The Republicans showed up in force on Sunday the 29th and they were all in town by Monday morning. The Police and Mayor had shown that they could play nice, and the masses of passionately idealistic but inoffensive marchers could show what really good Americans they were by following all the rules, and then politely going home for dinner and watch 60 minutes.

Not so for the most abject and powerless victims of the Bushevik Regime – the weak, black, brown, poor, unemployed – the welfare victims, disabled, sick, disenfranchised, undocumented, homeless, uneducated. These were the people who didn't get permits. These were the Untouchables, the lepers who needed to be hidden from the view of all those really-kind-if-you-get-to-know-them Republicans.

## **SEVEN DAYS IN NEW YORK CITY**

Just as they are the most defenseless against the marauding exploitation of Bushevism, these were the most defenseless against The City of New York, and the police, and the major media – who recapitulated the identical bait and switch routine that we have seen work so well for so many years – sell the dream, and then once ya got 'em, fuck 'em. They allowed many of these groups to gather, and to proceed peacefully to march – and then they kicked the shit out of them. Unlike United for Peace and Justice, these "poor peoples" marches were not given permits.

3,000 people gathered for the Still We Rise march from Union Square to Madison Square Garden. Later in the day at 4PM, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union Organized the Poor Peoples March for Our Lives that kicked off at the United Nations. Other events, protests, gatherings, were sponsored by Hip Hop Nation, Immigrant Workers, Buddhists for Peace, Zapatistas Contingent, NYC AIDS Housing Network (NYCAHN), Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), Housing Works, Latino Commission on AIDS, Pratt Area Community Council (PACC), FIERCE!, Picture the Homeless, Met Council on Housing, Harlem Operation Take Back, Mothers on the Move, Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), Coalition for the Homeless, Picture the Homeless, Make the Road By Walking, Fifth Avenue Committee, Community Voices Heard, El Centro de Hospitalidad, Project Hospitality, AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition, ACT UP NY, ACT UP Philadelphia, CHAMP, LIFETIME (in California), Hepatitis C Coalition for Awareness, GMHC, AIDS Action Baltimore, AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Racial Justice 911/Still We Rise People's Assembly, Restaurant Opportunities Center and Peace Vigil at Ground Zero, which has been holding a Peace Vigil there EVERY SUNDAY since 9/11.

Does it surprise you to learn that hundreds of these people were penned, beaten, and arrested? "The problem with this country is that we have a housing program and it is called jails. We have an employment program and its called the military. We would have a health program but we have war," said a priest during the rally.

Most people paused to cheer if they chose not to join, while others leaned out of their balconies waving their arms or left their jobs to catch a glimpse of the march. As the procession moved along on 23rd Street, police began snatching demonstrators and pulling them away. One Richmonder was arrested at the march, beaten by police but released the next day.

Undercover police have infiltrated every protest and group, sticking out like sore thumbs dressed in Yankees gear, sunglasses with black bandannas tied around their necks and their heads. So far, 1,700 people have been arrested in counter-RNC demonstrations. Some arrested people have been snatched off the street or singled out from larger groups and dragged away to jail. Often the police feel confident enough to arrest 300 all at once.

The Police tactics have become quite clear – be cool while the major media is around, placate the white liberal protesters and press, appear to relate and compromise with others; then, when no one is looking, pick out the most defenseless, and kick some ass.

Life during the RNC – a perfect mirror of Real Life, the way it is every day; who gets

## DAVID RUBINSON

bashed? Gays, blacks, immigrants, the poor, Aids victims, the elderly, the homeless, children.

Who stands up for them? You got it, bro.

The Kensington March contained a large percentage of elderly people, and the organizers were determined to keep them safe and protected. They had worked out a deal with the police – and everything seemed fine. As the march continued slowly and peacefully down Second Avenue from the UN, it turned west toward Madison Sq Garden, where The Still We Rise group had arrived some hours before. At West 29th Street and Eight Avenue, a few blocks from the Garden, the police became unglued, and the scene descended into needless violence. The cops suddenly decided to bifurcate the groups, and used (portable pens) plastic netting, metal barriers, and most idiotically, police scooters – which were driven into the crowd in the attempt to split it. One scooter went down, and chaos ensued. Things were deteriorating, but the worst was yet to come.

### **TUESDAY, AUGUST 31**

**O**rganized by the A31 Action Coalition, a loose coalition of groups, and a number of other groups including the War Resistor's League, Code Pink, Ruckus, Direct Action and Stop The War, events spread throughout the city, and the police scrambled to keep up. Downtown, a harmless prank, involving stretching a ball of yarn across a small intersection in the Wall Street area, turned into more Keystone Kop Kaos, violence and arrests. A few blocks away, protesters, including the War Resistor's League, gathered in a permitted protest in front of the WTC site.

They ended up bashed, penned and busted. The pattern was becoming clear. "It's an example of the police suckering the protesters," said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, referring to the arrest of 200 protesters, who said they thought they were abiding by an agreement they had negotiated with the police as they marched from ground zero on Fulton Street. "It was a bait-and-switch tactic," she added, "where they approved a demonstration and the protesters kept up their end of the bargain. They undermined people's confidence in the police, and that's a serious problem as we go forward."

"We don't know why we are being arrested, we were just crossing the street," said Lambert Rochfort, who was among the protesters. "We were told if we don't do anything illegal we would be allowed to march on the sidewalk and we did just that. Then they arrested us for no apparent reason."

950 People were arrested on August 31. That's 300 more than the TOTAL in Chicago in 1968. That brought the grand sum in New York to 1500 as of early morning September 1.

Uptown in Harlem, kids were busted for wearing bandanas. In Herald Square, Madison Square Garden, the New York Public Library, Union Square – people were coming together peacefully, following orders, and getting arrested.

We all knew what was up instantly, by logging on to various cellphone instant text

## **SEVEN DAYS IN NEW YORK CITY**

messaging systems set up by some of the participating groups, like Ruckus and Textmob. In the midst of this, I went over to the Johnny Cash Protest in front of Sotheby's at 71st and York Avenue. Inside the famous auction house were the Republicans – the American Gas Association and the Nissan Motor Co. had arranged a plush party to honor the notorious Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander. Sotheby's will be auctioning Cash memorabilia in mid-September, so it was decided to make the event a "tribute" to Johnny Cash.

Who gets to direct this film? Godard or Almodovar? Here are details. No violence, just lots of people in black, singing all the great Cash songs – and of course – total confusion by the cops. First we were put on one side of the street, behind steel barricades. Then a mucky-muck arrived, with more gold braid, and we were moved to another side of the street. Then back to the first side. Total lunacy.

Ultimately, in the cops' confusion, the crowd was able to mass directly in front of the door where the buses were spilling the Republican attendees onto the sidewalk.

I guess that answers my question – the director has got to be Mack Sennett.

### **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1**

**T**he day started at 630am, where we met to organize the Unemployment Line. Thousands of unemployed workers and supporters gathered along Broadway, in a single file line, stretching about three miles from Wall Street to 31st Street, just shy of Madison Square Garden. Each participant held aloft a pink slip of paper, warning, "the next pink slip might be yours." Went off perfectly. Brilliantly organized.

Protesters with mock pink slips, including members of the United Federation of Teachers, lined up on lower Broadway from Wall Street to City Hall to voice their opposition against what they claim are the failed economic policies of the Bush administration. I had an interesting talk with one of the cops, who was sympathetic since the NY police have been without a contract for two years. As soon as this week's overtime frenzy is over, the cops themselves will get back to nasty demonstrations, picketing and civil disobedience. How many arrests do you think there will be ?

From there uptown to Union Square where the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) staged a NY version of its ongoing devastating display – EYES WIDE OPEN – 1,000 pairs of empty BOOTS, surrounded by shoes, many of them childrens' slippers, sneakers, sandals. Some family members had put pictures of their dead near the empty boots; others just stood and wept. Where were the Republican busses for this event ? THIS was the show they needed to see; this was the memory that the Bush sisters and Momma Laura needed to bring back with them – burned deep into their memories.

Then on to Guantanamo on The Hudson, for the press conference and protest that was taking place in front of the condemned Pier, where a couple of thousand prisoners – truly our own Detainees – were being held in subhuman conditions, their legal processes

## DAVID RUBINSON

deliberately delayed for hours and days. I met a few people who had spent endless hours incarcerated there. They were still in shock, in stunned disbelief at what had happened to them. Mayor Bloomberg gave his police an A+ yesterday – saying how proud he was of them. The Miami Model in action: Final phase – congratulations all around for a job well done. Those who had spent hours or even days in this hellhole have a very different story to tell.

Then on to Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting's March on the Media event – which started at CBS, then CNN and FOX. What could be more fitting? Inside the Convention, Zell Miller was spewing forth his venomous lies and President Cheney trashed John Kerry, and there we were, looking right at their most complicitous pimp henchmen – the "lapdogs, not watchdogs" who make people like Miller and Schwarzenegger and Cheney and Bush – possible. The media LOVE Miller. He gets them ratings. They LOVE 527s – which spend billions on ads. They LOVE the current system of checkbook politics, which explodes their profits. And above all, the love the way things are – 'cause all of them are doing just peachy, thank you.

Speaking of loving the status quo – we moved on over to the Killer Coke protest, at one of my favorite Salsa dance clubs, Copacabana. If you are not aware of what this bastion of America's values is perpetrating world-wide, check it out. Following the earlier anti CAFTA demonstration, many of us showed up ready to descarga our asses off. I brought a particularly decorative Coke bottle filled with pennies – my own Coke-Shekere-Guiro contraption. Man was it LOUD. We look around, and see all the fat hyperactive Attention-Deficit-Disorder kids, sucking up Coke, just as the good folks at CNN CBS and FOX tell them to.

Once again, the cops could not make up their minds. When we arrived, there were 10 cops, and few protesters. The police told us to stay on the sidewalk. OK, no problem. We stayed, and we played. Soon many more of us arrived, and the cops told us not to block the sidewalk. OK. No Problem. Then a mucky-muck captain arrived, and changed everything. He made the cops grab the metal barriers nearby, and move them ACROSS the street. Then he bullhorned us to disperse.

OK. We crossed the street and kept moving, we were cool. Uh-Uh. He came across and told us we were going to be arrested if we did not disperse. What? We were behind barriers! That HE put up. OK. We kept moving, and crossed to a third corner. The captain had his cops run and move the barriers to where we had just moved. He penned us in, and grabbed the bullhorn, and announced that we were breaking the law, and would be arrested. Of course, we ignored him, and – so did the other cops. A good time was had by all.

Except for none of us getting bashed or busted, this typified the week's police efforts. Idiocy, lack of discipline, busted chain of command. If it wasn't for the cool montuno we were all making – cops and protesters alike – woulda been a bad scene. Thank goodness some of the cops can dance.

## SEVEN DAYS IN NEW YORK CITY

### THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

**J**udge John Cataldo of the NY State Supreme Court in Manhattan angrily took matters into his own hands, and freed the hundreds of illegally detained prisoners after a state judge in Manhattan had ordered the city to release more than 550 protesters who had been detained without seeing a judge.

The last day – for now. Bush was onstage, delivering his "acceptance" speech. We were in Union Square, holding candles, holding each other, fearing for our lives, and despaired for the future of our children, and our planet.

We must fight, all of us. This is 1935 in Berlin, and any one of us who cannot see that deserves what comes next.

You cannot say you didn't know. You know.

You cannot think it doesn't matter, because it does, and well you know it.

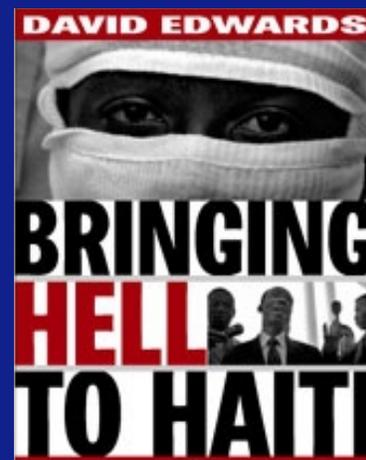
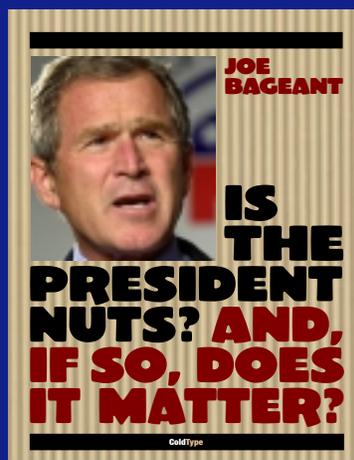
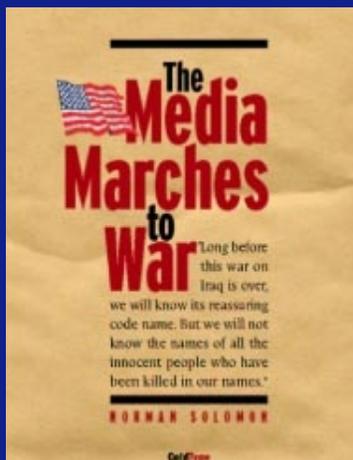
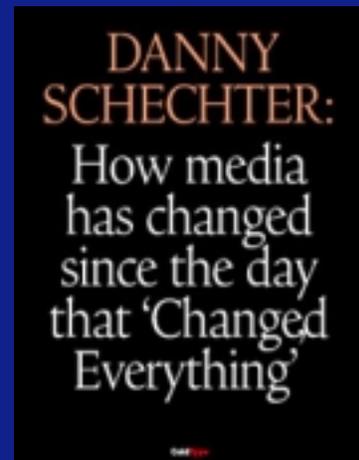
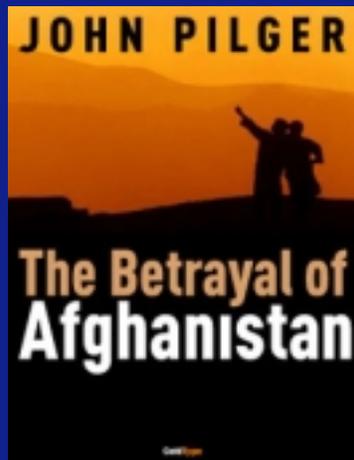
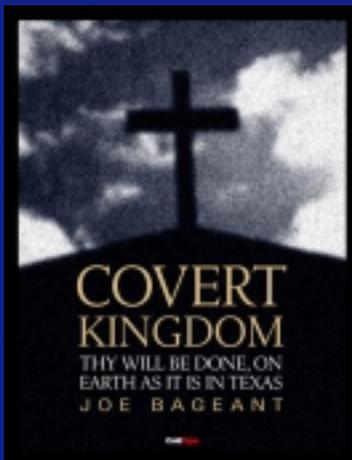
There has been a radical regime change in The USA, and profound crimes – including malicious mass murder – are being perpetrated on this world and its inhabitants, in your name, with your money, and you and your sons and daughters are pulling the trigger.

If that's OK with you, then do nothing.

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In a previous life, David Rubinson was a well known record producer, artists manager and producer of film scores, but has always been a troublemaker. He first marched with Jackie Robinson, A. Phillip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, and he thought that when we finally put Nixon on that 'copter from the White House loawn, he wouldn't have to march again. He was wrong. This essay is an edited version of one that appeared on Rubinson's website, <http://drrant.blogspot.com>

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