

**IT AIN'T
EASY
BEING
WHITE**

ColdType

JOE BAGEANT



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WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD
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As nightfall does not come all at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there is a twilight when everything remains seemingly unchanged.

– Justice William O. Douglas, supreme court justice

“Would the sonovabitch who super-glued my hair to the bar when I passed out please come take your goddamned beating like a man!” – Pooty Jenkins, welder

Pooty, don't you ever wash them booger hooks of yours?” That's Carol the bartender watching Poot pick up his Royal Burger with two blackened hairy paws that look like they just finished welding a greasy transmission housing back together – which is exactly what they did. “Carol Darlin,” Poot replies, “FUCK YOU.” Nobody ever claimed dining at a working man's joint like Burt's Tavern was a polished experience. Or even sanitary.

Whatever the case, some of us will be buying Poot rounds tonight because he just lost his job at the metal fabrication plant to some sweatshop in Bangkok. Pooty has been here an hour already, long enough to get warmed up for the evening: “I'm gonna follow my job to Indyneezya! Um-hum! Then I'm gonna strangle the livin piss out of the little motherfuckin gooks.” Nevermind that Bangkok is in Thailand, not Indonesia. It has little bearing on this evening, which I suspect will be a long one.

“Shuddap, ya goddam ape!” yells someone in the back. Poot is a goddamned ape. Even his own wife says so. She once stood up in the tavern and called Poot “nothin but a goddamned ape!” which has become sort of the Pooty meme around here. The punch-line. Whenever he gets to be too much someone will say, “Aw Poot, yer nuthin but a goddam ape,” and everybody will laugh and Poot will let up on whatever offensive or tedious jag he happens to be on at the moment – usually the Redskins or deer hunting laws.

He's a fun ape, though. Pooty is the guy who once bolted one end of a 60-foot

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chain to the rear bumper of a police car and the other to the Confederate statue in front of the court house, then raced right down Main Street by the police station at 1 a.m. The result was moreover predictable with regard to both the police car bumper and officer Danny Fogle's sphincter. We were 17 then, full of piss 'n vinegar and not above such pranks as greasing the railroad tracks through town with lard. If a kid pulled that today he'd get 10 years, assuming he escaped being gunned down in the street – “greased” by the cops, as it were.

Meanwhile, back in Bangkok... Your job doesn't have to get shipped to Asia to get hosed in the workplace by foreigners here in Winchester. We've got 4,000 Mexicans in this town of 29,000. Nearly every one of them is illegal but the authorities pretend not to see them because they provide the cheap labor for the local elite's plants and businesses and wipe the brie off the liberal college faculty's countertops after the cocktail parties.

So it is understandable that one of the things which fries local working folks' asses about liberals is their denial of the problem of illegal immigration – the crushing effects on wages for working class whites. It is also one of those things liberals will just never get. Liberals are so scared of being labeled racists that they simply refuse to acknowledge the issue. And besides, it's not educated liberals' jobs being taken by the Mexicans. But ya know what? If I stood up on a box in any beer joint or VFW in the country and said “Clean up illegal immigration, no more wetback wages for *anybody*,” I'd get cheers and free rounds on the house. It ain't racist, it's plain dollars and cents.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration and business of all type likes cheap, terrified illegal workers and is not one bit moved by all those little brown carcasses in the Sonora Desert. By avoiding the issue or advocating services for the illegals already here, liberals give working class folks the impression they approve of slave wage labor and non-citizens receiving public funds – which illegals don't receive. But most Americans think they do. Most of working white America does *not* like it and would be more than happy to see an 18-foot border wall with machine gun emplacements and a minefield between the two countries. We have a disconnect here, folks. Anyway, it's not a good idea to get on a soapbox at Burt's about medical care for illegals. They guy you are talking to probably doesn't have health insurance. When we get universal health care, then the illegal Mexicans can have free medical services. Maybe.

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HELLO YOU TWO-BIT LIBERAL MAMMY JAMMERS!!!! THIS IS THE SCREAMING MAN, THE BOOZE-DRIVEN, SMACK-LUBRICATED CORPSE OF THE ALTER-EGO OF JOE BAGEANT – A SAVAGE REMNANT OF WHEN HE WAS A BETTER MAN. NOWADAYS THAT PUKE KEEPS SCREAMING MAN SUPPRESSED DOWN BEHIND HIS GONADS WITH MASSIVE DOSES OF HOG TRANQUILIZERS AND A PAIR OF VICE-GRIPS ON HIS ASSHOLE . . . IT IS A NATIONAL TRAGEDY THAT SCREAMING MAN, WHO HAS ENOUGH HAIR IN HIS ASS TO WEAVE AN INJUN BLANKET IS TRAPPED INSIDE A GODDAM POTBELLIED GIN-SOAKED GIBBON LIKE JOE BAGEANT – A DESPICABLE OLD PUD-POUNDER WHO LETS WHORING HIMSELF ACROSS THE INTERNET PASS FOR A LIFE. RIP THE FAT BASTARD’S THYROID OUT WITH A SALAD FORK . . . FREE THE SCREAMING MAN!

Ahem. Meanwhile, Lucian Bandister, Burt’s only regular black patron at Burt’s, is telling Carol that: “It takes a white man to really kill. It takes a Ted Bundy or a Jeffrey Dahmer. While blacks and Hispanics are out there hustling dope and boosting cars you’ve got your dynamic white males slipping around raping, killing and like *eating* 25 goddamned people before they get caught!”

Given enough beer, Lucian, like everyone else at Burt’s is a social commentator, historian and expert. They can expound on any subject. But these days at Burt’s you won’t hear a word about one thing – terrorism. Not unless *you* bring it up. Despite all the blood-in-the-face patriotic rage supposedly felt by working people over 9/11, I am going to commit heresy and say not one shit-faced patron here tonight believes that the world changed on 9/11. What happened in New York City was just another televised event here among the NASCAR and Jimmy Johnson smoked country ham crowd. It was never *real* to them. Not to people who have never been to New York, and to whom New York is just an imaginary place on television where idealized liberal nether-worlds and nightly murders are electronically served up. And the Twin Towers? It is safe to say that none of these stump jumpers in downtown Deliverance ever even heard of them until they went up in a cloud of asbestos dust and smoke on their TV screens. Yet coastal intellectuals such as Norman Mailer are writing about how 9/11 psychologically affected working class America’s sense of virility, security,

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confidence, national mythology, etc. Not really. Now if the Styrofoam peanut plant across town closes down, eliminating 500 local jobs, THAT is world changing around here. You have a hard time believing it, don't you? Yes, I can imagine.

HELL, YES, I CAN BELIEVE IT! THESE PEOPLE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO BREED! BIG MISTAKE! NOW THEY ROAM THE STREETS, THESE 'UNDEAD' VIRGINIANS, ROTTING THROWBACKS FROM AN EARLIER AGE WHEN THEIR ANCESTORS ALWAYS RESERVED FRIDAY NIGHTS AS "LYNCHIN NIGHT." HELL, YES, I CAN BELIEVE IT!

Of course three years ago everybody was absorbed in that mobius tape loop of the planes crashing. It was an emotional topic for a while. But so is a football ball game. For a while. And it still provides the bloodiest shirt Americans will ever wave, an excuse to avenge something, strut around patriotically and root for our side. Just like a big football game but with explosives and torture. And for us Southerners it provided a fresh opportunity to kill dark-skinned people, always blessing in the slave states.

But if you stop and think about it, the scare noise was and still is coming out of the media and the feds, not the people. Same goes for the War in Iraq. On the whole Americans haven't given a flying fuck about wars, other than for entertainment value, since Vietnam went sour on them. "Iraq War? Pick up a couple of magnetic yellow ribbons at the Seven Eleven, will ya?" And that is it. Of course if you pour enough beer and rag on the subject long enough you'll get some heated arguments going about the war or the treatment of Taliban and El Queda prisoners held in Guantnamo.

MISTREATMENT OF TALIBAN AND EL QUEDA FIGHTERS IN CUBA? OH MAMA THUMPING SON OF CHRIST! THESE DESERT APES WERE LIVING IN A CAVE, SHITTING IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND AND WIPING THEIR ASSES WITH THEIR FINGERS AFTER EATING BURNT GOAT MEAT OFF A STICK. THEN THEY WERE CAPTURED, SEDATED WITH HIGH QUALITY NARCOTICS, AND FLOWN TO GITMO, WHERE THEY GET THREE SQUARES A DAY, HOT BATHS AND ONLY GET UP TO BEAT OFF. THAT'S A LIFESTYLE SCREAMING MAN CAN UNDERSTAND AND

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APPRECIATE – ASSUMING THE DRUGS ARE STRONG ENOUGH. THESE FUGGIN CAMEL JAMMERS FIGURE THEY DIED AND WOKE UP IN THE GODDAM LAP OF ALLAH!

Back to the subject... I think working class Americans have always been like that. Insulated. A little time in the National Archives listening to taped interviews reveals that most Americans were not much moved by Pearl Harbor at the time either, because, aha! Hawaii was simply not real to them. Especially before television. At the time of the attack most Americans didn't much give a rip, even though the newspaper headlines screamed "NIPS HIT PEARL HARBOR!" And everybody asked themselves, where inna hell is Pearl Harbor?" Half the country, particularly the South and the Midwest, wouldn't have even known World War II was going on if it were not for the shortages. American life was isolated and insulated by distances then. You'd never know that from the propaganda and hoopla generated since.

Now we are insulated by ignorance, body fat, cheap spectacle and electronics. Hang around the working class places very long and you'll see that they almost *never* talk about current events. They never mention politics except in an election year. They never mention any larger issues than sports, movies, and where to get good ribs and seafood and why GM just can't seem to build a decent engine. They put up flags and patriotic symbols because it seems like the right thing to do because everybody else does. But no conscious analysis takes place. Most working whites, blue collar, technical, service or whatever, are nonpolitical. And to the extent that they hold beliefs, they hold the beliefs they think they are expected to hold. Just like they hold little flags, and ribbons for the troops. That's to tell you who they believe they are, Americans and Americans only. Plain Americans, cut from the rest of the world by a self isolating belief that it's better to be American than anything else, even if they really can't prove why. Ignorance is bliss and, somehow, America is where everyone supposedly dreams to be. No depth of thought and consciousness involved or required. There is the American on top and the rest of the world who is envious and plotting to steal their freedom.

In the end maybe we cannot count on white Americans to change. An African American friend writes me that, "As long as Americans have that belief, Bush is safe and the world is in trouble. For all I know, the liberals and the suburbanites, even the progressives and leftists are a bunch of know-it-alls with the same supremacist

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tendencies in sheep clothing. They just can't shed this hubris of the curse of being better than the rest of the world for no good reason. There is something pathetic about this world view. So I'll just work with people of color because they don't seem to have this illusion and actually like other cultures and the world. They are the future and they need to be in power because they will change the status quo. I don't believe that white people in general want to change anything at all."

One thing for sure. Traditionally, we can count on working white Americans to go off in a homicidal swarm to "defend our way of life," whenever our leaders periodically declare it to be threatened. Whenever they nail the cowhide to the barn. Right now we have a fullblown case of the cowhide syndrome. Anyone who grew up on a farm knows what happens if you butcher a cow, then nail the hide up high on the barn. The rest of the cows go absolutely freaking bezerk until it is removed. Now George Bush and the neos have nailed the hide on the barn and they have no damned intention of taking it down. For the moment however, it is not election season so things have calmed down a bit...and it is mostly the neo-con leadership and the liberal herd that is agitated and bellowing out there. Everybody else is at Wal-Mart.

Numb-nutted dolphin killers?

Most people here in Burt's Tavern never get exposed to anything liberal, which is to say universal, generous and just, unless it comes from within their own families or their church. This being the South, they never expect an ounce of mercy from the workplace or any kind of government. Especially government. If they did, many could be made to understand the virtues of liberalism the same as the rest of the world. Not all of course, but many. I've convinced quite a few of them myself. It's about education. We all need educating.

So when I suggested in a column last month that an organized effort to inform and educate lower income working people might be worthwhile, I and got emails that said:

"That is the most ridiculous, inane thing you've ever written."

And:

Our problem with you guys is you fat, stupid, sweaty, mouth breathing, redneck, dolphin killing numb-nuts reelected George Bush.

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And:

White trash suffer from what psychiatrists call “no insight.” They will never agree with anyone from outside their zone of consumer culture ignorance because their desperate pride includes the right to be dreadfully wrong about everything and telling people more educated than themselves to “fuck off!” That’s what makes them feel good. The only thing that gets a rednecks attention besides the next six pack, is a good swipe upside the head with a two by four. And when the self awareness dawns, it’s too late, because he’s bankrupt, homeless and in jail.

Finally we have proof of liberal rage.

Allow me to address the skepticism of many lefties: Do you think red state working folks are too damned dumb to recognize the truth if and when it is ever presented in relevant terms? OK, don’t answer that. But buried under the cholesterol, fear and consumer state indoctrination, it is there. And lest you get too proud, remember: You voted for Kerry. We all be dumb sometimes, brutha. Most of the time, really. So educating working class folks is worth a try if for no other reason than that the alternative is just too awful to contemplate – Dale Earnhardt on the ten dollar bill. I can’t help but believe that if informed folks, like those on websites such as this, helped people focus on mutual class enemies, then the Bush bandits would have plenty to worry about.

And besides, the fundamental difference between true liberalism and neo-conservatism in America today comes down to a simple question: Are we or are we not our brother’s keeper? Well?

Can white people be trusted at all?

As someone who grew up poor, rural and white, but moved to the city and took advantage of the educational opportunities once available in this country, I probably represent an imperfect synthesis of snot-assed liberal and redneck Southern dirt eater. More of the latter because the taste of dirt has real staying power. Which is why I moved back here to Winchester Virginia five years ago... to be around the only people with whom I ever felt completely comfortable (not the same things as shared values or I’d have swallowed a can of lye the first week back.) Despite attempts to be hip, cultured and urbane, I know I am seed of that tribe of ignorant white dick-

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heads who drive the trucks, fight the wars and vote for people like George Bush. Small town working folks. And I can tell you this: It sucks out here in the heartland.

Many people who idealize rural or small town America either never grew up there or haven't been back in 30 years. The place has gone to hell. Rural America is now a heartless place that is difficult to escape, where the rules of hard work and honesty no longer apply. The only people making any dough in rural and smalltown America these days are bankers, lawyers, doctors and a few with government jobs. Thanks to the new global economy, it is hard and desperate terrain for working people. It's mean, too.

OH FER CRYING OUT LOUD! THIS PUTRID GENETIC CESSPOOL CALLED THE HEARTLAND HAS GOT TO BE PURGED WITH FIRE AND FEAR! BURN OUT EVERY CRACKER FROM HERE TO KANSAS. THIS IS WHERE THE GODDAM ICED TEA SLURPING, PIE GOBBLING BASTARDS BREED! FRY ALL THE PORK-FACED PUD-PUMPERS. KICK ALL THEIR CARS OFF THE BLOCKS AND BULLDOZE THEIR VERMIN INFESTED TRAILER HOMES. IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL SOMEBODY'S DOG GETS EATEN, SOMEBODY'S CHEA PET GETS SCALPED! WHERE THE HELL IS THAT GENOCIDAL NAZI JEW SHARON WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

There is really no nice way to say it. Even allowing for the way the system manipulates and exploits them, working white Americans, all things considered, are becoming a mean people. Being forced to eat shit and ask for seconds just have any kind of a job makes you mean. So they hang on to being white. They believe in the tacitly acknowledged white privilege, though they get damned little of it. Working whites share the same European culture of material accumulation and consumption with the corporate elite who own their lives. They believe in private property, they do not distinguish between their trailer and the boss' monster-bellum. They believe in defending it with weapons. They believe in consumption. They believe in the myth of the entrepreneur and the self made man. It's all bullshit, but they believe it because they are part of the three quarters of Americans who have no more than a high school education...just enough to absorb political propaganda and marketing

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messages. And they are going to stay that way so as long as we let corporations and crony capitalism continue to reduce our working brothers to machines...to a mere resource.

Challenging prevailing political and economic systems is something educated people do. So to change their fate (and the fate of the ecosystem, the nation and a lot of other things) working class America will have to become more educated. Regardless of the way it appears, red state working class Americans can be reached. But we have to humble ourselves. Admit that they have been screwed by the system more than most of us (and admit we *are* at least partly to blame for their situation. We had more power than them and we let the system go bad.) Elsewise we are all screwed. And if we are all screwed anyway, and it sure as hell looks like that from the end stool at Burt's, it is because the richest nation on earth broke John Locke's social contract by not providing quality universal higher education. Just like it refuses to guarantee even the most basic health care.

Reaching out is asking intellectuals to abandon the intellect as a bridge-building device and move over into intuition and compassion and selflessness to create the understanding needed. Selflessness is not a common attribute of folks accustomed to the "me-first" high self-esteem world of American liberalism. It's a hearts and minds kind of thang.

One last kick at the liberal dog

Just like the Republican junta's biggest potential enemy is their own hubris, thus is ours. Let's be honest. The liberal elite is not entirely a Republican myth. This generation of white liberals is not involved in class issues, and has become more about trendiness. To the average working American *Friends* and *Sex and the City* are the face of modern liberal culture. They are not wrong. The very fact that most elite celebrities call themselves "liberal" and don't get laughed off the stage tells you something is very wrong. A real class warrior would spit on the celebrities and materialistic, narcissistic celebrity itself.

American liberals define themselves and the issues within the same consumer culture machinery as the red state tire-biters – perception of class status (elitism.) This IS the main difference between educated liberals and less educated working folks. Neither are *citizens* of the United States or anything else. The United States no

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longer has citizens. It has consumers. So middle class liberals delude themselves into thinking they are so different from people like Pooty, Dink and the others who break wind and pool sticks down here at Burt's Tavern because based upon their consumer choices. Most liberals are not in a much higher income bracket, but their consumer choices – paid for on credit – allow them to mimic the ruling class. Starbucks vs Sanka, Mother Jones vs George Jones. Mark Twain vs Shania Twain.... all those ultimately meaningless consumer choices that are not representative of any competing or compelling values, but stimulate and keep alive class divisions.

For the time being at least, American liberalism has George Bush to blame for everything. And much the same as a zoo ape enjoys even negative attention, George Bush, peeling his lips back and mocking the crowd, is having the time of his life. But one of these days we will have to deal with the real reason middle class white American liberals hate Bush: Liberals hate Bush because he is a traitor to the white classes. Bush revealed the true face of American power and exposed it as the corrupt hoax it really is. He is a “cowboy” imperialist as opposed to the more acceptable kind – the Kennedy, Carter, Clinton type who conducted their dark little murders at the edge of the empire in secrecy while Americans wasted most of the world's resources. The Anybody But Bush crowd would have approved the use of force against Iraq if it had been presented by a senator from a Blue State with a bullshit UN resolution, as opposed to a simple ‘Yeeee-ha’ from a retard frat-boy from Texas and overwhelming international revulsion. The ABB movement was not about risking anything. It was simply about keeping self-serving appearances to preserve our Jabba the Hutt worldview and lifestyle and the privileged elite.

It is 2 AM and Pooty is in top form now and still determined to follow his job to Indyneezya and “make gook sauce out of the little fuckers.” But he won't. Instead, he will take a job with no benefits at Skink's Welding, a locally owned non-union sweatshop, and he will lay down welding beads on refrigeration units for about half what he made before.

And SCREAMING MAN is raging against his imprisonment lo these many years, “AAARRRGGGHHH! MY HYPODERMIC PLEASE! (MMMMMMMM TOO MUCH DOG WORMER IN THAT LAST DOSE OF ACID.) GIN...MORE GIN! AND RAW MEAT! ... I MUST HAVE RAW MEAT!”

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And all heads in Burt's are turned toward the front window where outside police car lights are flashing as the cops search a teenager for dope in front of the train station. The young blonde cops act like characters they've seen in crime dramas. In the distance is the approaching light and horn of the C&X, BLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOONK ... BLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOONK! Police car lights bounce off the storefront windows, and there is the smell of beer and the past and a sure enough approaching apocalypse... And the whole damned sad hologram of America rises up, arching over the scene...

Nothing to do but go home, break out the Old Grandad and drink it straight up from a rusty canteen cup. The voice of a ghost breaks in on the reverie....

AND DON'T EVEN BOTHER TO WASH THE MOTHERFUCKER!

Right, Hunter.

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