

Springtime

in the

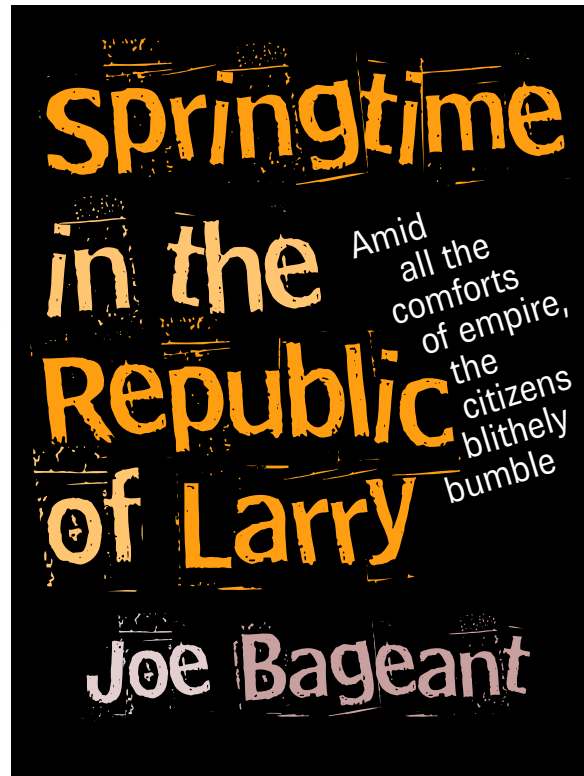
Republic

of Larry

Amid
all the
comforts
of empire,
the
citizens
blithely
bumble

Joe Bageant

ColdType



Joe Bageant is a writer and magazine editor living in Winchester, Virginia. Random House Crown is publishing his forthcoming book:

**DRINK, PRAY, FIGHT AND FUCK:
Dispatches from America's Class Wars**

Visit his blog at <http://www.joebageant.com>

He may be contacted at joebageant@joebageant.com

© Joe Bageant 2006

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD
www.coldtype.net

JOE BAGEANT / SPRINGTIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF LARRY

“YOU SPEAK OF LIBERTY? OF AN ENLIGHTENED POLITY? YOU BEER-SOAKED KNUCKLE DRAGGERS AND PRECIOUS WET-LIPPED LIBERALS WOULDN’T KNOW LIBERTY FROM A CONGOLESE ASS-EATING TAPE-WORM! YOU HAVEN’T GOT THE INSIGHT OF A GODDAM FRUIT FLY, MUCHLESS ENOUGH TO VOTE.” – Northern Virginia internet denizen called THE SCREAMING MAN!

“Grrrrrrrr!” – Bingo, the philosopher dog



Spring has truly arrived when I once again find myself in the garden shed with my dog Bingo while pretending to fix the lawn mower. Meaning that I need to clean out the stale gas that I purposefully leave in the tank each fall so my wife will have to ask me to tinker with the mower every spring. Screwing around in the garden shed, pretending to do maintenance only a man is supposed to be capable of, is one of the many ruses that keep me from having to do actual yard work. I love to watch a woman do yard work, what with the bending over in shorts and all.

At the same time there are less savory views from my shed. For instance, from here I can see through the shrubbery into the neighbors’ yards. I can see Big Larry, sitting there on his back deck in his skivvies and flip-flops, fresh from the shower, boring the wax out of his ear with what appears to be a house or car key, waiting for his wife Linda to yell: “Dammit Larry, get in here put some clothes on! Do you know what you look like? Don’t you ever think?”

Based on what Larry looks like, it’s hard to imagine him ever having a thought in his life. And it’s even harder to imagine anybody would care if he did. But there are folks who do. Two massive political parties fret endlessly over this portly “swing

JOE BAGEANT / SPRINGTIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF LARRY

voter,” in the belief that there is some internal logic to the way Larry’s vote moves back and forth between the parties. If you ask Larry, he will say: “I vote the man, not the party.” Which is an utter crock, because the truth is that Larry has no idea who he will vote for until he is inside the booth and is forced to pick. And then it usually comes down to which party was the loudest or the most fear mongering during the last five minutes before he went into the voting booth. There is also a “betting on a winner” sports aesthetic that comes into play. But beyond that Larry and millions of voters like him pay no genuine attention to politics. Zilch. To quote Larry on the matter: “I don’t really fucking care.” And he will never care until he gets the impression that something, it varies from election to election, has gone waaaaaay too far and things are definitely going to hell in a way that he can see affecting him. Then politics will have his attention. For about one week in November.

From here in the shed it looks to me like it’ll take years for the conditions to develop where Big Larry will really start caring. For now though, he’s got plenty else to occupy his attention. There’s that concrete patio to put down in his back yard... baseball season just started...and even with the building boom slowing, he’s still getting 12 hours a week overtime driving a bucket truck for Toll Brothers. Between him and Linda, they are pulling down 70-K. And what with their second refi on the house (once more, to pay off credit cards) putting some dough in his mitts, he’s shopping for a new truck. For the most part Big Larry is happy as a hog in slop, except when his back and ‘roids act up, and will remain so until something really big affects him directly...until something clips him hard right smack in the kisser, like losing his job, or gas hitting five bucks a gallon or maybe Linda running off with some other man...which ain’t gonna happen because, well, it just ain’t gonna happen, that’s all. “She’s as fat as I am god sake!” Who’s gonna steal either one of them away from that \$44,000 four bedroom money pit they purchased in 1990, now worth \$350,000, on paper at least. Never happen.

Big Larry is not blind. He has noticed that some working folks like himself seem to be going tits up financially of late. Or is that just his paranoia? “Fug it. Just mind your own business, work hard and everything will be OK.” As to the politics behind the looting of the economy, he doesn’t have a dog in that fight and doesn’t want one. Like so many working class folks, he blows it off with a single worn out line: “They’re all crooks.” Torture in Iraq? “If it makes us safer, go for it! Have another beer.” The most common citizens of the Empire – and Larry sure as hell is common – being smothered

JOE BAGEANT / SPRINGTIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF LARRY

in the commodities and comforts of its far flung corporate and military domination, are always the last to care about the situation out there in the resource colonies.

Then too, the same can be said of the middle class, regardless of party affiliation. The professional and semi-professional catering class, the one that juggles the nation's money, health and legal proceedings, and pretends to teach the X-box generation "consumer mathematics" and higher science, are sitting right there in the sidelines with Big Larry morally, if not physically. Being better educated, they yap about politics more than Larry does. But the truth is that, like Larry, they see no dog of theirs in the fight because theirs is at the groomer for \$70 a pop (Don't get any fancy notions, Bingo). Until there is something like, let's say, a military draft threatening the career paths of their precious little Camerons and Bices, and/or taxes gobble another twenty percent of their income in ways they can actually observe, they will continue to believe in their 401-Ks and that the two political parties represent a real choice at the ballot box.

Yet another part of the middle class, semi-professionals mostly, is clueless because they are too busy working themselves to death in cold fear of ending up competing with the mouthbreathers for a job at Wal-Mart. I met a guy ringing up groceries at the Food Lion the other day who used to be a social services administrator over in the next county. Assumedly the faith based initiatives around here, being guided by the hand of God, are doing a better job than he used to do. Still, it seems rather unfair that he would have to compete against God himself to keep track of WIC coupons and teen moms getting their GEDs. Guys like him know exactly what can happen to them in this new "ownership society," and they know that the game gets harder and harder if you want to keep on owning. They know, especially the semi-professional bean counters, how long a family survives trying to make a \$2,200 house payment on a \$1,600 monthly unemployment check. So the true middle classers are afraid to do anything at all. Oh, they will vote, mostly according to their greed or self-delusions. They will vote Republican because it is clear the Republican Party will kick the living shit out of anybody who gets between them and a full a full tank of gas or a fast buck. Or they will vote Democratic, vote for the good cop in our good cop/bad cop political charade, and kid themselves that they've struck a meaningful progressive blow of some sort. Such are the times.

Meanwhile, there's ole Larry digging the wax out of his ear with no idea that the shape if not the fate of the nation may depend on whether he ever gets a clue. Look

JOE BAGEANT / SPRINGTIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF LARRY

at the guy. What a slob.

A reader pointed out recently that there are an awful lot of slobes in my essays, and by god it does seem true, doesn't it? The reader, a Becky from Butte (which made me want to sing to myself, *Sweet Becky from Butte, with her brother Clute...* possibly because I had a couple in me, went on to ask if I especially seek slobes out for some literary reason. After much contemplation I am sorry to report that I do not. Apparently I am just surrounded by slobes, or at the very least, have an affinity for them, plus the stupidity to look into their souls seeking political truth of some sort about America. We all have our problems.

Maybe the biggest political problem we have is that most Americans think they know what is going on and that they have enough knowledge to cast a rational vote. Those people are also convinced that the effects of media are neutral and that they are actually thinking for themselves. They believe there is a difference between the two parties. And in all fairness, there is. Sort of. Despite the way both parties have gloried in America's post-war imperialist hard-on, treating the rest of the world like shit when it suits American corporate interests, there is a difference in the way the parties treat the American people. The Democratic Party can be said to be better for America on the grounds of being less brutal, rather kinder to the rabble inside the walls of Rome. Democrats will engage in a knockdown drag-out fight to get dental crowns for illegal aliens in Buffalo, but they will never once consider challenging big oil or big pharm or big anything that might have a campaign buck stashed up its cuff. Still, disallowing that congenital American weakness for a buck and anything BIG-BIG-BIG!, and assuming Diebold and the Republican crime syndicate don't rig a third election (cough! cough!) getting these rich, deluded, self-important Democratic hacks back into office seems to be the only way we have of stalling off the specter of a totalist corporate state until we can mobilize or whatever the hell it is you do when fascism is on your front porch and leering through your window. The thought of a Hillary Clinton or Al Gore or John Kerry being my first line of defense against what people like Shotgun Cheney and that mad bitch Condoleezza Rice want to do to my fat ass in this, the penniless prelude to my old age, is more than chilling.

Down the road 70 miles the road from this garden shed, over in Washington DC, the Republican camp is starting to smell like a Texas whorehouse on dollar night. As I write this, Tom Delay has resigned as House Majority Leader so he could devote more time to the conspiracy indictment smoldering in his lap. Department of

JOE BAGEANT / SPRINGTIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF LARRY

Homeland Security Deputy Press Secretary Brian J. Doyle has been busted for cyberspace solicitation of a 14-year old girl. Time does fly – It seems like only yesterday the Department of Homeland Security announced Operation Predator, a cyberspace initiative to “identify children depicted in child pornography to help rescue them, and to assist in prosecuting the people responsible for making and distributing the pornographic material...” Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist is under investigation for crooked stock deals. Bush’s top procurement official has been busted for obstructing the investigation of lobbyist Jack Abramoff. And ole Scoots Libby says George Bush OK’d the felony security breaches and outright lies used to scare people like Big Larry into supporting our military attack on a sovereign nation led by some fucked up hairball who allegedly was going to come over here and kill us all with – whoo-hoo! – weapons of mass destruction. And as if the scene playing out for the administration couldn’t get any riper, even the dark poisonous toad himself, Karl Rove may yet drop beneath the rising slime of the Plame affair. Nah, we would be almost disappointed if the Prince of Darkness proved a mere mortal. We like our bad guys to be so bad they are protected by Satan’s guilded hand. Too many crap movies and video games will do that to you. At the same time, there is much dirty money on the Republican side of the aisle which nobody seems to know anything about. Republicans everywhere are swearing they were never, never, never “that kind of Republican,” the kind of Republican who would accept campaign money without an overabundance of questions. Some are even giving back campaign money to the lobbyists with the most shit on their shoes, thereby demonstrating their involvement in the scams by public acts of contrived piety. It would be funny did it not expose what venal lizards crawl the republic’s halls of governance.

Yes, things have been bad my friends and, much as I hate the cliché, things will probably get worse before they get better. Not since the Twenties have we seen such a reactionary syndicate grab national political power. And like their predecessors the neocons are hell bent to reverse every scrap of previous social progress, in this case since FDR’s New Deal. Internationally they are aggressive evangelical paranoids steeled with Biblical justification for a policy of “Bomb their Ass and Take Their Gas.” An armed, petroleum-addicted Jesus on steroids roughing up the world for gas money.

At the same time at least some Americans are finally shedding their illusions. We don’t see that very often, but we have seen it occasionally: During the Sixties and

JOE BAGEANT / SPRINGTIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF LARRY

Seventies we learned that a president who proclaims “I am not a crook,” is probably just that. The Vietnam War taught most thinking people that American wars are noble wars merely because they are American. Also that the popularity of American wars, like that of sports teams, wears thin when we are not winning, causing people to start grumbling about the coach. The Iraq War is now unpopular with a majority and the president’s numbers are so low pollsters are using a dip net to fish them out of the toilet. That it took over three years of getting our asses kicked by swarthy shoeless peasant stock armed with cheap cell phones and junk ordinance IEDs for the point to soak in that something just might be going wrong with the “mission accomplished” over there...well, it says something about our lapdog media, or our Prozac addled brains, the contagion of national hubris or all three.

All of the above does not even begin to address the shadowy forces rustling in the background of our government, emerging occasionally to announce yet another chilling diminishment of our civil liberties, with almost no real objection. Most of America remains as clueless as Big Larry, believing that “It cannot happen here,” even though they haven’t the education or insight or attention span to grasp exactly what it is that can happen. Big Larry again: “What can’t happen here?” I’m telling ya the guy has about two fingers of forehead.

People with more than two fingers of forehead, those who understand what can happen and what obviously is happening, hope and pray the next election will begin to turn things around (which implies there are available candidates with the guts, wisdom and charisma to do so, but that’s a whole nuther matter). At the same time they remain in deep denial of, or are simply too horrified by, what the rigging of two national elections by Republican operatives spells about our condition. It means that the way out of this escalating nightmare, the way back to something resembling freedom just might not be through the ballot box. And as long as the Democratic leadership is afraid to stand up and name the crimes and the criminals involved, the noodle-spined middle class will feel justified in its denial. And ole Larry will just stay out there on the back porch scratching his ass and thinking things are mostly OK. Just like tens of millions of his fellow Americans.

Anyway, the Democratic leadership believes it’s too late to call bullshit on the crooked elections. I know because I get their newsletters. They keep me in the loop on these things. They also say Howard Dean is the new Newt Gingrich, only liberal. And yesterday I got one asking me what the Democratic Party should stand for.

JOE BAGEANT / SPRINGTIME IN THE REPUBLIC OF LARRY

I've got plenty of ideas for sure, but I did not reply because, well, if Howard Dean and the most powerful Democrats in the nation have to ask me what the party of Franklin Roosevelt stands for, then we are in a heap of shit, dear hearts. A heap of shit.

I gotta go.

Bye.

Read
more
essays
by Joe
Bageant

Download all of Joe Bageant's satirical essays, plus many more books, booklets, essays, newspapers and magazines – all in pdf format – all free of charge, at www.coldtype.net

(Click on this link to enter web site)

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD