

INSIDE: THE REAL HERO OF 'HOTEL RWANDA' ● EVEN THE KING HAS A BAD DAY ● WHY THE GENERALS HATE RUMSFELD ● HARD TIMES FOR SOFT DRINKS

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**IS THERE A RIGHT WAY
TO WAGE A **WRONG** WAR?**

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Cover Story on page 32

Editor: Tony Sutton
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3. EVEN THE KING HAS A BAD DAY

By Andy Moore

6. HARD TIMES FOR SOFT DRINKS

By Michael Blanding

12. I WAS A BEAUTY PAGEANT DROP-OUT

By Amanda Angelotti

16. LIES, INVASION AND THE ZIONIST LOBBY

By William Blum

23. NEW TENANTS FOR ABU GHRAIB

By Ron Jacobs

26. WHY THE GENERALS HATE RUMSFELD

By Tony Karon

29. DIGGING UP THE PAST IN 'ANOTHER COUNTRY'

By Stan Winer

32. NO WAY TO FIGHT A WRONG WAR

By Norman Solomon

34. THE REAL HERO OF 'HOTEL RWANDA'

By Paul Rusesabagina and Tom Zoellner

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*He can't sing, so he's not an Elvis impersonator. But **Andy Moore's** got the hair. Give him a boombox, an Elvis Presley Economy Adult Jumpsuit and the element of surprise, and you'll think The King is still in the building. But first make sure the boombox is working, or your big night could resemble this one . . .*

EVEN THE KING HAS A BAD DAY

When Jeanne called, it had been three months since I'd dressed up as Elvis. A little longer stretch than usual, so her call was well timed. Could I ask the Pelvis to make an appearance at her annual office party? No problemo.

Elvis would have been 71 (and a week) on the night of the big do. It was, appropriately enough, the Dr. King holiday. I've been dressing up as Elvis for six years. It started as a nutty gag at family camp. Time passed. Soon I needed no excuse whatsoever to reach for the costume bag, climbing into my get-up with a determination shared by men who like to try on their wife's clothes.

Nowadays my neighbors barely look up from their yardwork when Elvis strolls by. "Hi, Andy," they say. "Are you going to the PTG meeting tomorrow night?"

My transformation into Elvis easier than you'd think. Any old cheapo store-bought costume

will do. I favor gold shades and the pre-packaged Elvis Presley Economy Adult Jumpsuit. "One size fits most." A Vegas value at \$42.99.

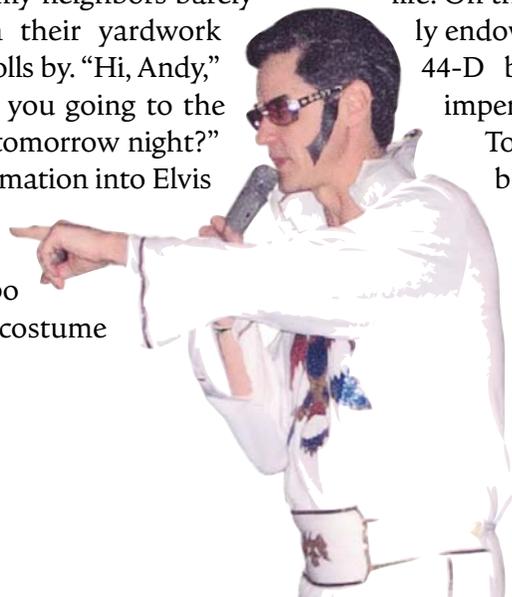
The snap flares reveal an exciting crimson flash within the ankle inserts. The sequined eagle cummerbund falls just below the deep cleavage in the high-collared show blouse. The suit treats your audience to the swollen but not yet obese Elvis. On his way to Hawaii. Not yet bathroom-bound.

At 6:30 on Dr. King night, I excuse myself from the family and head upstairs to get my Elvis on. Show time is 7:45.

The main trick in doing Elvis is the hair – a constant esthetic in the star's life. On this front, I'm as naturally endowed as a woman with a 44-D bustline who likes to impersonate Dolly Parton.

Tooth-brushing the inky-black dye into my locks is a labor of love. My daughter Maggie helps me with the back, and drips of dye turn our

The main trick in doing Elvis is the hair – a constant esthetic in the star's life. On this front, I'm as naturally endowed as a woman with a 44-D bustline who likes to impersonate Dolly Parton



NIGHT LIFE

Moving as Elvis without music is like flying as Superman without a cape. The first couple of people who notice me are startled, the desired effect, but without music I may as well be wearing a coconut bra and tighty-whities

bathroom's white tile floor into a checkerboard.

Lei or no lei? I ask Elvis in the mirror, turning profile-to-profile to compare sideburn uniformity. Sans lei for this gig, I decide, then clomp downstairs and enter the living room walking backward, arms spread out.

"I'll pick up the kids at swim practice," says Peggy's voice. I spin around and brush my thumb across my nose. "Thank you very much," I reply.

Jeanne meets me in the lobby of the Prime Quarter Steak House. My payment for this engagement is one T-bone to go, medium-well. Elvis will take questions from the crowd tonight, always a popular part of the act, and Jeanne feeds me inside office jokes to salt my responses.

I've instructed Jeanne to have a boombox in place and "Jailhouse Rock" cued for my entrance. Full blast. The element of surprise is the most powerful part of any Elvis appearance. The crowd is startled by the loud rock 'n' roll. Then the King himself emerges. Pure magic.

I'm supposed to loosen up the party for karaoke later in the evening. So after "Jailhouse" I'll take some questions, crack some jokes, then make an exit to "Suspicious Minds." Piece of cake. I wait for the music to start, standing outside the basement banquet space next to the men's room. A guy comes out of the john, tucking in his shirt. "Whoa! Elvis!" he says. "How ya doin' tonight?" I ask. He blinks. "Elvis!" he says again.

Jeanne appears. "It's time!" I don't hear any music. "Where's the music?"

I ask. She tells me it's on but the CD player isn't working right. "Jailhouse Rock" is playing out there, she says, only it's "kinda soft." This is a setback. It's supposed to be rattling the windows. Oily bubbles surface on the pond in my stomach.

I decide to go around back, come in from the rear and strengthen the surprise value. Once there I realize the music isn't soft. It's absent altogether. I scan the place. The banquet hall is a spray of a half-dozen large tables ringed with well-dressed people quietly chatting, finishing dinner.

Across the room Jeanne waves to me with the excitement of a prom date, points down to the CD player, about the size of a textbook, on the table next to her. Big smile. She gives me a giddy thumbs-up. A waitress sinks a tall stack of dirty plates into a bus bin with a sharp clatter. All heads turn toward her.

I make my entrance.

Moving as Elvis without music is like flying as Superman without a cape. The first couple of people who notice me are startled, the desired effect, but without music I may as well be wearing a coconut bra and tighty-whities. They turn their attention back to the sawing of steak.

Oh, this is not good. Not good at all, I think to myself. Self-doubt is the worst thing you can do in an Elvis suit, something that requires, if nothing else, complete confidence.

Never in this story have you heard me say I'm an Elvis impersonator. That requires a passable vocal impression of the King. I have none.

However, I do have core skills necessary to honor the life and legacy of Elvis Aaron.

I can move like the King. I'm an accomplished air kick-boxer. My hair, particularly the curlicue I sculpt over my forehead, is the real deal. And I can talk with a Memphis accent like nobody's business. Fact: I was in Memphis the day Elvis died.

But I don't sing him. My act requires Elvis to do the singing while I move and vamp and lip snarl. And now, through the quiet clink of spoons into coffee cups, I cruise to the next table, an iceberg to my Titanic.

"How y'all tonight?" I ask the youngest group of women in the house. "Y'all all right?" Eyes down, the women shift uneasily in their chairs. Jeanne hands me a wireless microphone. It doesn't work. Elvis is reduced to saying "Is this thang on?"

These nice medical professionals now sit in silence and witness my matrix of Elvis skills shut down, blink off one-by-one the way organs do when the body enters hypothermia.

I try to riff together a few of the inside jokes Jeanne fed me. But they smush together into one long, unintelligible sentence. I rap the head of the dead mike again with my hand. The fires at the massive stone grill flick out with a sickening spurt.

Things go downhill from here. One kind soul leads the King by the elbow over to a side table. "Maybe Elvis can get the karaoke machine started for us!" she announces. The real Elvis loved to fiddle with electronics. I can't even tune a car radio.

I fumble with the machine for a minute until a neurosurgeon comes forward and turns it on. I sing a passable "Blue Christmas" in a duet with a nurse, and then signal Jeanne that Elvis is about to leave the steakhouse.

The boombox suddenly works and Jeanne cranks up "Suspicious Minds." My semi-successful duet performance restores a fragment of inspiration. I grab some napkins and make a final lap around the room, mopping sweat from my brow with the faux scarves. I offer one to a game-looking woman at the front table. She pulls back as if it were dabbled with Ebola virus.

Back in the lobby, Jeanne hands me a hot T-bone and baked potato in a Styrofoam box. I head out into the dark parking lot and climb into our van. For a moment I consider walking next door into Visions to freak out the saps at the strip show. But that strikes me as the same kind of pathetic thing that happens when a poor-shooting guard continues to heave up three-point attempts.

Oh well. D.W.E., Driving While Elvis, is always a hoot. Honks and waves the whole way home down East Wash. I'm almost feeling myself, if that makes any sense, when I pull into Graceland. "How'd it go?" asks Maggie as I kick off my show boots. "Not so good, darlin'," I drawl and hand her the box. "How 'bout heatin' daddy up some of them steak 'n' taters?" **CT**

This article originally appeared in Isthmus, the alternative newsweekly for Madison, Wisconsin

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INVESTIGATION

There's an assumption in the market place that soft drinks are at least as safe to drink as, well, tap water. Not so, says a whistleblower who discovered that some of them contain up to four times the legal limit of the human carcinogen benzene. Michael Blanding reports on the scandal

HARD TIMES FOR SOFT DRINKS

The FDA quietly revealed that some soft drinks were found to contain the human carcinogen benzene in levels up to 10-20 parts per billion (ppb) – four times the acceptable limit found in drinking water

It could be nearing high noon for the soda industry. After years of repeated battering over the issues of childhood obesity and tooth decay, sugary beverages have suffered an unprecedented backlash. The New York Times reported recently that soft drink sales are down for the first time in 20 years, and sales of bottled water, juices and energy drinks are continuing to eat into the soda market.

Into this anti-carbonated climate comes a potentially bigger bombshell that could spell disaster for the industry. The FDA quietly revealed that some soft drinks were found to contain the human carcinogen benzene in levels up to 10-20 parts per billion (ppb) – four times the acceptable limit found in drinking water. Benzene, a chemical linked to leukemia and other forms of cancer, forms in certain beverages under certain conditions, such as exposure to heat and light.

The agency immediately downplayed the risk, saying that such small amounts did not pose a significant danger to health. “Levels like that with benzene, our only concern

would be lifetime consumption,” says George Pauli, associate director of science and policy in the office of food additive safety.

While scientists and doctors disagree on how hazardous benzene is to human health, the Environmental Protection Agency requires public notification and alternative water supply for drinking water contaminated with levels of 5 ppb. Even “relatively short periods” of exposure at that level can “potentially cause temporary nervous system disorders, immune system depression [and] anemia,” according to the agency. A lifetime of exposure, says the EPA, can cause “chromosome aberrations [and] cancer.”

The FDA has not set an acceptable level of benzene for beverages, arguing that the public consumes soft drinks and other beverages in far lower amounts than they do drinking water – a contention that any parent of a teenager might find laughable. Younger children may have already had a lifetime of benzene consumption.

Almost as alarming as the existence of benzene in soft drinks is that the

FDA knew about the problem for more than 15 years, yet never revealed it to the public or took adequate measures to fix it. Even the latest round of tests would not have been conducted if it weren't for documents posted on the internet late last year by an industry whistleblower named Larry Alibrandi. Those papers concern an undisclosed study at Cadbury-Schweppes in 1990 called Project Denver, which found that certain soft drinks, particularly diet orange-flavored sodas, had the tendency to form benzene when exposed to heat and light.

While the industry contends the problem was corrected in the most popular sodas, no public recall was done at the time. Judging from their ingredients, dozens of products now on the shelves could potentially have the same problem, including such popular brands as Sunny Delight, flavored Diet Pepsi and Fanta Orange. (The Environmental Working Group has posted a partial list of possibly risky products.)

"The question is, how much does this problem still exist today?" says Alibrandi, who is now head of American Quality Beverages, a small New York producer of health drinks. "We have hundreds of examples from the trade, and many of them could potentially be a problem. What's especially disconcerting is the products engineered for children, where it's a potentially bigger problem for them since their body mass is very small."

In November 1990, Alibrandi was working in product development at

the Connecticut labs of the British company Cadbury-Schweppes, when he says he was called into his supervisor's office one morning. "He closed the door and had a very, very concerned look on his face," recounts Alibrandi. "He said that a carcinogen was found in beverages, and they were concerned because they didn't know what the source was." That same day, Alibrandi booked a flight to Florida to test samples in a special lab capable of exposing them to extremes of heat and light.

After several trials, Cadbury-Schweppes' chemists determined that the benzene was caused by a chemical reaction between the preservative sodium benzoate and ascorbic acid (Vitamin C). The effect was found to be especially prevalent in diet sodas, and shot up to even higher levels after products were subjected to extremes of heat and light.

According to the documents, Cadbury-Schweppes' Diet Crush was found to contain benzene at 25 parts per billion (ppb) – five times the acceptable EPA limit. After exposure to 16 hours of ultraviolet light at temperatures around 30 C (86 F), that level jumped to a whopping 82 ppb. Diet Slice (made by Pepsi) contained 1 ppb before exposure, and 41.5 ppb after exposure. Diet Minute Maid (made by Coca-Cola) contained less than 0.5 ppb before exposure and 4.5 ppb afterwards, the documents say.

Despite the comparatively high levels found in these cases, however, the products tested in Project Denver were never recalled. By law, the FDA

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INVESTIGATION

In June 1999, Coca-Cola was forced to recall 65 million cans of Coke in Belgium and France after more than 200 people became mysteriously sick

is not allowed to order a recall of a product – but it can issue a request for a voluntary recall and, in extreme cases, can order seizure of products. On Dec. 7, 1990, representatives of soft drink manufacturers met with FDA officials to share their findings. According to a memo of that meeting, they “expressed their concern about the presence of benzene traces in their products and the potential for adverse publicity associated with this problem.” The FDA ruled that the problem was not large enough to warrant a recall, “agree[ing] that low ppb level of benzene found in these products do not constitute an imminent health hazard.” [sic]

That finding, however, flies in the face of other beverage scares involving benzene at the time, and may have had more to do with companies’ fear of damage to their bottom lines than legitimate health concerns. In January 1990, Perrier sparkling water in the United States had been found contaminated with benzene at levels up to 22 ppb. More than 160 million bottles of water were recalled worldwide, at a loss of \$263 million to the company. Perrier’s reputation took a hit as well, as the company was condemned for its failure to act quickly and for continuing to advertise during the recall.

A few months later, an Australian company named Koala Springs International ordered a recall in November 1990, when a Florida health agency found benzene levels of 11 to 18 ppb in its sparkling water with fruit additive – which was formed by the same combination of sodium benzoate and ascor-

bic acid as in the Project Denver tests (in fact, the Koala Springs incident precipitated the tests in the first place).

Other recalls have taken place since the Project Denver findings. In the United Kingdom in 1998, Coca Cola-Schweppes ordered a recall of Malvern sparkling water, as well as cans of Coke, Sprite, Fanta and Dr. Pepper found to contain benzene at levels up to 20 ppb due to contaminated carbon dioxide. Britvic Soft Drinks shortly followed suit, recalling more than 2 million cans of soda, including Regular and Diet Orange Tango, Lemon Tango, Pepsi and 7-Up, which had also been made with the contaminated gas. At the time, the British Soft Drink Association stated that the products were being withdrawn for “quality reasons,” not because they posed a health threat, but reaffirmed a vow to recall any beverages contaminated with benzene at more than 10 ppb.

And in June 1999, Coca-Cola was forced to recall 65 million cans of Coke in Belgium and France after more than 200 people became mysteriously sick. The company’s initial stonewalling on the issue caused a public relations disaster that led to a 10 percent drop in stock price and temporary bans in several countries. While the company eventually determined that the contamination was due to bad carbon dioxide and pallets contaminated by a benzene derivative, a European commission later concluded that Coca-Cola’s explanation was “highly unlikely,” leaving lingering questions about the source of that contamination.

Apart from the potential bad public-

ity, Alibrandi speculates that the Big Three soft drink makers (Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Cadbury-Schweppes) didn't publicly recall their products in 1990 because of fears that they might have to replace sodium benzoate – an important anti-microbial preservative. Without it or its cousin potassium benzoate, he says, drink makers would be unable to cold-bottle their drinks, instead having to undertake the more costly process of heat pasteurization. "The Big Three are going to safeguard that preservative," says Alibrandi. "If they told authorities the magnitude of it, maybe the risk was to have the preservative pulled. I imagine that would create a technical nightmare for these folks."

After the Project Denver tests, the industry moved quickly to minimize the problem. In less than a month, Cadbury-Schweppes changed the formula for Orange Crush, removing ascorbic acid from the drink. Later, chemists discovered that the benzene-causing reaction could be slowed by a "technical fix" – the addition of other chemicals called "chelating agents," of which the most common is called calcium disodium EDTA. "The soft drink industry promptly took steps to address the causes of benzene formation, and the matter was resolved through improved manufacturing procedures," said American Beverage Association (ABA) spokesperson Kathleen Dezio in a statement, when the whistleblower documents were posted last year.

After the most recent revelations, ABA vice president Mike Redman, who was at the 1990 meeting with the FDA, reiterated that point in a letter to the

Raleigh News & Observer: "Products that contain sodium benzoate and ascorbic acid are not inherently unsafe," he wrote. "Steps can be taken, and have been taken, in the formulation process to address reactions that may lead to benzene. You do not necessarily need to remove one of these ingredients to prevent benzene."

Spokespeople for Pepsi and Coke, which makes Fanta, referred calls to the ABA. A spokesperson for Sunny Delight, Sydney McHugh, denied that the company's products were dangerous. "We have a deliberate strategy to prevent benzene from forming in any of our products," she says, adding the company has gotten a clean bill of health from independent analysis. "If we ever find evidence of benzene in any of our products, we will reformulate our products."

But recently, Alibrandi says he was shocked when he pulled trade samples of hundreds of beverages and found the same combination of sodium or potassium benzoate and ascorbic acid, including some without the "technical fix" of one of the chelating agents. "I was astounded to see the number of products that contained this combination," says Alibrandi. "If this broke 15 years ago, why wasn't this rectified across the industry? The consumers of America deserve better."

Alibrandi and his lawyer, Ross Getman, alerted the FDA to the problem last November, but the agency initially denied the need for new tests, saying that it had adequately dealt with the issue in the early 1990s. To its credit, the FDA had commissioned a

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INVESTIGATION

"Many of these countries involve vendors who don't refrigerate their products. It's sold out of a cart along with the chicken kabobs"

study of the benzene problem shortly after the Project Denver findings. In that study, which appeared in a medical journal in 1993, FDA chemists tested 50 different types of foods and beverages, including soft drinks, and found that none had a level of more than 2 ppb.

Another study released around the same time by a chemist who consulted with the FDA isolated the process whereby sodium benzoate and ascorbic acid could form benzene. In samples made to approximate soft drinks, it found benzene was formed in levels of less than 1 ppb. Even so, the study recommended "the combination of ascorbic acid and sodium benzoate in foods and beverages should be evaluated more carefully."

Other findings in the FDA's study are more worrisome. In that study, beverages were kept refrigerated, despite the indications in the whistleblower documents that results were exacerbated by heat and light. As a postscript to the study, however, researchers prepared solutions of sodium or potassium benzoate and ascorbic acid, similar to those found in some soft drinks, and exposed them to heat and light. After 20 hours at room temperature, these solutions had formed benzene in levels of 4 ppb. After another 8 days, that shot off the charts to 266 ppb. Exposing the solutions to "strong UV light" and/or temperatures of 45 C (113 F) for 20 hours shot the levels up even further, to 300 ppb. The study concluded that the "benzene formed is associated with the interaction of these

two compounds. In these cases, the removal of one of the compounds may mitigate benzene formation."

Despite these findings, Pauli defends the agency's decision not to commission further testing at the time, saying that products were unlikely to be exposed to extremes of heat and light. "With the amount of staff we have, there is no way we could test more than a small sample of products," he says. "There are more important things for our people to do." Lawyer Getman, however, argues it's not unreasonable to think that soft drinks could regularly be exposed to extreme conditions. "What are they doing in New Delhi?" he says. "Many of these countries involve vendors who don't refrigerate their products. It's sold out of a cart along with the chicken kabobs."

Getman questions industry claims that all products have been reformulated to fix the problem. Because the Big Three producers and the FDA kept the benzene problem out of the press, other smaller manufacturers may have been unaware of the need for the technical fix. In addition, some European countries don't allow such chelating agents as calcium disodium EDTA, making it unclear how the Big Three's products may have been reformulated to correct the problem in those countries.

After being rebuffed by the FDA, Alibrandi and Getman organized their own series of independent tests in November, acquiring samples from as far away as Italy and Argentina and submitting them to a lab in New

York. Of the dozen beverages they tested, three were found to contain levels more than 20 ppb. They sent the results to the FDA, finally alarming the agency enough to conduct its own tests.

Two weeks ago, Pauli confirmed to reporters that a small number of beverages in their study had tested positive for elevated levels of benzene up to 10-20 ppb. Since then, however, other countries including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany and China have followed through with their own tests. Last week, tests in Britain returned more alarming results: of 230 beverages tested, 130 had benzene levels in excess of the European Union limit for drinking water of 1 ppb, with some containing up to eight times that limit, according to The Times of London.

Neither American nor British authorities have so far released their testing results, and the FDA has yet to make a public announcement about the danger. That's unacceptable, says Tim Kropp, a senior scientist with the Environmental Working Group, a watchdog organization that has called on the FDA to release data from its study. "Without the public knowing, there is no incentive to do anything," he says. "Industry doesn't move unless they have to."

After all, says Kropp, if the public had been notified back in 1990, the current scare might have been prevented. "We've known this is a problem for over a decade, and it hasn't been fixed. This is what happens when you have a voluntary agree-

ment that is not even made public. It boggles my mind that anyone would think that would work."

A good start to preventing future problems, says Kropp, is to set levels for harmful chemicals like benzene for food and drink similar to those that are in place for drinking water. "Benzene doesn't care whether you are drinking soda or water, and neither does your body," he says. Lawyer Getman agrees. "Consider, which does the average 5-year-old drink more of, pop or water?" he says. "You are not going to find a parent who says my kid drinks eight glasses of water a day."

Getman and Alibrandi are now awaiting the results of further testing in the United States and other countries to determine the extent of the problem that was first discovered in a lab 16 years ago. As more details about what the industry did and didn't do emerge, there is a possibility that companies could be held legally at fault, adding another crisis to a soft drink industry that has had no shortage of bad news. Getman ticks off a long list of legal questions presented by the issue, including product liability and deceptive consumer practices. "Especially in hot climates abroad where no technical fix was put in," he says, "the potential implications for liability are huge." **CT**

Michael Blanding is a freelance writer living in Boston. Read more of his writing at MichaelBlanding.com. This article originally appeared at www.alternet.org

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THE BEAUTY JUNGLE

After a childhood as a beauty pageant winner, Amanda Angelotti decided to take a shot at the Miss America title, choosing as her advocacy platform a discussion of a universal health service for all Americans. Then a week after winning the Miss Arlington pageant she gave up her crown. Here's why ...

I WAS A BEAUTY PAGEANT DROP-OUT

It was like Little League, but with high heels and bustiers instead of cleats and jerseys

It was with a combination of contradictory emotions – familiarity, estrangement, anticipation, disdain, and even a twinge of regret – that I tuned in and watched the recent Miss America pageant. Why? I'm not your average viewer or loyal fan.

No, I was a teenage beauty queen.

It might have been a long shot, but had circumstances been slightly different, I could have been in Las Vegas competing for that crown myself. As an insider, I want to correct some of the most common misperceptions about Miss America's image of women, but I also understand some of the deepest flaws in the organization's brand of feminism.

Raised in a conservative Republican family, I entered and won my first pageant at the age of 11. I was constantly encouraged to look beautiful, even sexy, from very early on. It was fun, and it was a mutually beneficial experience. I got to dress up in gorgeous, expensive gowns and command the attention of hundreds of people while on stage, and my mom

got to dote on me and rake in quality time as we drove all over Southern California on weekends for different competitions. It was like Little League, but with high heels and bustiers instead of cleats and jerseys.

After we moved to Texas when I started high school, I went on to earn such titles as "Miss Teen North Texas" and "Miss Dallas Teen" in the younger age categories of the Miss America and Miss USA systems. Toward the end of high school, I burnt out on pageants and stopped entering, much to the very vocal dismay of my mother.

During college, I experienced a dramatic ideological leftward shift (also to the very vocal dismay of my mother), which at first made me ashamed of my prior participation in the pageant circuit. Ultimately, however, my newfound progressive beliefs brought me full circle, and I returned to pageants more determined than ever to make it to Miss America.

To be sure, I do not defend all pageants. Some are entirely without merit. The Jon-Benet-style contests I

entered as a child are decided almost exclusively on the basis of appearance. Winners earn little more than a gaudy tiara and a 5-foot trophy, and the pageant directors walk away with a ton of cash bilked from gullible parents who unflinchingly believe – and try to prove – that their child is just the cutest kid in the whole world.

Or, for instance, though the Miss USA Pageant (part of the Miss Universe system) includes an interview phase and the winner does some charitable work, it is a for-profit enterprise owned by Donald “The Donald” Trump and NBC. Founded in 1952 by Catalina Swimsuits as a product promotion tool, it seeks women as models.

Just watch the show and you can’t miss all of the product placement interspersed throughout – the reigning Miss USA hawks everything from suntan lotion to flashy diamonds. So the formula is simple: the most attractive woman makes the best spokesmodel and, therefore, the best Miss USA.

But, I swear, Miss America is different! Why else would a proud lefty feminist like myself want to enter a local preliminary with dreams of winning a state and then national title? The short answer: money, celebrity, and a cause.

The non-profit Miss America Organization proudly proclaims itself to be the world’s leading provider of scholarship money for women, offering over \$45 million to American women last year alone to pay for higher education. After crowning the new win-

ner on Saturday, Deidre Downs, Miss America 2005 and a Rhodes Scholar finalist, will enter medical school at the University of Alabama with the help of a whopping \$50,000 scholarship. I have designs on medical school myself and could certainly use the assistance.

The organization’s stated purpose is to “[empower] young women to achieve their personal and professional goals, while providing a forum in which to express their opinions, talent and intelligence.” In fact, despite the high profile of the swimsuit competition, a substantial majority of a contestant’s score is based on the talent and interview competitions. The scoring system ensures that, often, the winner isn’t necessarily the one with the most obviously comely figure or brightest smile.

Every contestant is required to enter with a platform, a cause to advocate during a year-long speaking tour should she win, about which a panel of judges asks rapid-fire questions during the interview. The most common selections are comfortably non-controversial, such as literacy education or breast cancer awareness, while some women have ventured into hotter topics with surprising ease; Miss America 1998’s platform was a relatively progressive vision of AIDS prevention and treatment.

It was this aspect of the competition that appealed to my own progressive activist ideals. I had fantasies of using the built-in fame and PR resources of the Miss America title to advance my personal vision of large-

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THE BEAUTY JUNGLE

I thought I could show the Miss America Organization, my fellow contestants, and the public that even a borderline hippie could win the Miss America title and do some good through relatively unorthodox titleholder advocacy (and maybe, just once in a while, trade in those colorful tailored business suits for some worn-out cords)

scale public health reform in the United States. My plan involved advocating for universal health insurance, expansion of the National Health Service Corps and public health infrastructure, incentives for the practice of evidence-based health care, and mandated adoption of electronic medical records by all hospitals and clinics, among other reforms.

Anyone can speak to student groups in vague platitudes about “awareness” of drugs or diseases. I wanted to make a concrete difference in policy and thought I could get more press attention now as Miss America than I’ll probably ever be able to get once I become a public health official.

Yes, it would be a purely strategic move. But Miss America advocating progressive public health reform would be sort of like Nixon going to China, right? My platform, while admittedly overly ambitious, stood out in its detail and goals. Plus, I thought I could show the Miss America Organization, my fellow contestants, and the public that even a borderline hippie could win the Miss America title and do some good through relatively unorthodox titleholder advocacy (and maybe, just once in a while, trade in those colorful tailored business suits for some worn-out cords).

So it was with some excitement that I entered the Miss Arlington pageant in February of 2005. But my delusions of grandeur quickly evaporated. All of my prior reasons for quitting came flooding back to me. The heavy

make-up, the smothering smell of endless cans of hairspray, the excited backstage patter about wardrobe selections, pushy stage mothers primping and fussing over their daughters, spending hours on end with my body bound up in tight undergarments.

And I remembered the subtle dishonesty of it all. I found the local competition utterly oblivious to the true substance of contestants’ lives. When the Miss America finalists were asked on Saturday about a childhood experience that challenged them, neither the judges nor the audience really wanted to hear about the deep problems that I’m certain many of these women have experienced because doing so would simply be uncomfortable.

Take the first runner-up, Miss Georgia, a young woman who grew up in the South with a blonde mom and an Asian dad. She took an unusually bold move for a pageant contestant by even mentioning race, noting that in her youth, she experienced taunts because of her background. But still, she glossed over the mammoth issue of racial rifts in American culture with perfect pageant sheen.

She acted as if her encounters with racism were only discrete moments that existed exclusively in the past, that the ongoing racial dynamics of America couldn’t puncture the supposedly color blind pageant world bubble.

It seemed that she was “over it,” having purged her childhood trauma

from her perfect heart, body and brain.

But that's what viewers want. They want "cute," they want neatly packaged problems articulated as profundity, and many of the contestants were eager to oblige. I chose my daddy as my escort for the evening wear competition. Kids made fun of me because of my big glasses and gangly limbs, and it made me a stronger person. Viewers and pageant organizers don't want to confront the process of being a woman. They want to see the product of being a woman – a complete package with challenges overcome, plus honor roll status and a rockin' bod.

I enjoyed or at least tolerated all of these things as a teenager. But in the midst of the Miss Arlington pageant, I realized I had changed too much to endure them for even a day as an adult.

And then, of course, I won – the first step toward the 2005 Miss America pageant – based largely on my platform-based interview score, the highest of the contestants.

I gave up my crown just one week later, after what was for me the final straw: I learned how little say I would have if I were to win the national or even state title. Miss America must sign her life away for a year in a contract that obligates her to be, first and foremost, a public relations tool for the pageant – wearing what they tell her to wear and giving prepared speeches at fundraising events. Time to pursue her own cause is limited at best.

Under the weight of so many compromises, I finally gave up on pageants once and for all. Still, the media hype about this year's culminating contest compelled me to be one of 3.06 million people to tune in to the Miss America Pageant. They said it was going to be a return to tradition, and I wanted to see what that might look like.

After watching, I found the changes to be minor and irrelevant. They brought back the Miss Congeniality award and did away with reality show-style gimmicks that had been adopted in recent years to try to boost ratings. But those were replaced with new gimmicks, hardly traditional, such as live satellite feeds from a Miss America house party in Maine, live blogging from the pageant, and a hunky host from one of the most popular (and sex-filled) shows on television.

Watching the show in light of my own complicated pageant history, it wasn't tradition or lack thereof that struck me. Instead, it was my sense that the Miss America Organization's anti-feminism is found less in its eternally popular swimsuit competition and more in its ironic ability to take smart, talented women – many of whom will go on to become physicians, attorneys, professional opera singers, and teachers – and transform them into living, breathing public relations props who must ignore their whole selves that got them that lucky gig in the first place. **CT**

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Viewers and pageant organizers don't want to confront the process of being a woman. They want to see the product of being a woman – a complete package with challenges overcome, plus honor roll status and a rockin' bod

*Whatever ambiguity may remain about the role of the the 'Israel Lobby' in the invasion of Iraq, says **William Blum**, it's clear that if and when the sociopaths who call themselves America's leaders attack Iran, Israeli security will be the main reason, with the euro in second place*

LIES, INVASION AND THE ZIONIST LOBBY

In 1998, after seven years of relentless US bombing and draconian sanctions, Iraq was but a pitiful shell of its former self and no longer a threat even to its neighbors, much less "the world"

The recent paper by two prominent academics, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, on "The Israel Lobby", has spurred considerable discussion both in the mainstream media and on the Internet about the significance of the role played by this lobby in instigating the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The answer to this question may reside ultimately, and solely, in the minds of the neo-conservatives, in or close to official government positions, who lobbied for years to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein; an early instance of this being their now-famous letter to President Clinton in January 1998, which, in no uncertain terms, called for an American strategy that "should aim, above all, at the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power". Warning of Saddam's potential for acquiring weapons of mass destruction, the neo-cons, in language at times sounding frenzied, insisted that his removal was absolutely vital to "the security of the world in the first part of the 21st cen-

ture" and for "the safety of American troops in the region, of our friends and allies like Israel and the moderate Arab states, and a significant portion of the world's supply of oil."

This of course was a gross exaggeration. In 1998, after seven years of relentless US bombing and draconian sanctions, Iraq was but a pitiful shell of its former self and no longer a threat even to its neighbors, much less "the world". There were those who hated Saddam, but the only country that had any good reason to fear Iraq, then or later, was Israel, as retaliation for Israel's unprovoked bombing of Iraq in 1981. The letter to Clinton was signed by Elliott Abrams, Richard L. Armitage, William J. Bennett, Jeffrey Bergner, John Bolton, Paula Dobriansky, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan, Zalmay Khalilzad, William Kristol, Richard Perle, Peter W. Rodman, Donald Rumsfeld, William Schneider, Jr., Vin Weber, Paul Wolfowitz, R. James Woolsey, and Robert B. Zoellick(1), most of whom, if not all, could be categorized as allies of Israel; most of whom were soon to

join the Busheviks. What could have prompted these individuals to write such a letter to the president other than a desire to eliminate a threat to the safety of Israel? And when they came into power some began immediately to campaign for regime change in Iraq.

There are those who argue that the United States has invaded numerous countries without requiring instigation by Israel. This is of course true, it's what the empire does for a living. But to say that the Israel lobby played a vital role in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is not to suggest an explanation for the whole history of US foreign interventions.

To the role of the Israel lobby we must add two other factors carrying unknown degrees of weight in the decision to invade Iraq: controlling vast amounts of oil, and saving the dollar from the euro by reversing Saddam Hussein's decision to use the latter in Iraq's oil transactions (and this reversal was one of the first edicts of the occupation).

Whatever ambiguity may remain about the role of the Israel lobby in the invasion of Iraq, it's clear that if and when the sociopaths who call themselves our leaders attack Iran, Israeli security will be the main reason, with the euro in second place because Iran has been taking – or at least threatening to take – serious steps to replace the dollar with the euro in oil transactions. Iran of course also has lots of oil, but unless the United States aims at conquest and occupation of the country – and

where will Los Socios find a few hundred thousand more clueless American bodies – access to and control of the oil would not be very feasible. The Israel lobby appears to be the only major organized force that is actively pushing the United States toward crisis in Iran. Along with the lobby's leading member, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), there's the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which has taken out full-page ads in major US newspapers with the less-than-subtle heading: "A Nuclear Iran Threatens All", depicting radiating circles on an Iran-centered map to show where its missiles could strike.

"The threat from Iran is, of course, their stated objective to destroy our strong ally Israel," declared George W. last month. "That's a threat, a serious threat. It's a threat to world peace. I made it clear, and I'll make it clear again, that we will use military might to protect our ally Israel."(2)

Chutzpah of an imperial size

Do you remember the classic example of "chutzpah"? It's the young man who kills his parents and then asks the court for mercy on the grounds that he's an orphan.

The Bush administration's updated version of that is starting a wholly illegal, immoral, and devastating war and then dismissing all kinds of criticism of its action on the grounds that "We're at war."

They use this excuse to defend warrantless spying, to defend the imprisonment of people for years

Whatever ambiguity may remain about the role of the Israel lobby in the invasion of Iraq, it's clear that if and when the sociopaths who call themselves our leaders attack Iran, Israeli security will be the main reason, with the euro in second place

THE ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Very few of the poor souls were captured on any kind of battlefield, few had even a gun in their hand; most were just in the wrong place at the wrong time or were turned in by an informer for an American bounty or a personal grudge

without charging them with a crime, to abuse and torture them, to ignore the Geneva Convention and other international treaties; they use it against Democrats, accusing them of partisanship during “a time of war”; they use it to justify the expansion of presidential powers and the weakening of checks and balances. In short, they claim “We can do whatever we want about anything at all related to this war, because we’re at war.”

“War is war,” says Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, “and it has never been the case that when you captured a combatant you have to give them a jury trial in your civil courts. Give me a break.”(3) Scalia, in his public talks, implies that prisoners held in the far-flung American gulag were all “captured on the battlefield”.(4) But this is simply false. Very few of the poor souls were captured on any kind of battlefield, few had even a gun in their hand; most were just in the wrong place at the wrong time or were turned in by an informer for an American bounty or a personal grudge.

The American public, like all publics, requires only sufficient repetition from “respectable” sources to learn how to play the game: Earlier this month many cities of Wisconsin held referendums on bringing the troops home from Iraq. Here’s Jim Martin, 48, a handyman in Evansville. He thinks that his city shouldn’t waste taxpayers’ money running a referendum that means nothing. “The fact of the matter remains, we’re at war,” he said as he ate his lunch at the Night Owl bar.(5)

And here now is Chris Simcox a leader in the Minuteman movement that patrols the Mexican border: “If I catch you breaking into my country in the middle of the night and we’re at war ... you’re a potential enemy. I don’t care if you’re a busboy coming to wash dishes.”(6)

One observer has summed up the legal arguments put forth by the Bush administration thusly: “The existing laws do not apply because this is a different kind of war. It’s a different kind of war because the president says so. The president gets to say so because he is president. ... We follow the laws of war except to the extent that they do not apply to us. These prisoners have all the rights to which they are entitled by law, except to the extent that we have changed the law to limit their rights.”(7)

Yet, George W. has cut taxes tremendously, something probably unprecedented while at war.

Facing calls for impeachment, plummeting popularity, a looming Republican electoral disaster, and massive failure in Mesopotamia, Georgie looks toward Persia. He and the other gang members will be able to get away with almost anything they can think of if they can say “We’re in two wars!”

A tale of two terrorists

Zacarias Moussaoui, the only person charged to date in the United States in connection with the September 11, 2001 attacks, testifying at his trial in Alexandria, Virginia:

The sobbing September 11 survivors

and family members who testified against him were “disgusting” ... He and other Muslims want to “exterminate” American Jews ... executed Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh was “the greatest American” (8) He expressed his willingness to kill Americans “any time, anywhere” ... “I wish it had happened not only on the 11th, but the 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th.” (9)

Orlando Bosch, one of the masterminds behind the October 6, 1976 bombing of a Cuban passenger plane, blown out of the sky with 73 people on board, including the entire young Cuban fencing team, interviewed April 8 by Juan Manuel Cao of Channel 41 in Miami:

Cao: Did you down that plane in 1976?

Bosch: If I tell you that I was involved, I will be inculcating myself ... and if I tell you that I did not participate in that action, you would say that I am lying. I am therefore not going to answer one thing or the other.

Cao: In that action 73 persons were killed ...

Bosch: No chico, in a war such as us Cubans who love liberty wage against the tyrant [Fidel Castro], you have to down planes, you have to sink ships, you have to be prepared to attack anything that is within your reach.

Cao: But don't you feel a little bit for those who were killed there, for their families?

Bosch: Who was on board that plane? Four members of the Commu-

nist Party, five north Koreans, five Guyanese ... Who was there? Our enemies.

Cao: And the fencers? The young people on board?

Bosch: I saw the young girls on television. There were six of them. After the end of the competition, the leader of the six dedicated their triumph to the tyrant. She gave a speech filled with praise for the tyrant. We had already agreed in Santo Domingo, that everyone who comes from Cuba to glorify the tyrant had to run the same risks as those men and women that fight alongside the tyranny.

Cao: If you ran into the family members who were killed in that plane, wouldn't you think it difficult ... ?

Bosch: No, because in the end those who were there had to know that they were cooperating with the tyranny in Cuba.

The main difference between Zacarias Moussaoui and Orlando Bosch is that one of them is on trial for his life while the other walks around Miami a free man, free enough to be interviewed on television. Bosch had a partner in plotting the bombing of the Cuban airliner, Luis Posada, a Cuban-born citizen of Venezuela. He's being held in custody in the United States on a minor immigration charge. His extradition has been requested by Venezuela for several crimes including the downing of the airliner, part of the plotting having taken place in Venezuela. But the Bush administration refuses to send him to Venezuela because they don't

The main difference between Zacarias Moussaoui and Orlando Bosch is that one of them is on trial for his life while the other walks around Miami a free man, free enough to be interviewed on television

THE ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Mr. Amador is presumably claiming that no one in Cuba is ever happy or even smiles. The book is currently being reviewed by a school committee

like the Venezuelan government, nor will they try him in the United States for the crime. However, the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Civil Aviation (1973), of which the United States is a signatory, gives Washington no discretion. Article 7 says that the state in which “the alleged offender is found shall, if it does not extradite him, be obliged, without exception whatsoever and whether or not the offence was committed in its territory, to submit the case to its competent authorities for the purpose of prosecution.”(10) Extradite or prosecute. The United States does neither.

This is your mind on anti-communism

Earlier this month, in Miami-Dade County, Florida (where else?) it was reported that the parent of a schoolchild asked the school board to ban a book called “Vamos a Cuba” (“Let’s go to Cuba”), a travel book that has smiling kids on the cover and inside depicts happy scenes from a festival held in Cuba. “As a former political prisoner from Cuba, I find the material to be untruthful,” Juan Amador, wrote to the school board. “It portrays a life in Cuba that does not exist. I believe it aims to create an illusion and distort reality.” Mr. Amador is presumably claiming that no one in Cuba is ever happy or even smiles. The book is currently being reviewed by a school committee.(11)

During his recent election campaign, Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi declared that communists in

Mao’s China boiled babies to make fertilizer.(12) He defended his remark by citing: “The Black Book of Communism”, a “history” of communism published in 1997, a book that is to the study of communism as “The Protocols of the Elders of Zionism” is to Judaism or the collected statements of George W. Bush are to understanding why we are fighting in Iraq. Berlusconi’s remark may actually be regarded as progress in the wonderful world of anti-communism, for following the Russian Revolution of 1917 it was widely and long proclaimed that the Bolsheviks killed and ate babies (as the early pagans believed the Christians guilty of devouring their children; the same was believed of Jews in the Middle Ages). It’s interesting to note (Well, to me at least) that in 2003, when my book *Killing Hope* was published in Italy, the publisher gave it the title “Il Libro Nero Degli Stati Uniti” (“The Black Book of The United States”).(13)

Charles Taylor and that fake opposition party known as the Democrats

Some things I have to repeat, because the news makes them relevant once again, and because the media ignores them once again. Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, has been captured and is being held for trial in a UN-sponsored war-crimes court in neighboring Sierra Leone. In 2003 Taylor was indicted by this court for “bearing the greatest responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious violations of interna-

tional humanitarian law” during Sierra Leone’s civil war. The United States, along with the rest of the world, condemns Taylor, applauds his capture, and calls for his punishment. What we’re not reminded of is this:

In 1998, President Clinton sent Rev. Jesse Jackson as his special envoy to Liberia and Sierra Leone, the latter being in the midst of one of the great horrors of the 20th century – You may remember the army of mostly young boys, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), who went around raping and chopping off people’s arms and legs. African and world opinion was enraged against the RUF, which was committed to protecting the diamond mines they controlled. Taylor was an indispensable ally and supporter of the RUF and Jackson was an old friend of his. Jesse was not sent to the region to try to curtail the RUF’s atrocities, nor to hound Taylor about his widespread human rights violations, but instead, in June 1999, Jackson and other American officials drafted entire sections of an accord that made RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, Sierra Leone’s vice president, and gave him official control over the diamond mines, the country’s major source of wealth.(14)

And what was the Clinton administration’s interest in all this? It’s been speculated that the answer lies with certain individuals with ties to the diamond industry and to Clinton, while he was president or while governor of Arkansas; for example, Maurice Tempelman, generous contributor to the Democratic Party and escort of Secretary of State Madeleine

Albright around this time, whose Antwerp, Amsterdam and Tel Aviv diamond marts arranged for Sierra Leone diamond sales to Tiffany and Cartier.(15)

Good ol’ Bill? Good ol’ Jess? I know, I know, I keep tearing down your heroes. Who will you have left? But remember the words of the two characters in Bertolt Brecht’s “Galileo”:

“Unhappy the land that has no heroes,” says the first.

“No,” says the other, “Unhappy the land that needs heroes.”

Or as Abbie Hoffman said: “Sacred cows make the best hamburger.”

After the war-crimes trial we'll need a second tribunal for shameless lying, gross insults to our intelligence, and just plain weird stupidity and stupid weirdness

George W. Bush, speaking March 29, 2006 to the Freedom House organization in Washington: “We’re a country of deep compassion. We care. One of the great things about America, one of the beauties of our country, is that when we see a young, innocent child blown up by an IED [improvised explosive device], we cry. We don’t care what the child’s religion may be, or where that child may live, we cry. It upsets us. The enemy knows that, and they’re willing to – they’re willing to kill to shake our confidence. That’s what they’re trying to do.”(16)

“Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.” Voltaire

“One of the great things about America, one of the beauties of our country, is that when we see a young, innocent child blown up by an IED [improvised explosive device], we cry. We don’t care what the child’s religion may be, or where that child may live, we cry”

THE ANTI-EMPIRE REPORT

Many units are rent-controlled apartments, we are told, landlords have few incentives to seismic retrofit. There are those who would use this as an argument against rent control. There are others who would use it as an argument against free enterprise or private ownership of housing

Is this any way to organize a society of human beings?

April 18 was the 100th anniversary of the historic, catastrophic San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Studies predict that the next big quake in the city will take a much greater human toll because so many of the residents live in apartments and houses built before building codes were tightened in 1970. And because many units are rent-controlled apartments, we are told, landlords have few incentives to seismic retrofit. (17)

There are those who would use this as an argument against rent control. There are others who would use it as an argument against free enterprise or private ownership of housing. Think of it.

Over the years, California has learned very well how to modernize buildings to prepare them to withstand earthquakes much better than in the past. That this works has been proven again and again, even dramatically, such as in Los Angeles, hit by a 7.4 quake in 1994, with relatively little damage. (I was asleep in my bed in Hollywood when it hit in the early morning of January 17 and was rudely and frighteningly awakened, but the apartment building was fine.) Yet large numbers of people in California are still living in dwellings very vulnerable to a quake because to correct the situation would adversely affect the profit and loss statements of the owners of those dwellings. **CT**

NOTES

(1) Letter to Clinton: [\[cancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm\]\(http://cancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm\)](http://www.newameri-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

(2) Agence France Presse, March 20, 2006

(3) Newsweek, April 3, 2006

(4) Washington Post, April 15, 2006, p.2

(5) Associated Press, March 27, 2006

(6) Philadelphia Inquirer, March 26, 2006

(7) Dahlia Lithwick, Slate.com, March 28, 2006

(8) Washington Post, April 14, 2006, p.1

(9) Deutsche Presse-Agentur, April 13, '06

(10) www.unodc.org/unodc/terrorism_convention_civil_aviation.html

(11) Washington Post, April 9, 2006, p.2

(12) Associated Press, March 29, 2006

(13) For many other examples of the mind on anti-communism, see William Blum, "Freeing the World to Death", chapter 12 ("Before there were terrorists there were communists and the wonderful world of anti-communism")

(14) Ryan Lizza, "Where angels fear to tread", New Republic, July 24, 2000

(15) The Washington Post, August 2, 1997, p.A1 and February 6, 1998, p.B1 re Tempelman. Other speculation in various places has concerned diamond investors Jean Raymond Boule and Robert Friedland, each with alleged ties to Clinton.

(16) Federal Information and News Dispatch, Inc., State Department Documents and Publications, March 29, 2006

(17) Washington Post, April 17, 2006, p.3

William Blum is the author of: Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2; Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir; Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire.

His web site is www.killinghope.org

Henry Kissinger and Alexander Haig, two of the main architect's of the last American military debacle in Vietnam, are still in demand to defend their actions and talk about the current military adventure in Iraq. Ron Jacobs suggests another place where the two 'heroes' might have their next meeting

TWO NEW TENANTS FOR ABU GHRAIB

Remember those big headlines about the closing of Abu Ghraib? According to the media splash, the US was preparing to shut down those notorious chambers within three months. That would mean by June 2006. Well, guess what? Those stories were just another piece of disinformation. According to the US Department of Defense news service DefenseLink, "News reports that the U.S. military intends to close Abu Ghraib within the next few months and to transfer its prisoners to other jails are inaccurate."

Like everything else in Iraq, the actual timetable for any closure of the prison will be based on "the readiness of Iraq's security forces to assume control of them" and some kind of infrastructure improvements at other facilities. (DefenseLink 3/12/06) If previous reality holds true in this instance, that means that the Abu Ghraib facility will not be closing any time soon. Just like the reports of soon-to-come troop withdrawals rumored every few months, the sto-

ries of the closure of Abu Ghraib are just one more part of the government's attempts to keep us hopefully confused. Whether the media's intention is to deceive or clarify by reporting these statements, the objective reality is the former.

Once again, it becomes clear that the only way the troops will come home alive is by consistent and loud popular demand. Polls showing that most Americans favor such a withdrawal are obviously not enough. Neither are votes for antiwar legislators. More is needed.

Of course, if one listens to Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger – two architects of the last major US foreign disaster in Vietnam – they might think that the only way to get out of Iraq is by blowing the country and its inhabitants to hell. Indeed, Mr. Haig, who was a general, Secretary of State under Reagan, and an advisor to Richard Nixon (even serving as his Chief of Staff during the final months of Nixon's presidency), told an audience of a conference on the Vietnam War at the John F. Kennedy Presiden-

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WAR GAMES 1

The mindset that Haig represents seriously believes that the US military was restrained in Vietnam and that a similar situation exists in Iraq. This is despite the fact that more ordnance has been dropped on those two countries than on any other country in history

tial Library and Museum, “Every asset of the nation must be applied to the conflict to bring about a quick and successful outcome, or don’t do it.” This is from a man, who helped engineer (among other things) the Christmas bombings of 1972, the mining of Haiphong harbor and the bombing of Hanoi and the dikes of northern Vietnam, and the invasion of Cambodia. What does he suggest the US do in Iraq? Break out some tactical nuclear weapons? The mindset that Haig represents seriously believes that the US military was restrained in Vietnam and that a similar situation exists in Iraq. This is despite the fact that more ordnance has been dropped on those two countries than on any other country in history.

His fellow panel member, Henry Kissinger, would probably like that idea. After all, it was Mr. Kissinger who considered the use of nuclear weapons against northern Vietnam in 1969, but was convinced such an idea might be a bad move after hundreds of thousands of US residents filled the streets of DC and several other cities on November 15, 1969 in a national mobilization to end the war in Vietnam.

Both of these men should be in adjoining cells in the Hague. Instead, they are guests of honor at the JFK Library. It’s not that they were besmirching Kennedy’s legacy by being there. Indeed, Mr. Kissinger said he admired the Kennedys – a statement that should not surprise any serious student of US history given Kissinger’s tenure as a consultant on

security matters to various U.S. agencies from 1955 to 1968. Indeed, Kissinger’s treatise on nuclear weapons and foreign policy was a major influence on the strategic policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Given that treatise’s emphasis on the use of tactical nuclear weapons together with conventional forces and the current discussion of just such a policy, one could say that Kissinger’s influence continues to steer US war policy.

According to a report on Boston TV station Channel 4 of the conference attended by Haig and Kissinger, he was met by antiwar protestors on his way to the meeting. In addition, during the question and answer session Mr. Kissinger was asked if he wanted to apologize for the hundreds of thousands of deaths in Vietnam. His answer was typical Kissinger, arrogant and dismissive: “This is not the occasion,” he said. “We have to start from the assumption that serious people were making serious decisions. So that’s the sort of question that’s highly inappropriate.” (CBS4boston.com 3/12/06) When asked about the possibility that the US bombing of Cambodia helped create the Khmer Rouge and the ensuing killing that followed, Mr. Kissinger dismissed the possibility. In fact, he minimized the extent of the US bombing, telling the audience that it only took place along a “five-mile strip” of that country. According to Globalsecurity.org this is simply not true:

“Many of the bombs that fell in Cambodia struck relatively uninhab-

ited mountain or forest regions; however, as declassified United States Air Force maps show, others fell over some of the most densely inhabited areas of the country, such as Siemreab Province, Kampong Chhnang Province, and the countryside around Phnom Penh. Deaths from the bombing are extremely difficult to estimate, and figures range from a low of 30,000 to a high of 500,000. Whatever the real extent of the casualties, the Arc-light missions over Cambodia, which were halted in August 15, 1973, by the United States Congress, delivered shattering blows to the structure of life in many of the country's villages."

It wasn't all warmongering at the conference. Former aide to Lyndon Johnson, Jack Valenti told the audience that Washington has forgotten the major lesson of Vietnam. That lesson, said Valenti, who is retired from the presidency of the Motion Picture Association of America, "No president can win a war when public support for that war begins to decline and evaporate." Of course, this fact didn't stop Messrs. Haig and Kissinger from trying their damndest and it doesn't seem to be preventing their modern-day incarnations from doing the same.

Back to Abu Ghraib.

It is public knowledge that this prison has been the site of torture and murder of prisoners by the US military and intelligence agencies. It is also public knowledge that Abu Ghraib is but one of several such prisons operated by the US government around the world, with the one at

Guantanamo Bay in Cuba being the most (in)famous. Back in 1970, the US public was told about similar prisons in Vietnam. These were known as tiger cages and were used to hold and torture so-called enemy no-combatants and political prisoners. Despite the fact that the tiger cages were exposed and decried by human rights organizations and some US congressmen, the cages were not shut down until the United States military and its southern Vietnamese cohorts were defeated in May 1975.

As I wrote this, a story appeared on my computer's news ticker that U.S. State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Colleen Graffy told BBC that Washington wants to close down Gitmo. Upon closer reading, however, such a closure is just something under discussion and will hopefully happen "over the years." (Reuters 3/12/06)

So, the question remains, how long will it be before today's cages are closed? **CT**

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Jacobs' essay on Big Bill Broonzy is featured in CounterPunch's new collection on music, art and sex, Serpents in the Garden.

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Despite the fact that the tiger cages were exposed and decried by human rights organizations and some US congressmen, the cages were not shut down until the United States military and its southern Vietnamese cohorts were defeated in May 1975

*Why have the retired generals decided to break their silence on Donald Rumsfeld's conduct of the war on Iraq? Because, writes **Tony Karon**, they're sending a signal to the US public, in this election year, that Bush, Cheney and co are strategically incompetent and should not be allowed to open a second front in Iran*

WHY THE GENERALS HATE RUMSFELD

So why have the military men chosen this moment to break their silence? And, for that matter, why have they chosen Rummy as their target?

The retired generals (presumably, as is typical in U.S. public life, speaking on behalf of those still on active duty, since they can't speak for themselves) who have – in a political sense – dumped Donald Rumsfeld's body on the White House lawn, are not men prone to launching offensives on the impulse of vengeance or any other whim. They have spent years in military academies and on battlefields learning the art of picking their battles with a view to advancing an overall strategy, with their targets and their timing always chosen not simply with the optimal conditions for winning a particular engagement in mind, but also with an overriding sense of how that particular engagement advances the overall aims of the war. (Trust me, it's there in Clausewitz's definitions of strategy and tactics; I never kept the page reference.)

While we may all enjoy the spectacle of the most stupendously arrogant member of Bush's cabinet being taken down by those entrusted with defending America – even as a couple of generals he appointed rush to his

defense, along with President Bush (“You're doing a heck of a job, Rummy...”), we still need to ask why this is happening, and why now.

After all, the egregious errors of which Rumsfeld is being accused were made in 2003, and America has chafed under the burden in blood and treasure that the Iraq misadventure has cost for at least the past two years. So why have the military men chosen this moment to break their silence? And, for that matter, why have they chosen Rummy as their target?

While they accuse the Defense Secretary of resisting sound military advice and authoring spectacular tactical errors, it's long been pretty obvious that the military brass regarded invading Iraq as a colossal strategic error even before the tactical mistakes came into play. It was the likes of former Marine commander Anthony Zinni who warned that taking down Saddam's regime was a bad idea because it would produce precisely the sectarian equation we see today. And when members of the top brass, such as Shinseki, told the Pentagon civilian

leadership that they'd need at least 300,000 or more troops to pacify Iraq, this was not simply because they believed it was true, but also because they believed that these numbers would render invading Iraq politically prohibitive for the Bush administration. And for the same reason, the war's most fervent advocates, such as Paul Wolfowitz, shot down those estimates without even seriously contemplating them – they were seen as an attempt to delay or even cancel the march to war.

So, again, why Rummy, and why now?

Rumsfeld is, in some ways, low hanging fruit for the generals. After all, he's the civilian political appointee who translates administration policy into the military, and as such is the obvious target of a backlash by the uniformed professional military against the administration. If the generals were going on Sunday talk shows calling for President Bush to resign, they'd be deemed to be part of a coup. The generals' grievances over Iraq, and the no-win situation in which it has placed the U.S. military (and the epic weakening of the U.S. strategic position more generally it has occasioned) obviously extends to President Bush, Vice President Cheney and others. But to avoid appearing insubordinate, the generals are couching their criticism in terms of policy choices made in the Pentagon, their immediate overseers. (In corporate culture, disgruntled employees are permitted to complain to Human Resources about their immediate managers, but nobody in the company is

going to hear out any complaints they may have about the strategic choices made by the CEO – thus the generals targeting Rumsfeld, rather than Bush.)

But Rumsfeld represents far more than a manager to the generals; he's widely viewed along with Cheney as one of the key architects of a relentlessly hawkish policy, or set of policies, that has placed the military in a quagmire in Iraq and weakened its ability to deal with a number of other challenges. It's not just Rummy the cost-cutting technocrat who is drawing the fire of the generals, but Rummy the Strangelovish champion of a "forward-leaning strategy of freedom."

And the timing, of course, is everything.

There's no obvious reason by the logic of the current situation in Iraq, or decisions that may be made shortly, for the generals to choose this moment to launch their offensive. They all believe that the U.S. needs to remain in Iraq as long as it takes to stabilize it in some way (although they may well differ with the administration on what that might involve).

But given what Seymour Hersh's sources in the military and intelligence communities are telling him about plans for military action against Iran, there's certainly a clear motive for those seeking to save the U.S. military from further calamitous misadventures to pick a very public battle with the administration over its handling of strategic matters.

Having watched the Iraq debacle take shape in no small part because those from the military establishment

It's not just Rummy the cost-cutting technocrat who is drawing the fire of the generals, but Rummy the Strangelovish champion of a "forward-leaning strategy of freedom"

WAR GAMES 2

The military would in all likelihood side with the grownups in the intel and diplomatic community who believe President Bush is making an adolescent blunder in simply refusing to talk to Iran because he doesn't deem it a legitimate regime when that regime is offering a dialogue signed to address all issues of U.S. concern

in a position to do so (think Colin Powell) failed to publicly challenge what they could see was a disaster in the making, the generals are clearly inclined to act preemptively this time. And given the diverse range of pressures and variables in the Iran equation, they also know that an attack on Iran is not a done deal, and can be prevented.

Smart military minds know that invading and occupying Iran is simply not an option (it has three times the size and population of Iraq, where a substantial portion of the U.S. military's combat units remain embroiled), and also that simply bombing Iran's nuclear facilities – those that are known, at least – is unlikely to deter Iran from seeking nuclear weapons. Indeed, it is more likely to spur them to accelerate their efforts. (If the Israeli air strike on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981 is the model of preemptive action, then its limits should be made abundantly clear by the fact that ten years later, the IAEA found Iraq far more advanced in its covert bomb program than anyone had thought possible.)

Despite the insistence of the same talk-TV zealots in the pre-Iraq days that a bit of shock and awe would presage the collapse of the mullahs, the military also knows that attacking Iran would almost certainly shore up the power of the regime, and tilt most debates in favor of its most hardline element. And the likely response from Iran, both in terms of direct strikes on U.S. personnel stationed in Iraq, as well as proxy terror strikes throughout the region – and also the likelihood that

such an attack would crank up the hostility of Iraq's Shiite majority to the U.S. presence – would imperil U.S. strategic interests across a wide front. And that, in turn, would force the U.S. to escalate its own response, opening a new war of attrition even if the original intention was simply to destroy particular Iranian assets.

While the arm-chair warriors of the Rumsfeld stripe pursue regime change through the Che Guevara type foco model – blow up a few things, and the masses will rise – the military would in all likelihood side with the grownups in the intel and diplomatic community who believe President Bush is making an adolescent blunder in simply refusing to talk to Iran because he doesn't deem it a legitimate regime when that regime is offering a dialogue designed to address all issues of U.S. concern.

So why go after Rummy if the goal is to stop another bout of reckless adventurism for which the men and women in uniform pay the price? Well, it's a key battle in pursuit of that goal, because by publicly challenging Rummy's handling of Iraq, the generals send a none-too-subtle signal to the U.S. public, in an election year, that the Bush administration is strategically incompetent. And that would make it harder for Messrs. Cheney and Rumsfeld and co. to open a second front in Iran. **CT**

Tony Karon is a senior editor at TIME.com. This was taken from personal web site, Rootless Cosmopolitan, at tonykaron.com

Should politicians be forced to account for their lies while in office? Yes, says Stan Winer, who tells of efforts in Latin America to bring former dictators and their death squads to justice. This trend has also extended to South Africa, where ex-defence minister Magnus Malan may finally find himself in the dock

DIGGING UP THE PAST IN 'ANOTHER COUNTRY'

No wonder capitalist societies are coming apart at the seams. Trust is supposed to be the bond that holds a society together, and trust is based on truth. But so often have government leaders asserted their “right” to lie, to manage the news and contrive to deceive the public, that large numbers people in the West no longer believe much of what their governments say about anything. There has of course always been some degree of scepticism about politics and politicians – but that was something quite different from today’s automatic perception that they are all liars and cheats. Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Iraq’s non-existent weapons of mass destruction are just some of the historical milestones along the path to disillusionment. There are many others, already buried and forgotten, because people tend forget that the present derives from the past and the future from both. The officially endorsed public attitude seems to be that, if the past is another country, let’s declare independence from it.

The end result is that people nowadays don’t even care if public officials lie to them. Others seem to expect it. This is not mere, healthy questioning of those in authority. It reflects a destructive phenomenon of the times: mass cynicism and a sense that we are powerless victims at the mercy of uncontrollable forces. Yet, there is no reason to believe that the process of human progress has come to an end, or that it ever will. There will always be exceptional people to stand up for justice, and to resist the scourge of an age turned apathetic.

A leftward tilt in Latin American politics, for example, has meant that socialist governments throughout the region have recently started digging up the past and prosecuting human rights violations that occurred, in some cases, 30 years ago or more. These were of course all countries where for decades the United States propped up right-wing dictatorships, conducted covert operations, and helped train “anti-terrorist” death squads.

Chile, for instance, has offered rep-

There will always be exceptional people to stand up for justice, and to resist the scourge of an age turned apathetic

WAR GAMES 3

Leftwing Venezuelan vice president Jose Vicente Rangel has lashed out at President Bush, calling him "the North American Hitler" and comparing Bush's administration to the Nazi Third Reich

arations to torture victims and forced the army to apologize for its abuses, while the Supreme Court in Argentina has declared unconstitutional a pair of amnesty laws from the 1980's. In Uruguay, a leftist government, led by Tabaré Vázquez, has taken power and a former president, Juan María Bordaberry, has been indicted for the 1976 murders of two political leaders. Mexico under President Néstor Kirchner last year charged one of its former presidents, Luis Echeverría, with genocide for his role in a "dirty war" against students and leftists in the late 1960's and early 1970's. And in Peru, military, intelligence and police officials involved in abuses during the authoritarian rule of Alberto K. Fujimori in the 1990's are also facing charges. In Bolivia, newly elected socialist president Evo Morales has wasted no time in expelling 28 right-wing generals from the police, army, navy and air force after a government-appointed commission denounced high-command complicity in a US covert operation to demolish Bolivia's anti-aircraft defenses. Both Bolivia and Venezuela are cementing ties with Cuba. Leftwing Venezuelan vice president Jose Vicente Rangel has lashed out at President Bush, calling him "the North American Hitler" and comparing Bush's administration to the Nazi Third Reich.

In Cambodia, meanwhile, 27 years after the ruthless Khmer Rouge leadership under Pol Pot was driven from power, some of its top figures are expected to soon be put on trial for causing the deaths of nearly one-

fourth of the Cambodian population. Britain and America, which for years have done their utmost to forget their past support for the Khmer Rouge, may now have to confront events they once thought were safely buried.

Much the same might also apply to former senior officers of the apartheid South Africa military establishment who were either absolved or granted generous amnesties after the country's transition to democratic rule in 1994. Former defence minister General Magnus Malan, for example, was absolved of any criminal offence in the in the context of South African counter-insurgency operations that took place during the 1980s.

A South African Supreme Court judge ruled in 1996 that, in the context of those operations, "offensive" actually meant "protective". It was a post-apartheid measure of the extent to which words have become denuded of significance, to mean the very opposite of what they were supposed to convey.

Brigadier Wouter Basson, formerly in charge of the South African Army's chemical and biological warfare program, was another leading military figure who got away with murder during the apartheid years. Basson was allegedly involved in the murders of more than 200 South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) prisoners of war. According to eye-witness evidence presented at the South African Truth Commission, the prisoners were injected with muscle relaxants before their bodies were dumped into the Atlantic Ocean from

an aircraft. Basson also allegedly conspired to contaminate the water supply of a SWAPO refugee camp with cholera. However, all charges against Basson were subsequently withdrawn by the State during a marathon 30-month trial in the Pretoria High Court three years ago.

In a classic case of legal bungling, if not an outright travesty of justice, the court ruled that it had no jurisdiction in respect of crimes committed in South West Africa – or Namibia as it is now named. An appeal court later overturned the decision on the basis that South West Africa was in fact a South African colony during the apartheid era. It was illegally occupied and administered by the former South African regime. But the Directorate of Public Prosecutions decided last year not to reopen the case against of Basson because of the legal principle of double jeopardy, which means in effect that an alleged perpetrator cannot be tried twice on the same charges.

Since then, however, a number of secret mass graves were discovered

last year near several former South African Army bases in Namibia. The graves are believed to contain the remains of hundreds of SWAPO guerrilla prisoners of war, who were secretly executed by South African police and military intelligence units. Extensive forensic tests on the exhumed remains are currently underway. Depending on the results, Malan, Basson and their cohorts may well find themselves in the dock yet again, to confront events they once thought were safely buried. For them, as for other alleged war criminals around the Third World who once thought they would get away with it, the past might no longer be another country from which they can claim independence. **CT**

*South African journalist Stan Winer is author of the book *Between the Lies: Rise of the media-military-industrial complex* (London: Southern Universities Press, 2004).*

Buy this book from www.amazon.co.uk or download it free of charge at www.coldtype.net

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GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Speaking to an antiwar rally on the third anniversary of the war on Iraq, media critic Norman Solomon questions how it is possible to drop bombs on urban neighborhoods in a competent way. The problem is not, he says, that the war isn't winnable – but that it was and is and always will be wrong

NO WAY TO WAGE A WRONG WAR

How do you ravage the housing and health care and education of communities across the United States, while war-profiteering corporations post bigger profits – how would you do that in a competent way?

During a national radio response to the president, Senator Dianne Feinstein accused the Bush administration of “incompetence” in the Iraq war.

What would be a competent way to pursue the war in Iraq?

How would you drop huge bombs on urban neighborhoods in a competent way? How would you deploy cluster munitions that shred the bodies of children in a competent way? How would you take hundreds of thousands of people from their homeland and send them to a country to kill and be killed – based on lies – in a competent way?

How do you ravage the housing and health care and education of communities across the United States, while war-profiteering corporations post bigger profits – how would you do that in a competent way?

Senator Feinstein went on to say that it's so important, for the war in Iraq, for the United States government to “do it right.”

How does one do this war right, when every day it brings more carnage? The only way to do this war right is to not do it at all.

Reporting on a new assault by the U.S. military in Iraq, a headline on the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle said: “Biggest air attack since the invasion seen as delivering a message.”

Forty years ago, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said it was necessary to drop bombs on North Vietnam in order to deliver a message to the Communist leaders in Hanoi. The former war correspondent Chris Hedges, in his book “War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning,” recalls that when he was reporting from El Salvador, one morning he and other reporters woke up at their hotel and discovered that death squads had dumped corpses in front of the building overnight, and in the mouths of those corpses were written messages threatening the journalists.

In Yugoslavia, during the spring of 1999, the bombs fell with the U.S.-led NATO forces delivering a message.

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

And when, at noontime one Friday in the city of Nis, cluster bombs fell courtesy of U.S. taxpayers and ripped into the body of a woman holding a bag of carrots from the market, that too was an instance of sending a message.

Time after time, leaders send messages by inflicting death. On September 11, 2001, Osama bin Laden sent a message at the World Trade Center. And in the fall of 2001 the U.S. military sent a message to Afghanistan, where the civilians who died, if we are going to count numbers, were at least as numerous as those who died at the World Trade Center.

And now, George W. Bush continues to send a message with the bombs and the bullets. And we're encouraged – if not to avidly support – to be passive. To defer. To be inactive.

When people across the United States gather to oppose this war, they are refusing to participate in sending the message of death.

Almost 40 years ago Martin Luther King talked about what he called “the madness of militarism.” And it's with us, here and now; it's with us in the United States every time a child is malnourished, every time people need medical care and don't get it and suffer and sometimes lose their lives, while the military budgets of this country – over half a trillion dollars a year – are spent not on defense but on military expenditures, which dwarf anything that could be accurately described as defense. The madness of militarism that Dr. King talked about

is expressed every day by the likes of Senator Feinstein, who demands “competence” in war and says that it must be done right.

We need a peace effort, not a war effort, from the United States. Instead of doing a better job of killing, there's a movement around this country to compel what is said to be our own government to do a much much much better job of sustaining life – instead of taking it.

The problem isn't that this war may not be winnable. The problem is the war was and is and always will be wrong, and must be stopped.

At every demonstration for peace and social justice, why are we here? Because those are values we want to live for.

And why are we here on this earth? Why are any of us here? Not an easy question to answer. But activism is a way of insisting that we're not here to be part of war machinery. We're not here to be part of the killing, we're not here to aid and abet or enable those like George W. Bush who lead the charge to slaughter in the name of freedom to serve profit. We're here with a very different mission. **CT**

This article is excerpted from Norman Solomon's speech to an antiwar rally in Sebastopol, California, on Sunday, March 19.

His latest book is War Made Easy – to read excerpts, go to www.warmadeeasy.com

George W. Bush continues to send a message with the bombs and the bullets. And we're encouraged – if not to avidly support – to be passive. To defer. To be inactive

BOOK EXCERPT

When Rwanda exploded into civil war in 1994, an unassuming hotel manager saved the lives of 1,268 people. In this extract from his autobiography, **Paul Rusesabagina** tells how, with drinks, cash and sweet talk, he persuaded leaders of the killer militias to spare the lives of refugees at Kigali's Hotel Mille Collines

THE REAL HERO OF 'HOTEL RWANDA'

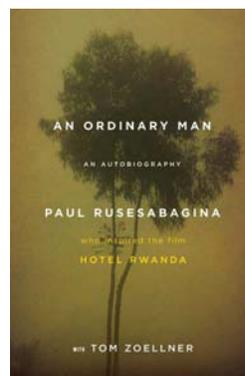
I kept the Hotel Mille Collines open, even as the nation descended into chaos and eight hundred thousand people were butchered by their friends, neighbors, and countrymen

My name is Paul Rusesabagina. I am a hotel manager. In April 1994, when a wave of mass murder broke out in my country, I was able to hide 1,268 people inside the hotel where I worked.

When the militia and the Army came with orders to kill my guests, I took them into my office, treated them like friends, offered them beer and cognac, and then persuaded them to neglect their task that day. And when they came back, I poured more drinks and kept telling them they should leave in peace once again. It went on like this for seventy-six days. I was not particularly eloquent in these conversations. They were no different from the words I would have used in saner times to order a shipment of pillowcases, for example, or tell the shuttle van driver to pick up a guest at the airport. I still don't under-

stand why those men in the militias didn't just put a bullet in my head and execute every last person in the rooms upstairs but they didn't. None of the refugees in my hotel were killed. Nobody was beaten. Nobody was taken away and made to disappear. People were being hacked to death with machetes all over Rwanda, but that five-story building became a refuge for anyone who could make it to our doors. The hotel could offer only an illusion of safety,

but for whatever reason, the illusion prevailed and I survived to tell the story, along with those I sheltered. There was nothing particularly heroic about it. My only pride in the matter is that I stayed at my post and continued to do my job as manager when all other aspects of decent life vanished. I kept the Hotel Mille Collines open, even as the nation descended into chaos and eight hundred thousand



AN ORDINARY MAN

Paul Rusesabagina
with Tom Zoellner
Viking
\$23.95

people were butchered by their friends, neighbors, and countrymen.

It happened because of racial hatred. Most of the people hiding in my hotel were Tutsis, descendants of what had once been the ruling class of Rwanda. The people who wanted to kill them were mostly Hutus, who were traditionally farmers. The usual stereotype is that Tutsis are tall and thin with delicate noses, and Hutus are short and stocky with wider noses, but most people in Rwanda fit neither description. This divide is mostly artificial, a leftover from history, but people take it very seriously, and the two groups have been living uneasily alongside each other for more than five hundred years.

You might say the divide also lives inside me. I am the son of a Hutu farmer and his Tutsi wife. My family cared not the least bit about this when I was growing up, but since bloodlines are passed through the father in Rwanda, I am technically a Hutu.

I married a Tutsi woman, whom I love with a fierce passion, and we had a child of mixed descent together. This type of blended family is typical in Rwanda, even with our long history of racial prejudice. Very often we can't tell each other apart just by looking at one another. But the difference between Hutu and Tutsi means everything in Rwanda. In the late spring and early summer of 1994 it meant the difference between life and death.

Between April 6, when the plane of President Juvenal Habyarimana was

shot down with a missile, and July 4, when the Tutsi rebel army captured the capital of Kigali, approximately eight hundred thousand Rwandans were slaughtered. This is a number that cannot be grasped with the rational mind. It is like trying – all at once – to understand that the earth is surrounded by billions of balls of gas just like our sun across a vast blackness. You cannot understand the magnitude. Just try! Eight hundred thousand lives snuffed out in one hundred days. That's eight thousand lives a day. More than five lives per minute. Each one of those lives was like a little world in itself. Some person who laughed and cried and ate and thought and felt and hurt just like any other person, just like you and me. A mother's child, every one irreplaceable.

And the way they died...I can't bear to think about it for long. Many went slowly from slash wounds, watching their own blood gather in pools in the dirt, perhaps looking at their own severed limbs, oftentimes with the screams of their parents or their children or their husbands in their ears. Their bodies were cast aside like garbage, left to rot in the sun, shoveled into mass graves with bulldozers when it was all over. It was not the largest genocide in the history of the world, but it was the fastest and most efficient.

At the end, the best you can say is that my hotel saved about four hours' worth of people. Take four hours away from one hundred days and you have an idea of just how little I was

And the way they died... I can't bear to think about it for long. Many went slowly from slash wounds, watching their own blood gather in pools in the dirt, perhaps looking at their own severed limbs, oftentimes with the screams of their parents or their children or their husbands in their ears

BOOK EXCERPT

It would have been better if the soldiers had never been there to offer the illusion of safety. Even the vaguest rumor of rescue had been fatal to those on the wrong side of the racial divide. They had clustered in one spot and made it easy for their executioners to find them

able to accomplish against the grand design.

What did I have to work with? I had a five-story building. I had a cooler full of drinks. I had a small stack of cash in the safe. And I had a working telephone and I had my tongue. It wasn't much. Anybody with a gun or a machete could have taken these things away from me quite easily. My disappearance – and that of my family – would have barely been noticed in the torrents of blood coursing through Rwanda in those months. Our bodies would have joined the thousands in the east-running rivers floating toward Lake Victoria, their skins turning white with water rot.

I wonder today what exactly it was that allowed me to stop the killing clock for four hours.

There were a few things in my favor, but they do not explain everything. I was a Hutu because my father was Hutu, and this gave me a certain amount of protection against immediate execution. But it was not only Tutsis who were slaughtered in the genocide; it was also the thousands of moderate Hutus who were suspected of sympathizing with or even helping the Tutsi “cockroaches.” I was certainly one of these cockroach-lovers. Under the standards of mad extremism at work then I was a prime candidate for a beheading.

Another surface advantage: I had control of a luxury hotel, which was one of the few places during the genocide that had the image of being protected by soldiers. But the important word in that sentence is image. In the

opening days of the slaughter, the United Nations had left four unarmed soldiers staying at the hotel as guests. This was a symbolic gesture. I was also able to bargain for the service of five Kigali policemen. But I knew these men were like a wall of tissue paper standing between us and a flash flood.

I remembered all too well what had happened at a place called Official Technical School in a suburb called Kicukiro, where nearly two thousand terrified refugees had gathered because there was a small detachment of United Nations soldiers staying there. The refugees thought – and I don't blame them – that the blue helmets of the UN would save them from the mobs and their machetes. But after all the foreign nationals at the school were put onto airplanes safely, the Belgians themselves left the country, leaving behind a huge crowd of refugees begging for protection, even begging to be shot in the head so they wouldn't have to face the machetes. The killing and dismemberment started just minutes later. It would have been better if the soldiers had never been there to offer the illusion of safety. Even the vaguest rumor of rescue had been fatal to those on the wrong side of the racial divide. They had clustered in one spot and made it easy for their executioners to find them. And I knew my hotel could become an abattoir just like that school.

Yet another of my advantages was a very strange one. I knew many of the architects of the genocide and had

been friendly with them. It was, in a way, part of my job. I was the general manager of a hotel called the Diplomates, but I was eventually asked to take charge of a sister property, the nearby Hotel Mille Collines, where most of the events described in this book took place. The Mille Collines was the place in Kigali where the power classes of Rwanda came to meet Western businessmen and dignitaries. Before the killing started I had shared drinks with most of these men, served them complimentary plates of lobster, lit their cigarettes. I knew the names of their wives and their children. I had stored up a large bank of favors. I cashed them all in – and then borrowed heavily – during the genocide. My preexisting friendship with General Augustin Bizimungu in particular helped save the Mille Collines from being raided many times over. But alliances always shift, particularly in the chaos of war, and I knew my supply of liquor and favors would run dry in some crucial quarters. Before the hundred days were over a squad of soldiers was dispatched to kill me. I survived only after a desperate half hour during which I called in even more favors.

All these things helped me during the genocide. But they don't explain everything.

• • •

Let me tell you what I think was the most important thing of all.

I will never forget walking out of my house the first day of the killings. There were people in the streets who

I had known for seven years, neighbors of mine who had come over to our place for our regular Sunday cookouts. These people were wearing military uniforms that had been handed out by the militia. They were holding machetes and were trying to get inside the houses of those they knew to be Tutsi, those who had Tutsi relatives, or those who refused to go along with the murders.

There was one man in particular whom I will call Peter, though that is not his real name. He was a truck driver, about thirty years old, with a young wife. The best word I can use to describe him is an American word: *cool*. Peter was just a cool guy; so nice to children, very gentle, kind of a kidder, but never mean with his humor. I saw him that morning wearing a military uniform and holding a machete dripping in blood. Watching this happen in my own neighborhood was like looking up at a blue summer sky and seeing it suddenly turning to purple. The entire world had gone mad around me.

What had caused this to happen? Very simple: words.

The parents of these people had been told over and over again that they were uglier and stupider than the Tutsis. They were told they would never be as physically attractive or as capable of running the affairs of the country. It was a poisonous stream of rhetoric designed to reinforce the power of the elite. When the Hutus came to power they spoke evil words of their own, fanning the old resentments, exciting the hysterical dark

Peter was just a cool guy; so nice to children, very gentle, kind of a kidder, but never mean with his humor. I saw him that morning wearing a military uniform and holding a machete dripping in blood

BOOK EXCERPT

Today I am convinced that the only thing that saved those 1,268 people in my hotel was words. Not the liquor, not money, not the UN. Just ordinary words directed against the darkness

places in the heart.

The words put out by radio station announcers were a major cause of the violence. There were explicit exhortations for ordinary citizens to break into the homes of their neighbors and kill them where they stood. Those commands that weren't direct were phrased in code language that everybody understood: "Cut the tall trees. Clean your neighborhood. Do your duty." The names and addresses of targets were read over the air. If a person was able to run away his position and direction of travel were broadcast and the crowd followed the chase over the radio like a sports event.

The avalanche of words celebrating racial supremacy and encouraging people to do their duty created an alternate reality in Rwanda for those three months. It was an atmosphere where the insane was made to seem normal and disagreement with the mob was fatal.

Rwanda was a failure on so many levels. It started as a failure of the European colonists who exploited trivial differences for the sake of a divide-and-rule strategy. It was the failure of Africa to get beyond its ethnic divisions and form true coalition governments. It was a failure of Western democracies to step in and avert the catastrophe when abundant evidence was available. It was a failure of the United States for not calling a genocide by its right name. It was the failure of the United Nations to live up to its commitments as a peace-making body.

All of these come down to a failure

of words. And this is what I want to tell you: Words are the most effective weapons of death in man's arsenal. But they can also be powerful tools of life. They may be the only ones.

Today I am convinced that the only thing that saved those 1,268 people in my hotel was words. Not the liquor, not money, not the UN. Just ordinary words directed against the darkness. They are so important. I used words in many ways during the genocide – to plead, intimidate, coax, cajole, and negotiate. I was slippery and evasive when I needed to be. I acted friendly toward despicable people. I put cartons of champagne into their car trunks. I flattered them shamelessly. I said whatever I thought it would take to keep the people in my hotel from being killed. I had no cause to advance, no ideology to promote beyond that one simple goal. Those words were my connection to a saner world, to life as it ought to be lived.

I am not a politician or a poet. I built my career on words that are plain and ordinary and concerned with everyday details. I am nothing more or less than a hotel manager, trained to negotiate contracts and charged to give shelter to those who need it. My job did not change in the genocide, even though I was thrust into a sea of fire. I only spoke the words that seemed normal and sane to me. I did what I believed to be the ordinary things that an ordinary man would do. I said no to outrageous actions the way I thought that anybody would, and it still mystifies me that so many others could say yes. **CT**

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