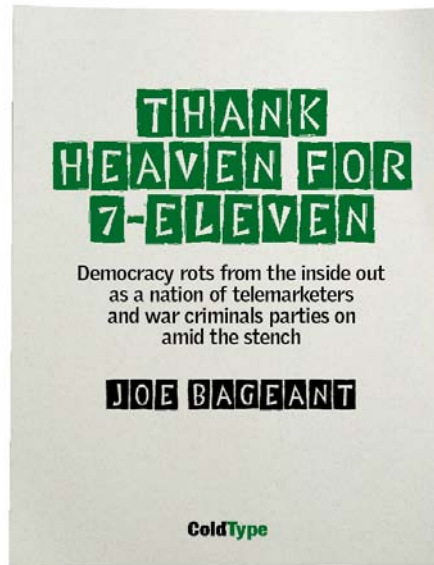


THANK
HEAVEN FOR
7-ELEVEN

Democracy rots from the inside out
as a nation of telemarketers
and war criminals parties on
amid the stench

JOE BAGEANT

ColdType



Joe Bageant is the author of a forthcoming book, **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War** from Random House Crown on working class America, to be released on April 24, 2007.

A complete archive of his online work, along with the thoughts of many working class Americans on the subject of class may be found at ww.joebageant.com.

Feel free to contact him at joebageant@joebageant.com

© Joe Bageant 2006

ColdType

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

A SPRING

Sunday morning and I am at the politically incorrect Seven-Eleven buying my cholesterol loaded half and half for my peasant slave labor grown coffee. In the parking lot car speakers blare out Bob Marley from a grungy 1987 Olds Cutlass (the last year GM made 'em), while the owner, a Haitian guy, sits on the curb eating his Smokey Big Bite hot dog, sunshine pouring over the whole world sweet as that quart of chocolate milk he is going to wash it all down with. Bob Marley is singing *One Love* and that Smokey smells so damned good I order one for myself and settle in next to that Haitian dude. And I think, "Is this a great fucking country or what? Yessiree, the world's best hope."

And it is. Or was. Or something. Ask any poor suffering bastard in the garbage dumps of Mumbai or Caracas to name the best place in the world to live and most will answer "The United States." Maybe it's for all the wrong reasons. And surely the image is driven by the global hype and bullshit of an America that cannot get over itself...cannot pause from its huckstering long enough to see that the America of both John Wayne and FDR quit circling the drain thirty years ago. It has since been pulled asunder by spectacular greed and the learned helplessness of the consumer state. And denial. The kind that allows us to sanctify the young men starring in that horrific snuff flick over In Iraq as "heroes." But we were talking about the third world weren't we? Where if you are eating spoiled cat meat and getting raped nightly in a Bangkok slum, things like a Cutlass gunboat with busted springs and a Smokey Big Bite on a Sunday morning look good. Damned good. There is not much that cannot be explained by population geography and proximity to basic goods and services. This is not wasted upon the predatory few among us concerned with capturing, holding and blackmailing others for access to them under our free market system. It's a brutal process, one we can only coexist with through ironclad denial. Did free people make your clothes? Mine neither.

JOE BAGEANT / **THANK HEAVEN FOR 7-ELEVEN**

My Dutch friend Bram, is mystified at our denial, which he says “is spooky.” “How can anyone sustain such a thing?” Well, it’s easy when you are born numb. Most of us born under American extremist capitalism are inured to its sheer brutality. To Americans, it’s just the way things are. The world is a tough place. We agree that God has blessed us; we deserve what we have and let it go at that. Citizens born under the Third Reich felt the same way about their consensual reality. Not many of us can grasp the national hubris involved, thanks to the heady patrio-religious mythology of American exceptionalism in which we were spawned and educated in preparation for adulthood as citizens of the consumer state. Collectively, we feel exempt from human folly because our particular god, the Christian God, the Jewish God, The Mormon God, the Seventh Day Adventist God, Muslim God or whatever one’s cult deems divine, has chosen us. Whatever we think we are as liberals, your nation and mine, the government we are responsible for has always acted on these beliefs, destroying whole nations, peoples and the planet under that exceptionalist banner. At some point, liberals and neocons and the apolitical alike, are going to have to own all of America’s history, not just the parts we prefer. For instance, it was FDR who packed off all those decent Japanese families off to interment camps. Abraham Lincoln loved his nigger jokes. Bram remains mystified.

Mercifully enough, the same predatory American capitalism that generates so much of the world’s misery renders its own citizens irrelevant save for their purchasing power, to the entire process and therefore guiltless – in their own minds at least – of the empire’s crimes. Such is the unburdened material happiness granted us. It is not hard for Americans to conclude that we are outside of, and therefore irrelevant to global events or changes. We are waaaaay over here on this vast continent with only a media generated holograph to tell us who we are as a people and as individuals. And it tells us we foremost are citizens of a state which suffers no diversion from profitability. The vast majority of Americans don’t even know there is a global reality, except in the sense that the price of gasoline is affected by some swarthy people living in a sandy place full of terrorists somewhere else on the globe. We know the price of gas and we know what we are going to rent at the video store on Friday. We know what we will eat at the restaurant on Saturday and when the game is televised on Sunday. Personally, I also know that four blocks from where I sit writing this an old man named Virgil pulled one of his own teeth last week because he cannot afford a dentist. Rather than kick out a little dough Virgil’s way, I poured a

JOE BAGEANT / **THANK HEAVEN FOR 7-ELEVEN**

shot of Woodford Reserve and was grateful I have dental insurance. Being “grateful for what we have” is the time honored American mantra used to mask denial.

Thus we express gratitude for what the corpocracy bestows us, convinced that we are flourishing in those big box store isles of Kansas or in the soft leather booths of the martini bar off Central Park, depending upon one’s class. It only took a couple of generations to accept and then enjoy the reduced humanity but increased flood of material stuff as a bona fide life experience. Beat off to internet porn and NFL football while the wife sleeps alone. The state generated hologram IS reality. Reality IS the image, not the flesh. It’s true of all of us. I have done it and still do it. I know. And you more than likely do too. Let’s not kid ourselves here.

Even as the empire is coming down around us all very few can possibly believe it. Why should they? Nothing seems to have changed their particular religious or political camps. Literate and thoughtful liberals can still watch Brit coms and send their kids to Shakespeare camp. Less than literate Fox Network watching worker bee Republicans can still sup on the easy piety of cross and flag...ogle Anne Coulter’s boney ass. And Joe Six-pack still scratches his belly in irrelevance as the elites of two political priesthoods struggle, one to get their mitts deeper into the national treasury, the other to convince us that Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden actually have blood in their veins. The next elections, both parties tell us, will determine the fate of our nation. Really? Regardless of who wins, Joe Six-pack will lose. Virgil will lose. The rest of us will continue being carried along by the media hologram of political lies and profitable illusions that hold it all together. Today I read a news story about how the massacre of Iraqi families in Hidatha “traumatized” our heroes. What do you call a republic that dishes up such shit up to its citizens? What do you call the citizens who mindlessly swallow it? What do you call people who do not march in the streets and start fires in protest of a horrific regime that guts small democracies, slaughters whole families and villages abroad and rigs the ballot boxes at home? What do you call such deniers of the obvious? Of course we can safely call the latter modern Democrats, but that is another story.

In any case, most liberals/leftists/progressives, whatever the hell one calls such an ineffectual bunch of twits, refuse to even consider open resistance. They exist in the same prison of learned helplessness and planet devouring gluttony as conservatives, but with New Age or pseudo-leftist wallpaper. I have an awful suspicion they will never be brave again in their lives, assuming they ever were.

JOE BAGEANT / **THANK HEAVEN FOR 7-ELEVEN**

There seems to be no warning people of the lie they have swallowed, the black thing they have eaten and which now devours them from within. The “American lifestyle,” the “good life,” was such a comfortable lie to swallow. And because the material world trumps the mind and therefore trumps less quantifiable stuff such as freedom and insight quite easily, the black thing is now chewing at the Constitution which, being essentially a property document, was never all that strong to begin with. But it’s all we have. As resident bully of human consciousness, the reptilian brain so easily slashes and chaws through the limbic one, announcing the supremacy of the fist and the gullet over the higher self. “I can eat these tortilla chips (or perhaps nine dollar a pound organically pastured chicken breast, or whatever it is that socially responsible rich people eat) and watch plasma TV right now. But I would have to go to the library to get *On Walden Pond*, which I never heard of anyway. Take to the streets? What for? Pass me the salsa, honey.” I do this myself almost nightly. There may be no saving me or the world, or mankind in the world from itself. Realization will come the hard way, which is how humanity learns. Too late and at a terrible cost.

Meanwhile, we remain obedient, not disturbing of our comfort, save maybe once a year for a rote “demonstration” downtown for or against something or other, the school bond or the war in Iraq, during which we are flushed with joy at the site of so many of our own kind, but having demonstrated only that such displays are just that – displays. Toothless displays in a predatory system that respects only the fang and the claw. The newspapers print a photo next day, we dispute their estimated number of demonstrators, and then we settle back into obedience.

Americans have always been an obedient people, proud to be answerable and obedient to the nation’s law and god, with one reinforcing the other somehow in the national mind. Obedient people do not look up from their assigned cubicles; do not ask if their work is meaningful or contributory to mankind. Never question the way things are. Not in church, nor in daily life. And if the air reeks of a republic rotting from the inside out, you just hold your nose.

Consequently, we are we forced to acknowledge the fiction of self governance, though voting power never gets in the way of elite agendas such as tax breaks and war profits (though it may slow them down at times, giving the illusion of voting power to a nation with no memory whatsoever.) The pretense reaches its most absurd levels during national elections, where self governance is put to the test. For

JOE BAGEANT / **THANK HEAVEN FOR 7-ELEVEN**

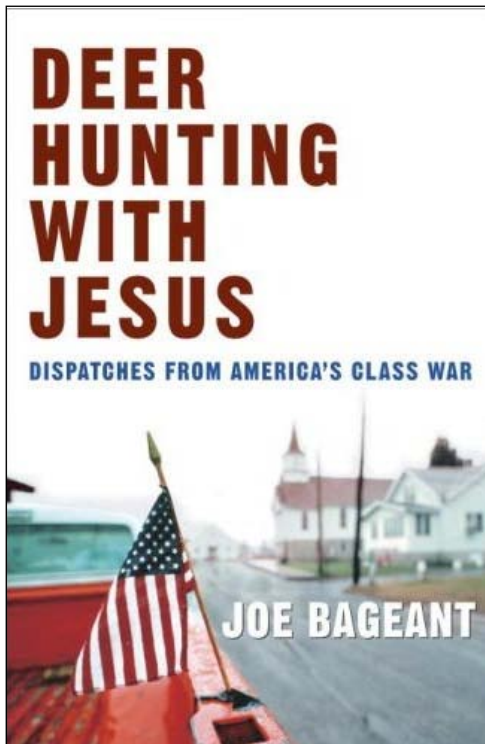
instance, no matter who won in the 2004 presidential elections, this country would still have been led by a member of the Skull and Bones Society. What are the odds of that happening? In a nation of 295 million people our choice came down to two members of one of the most exclusive and secretive clubs on the planet. Do you really believe in coincidences like that? I don't. Nobody does. But we pretend to because the truth is just too awful for anyone with more than an inch of forehead to contemplate.

Yet, unimaginable as it may seem, there are even worse things afoot to contemplate. Forces such as the emerging Christian militia, the Joshua generation, a runaway military establishment, to name a few, working fanatically to make our obedience ever more lethal. Yesterday I saw a picture of 25,000 young fundamentalist Americans marching in Philadelphia and San Francisco in support of a theocratic state. I can honestly say I was completely unnerved by it. Those little electrical nerve waves went through my entire body, the kind that happen when you see a car wreck take place. I live around fundamentalist Christians, my whole family is fundamentalist Christian and I know what they are capable of and indeed are planning to do given the chance. They are being led by the same types who formed the old white militia movements in the Seventies and Eighties before Timothy McVeigh rendered their public position untenable. I couldn't shut up about it and friends. But even the most "informed" ones looked at me like I was crazy, or at the very least, weirdly obsessive. These are not stupid people. They are simply Americans. And because we are friends, we moved on to another topic. This is the sort of strange national disconnect that has so many folks like myself silently screaming inside our heads.

And that is when we must do something something to stop the screaming, something utterly mundane and completely oblivious to break free of the hysterical grimness of it all. Like sit in the sun with a Smokey Big Bite and let Bob Marley *Stir it Up* right there in the parking lot. Grin along with some Haitian dude and watch a white trash mama in ridiculously tight shorts step around you, inches from your face on that curb by the Seven Eleven door, an ankle tattooed, cheap perfumed angel of god sent to remind us that, "Politics ain't everything Buster, and the world ain't all bad. Not by a long shot! Now finish that chowing down dog, get off your ass and go do the right thing."

Yo mama!

JOE BAGEANT / **THANK HEAVEN FOR 7-ELEVEN**



Order Joe Bageant's new book

DEER HUNTING WITH JESUS: Dispatches From America's Class War

"Many friends and readers will notice that the title has changed to *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches From America's Class War*. The original title was *Drink, Pray, Fight, Fuck: Dispatches From America's Class War*. Contrary to what one might suspect, the name change had not as much to do with the word "fuck" as it did the fact that a book was recently released with a very similar title. Then too, when I started putting the title "Drink, Pray, Fight, Fuck" on the web, it kicked off some merchandising by small scale entrepreneurs of ball caps, tee-shirts, etc. bearing the four words. Which is no problem with me -- I like to see the little guy printing tee-shirts make a buck" – **JOE BAGEANT**

Pre-order now from www.amazon.com/Deer-Hunting-Jesus-Dispatches-Americas/dp/030733936X/ref=pd_sxp_f_pt/104-7289464-5668749?ie=UTF8

The book will be released on April 24, 2007

READ MORE ESSAYS BY JOE BAGEANT

Download all of Joe Bageant's
satirical essays, plus many more
books, booklets, essays,
newspapers and magazines – all
in pdf format – all free of
charge, at www.coldtype.net
(Click on this link to enter web site)

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD