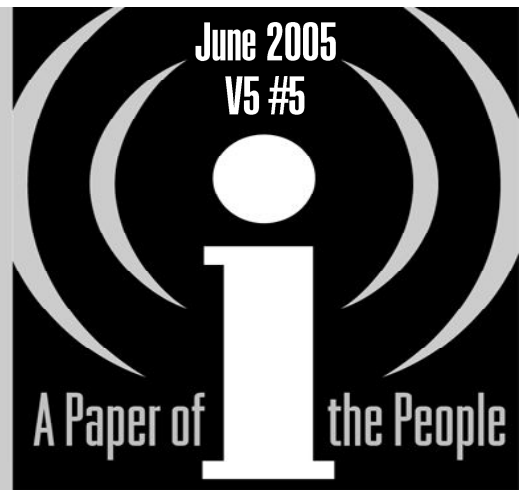


The PUBLIC



Looking for Martha: The Mess Behind Bars

by Daniel Larson



Daniel Larson is a graduate student at the University of Illinois. His interests include the drug war and prison system of the United States.

THE ALDERSON FEDERAL PRISON CAMP in West Virginia looks to have solved the problem that has beset modern penal policy for hundreds of years: recidivism. Its progressive plan of image rehabilitation has now set free a series of media spectacles and millionaires-to-be in the last six months. Prisons, politicians, and the public have taken notice as legislation has been introduced in 43 state legislatures as well as the floor of U.S. Senate to start pilot programs modeled after Alderson's program.

Janet S., awaiting her release at the end of April, is one such inmate at Alderson that will benefit from this new penal program. For the last three months she has been immersed in an exhaustive schedule of persona clinics and strategic planning sessions designed to prepare and celebrate her re-entry into society.

Each morning begins with a 90-minute workout guided by a personal trainer, trimming and tightening her physical appearance. Afterwards, she heads straight into a conference room for two hours of image maintenance consultation. In the afternoon, Janet spends sixty grueling minutes at the podium fielding a rapid-fire succession of questions from faux media followed by watching a video of the performance. The tape is meticulously critiqued and deconstructed by her media coaches. An appointment with her Freedom Day event planners ends her day where everything from the menu, flowers, fashion, and guest list are tweaked for the upcoming celebration.

Janet has already received a dozen invitations from mid-major corporations interested in bringing her aboard; yet, many of the Fortune 100 are quietly waiting to gauge the heat of her release before tendering a formal offer. Nonetheless, Janet eagerly anticipates her return to society.

In truth, the female prison population is right where we left it: overcrowded, violent, and wilting. Except for Martha Stewart, the reality for the 100,000 women in U.S. prisons stands in stark contrast to the exhibition unfolded on television screens, magazine covers and newsprint across the United States that clamor over Stewart's recent release. The female prison population is offered no such reward at the end of their prison sentence.

Now it has been a comedic right of passage for the last ten years to snicker and sneer at Stewart – perhaps justified by the absurd lifestyle she sells – while other criticism is couched in the sexist rhetoric that surfaces when discussions of female leadership occur. Certainly, Stewart did not have to forfeit her

fortune when entering Alderson nor should she be denied the right to return to the empire she built. And can she really be faulted for playing the appearance game that is now, sadly, the only measure that matters in U.S. culture. It is easy and ordinary to pick on Stewart.

But, there is much to be considered and learned from her event. Steffan Postaer, chief creative officer for the ad agency Euro RSCG, recently stated in the *Chicago Tribune* that Stewart's prison term was like "discovering she has a tattoo...she now has street cred; we like people with flaws." The media likes celebrities with flaws as it produces a new cycle of feel-good, second-chance, overcoming-the-odds story angles that we can predictably expect in the coming months. Stewart's image will be reborn.

For the rest of the female prison population, the stigma of "criminal" and "inmate" will tragically follow and hinder them upon exiting the penitentiary. Their "street cred" will be a near-impossible burden to overcome, consuming many of our fellow citizens and returning nearly two-thirds of them to their home away from home.

A quick glance at the numbers should sound familiar. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, from 1977 to 2001, the female prison population increased 592 percent from 12, 279 to 85,031. From 1990 to 2000, the annual growth rate for female inmates was 7.6 percent (5.9 percent for male inmates during the same period). Black women are more than twice as likely as Hispanic females and five times more likely than white females to be in prison as of 2002, all of which are predominantly in the lowest socioeconomic status. There are an additional 550,000 women nationwide under court probation. Of the 650,000 women currently under the penal gaze, 85 percent are there for nonviolent drug offenses. Yet, we know that nearly 99 percent of these women will return to society, what awaits them: a demonic rhetoric that follows these women from the walls of prison to the communities of this country.

The female drug user has historically and hysterically been used as a figurative scapegoat to blame for the breakdown of the nuclear family. In 1926, Richmond Pearson Hobson, renowned temperance advocate and head of the World Narcotic Defense Association, declared at a hearing before the House Committee on Education, "addiction destroys the seat of those very attributes upon which all the institutions of freedom and civilization

must rest, and destroys its power of procreation." Since Harry Anslinger became chief of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in 1930 (the "opium vampire"), to William Bennett's term as drug czar in the 1980s (the "crack mother"), the politics of perception has consistently constructed a symbolic female drug user as the greatest threat to the United States.

So, as millions were spent by the Nixon administration to the billions now spent under the Bush Administration in the modern war on drugs, there has been a corresponding increase in the incarceration of the population. Between 1984 and 1999, the number of defendants charged with a drug offense in U.S. district courts increased almost 3% annually. This continuous growth was accompanied by the opening of over 600 state and 52 federal correctional facilities. Many of these new facilities were needed for the exploding female population, and corporate America has responded.

As a California Department of Corrections

official explained, "there are no seasonal fluctuations, it is a non-polluting industry, and in many circumstances it is virtually invisible...if crime doesn't pay, punishment certainly does." For companies like Corrections Corp. and the Geo Group, this booming prison population produces a steady, new customer base. By the end of 2004, Correction Corp. stock was up

nearly 75 percent since the beginning of the year and the Geo Group stock increased over 125 percent. "These are good growth stocks and we think the earnings are going to continue to keep growing," said Don Hodges, president of Hodges Capital Management.

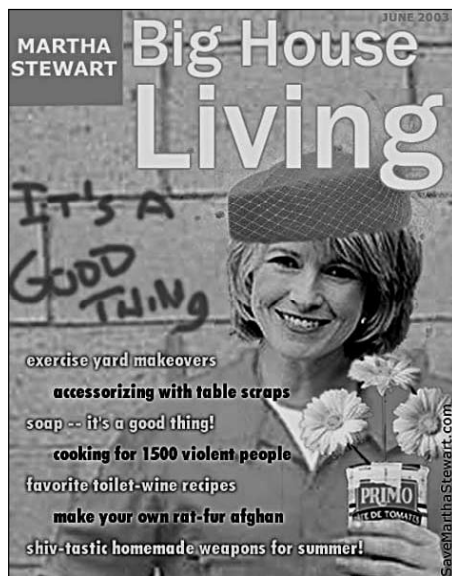
But what are the hidden costs? Nearly 70 percent of female inmates at both state and federal prisons have young children according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. This equates to at least 1.3 million children nationwide who have a mother behind bars, states a report by the Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers organization. At the time of imprisonment, nearly half of the women ran single-parent households and their children were sucked into child services upon imprisonment. Although there are now 104 female prison facilities, a 47 percent increase since 1990, the geography of most of the penal facilities leave the inmate population over 100 hundred miles away from their children, extended family, and friends. Thus, we are succeeding in breaking down certain nuclear families. And with their family unraveling on the outside, life inside pro-

vides no relief.

In 2000, a report by Amnesty International concluded that U.S. correctional "authorities [routinely] failed to protect women from sexual misconduct by correctional officers and other staff: the misconduct included rape, sexual relationships, sexual touching and fondling, and without good reason, frequent, prolonged, close-up and prurient viewing during dressing, showering and use of toilet facilities." The few female inmates that spoke out about their abuse suffered physical reprisals from the guards and staff ultimately producing a violent chilling effect throughout the national prison population. Are we protecting these women? There is no parity across the states regarding custodial sexual misconduct. Six states have no laws prohibiting sexual relations between inmates and correctional staff, four states make the inmate criminally liable for engaging in sexual conduct, and the law in 19 states does not cover all forms of sexual abuse.

Tragedy and heartache in their suspended life, horror and brutality in their everyday life; the female prison population has been ignored, again, during this opportunity provided by the Martha Stewart Show. Instead, the women return to their overcrowded cells (average state prison is 8 percent overcapacity, average federal prison is 33 percent overcapacity), fearful of physical confrontation by not only fellow inmates but the prison staff as well, and given no prospect to prepare for life on the outside. No educational opportunities. No job skills training. No individualized counseling. No adequate health care. No network of support on the outside. It becomes easier and easier to see why the prison industry is most certainly a growth industry.

Although we are a nation that professes a belief in second chances, the reality for our female prison population past and present is not indicative of this mantra. Martha's spectacle aside, female prisoners are haunted by their prison time. Housing, employment, education, and childrearing are just a few aspects where this shadow impedes their second chance. But there is some hope. Congressman Danny Davis of the seventh district in Illinois and a bi-partisan coalition has introduced the Second Chance Act of 2005 designed to help "ex-offenders successfully reintegrate back into civilian life." Representative Davis stated during the announcement, "No matter what, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and jobs are the cures for incarceration. These men, women and children still have to live in our communities and need all of the help we can give them because when we help them, we help ourselves." This legislation is only a beginning, but a necessary beginning that moves the status quo away from simply warehousing our prison population in a labyrinth of violence and hopelessness towards embracing the humanity of emancipation.



Local



PUBLIC SQUARE COMMENTARY: It's Time To Reclaim the Media

By Durl Kruse, member of AWARE and the local Independent Media Center

ARE YOU AS CONCERNED about the current state of our local and national broadcast media as I am? I hope so, because our democracy is facing a media crisis of untold proportions that is threatening its very vibrancy and vitality.

On May 13-15, I, along with 2500 concerned citizens from all fifty states and ten countries, converged on the city of St. Louis for the second National Conference on Media Reform to work together to reclaim an important and endangered national resource, our public airwaves.

The media is our window to the world. It provides the information we use to form opinions and make crucial decisions about the issues we care about most – issues like health care, education, the economy, and going to war.

But today's media is dominated by a small number of powerful companies whose sole objective is making money, not serving the needs of our local community or our democratic society. For example, Channel 3 is owned by Nextar Broadcasting Group located in Irving, Texas, and Channel 15 by the Sinclair Broadcasting Group located in Baltimore, Maryland.

The media system in our country is broken. Investigative journalism is declining. Commercialization is out of control, with over 30,000 advertisements bombarding the average child each year.

Did you know our government subsidizes the media in the form of giveaways to huge media conglomerates like Disney and General Electric? For example, TV and radio stations are allowed to broadcast on the airwaves that legally belong to the public – free of charge! Yes,

the airwaves belong to us – just like a national park – yet media moguls are making billions of dollars off of them.

Unless we create a more diverse, independent, skeptical and competitive media system, all of the issues we care about will be left unheard and unaddressed.

Yet individuals like you and me can make a difference. In 2003, the FCC tried to quietly change the regulations to make it possible for one company to own virtually all the media outlets in one town – the cable system, the newspapers, TV and radio stations. [In the process], they inadvertently started a revolution. Over two million Americans from across the political spectrum spoke up to say that they didn't want to let giant media conglomerates to get even bigger. The people won, and these rule changes were stopped in the courts.

The battle is not over. Congress will soon begin debating changes to the 1996 Telecommunications Act that will define the role and state of media in our country for years to come. Will Big Media with its enormous sums of money and highly paid lobbyists control the debate? Or will the people of this country speak out loud and clear to our elected officials to protect our airwaves and our access to them?

To save our media, join in by contacting your representatives in Congress, writing the FCC, and supporting local independent media movements. To learn more visit www.freepress.net and www.ucimc.org

The preceding commentary was heard on public broadcasting station WILL-AM 580 during "The Public Square," a weekly 3-minute opinion piece from any member of the community on any subject of interest to him/her. "The Public Square" airs at 4:45 pm on Fridays with repeats at 6:45 pm on Fridays and 10:59 am on Saturdays. Commentaries are archived on WILL's website. To submit a commentary of your own for broadcast, visit <http://www.will.uiuc.edu/community/publicsquare/>

National



The Challenges of Media Reform

By Laura Stengrim



MORE THAN 2500 PEOPLE converged in downtown St. Louis in mid-May for an historic meeting of citizens, journalists, activists, scholars, artists, policymakers, and media producers, all dedicated to solving a crisis that threatens the roots of American democracy: the media.

Readers of the *Public i* – its very existence being to counter the onslaught of big corporate media – no doubt know already that democracy depends on a free press. Likewise, those reading this paper, following the activities of the UCIMC, tuning into WEFT, nosing about on various blogospheres, or attempting in any way to be more active consumers of news and information likely know about the problems already: Deregulation, corporate consolidation, Bushie propagandizing, Rathergate, Sinclair Broadcasting, Clear Channel, and the recent Newsweek retraction, to name a few.

Many of the St. Louis Media Reform magnates, including Sy Hersh, Phil Donahue, Bernie Sanders, and Maurice Hinchey, had the week before appeared in Champaign-Urbana for a separate conference, and as one might expect, several of the themes addressed were alarmingly consistent. All were in agreement that something must be done, now. One of the most compelling, sobering, worrying analyses of the pathetic state of America and its media comes from the incisive Canadian journalist Naomi Klein: "When US democracy is in crisis, the world is in crisis. When Americans learn geography through religion and war, we are in crisis."

But I didn't venture to St. Louis to hear dire proclamations, wallow in my ongoing patriotic misery in the company of like-minded others, nor to report back that we have reached the sunset of enlightenment. Rather, I went to St. Louis to experience the optimism, hope, creativity, intelligence and power that is driving the media reform movement. Overall the spirit of St. Louis was one of people coming together to learn, laugh, and act for change. Al Franken and Jim High-

tower entertained us. Amy Goodman, Medea Benjamin, and Representative Diane Watson inspired us. Policymakers, politicians, and keynote speakers brought us to our feet, drawing cheers and applause as they committed themselves to saving democracy through media reform. I left St. Louis with the feeling that our hard work is worth it, our movement is sustainable, and that we must continue in our tireless efforts.

A sinking feeling arises again, however, when I look at the challenges faced by the media reform movement, and progressivism more generally at this historical juncture. Please allow me to toss aside any pretense of journalistic objectivity or balance to be frank about such challenges:

Technology: Urbana, thanks largely to the efforts of a handful of people working with the UCIMC, is an exemplar of community-based internet access; likewise, the worldwide Indymedia movement, starting with the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, has thrived by appropriating the technologies of globalization. Savvy internet users can stream media from all over the world, progressives can connect with one another through web sites and blogs and, as we saw last year, entire presidential campaigns can be both motivated and derailed online. But what about access to internet-capable computers? What about print culture, and newspapers such as this one? What happens when internet service providers become increasingly privatized and therefore more expensive and more limited?

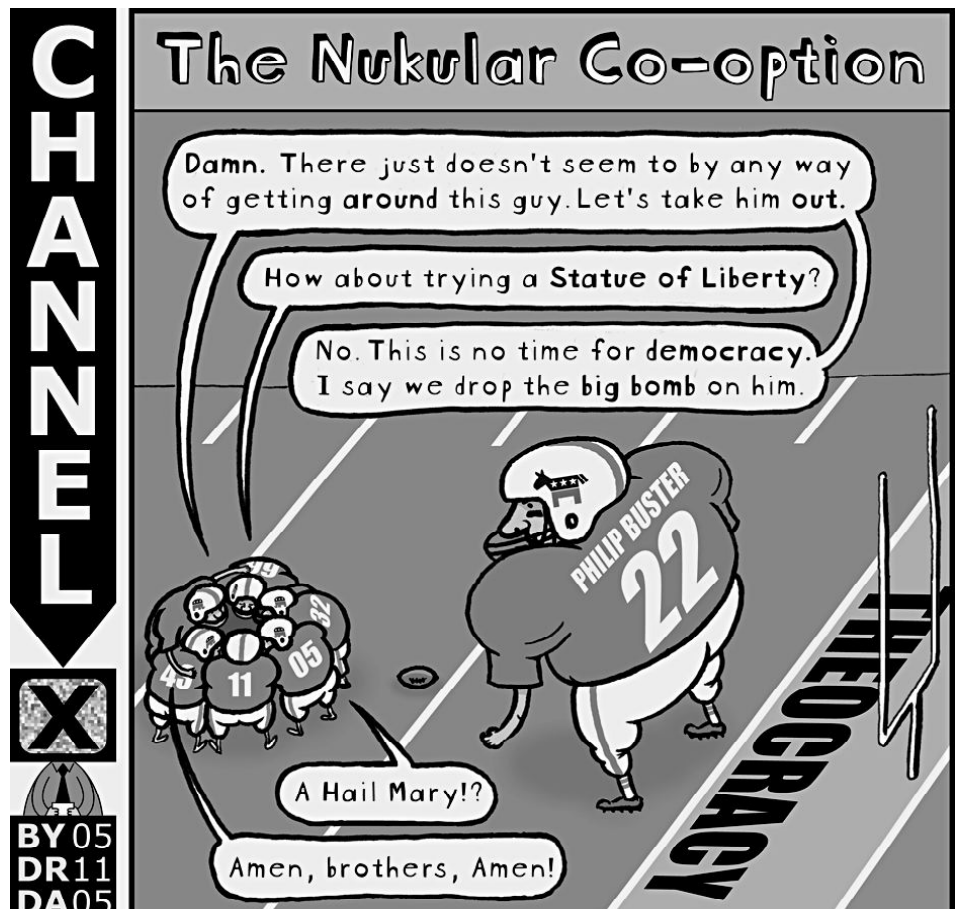
Power: At the Media Reform Conference, it became clear to me that the most powerful figures in our movement are affluent white men. Sure, these figures are sympathetic to the plight of the working classes; sure, having lived through the civil rights movement and the 1960s, they are sympathetic to the civil rights and feminist movements; sure, being open-minded liberals, they support gay rights, reproductive rights, immigrant rights, and workers rights. Is it a problem, then, that the leadership of the media reform movement is largely comprised of affluent white men? After all, they were the very

founders of this democracy now in such peril. However, the tokenism seen in St. Louis remains troubling to me.

Coherence: I met and saw so many wonderful people at the conference, ranging from young pink-haired anarchists to Pacifica radio producers, to professors, to elderly Democrats, to young liberals, to closet policy wonks like myself. Robert McChesney and his cadre of dedicated, organized, and talented media reformers deserve great credit and should still blush with pride at the success of the conference and the movement. Yet I worry about sustainability. It's one thing to gather together for a rousing weekend of speeches and entertainment, and yet quite another to ensure that the momentum is strong enough to endure another three years of the Bush administration, FCC rulings, and judicial appointments, not to mention unforeseen repercussions of war and torture. How can a media reform movement achieve a coherent balance between cre-

ative production of video, radio, print, and web content while still engaged in policy reformation and lobbying?

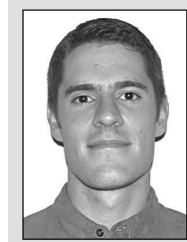
Audience: As a student of rhetoric, I am particularly concerned with the notion of audience; that is, are writers, speakers, and artists communicating as best they can to their readers, listeners, and other happenstance consumers? The *Public i*, for example, prints approximately 4,000 papers ten months out of the year. We are not certain how many people actually read our paper, nor how many people toss them in the garbage (please recycle, at least!), nor how many clip articles and pass them along to friends. Sure, I fantasize that Maureen Dowd or Katha Pollitt will someday soon call me up to work with them at the *New York Times* or *The Nation*, but in the meantime how can we be assured that independent, non-corporate, anti-conglomerate media is arriving at the doorsteps, eyes, and brains of those who would most benefit from it?





Listen For It: Bush Easing America into Theocracy

By Kevin Coe



Kevin Coe is a doctoral student in the Department of Speech Communication. His research focuses on the interaction of political discourse, news media, and public opinion.

IF YOU HAVE LISTENED CLOSELY to any of George W. Bush's national addresses during his tenure in the White House, you probably know how the president feels about mixing religion and politics: he digs it.

Since Bush entered office, and particularly since the attacks of September 11, religion has had a new prominence in the political arena, especially noticeable in the president's use of religious language. Indeed, Bush has made what theologian Martin E. Marty has termed "God talk" a cornerstone of his discourse—most evident in his oft-repeated claim that "freedom is not America's gift to the world, it is the Almighty God's gift to every man and woman in this world." Such language has triggered a heated public debate over the nature of the president's religious discourse. Some argue that Bush's rhetoric exceeds that of past presidents while others side with Reverend Richard John Neuhaus, editor of the Catholic journal *First Things*, who claims that Bush's frequent references to a divine being are "as American as apple pie."

If Bush is serving only "apple pie," he is serving considerably more of it than did his predecessors. Analysis of presidents' inaugural and State of the Union addresses since Franklin Roosevelt entered office in 1933 reveals that Bush has referenced God far more frequently than have other modern presidents. Bush's average of 5.8 references to God per address is rivaled only by Ronald Reagan—like Bush, a favorite of the Religious Right—who averaged 5.3 references per address. Other modern presidents known for their religiosity referenced God far less frequently than did Bush: Dwight Eisenhower averaged 2.7 references per address, Lyndon Johnson averaged 1.5, and self-proclaimed "born again" Christian Jimmy Carter had only two references total in his four major addresses while in office.

Explicit references to God are only half of Bush's political/religious rhetorical arsenal. Bush also packs his speeches with subtler religious references. In his January 2003 State of the Union address, for instance, Bush recalled a Christian hymn by referring to the "wonder-working power" of the American people. Similarly, in his second inaugural address, Bush said we could all

feel proud when "the unjust encounter justice, and the captives are set free"—an allusion to the Bible's book of Isaiah (among other passages). Such references are a regular part of the president's addresses. Even the term "evil," which marked much of Bush's rhetoric following September 11, calls to mind a Manichaean struggle between God and Satan.

Bush's decision to saturate his public discourse with religious rhetoric is important because modern presidents—far more than those who preceded Roosevelt—are able to circulate their messages widely through mass media and have significant power to shape political policy. In such an environment, presidents are well-positioned to insert religious ideology into political decision-making, thereby threatening Thomas Jefferson's vision of "a wall of separation between church and state."

For his part, Bush has never thought too highly of Jefferson's notion. Within days of taking office in 2001, the president spoke with reporters not of a wall of separation, but of an "important bridge between church and state." In truth, the relationship between religion and politics has throughout American history generally resembled a bridge rather than a wall. For example, in 1954 the Knights of Columbus, a

Catholic fraternal organization, successfully lobbied Congress and President Eisenhower to have the words "under God" inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance as a means of distinguishing Americans from "Godless communists." And, to this day, several states have constitutions that bar from public office those who refuse to profess a belief in the existence of a divine being.

Bush, however, has taken this common American practice of mixing religion and politics to heights previously unseen in the modern presidency. It would be comforting to think that the president's elevated use of religious language was mere political posturing, ultimately of little consequence in terms of determining policy. Unfortunately, this is not case.

Bolstered by religious conservatives' ascendancy in the political sphere, Bush has moved God to the center of his language and his political decision-making. The Bush administration's pursuit of "faith-based" initiatives, the rise of a voucher system that provides government funds to pay for students' tuition at religious schools, the push for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, and the Manifest-Destiny-like invasion and occupation of Iraq all smack of religious motivations finding their way into governmental policy.

Perhaps the most frightening aspect of all of this is that the president is unabashed in admitting that his religious beliefs shape his policies. Bush made this clear during the final presidential debate of the 2004 campaign, saying: "I believe that God wants everybody to be free. That's what I believe. And that's part of my foreign policy. In Afghanistan, I believe that the freedom there is a gift from the Almighty."

This statement alone should be enough to raise the hackles of citizens interested in preserving some semblance of American separation of church and state. Although Bush's fondness for sermonizing may be due in part to his underlying worldview, it is also a strategy

aimed at pleasing the substantial voting block of religious conservatives—a strategy that appears to have paid off for the president during his narrow reelection last November. Ultimately, it matters little whether Bush is a "true believer," a callous strategist, or some combination of the two. The outcome of this conflation of religion and politics is what matters, and the outcome is clear. When our president bases policy decisions as much upon divine guidance as upon the will of the electorate, only one conclusion can be drawn: we are living in a theocracy. Pundits' frequent bickering about the risks of theocracy in the Middle East creates an unfortunate irony: dead-set on promoting a particular vision of democracy abroad, we are sliding toward theocracy at home.

It is a dangerous situation, one with which all of us, regardless of our individual political and religious beliefs, should be concerned. Confusing the abstract realm of the metaphysical with the concrete goals of the state leads to a place where political leaders' untoward acts are easily excused because they are thought to serve a higher purpose. In the current political climate, this is a place that America can ill afford to go.



SENSITIVITY TEST

A PLAY by Susan Parenti



Susan Parenti is a composer who worked with Herbert Brun and the Performers' Workshop Ensemble. She continues to be one, and to work, in her current role as teacher at the School for Designing a Society in Urbana.

In one scene (shortened from the original four scenes for the *Public i*)

Original cast: Walter Matherly, Mark Enslin

Original Performance: April 2005 House Theater, Urbana, Illinois

Mark and Walter, sitting on chairs, with cardboard boxes over their heads, holding hands.

Mark (takes off his box, knocks on Walter's box): Knock knock. Hey – how is it?

Walter (taking off his box): Still numb. Num'b'. (to audience): You pronounce the 'b'.

M: Why do you think you're 'num – b'?

W: Something happens, I don't feel anything. Something doesn't happen, I don't feel anything.

M (optimistic): You're 'reliable'!!

W: (shrugs it off)

M: You ever hear of 'predisposition to action'?

W: No-pe. (to audience): I'm practicing the ends of my worDS.

M: Biologist Humberto Maturana coined it – he said, we humans do and feel things together such that our bodies become PREdisposed to act. Take a mother with a baby – all that bonding and loving each other they do – the moment the baby cries the mother jumps up and takes care. She's 'predisposed to act'.

W: What's that got to do with numb'b'?

M: If you have no feelings, you're not 'predisposed to act'!

W: Huh?

M: In other words, when your baby cries, you don't jump up.

W: I don't care about the jumping up part. I'm no mother. It's the numbness –

M: Let's try something. Here's an ice cube – do you see it?

W: Yup.

M: I'm going to press it in your arm. (presses ice cube in Walter's arm) How do you feel?

W: Cold.

M: And how do you feel predisposed to act?

W: Predisposed'? Huh?

M: What are you gearing yourself up to do with this cold thing on your arm?

W: To tell you to get it off!!!

M: Good. Next: You ticklish?

(continued on page 5)

Bush...has taken [the] common American practice of mixing religion and politics to heights previously unseen in the modern presidency.

Illinois Shakespeare Festival

JUNE 29-AUGUST 13, 2005

Twelfth Night, Macbeth, and Henry VIII.

The Festival takes place in an open air theatre on the grounds of Ewing Manor in Bloomington. For tickets call: (309) 438-8110 or visit www.thefestival.org

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A COMMUNITY FORUM ON THE PATRIOT ACT

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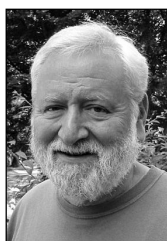
Wednesday, June 15 at 7pm

at the Urbana Free Library Auditorium.



Impressions of Northern Vietnam

By Belden Fields



IN THE FALL OF 2001, I had been invited to give a lecture on human rights in Thailand. I was eager to see Thailand where I had friends, but I also wanted to use the occasion to visit Vietnam. The latter country had had a significant impact on my life in the 1960s and 1970s when I was active in the anti-Vietnam war movement. But my visit in 2001 was not to be. I had made all the arrangements for my trip, and my plane was to have left on September 13, 2001. We all know why it did not leave.

But I retained the desire to see something of both Thailand and Vietnam. Fortunately, the opportunity presented itself again this year. On April 14th, I began my journey: from Champaign to Chicago and then to Los Angeles (where I picked up my friend Steve Douglas, a specialist on Southeast Asian politics), crossing the Pacific to Hong Kong and transferring to a flight to Bangkok. A homeopathic concoction called No Jet Lag proved to be a savior. I spent four days in Bangkok where I lectured on human rights to both Thai and Cambodian students at the National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA). The intellectual and personal high points in Bangkok were my interactions with the faculty and students at NIDA; the cultural high points were visiting the palace and temple complex in the center of the city and a traditional dance performance; and the gastronomic high points were virtually every Thai and Chinese meal that I ate in the city.

Unfortunately, I did not venture out of Bangkok and its outskirts. This was because the plans that Steve and I had agreed upon for our trip to Vietnam required all the remaining time that we had allowed for our trip. So, the day after both of us lectured at NIDA, we were on a Thai Airline plane bound for Hanoi.

What an incredible contrast there was between Hanoi and Bangkok. Bangkok was a huge, sprawling city. Traffic jams were everywhere and the pollution in the streets was so great that people who had to work outside near the streets almost always wore face masks. In order to drive any distance in the city, one had to take elevated roads. Neighborhoods seemed relatively undifferentiated as though zoning was never a consideration. And Bangkok is very hot and very humid, especially this time of year. -

middle- and upper-class people seemed to walk or drive from one air-conditioned place to another. Walk under the Bangkok sun for ten minutes and you are soaking wet.

Hanoi is a smaller city. The neighborhoods are quite differentiated and very interesting. There is the Old Quarter in which there are open shops and little restaurants. Here the people really spend their work and leisure time outside on the sidewalks and streets. Most of the streets in the Old Quarter are narrow and tree-lined. They are specialized by economic enterprise: if you want to buy shoes you go to this street, women's clothes to another, appliances to another, etc. In the center of the Old Quarter there is Hoan Kiem Lake, where people do their Tai Chi exercises in the early morning, children play in the afternoon, and lovers sit in the evening. All around the lake are restaurants, ice-cream parlors, and other little shops and stands. Next to the lake is the famous water puppet theater where puppeteers enact fun stories by manipulating their underwater puppets with sticks, accompanied by a traditional orchestra.

Move a little south and east and you are in the area dominated by old French architecture. Most spectacular is the opera house, which looks like a white version of the Palais Garnier opera house in Paris. Next to it is a Hilton Hotel which has adopted an architectural style that blends in with that of the Opera House. There is a beautiful boulevard that leads up to the opera house with other splendid buildings dating back to the French colonial period. In this area there are also many museums worth a visit, such as the Museum of the Revolution, the Ho Chi Minh Museum and Tomb, the outdoor Temple of Literature, the Vietnamese History Museum, and the museum of women imprisoned and killed in the wars of resistance. Also in this area is the "Hanoi Hilton." The former prison was used by the French and the Japanese during their occupations and also by the Vietnamese to hold U.S. pilots shot down during the U.S. war on Vietnam. A bit farther away and well worth a visit is the Museum of Ethnology.

In the more outlying areas of the city one



Street scene in Hanoi

sees the typical three-story houses that many urban families inhabit. Children who marry tend to move in with one of the sets of parents. There is also often a business on the first floor of the house. The houses are usually very ornate on the façade, with the sides and the backs often left in plain cement.

Hanoi is much easier to move around in than is Bangkok. First, there are very few cars. Most of the cars that one sees are taxis. Most people travel by motor scooters or

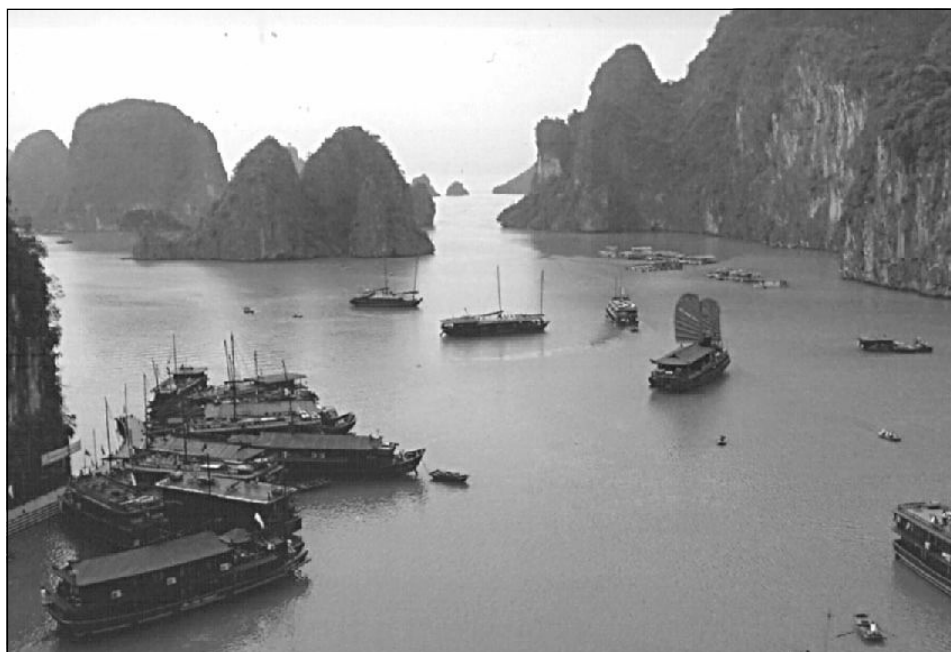
Visiting Vietnam provides one with the chance to meet some of the nicest people I have ever met...and to reach out to a country so badly devastated by our government in the 1960s and 1970s.

small motor cycles. Many also just ride bicycles. Visitors can take taxis that are good for longer distance travel like to the airport. If it happens to be hot outside, all of them are conditioned. Also available are cyclos, a sort of rickshaw driven by a cyclist behind the passenger rather than in front. One can either rent a motor scooter or

hire a ride from someone who has one, but just walking is a pleasure in this city that is usually much cooler and less humid than Bangkok. While Bangkok is inexpensive by U.S. standards, Hanoi is even less expensive. But in both cities the people are extremely nice to foreigners. Despite the 2 to 3 million Vietnamese killed, the ecological devastation, the continuing physical and mental after-effects of the chemicals like Agent Orange (used by the U.S. government to defoliate their country), and the post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by Vietnamese as well as Americans, Steve and I were never reproached over the war that our government inflicted on these people or over its earlier support of French colonialism. Two things, troubling things, were missing in Hanoi. First, I saw few old people. Second, both in Hanoi, with its tree-lined streets and its beautiful lakes, as well as in the countryside, I heard no birds singing and saw no birds. I can't help wondering if this missing generation and missing genus were results of our war against these people and their environment. If so, it deepens their senseless loss and our legacy of war crimes, which continues to accumulate elsewhere even as I write.

Thailand has been losing economic ground to some of the lesser developed countries, and I was told that there is now a significant migration of Thai people looking for jobs elsewhere. Vietnam, on the other hand, is a much poorer country but it is attracting a lot of transnational businesses. This became apparent when Steve and I made a trip to Ha Long Bay. Ha Long Bay is truly one of the wonders of the world and is so declared by UNESCO. It is a Bay on the north coast of Vietnam in which over 3,000 narrow mountain-like islands jut straight up out of the sea. Aside from the natural beauty, which for me is as spectacular as the Grand Canyon, there are also the fascinating floating villages where people who have found it impossible to make a living off of the land have built permanent homes. These homes are on rafts and the people make a living off of fishing and fish farming. One of the villages that we visited by sea kayak had 500 people living in it. Ha Long Bay is a great place to relax on a junk, swim, and kayak. We did all those things. But to get to Ha Long Bay we had to travel on the main road from Hanoi to Haiphong, a port that had been heavily bombed by the Americans. Steve, who had been on that road six years before, warned me that it was going to be a hair-raising trip. In fact, he was stunned to see a wide and good road with new manufacturing establishments lining both sides almost the entire length of the 3 hour trip. Vietnam is indeed very poor. But Vietnam is developing with a mixture of private investment and plant and government-owned operations. What we saw on the road was private, undoubtedly attracted by labor that is cheaper than Chinese or Thai labor. It will be interesting to see whether this one-party state will go as whole hog for capitalism as China is doing or whether it will retain a greater element of socialism in its economy. There are, indeed, all kinds of privately-owned small shops and businesses in the towns and cities. But the influx of the manufacturing multinationals from all over the world is a newer phenomenon that brings wealth but that can also have downsides such a labor exploitation, a very uneven income and wealth distribution, and threats to the traditional economies.

Some of the most interesting traditional economies are in the far north, near the Chi-

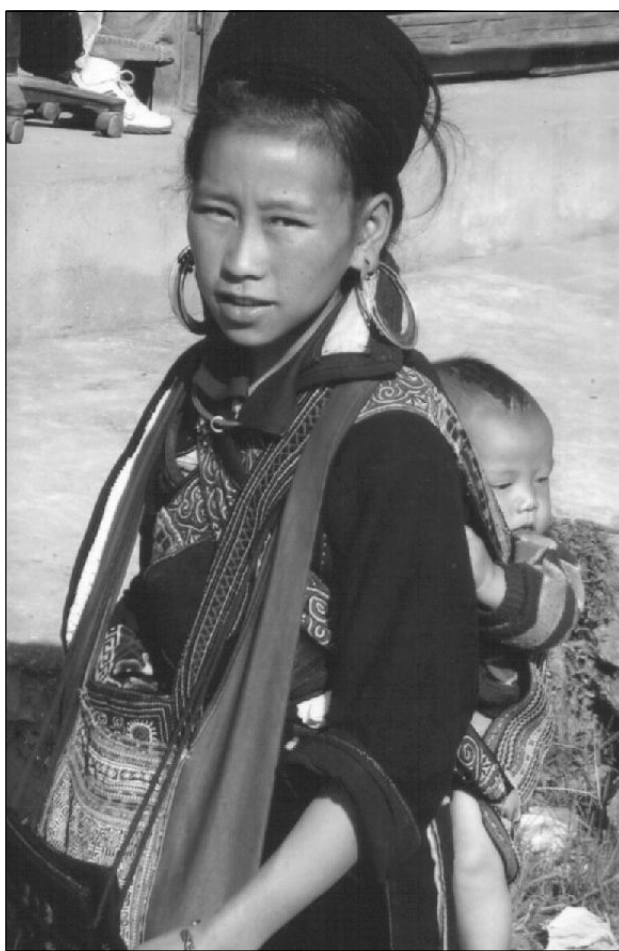


Ha Long Bay on Vietnam's northern coast



nese border. We made a trip up there to Sapa, a mountain village first created by the French colonialists as a mountain retreat. The French called these mountains the Tonkinese Alps. The Vietnamese call them the Hoang Lien Mountains. Sapa is situated in the traditional lands of several of what the Vietnamese refer to as "minorities." The majority in Vietnam call themselves the Viets (Viet Nam means "Viet man" in Vietnamese). But when you get into the mountainous regions of north and central Vietnam, you find people who are ethnically and linguistically distinct. Sapa is located on an elevated position overlooking a valley in which there is a H'mong village. This village does not have houses clustered together, but rather houses scattered over an expanse in which there are terraced rice paddies and animal husbandry. From the valley, one looks in the other direction at the highest mountain in Vietnam called Fanispan (3,143 meters). It is a truly beautiful site where visitors can enjoy trekking through the valleys or climbing Fanispan.

In the city of Sapa there is a market in which both the H'mong people, who wear predominantly black, and the Dao people, who wear predominantly red, sell their beautiful crafts. Some of the H'mong people, especially young girls and old women (in these mountains, which did not suffer direct American attacks, I did see many old people) are much more aggressive about selling their wares on the streets of Sapa outside of the market. The old women, particularly, do not hesitate to place a hat or another article of clothing on a visitor who is protesting that he or she is not interested in the item. They have even been known to follow people into restaurants, usually to be hustled out by the owners or waiters. Whether one finds their persistence annoying or amusing, what they have to sell is almost always some of the most colorful woven work that one will see anywhere in the world. In addition to this, there are several higher-end stores that feature silk items, such as clothing and pillow covers, that reflect the fine silk and careful



A H'mong woman and child

work of the local people.

While most of the minority people living near Sapa have had limited, if any, formal education, a number have picked up English largely from the predominantly Australian

tourists who have been frequenting the area. Thus they are not just people dressed and adorned in interesting ways offering beautiful crafts, they are also often people with whom one can have conversations and from whom one can learn things about their products and their everyday lives. They will often ask about you as well.

My ten days in northern Vietnam were an extraordinary experience that I would encourage others to share. The flight is expensive, but there are discount tickets available (I got mine from Travnet in Chicago). American citizens need a visa and should have inoculations. Once you are in the country, the costs are minimal. Meals can be had for a couple of dollars, hotel double rooms for \$15 to \$45. For travel outside of the city, I would recommend going with a local eco-travel agency. We used Handspan Adventure Travel (www.handspan.com), an agency started by students at Hanoi University. They are highly recommended by Lonely Planet's guide to Vietnam (which I, in turn, highly recommend to anyone intending to visit Vietnam) and their service was indeed excellent. Five days traveling round-trip from Hanoi to Ha Long Bay and from Hanoi to Sapa included transportation, lodging, a guide, and meals except drinks other than bottled water. All this came to about \$225 per person.

Visiting Vietnam provides one with the chance to meet some of the nicest people I have ever met in my many years of travel, to aid their economy, and to reach out to a country so badly devastated by our government in the 1960s and 1970s. If you cannot afford to travel there but would like to help them economically, educationally, and medically, consider a contribution to East Meets West Foundation (www.eastmeetswest.org). In significant ways, they attempt to compensate for the extraordinary damage that our government delivered upon these warm and forgiving people who refuse to be dominated by others, whether they be French, Japanese, or American.

SENSITIVITY TEST

(continued from page 3)

W: Yup

M: Under your arms?

W: Especially

M (starts tickling him): How do you feel?

W (giggling): I feel tickled.

M: And the 'predisposition for action'?

W (giggling): I want you to stop....no, continue!!!...no, stop, stop!!

M: Ok. Imagine your wife.

W (longingly): Oh I would love to. The box has come between us, more trouble –

M: she ticklish?

W: Very.

M: Imagine that I'm tickling her – with your permission. Here I go (Mark makes animated tickling gesture) Now, what do YOU feel?

W: (looks for a moment at Mark miming tickling): Aside from enjoying you make an ass of yourself, nothing at all.

M: No, c'mon – what do you feel?

M: What am I supposed to feel? You're tickling HER, how can I feel it?

M: Imagine! Use your mind like a human, not only for ingesting and pooping out data. Imagine your wife – see, she's laughing, she's giggling. Remembering being tickled yourself. Imagine!!

W: Alright – yeah, my imagination – ok alright. She's laughing! Get her a little lower, under the ribs!!.... That's it, now you got her – she's hysterical!! (he starts giggling)

M: How do YOU feel?

W (giggling): Me? I feel good, great!! I love to see her laugh!! (to his imaginary wife) He's good, isn't he? Man, he got me going there, right under the armpits –

M: And, predisposition to action?

W: Alright now stop tickling her. She's my wife...Keep your hands to yourself, one thing leads to another –

M: Alright, last experiment –

W: Wait, time out. What has my feeling numb

got to do with you tickling my wife? It's MY numbness I'm concerned about. Are you proposing that I'm supposed to FEEL vicariously what the other person is feeling – and thus won't be numb? That I have FEEL my wife being tickled?

M: Why not? You feel only when things happen to YOU?

W (his mouth open, speechless, jabbering): Well no, of course not, but err, umm, see I –

M: Speechless, eh?

W: Not really but I uhhh –

M: Let's go on – See my hand? And my nails?

W: You got fangs there buddy. What are you going to do?

M: OK, I'm going to dig my nails into the hand of –

W: Not MY hand! –

M: No, not yours – into the hand of someone we don't know, on the other side of the world.

W: As far away as possible, puhlease!

M: I'm going across the ocean, I'm traveling in Europe, I'm in the Middle East, I'm in Ira—

W: now wait a minute –

M, repeating: I'm in the middle east, I'm in Ira—

W: No, DON'T GO THERE!!! Not there!!! It's not only a horrible situation, it also changes this skit from a light-hearted comedy

between two men in boxes into a political polemic and —

M: I'm digging my nails into a man's hands, someone we don't know. Here I go. (Here Mark sings one pitch; he keeps singing this throughout the 'digging-his-nails-into-a-man's-hands' section, stopping only to speak his lines.) How do you feel?

W: No, I won't do this – it's a fiasco over there – if I didn't already have a box, it would drive me to hiding inside a box – it's a mess, a disaster area over there –

M: Not about tidiness issues – how do you feel?

W: The invasion started as a farce, now its

black comedy, and –

M: Not about theatrical forms, either. How do you feel that I'm digging my nails into a man's hand?

W: I won't go along with this.

(M continues the digging action, with singing)

W: I wish you would stop....(Mark continues)...How can I get you to stop? I have my box you know....retreat IS an option...

M: Imagine.

W: What?

M: That I'm pressing my nails into the hand of a man.

Walter (upset): What is this – reality TV? A ritual? A symbol? A representation? A simulcast? Infomercial? Metaphor? Test? What are you asking me to participate in?

M: I want you to imagine I'M digging my nails into the hand of a man, and then tell me how you feel

W: "How I feel?" "How I feel?" You've got a lot riding on the question 'how do I feel'?

M: What's the question you've got a lot riding on?

W (opens his mouth, is speechless): Err, ummm, seee, but, uhhhh –

M: See?

W (to audience): This is the second time I've been given nothing good to say back. No snappy comeback. To the writer I protest –

M: Just imagine the situation

W: Alright alright.

M: Imagine I'm digging my nails into the hands of a man.

W: Alright. No it's not alright – I hate this, I hate what you're doing...People like you are vicious, enjoy inflicting pain... those American soldiers, humiliating soldiers, torturing them. Oh they say "a few rotten apples" – bullshit!! –

M continues.

W: C'mon stop it – I voted against this. I registered people to vote to be against this. I go

to rallies against this –

M: not asking you what you're DOING, – I'm asking you what you're feeling. Do you feel the suffering?

W: O give me a break. I feel MY suffering...Give me that hand (pulls Mark's pressing hand away) – See I can't stop you – I can't stop this war – the racism in this country...stupidity...neocons...the sickening wealth... the power over— you want the whole list?

(M continues)

W: Oh give me my box, I can't stand watching this.(Puts on box)

M continues pressing down on hand

W (peeks to see if Mark has stopped; goes back inside box)

W (from half inside the box): And you're wrong – I'd like to feel something. there's a little sweetness, to feeling. But there has to be some positive outcome – why feel if it's going to be horrible?

W peeks to see if Mark has stopped. Back into box.

W: (half out of box): Alright, I don't feel anything. You wanna know why? Because I don't want to feel anything. You wanna know why? Because I'm smart not to feel anything: I do not want to sit here in a hot seat of pain where everything I do seems grotesquely insufficient, the insufficiencies grinning at me like gargoyles. I don't trust 'feeling'. I'll settle for good old numb.(back in box, then comes out: "b" (goes back in).

M (stops the nail digging): Sorry. (gives hand back to suffering man) (to audience): I work backwards: the baby is crying and crying and crying – and it doesn't look like anyone is jumping up, to stop war on Iraq. So – we seem to have no predisposition to action. So – we don't know what we're feeling. Or we simply feel nothing. We're num'b'. (puts his box on, reaches out to hold Walter's hand).

End

Media



White Guys with Guitars: Indy Musicians on Tour in Acoustic La-La-Land

by Darrin Drda

Darrin Drda is a long-time C-U resident, part-time musician, and full-time Buddhist with a big-time insignificance complex that compels him to publish verbose travel journals.

SOMETIME IN 2004, shortly after the seasonal withering of my freelance work and not too long before the traumatic presidential election, I began having daydreams of becoming a troubadour. I'd just bought myself a Martin guitar that seemed to write songs by itself, as well as a 1979 Mercedes diesel that I planned to run on vegetable oil after the installation of a second tank. Little did I know that it would take a full seven months for the long-dormant car to be revived to "good working condition and safe to drive," as per my agreement with the seller, Bernie, an obviously over-committed mechanic with a thing for German cars.

*She's got a leather interior and an engine that never will cease
All others are inferior because she runs on vegetable grease
It don't make her wearier, no her energy is ever increased
And it makes me cheerier, because I know that we're headed
for peace*

Me and my Mercedes...gonna save the world.

(from *Me and My Mercedes* by Darrin Drda)

In the face of post-election depression and winter doldrums, I nevertheless maintained a vernal vision of myself criss-crossing the country on the amber nectar discarded by fast food joints and roadside diners, playing music of peace and social change. I would live frugally on tips and out-of-the-trunk CD sales, earning fans one by one and making friends in each cultural oasis. I would be the very poster boy of freedom – true freedom, mind you, not the kind being falsely advertised on TV.

*Well I hear you say that freedom is a thing that you hold dear
And to you it may sound like treason when I say that freedom
is what you most fear*

*And you talk about democracy as a thing that you promote
And you say that's the way it's got to be and you shove it
down the peoples' throat*

*And I see the lies that you're tellin' me
and you'd better just be quiet
Cuz I realize what you're sellin' me
and I've never gonna buy it*

(from *Never Gonna Buy It*, by Darrin Drda)

The only cloud in my sunlit dream was a vague fear of solitude, not wanting to undertake the adventure alone. As I began strengthening my resolve, the answer came in the form of my friend Scarth, a fellow musician living in Oakland, whom I'd met in India late last millennium. In one of our periodic email exchanges, I learned that he, too, was seriously considering going mobile with his music, which I'd always appreciated for its intricacy, sincerity, and soul.

*A man and a woman went over a waterfall
One was a suicide, one was a saint
Both of them climbed out of the water laughing
One was the same, the other had changed*

*And we all go all the way down
Some have already arrived*

For me, it takes a shipwreck to learn how to dive...



Sparky and Darrin in Oakland, ready to hit the road

*So this is my prayer, for those who are searching for the
furnace that burns away lives, and leaves what is true behind
And we all go all the way down
To where none of this matters at all
And when you think you've hit the bottom,
there's further to fall...*

(from *All the Way Down*, by Scarth Locke)

With our similar musical and spiritual sensibilities, the question of a Scarth and Darrin tour quickly turned from "if" to "when." Once we decided upon the "where" of the West Coast, Scarth began the tedious task of booking shows, whiling away countless cellphone minutes and afternoons on the web. Though I tried to pick up some slack on my end, I was largely preoccupied with the recording of *Theory of Everything's* 2nd CD, and I was keen to get it finished and begin spreading the musical message that would, of course, change the world.

*Well, it isn't hard to see that we're livin' in a prison
And to a degree, we're victims of the system
But we can be free if we listen to the wisdom of the heart
And don't believe the lies of the rich politicians
Or the devil in disguise of the Christian Coalition
Keep your eyes on the prize that's hidden in the rhythm of the heart*

*And it's easy to imagine no religion, no division
But it isn't gonna happen just a-sittin' and a-wishin'
People got to take action, start a revolution of the heart.
Start a revolution of the heart. Be part of the solution, be smart...*

The heart is a muscle the size of your fist.

You've got to keep lovin', rise up and resist...

(from *rEvolution of the heArt* by Darrin Drda)

As the CD neared completion, I scheduled a release show for March 10, an ambitious deadline which led to a week-long test of the band's musical and psychological limits. With elbow grease and caffeine, we managed to finish our project in time, which is more than can be said about Bernie the mechanic. Alas, the Mercedes was deemed road-worthy a mere two weeks before the first scheduled West Coast tour date of April 2, not enough time to complete its conversion to veggie oil. Necessity dictated that I buy a plane ticket to San Francisco and that we do the tour in Scarth's Subaru station wagon, a.k.a. "Sparky." Though the engine had been reworked after a recent accident, the body retained the scars: mismatched fenders, a wrinkled hood, and bungee cords securing the passenger side headlight. The most humbling part, of course, would be having to buy our freedom from Arco and the other Emperors of Oil, at West Coast prices that often approached \$3 per gallon.

Here it comes, here it comes down the avenue.

Everyone better run, cuz it's comin' after you.

It's a two-ton missile made of chrome and steel,

It's my overdrivin', terrorizin'...Deathmobile...

Well, it runs on the blood of those in foreign lands

Who dare to keep our oil underneath their sand.

But nothin' can destroy the special joy I feel

For my gas-guzzlin', mass-destructin'...Deathmobile

(from *Deathmobile*, by Darrin Drda)

My arrival in Oakland was a joyful reunion with old friends and a chance to make new ones, many of them members of the Earthville house (www.earthville.net), home to a handful of hip and hug-happy artists, musicians and activists. The first few days were spent practicing with Scarth, sorting through the details of the weeks ahead and buying last-minute accessories, among them a thrift store lamp needed to illuminate the LCD of Scarth's drum machine. Known as Drumbot or Lovebot, the *de facto* third member of our entourage would prove the most difficult to get along with, often producing unexpected noises at uncomfortable volumes.

Our kickoff show at Earthville was attended by the warmest and most attentive audience any no-name performer could hope for. The enthusiasm and praise went straight to our hearts, which were in for a proper deflation over the next



The tour poster that would inspire homophobia

few shows. In fact, it's probably more accurate to call them "live practices" witnessed by café workers and a few half-curious patrons.

*I feel so lame and so low/ cuz nobody came to the show.
Apart from Jane and her friend Joe*

No, no, no nobody came to the show.

I do not claim to be a pro/ like Curt Cobain or Sheryl Crow,

But all the same and even so,

I thought that someone would come to the show.

Someday my fame, it will grow./ You'll see my name all aglow.

But this gravy train's movin' kinda slow

No, no, no nobody came to the show.

(from *Nobody Came to the Show*, by Darrin Drda)

After a rejuvenating stay with friends in the hippy haven of Eureka/Arcata in northern California, we headed up to Portland to perform at a pizza pub. Scarth had lived in that town for a few years and was able to gather a lively crowd of friends and supporters who joined ranks with fans of the opening pop band, Sounds Like Fun.

By this point, we had begun to discover the difficulty of promoting our act, or even describing our music to the uninitiated. When pressed, we'd usually throw out adjectives like folk, funky, quirky, or songwriterly, though the question was confounded by the fact that we weren't a band, or even a duo. We were two separate performers touring together, each with quite different, though complementary, styles. Taken as a whole, we hovered in a musical La-La-Land – a bit too boisterous for most coffee shops, a tad too tame for most bars. Eventually we decided to label ourselves simply "indy pop", conceding that, in the grand scheme of things, we were just another couple white guys with guitars.

They came from the burbs. They were on a mission.

With music and words they would fight the system.

And they wanna be heard, so be quiet and listen! (to...)

White Guys with Guitars (and)

Pipe dreams of bein' big stars

Changing the world and breakin' some hearts,

those White Guys with Guitars

Playing coffee shops All across the nation

Looking for props and appreciation

Nothing can stop the Caucasian invasion (of...)

White Guys with Guitars...

(from *White Guys with Guitars*, by Darrin Drda)

Our three-day stay in Portland offered us the chance to practice, catch up on quality dining and sleep, and attend a couple open mics (see song above). After bidding farewell to the gracious neurologists who hosted our stay and to Scarth's wife

Media



Karina, we headed further north to Seattle. Scarth's mother, who lives on Lake Washington, was kind enough to put us up for a couple nights and to be one of the few responsive audience members at the colorfully-painted El Diablo coffee shop. Another enthusiastic fan appeared in the pint-sized form a three-year-old girl who danced merrily during the first part of our show. Notably, it wasn't the first time on our tour that we had inspired a toddler to cut the rug, leading us to wonder whether we were doing something horribly wrong or remarkably right. We did seem to be inspiring a certain kind of movement, though not exactly the kind I had imagined.

*Is that a baby in her belly, or is it just because she's fat?
If it's a baby, what will she call it? When you had me, did you
look like that?*

She is dancing...

*What are doing when I can't see you from my big chair by the
door?*

*You say you're working for a living, but tell me: what are you
living for?*

Are you dancing?

*I am three years and a half now, I will soon be a boy of four.
After that, well you know how time flies, I'll be dancing out
the door...*

(from *Mo's Waltz*, by Scarth Locke)

After a pair of mediocre shows in the Seattle area, we settled in for our longest commute of the tour, a 13-hour drive south to Chico, CA. It had already become ass-painfully clear that our tour schedule was on the ambitious side geographically. Though we did wind through some breathtaking landscapes, the money spent on gas and parking and speeding tickets, as well as the long hours sacrificed behind the wheel, came without the assurance of a generous and adoring crowd at the end of each stretch. The show at Café Flo in Chico looked to be another example of imbalance as we began our setup, but before too long the small café was crowded with smiling strangers who soon became friends. Our hostess, Liz, and barista Kelly acquainted us with Chico's youthful night life, and we slept soundly that night with full bellies and hearts.

Somewhere way down the road

Well, we'll see the welcome sign

And everything will be just fine someday

And we'll all get what we're owed

There'll be nothing left to fear,

because the wind is gonna clear the clouds away

And when I close my eyes, love, there you are

You're so close but yet so far

(from *So Close But Yet So Far*, by Darrin Drda)

Our experience in Chico taught us the value of booking shows in smaller towns, where folks tend to be less cynical, perhaps, and have fewer entertainment options, to be sure. Unfortunately, this was to be our last taste of such intimacy, as we continued south to a well-peopled multimedia art event in the heart of La-La Land – Hollywood. Our performance at "Create-Fixate" was little more than background music for the tragically hip and beautiful bohemians parading in front of the post-modern paintings, but I was thrilled to be an ingredient in the sensory soup.

Our hostess in LA was an angelic Kim Fox, a singer-songwriter who had been signed to the Dreamworks label back in the late 90s. Now overwhelmed with her own photography business, she nevertheless shared her time and space and helped us celebrate Scarth's 34th birthday at a 24-hour Jewish deli whose adjacent bar was holding an open mic.



Darrin and Scarth with Kim Fox in Los Angeles

*Whites of eyes and faces that go black
Eyes and ears and mouths that will attack
Your attention to the center ring
Muscle men and showgirls in the wings
Fool, where did I go wrong?
Aiming to please but striking the gong.
Hero, villain, jester, fool, am I / Is this a hello or goodbye?
(from *Fool* by Kim Fox)*

As we pulled out of LA on our way to ASU in Phoenix, the Activities Coordinator on the other end of the deal and of the cellphone canceled the show, fearing we wouldn't make it in time. Since we were headed that direction anyhow, we sped across the desert, determined to prove her wrong and to fulfill the most lucrative contract of the tour. We succeeded on both accounts, although trying to convey the spirit of "student appreciation day" to undergrads scurrying between buildings on the quad proved fairly fruitless.

Unable to find a campground, we squatted that night at a state park. As we slept uncomfortably under the stars, we were awakened by a herd of horses that almost literally stumbled upon our bodies amidst the tall brush. Next morning we bathed in the river and found a safe and legal campsite southwest of town, in a picturesque valley filled with Saguaros and other types of colorful cacti. Our gregarious and well-traveled neighbor Lewis, himself a musician, warned of us the "mean mother fuckers" we would likely be playing for in downtown Tucson. Though we took his words with a grain of salt, they turned out to be prophetic, as we were made to feel most unwelcome by a few drunken hecklers at The Grill who later defaced our posters and plastered them across Sparky's windshield.

*Back up now and give me space. It's time I took my place.
Everybody gather round. Listen to the master expound, on the
wonder of...*

*Pride, push back, it's a natural fact,
fat kid on a swingset.*

*Push, push back, it's a natural fact,
it's gonna knock you down.*

*If you don't think I am qualified, let me assure you I have
analyzed*

*Every book written since 2047 BC. Damn right, damn right I
got...Pride...*

*If you don't like what I've got to say, you can just pack
your things and go away.*

(from *Pride*, by Scarth Locke)

The crowd at The Tiki Lounge in San Diego was much more hospitable. We shared the bill with two other white guy guitar bands, a fourth act of fiesty females having unfortunately canceled. From there we crossed the burning sands back to Phoenix and a coffee shop gig attended by a sparse but appreciative crowd, which included our hosts, Joanne and Chris. Though we had to hit the road at 4 am, their delightful company and backyard jacuzzi were hard to say goodnight to, and we squeezed in little more than a nap before heading to LA for an early afternoon slot at the annual music festival of Scarth's alma mater, Pitzer College.

At Kohoutek, as it's called, we encountered a decent reception from the thickening crowd and a royal welcome from the organizers, who lavished us with platters of BBQ tofu, veggies, cheese, and scrumptious vegan cookies. The afternoon was spent consuming free beer and music whilst romping on the lawn with friends (old to Scarth, new to me). Among them was Tommy Jordan of the pop-funk band Geggy Tah, who extended an invitation to join him at a rare, all-night performance of King Sunny Ade, and to crash at his house in Pomona. Already overtired, we were sad to decline the former and happy to accept the latter, but not before frolicking with Tommy in his tastefully-cluttered musical playground. Upon waking, we unpacked and re-packed the car to make room for Tommy, who needed a ride to San Francisco, and headed north, swapping stories and songs.

All I wanna do is to tune in / Radio L.A. Lujah

*'Cause we're broadcasting live / And we wanna hear all of ya
On the mic is Geggy Tah / But a whole lot more of all of ya
Let us hear ya, let us hear ya / In a big echoing holla
All I wanna do is to thank you / Even though I don't know
who you are*

*You let me change lanes / While I was driving in my car
(from *Whoever You Are* by Geggy Tah)*

For our final show at the I.C.A.N. Gallery in the Mission,



On the beach in San Diego

Scarth and I shared the spotlight with 3 other songwriters: Dara and Mark (Earthville superstars and mutual friends of Scarth and me) and Amy, who had organized the event. My bandmate David, who was in town visiting his dad, also took the stage with his grab bag of instruments to put the eyebrows on some of my songs. Each performer got a chance to shine, and the crowd was touchingly responsive. I myself was moved nearly to tears on a few occasions by the music, the overall vibe, and by the realization that the tour had come to a close. I ended my short set with what had become my traditional finale, an upbeat number called "A Happy Medium" that ironically served to deepen my funk. Immediately after the show, I was rescued from the blues by compliments and outpourings of affection that led to a blissful night's sleep.

*I wanna find myself a happy medium
between being who and where I am
And always striving for more peace and freedom
and doin' everything I possibly can*

*Sometimes it seems like the haziest dream,
it sounds sentimental or somehow sappy
But somewhere between all the crazy extremes,
I think a happy medium could make me happy
How wonderful would that be?...*

(from *A Happy Medium* by Darrin Drda)

In the audience at the last show were Dara's friends Jesse and Katie, who, like Scarth and me, spent the night at the Earthville house. In the morning, Jesse shared a few of his songs, each with a tenderness that betrayed his former involvement in a metal band that once opened for Metallica. Later I made a coffee excursion with Katie, a New York actress and singer, exchanging stories and perspectives on the Big Questions. Scarth, meanwhile, stayed in and sorted through receipts, calculating that we had indeed lost money on the tour, although not as much as we'd both anticipated.

Before long it was time to take one last ride in Sparky, and to say goodbye to Scarth. As we drove to the BART stop, we talked a little about what the tour had taught us, but found it hard to articulate what we were feeling exactly. We had shared a 3-week emotional roller coaster ride, an amazing adventure, and we searched for some pithy or profound words that might sum up the experience or wrap it neatly with a bow. But nothing came to mind. The question of when or if we might do another tour was left to linger. All we knew as we embraced at the turnstile was that we would remain bonded as friends and committed to using music as a way to express the incredible mysteries of love and life.

*There is beauty everywhere I look
I know because I read it in your favorite book
The one you like to keep beside the bed
To read when storms are brewing inside your head
It says it matters what you do...in the meantime...*

*We've got confusing things like hope to occupy us.
We've got confusing things like dreams to occupy us
in the meantime...*

*And I thought I knew what love was, but I never got it right.
And I thought I knew surrender, but I always end up back in
the fight.*

Maybe there's something I can help you find.

Don't know what it is, but in the meantime...

(from *Meantime* by Scarth Locke)

Darrin's music can be heard at www.myspace.com/darrindrda, or www.darrindrda.org. He plays periodically in C-U, sometimes with his band, Theory of Everything. A few of Scarth's songs are at www.sonicbids.com/scarthlocke.