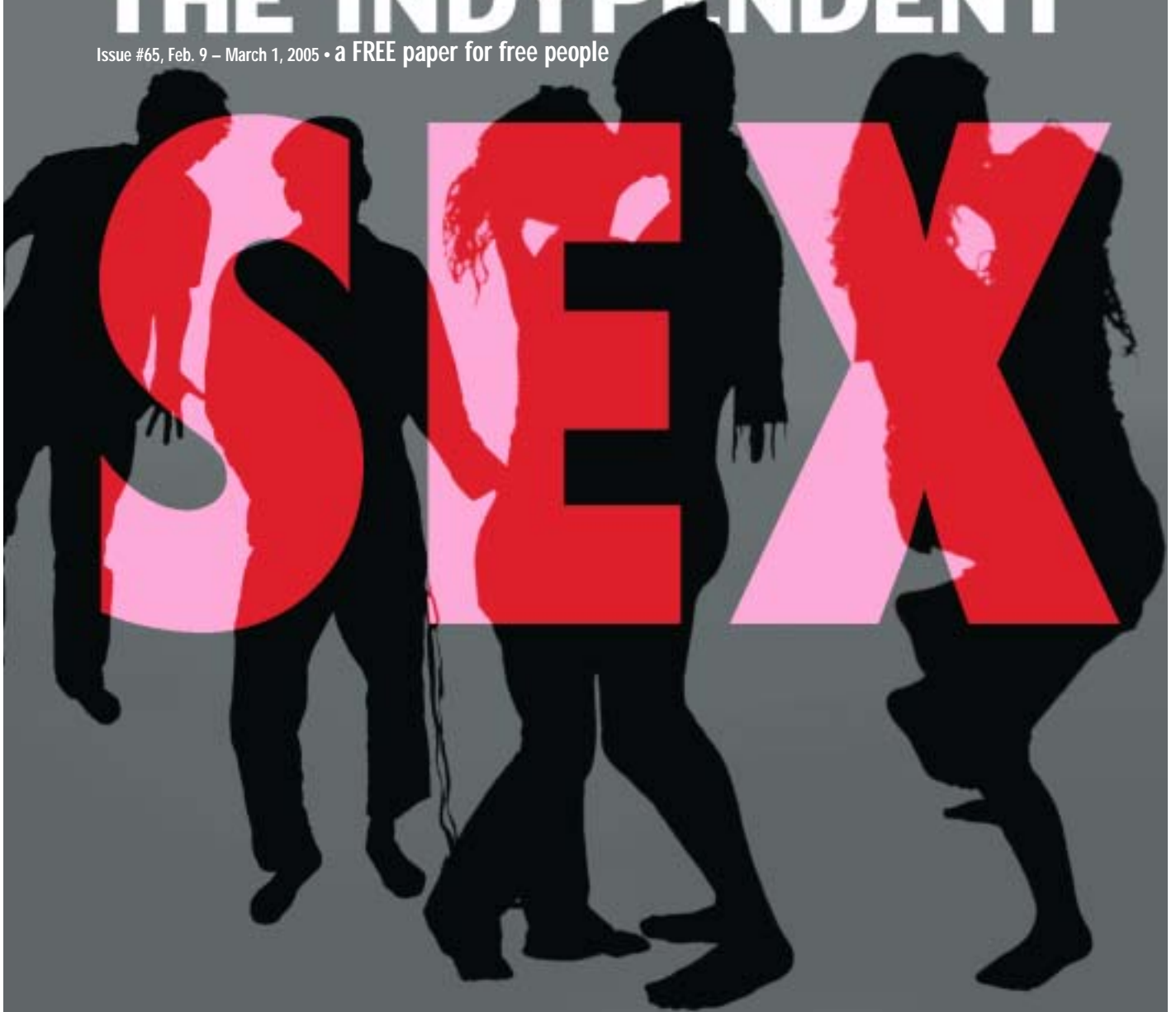


SAYING NO TO UNCLE SAM, P.5 • SURVIVING UGANDA, P.6 • IRAQ'S WHACK ELECTION, P.7

THE INDYPENDENT

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Moving Beyond Bush & Dick

pages 8-15

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With autonomous chapters in more than 120 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The Independent is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write for *The Independent*, film events and rallies, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

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update

"My fight might be over," says Herold Noel. "But it's not over for all the veterans who are still in my situation."

Homeless Iraq Vet Gets a Break

By JOHN TARLETON

Herold Noel's homeless ordeal is over, thanks to a wave of media attention he received after being featured on the cover of the Dec. 22 *Independent*. But, the Iraq War vet vows to continue his battle.

"My fight might be over, but it's not over for all the veterans who are still in my situation," Noel told a small crowd of reporters and camerapersons on Jan. 26 when he moved into a donated apartment in the Bronx. "I won't stop fighting for everyone who ends up like me."

Noel, 25, a Flatbush native, participated in the March 2003 invasion of Iraq as a member of the 3rd Infantry 7th Cavalry. He later saw intense combat near Falluja before being honorably discharged in December 2003. A series of misfortunes left Noel, his wife and their three children homeless by last summer. When *The Independent* broke his story ("Soldier's Story: A Perilous Journey from Flatbush to Falluja And Back Leaves Herold Noel Out In The Cold"), he was living outside in the middle of the winter while his wife and children stayed with relatives.

Noel's story was subsequently picked up by Democracy Now!, CBS, CNN, *The New York Post*, the *UK Guardian* as well as a number of web sites. In January, an anonymous donor contacted Operation Truth (optruth.org), an Iraq vets group, and gave Noel \$18,500 through a nonprofit community organization, enough to cover rent for a year plus furnishings for his new digs.

Noel, his wife and their one-year-old son will



HEROLD NOEL (top), a formerly homeless Iraq war veteran, looks around his new apartment in the Bronx. Noel says he has been interviewed by over a dozen journalists since *The Independent* broke his story on Dec. 22. (Above) Journalists gather to chronicle Noel's big day.

stay for the first month in his one-room apartment in East Tremont. They will then move into a three-room apartment in Mott Haven and be reunited with their twin five-year-olds.

"It feels good. I'm excited about the situation," says Noel, who is receiving treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder and is still looking for a job. "I'm enjoying the simple things in life, like being able to walk around in your house with your boxers on."

Ricky Singh, director of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program at the Brooklyn-based Black Veterans for Social Justice (BVSJ) helped work on Noel's case.

While pleased with Noel's good fortune, Singh told *The Independent* that about a half-dozen Iraq vets had come to BVSJ in the past two weeks looking for help. Singh expects the numbers to continue increasing. He says ultimately the fate of returning Iraq vets will depend on the government's commitment to providing services like transitional housing and mental health care, not individual acts of charity.

"We're finding resources for the war," Singh says. "But we're not finding the resources for the back end of the operation, which is taking care of veterans when they return."

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NYC'S LARGEST HOUSING RALLY IN A DECADE: Fermina Santiago (left) and Carmen Rodriguez (right) proudly represent All Saints' Church of Brooklyn at City Hall, Feb. 2, 2005. PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY



BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The worst thing is when you have a job and can't afford housing," says William Medley. "Rent's too much. For a studio they want \$900 a month. For a studio!"

Medley, 42, was crossing the Brooklyn Bridge to join the "Housing Here and Now" rally at City Hall on Feb. 2. A tall, lanky black man with oval glasses and two crosses in his left ear, he's currently unemployed — "I'm a jack of all trades, master of none, but my passion is cooking," he says — and lives in a homeless shelter in East New York. He came out to the rally after seeing flyers in the shelter.

"I'm homeless. I need housing. I'm going to put in my voice," he explains.

The rally, sponsored by a coalition of more than 100 labor unions and housing, community, and AIDS-activist groups, drew several thousand people. It was a diverse crowd: Gray Panthers and Queers for Economic Justice, Teamsters in satin baseball jackets advertising better inspections and tougher penalties for landlords who don't maintain buildings.

The protest had five main demands: use Battery Park City money to build and preserve affordable housing; guarantee housing for low- and moderate-income people in neighborhoods being rezoned; win back New York City's right to determine our own rent laws; provide permanent housing for homeless people living with AIDS; and support legislation for better inspections and tougher penalties for landlords who don't maintain buildings.

Many people carried "Repeal the Urstadt Law" signs, referring to the state law that bans the city from enacting its own rent regulations. "Why has Mayor Bloomberg fought tooth and nail to gain control over our schools, but not over our rent laws?" asked Hilda Chavez, a speaker from the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.

CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

A different housing-education connection was on the mind of Nether Carter, parent advisory chair at PS 42Q in Far Rockaway, Queens. Homeless children in the school, she says, are missing the English Language Arts test, which is used to determine whether pupils get promoted to the next grade, because they're being bounced from shelter to shelter.

"It's not one or two. There's thousands of these children," she says angrily. "No child left behind? These are the children being left behind!"

The homeless are the most visible part of the city's housing crisis, but the biggest part



ANTHONY MARTY, 14, of the Youth Power Project of Make the Road By Walking, a Brooklyn-based community organization, marches across the Brooklyn Bridge towards the rally at City Hall.

is the squeeze it puts on working people. There was a strong labor presence at the rally, with many people wearing baseball caps in the purple and yellow of the Service Employees International Union or the dark green and gold of District Council 37. DC 37 printed up scores of black-and-white signs reading "No More Luxury Construction," and "Don't Price Me Out of the Market." One union official spoke of construction workers commuting from Pennsylvania because they can't afford to live here any more.

"My rent goes up and my pay is lower. We're playing tug-of-war here. Every time you catch up you're a step behind," says Wilson Lassus, 38, a Brooklyn hospital worker and SEIU Local 1199 member. "The only way we can make a difference is if we support each other. Every community should unite and give each other strength."

"Housing is our main problem. Rent is so high. And most of the apartments have roaches," says Joyce Thompson, 73, a Jamaican-born resident of Parkchester, in the Bronx. She's retired and pays more than \$800 in rent; others in the neighborhood pay more — "plus gas, electric, heat. It's hard."

At the other end of the generational spectrum was a high-spirited group of about 50 students from the School for Social Justice, a small high school in Bushwick, chanting "Si, se puede" (yes, we can) and "Where housing at?" to the beat of cowbells and plaster buckets. "People don't have heat in their house," says Veronica Calle, 15.

"We're the voice that doesn't get heard," says Diandra Atkinson, 16, a student at Louis D. Brandeis High School in Manhattan. She's wearing the red armband of Youth Against Homelessness, a project of the Coalition for the Homeless that "allows youth who've experienced homelessness to speak out," an organizer explains. There are 15,000 homeless youth in New York City, says Ashana Balliram, 17.

Another contingent wore "Queers for Economic Justice" stickers. How is housing a

queer issue, other than that gay and lesbian New Yorkers have to pay rent too? "A lot of it's the same, but transgender people and stone butch lesbians have a hard time getting housing," answers QJE organizer Jay Toole, 56, of Brooklyn. Almost half the city's homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, adds Jessica Stern, 28, of Brooklyn, and many of them were thrown out of their homes by their parents after they came out.

NEEDED: NEW ZONING LAWS

Another demand was for "inclusionary zoning," requiring permanent affordable housing to be part of any new development in the city. The Bloomberg administration has dramatic plans to rezone the waterfront in Williamsburg and Greenpoint for luxury high-rises, but has not committed to including a definite amount of affordable housing in the plan, says Barbara Schliff of Los Sures, a housing group in Southside Williamsburg.

"Right now, they're only talking about incentives [for developers]," she explains. "We want a plan that's going to be good for the whole neighborhood, not just pushing everybody out." Neighborhood activists want a minimum of 40 percent affordable housing in the plan, she adds.

SAVING PUBLIC HOUSING

Percentages are critical to any inclusionary-zoning scheme. Developers in Manhattan get tax breaks if they agree to include 20 percent affordable housing, but "we're trying to get a better split. Twenty percent is not enough," says Pat Boone, vice president of ACORN's New York State chapter.

Saving public housing was a priority for Hilda Wright, vice president of the tenants association at the Beach 41st Street Houses in Far Rockaway. Otherwise, "the people don't have a place to go. The rent outside's as high as the sky. And now Bush is talking about taking Social Security."

"I'm protesting to help others," says Lorraine Nunez, 45, who's grateful that she's finally found a place to live, in a building designed for the formerly homeless. "I used to live in the streets, live in abandoned buildings. I thank God every day I have my housing." Her advice for Mayor Bloomberg? He should watch *Trading Places*, the 1983 movie in which Eddie Murphy played a homeless man who switches social stations with a Wall Street broker.

"We are not just a pressure group. We are an advance guard for a movement for affordable housing," declares Velma Murphy Hill of Afford Chelsea. "We have a message for Mayor Bloomberg: We will not give up."

IN BRIEF

BROOKLYN COPWATCHERS BUSTED ON FELONY CHARGES

Three members of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement Copwatch Program were arrested on assault charges in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn shortly after midnight on Feb. 9.

Lumumba Bandle, Desaw Floyd and Djibril Toure said they were arrested while videotaping the police beating a person on Greene Avenue. After police told them to leave the area, the Copwatch activists insisted they had a right to monitor police activity. The police then arrested all three on charges of assault and obstruction of governmental administration.

"This arrest is outrageous," said attorney Kamau Karl Franklin. "They were involved in completely legal activities."

MOMA FEATURES INDYMEDIA FILMS IN DOCUMENTARY SERIES

As part of MoMA's Documentary Fortnight film series, a collection of independent media films about the war in Iraq will be shown on Feb. 12 at 5:15 p.m. The selection, "Art and Politics: Indie Media Makers Respond," features short films by filmmakers from NYC Indymedia and Deep Dish TV on topics ranging from daily life in occupied Iraq to how American soldiers cope with fear by listening to rock music. More info: moma.org

'BROOKLYN 7' DEFENDANTS PREPARE FOR MARCH TRIAL

Over 18 months after the brutal police raid of a Brooklyn benefit party, supporters of APOC (Anarchist People of Color) are preparing for the March 21 commencement of the trial. The Brooklyn 7, as the defendants have come to be known, are charged with several offenses, including attempted assault, inciting a riot and resisting arrest. Numerous witnesses claim that it was in fact police who attacked them without provocation. Dozens of police descended on the party in a matter of moments, deploying chemical sprays and assaulting partygoers on the pretext of an open container violation. Several partygoers were injured. For ongoing coverage, check nyc.indymedia.org and criticalresistance.org.

TWO MILITARY RECRUITING STATIONS VANDALIZED

Two Army recruiting stations, in the Bronx and Manhattan, were vandalized in unrelated incidents on Jan. 31. Police arrested 19-year-old suspect David Seigal after he was seen loitering in the Bronx area. According to police, antiwar materials were found in his possession. Fire marshals and the Joint Terrorism Task Force are also investigating the incidents. CBS News reported. There are no suspects in the Manhattan attack.

BLOOMBERG'S \$800 MILLION GIVEAWAY

\$823 million. That's the amount Mayor Bloomberg plans to essentially give up in potential city revenue if he succeeds in his plan to sell the New York Jets a 13-acre plot of land on the West Side of Manhattan.

According to Juan Gonzalez of the *Daily News*, the economics of the deal goes like this: The Jets are offering to pay \$100 million for 13 acres on the West Side. The football team claims the plot of land is worth just \$35 million as is, or \$350 million if the state builds a deck over the rail yards. However the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has appraised the land value at \$923 million on the open market.

OSSIE DAVIS, 1917-2005

Actor, playwright and civil rights activist Ossie Davis has died at the age of 87. "A lion has fallen," said death-row journalist Mumia Abu Jamal upon Davis' passing. Both on screen and off, Davis was a giant and not just because of his booming baritone voice. In 1965 he eulogized Malcolm X calling him our "own black shining prince." For the past four decades he and his wife Ruby Dee engaged in countless human rights and peace campaigns.



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MADELINE ARROYO WATCHES AS JASON LEWIS helps her prepare her taxes.

Free and Easy:

Community Groups Offer Tax Prep Alternatives

Madeline Arroyo used to pay a private company \$100 to have her taxes prepared. Now, Arroyo gets her taxes done free and quick at the Lower East Side People's Federal Credit Union thanks to an increasingly popular program across the city that enables low income wage earners to get free assistance with their taxes as well as rapid refunds within a couple of weeks of filing their forms.

BY KAT AARON

This is great for the community," says Arroyo, 29, who will keep every dime of her modest \$300 tax refund. "When you're low on cash, it's great to be able to come to a place like this and know they're doing it the right way."

This marks the third year that the credit union and more than 100 other sites around the city are preparing people's taxes for free, on the spot. Many people who came to the credit union last year for tax prep are returning, and bringing friends and relatives.

"When their refund is calculated and they see the amount, and they realize that every penny of it is going in their pocket, you just see so much joy in people's faces," says Meagan van Harte, coordinator of free tax services at the credit union. "These are working people, and they need that money."

In addition to preparing basic tax returns, the volunteer sites can help low income New Yorkers to claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) – a major tax credit for working people which can bring in up to \$4,300 a year. Since the EITC is available for up to three years retroactively, families can reclaim upwards of \$10,000 – a significant boost for many working families struggling with the poor job market and rising prices.

These free tax sites offer a sharp contrast to the high-cost tax preparers that target low income neighborhoods of color. The storefronts pop up at the start of each year, with empty offices transformed into Jackson Hewitt or HR Block outlets promising immediate cash. But the so-called "rapid refunds" these preparers offer are in fact high-interest-rate loans, with annual percentage rates of 40-700 percent.

Nationally, low-income consumers are the ones stuck with most of these expensive

refund-anticipation loans. Almost 75 percent of Jackson Hewitt's customers have incomes less than \$30,000. And these high cost loans are siphoning off vital Earned Income Tax Credit dollars, one of the few anti-poverty programs left unmolested by the Bush administration. A new report by the National Consumer Law Center estimates that nationwide people receiving the EITC are spending a total of \$1.73 billion dollars to get their refunds.

Margarita Lopez, City Councilmember representing the Lower East Side, has been a supporter of the free tax-prep sites since they appeared in 2003. And with good reason – last year alone, the credit union sites in her district processed almost 2,000 free tax returns, bringing over \$2.1 million in refunds to the neighborhood. Other free sites around the city coordinated by the Community Food Resource Center prepared over 10,000 returns totaling \$18.5 million in refunds.

But Lopez notes that there's still a long way to go, with over 230,000 New Yorkers not filing tax returns and claiming the benefits for which they qualify. "Those 230,000 people are equivalent to \$500 million that we are losing in the city of New York," she says. And while putting tax dollars in New Yorker's pockets is important, Lopez mentions another critical reason to file a tax return. "This is money that belongs to us, that we...have worked for and put in the coffers of the federal government. And I'll be damned if that \$500 million is going to be used to buy guns to kill people in Iraq."

For more information about free tax preparation sites in New York City, see nedap.org; or call the IRS at 800-829-1040. Sites may have income restrictions on their service; most offer free tax prep to filers with incomes under \$36,000-\$40,000.

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Activists Target Military Recruiters, Recruiters Target Students

No Thanks, Uncle Sam

By JORGE MARISCAL

When Boston College student Joe Previtera decided to protest the war in Iraq, he headed to the one place that keeps the war machine well stocked with fuel – his local recruiting office. Previtera put on a black hood and cape, stood on a box, and attached stereo wires to his hands. The message was clear enough. The recruiters say “money for college,” but the reality of war says “Abu Ghraib.”

No one signed up that day, and Previtera was arrested by Boston police and subsequently charged with two felonies having to do with “making false bomb threats” (charges were later dropped). In his act of grassroots pedagogy, Previtera joined a growing number of activists across the country that are focusing their attention on military recruiting as one of the most important fronts in the struggle against militarism and war. While many people continue to generate fearful predictions about an impending draft, others have realized that the so-called volunteer army is already a form of conscription for those young people with limited economic and educational opportunities.

Over 50 people staged an act of civil disobedience outside a recruiting office near the University of Wisconsin in Madison in November. Four students and a university employee entered the office and delivered their press release, refusing to leave until the recruiting station was turned into a financial aid office. The four protesters were arrested for trespassing.

In their press release, the Madison group called recruitment “a predatory practice” and argued: “the war in Iraq has seen hundreds of thousands of soldiers sent to fight in a needless conflict. A large proportion of these soldiers were recruited from the most disempowered segments of American society – the poor, people of color, high school students. Recruitment often takes the place of financial aid or a decent job, and it is grossly unfair.”

For a two-week period following the protest, a Madison television station conducted a survey on its website. Evidently counter-recruitment activists still have much work to do: 58 percent of the over 900 respondents answered “no” to the question “Are Military Recruiting

Methods Unfair or ‘Predatory?’” Protest organizers promised they would revisit the recruiting station in the near future.

In Vermont, activists converged on a local National Guard recruitment office. Among the 50 states, Vermont has one of the highest percentages of its population in the Guard, and many have been deployed to Iraq and Kuwait. Organizer Leo Schiff called military recruiting “deceitful and deadly.” In a local newspaper in Montpelier, one letter writer observed that the U.S. Constitution may actually prohibit the use of Guard troops in foreign conflicts, since

“[Military] recruitment often takes the place of financial aid or a decent job and it is grossly unfair.”

Article I, Section 8 grants Congress the power “to provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions” but not the power to deploy the Guard overseas.

One of the more dramatic protests targeting a recruitment station took place in late November in Philadelphia. Increasingly frustrated by the lack of response from the Office of Housing and Urban Development to the needs of local homeless families, members of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union moved out of the “Bushville” tent city they had established and staged a sit-in at the city’s main Army recruiting station. Carrying signs that read, “Bring the Money Home” and “Billions for War, Still Nothing for the Poor,” they briefly took over the office and issued a list of demands, including affordable housing and domestic-violence shelters. Several homeless families stated that they had relatives fighting in Iraq. The sit-in ended peacefully when fire and police officials arrived, and the homeless families returned to their encampment. “Operation Bring the Money Home” will continue, the KWRU says.

On Jan. 20 in Seattle, hundreds of students walked out of schools to protest the war in Iraq. At Seattle Central Community College, an ethnically diverse group of working-class students surrounded an Army recruiters’ table and tore up enlistment literature, forcing the recruiters to leave the campus.

Counter-recruitment actions at community colleges may be the wave of the future, given the Pentagon’s increased interest in recruiting there. A 2003 study by the Rand Corporation said that “the greatest enlistment potential exists among two-year [college] students and two-year dropouts.”

In related actions, students and faculty at

the University of Puerto Rico (Mayagüez and Río Piedras campuses) have sustained a three-year struggle to demilitarize their institutions of higher learning. Born out of the successful struggle by the community of Vieques, Puerto Rico to remove the U.S. Navy bombing range, the University Front for Demilitarization and Education) has led the fight to oust ROTC programs. They have used sit-ins and hunger strikes to block the construction of an Air Force ROTC building, and temporarily took over an Army ROTC office where they painted murals with counter-recruitment themes on several walls.

One of the faculty leaders is mathematics professor Hector Rosario who, as an untenured faculty member, risked his career by participating in a fast at the end of last summer. He was suspended from teaching and will not receive any salary until university officials consider his case this March.

With at least 23 Puerto Ricans from the island killed in Iraq so far and thousands more in the armed forces, the issues of recruitment and war are controversial. But Rosario and his students will not be deterred. As he wrote last February: “Students claim these buildings that were meant ... of a country not for the military training of its citizens that will eventually participate in the massacre of children. Not in our name. Not with our resources. Not anymore.”

Jorge Mariscal teaches *Chicano Studies* at the University of California, San Diego. Reprinted with permission from www.counterpunch.org.

IN BRIEF

BUSH USES UNIVERSITIES TO SPREAD PROPAGANDA

First it was the pundits propagandizing for the administration, now it is the universities. *The Palm Beach Post* reports that the Bush administration has given Florida State University \$600,000 since 2003 to put a positive spin on Bush’s education policies.

The money goes to the School Choice Center which works to expand the number of charter and magnet schools in the state and to help the schools “work the media.”

The Center also promotes the pro-school choice movement by posting articles backing Bush’s policies from conservative groups including the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Center for Education Reform and the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. A spokesman for the Florida Education Association criticized the program saying, “I think this is an attempt to present one side of the story and make it appear as though it’s an objective thing.”

The news comes just a month after prominent pundit Armstrong Williams admitted he had received \$240,000 from the government to promote Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act.

CAMPUS WITCHHUNT TARGETS WARD CHURCHILL

University of Colorado professor and longtime American Indian Movement activist Ward Churchill has come under intense attack by Fox News and Republican politicians for writing an essay charging that the 9/11 attack was a consequence of U.S. foreign policy. The controversy exploded after Fox News host Bill O’Reilly called Churchill an “anti-American fanatic” on Jan. 28. O’Reilly continued to cover Churchill every show until Feb. 3.

A three-year-old essay suddenly became front-page news. Churchill’s speech at Hamilton College in New York was canceled. Churchill resigned his post as chair of University of Colorado’s ethnic studies department. The governor of Colorado and New York called for the tenured professor to be fired outright. Death threats have forced the cancellation of other Churchill speeches.

Churchill has admitted he could have expressed himself better in the essay – in one part he compares the victims inside the World Trade Center to “little Eichmanns” – but, he says, the overall message in the article has been ignored.

“If U.S. foreign policy results in massive death and destruction abroad, we cannot feign innocence when some of that destruction is returned,” says Churchill. “Such attacks are a natural and unavoidable consequence of unlawful U.S. policy.”

BUSH BOOSTS PENTAGON BUDGET BY \$19B

President Bush’s \$2.57 trillion 2006 budget proposal slashes domestic programs to strengthen defense. Of the 15 Cabinet-level departments, nine receive reductions in funding. Over 150 programs receive funding cuts or are completely eliminated. The \$637 million Community Services Block Grant which assists low income people with housing, nutrition, education and other needs is eliminated, prescription drug co-payments for veterans are more than doubled, drug education at the state level is discontinued and the Environmental Protection Agency budget is decreased by almost six percent.

Not all programs are facing budget cuts. Abstinence-only education programs will receive \$38 million more. The Pentagon’s budget will increase by \$19 billion – not including the cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

SOLDIER OF PEACE

Amy Goodman (left) of Democracy Now! looks on as former Marine Staff Sergeant Jimmy Massey (right) speaks Feb. 6 at Joe’s Pub in downtown Manhattan. Massey described how he killed unarmed demonstrators while in Iraq and said he hopes to be tried someday for war crimes.

“I’m not going to stop,” he added, “until I have my commanding officer in court across from me.”



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Surviving Uganda

GULU, Uganda—At night fierce winds batter the graying tarp of the UNICEF tent at the Noah's Ark Children's Center in Gulu. Fifty teenage girls huddle in stiff wool blankets on the floor, undisturbed by the 6 a.m. call to prayer from a nearby mosque, and the pounding of soldiers' boots from calisthenics. At seven, they slowly roll from their makeshift beds, fold their blankets and trickle outside, joining hundreds of boys and girls pouring out from identical shelters. Shivering in thin dresses and T-shirts, they begin the long journeys back home to their villages.

By NEELA GHOSHAL AND JEREMY KAMPS

We always sleep with the light on," explains Alice, a sturdy 16-year-old with close-cropped hair whose parents were both killed by Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels. "The children get nightmares in the dark." This is no wonder, as children have been the primary victims in the 18-year-long civil war in northern Uganda.

The LRA thrives upon raiding villages, abducting children and forcing them into combat and service as porters and "wives" for commanders. Alice walks four kilometers from her village every evening to sleep in Gulu town, and treks back every morning.

'WE LOOK SO GOOD TO THEM'

"They came so many times last year," Alice says, looking out at a full moon hanging in the morning sky. "Girls our age, we look so good to them. Even a girl of 12 years they may take as their wife."

Alice is one of the lucky ones. An estimated 20,000 children have been abducted from northern Uganda since the LRA began battling governmental Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) in 1986 – over 10,000 of those since 2002.

Lucy Abalo, 18, recounts her story from a concrete stoop outside the home where she now works as a house girl. She was abducted in 2000 and handed over to a commander as his wife. "I totally refused," she says vehemently. Her refusal prompted a beating, but the commander was given another girl in her stead.

Her hardships didn't end there. Lucy was forced to steal food from villages and to participate in the abduction of 40 boys from a boarding school. After two years in the bush, she fled and found her way to safety. "We were six girls who escaped. But two died on the way."

Ten minutes down the road, Johan Otim, 14, sits on a broken bed frame at World

Vision Rehabilitation Center, recounting his abduction last April. "I had gone to bathe with my friend. Suddenly I saw strange men, rebel men. They abducted the two of us." Johan and his friend were forced to carry baggage for a group of eight soldiers. "We would be overworked and fall down and in return we would be beaten." A scar on Johan's back still marks the 100 strokes he received for falling asleep in a tree while on guard duty.

The scars borne by former child soldiers are emotional as well. Brenda Achan, 13, was abducted in July 2003 by a rebel group on its way to the base of LRA leader Joseph Kony in southern Sudan. "Many people died on the way," she remembers, eyes downcast, twisting her hands compulsively. "Those that

>>Those that could not walk would just be left by the roadside and die. Others died of thirst. You would have to walk over your friend like they were not even human.>>

could not walk would just be left by the roadside and die. Others died of thirst. You would have to walk over your friend like they were not even human."

World Vision, a California-based "Christian relief" group, is one of several organizations that aim to rehabilitate former child soldiers. At World Vision, children receive individual and group counseling and "class therapy," which eases their return to school. World Vision also emphasizes art therapy and aspects of traditional culture, such as dancing and drumming.



Child survivors of Uganda's civil war. PHOTO: NEELA GHOSHAL

'NOT THE SAME CHILD AS BEFORE'

Sometimes, counseling is provided to parents as well. "They're visiting a new child," says Dennis Oruk, a slender, energetic administrator. "Their daughter may have been abducted at 12 or 14, and now she's a mother of two kids." As he speaks, screams erupt nearby. The screams, Oruk explains, are coming from a 15-year-old mother, who recently tried to run away and abandon her baby at the center. "She doesn't want her baby," he says – a common feeling among the child mothers who have been raped.

World Vision's work extends into the villages and internally displaced people's camps. "We sensitize the community so that they

kill, looting. The children step on eggs, they are smeared with oil, and they drink Mato Oput" – a bitter herb whose consumption is said to remove the bitterness between former adversaries.

But Acholi cleansing ceremonies aren't always enough. At Coopee Internally Displaced People's Camp, 70-year-old Calito Kissa sits outside his thatched-roof hut, his 17-year-old son, Michael, at his side. Kissa, a retired teacher, has seen the stigmatization of former child soldiers in his classroom. "They are isolated and scorned," he says.

"Some things happen in the bush that are so terrible that they fear coming home," reflects Michael, who was abducted for six months. "They feel stupid and unaccepted, and the army is the only place they are accepted."

Such feelings make children easy targets for the UPDF, which recruits former abductees with open arms. "So many go back to being soldiers," Michael's father laments.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Private groups provide limited support for former abductees' school fees or vocational training, but no uniform government policy exists to ensure them alternatives, leading to a cycle of violence.

Dennis Olema is one who hopes to help break the cycle. An Acholi who graduated from Kampala's Makerere University, he returned to northern Uganda to play his part in rebuilding a badly broken community. With the support of Project Namuwongo Zone B, a U.S.-based group of campus activists advocating for peace in Uganda, Olema is developing a program aimed at bringing together youth who have been abducted and those who have not. Through sports leagues, drama and cooperative play, he believes stigmatization can be reduced and an element of normality can be restored to the lives of former child soldiers.

U.N. CRISES OF VIOLENCE

By DONALD PANETH

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y.—Multiple worldwide crises are being addressed and administered at the United Nations by men who very seldom either speak for or to the subjects of their deliberations – people, the rag-tag people.

These men are diplomats, foreign ministers, heads of state and the enormous numbers of functionaries they command who make it possible for them to carry out their questionable policies, who can think fast on their feet and have an answer for everything.

There are all sorts of crises. There is the crisis in Iraq, on several levels, which refer to both past and present. There is the crisis of murder, rape and refugees in the Darfur region of Sudan; the U.N. Security Council has adopted resolutions, dispatched missions, received reports on Darfur since spring 2004 – nothing has been

remedied. There is the crisis of violence and foreign intervention and exploitation of resources which has existed since 1960 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There are the equally perennial crises of Palestine/Israel; of poverty, hunger and malnutrition; of disarmament, of the environment and climate.

To the powers-that-be, it is a game, an exercise in control and manipulation, on which they spend an awful lot of words. "Let me be clear," Mark Malloch Brown said repeatedly at a 5 p.m. press conference here on Feb. 3. Brown was standing in for U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, responding to the interim report of an inquiry committee on the now defunct Iraq oil-for-food program. Wrongdoers would be disciplined, Brown said, reforms implemented.

Another functionary, Paul A. Volcker, released the interim report to U.N. correspondents attending an earlier press conference that day. The correspondents listened closely to

Volcker's words. He said that the report did not make for "pleasant reading," that it found the program's procurement process was tainted, that its audit process was underfunded and understaffed, that its director, Benan Sevan, had "placed himself in an irreconcilable conflict of interest."

Questions about Annan, himself, and his son, and their relation to the program were put over to a further report to be submitted this summer. It appears as if Annan will survive the scandal, with the indulgence of the United States, and stay on to the end of his term in December 2006. The recovery and functioning of the U.N. is another matter. It will continue to exist, but it seems in an ever-diminishing political and international security capacity, more, or mostly, as the provider of humanitarian aid to the multitudes victimized by the destructive characters who are running things.

IRAQ: Reality Dims Election Luster

It took mere days for the democratic shine on Iraq's national elections to lose its luster, revealing a festering mass of coercion, intimidation and irregularities. It seems that less than half the eligible voters chose to cast ballots, leaving the victors with a fragile legitimacy that may shatter if they can't end the U.S. occupation and restore the economy.

BY A.K. GUPTA

One of the most disturbing irregularities concerned reports that Iraqis were being told that if they didn't vote, their food rations would be cut off. A *Washington Post* report from Jan. 30 stated that some officials circulated rumors deliberately to "try to lure voters" to the polls. Khalaf Muhammed, the electoral commission official in charge of a polling station in Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, told the *Post*: "Even though we spread a rumor in the city saying anyone who doesn't vote will be deprived of their food ration, only ten people voted."

That rumor was also rife in the Sunni neighborhoods of Baghdad, the *Post* account added, "gaining credence because voter registration rolls were taken from centralized records for the ration of rice, flour, oil and other staples."

Freelance journalist Dahr Jamal interviewed numerous voters in Baghdad who said their food-ration agents had to approve them before they could vote. "Two of the food dealers I know told me personally that our food rations would be withheld if we did not vote," one engineering student told Jamal.

Even according to the Election Information Network, an Iraqi poll-monitoring group established in part by the CIA-linked National Endowment for Democracy, there was "intimidation at 15 percent of polling stations, ranging from assurances that a party had been blessed to outright threats of violence."

An AFP reporter observed numerous irregularities in Mosul, such as election workers telling voters for whom to vote. One voter,



BULLSHIT, BALLOTS AND RATIONS: USAID distributes food in Southern Iraq as part of "hearts & minds" campaign.

Zahra Ibrahim, 60, after being told to vote for the list headed by interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, said, "I really just did what they asked me to do."

The *Financial Times* observed, "In the heavily Shia towns of Najaf and Karbala, government officials barred voters whom they believed would support the opposition from entering polling centers." The allegations came from Allawi party officials, who presumably were referring to the Shiite religious parties that control those municipalities.

THE EVER-DECLINING TURNOUT

Hours before the polls had closed, one election official stated that turnout was a whopping 72 percent. Iraq's electoral commission quickly clarified the comment as "very rough, word-of-mouth estimates gathered informally from the field." But it still maintained that "turnout has exceeded expectations throughout the country." Very quickly, though, turnout was placed at 57 percent or 8 million voters, which is precisely the number the

commission estimated before the vote.

On Feb. 4, the *New York Times* reported that one election official, "Safwat Rashid, a 59-year-old lawyer from Sulaimaniya, in the Kurdish region, was evasive about the turnout, implying it might end up significantly lower than the initial estimate." Rashid told the *Times*, "Only God Almighty knows the final turnout now."

Howard Kurtz, the media critic of the *Washington Post*, was perhaps the only mainstream media commentator to raise the issue of eligible versus registered voters. After talking to reporters in Iraq and Kenneth Pollack of the Brookings Institute, Kurtz surmised that the number of eligible voters was 17 to 18 million. And this doesn't include the more than 1 million expatriate Iraqis who were eligible to vote (barely 25 percent of them did). In the end, if 7 million or fewer Iraqis voted overall, this would be a turnout of less than 40 percent, which would make the elections a stunning failure.

SUNNI BOYCOTT

One revealing benchmark of the low Sunni turnout came from the largely Sunni Arab province of Salaheddin. The AP reported Feb. 7 that with 80 percent of the polling stations reporting, the United Iraqi Alliance, cobbled together by Shiite ayatollahs, was leading in the province with a total of 27,000 votes. In second place was the Kurdish list.

In Samarra, a city of 200,000, fewer than 1,400 ballots were cast – including Shiite soldiers and police from the south who were allowed to vote there. The turnout was even more dismal in ar-Ramadi, a city of 400,000. According to an unofficial tally, just 1,700 ballots were cast, also including votes by imported police and soldiers. Vote totals in Al Anbar province, which includes Ramadi and Falluja, were put at 15,000.

TO THE VICTOR GOES THE PROBLEMS

But a new government has even bigger problems to confront. Millions of Sunni and Shiite Arabs boycotted the polls as illegitimate under occupation, and apart from the Kurds, the vast majority of Iraqis who voted indicated that their ballot was one against the U.S. occupation. In response, many of Iraq's present and

future leaders rushed to speak out against a timetable for American forces to withdraw, probably because they realize their political survival is dependent on U.S. firepower.

Iraqis are also looking to the new government to restore basic services, tackle corruption and jumpstart the economy. However, the main parties in the victorious United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) have a sketchy track record. They have gained control of numerous municipalities in southern Iraq since the U.S. invasion, but many Iraqis say the religious parties' rule, particularly in Najaf and Basra, has been marked by incompetence, favoritism and corruption.

Many Iraqis distrust the religious Shiite parties that swept national and provincial elections in the south, seeing them as tied to Iran, where many were based during the rule of Saddam Hussein.

The UIA and the Kurdish slate may join forces, as they possess the two-thirds majority needed to form a new government. But the two slates are split on basic issues. The UIA is calling for a constitution of "Islamic character," to which the secular-minded Kurds are strongly opposed. And such a move could further alienate Sunni Arabs, who have fundamental theological differences with Shiism. The Kurds are also demanding outright independence, whereas the Shiite ayatollahs who guide the UIA want a strong central government.

Nonetheless, in these image-building exercises, perception is in the eye of the beholder. Anecdotal reports from Baghdad state that "the mood" among the public has changed since the election, with many optimistic that the days of car-bombings and open firefights may be drawing to close.

But for the resistance, who killed scores of security forces after the post-election lull, that depends on the withdrawal of U.S. forces. The deciding issue is whether the resistance will continue to draw popular support. There are legions of Sunnis and Shiites who still feel disenfranchised. If the victorious parties revert to form, squabbling among themselves, rewarding supporters while letting basic services crumble, and leaving the U.S. occupation untouched, then it's only a matter of time before Iraqis turn to those who shunned the electoral system.

The war hasn't ended. It's just entered a new stage.

WHERE DID ALL THE BALLOTS GO?

Up and down Iraq, there were persistent reports of missing ballots. Interim President Ghazi al-Yawer alleged, "Tens of thousands were unable to cast their votes because of the lack of ballots in Basra, Baghdad and Najaf." *Agence France Presse* reported on Jan. 31 that riots broke in the town of Qaraqush, north of Mosul, after thousands of voters found that many polling stations lacked ballots. Professor Juan Cole adds that an Iraqi newspaper, *Az-Zaman*, reported, "150,000 angry Iraqi Christians in Nineveh Province came out to protest on Monday [Jan. 31]."

In Nineveh, the province that includes Mosul, election official Safwat Rashid told the AP that U.S. and Iraqi forces at first allowed less than one-third of the 330 polling stations to open. Iraqi election officials initially reported that the turnout in Mosul was 30 percent or higher, but the *New York Times* stated on Feb. 3 that the actual turnout "seems slightly more than 10 percent, somewhat more than 50,000 of Mosul's 500,000 estimated eligible voters." Mosul is a city of 2 million people, so it seems that most people didn't bother to register.

The charge of too few ballots is especially curious given that U.S. officials reportedly had 60 million ballots printed up and delivered to Iraq – for 14.2 million registered voters.

The chairman of the electoral commission, Abdul Hussein al-Hindawi, admitted that not enough ballots were distributed and many polls failed to open in Nineveh, Salaheddin and Tamim provinces.

Around Kirkuk, in Tamim, according to the *Financial Times*, one provincial official said that only 50,000 ballots were sent to the district of Hawija "even though more than 100,000 voters were on the rolls." Only 19 of 38 polling centers opened in the area, and "almost all" Sunni Arabs who tried to vote found themselves out of luck, as Kurds were able to reach the centers first.

Having Your Cake & Eating Hers, Too

THE ETHICAL SLUT

By Dossie Easton and Catherine A. Liszt
Greenery Press, 1997

The Ethical Slut is less a free-love manifesto than a guide to maintaining a sane and healthy polyamorous lifestyle within this society that is more apt to condemn than endorse this behavior. Authors Dossie Easton and Catherine A. Liszt speak to the slut within – the part of you that wants to have all the consensual sex you desire with as many people as you desire, simply because “sex is nice and pleasure is good for you.” It’s an important read for those engaging in multi-partnerships, as well as for serial monogamists curious about expanding their sexual repertoire to include not only Dick, but also Jane, Harry, Tom and Nancy.

As one of those serial monogamists, I read this book hoping to understand how to navigate open relationships. At the time I was reading it, I was having mind-bending sex with a man whom I have a meaningful and loving friendship with, though without any defined commitment to each other.

It was perfect: for the first time I had my cake and was eating it, too. But as time went on, I found myself wanting to default to monogamy – a place where my real relationship with this man just couldn’t fit.

Rather than feeling that I had failed with that relationship, *The Ethical Slut* led me to understand I could have many people in my life whom I love and respect, and who could fulfill my sexual and emotional needs. Polyamory is not about indecision or the unwillingness to commit; it is about working hard on the relationships we care about, while exploring sex and pleasure in a safe, expansive and honest atmosphere (with whomever we damn well please).

Although the book tends to speak to those who have already gotten over monogamy, it is useful for those who are coming to terms with the limits of single partnerships.

—LAUREN GIAMBRONE

Knot Nice

SM 101: A REALISTIC INTRODUCTION

By Jay Wiesman
Greenery Press, 1996

If you don’t know what you think of SM ethically, don’t look at *SM 101* for answers; this is a training manual. However, if you’ve come to terms with your torture fantasies, this book will help you pick up 20 feet of rope and a riding stirrup for confident experimentation. Much of the mystique is removed from practices like flogging and going to SM clubs, as the book lives up to its title, taking on the feel of a college 101 course. Weisman writes from the position of a dominant, so I would second his suggestion that submissives pick up a copy of *The New Bottoming Book* by Janet W. Hardy and Dossie Easton to make up for Weisman’s inability to fairly portray that end of the experience.

Despite the author’s encouragement to stay in the closet with your interests in SM, I made a point of reading his book in public. He generally takes the overly cautious stance with everything from placing personal ads to the risks involved in suspension, but for good reason. We don’t want to inflate the egos of any novices. This is tricky territory. As a novice myself, I was a little put off to see suggestions like lengthy written agreements before engaging in SM play. However, as I started to fool around with a more experienced partner, I found some of the caution very useful in creating a sense of safety and protecting myself.

—CAITLIN BENEDETTO



Politically minded people talk a lot about justice and changing the world, but sex continues to be a thorny subject. For example, *The Independent* received numerous complaints from readers upset to see a graphic ad for a local sex-toy shop. Our collective discussed the situation over several weeks and decided that rather than pull the ad, we’d engage the readers on the topic of sex. You may be offended; you may be excited. But we hope that this collection of articles starts some interesting and necessary conversations about sex in all of its varied forms, bringing us a bit further toward a fuller understanding.

Sex at the Barricades

HOW DIRECT ACTION IN THE RAMBLE FOILED THE VICE SQUAD

I walked along the dirt paths of the Ramble, around its oaks, maples and glacial rocks, and stopped near a footbridge spanning a brook. A clear night here turns strangers into silhouettes. But on a cloudy night, the eternal lights of New York City are captured and then refracted in an orange glow that peeks under tree tops and reveals glimpses: shiny Adidas pants with racer stripes hugging boy hips; a nipple ring glimmering in the light down of a defined chest; a knit cap above a square jaw.

BY QUERY

Two guys stared each other down like gun slingers about to draw. I heard footsteps behind me, felt a hand move under my spiked belt. I turned around, saw pursed lips, tousled hair. “Let’s play,” he said.

I nodded and we ducked under branches then moved to higher ground.

The Ramble is a micro-forest in the heart of Central Park. Paths grip cliffsides, double back and meander along slopes. The dense brush and trees provide infinite alcoves. A cock-shaped peninsula projects into Azalea Pond, a topographical totem to the men who have been coming here for over a century. And still they come: uptown boys in do-rags, downtown artists wearing paint-spattered pants, even middle-aged men from the Upper East. Just trees and rocks and sky and us.

And cops. They patrol in vehicles or wear plainclothes to try to surprise us. Queers scatter under the beams of headlights or, after a big bust, line up in handcuffs.

One summer night, I walked down the gravel path of the peninsula. At the proverbial head, a cop shined a light in my face. “Did you lose your dog?” he said.

“I saw a poodle somewhere around here,” another cop said.

I turned around to leave and they got into their souped-up golf carts and followed me, the headlights blazing on my backside. My face burned, not with shame but rage. They finally swerved away and the night draped around me.

I remembered an old Earth First! technique called “slash.” Slash referred to the fallen trees and other objects from the forest floor that activists use to blockade logging roads. The logging trucks backed out and the forest lived another day.

I began dragging rocks, branches and decaying tree trunks into the paths. Some queers looked over at me with raised eyebrows or walked a wide “U” around my mounting fortifications.

“We have to bash back,” I said.

A queen in a leather trenchcoat and a shaved head stopped and smiled. “Girlfriend, you bangin’

on the wasps’ nest tonight, ain’t you,” she said.

I erected three barricades along a path that was several feet wider than a car. Unplanned, the barricades went from smallest to tallest. The tallest was over eight feet (a fallen tree with an umbrella of intact branches provided the base). Behind it was the gazebo, the place the cops most love to surprise us – that’s where the group scenes happen.

Five minutes passed. Some cops in an electric car drove in to start another patrol of the area. They pulled up to the lowest of the barricades and – a crash, a scraping of rock and wood on metal.

Their lights started flashing and the vehicle remained stationary for a full minute before continuing forward. They were heading towards the next barricade.

Other queers stood in clumps, watching, waiting. Some of them snickered.

The cop hit the next barricade without seeing it, the sound of damage much louder. This time, the car didn’t move. They hit their sirens and must have radioed for back up, because an SUV spun down another path, headed towards the



LOUIS PETERSON

gazebo, lights flashing. The driver slammed the brakes right before the third barricade.

A lot has changed since Stonewall. But more than ever, our elected officials, their corporate backers and their minions in blue control our public spaces. They tell us we can’t dance in bars or on the streets and say we need to ask permission to have a picnic with more than 20 people in the park. They beat us, corral us and pepper spray us at political rallies like the one on February 15, 2003, when we took to the streets to try to stop the bombing of Iraqi civilians in the name of non-existent “weapons of mass destruction.”

A sea of red and blue lights pulsed along the peripherals of the Ramble as dozens of back-up units arrived. I walked out, laughing, freer than when I arrived.

You’re supposed to fuck in the parks of New York City. And dance and sing and organize in the streets. Whether you prefer the long-term commitment of changing legislation or the quick thrill of direct action, do something to take the city back. Organize a street party, un-elect a mayor, monkey-wrench the machines they use to suppress us. But above all, don’t ever forget those moments when you experienced what it means to be free in our city.



EDGAR MATA AND DAVID GOCHFELD

Come One, Come All

WHERE POLYAMORY MEETS REALITY

BY A. WOLF

Being polyamorous, as opposed to being polysexual or a swinger, is being involved in a sexual and loving relationship based on trust and respect with two or more partners. It encompasses hot and sweaty threesome action – straddling a hungry mouth while your best gal gets some deep dickin’ a couple feet back – but it’s based on something, well, deeper. Gymnastics aside, the sex is the easy part. Contrary to some urban myths, multiple partners will not cancel each other out in net emotional toll. In fact, any non-traditional sexual practice requires amped-up communication skills. I wouldn’t call myself an expert, but I have attempted a polyamorous relationship three times in my life. The following is the last installment of this trilogy.

I convened a love triangle for about a month with my friends Randy and Lu Lu. Randy was a chiseled, soft-spoken boy, a groomsman at a friend’s wedding. Our relationship was based on poetic emails, a mutual interest in sustainable business practices and making out in the woods. Lu Lu is a gal that will be in my life forever as a friend, lover and artistic collaborator. Neither of these relationships was about the sex, but with all three of us being pretty fuckin’ hot, the attraction was there. All three of us lived in different cities, so each relationship grew separately. I let Randy know right away of my semi-erotic

friendship with Lu Lu and gave him a choice to enter in, which left him feeling privileged rather than betrayed. When the stars aligned and enabled us to be in the in the same place, it didn’t take long for he and Lu Lu to become attracted to each other. It helps that I have great taste. It took about 4 days – morning cuddling escalated to a puppy pile, which turned into bitches in heat.

Having people love have sex with each other was quite possibly one of the best things that I’ve ever experienced? For one, having a three-way let me watch and be watched as much as my heart desired. It also proved to be a good setup for us, because conflicts of interest turned into just subbing out when one of us, usually me, felt like going on a run or embracing the morning without hours of sex and naked laying about. Because having a three-way love affair broke boundaries of normal behavior, it inspired us to bring that sense of adventure and abandonment into everything we did. Even fieldtrips to get coffee felt new and amazingly satisfying.

After a couple weeks, the puppy piles transitioned into mainly Randy and Lu Lu having tons of sex. Even though Lu Lu would try to rope me in, I became the least interested in having sex, content with my role as voyeur and sex-yenta.

My relationship with Randy became more intellectual and cerebral, and I was never that hard-core of a lesbian to begin with. The sex they were having seemed

superior to anything I could have with either of them. It was more erotic for me to watch them have amazing sex than to have sex that for me felt forced. It ended when Randy left to go make some money in San Francisco, feeling sexed out, and in need of a career.

Lu Lu was relieved to have me all to herself again; she felt her odds were better at getting me into the sack without a boy around. Lu Lu and I fell back on the pillows and giggled about our mutual lover: his tendency to cut the sleeves off of his shirts to showcase his biceps, his dislike of most food with color and his passion for showering. We knew that he would find a good job, as the world seemed to treat incredibly attractive people a bit kinder. We had been no exception.

Soon afterward I left the love nest to go back east to a purple state and work to defeat George Bush. Although polyamory didn’t feel wrong, too much hedonism, hot sex and bong hits did. And so I started working for the Democratic Party. That fixed it.

I still have a long-distance love affair with Lu Lu. She calls me her “Bitch” and she’s my “Bitch Master.” Randy fell back in love with his ex and is having a monogoodtime. He and I are on good terms and settled on being “adventure buddies.” Pretty damn good adventure.

Watch Out for Bed Bugs

In the U.S., more than 65 million people are currently living with an incurable sexually transmitted disease (STD). An additional 15 million people become infected with one or more STDs each year, roughly half of whom contract lifelong infections. Here are some tips on not becoming one of them.

1 STDs ARE OFTEN DIVIDED INTO TWO CATEGORIES – viral and bacterial. Bacterial infections, like gonorrhea, syphilis and chlamydia are curable with antibiotics. STDs caused by viruses are not. These include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), human papilloma virus (HPV), herpes and hepatitis B. Medical treatment can, however, alleviate the symptoms of viral STDs and in some cases help them from spreading. Some STDs are also caused by protozoa and other organisms (crabs/public lice and scabies). These STDs are curable with antibiotics or topical creams.

2 CHLAMYDIA IS THE MOST COMMON STD AMONG WOMEN. This is because it is very contagious and difficult to detect. In fact, 75 percent of women and 50 percent of men with chlamydia have no symptoms. Luckily it can be cured with antibiotics. Ask to get tested with your Pap smear, because untreated, chlamydia can cause infertility or pelvic inflammatory disease.

3 LADIES – STD SCREENINGS ARE NOT NECESSARILY PART OF YOUR ANNUAL GYNECOLOGICAL EXAM and not all Pap smears screen for STDs other than HPV. So talk to your doc about getting tested while you’re there.

4 LESS THAN HALF OF ADULTS 18 TO 44 YEARS OF AGE in the United States have been tested for an STD other than HIV.

5 GENITAL HERPES IS A VIRUS THAT CAN SPREAD TO YOUR MOUTH. You are most at risk for infection if your partner has sores (blistery, red ulcers), but there is also a chance to contract without the sores.

6 ABOUT ONE MILLION PEOPLE BECOME INFECTED WITH HERPES EACH YEAR IN THE U.S., and an estimated 45 million are currently infected (that’s more than 1 in 5).

7 AN ESTIMATED 75 PERCENT OF THE REPRODUCTIVE-AGE POPULATION HAS BEEN INFECTED WITH SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED HPV. Genital warts are caused by HPV, and can lead to cervical and bladder cancers. There’s no cure, but there is treatment.

8 GENITAL WARTS DON’T LOOK LIKE OTHER WARTS. They are soft, moist, pink growths and can occur all around your he/she parts. They might become stalked like a cauliflower. Eat your vegetables, but not these!

9 HEPATITIS B IS THE ONLY STD OUT THERE THAT YOU CAN GET A VACCINE FOR. See your doctor if you’re not sure if you’ve had it. It’s a nasty STD that can cause liver failure and death.

10 RECEIVING ORAL SEX (EXPOSURE ONLY TO SALIVA) IS VERY LOW RISK FOR HIV. Yay! But giving oral sex (exposure to pre-cum, semen, vaginal secretions and menstrual blood) is risky for HIV. Boo! The more of these body fluids that a person gets into their mouth, the greater the risk. So if you don’t use a condom, don’t spit or swallow, shoot it on the wall! Then stick a picture up with it.

—IMC STAFF

QUEERING POWER

BDSM and Radical Consent

BY REK KWAWER

Radicals like to dissociate themselves from power. From socialistic models to consensus method, groups often claim to be non-hierarchical, to have moved beyond the need for leadership, that power is bad. But power is sexy. Queering the idea of power is even sexier. Why is it, then, that despite the presence of self-identified kinky people in progressive groups, we rarely acknowledge that kinky sex exists, much less think about the ways in which it overlaps with and might influence the work we do? Radical activism is about dismantling unaccountable structures of power and authority. BDSM – a triple acronym standing for bondage/discipline, domination/submission and sadism/masochism – plays with those structures and places the ideas of power into a consensual context.

How can someone enjoy pain? Can a person really want to be tied up? What about rape fantasy? These questions miss the point. There are many theories about what makes something sexually appealing, from brain chemistry to socialization to the influence of mass media. What matters, though, is the way people act on those thoughts and fantasies.

From “safewords” that signal the end of play to explicit written negotiations, conscious practitioners of BDSM have created definitions of safety and promoted a culture of consent. They examine and play with power on an individual level, between two people and even on a societal level. Consent is something that needs to be negotiated on an



GUIDO CREPAX'S THE STORY OF O

on-going basis and can be influenced by a wide variety of things.

In a scenario, how can you tell who is actually the person with the power? Is it the person holding the flogger, or is it the one tied up and being beaten who can stop the scene with a simple safeword? The power dynamics in a scene can be very different than the power dynamics of day-to-day life, and in fact, often offer bold chances to see a different side of the power spectrum. The stereotype of the powerful, heterosexual, white businessman seeking a woman who will humiliate and tease him, force him into lingerie and make him “do whatever she wants” (with a safeword, of course) is not just a myth.

If we acknowledge that the problem with power isn't its existence, but its misuse, a new world of possibilities opens for radical organizing and radical sex. And, to our communities become more welcoming places to the kinky in all of us.

Unburning a Witch

PORNOGRAPHY:
MEN POSSESSING WOMEN

By Andrea Dworkin
Plume, 1979

BY JED BRANDT

Anti-sex. Reactionary. A man-hating shrew out to destroy sexual liberation. Andrea Dworkin is mythologized as the caricature of a woman who gave feminism a bad name in her fight to analyze, then criminalize porn. Who wants to be a censor and a prude? Apparently Andrea Dworkin did. So she was denounced and ridiculed – told to shut up for the sake of the pornographers' free speech.

But just about no one bothered to consider

what she was actually saying. To Dworkin, porn wasn't merely a picture or story about sex. It is the act of “men possessing women,” something so ubiquitous that we don't have many words for it. Dworkin provided one and reported on what porn does and how. She says the etymology of the term itself is the “graphic depiction of whores.” And whores get used. Porn sexualizes degradation, from the soft-core gauze of *Playboy's* ever-ready playmates to the current industry standard of “gonzo,” where the pussy is ignored in favor of throat-fucking and hard anal.

I first read the Marquis de Sade, patron saint of pornographers, at the not-so-tender age of 12. Each of his works seemed filled with rebellion, a casting off of Puritanism and sexual repression. Raw sexuality.

Concerned that all Sade's torture and abuse might not be good, I consulted the philosophers and literary critics, who in turn explained how Sade was a transgressive hero. In fact, as Dworkin catalogues, he was an aristocratic serial rapist who drugged, mutilated, and sodomized scores of prostitutes and servants, and then wrote about it with obsessive fury.

Maybe not a hero, but certainly a truth-teller, if the adoration he has received from men is any measure. For Dworkin to proclaim how uninterested de Sade was in sex itself, is for her to be “anti-sex.” Because to imagine sex without unrestrained male power, as plainly evident in even the most vanilla porn and the average marriage, is too fearful for some to consider. To suppress oppression is, in proportion, repression.

The brutality that Dworkin was subjected to from both left and right is a testament to the radical vision she trained on male supremacy without apology. Here is one woman who wouldn't bow before the cock.

For the full review, check burning.typepad.com

interview

Getting Paid to Play

Ms. Sophia Bitters is a popular New York dominatrix who enjoys her work. She spoke with Erin Siegel about her experiences.

I wanted to work as a professional dom when I moved to New York a few years ago. So I found an ad in the paper, answered it, and went in for an interview. They asked me if I could do wrestling sessions. I'd do anything, I didn't really care, and so they started promoting me right away as a star wrestler. I had no wrestling training whatsoever. I'd had previous experience with self-defense and martial arts, but they're a lot different from actually wrestling someone. I applied what I knew about basic body mechanics, and I ended up doing really well.

At my dungeon, there was fantasy wrestling, semi-competitive and competitive wrestling. Fantasy is just putting people in holds, and they don't fight back at all. They think of some kind of fantasy, like I'm some jealous ex-girlfriend whose been cheated on, enacting my revenge, or I was a prisoner who lured a guard into my cell and assaulted him once he was inside. The person is fetishizing your muscles and your strength. Some of them role play Superwoman fantasies – superheroes, Catwoman, roles like that. A lot of the men I

saw had the simple fantasy of me, a woman, just being indomitable, Amazonian almost. I felt really comfortable playing that role. This was my entrance into life as a dominatrix. I had wanted to do work that was life-affirming and fun, and where I made money. I was either going to do dom work or peepshow work, and in post-Giuliani New York there weren't many peepshows still around.

Much of the time it had nothing to do with role-playing, it was more muscle worship, just me being this really strong, overpowering woman. They want to be punched, struck, and of course they want ball-busting, which is basically getting kneed in the groin, repeatedly.

Then there's semi-competitive wrestling, where they're actually allowed to wrestle back, but they let you win. In competitive wrestling, you actually wrestle each other. That always had a very different vibe to me – the whole energy was very masculine. It always reminded me of my older brothers, because it's like you're testing, tussling. It was kind of humiliating for me to do competitive wrestling sessions. I don't do them anymore. Most of the time I won, but when I didn't, I didn't like it at all.

Most of the men I see are white, middle class types – but not exclusively. Different people tend to attract different kinds of cus-



ERIN SIEGEL

“BOTTOM LINE, whether I'm dominating them, indulging one of their fetishes or giving a hand job, I'm doing it as a woman.”

tomers. My big thing was being a female supremacist, a genuine article, like you couldn't get any more female supremacist than me. If they wanted a genuinely dominant lady, that's me. That was my angle. I went from being a lesbian separatist to doing sex work. It was all about gender and performance, it was just fascinating. Bottom

line, whether I'm dominating them, indulging one of their fetishes or giving a hand job, I'm doing it as a woman, and they're perceiving it as a man. There are all these aspects of virility, power, and prestige, and no one else knows about it. In his psyche, that's what's going on for him. He's paying you to create this space for masculinity within his own self. It's fascinating to me.

What happened with working as a dom is that it was all very underground until the Internet came along. Now, it's much more socially acceptable, and doms have to do more hands-on work and things they maybe aren't as comfortable doing just to make the same amount of money as before. The whole industry has become a lot more competitive. All of a sudden, people who thought they were the only ones in the world with a bizarre fetish realize that there are lots of other people out there too, and plenty of people who will play with you. Before, clients had the illusion that they were the only sick bastards in the universe who had this fantasy and needed to find the one woman who'd indulge them, and pay her lots of money. And now, there's much more of a market with more girls who will indulge them for less money.

For more about sex workers, see spreadmagazine.org

review

The Back Door to Bliss

THE SURRENDER: AN EROTIC MEMOIR
By Toni Bentley
Regan Books, 2004

Toni Bentley, who says she has always looked good from behind, has written a radical, rollicking book about ass-fucking, *The Surrender: An Erotic Memoir*.

Bentley's credentials are interesting. She is beautiful. She was for ten years a dancer with George Balanchine's New York City Ballet. As a young dancer, she published *Winter Season: A Dancer's Journal*. Later, she co-authored Suzanne Farrell's autobiography, *Holding on to the Air*, and wrote still other works.

She relates that she lost her virginity when she was nearly 20. At the age of 23, she marries. After several years of marriage, she divorces her husband.

Her sex life flourishes. She becomes the Queen of Condoms and celebrates the crotchless panty. She finds that the Pussy Hound – the “man who loves to dive” – can mend years of patriarchal ramming.

Then, A-man shows up. He fucks her in the ass, gracefully, slowly, carefully and painfully. “It was here,” Bentley writes, “that I first tasted the experience of moving through pain and fear to... Bliss.” With A-man in her ass, she becomes sweet. “So sweet.”

This is psychologically significant, she explains. He shows her physically where her rage resides – in her ass, which contains yard upon yard of coiled past traumas, “the internal gripping of the emotionally unbearable.” He helps her to release this.

Ass-fucking, Bentley's term, transcends all opposites, all conflicts. Bentley says it is about cooperation, and the submission in bed of the woman to the man's authority. A-man imaginatively experiences her submission with her. He is a kind, gentle man.

They pussy-fucked, too, as a warm-up. But she concluded that the back door was the portal to love.

Bentley's book connects with D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Mellors, the gamekeeper, sodomizes Connie in an episode that Lawrence narrates poetically. Mellors exclaims: “What is cunt but machine-fucking!” He devotes himself to her ass.

Connie says that in a short summer night she had learnt much. She would have thought a woman would have died of shame. Instead, the shame died.

The same outcome is suggested by the Marquis de Sade (a great writer, a great psychologist, and a great humorist), in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*. Eugenie is initiated. “Go softly,” she says, “I beg of you.” Finally, “Woe unto girls who shy away from such an attack! ... What tremendous pleasures they deny themselves at the cost of a little trouble!”

Bentley echoes this sentiment, hailing the power of a still potent taboo in a work that is as independent, rebellious and venturesome as her sexual experience.

—DONALD PANETH



FRANK REYNOSO:INDYARTSNYC.ORG

FDA Stymies Choice

By CATRIONA STUART

In a lawsuit filed against the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), women are demanding that they be able to buy an emergency birth control pill without a prescription. Nine individuals and two advocacy organizations are the plaintiffs in the suit, which was filed in federal District Court in Brooklyn. They argue that the FDA is stalling on making the emergency contraceptive, Plan B, available over the counter is restricting women's access to a safe form of emergency birth control. The agency has been deliberating on the matter for nearly two years.

“It is clear that the FDA has been dragging its feet for a very long time on an issue that is really very simple,” said the lead plaintiff in the case, Annie Tummino, vice chairwoman of the New York Reproductive Rights Task Force.

FDA officials declined to comment on the suit.

Taken within 72 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse, Plan B can reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy by up to 89 percent, though the drug is most effective when taken within 24 hours after intercourse, according to the drug's manufacturer, Barr Laboratories.

Getting a doctor's appointment and finding the medication within the 24-hour window can be difficult and expensive, Tummino explained. Advocates of the drug contend that making emergency contraceptives available on drugstore shelves would be preferable. Anti-abortion groups opposed to the drug have said, however, that making Plan B available without a prescription could pose a threat to women's health and increase rates of unprotected sex and sexually transmitted diseases among teenagers.

A study published in the Jan. 5 issue of

the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that women who have ready access to emergency contraception are no more likely to engage in unprotected sexual activity than women who do not have access to the pills. The study also found similar pregnancy rates among women whether or not they had nonprescription access to an emergency contraceptive.

Last May, the FDA rejected Barr Laboratories' petition to make Plan B available without a prescription – against the recommendations of two of the agency's advisory committees. The FDA's “non-approvable letter” to the manufacturer cited inadequate data regarding the impact of the drug on adolescents.

The FDA was expected to issue a decision on Barr Laboratories' amended application last month, which would have made the drug available without a prescription only to women 16 and older. Instead, the agency said it had not yet completed its review. The application is still pending, an FDA spokeswoman said, and no target date for a decision has been set.

“The FDA's mandate is to approve drugs when it is in the public interest to do so, and by delaying that, they are violating federal law,” said Priscilla Smith, director of the domestic legal program for the Center for Reproductive Rights.

Smith said the FDA's foot-dragging on its decision is effectively infringing on a right outlined 40 years ago by the Supreme Court in the case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*.

More than 70 medical and advocacy organizations sent the FDA a letter in 2003 that stated the rates of unintended pregnancy and abortion in America could be reduced by up to one-half should emergency contraceptives be widely available.

sexuality CONFERENCES

FEB. 22–23

A Symposium on Intersex Education, Advocacy, and the Law

The issues surrounding children whose genitals do not match their genetic sex chromosomes have come under scrutiny in the media, in medicine and by the general public. As intersex advocates and others urge a non-surgical approach and seek more awareness of the issues, there are legal and core human rights implications being examined and studied.

The Benjamin A. Cardozo School of Law, 55 5th Ave., NY
www.intersexsymposium.org

MAY 6–7

Trans Politics, Social Change and Justice

This conference will provide a venue to strengthen activist and research networks, incite dialogues, share research and create resources central to creating social change for trans people.

CUNY Graduate Center, 365 5th Ave., NY
web.gc.cuny.edu/clags/transpolitics.htm

JUNE 24–26

Born In Flames: Sexual Assault

Born In Flames is a 3-day conference addressing sexual assault from a radical perspective and addressing the unique needs our communities have. We will focus on education, support and accountability. We would like people from all over to come and share their ideas and experiences.

Portland State University, Portland, OR
borninflamesconference@yahoo.com

Go Against the Flow

Healthy and Sustainable Alternative Menstrual Products

LEANNE TORY-MURPHY

A woman will use an estimated 10,000 disposable tampons or pads in her lifetime. In addition to the environmental concerns raised by the waste, there are also disturbing health concerns to consider. All of the major brands contain rayon, a pulp product made only through a chlorine-based bleaching process. Fiber loss from rayon, which can occur through the use of tampons, has been traced to Toxic Shock Syndrome and can damage a woman's vagina by causing ulceration and peeling of the mucous membrane. So what are some alternatives?

SEA SPONGES

Very comfortable and easy to take care of. Disinfect the sponges by boiling them before the first use as well as between cycles. During your period you should take them out every three hours or so depending on your flow, rinse in water and reinsert. Use your fingers, or add a piece of dental floss for easier removal. Sea sponges can be used for up to two years. Available at health food stores and pharmacies.
www.jadeandpearl.com

THE KEEPER

This rubber cup catches menstrual blood internally. Created in the 1930s, it never gained popularity due to the tampon industry's advertising strategies, which suggested that reinserting something into the vagina is unhealthy. The Keeper is safer than tampons because it doesn't absorb natural bodily fluids or disrupt the vaginal ecosystem. It requires no special care. You simply rinse it out with water every few hours and reinsert. The Keeper can last up to 10 years.
www.thekeeperinc.com

THE DIVA CUP

An alternative to the Keeper for those allergic to rubber. It is latex-free and made of a soft medical grade silicone.
www.divacup.com

REUSABLE PADS

Pads made out of cloth. You can make them by sewing several layers of soft fabric such as flannel together. An internet search for 'menstrual pad pattern' will yield plenty of instructions to guide you. If you're not up to the challenge, you can always buy reusable pads.
urban-armor.org, www.gladrags.com, www.lunapads.com

100% COTTON TAMPONS

(UNBLEACHED OR HYDROGEN PEROXIDE BLEACHED)
If you find that tampons suit you best, 100 percent cotton unbleached or hydrogen peroxide bleached tampons are the way to go. They can be found at health food stores and some pharmacies.
www.whyyorganic.com

Hot Off The Rack

BY LEANNE TORY-MURPHY

In recent years, young women have been filling the gaps in available information concerning their bodies by writing and reading zines. Through these, women are helping people to lead healthier, happier lives. Here are some zines worth tracking down.

HOT PANTZ: DO IT YOURSELF GYNECOLOGY

The mother of all DIY gynecology zines, *Hot Pantz* is a comprehensive and compact guide to treating female (and some male) maladies with herbs. From various menstrual issues to sexually transmitted diseases to urinary tract infections, yeast infections and beyond, *Hot Pantz* is consistently accessible and straightforward. In each entry there is a description of what's happening in your body, resulting symptoms, and various ways to treat the problem. So, know thyself, and treat thyself - outside of the medical establishment!
Distributed by Blood Sisters:
www.bloodsisters.org

MINE: AN ANTHOLOGY OF WOMEN'S CHOICES

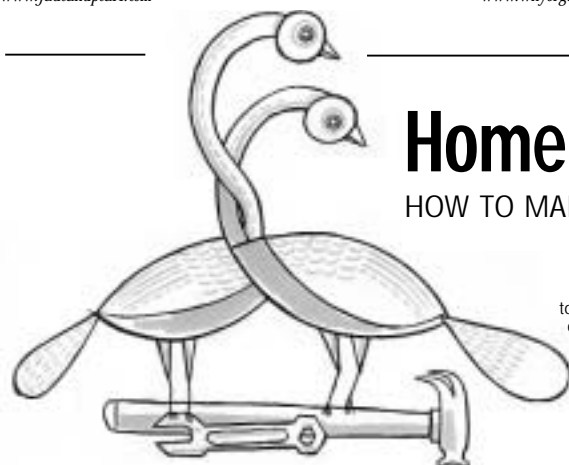
Always subtle and personal, and at times inspiring, disturbing and thought-provoking, *Mine* is a moving first-person anthology of abortion tales and issues. The stories include clinical and herbal abortions, as well as uterine extraction. *Mine* passionately and emphatically speaks to the overwhelming need for safe, accessible, low-cost abortions, and is critical of the often cold and rushed abortion clinics and their overworked practitioners.
Contact: merrydeath@hotmail.com

RED ALERT

Although *Red Alert's* composition varies issue by issue, this infozine is a mixture of political essays, poems, feminist comics, photographs, stories, alternative menstrual health info, cloth-pad templates and other offerings. Its excellent design, well-supplied with graphics, offers a sassy and informative read. *Red Alert* puts the fun and bite back into menstrual politics.
Distributed by Blood Sisters:
www.bloodsisters.org

WIVE'S TALES

Wive's Tales is also dedicated to women reclaiming control over their bodies, health and lives. It includes information rarely collected elsewhere. In addition to herbal treatments for common diseases (UTIs, yeast infections, scabies, etc.) and alternative menstrual health info, *Wive's Tales* delves into less known methods of birth control, such as fertility awareness and homemade spermicides. The zine also discusses breast self-exams, vaginal inspections with a speculum, homebirths, the morning after pill and more.
Contact: dateaspokeanarchist@hotmail.com



NIK:INDYARTSNYC

Homemade Lovin'

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN DILDO

to seven layers. You might have to let it dry overnight in order to do the last few layers.

3. Wait

The latex takes about a week before it is dry enough to use without breaking apart. (Borrow a toy from a friend if you're getting anxious! Just make sure to use a condom on it and/or boil it afterwards.) After it's done drying, squeeze the clay out slowly.

4. Fill 'er up

Now it's time for the silicone. The most easily available silicone is the kind found in tubes at hardware stores, used for caulking windows and such things. It's very important that you get 100 percent silicone with no chemical additives, so doublecheck the container. Many hardware stores will only have white and clear silicone, but if you look around, you can find it in a wide variety of colors.

To apply the silicone you'll need a caulking gun - a metal device that squeezes the silicone out of the tube. Every woman should have a caulking gun. Most hardware stores should have these as well, and they're not too expensive.

Cut a hole in a cardboard box slightly bigger than the width of your toy, and tape the latex so that it hangs into the inside of the box. This is where that extra two inches of latex come in handy.

Put in the silicone slowly, squeezing it down through the bottom of the latex to make sure there are no air bubbles.

5. Enjoy

You'll have to wait 24 hours for the silicone to dry, and then you can peel off the latex and enjoy. You can use the latex mold over and over again. Now there's a stocking stuffer!

BY ALIX SHEDD

This is a perfect my-first-silicone-casting project for those who are incensed by the high price of dildos (on average \$60-\$100). Upon completion, you will have a high-quality silicone dildo that will put that scarf you knitted to shame. Lesser dildos are made of latex, which is more porous, and therefore more likely to harbor germs. The silicone dildo is non-porous, so that means that cleaning is a cinch, and you can even share it!

1. Mold It

Use a soft clay to mold the toy of your dreams. The possibilities are endless.

2. Paint It with Latex

Push the base of the clay toy onto a piece of cardboard so it's nice and steady.

First cover the clay in Vaseline so you can slip the clay out later. Use liquid latex (the kind at art stores meant for making casts, not the sex-shop bodypainting kind) to paint layer after layer onto the clay, as well as about two inches in radius onto the box around the toy. Latex takes a long time to dry, so it's best to paint lots of thin layers. Use a hair dryer to speed up the process. Make sure each layer is dry before applying the next. Use about four



the jndy
talks

SEX

LEFT-WING LOVE STORY

I'd just gotten out of jail. Two days oozing through the bowels of the system for the crime of being one of the 30 slowest people at a protest broken up by the cops. I called the closest person I knew to a radical lawyer. She was a forty-ish cartoonist turned law student, call her Monica, who I'd met the summer before. She had long dyed-black hair, glasses and a black T-shirt that proclaimed "WEIRDO" in fiendish horror-comic lettering. I was intensely attracted to her – but we were both married.

Four months later my wife walked out. A few months after that, I was dancing with Monica at a party and she whispered that she was leaving her husband because he was abusive. When we finished talking about my case, about ACDs and fact patterns and causes of action, she paused.

"Would you like to get together sometime?"

The yes flew out of my mouth before she finished.

She slipped out of the house to meet me at a Lower East Side bar, where we played '70s soul oldies on the jukebox. The Cornelius Brothers and Sister Rose. *It's too late to turn back now, I believe I believe I believe I'm falling in love.* Luther Ingram. *If loving you is wrong I don't want to be right.*

I tried to avoid sleeping with her. She was still living with her who-knows-how-ex. But we were spending hours a day on the phone, talking about life and sex and love, art and music and politics, our children. One night we got drunk and started making out. We took a cab back to her building in Brooklyn. She wanted me to watch her back until she got inside. *The biggest danger's not out here, I thought as she disappeared behind the door.*

The phone rang at 5 a.m. Her husband had attacked her. She came over and climbed into my bed wearing a T-shirt and no panties.

We didn't live happily ever after, but we're still friends.

—MICK GREENBERG

SILHOUETTE SEX

One of the sexiest things I ever saw occurred just while walking down the street. I was hanging out with a friend, ambling along a West Village side street when we spied a couple having sex.

They were inside their apartment, but visible as silhouettes through a window shade. The action was unmistakable. A female was on top, we couldn't really make out whom she was sitting on, but assumed it was a man by the rhythmic gyrations.

We stopped and watched. The grinding grew in intensity. We could make out her form, small-breasted and lithe, her body spinning like a top on the axis of her partner. I looked at my friend. He's gay. And he was as turned on as me.

We kept watching until the dam burst and she arched up and stiffened momentarily. The deed was surprisingly short, a few minutes at most. She hunched down for some post-coital cuddling.

The whole time people passed us by, oblivious to the watchers and watched. We didn't say much as we went on our way. Muttering something about it being hot and cool, the linguistic peaks of dude aestheticism. But I can still see them, however they were, gyrating endlessly. —AK

These Boots are Made for Polishin'

He prays with spit and fire. It can seem like simple shoe cleaning but every Saturday night at the Eagle, the famous Chelsea leather bar, Bootblack Dave is blessing boots with the rag in his hands. "I light the polish on fire and pass the flame under the boot. It's a cleaning ritual," he says. "I practice urban shamanism and try and leave customers in a state of being grounded. Some people get the magic, some don't. But if nothing else they leave with a clean pair of boots."



Bootblack Dave blesses boots every Saturday night at The Eagle bar.

INTERVIEW AND PHOTO BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Bootblack Dave is many things: an actor, a musician in the band Monster Rally, a Tae Kwon Do student, an openly gay man, a Mexican-American and a fetishist. Every identity is a force that pulls and pushes and at the center he exists by holding them together. What grounds him is his spirituality, channeled through his careful craft. He is well known in the New York artist circles for being a work of art, for being dedicated to the beauty of the boot.

What's the difference between fetish and fashion?

When it's real, instead of cruising porn sites, you are on-line bidding for boots. I search for jackboots worn in World War II or boots worn by Vietnam soldiers, pairs that are charged with history, that have life in them.

Why boots?

Boots equal power. They have an iconic status and a defined cultural history. When you see steelworkers, cowboys, hard hats at a construction site, they have boots on and so boots come to mean masculinity, authority and power.

Is there a deeper reason?

I grew up in Texas and we all wore them. Every Sunday I shined everyone's boots. It allowed me to indulge in the sensuality of the shining: the smell of the leather and polish; the sound of the horse-hair brush against the boot; the touching and holding the boot and brush; and the sight of the transformation of the boot from dull and scuffed to clean and brilliant. My reward was 50 cents which I used to buy comic books. I wanted to be a superhero and ran around wearing a cap and boots like Batman and Superman.

Breaking Away in Barcelona

BY BENNETT BAUMER

Barcelona has always been a city of love for me. The two other big cities in my life have been Madrid, full of smoky bar lust and sex in the park, and New York, with its Viagra-popping investors and an abundance of online dating. But Barcelona is about getting caught in the night rain and staking out a secluded doorstep with someone. It's walking slowly in the Ramblas with your hands in each other's back pockets talking about politics.

I met and last saw Gemma over a year ago. She attracted me because she was so Euro: cute accent, leg warmers, anarcho-mullet and a curvaceous body to boot. I was in Barcelona for only a couple of weeks. Both of us were in the wedding of mutual friends and during the reception we split to the grocery store to buy more booze for the guests (there was no shortage of liquor!). Our short time together was like that – breaking away for small excursions returning with loot.

One cold day on the beach I told her I was attracted to her, though she had just come off a passionate relationship with a long-term

Like the superheroes you read about, do you change when you put your gear on? Immediately the first change is that I get taller. My footfall is heavier; it affects my stride and bearing. Then there is the mental change, like when I'm wearing my pole-climbers, which can put a dent in the side of a car. I have the confidence of walking on weapons.

Is the boot fetish and its masculine vibe a signal that you'll fight back violently against gay bashing?

It's more about not being seen as an easy target. If I walk with confidence it says "I won't let anyone hurt me."

Is there a prejudice against fetishists in the gay community?

Being a gay fetishist is like coming out twice. The first is that I was gay, the second that I was a fetishist. I wear boots all the time because I feel powerful, which is exactly why there is resistance. Gay people are tolerated as long as they blend in – funny, benign, wear Gap or Prada, cut hair and redecorate homes – but mainstream America is not ready to see us express power.

What do you say to the monopoly on the gay image by the "Will and Grace" crowd?

I tried all of your stuff, I've been to musicals and it's not as fun as going to a shooting range. The unsaid agreement is that if you're gay you must like Liza Minnelli and drink cocktails. A lot of men and women who come out of the closet embrace that image whether it's them or not because they want to be unambiguously gay. I believe there's room for all types of gay identity.

Where do you want to as the goal for gay politics?

We are making strides with money. In this nation you have to buy your way in. As an actor, I believe we've got to take control of the images projected of us, so it isn't just "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," but more aggressive images. We need to stop asking and start demanding.

boyfriend and didn't know what to say. Months before, Gemma had returned to the apartment they shared and a "Dear John" letter told her he had found everything she wasn't in another woman.

Later that night we warmed up on her couch to wine and each other. I pushed her emotionally to come out of the shock of being left by her boyfriend. We had awkward sex, and she asked me if I was going to leave or spend the night. I stayed and we spent the next couple days together. Gemma challenged me to make love to her with passion and I explored her body like a one-man search and rescue team. As we writhed and moaned under the duvet, one of us would pull away only to embrace again. Each night the sex grew more intimate and comfortable; Gemma reacquainted herself with desire and feeling, and I wanted her more and more.

After leaving to spend a few days in Madrid, I returned to Barcelona and went straight to Gemma's house for a quickie before dinner plans.

We spent our last night together naked in bed and realized how intense our time had become. I got on a plane the next morning and Gemma got over her boyfriend.

counseling and social services

LGBT support groups

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
208 West 13, Manhattan — 212.620.7310

Center CARE Winter-Spring 2005 Groups

Center CARE winter/spring 2005 groups begin in early February and run for 10-weeks. Groups require an intake interview prior to participation and are offered on a sliding-scale basis, unless otherwise noted. Groups and services are confidential. To register or for more information, call Center CARE at 212.620.7310.

BEREAVEMENT

Co-ed Grief Support Group Phase I LGBT-identified people of all genders navigate their grief and healing processes after losing a loved one. Mondays, beginning February 7, 6-7:30 p.m.

Co-ed Grief Support Group Phase II LGBT-identified people of all genders re-integrate their lives into a community after the loss of a loved one. Must have previously attended Co-ed Grief Support Group Phase I. Tuesdays, beginning Feb. 8, 6-7:30 p.m.

HIV+

Positive CARE Group is an ongoing group for newly diagnosed (within the last three years) HIV-positive gay and bisexual men and men of trans-experience. Free Ongoing: Mondays, 6-7:30 p.m.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Come As You Are - Harm Reduction Group for Men Ongoing group for gay and bisexual men and men of trans-experience take a look at the pros and cons of their substance use. Ongoing: Wednesdays, 6-7:30 p.m.

Sexuality, Drugs & Recovery Group for Men For gay and bisexual men and men of trans-experience healing from the effects of alcohol or other drugs. Tuesdays, beginning Feb. 8, 6-7:30 p.m.

Relationships, Sex & Recovery for Women is an early recovery group for lesbian and bisexual women and women of trans-experience healing from the effects of alcohol and/or other drugs. Mondays, beginning Feb. 7, 6-7:30 p.m.

MENTAL HEALTH

Learning, Coping and Healing LGBT-identified people of all genders dealing with anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns. Mondays, beginning Feb. 7, 6-7:30 p.m.

GENDER IDENTITY PROJECT

Gender-Queer: Beyond the Binary for those assigned female at birth who are now exploring or questioning that birth identity, including those who identify as boi, gender-queer, ag/aggressive, trans, non-gendered, bi-gender and andro/androgynous. (You do not have to be trans-identified to join this group.) Thursdays, beginning Feb. 10, 6-7:30 p.m.

TransGENDER Exploration-Drop-In for those assigned male at birth who are now challenging, exploring, questioning or reconfiguring that birth identity including those who identify as transgender, transsexual, gender questioning, cross-dresser, exploring and soul-searching. Drop-in; no registration required. \$5 suggested donation for each

group. Wednesdays, beginning Feb. 9, 7:30-9 p.m.

Living as Trans-Men who want to explore relationships, community, medical and emotional well-being and the struggles and joys of being in the world as men. Wednesdays, beginning Feb. 9, 7:30-9 p.m.

Living as Trans-Women for transgender women, who want to explore relationships, community, medical and emotional well-being and the struggles and joys of being in the world as women. Wednesdays, beginning February 9, 7:30-9 p.m.

Partners of Trans-Identified Individuals for people of all genders who are, have been or are seeking to be in relationships or partnerships with trans-identified individuals. Wednesdays, beginning February 9, 7:30-9 p.m.

Trans-Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse for trans, gender-different and gender-questioning people of all genders who have survived childhood sexual abuse. Tuesdays, beginning February 8, 6-7:30 p.m.

Intersex Support Group ongoing monthly all-gendered group for those with intersex conditions, or identities, seeking to connect. Beginning February: Date and time to be announced

Trans-Parent Support Group monthly gathering for trans, gender-different and gender-questioning people of all genders to share with others who are parents, or who are planning to be. For more information, contact the group's facilitator, Diana Feliz Oliva, at Center Kids, 212.620.7310, ext. 294.



UDENT RESISTANC
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THU FEB 17
@ 7pm - Free
Zine Release: "Queer Zine Showdown"
This extravaganza includes three featured bouts. In round (1) Queens Cutter Sarinya In round (2), Tennessee "Tussler" Jones reads from the latest "Teenage Death Songs". And in round (3), Brooklyn Bruiser Carolyn Connelly presents "Street Corner Sass", the second edition of "Brooklyn Diary."

SUN FEB 20
@ 4pm to 6pm - Free
Knitting: Dyke Knitting Circle!
Please bring yarn and knitting needles, and feel free to contact the DKC at knittingcircle NYC@yahoo.com or (212)714-8375 with questions.

MON FEB 21
@ 7pm - \$3 to \$5 Suggested
Screening / Discussion: "A Huey P. Newton Story"
Directed by Spike Lee, "A Huey P. Newton Story" is film about Newton's thoughts and philosophies and his history as the founder of the Black Panther Party. Following the film, Anarchist Panther Ashanti Alston will lead a discussion for all those with the desire to create revolution now.

the HOSTILE

WHERE DO I GET MY COPY OF THE INDEPENDENT?

BELOW 14TH ST.

- Bluestockings Books & Café**
172 Allen St.
- Shakespeare & Co.**
1 Whitehall
- Times Up!**
49 E. Houston St.
- Lotus Café**
Clinton & Stanton Sts.
- Key Foods**
Ave. A & E. 4th St.
- May Day Books at Theater for the New City**
155 First Ave. (between 9th & 10th Sts.)
- Housing Works**
126 Crosby St.
- LGBT Center**
213 W. 13th St.

14TH TO 96TH ST.

- Revolution Books**
9 W. 19th St.

CHelsea Sq. Diner

- 23rd St. & 9th Ave.
- Second Wave Laundroceter**
55th St. & 9th Ave.
- ABOVE 96th St.**
- Labyrinth Books**
536 W. 112th St.
- Kim's Books**
113th St. & Broadway
- Strictly Roots Restaurant**
123rd & Adam Clayton Powell
- Coogan's Bar**
169th St. & Broadway
- Cafe Seven**
7 Henshaw St.
- Fort Washington Bakery & Deli**
808 W. 181st St.
- Jumpin' Jalapenos**
W. 207th St. (between B'way & Vermilya)

BROOKLYN

- Vox Pop**
1022 Cortelyou Rd.
- Spoonbill & Sugartown**
218 Bedford Ave.
- Tillie's of Brooklyn**
248 Dekalb Ave.
- Green Apple Café**
110 Dekalb Ave.
- Marquet Patisserie**
680 Fulton St.
- Halcyon**
227 Smith St.
- Moda Cafe**
294 5th Ave.
- Freddy's Bar and Backroom**
Dean St. & 6th Ave.
- BAM**
30 Lafayette Ave.
- Community Book Store**
7th Ave. & Carroll Sts.
- Tea Lounge**
Union St. @ 7th Ave.
- 9th St. @ 7th Ave.**

ATLANTIS Super Laundry Center

- 472 Atlantic Ave.
- Photoplay Video**
933 Manhattan Ave.
- Verb Cafe**
Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.
- Jane Doe Books**
93 Montrose Ave.
- Make the Road by Walking**
301 Grove St.
- QUEENS**
- Sunnyside Library**
43-06 Greenpoint Ave.
- East Elmhurst Library**
95-06 Astoria Blvd.
- Jackson Heights Library**
35-51 81st St.
- Friend's Tavern**
78-11 Roosevelt Ave.
- Langston Hughes Library**
100-01 Northern Blvd.

Café Aubergine

- 49-22 Skillman Ave.
- Book Value**
Broadway between 33rd & 34th Sts.
- BRONX**
- Bronx Museum**
165th St. & Grand Concourse
- Barnes & Noble**
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