the progressive voice on campus
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With our quarterly publication, Diskord, we intend to fill the void that exists between the student community, progressive causes, and the outside world at the University of Chicago.

Our publication will provide a centralized hub for progressives to voice their causes and activities to the greater student body. We furthermore seek to underscore the relevance of campus student issues to real world current events through an accessible print publication.

Because of our quarterly format we will provide in depth coverage and analysis of international, domestic, and cultural issues. Also, we will provide a much needed progressive voice currently lacking in student media.

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George W. Bush is a divine lawgiver, sanctioned by God to bring rules to all mankind. He need look nowhere but inside himself to determine which laws will best suit humanity. At least, such is the impression one gets by looking at his administration’s actions over the last couple of years.

An excellent diary by Kagro X at the blog Daily Kos on February 9th puts these actions in stark relief. The diary discusses the recent flap over Douglas Feith’s “inappropriate” but not “unauthorized” intelligence memo. At the beginning of his entry, Kagro X quotes Richard Nixon. The quote is worth repeating:

Frost: So ... what ... you’re saying is that there are certain situations ... where the president can decide that it’s in the best interests of the nation or something, and do something illegal.

Nixon: Well, when the president does it that means that it is not illegal.

Frost: By definition.

Nixon: Exactly, exactly. If the president, for example, approves something because of the national security ... then the president’s decision in that instance is one that enables those who carry it out to carry it out without violating a law.

The fact that Nixon is the one who made this comment is (a) not surprising at all and (b) highlights an important connection with the current administration. People like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld came of political age in the Ford administration. Consequently, they are still stinging from the rebuke Nixon’s ridiculous theories of executive power received from the Congress of the day. Much of the unitary executive theory that the crackpots in the White House subscribe to today is basically a continuation of Nixon’s plans to unilaterally bring Law to Man.

This brings us back to Feith’s comment that his unsavory, reprehensible, morally odious memo was not unauthorized. Beyond individual accountability, does it really matter whether it was authorized or not? It matters to the Administration, because whatever the President approves becomes legal by transubstantiation. As Kagro X also points out, that’s why Alberto Gonzales felt justified in telling the Senate that the Administration’s illegal wiretapping program was operating within the law.

This concept of the “unitary executive branch” is dangerous and illegitimate, and it underlies everything Bush does. Case in point: his now-infamous signing statements. At a far higher rate than any previous president, Bush has issued statements that he will interpret the law in question “in a manner consistent with his Constitutional authority to supervise the unitary executive branch”. Note that Bush does not say he will or will not disregard any law in any specific way. All he says is that he will interpret laws however his royal whim dictates.

In addition to ignoring any bill Congress passes, Bush’s mandate to protect of “the ... executive branch” apparently authorizes ignoring Congressional oversight. Bush’s appointed Attorney General, Alberto Gonzales, has done some unorthodox things at the head of the Department of Justice (DOJ). The DOJ is responsible for providing legal counsel to other cabinet departments, and under the leadership of Gonzales it has advised them to be unresponsive to requests from Congressional committees.

The DOJ has also been firing US Attorneys from offices around the country and replacing them with hyper-partisan loyalists. This would normally be merely a disgusting misuse of power for political purposes. But in this context it starts to take on a much more sinister character. The DOJ may also take advantage of a provision of the PATRIOT Act that makes these appointments indefinite without Senate confirmation.

If Bush & Co. are to be believed, the President is the only part of government that matters. He could probably play all nine positions on a baseball team, too. But I don’t think this is what the framers of the Constitution had in mind when they set up three separate branches of government, just as Abner Doubleday didn’t have one-person baseball teams in mind. Since Bush’s most significant experience before becoming governor of Texas was (poorly) running the Texas Rangers, maybe we should get over our surprise.
Progressive politics and, more importantly, progressive policies have historically been demanded by the American public. It has not demanded a centrist-conservative government as the media, neo-conservatives, and third way democrats have been contending for the past quarter century. This myth has been propagated by both media pundits and historians alike. In reality, the Reagan Revolution was truly a revolutionary upheaval of traditional progressive American values to justify a radical right wing agenda. It has only been due to the right’s political power, the media’s inherent bias towards that power, and the Democratic Party’s consistent ceding of the policy debate to conservatives that has led to this successful reframing of history—the idea that progressivism, not conservatism, is the radical agenda.

As the 2008 election approaches, it is clear that both parties are at an ideological crossroads; Hurricane Katrina and the failure to win in Iraq have demonstrated that the gradual privatization and dismantling of government advocated by the Reaganites has largely failed to make our country better. It has also become apparent that Democrats such as John Kerry and Al Gore with poll-tested positions and consultant-driven campaigns have failed to gain the trust of the American people. It is essential for all progressives to assert their historical roots in the American tradition and use that history to ultimately define and defend the new era of progressive politics looming on the near horizon.

Theodore Roosevelt, in many ways the first progressive, pushed through labor reforms and trust busting policies. He would be followed in spirit by William M. Lafollette, a Republican from Wisconsin, and Eugene Debs, a Socialist labor activist, both of whom would run third party Presidential campaigns that, although unsuccessful, would push both major parties, especially the Democrats, to pursue their policies.

By the time the twenty year reign of the New Deal coalition ended with the election of Eisenhower, the entire country had been electrified, social security protected our elderly, modest welfare programs were implemented, and thousands of public works projects spanned the country.

The continuation of progressive policies during a Republican administration was assured when the internationalist, pro-New Deal, pro-labor Eisenhower defeated the isolationist laissez faire Senator Taft for the Republican nomination to preserve the essential components of the New Deal for another generation. It was clearly the consensus in the country was that these programs were vital and that liberalism and progressivism would continue to govern.

This consensus was demonstrated in 1964 when President Johnson, running on a social welfare and civil rights platform, crushed libertarian-leaning Republican Barry Goldwater. Even President Nixon, vilified by those on the left today and considered a conservative by his contemporaries, would be a liberal by modern standards. Civil rights protections, environmental regulations, the establishment of the EPA, OSHA, and even single payer healthcare were all policies implemented or advocated by Tricky Dick. Sadly the defeat in Vietnam, the malaise of Jimmy Carter, and a backlash against the civil rights movement among white blue collar workers would engender a radical right wing revolution that would govern for a generation.

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When Ronald Reagan said “government is not part of the solution, it’s part of the problem” no one realized the destructive cascade this would cause. Reagan privatized utilities and many social programs were gutted or completely eliminated. Organized labor suffered a series of embarrassing defeats including the ruthless crushing of the traffic controller strike, and union leaders’ capitulation to the first round of outsourcing that eliminated thousands of American jobs and sent them overseas.

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Barack Obama Beyond the Hype

He’s More Than Just a Black, Moderate Smoker

by James Kraft

Barack Obama is running for President. From the very beginning of his media career, political pundits have criticized his newfound celebrity as baseless, calling him inexperienced and under-qualified. He is only popular, they argue, because we have made him so—and because he is black and has no history of marital infidelity or drug use.

Without even dwelling upon the internal contradictions of media figures panning a celebrity for the very reason that they bother to report on his existence at all, it is possible to confront these questions directly, with evidence. Is he experienced or not? Is he qualified or not? In fact, Obama is a highly qualified and experienced political actor with much more to offer than any of the other candidates. The real question a self-reflective media pundit ought to ask of itself is why the facts of the case are yet to have a fair hearing on the national stage.

The “he’s only popular because he’s black” argument understates the profound distinctions between Obama’s background and the background of any recent major presidential candidates. Not only is he the only black candidate, he’s the only candidate who was born in Hawaii and raised in Indonesia, the only candidate who directed a major non-profit community initiatives center at the age of 24, and the only candidate, unless you count Clinton, who distinguished himself as a student.

Many people have heard that he was the first black president of the Harvard Law Review; but not as many mention his magna cum laude J.D. from the institution or the eleven years he taught constitutional law right here at the University of Chicago Law School. How’d he land that job? Well, he was only moonlighting really. During the day he was working at the prestigious civil rights law firm Miner, Barnhill and Galland. That sure beats owning a mediocre baseball team in Texas.

Then there are the two bestsellers he wrote and his addiction to cigarettes. The combination certainly implies he would make a good conversationalist. Anyway, every president smokes, really—they just smoke big fat cigars. According to Cigar Aficionado magazine, every president since James Madison has smoked.\(^1\) Why not elect a smoker of the people for a change? The “no political experience” argument cuts both ways. On the one hand, it’s true—four years in the Senate is nowhere near enough experience to learn how to run a country. On the other hand, the influence of prolonged exposure to the recent political climate has not proven beneficial in any of the clinical trials ongoing. “Experience,” measured in years, is probably more of a point against a candidate than a point in his favor.

The point behind the “no political experience” argument is that this implies a lack of political savvy and a dearth of powerful friends. Political savvy, however, it has been demonstrated, is not a quality Obama lacks. His clean plate and excessive popularity are a proof of that in themselves. As for powerful friends, let us not forget that his first chief of staff was formerly former Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle’s. Besides, any economics student would point out that people with powerful friends don’t all become presidents, but all presidents attract powerful friends. That’s one problem a united Democratic party could solve for him fairly quickly.

The other real flaw with the “he’s only popular because he’s black” argument, though, is that it seems to imply that being black, in and of itself, would be of no help to an American president. Quite the contrary—it would be an enormous asset. The oppression of black Americans is held up as evidence of American hypocrisy by every extremist political faction from Al Qaeda to Hamas to the Communists. So from a realpolitick perspective, it is a point in his favor that he’s black.

And if you want to get sentimental about it, it’s still a point in his favor that he’s black—but not just that he’s black. It’s that he’s black and he’s a good role model. The American political scene has been in need of a few of those for quite some time. I’ll never forget the first time I saw the Rev. Al Sharpton up close. It was at a friend’s 16th birthday party dinner at Le Cirque, a good New York restaurant. He was smoking a presidente cigar in the (now, alas, no more) smoking room with a 26-year-old practically on his lap. I’ll take Obama smoking a cigarette outside the Law School over that any day.
**Habeas Corpus All Around**

A Legal Defense of the Writ of Habeas’ Applicability to Aliens

by Aditya Habbu

Article 1 Section 9 Clause 2 of the United States Constitution reads, “The privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it.” The writ of Habeas Corpus as it was used in England allowed a person being detained to be brought before the court to determine if he was being held for a valid reason. The intention of the right is to stop the arbitrary and unjust use of state apparatus against individuals. The Detainee Bill denies this right to non-citizens under the argument that non-citizens are not eligible for the right. However the language of the Constitution and previous use of the Writ strongly suggests that this is not accurate.

The language of the Constitution and the Constitution’s historical context strongly suggest that Habeas is intended for both citizens and non-citizens. The Framers knew how to state the distinction between citizens and non-citizens. When they wanted to reserve right for citizens, they specifically chose the word “citizens”. Thus only citizens are allowed to run for political office (See Article 1 Section 2 clause 2 and Section 3 Clause 3). In addition, the clauses governing the judicial power speak both of “citizens” of the United States and “citizens” and “subjects” of other states. The use of the term “person” is meant to limit federal power as it applies to all people. Thus the immigration clause that precedes the Habeas clause (Article 1 Section 9 Clause 1) uses the term “persons” to cover non-citizens. There is no place in the Constitution where the term “person” is used when it is intended to limit the right to citizens only. However there are many provisions, like Habeas Corpus, which refer to neither “citizens” nor “people”. But we know that Habeas was freely available to aliens after ratification. Thus, they too are protected against its suspension and the abuses of power it entails.

The historical meaning of Habeas Corpus, as it applied in England, would also imply that the Great Writ was intended for non-citizens. The Habeas Corpus Act of 1679 specifies that it applies to “any person or persons” (paragraph 2). In 1772 in *ex parte Somersett* the Great Writ was granted to a Jamaican slave. Thus, the historical evidence would imply that the Writ was intended for non-citizens.

Some defend the Detainee Bill by arguing that the Suspension Clause of the Habeas Clause has been triggered and thus a limitation of Habeas is constitutional. However, the Senate has made no such argument. They have assumed that Suspension Clause is not required. Thus the Suspension Clause is irrelevant in determining the constitutionality of the Detainee Bill.

The legal profession has formed a united front against Habeas limitation (See the *National Review* article of December 5, 2005, if “by are top-notch law firms aiding Gitmo detainees? These attorneys do not see themselves as defending terrorists. Instead, they see themselves defending the law from blatant judicial and historical activism."

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This was soon coupled with a radical social conservative agenda that pushed back several civil rights advancements, defeated equal rights for women, and nearly eliminated a woman’s right to vote. These gains would become permanent after the landslide defeats of liberal Democrats like Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis and the shift of the Democratic Party to the economic right with the election of Bill Clinton who famously said “the era of big government is over” as he continued the destructive policies of Reagan, albeit at a much slower pace. This has been a defining political shift the country has yet to recover from.

Although this radical revolution turned the American political landscape upside down and made “personal responsibility” more important than social responsibility, there is still hope. With the second Bush presidency now entering a lame duck period and the domestic agenda of the radical neo-conservatives finally opposed by a Democratic opposition party, there is some hope for progressives. As 2008 draws near we should reexamine our history and understand that, though Reaganites won the last round, historically this country has consistently been on our side. In short, we must realize that patriotism and progressivism are one and the same.
A SHATTERED IRAQ

by Mario Diaz-Perez

Outside the Green Zone

On the western banks of the Tigris River stands the most expensive and heavily fortified US embassy in the world, rivaling the Vatican City in size. Unlike its sacred counterpart, the American outpost and its imperial attendants are harassed on all sides by rival militias who can at least all agree on one thing: the necessity of American withdrawal from Iraq. What is perhaps most remarkable about this picture are the misconceptions and incoherent logic used by conservatives and liberals alike to justify a continued American presence there. While a set of fancifully optimistic expectations are still peddled to the American people, the Iraqi people were hardly ever deemed to be deserving of any justification whatsoever. What ought to be clear after four years of bloody occupation and 600,000 dead Iraqis is that the US is the main source of violence and political instability.

While civilian deaths attributed to sectarian violence are about the same as those attributed to allied forces, the continued American presence in Iraq is simply spurring a civil war. In a recent report in the Lancet medical journal (October 2006) revealed that the death toll among Iraqis as a result of the US-UK invasion has reached 655,000. This is about 2.5% of the population and should stand out in stark contrast to the number of American soldiers killed (not yet 3,000). The Lancet report also undermines figures touted by the governments of the US and Britain, especially many of the claims that sectarian violence is the main threat to Iraqis. While there is no disputing the fact that Iraq has crumbled to pieces, this should never serve as a reason for a prolongation of the US occupation. The US is entirely to blame for killing more than 325,000 civilians and manipulating religious/ethnic tensions for limited and expedient American purposes.

As the UK recently announced that it will cut its number of troops in Iraq in half, President Bush and others have tried to con Americans into believing that the British withdrawal signifies an accomplished mission. Republicans and Democrats often make the claim that the US must not “cut and run” for the sake of the Iraqi people, every Iraqi knows that the Americans have no interest in their safety or freedom. For example, despite the thousands of additional troops sent to secure Baghdad since August 2006, most of the 6,000 civilians killed in October (the bloodiest month of the entire occupation) lived in the perilous capital city. As Americans remain huddled behind the walls of the Green Zone, a great deal of their future will be decided in the next few months as Americans attempt to lead the Iraqi national military in securing Baghdad.

The End of Strategy

The battle to hold on to a shred of legitimacy in Iraq is contained entirely within Baghdad, the most populous city of Iraq (6 million). Because it is both the hub of American diplomatic and military involvement as well as the home of all of Iraq’s feuding sects, it has become the main target for destabilizing violence. Unlike rural areas in which the US can establish small zones of stability and control the limited access-routes through which the resistance supplies weapons and personnel, Baghdad is a densely populated collection of districts split along sectarian lines. The sprawling slums of the Shia-dominated Sadr City, in the northeast corner of Baghdad, are controlled by Moktada al-Sadr and his Mehdi Army. On the other side of the Tigris, tucked closely against the western perimeter of the Green Zone are the Sunni-dominated districts of Mansour and Rasheed. Exactly how the US plans to secure areas through which it hardly sends armed patrols is

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The Argument for Divestment

Why We Need to Divest from Darfur

by Seth Mayer

In the Kalven Report, which has been much discussed recently as a result of the movement for the University to divest from the Darfur region of Sudan, Stigler, one of the report’s drafters, offers a caveat that has not often been mentioned in the debate. He argues that, as opposed to acting according to what the report called “paramount social values,” the University should only be careful to “conduct its affairs with honor”. It should avoid trying to “foster any moral or political values because such use of its facilities will impair its integrity as the home of intellectual freedom”.

So the question is: what does the word honor mean to a Nobel laureate Chicago economist like Stigler? The limit of honor is definitely less restrictive than “paramount social values” (which the University of Chicago administration agrees with Stigler is a part of the Kalven Report that should be ignored). Where, then, does the lesser restriction of acting with honor lead us in evaluating whether or not the University was right not to divest from Darfur?

To begin, it has to be made clear why divesting from Darfur is an issue in the first place. In February of 2003, the conflict had a kind of official beginning, as militant groups made up of members of African pastoralist tribes from the region rose up against the Sudanese government in Khartoum over mistreatment. The response to this uprising was quick and fierce on the part of the government, who used the superior force of the military and the Arab Janjaweed militia in order to subdue those involved in the uprising. The response, funded by export revenues, especially from oil exportation, has led to massive civilian deaths, sexual violence, and displacements that have not yet ceased today. Entire villages are being wiped out and the violence threatens to spread to neighboring countries. Systematically, the pastoral way of life in Darfur is being wiped out through the killing of people and the deliberate destruction of their means to survive. The hundreds of thousands of deaths include far too many civilians to call this violence simply a civil war. Especially in light of the racial component involved, it can only be called genocide.

A peace agreement was brokered by some of the parties involved in the conflict and African Union (AU) troops have been allowed into the country, but neither one of these attempts at ending the crisis has had a significant practical effect. It has proved hard to enforce the partial agreements that have been reached, and the limited AU troop presence is seriously restricted in what they can do to stop the violence in the region.

Help from outside the continent of Africa has also struggled along. The UN should currently have 17,000 troops in Sudan, but the Sudanese government, unsurprisingly, never gave its consent, which is needed in order to put troops on the ground. Humanitarian groups have also been met with violence, often finding themselves unable to provide aid as a result of the dangerous situation.

In this climate, divestment has become the favored option of states, communities, and institutions in this country, wishing to acknowledge their condemnation of the violence and their unwillingness to support it. Pension funds and endowments across America have taken their assets out of companies whose money is used to fund the violence in Sudan. The kind of divestment most advocate is targeted, to make sure that Sudan’s economy is not seriously damaged. The goal is to cut off the capital supply that supports Khartoum and the militia groups’ violent campaigns.

If enough institutions divest, there is a realistic hope that practical effects will be seen. Historically, the pressure of economics has been an effective tool, as the example of South Africa shows. In Sudan itself, it has been seen that divestment has led to companies like Siemens not doing business in the country. When rogue regimes are unable to finance their activities through export revenue, they are economically unable to finance human rights violations. If oil companies like PetroChina, for example, feel the pressure of devalued stock prices (from divestment), they will have fewer incentives to deal with the government of Sudan. If companies like PetroChina stop doing business with the government, the funds for its genocide will evaporate. One institution alone cannot affect this change, but a collective recognition of responsibility to invest with a minimal amount of ethical concern will make a difference.

It is not a radical or irresponsible idea to press for divestment. State and city legislatures and most of our peer institutions (Harvard, California, Stanford and many others) have used this tactic. And in excluding ourselves from that group, the University does not remain neutral, but in fact takes a clear position. The University says that refusing to fund genocide is not our responsibility.

In making investment in genocidal regimes an acceptable practice, our University makes it easier for others to do the same. Unfortunately, the University administration’s decisions do not take place in a vacuum. As Northwestern considers divestment, our rejection of that tactic makes the decision not to divest that much more socially acceptable.

The Kalven Report is right to argue that we, as corporate academic entity, are not in the same position as an individual, however. The Report is also right to argue that at the very least we have some social responsibility, or perhaps what can be called a duty to act honorably.
The University decided not to divest, using the Kalven Report as support. Preserving an environment of free academic inquiry was given as the reason for this decision. A concern for academic freedom must, of course, be of paramount concern and the University should avoid letting vocal groups of individual members be the ones to determine its values.

What is problematic in this argument and in the administration’s actions is that academic freedom and institutional-administrative freedom are muddled together. The University says academic freedom is its concern, when it is institutional-administrative freedom that is preserved in the action (or lack thereof) that it has taken. The students and faculty do not have their academic position restrained through divestment in Sudan; the only people who are forced to act a certain way are those in charge of our financial portfolio.

Indeed, if students want to divest from companies working in Iraq, for example, there is room for disagreement about whether or not the situation there warrants action. There is a wide spectrum of opinions the academic community in this country holds about Iraq and in a liberal democratic polity this is as it should be. In the case of Darfur, there is no room for disagreement about the seriousness of the problem and the University administration has not argued otherwise. It is hard to see how anyone could make the case that what is going on in Darfur is anything other than morally reprehensible. The disagreements are not academic ones then, but are disagreements about how we act as a corporate institution. And in that capacity, unlike in our academic capacity, our freedom is not boundless.

Since the law does not restrict our freedom in where we invest, it is up to us as an institution to determine what exactly the honorable thing to do is, if not the politically or morally valuable. Only the University can say where its freedom in this regard ends and value or honor restricts us. It is hard for me to see where the honorable action has been in this situation.

To say that a slippery slope has been avoided is unconvincing. The University has already set clear past precedents when it refused to divest as a result of the war in Vietnam and the South African apartheid. Rather than avoiding misinterpretation, we find ourselves without any way to interpret the exceptional clause of the Kalven Report, which, with this decision, has been interpreted out of existence. Even the argument of John Hope Franklin, the lone surviving Kalven drafter—that the exceptional clause does apply in this situation—was not heard. Acknowledging that the support of genocide was wrong would not have made the University beholden to any quibble the students and faculty have about its financial holdings. If the Vietnam War and apartheid don’t count, clearly the bar for being an exception is set quite high.

Acting with honor would have meant recognizing genocide as fundamentally incompatible with the values of this institution. Those values are our values, not just the political or moral values of society. It was up to us as an institution to decide what the honorable thing to do was. To dedicate money to research is, of course, a good thing, but this is what we have been doing all along through speakers, classes, and research. The reason why divestment became an issue was because something about the way we were acting needed to be changed. Instead of change, we have gotten more of the same. Instead of acting with honor, we have forgotten our duties as an institution.
**The Aesthetics of Misrepresentation**

Atom Egoyan’s Anti-Orientalism in *Citadel*

by Niko Banac

On Thursday, November 9, the writer of this piece was present at the U.S. premiere of *Citadel*, a documentary by Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan, at the University of Chicago’s Ida Noyes Hall. Egoyan, who is of Armenian descent, has directed thirteen films. He received critical acclaim for *The Sweet Hereafter*, produced in 1997, and with it, a nomination for Best Director in the 1998 Academy Awards. Egoyan and his wife, Beirut-born actress Arsinee Khanjian, were present at the screening and afterwards answered questions during a Q&A session moderated by Gretchen Helfrich of Chicago Public Radio.

*Citadel*, filmed on a hand-held digital camera, chronicles Egoyan’s family trip to Lebanon in the summer of 2003. Egoyan spends most of his time filming his wife as she returns to the city which she left at the age of 16 in the wake of the Lebanese Civil War. On camera, Egoyan captures their walks through several Beirut neighborhoods, as well as the Roman ruins of Baalbek, Bsharri, the hamlet where Kahlil Gibran was born, and the medieval streets of Tripoli. These he intersperses with family encounters. The film, addressed to Egoyan’s son Arshile, straddles the narrow boundary between documentary and home movie, giving equal attention to family situations and Egoyan’s meditations on the subjects he films.

Throughout the film, Egoyan’s voice-overs, often addressed directly to his son, comment on the images and scenes he shoots. Far from being neutral, the voice-overs are often blunt and to the point; they reflect Egoyan’s immediate reactions to what he sees. This is a mixed blessing while at times offering a crucial insight into the relationship between the director and the subjects he films, as when Egoyan muses about the many stories present in a single Beirut street, his comments often limit his viewer’s perspective, especially to one familiar with the Middle East.

At some points, the voice-overs tell us more about Egoyan’s own prejudices than the scenes he captures. The most glaring incident occurs in a scene in which Arsinee Khanjian struggles to remember the Arabic word for “election” while discussing Lebanese politics with a cab driver. Egoyan wonders aloud whether Khanjian’s inability to remember the word for election has something to do with an innate lack in the Arabic language. After all, Egoyan would be correct to maintain that there are few free elections in the Arab world and that in Lebanon elections have often been far from democratic. However, there is an ugly undertone to this sort of rhetoric, like when Egoyan states that translating “election” into Arabic is like communicating the idea of “tolerance” to Attila the Hun.

This sort of condescension shows itself in Egoyan’s trip to the Shi’ite suburbs in Beirut’s south. He equates the posters of Shi’ite “martyrs” on lampposts with Palestinian suicide bombers, neglecting to mention the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and how its brutality radicalized Lebanon’s Shi’a. He then remarks how the “suicide bombers” are on posters, while their victims, “blown up in cafés” do not enjoy such representation. He obviously confuses the phenomenon of Palestinian suicide bombings of recent memory with the Shi’ite campaign against the Israelis and other Lebanese denominations. Moreover, the comment sets the tone for the way in which Egoyan continues to characterize Islam in *Citadel* as the “other” in the most abstract sense, a religion whose nameless faces, impenetrable, stare down at us from distant posters.

Egoyan’s visit to Sabra and Shatila is also quite telling. Egoyan avoids discussing the magnitude of Israel’s 1982 invasion, in which 22,000 Lebanese and Palestinians lost their lives. The massacre at Sabra and Shatila is portrayed as an exclusively Lebanese affair: the Phalange are responsible, the IDF’s involvement is limited to firing flares in order to illuminate the night sky over the camp. Characteristically, he quotes an Israeli soldier as asking a Phalangist why his militia is killing pregnant women in the camp, to which the Phalangist responds that the women are carrying “terrorists” in their wombs. Here, the Israeli is portrayed as the enlightened Western interlocutor trying to make sense of Oriental barbarism. Whether consciously or not, this is also how Egoyan presents himself to his audience: the unassuming Canadian coming to a land in which, he tells us, “traditionalism” manifests...
Afterward, during the Q&A session, Egoyan revealed that one of the few hints in the film that the scene had been manipulated. The question reveals that the azan possesses a quality that Egoyan, unlike his wife, struggles to interpret: the azan is something distant, something alien. That he should ask this question in a country that has been a part of the Islamic world since the 8th century adds to the perplexity of his position. On the one hand, Egoyan keeps the Islamic presence at a distance. On the other hand, Islam is there, a reality that at the same time confronts Egoyan and requires a response.

How does Egoyan respond? The climax of the film occurs in Tripoli, a Sunni town on the coast north of Beirut, where Egoyan and Khanjian spend a day. A young man offers to give them a tour of the citadel of Tripoli, a medieval fortification on a hill overlooking the town. They accept the invitation. From the very start, Egoyan portrays the guide in a negative light: he is ignorant, unintelligent and insincere, fitting the stereotype of the dishonest Arab. Egoyan does not even think it necessary to tell us the guide's name, turning the young man into an anonymous stranger in his own country.

While filming their walk through the citadel, Egoyan and Khanjian peer through an opening in one of the turrets, and much to their astonishment, see two young men engaging in anal intercourse in the bushes below. Egoyan rushes to capture the scene. Then, the camera goes black. Egoyan's voice informs the audience that the anonymous guide was in fact quite reliable. Although Egoyan and Khanjian did film two young men having sex in the bushes, the tour guide did not take their camera, nor did an officer ask for their camera in order to establish the identity of the boys.

In reality, Egoyan and his wife simply peered down, filmed the two boys and then continued their tour of the citadel of Tripoli. But in the film, Egoyan does not directly address why he consciously chose to present the circumstances of their walk through the citadel in a radically different light. The sort of cultural stereotyping in which Egoyan engages simply brushes over the peculiarities of homosexuality in Levantine society. While not condoned, homosexuality is taken for granted in Lebanon and Syria. A friend who lived in Lebanon informed me that the two boys would probably not have suffered serious consequences had someone apprehended them in the park, at least no worse than in some American Red States. That is beside the point though: Egoyan turns the sexual act, which he witnesses, into a further instance of Oriental “otherness”: a religious court will punish the two boys, his camera is responsible.

The fact that Egoyan consciously misrepresents the reality of this situation is dubious for two reasons. Not only does he portray the people in the ‘Tripoli sequence as stock characters from the orientalist imagination, with the deceitful tour guide and the young homosexuals breaking social taboos, but he also forces his audience to accept his narrative at face value. With this, Egoyan loses all credibility: first, he violates the subjects he films, and with that, the trust of his audience.

One could perhaps get away with playing with the audience's reaction on the grounds of taking an “artistic license”, to paraphrase the character Ani whom Khanjian plays in *Ararat*. But there is something profoundly disturbing about using such a technique to perpetuate essentially racist stereotypes. Perhaps Egoyan simply wanted to reveal to his Western audience just how deep-seated their biases and prejudices about Arabs and Muslims are. Had that been his intention, though, he could have simply inserted a disclaimer making his audience aware that the last sequence had been staged. Rather than give us the opportunity to come to our own conclusions, the aid of his artistic direction, Egoyan forces us to accept his narrative, to accept his biases and prejudices. Another term for this sort of art is “propaganda”.

The goal of the intellectually conscious traveler is to try to understand the foreign on its own terms, without necessarily accepting everything that he encounters in it. But the traveler who goes to another land in order to reinforce his own prejudices and revel in his complacency would have done better to stay at home. Instead of building bridges, Egoyan throws more debris into the imagined chasm separating East and West.

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1 To his credit, Egoyan blurs the faces of the boys so as to keep their identities a secret.
services are well-integrated and the US gathers quality intelligence. How could anyone in Baghdad remain passive when at least one member of their family has been killed in recent years and going out for food means risking life and limb? In his manual Petraeus argues that a necessary condition for victory is to provide better public services, security and the hope of economic development because these convince the general population that the occupying force has its best interests in mind. Yet the US military has been so negligent in the most basic areas of civilian concern; water, electricity, and oil are today far more precious than they were under Saddam.

Aside from the fact that “military intelligence” is an oxymoron, intelligence collection in Iraq lacks the elementary but truly indispensable human dimension. There has been ample evidence to show that many Iraqi police officers are also members of Shia militant groups like the Mehdi Army which protect the inhabitants of Sadr City better than the US military can. Native Iraqi language interpreters rightly fear for their lives and the employees at US and Iraqi government buildings risk their lives driving into the Green Zone (in fact, they are all instructed to change their route to work each week to avoid being attacked or kidnapped). Obviously, the US can send countless reconnaissance flights equipped with the best infrared and video sensors in the world, but this will have little effect and costs hundreds of millions of dollars a month.4 The Iraqi insurgency lacks what military people refer to as “high-contrast” targets (tanks, planes, and bases) which the US could easily eliminate, but instead relies on smaller weapons and the tactics of asymmetrical warfare. Much of counterinsurgency is concerned with making one’s enemy visible and while the US military is a highly visible source of grief, its enemies are as elusive as ever. Those who resist the occupation or attack rival religious groups can emerge to plant bombs or launch limited attacks and return to the cloak of civilian status.

The Counterinsurgency Manual states that there should be a specific ratio of 25 soldiers to 1,000 civilians in order combat insurgents and provide the non-military social work to win the “hearts and minds” of whichever country the US happens to be invading.

There are currently just 150,000 coalition troops in Iraq and even with the proposed “surge” of 21,000 troops the US would still fall short of this golden ratio.

**Occupational Hazards**

All of the tactical deficiencies of the US military simply reflect the political bankruptcy of its presence in Iraq. This is not war in a vacuum or, for that matter, on a battlefield. Instead, it is a civil war largely created by the ignorance and arrogance of US strategic-planners. The occupation was built on the manipulation of sectarian divisions in Iraq to form a Shia and Kurdish coalition government that would simultaneously isolate the Sunni population. This vile strategy may have enabled the US to undercut any hopes for a nationalist resistance movement, but it has also forced the world to see anger as Iraqis pay the price for this imperial adventure.

The problem with such a simplistic strategy was that some Shia leaders were easily co-opted by the occupation forces while others remained intransigently opposed. The disastrous slide into a full-fledged civil war can be traced back to some of the mistakes made by powerful Shia clerics who decided to cooperate with the American occupation. The most influential Shia (the title of most powerful should be reserved for Moktada al-Sadr), Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, played a leading role in the transitional government with the hope that this would lead to Shia preponderance in the new Iraqi government. This move and the transparency of the strategy behind it exposed many Shia who actually opposed the occupation to the attacks of Sunnis and the resistance. If Sistani had publicly opposed the Americans in 2004 as did Moktada al-Sadr, lines of solidarity could have been drawn in order to end the occupation. If Sunni and Shia were united against the occupation, the US would have been out of Iraq a year ago.

The only outcome that can bring any relief to this ravaged country is the departure of all American forces and the abandonment of its new network of bases. This is not to say that Sunnis and Shias and Kurds will immediately coexist in harmony, but the main factor exacerbating their conflicts must first be removed before there will ever be talk of peace.

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An American Girl’s Week-Long Holiday in Sarajevo

Pretty American Girl

by Andrea Fjeld

At six a.m., Sarajevo was bleak and sullen. Recent rains had slicked the pavement and puddles leaked into my cowboy boots with each misstep; the few trucks that passed soaked my bare, white legs. None of the directions I had worked out the night before made sense now. I needed to exchange money. I needed to brush my teeth. I needed some fucking coffee. I went back to the bus station to reorient myself. This was the first day of my “adventure”, and here I was, sitting on a park bench watching pigeons squabble over bread crumbs.

At twenty, I was finally beginning my coming-of-age story. I had been studying in Vienna and we were given a week off to travel. Some of my friends went to Denmark, some to Spain. I remembered a boy I had interviewed from Banja Luka and decided to go to Bosnia.

His name was Boris Nikolic. In the spring of 1992, most seven-year-olds I knew were just finishing the first grade, but Boris and his family were packing their belongings. As Bosnia declared its independence and Slobodan Milosevic began his vicious campaign of ethnic cleansing, Boris was about to start a new life as a refugee—dodging bullets on the way home from school, crouching in his basement as the armaments factory exploded down the street. When he and his family finally evacuated to America, the only job his father—a former university professor—could find was as the janitor at Boris’ high school, Greensboro Day. I interviewed Boris for Duke Magazine the summer before he started there as a freshman, riding a full, academic scholarship. In a voice still colored by an Eastern European accent, he described the three-day “hell ride” through Serbia—a trip that normally takes four hours. He explained why his mother couldn’t find work after they relocated to Croatia, because nobody wanted to hire a refugee—and a Serb, at that. He told me how his father had left them to take a job in Germany and how they didn’t see him for two years. I had been thinking about Boris’ story ever since I arrived in Europe.

Dad fought me from the beginning. “American girls don’t go to Bosnia,” he said. He called it a third-world country that was under a State Department travel advisory. The second part was true. “Why don’t you go to France?” he suggested. Later that week riots broke out in Paris and I was tempted to take his advice. But if my mother’s given
tempted to take his advice. But if my mother’s given

waiting for the four p.m. bus, I nervously folded and refolded the wrinkled ticket in my hands. This was my first act of independence. My parents thought the country was dangerous—the three wars much more real to them. But I was not afraid. I am of the generation that seeks understanding and acceptance over fear. The bus growled awake and with a roar pulled out of the station. There were fourteen hours between me and Sarajevo.

The Holiday Inn is a landmark in the city: a bright yellow cube, visible for miles. It’s famous for surviving the Balkan wars because it catered to bureaucrats and journalists who would camp out in the lobby as far from the conflict as possible. During the siege, it was the only functioning hotel in the city. Even today, with its inflated prices, it’s often preferred by the cautious traveler. I couldn’t afford to be cautious, but neither did I want to be. The friendly concierge pointed me in the direction of Old Town.

As desolate as the city seemed in the half-light of dawn, within moments it had awakened. Signs flipped from zatvorani to otvorenii. Cars screeched along the crooked streets. Within minutes I had fallen in love twice: once briefly with a dark-haired boy I would never see again, and once with the city herself: part rundown, part vibrant; part oriental, part western, and full of pigeons.

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The stench of cigarettes seeped into the couches, the curtains, the cushions, their skin. They were expatriates—or wanted to be. That’s what Patrick said that night as we stumbled down the Sarajevo streets. I didn’t really know what he meant but it sounded fine to me—drinking wine and arguing and letting boys kiss me in the dark kitchen when everyone else was asleep. “Haven’t you read Hemingway?” he said, which I hadn’t, not since high school. He shook his head and dragged on his
The Tunnel was built in 1993 to sneak supplies into Sarajevo during the siege. It starts in the garage of a rickety little house down a dusty road. The Kolar family runs the Tunnel and the war museum that is attached. Their home is the last house in the village of Dobrinja, 400 meters from the front line. Instead, I muttered that he was handsome and stared at my feet. There was fierceness, even hope, in his eyes. In the photograph, he was no older than twenty, perhaps—my age. But the war had been nothing more to me than grainy images marching across the nightly news. This Kolar boy, who inspected me suspiciously from his perch, was he alive now or dead? I dared not ask. Instead, I muttered that he was handsome and stared at my feet.

Emerging from the Tunnel, the dismal day seemed brighter than before. We were silent on the tram as we returned downtown. We crossed the bridge out of Bašćaršija to the more residential side of the Milijacka River and walked into a local joint where men played cards by the window and the neighborhood drunk—or one of them—slumped over the bar. Kaldon ordered us pivo. We discussed the proper way to pour a beer. Long-forgotten one-time hits cackled over the radio and we sang along to the music of our childhood—three crazy Americans, ignored by Bosnians. When we left, still arguing over the words to Dancing in the Moonlight, dusk had descended. From the hill we gazed at the city, illuminated and finally alive under a royal-purple sky. The smells of grilled meat, smoke, and onions beckoned to us from restaurants tucked neatly away from the street. When the boys asked why I wouldn’t eat, I said “vegetarian”, which is far easier to say than “anorexic”.

After dinner, we stopped by the Central Café—a European lounge where young professionals drank 7 Mark cocktails and blew idle smoke rings at the ceiling. They were young. They were laughing. Did they think of the Balkan Wars—wars they had seen, that they had lived through, wars they had fought in? Did they talk about it? Few would talk to me about it, even our young hostel manager. “I don’t,” he told me later that night. “But I have a friend—he will talk to people like you.”

On modular, leather couches of the Central Café, we drank till we got honest, then we drank till we lied. Kaldon told us he had come to Bosnia for distance from his English wife, “the frigid bitch”. Patrick had come to see the world after college graduation. I couldn’t think of a good reason, so I smiled and said, “I’m just here.”

Fed up with expensive drinks, we stumbled back to the hostel to finish the beer they forgot to put in the fridge. We played rock-paper-scissors and the loser, me, was sent out for vodka.

Feigning chivalry, Kaldon came along. “A gal’s gotta be ca’ful in Sa’ajevo,” he said. I didn’t want to be careful. On the way back he kissed me on the stairs and we made out like high schoolers on prom night, pulling lips, tickling the tips of tongues, and fumbling with each other in the dark.

In the morning I woke up on top of my sheets, my skin and clothes still steeped in last night’s smoke. I didn’t bother showering.

We had coffee. We bought cigarettes. We made grand plans to see the coast.

It was Wednesday. That night, a drunk and angry Patrick shot us a dirty glance before throwing his empty beer bottle against a cop car. It shattered. It was Wednesday. That night, a drunk and angry Patrick shot us a dirty glance before throwing his empty beer bottle against a cop car. It shattered. We scattered and hid in the alleyways while the police made grand plans to see the coast.

I was envious of Patrick and Kaldon, who were free from agendas and responsibilities. I was tempted to abandon life as I knew it and continue to wander, following nobody but my curiosity and bus schedules. They had no one but themselves, and briefly, we had each other.
The countryside beyond Sarajevo was littered with haystacks and road signs pointing to Terein, Konjic, Split. Fog and clouds swallowed the hills. Branches, empty of their leaves, turned the hillside a hazy brown. An eerie mist sifted through the bare trees. These hills were still haunted by ghosts, I thought, whose bodies rest unsoundly beneath a countryside of uniform, white gravestones.

Would Bosnia ever really be at peace? Bombed-out houses, where nobody but squatters live, might never be rebuilt. Landmines still lie in wait across the country. As the bus rumbled up and down the narrow roads, the land unfolded for us, an empty scene in the sun. Were it not for the passport check, we’d have never known when and where we crossed into Montenegro.

“You want place to stay?” a woman asked as we disembarked in Herzog Novi. “Stay fifteen minutes. I call car for pick up.”

Forty-five minutes later, a beat-up Saab rattled into the parking lot and pulled us, groaning all the way, half a kilometer to a housing complex nestled in the hills. On the way, we haggled the price from thirty Euros to fifteen to rent two rooms for one night. It smelled of dinner when we arrived. A TV cackled from the kitchen. A child ran by in his underwear.

Herzog Novi was a quaint town, full of restaurants and cafés and lime trees in fruit. It was late; the clocks had all struck twelve. Kaldon had locked his door, which left us as we wandered off to find cigarettes. Kaldon and I had a beautiful view of the Adriatic Sea as we sat, silently, listening to the waves slap the shore. When Patrick returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or returned, a couple of burnt-out twentysomethings lagged at his side, promising us weed or blow or 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“It’s eleven,” Patrick told me. I should have showered at the hotel, but I forgot that it’d be two days before I had the chance again.

I drank my coffee black for breakfast, and swallowed the grounds. We wandered around the bazaar and stopped every three goddamn minutes so Patrick could look at wool socks or dried fruit or silly denim hats. Patrick was ignoring me, but I was more upset to be leaving the place than I was to leave him.

Unobtrusely by day, at night Novi Pazar jumped and throbbed. People overflowed into the streets. Cars honked and screeched and swerved and the drivers swore. Women painted with rouge wiggled their hips in nylon dresses while men with greased-back hair catcalled after them. At eight, every bar played the soccer game; at nine, hip-hop pumped from every club. People jostled me and I clutched my purse, afraid of losing my passport or Patrick. We brushed arms. I was grateful when, as we waited for cars to pass under the streetlight, he finally kissed me.

We shivered outside the bus station and made plans I knew we’d never keep to see each other soon. The minutes trickled by like icicles melting on a warm day. In two bleary bus rides I’d be back at school.

On the journey home I spent my last Marks on local beer for my classmates and lit a cigarette on the mountainside. I befriended the woman next to me who let me rest my feet upon her seat. Cars rushed towards us just beams of light. In a flash they were gone like the embers of cigarettes, burning in space. The roads grew wider and smoother as we reached the Balkan border. We were crossing into Hungary, and soon Hungary would become Austria. The Linden trees were silhouettes against a cold palette of gray. It had been ten hours since I left Sarajevo and I sensed Vienna, distant and dim, through the dusk.

The checkpoint between Croatia and Hungary was the only building illuminated, and unexpectedly bright. The border guard, a stumpy woman with long, auburn hair, instructed us to file out of the bus. The line moved smoothly as a bored, clean-shaven youth stamped passports. It clicked monotonously... ker-bick... ker-bick. I was just re-boarding when female guard rushed up behind me, barking Hungarian. I didn’t respond. She tried Croatian. Then, in German she said, “Remove your bags and follow me.”

She led me to a backroom—white, sterile, overly lit. She slipped on gloves and unzipped my pink duffle bag, slowly. Carefully parting the lips like a surgeon, she removed my dirty laundry, sniffed it, sorted through it, and set it aside. She took out my books and journal and leafed through the pages. She asked me to translate a few paragraphs, and in German I told her about the Sarajevo bartender who squeezed my hand and made me promise to return so he could spend some time with a “pretty American girl”.

She undid each of my tampons and handed German spiked with a Hungarian accent.

“Medicine...” I faltered.

“Drogen!” she accused.

“Not drugs! From my doctor!” I tried to explain, but never in my eight years of German had I learned the words for depression and bipolar disorder.

She gave my Lamictal to the male attendant lurking outside the door.

“Take off your shoes,” she said. “Socks too.” And there, surrounded by my dirty laundry and deconstructed tampons, she undressed me—stripping me down to my underwear.

It was cold. My skin was in goose-bumps under her touch. This redheaded woman, squinting up at me with meanness in her eyes, unzipped my skirt so it puddled at my ankles and demanded to know why I had come to Bosnia...because American girls don’t go to Bosnia. Because I was alone. For the first time I felt a bit of the confusion, the violation, the distrust, and the terror that the Balkans had long endured and that I had spent my week trying to understand.

As she lifted up my bra, she asked, “What do you do?”

“I’m a journalist,” I lied.

A pause. She pulled down my bra. She handed back my clothes.

I was allowed to dress in peace. As I walked through the checkpoint one more time and my passport was re-stamped, the guard smiled tightly and said, “We hope you enjoyed your stay and come back to visit.”

“Don’t be sad,” her colleague winked as he handed me my antidepressants. “You are in Europe.”
IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD, MAD WORLD

A Review of Chris Hedges' Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America

by Julia Simon

American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America by Chris Hedges, Free Press, 254 pages, $25.00

Tom Crouse, pastor in Holland, Mass., and host of Christian radio show Engaging Your World, will only use the word gay “in its proper context” he says, “which means ‘happy.’” Crouse continues, “People will call in to my show and say, ‘You’re gay,’ to me on the air, and I’ll say, ‘I’m gay, you’re gay.’”

If these words sound ludicrous, author Chris Hedges insists they are not. These are the words of the Christian Evangelist movement, wielding power over the 70 million evangelicals in the United States, about 25 percent of the population.

In his new book, American Fascists, Hedges offers an analytical and solemn reading of the words of the movement. As the son of a Presbyterian minister and a graduate of the seminary at Harvard Divinity School, Hedges has intimate ties to the language of the church. In his father’s church in upstate New York, Hedges learned that the four gospels “were filled with factual contradictions” and that “faith presupposes that we cannot know”.

The Evangelist movement there is no room for unknowing. Hedges cites a Gallup poll indicating that “about 40 percent of respondents believe in the Bible as the ‘actual word of God’ and that it is ‘to be taken literally, word for word’.”

Hedges describes his visit to the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. The woman who leads the museum tour states, “We take as our philosophy that the whole museum will prove that God’s word is true.”

If God’s word is true, Darwin poses complications for the curators of the museum. For evangelists, God introduced death to earth, Hedges explains, “as a punishment for living in a sinful, fallen world. Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion … made possible a return to a deathless paradise.” Evolution becomes problematic. As Hedges writes, “if the Darwinian account of evolution is correct, then death and suffering were always and will always be a part of human existence.”

In the textbook Biology: God’s Living Creation, creationists offer their only answer: “Unlike the animals, mammals included, man is an immortal being who will live somewhere forever.” In terms of dinosaurs, a museum display reads, “Some people think that dinosaurs were too big, or there were too many of them, to go on this ark.”

Hedges argues that creationists use the “veil of science” deliberately, employing museums, textbooks and Ph.Ds to strengthen their authority. Jason Lisle, who works at the museum, suggests that creationists wait to “come out” until they graduate. “Some professors will just stop you from getting your Ph.D. if you’re a creationist.” The evangelists are using the tools of the godless world to achieve their “Christian Nation”.

The Christian Nation continues to grow partly due to the “Evangelism Explosion”. To showcase this particular phenomenon, Hedges attends a seminar led by Dr. James Kennedy. (Throughout the book, Hedges visits many similar seminars and conventions, his access presumably stemming from his seminary background, or his journalistic finesse.)

The Evangelism Explosion workbook offers students in the seminar a conversational guide to opening up a potential convert. Kennedy calls this process “making a friend”. Hedges perceives the profusion of sexual and warlike metaphors in language of the Evangelists. Kennedy warns to not hold a large bible but to carry a small bible hidden: “Don’t show your gun until you’re ready to shoot it.” Kennedy also speaks of “consummat[ing] the witness”.

Hedges emphasizes that the movement—which he calls “a cult of masculinity”—preys upon the weak and despairing. The Evangelists offer these converts “the truth”. As Hedges notes, “For those that have known despair, it feels like a new life, a new beginning.”

The movement uses the capitalist system to cheat followers who are “guilible, desperate and often impoverished.” Television is their medium of manipulation and in his chapter “God: The Commercial” Hedges unpacks the slippery tactics of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). The televangelist network encourages viewers to call and make donations. Paul Crouch, host of Praise the Lord, suggests viewers start with $1,000, even if they can’t afford it — “Write the check anyway, he tells them, as a ‘step of faith’, and the Lord will repay them many times over.” According to the Los Angeles Times, TBN generates $170 million a year in revenue—viewer’s contributions make up two-thirds of that figure.

Hedges recalls the warning of Dr. James Luther Adams, his professor at Harvard Divinity School. Adams foresees Hedges and his classmates fighting the “Christian Fascists”. Hedges emphasizes that Adams “was not a man to use the word ‘fascist’ lightly.” Adams was in Germany in the mid-1930s working with the underground anti-Nazi Church. Hedges similarly avoids frivolous use of this f-word.

The solemnity of Hedges’ words gives his book the feel of a sermon. Most of his sentences are short, with breath around the words, as if to give his readers a chance to inhale the gravity of his punctuation. He assures his readers: This is a war.

In the war for the Christian Nation, Evangelists have named the enemy: “secular humanism”. Although this enemy may seem “laughable” as Hedges writes—the only group that goes by that name, the American Humanist Organization, numbers a meager 3,000—the evangelists are very serious.

In his book Marriage Under Fire, Christian Conservative leader James C. Dobson conjures that with the advent of gay marriage, secular humanists might suggest, “group marriage? Or marriage between daddies and little girls? How about marriage between a man and his donkey?”

“What is happening in America is revolutionary,” Hedges writes, “A group of religious utopians, with the sympathy and support of tens of millions of Americans, are slowly dismantling democratic institutions to establish a religious tyranny, the springboard to an American fascism.” Hedges’ book chronicles the advent of credo quia absurdum in America—“I believe because it is absurd.”

The Evangelist war is as irrational as it is seductive. Absurdity becomes truth.
by Christopher Ross

What would you need to drag a steamboat over a mountain, deep in the jungle and miles from civilization? For such a serious undertaking, considerations of logistics—men, tools, weather, and luck—would be, ultimately, secondary. What would be needed is a person of vision with a stoic indifference to calamity and chaos. This person must possess self-confidence approaching that of a fool or a god. We find such a character in the film Fitzcarraldo, the protagonist drags a steamboat over a mountain, but only in order to accomplish his greater task of building an opera house in the center of the Peruvian jungle.

This man of vision and self-confidence also happens to intimately resemble Fitzcarraldo’s director, the inimitable Werner Herzog, who was celebrated by Chicago’s Gene Siskel Film Center in February with a ten-film series. The series included older films like Aguirre: Wrath of God, Lessons of Darkness, Fitzcarraldo, and The Mystery of Kasper Hauser as well as more recent films like Grizzly Man and The Wild Blue Wonder. Most of these films attest to Herzog’s inhuman dedication to producing films which bring characters and crew to the brink of disaster and death. Herzog has said, “If I had to climb into hell and wrestle the devil himself for one of my films, I would do it.” Watching Herzog’s films, you get the sense that the director and the devil must be well acquainted by now.

For example, to portray Fitzgerald transporting a steamboat over a mountain via Indian manpower and pulleys, Herzog actually dragged a steamboat over a mountain, in an absurd act of cinema verité. The production notes from Fitzcarraldo are extraordinary. While filming in Peru, a border war began with Ecuador. Soldiers burned the production camp to the ground. Then the crew found itself in the country’s worst drought in 65 years; the movie’s steamboat was stranded on a sandbank for two months. One crew member was paralyzed, another drowned, another cut his foot off with a chainsaw when he was bitten by a fatly poisonous snake.

Herzog’s films and Herzog the man have a way of accumulating fantastic stories, traded gleefully among Herzog fans. There is the story of Herzog walking on foot from Munich to Paris to visit a dying friend. There is the story of Herzog eating his own shoe after losing a bet (later made into a documentary, Werner Eats His Shoe). There is the story of Herzog being shot with an air rifle during a BBC interview and remarking afterwards, “It was not a significant bullet. I was not afraid.” Herzog and his films have acquired a mythical status. The moviegoer senses that Herzog revels in the myth, as a man who finds noble truths in fiction, not fact. Nowhere is this more visible than in Herzog’s documentaries, although you might hesitate to call them documentaries, exactly. Lessons of Darkness is composed of footage of Kuwaiti oil fields, set on fire by fleeing Iraqi forces. The film begins with a quotation of Blaire Pascal, a 17th century mathematician: “The collapse of the stellar universe will occur like creation—in grandiose splendor.”

The visual topic of Lessons is the grandiose spectacle of destruction: a birds-eye view pans over annihilated landscapes, lakes and rivers of oil, pillars of smoke reaching towards the sky. The narrative voice-over, however, never mentions Kuwait nor the political context. The opening Pascal quote, Herzog admits, was fabricated. Minutes into the film, viewers realize they are in for something far more sinister than the rote PBS or CNN documentary. Rather than factual history, the narrative offers a science-fiction portrayal of apocalypse. Oil workers become aliens in goggles and white body suits. Herzog intones in grand Biblical language the end of man, who has met a fate so awful, “even death flees from him.”

When questioned about the uniform blending of fact and fiction in his documentaries,

Herzog refers to a phrase he purportedly invented, “the ecstasy of truth.” In a Fresh Air interview with NPR’s Dave Davies, Herzog said, “I think cinema verité somehow doesn’t quite make a clear enough distinction between fact and truth—as if facts constituted truth. In great moments of cinema you are hit and struck by some sort of enlightenment, by something that illuminates you and it’s a deep form of truth. And I call it an ecstatic truth, the ecstasy of truth.”

Herzog often locates this ecstasy of truth at the tumultuous intersection of civilization and nature. His images, at their most
powerful, feature the stunning paradox of these elements. Point in fact: the multiple-ton steamboat shrugging up a mountainside, bordered by miles of jungle canopy. In *Aguirre, Wrath of God*, a companion movie to *Fitzcarraldo*, a band of Spanish conquistadors journey into the Amazonian jungle to find the lost city of gold, El Dorado. When the conquest falls apart, the wife of one of the explorers, in ornate dress, walks calmly into the jungle which swallows her silently. The mercurial actor Klaus Kinski plays the lead role in both these movies, embodying the terrifyingly lunacy which leads man to try to conquer nature.

Films such as *The Mystery of Kasper Hauser* and *Land of Silence and Darkness* feature the same conflict, in reverse: the uncivilized entering the civilized. *Kasper Hauser* follows the life of a young man, raised alone in a basement, then plopped in the middle of a town and left to fend for himself. *The Land of Silence and Darkness*, a documentary about a deaf-blind community, traces the efforts of people isolated from normal human communication and perception to penetrate the world around them. Part of the force of Herzog’s oeuvre is their timelessness—Herzog creates his own context. His works refuse categorization, each stamped with the intense personality of their creator. Herzog is often grouped with the New German cinema, which includes directors Wim Wenders and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who all sought to separate themselves from a decrepit and conservative German film industry. But there is little aesthetic commonality among them.

Herzog’s originality may stem from his hopscotch film education. With no formal film schooling, Herzog began making films at 17 and created his own film production company. He funded his own films by working the night shift at a steel factory. His advice to young filmmakers may inspire serious soul-searching for students in film school.

“Go out to where the real world is, go work as a bouncer in a nightclub, a warden in a lunatic asylum or in a slaughterhouse,” says Herzog in the *Herzog on Herzog*. “Real life, this is what’s vital. Work on your feet, learn languages, learn a craft or trade that has nothing to do with cinema.” Were he to start a film school, Hertzog says, the first requirement would be that applicants walk alone on foot from Madrid to Kiev, and then submit their journals, rather than resumes.
by Reid Singer

On January 31, Italy’s second largest newspaper, La Repubblica, published a front-page declaration by Veronica Lario, wife of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, demanding an apology for his behavior at a VIP party following the television awards show Telegratti. During dinner, Berlusconi made comments of a bold sexual character to the many women sitting near him, suggesting, in front of Lario, that were he a bachelor, he would escort all of them to the nearest hotel room with a large, circular bed.

Lario published her letter in La Repubblica rather than the newspaper’s national competitor Corriere della Sera. Many have read this as a deliberate slight, considering La Repubblica’s overt editorial slant against Berlusconi and his party, Forza Italia. The following day, La Repubblica published a second letter, this time written by Berlusconi, in which he expressed regret for his actions and professed utter loyalty to his wife (“Forgive me, I beg you.”)

Since the second letter was published, no new developments on Berlusconi’s comments at the dinner table conversation have surfaced, with one exception. A waiter who claims to have been working on the night’s conversation (translated into English by Diskord) while his name was confirmed by the catering company’s staff roster and he was reported to have been serving drinks to the section of the spread that included Berlusconi’s table, there is no way we could prove that this young man was telling the truth. He could have made it all up.

Claudia Rossi: How are your children?
Silvio Berlusconi: Very well.
Loredana Biaggi: I’ve been seeing your son Piersilvio on the magazine stands almost constantly.
Berlusconi: Really?
Sandrina Vernizzi: In GQ?
Biaggi: No, I think it Men’s Health Was it Men’s

Berlusconi: Yes it was. In September he spoke to reporters about his fitness regimen. Full ten-page spread about his stretching routine, as well as some commentary on a liquid diet that he does once a week. They took pictures of his blender. It was very thorough.

Biaggi: Charming!
Berlusconi: Indeed. I remember when that magazine was first available outside of America. I got a call from some people who wanted to do a photo-profile of myself and uh … Hugh Hefner.
Rossi: Really?
Biaggi: Oh, yes. They took pictures of us playing in a beach volleyball tournament on the Riviera. I was so much more vigorous in those days.

Lario: Don’t be silly, Silvio.
Berlusconi: You don’t understand. I used to be ripped. Seriously, I had an actual 8-pack going. I’d been working on my definition all summer and had some veins—

Biaggi: When was this…?

Biaggi: I see.

Berlusconi: I did beat our son Luigi in an arm-wrestling match last night.
Lario: He let you win, Silvio.

Berlusconi: No way. I whooped his ass. It was awesome. You ladies should have been there.

about now I’m actually thinking about swiping some Amaretto, ditching this thing and just finding someplace to just chill. I’ve got a Jacuzzi at my place where we could hone our mastery of the buddy system. Any takers? [slicks hair across the sides of his head, straightens tie. The table is silent.] Rock on. You take it easy, now.

[Berlusconi winks at Rossi and makes the “I’ll call you” gesture with his thumb and pinky finger.]

Berlusconi and Lario leave.}