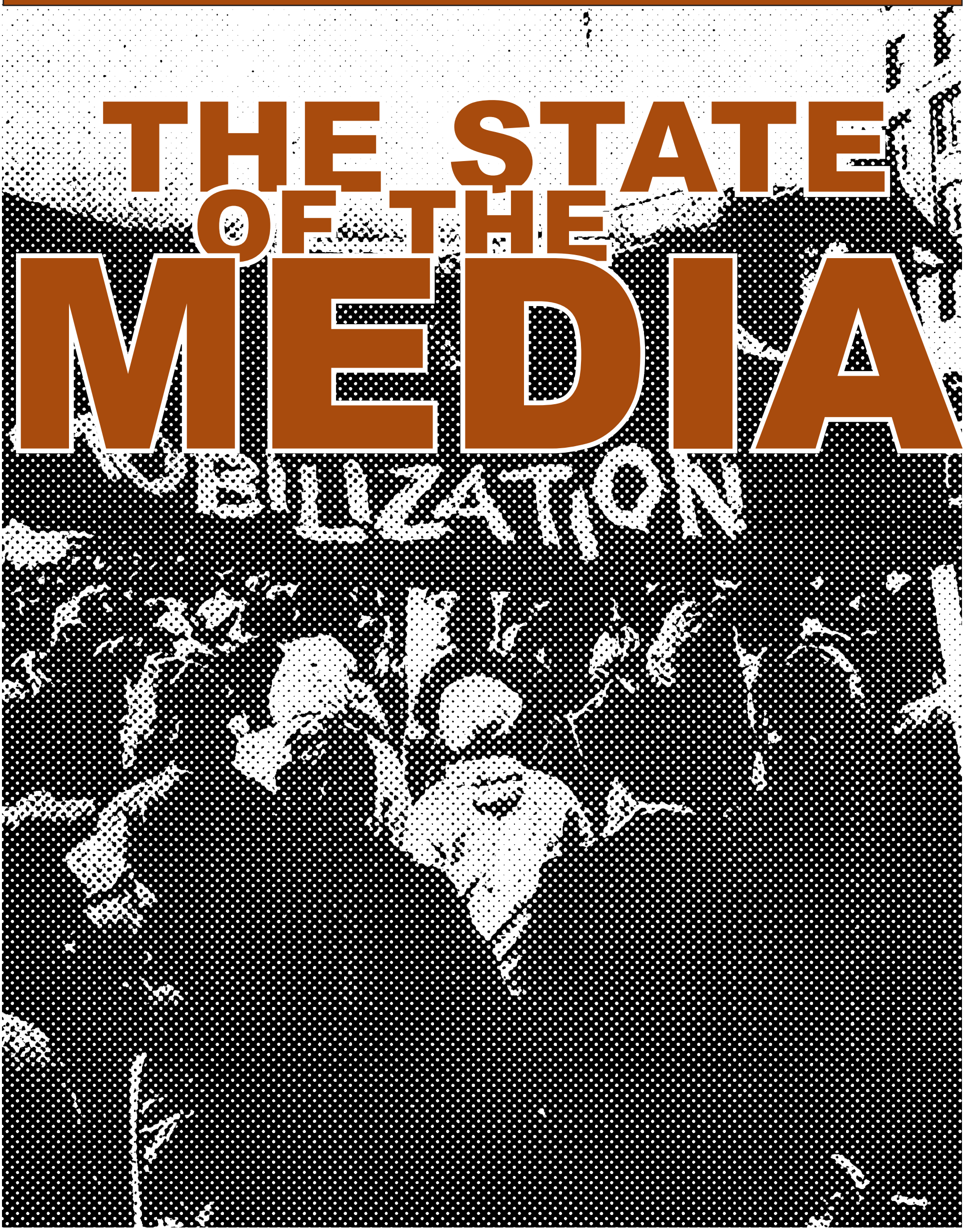
FREE

INDYPENDENT READER

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old ...

Winter 2009-10 Issue 13

THE STATE OF THE MEDIA



Indypendent Reader

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old …

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The ***Indypendent Reader*** is a quarterly newspaper that aims to serve marginalized communities in Baltimore through research, communication, and organizing. The project began as a collaboration between the Baltimore Independent Media Center and Campbaltimore Project and now includes many others. We encourage people to "become the media" by providing democratic access to available technologies and information. We seek to bring to light Baltimore's rich tradition of social and political activism. The primary goal of the project is not merely to produce a newspaper, but to start a collaborative project in which people dedicated to social justice in Baltimore can speak for themselves and continue to organize forums, workshops, and other events. These events disseminate ideas, build solidarity, and help promote and increase the reach of the paper itself.

The Indypendent Reader Editorial Group is autonomous.

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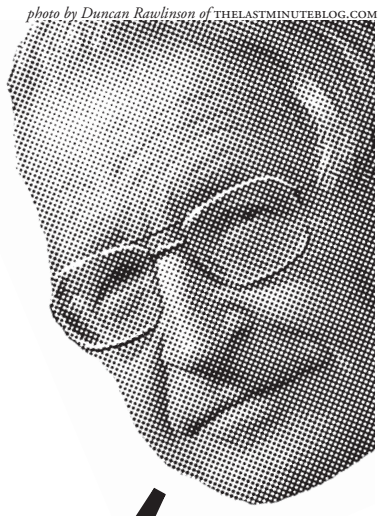


photo by Duncan Rawlinson of THELASTMINUTEBLOG.COM

that's Noam Chomsky

> The mass media are basically trying to divert people. Let them do something else, but don't bother the people who run the show. Let them get interested in professional sports, for example. Let everybody be crazed about professional sports or sex scandals or the personalities and their problems or something like that. Anything, as long as it isn't serious.

No matter what your political or ideological orientation might be, it's become increasingly difficult to ignore the "crisis" in the world of media. Newspapers are downsizing, magazines are going bust or ceasing print production in favor of a cheaper, but much less substantive online format, and every day there's yet another casualty in the bookstore world. You can't read an op-ed section any more without running into *somebody* waxing poetic about the "death of print," or lamenting the "end of journalism." Yeah, we're just going to go ahead and call bullshit on that. Welcome to the *Indypendent Reader*, one of the *many* sources for independent journalism that's doing just fine.

There's this thing that happens where people refer to "The Media" as a single, monolithic entity. I've fallen for that myself. And certainly, the past few decades have seen more than their share of media consolidation and mega-mergers. The world braced itself for a time when all the news came to us from a single source. That source would claim objectivity, obviously, but of course we would know better.

But then a funny thing happened: "The Media," as we know it, fell apart. Returns on advertisements fell as newspaper readership dropped, so the newspapers lost their money. More and more people started getting their news online, forgoing even television, and suddenly publishers and journalists alike began to lose their jobs.

But as the illusory monolith of The Media fades away, independent media grows. The rise of Indymedia, then blogs, and now Twitter are letting us tell our own stories as soon as they happen.

The myth of objectivity seems fallen by the wayside, as well: now, when you're reading an article, you *know* the author's biases, because as often as not they just come out and say them. And that's not a bad thing; so-called "objectivity" has given way to a new journalistic ethics, one that doesn't tell us we have to hide our politics, our opinions, our experiences behind an all-too-thin veneer of disengagement from the world around us.

Print, and journalism in general, aren't dying. They never will. What's happening is that they're changing. And not very comfortably or incrementally. We're in the midst of a revolution, it turns out. There are going to be a lot of false starts, of promising projects that just don't hold up in the modern world, but there are also going to be a lot of models that *do* work.

And if we're lucky, we're not going to settle on just one idea of what "The Media" ought to be. We're going to have thousands of ideas. Diversity is strength because a diverse system is more robust: when one component fails, it doesn't drag the entire system down.

What happened is that one element of modern journalism—the sale of advertisements—began to fail, and it brought down pretty much the entire thing. Whatever replaces the twentieth century model will be, by necessity, significantly more flexible.

But as long as there are printing presses, there will be print.

This issue of the *Indyreader* explores the history of the underground press in Baltimore and beyond, shedding light on the forerunners of the media revolution. We talk to *Baltimore Brew*, contemporary pioneers who are exploring how best to develop web-based journalism.

This issue also speaks to the ways in which the media we consume shapes our desires and our assumptions about the world. Because it does: by choosing what to include and what not to include (a decision necessary in any editorial process), journalists speak as definitively about what *isn't* news as much as what *is*.

And this is what independent media has always sought to rectify: we've always explored other points of view than those pushed by the mainstream press. Every time we publish a paper—or a blog post, for that matter—we're able to say that, for example, sex workers and drug dealers and violent protesters are actually people. We're able to challenge some of the basic premises that the mainstream world tries to slip past us, and we're able to show ourselves and others that we can and should challenge our system at its most fundamental level. That work has always been revolutionary.

And now, at last, we find ourselves free of the shadow of that impenetrable monolith, "The Media." And we've all got work to do.★

–Margaret Killjoy

photo by John Bylander

News in Brief

United Workers Launch Theatrical Campaign

by Ron Kipling Williams

On a sunny mid-afternoon on Wednesday, November 4, the United Workers (UW) performed a theatrical announcement at the Inner Harbor to kick off a major campaign for workers' rights.

The grassroots human rights organization declared the Inner Harbor a Human Rights Zone back on April 18, 2008. Since then they have been organizing workers to fight for a living wage, health care, and education training.

"The Inner Harbor has been built tremendously with tax breaks and subsidies that have created a poverty zone that is not talked about," said leadership organizer Ashley Hufnagel.

United Workers members performed a mock demonstration at General Sam Smith Park, located on Pratt and Light Streets (no one is allowed to formally demonstrate inside the Inner Harbor Proper), showing how the targeted businesses are treating their employees.

Companies like Phillips Seafood, which has locations in five cities, found the United Workers activities no laughing matter. This past summer, at a mandatory employee meeting, Phillips management told its workers that they would shut down the restaurant if they continued their organizing activities.

This was a response to the workers who had called for face-to-face meetings with the management and a six-month "cooling down" period in which workers promised to engage in dialogue rather than measures such as public protests and boycotts. The threat from Phillips did not deter the United Workers, a coalition of low-wage workers across racial and cultural lines who, only two years ago, battled the Maryland Stadium Authority and won their rights to a living wage.

"People need to wake up and stand for what's right," said leadership councilperson Ernest Lindsay. "It's not just my rights, it's our rights."

The promised six-month "cooling down" period ended in October of 2009, after which workers engaged in a four-day retreat to strategize about their next major campaign.

The result: Our Harbor Day 2010, which will take place on May 1, otherwise known as May Day—which has become, in many ways, a day of action. Through the theatrical presentation series, workers will reveal to the public their plans to secure human rights and dignity for all Inner Harbor employees.

To prepare for this, on January 16, 2010, a Justice Theater Conference will be held at the 2640 Space at 2640 St. Paul Street. The conference will take place over the course of the day and will include a series of workshops and discussions featuring works based on the concept of The Theater of the Oppressed, street theater, puppet making, and the battle of stories framework.

Nommo Theater, Class Lines, Theater Action Group, and Puppet Underground will serve as facilitators to prepare the United Workers for the play.

During the second week of December 2009, various low-wage workers plus forty members of the United Workers and several allies joined the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) on their Fair Foods Solidarity Tour.

The Baltimore delegation expressed their solidarity to CIW members. Farmworkers are sometimes forced to wait long unpaid hours before they're allowed to work the fields. The stadium workers of the United Workers understood this injury, as they often had to wait long unpaid hours before the stadium gates opened for them to work.

"Their struggle is our struggle," said Hufnagel, "It's all part of the same system that maintains poverty conditions."

On Human Rights Day, Thursday, December 10, 2009, the United Workers sent a letter to Cordish, the owner of the Power Plant, and to GGP, the owner of Harborplace and Gallery, to inform them of their demands.

"We are asking them to come to the table, face-to-face with the workers, for human rights violations," said Hufnagel, "We will see what the response will be."★

Media en Resistencia: Organizing and Independent Media in Honduras

by Laura Taylor

I can't help but smile remembering the frank instructions from members of the Honduran resistance upon my arrival in Tegucigalpa: "Stand between police and protesters. Hold your camera. Hope it might slow the rapidly advancing boots or raining blows. If it doesn't, run like hell."

After a narrow escape, sharing my water bottle with one of the protesters, he teased, "Solidarity here is very practical and urgent."

I don't speak with any particular expertise on the complexities of the Honduran resistance struggle since the military coup of June 28, but I am grateful for the chance to share some ongoing reflections on the power and the limitations of the tools of independent media in this struggle.

Being perceived as a member of the international press, I was often approached by people who would pull up their sleeve in order to show me bruises or scars caused by police repression, conveying their absolute faith in my ability to document, honor, and carry these stories. But what I saw in actual practice were organizers utilizing cell phone trees in order to communicate information to one another and concerts being performed in the streets to demonstrate that the resistance is unafraid. These and many other examples represent a far more powerful media than any certified document could hope to provoke, considering the lackluster international response to the crisis in Honduras. Media by and for the Honduran resistance creates a critical context for analyzing the six months of active demonstrations and helps create a network to channel anger into action.

Resistance-media establishes channels for sharing experiences and values, and provides a forum to coordinate movement around an issue. In Honduras, the need for these channels is literal and urgent, and the military dictatorship, understanding the power of this tool, has sought to maintain control of a population in revolt by closing Radio Globo and Canal 36, two prominent voices in resistance to the coup. The *Frente en Resistencia Del Golpe de Estado* (the Front in Resistance to the Coup in Honduras) has responded with creativity and tight organization, using internet streaming, cultural actions, and word of mouth to continue sharing information that is critical to logistical planning and to the safety of protesters. As media makers, we must principally be organizers and recognize that the paths we create to share our words and visions are also the infrastructure for the redistribution of the resources we fight for.

Members of the resistance describe the state's repressive response to popular demands for constitutional reform by saying, "The masks have come off."

The masks have fallen from the faces of the coup supporters, who have claimed to have acted in defense of democracy. This lie is unveiled when discovering the overwhelming police force, intimidation, and assassinations that have confronted the efforts of peaceful protesters who have simply tried to be better represented in the country.

Before his removal from power, Manuel Zelaya was not the popular hero of the resistance that the mainstream media portrayed, but rather took only a small step to create a process for constitutional reform as demanded by popular pressure. Media made by the resistance and allies maintained a focus on the demands underlying the call for constitutional reform such as land reform and workers' protections. And the resistance took a step towards creating a government that was relevant and responsive to the people's struggles, as evidenced by the more than 60 percent abstention they achieved in their boycott of the November elections. Media, by providing this critical context, have spurred participation in social organizations such as student groups and unions—thus creating space to recognize the common struggles they share—and a strong identification with the Frente, not as a homogenous group, but as a united front.

This infrastructure of resistance media is critical for sustaining the fight for structural change and representation that has been made impossible through the traditional electoral process by repressive and fraudulent elections. As media makers working in solidarity, we must continue to fight media sources—backed by the US government and its economic interests—that recognize these illegitimate elections and condone human rights abuses. Speaking from my perspective as part of the independent and international press, I believe that we sometimes wield the tools of the media via a position of privilege so that we can provide safety for those in active resistance. However, we must also continue to fight to change the relationships of power around those tools. For us to recognize the face of the common enemy we fight, we must hear the words and perspectives from the trenches of various struggles. Without media made by all sectors of the struggle, our strategy and understanding of what we are fighting against will be incomplete.★

A Beginning

by The Baltimore Free School

After a summer trial run at 2640 St. Paul Street, The Baltimore Free School opened its doors at our new location: 1323 N. Calvert. St., at the intersection of Mount Royal and Calvert.

This volunteer-run and community-funded project exists to provide a space where anyone can teach and anyone can learn for free. Conventional education is limited by the exchange of money, the need for "teachers" to have official certification, and arbitrary grading based on the false assumption that all people learn in the same way.

We believe education is too important to the health of any community to be constrained by these conditions, so we aim to find multiple routes towards educating ourselves and each other.

Since the doors opened in September, dozens of courses have been offered, including: To Be Tobacco Free, Taijiquan & Qigong, Introduction to Music Theory, Prisons and Political Repression, and Patternmaking for Clothing.

Our website provides a complete calendar of our courses and enables people to sign-up for classes, propose classes they wish to facilitate, and participate in online discussion forums.

We encourage instructors to explore alternative teaching models in their classrooms in order to empower people to start visioning their own educational futures.

For more information on how you can teach, learn, or become involved with the organizing, email: FREESCHOOL@REDEMMAS.ORG or visit HTTP://FREESCHOOL.REDEMMAS.ORG.★

"Their struggle is our struggle. It's all part of the same system that maintains poverty conditions."

MEDIA IS PROPAGANDA!

by E. McCarson

Even before the spike in popularity of online news sites, blogs, Facebook, and other social networking tools, print media in this country was already in a state of crisis, despite the fact that the prevalence of major newspapers and magazines might have indicated otherwise. While print media (newspapers in particular) seem to be slightly more substantive than television, even before the "crisis" the media was overwhelmingly narrow, limited in scope, monolithic in perspective, hollow, and dangerously propagandistic. In other words, it doesn't much matter to most Americans (or independent journalists, for that matter) that corporate-funded print media is declining since it was mostly propaganda anyway.[1]

"Propaganda for whom?" you might ask. It should come as no surprise that corporate-funded media acts as propaganda for the continued existence and dominance of corporations, in the form of pro-State and pro-industrial-economy premises. No matter how varied the articles are, nor how many of them "expose" City Hall, the aggregate message of every major newspaper and magazine is that whatever helps the industrial economy is good and whatever doesn't is bad. Even "liberal" newspapers start with the premise that the State should exist, especially in its current late-capitalist form, and that all arguments should be concerned with how to make the economy "grow." All arguments about whether or not the economy should grow, or whether it should even exist at all, are either omitted or roundly rejected.

Furthermore, this slant holds true not just for editorial sections of newspapers and magazines but for their entire content. In fact, the propaganda is even heavier in the "news" sections because in these sections the premises are more covert. The primary goal of truly effective propaganda, it must be pointed out, is not to hit people over the head with messages, but rather to slip them by in the form of hidden premises that people come to take for granted as true.

Think about every article about the police that you've ever read in a major newspaper. The article may include views that question the actions of the police department in a certain community, or the tactics of a particular officer in one situation or another, but the underlying premise is always that the police department should exist, and should enforce certain laws, and should be involved in every community, everywhere. Thus, even a question such as "What kind of policing is working best to lower Baltimore's homicide rate?" contains the following hidden premises: one, the police department should exist; two, the police department is the only entity that can lower the homicide rate; three, the police department has been responsible for lowering the homicide rate in the past; and four, people in power want the homicide rate to decrease.[2]

By hiding these premises as givens, the editors of major papers and magazines are allowed to shape the framework so that even when allowing for so-called "dissent," the same pro-State, pro-economy message resounds. The more variance the opinions have while still remaining in this box, the more effective the propaganda becomes. The goal of the propagandist is to have the receiver perceive choice—to have her perceive that a wide range of topics is being covered—while she eventually comes to adopt the major premises, hidden in all of the "varied" topics as givens.

Joseph Goebbels, Propaganda Minister for the Third Reich, understood completely the use of subtlety to indoctrinate a mass of people with ideological messages. He disliked the portrayal of Hitler in movies, for example, because he thought the glorification of the *führer* was too obvious and blunt. His preferred tactic was to bury premises in lighter, more entertaining, more seemingly "moderate" scenes and situations. He justified this technique to other members of the Nazi high command by insisting that "even entertainment can be politically of special value, because the moment a person is conscious of propaganda, propaganda becomes ineffective. However, as soon as propaganda as a tendency, as an attitude, remains in the background … then propaganda becomes effective in every respect."[3] Goebbels also believed that propaganda should, when possible, reinforce what people already think so that the messages seem natural or self-evident to the viewer.

To provide some examples of how this technique is used all the time in our own media, I skimmed through the headlines of some newspapers and magazines (both "liberal" and "conservative" ones) at random and made a list of all the premises that they imply (although I'm sure you can come up with others I missed). I've listed them here, first the headline and then the corresponding premises:

Treasury Weighs Hard Choices To Save Banks: Any Path Carries Risk of Failure (*The Washington Post*)
- The banks deserve to be saved
- Saving the banks would be a "success"
- The decision over whether or not to save the banks did not need any heavy consideration

How to Make Terrorists Talk: With the U.S. scrapping harsh interrogation techniques like waterboarding, interviews with former interrogators reveal why a soft touch can work better than torture (*Time*)
- There are people who are rightly classified as "terrorists" who must be made to talk
- Making the terrorists "talk" is beneficial to us
- The government has the right to detain people without cause or trial
- Torture is working (note how it reads: a soft touch can work *better* than torture)

Are Stocks Still Good for the Long Run? (*Time*)
- Stocks were good for the "long run" at some point
- The economy is sustainable enough to have a "long run"
- The economy (and specifically Wall Street) should exist

Environmental Politics: Tree-huggers v. nerds[4] (*The Economist*)
- Environmentalism is a ridiculous notion
- Environmentalists should not be taken seriously
- Using derisive epithets for people who don't share the mainstream dominant culture's values (i.e. industrial capitalism, consumerism, the legitimacy of the federal government) is acceptable
- There are little or no nuances between the views of environmentalists—they're easily compartmentalized into two main (derogatory) categories

Why We Must Ration Health Care (*The New York Times*)
- There exists a "we" that is comprised of a group of people, including the reader, which has the power to influence the decision on how health care services are distributed
- There is currently not enough "health care" to go around
- The previous premise restated: it is inevitable and thus acceptable that there will always be people who are not insured or under-insured in our society

FDA gets new powers to improve drug safety (*The Baltimore Sun*)
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), by extension of the US government, should exist
- The FDA has kept drugs safe in the past
- The FDA's approval is a good indicator of the safety of a certain food or drug
- It is logical and acceptable that certain drugs are deemed legal and "safe" by the government while others are not

While these observations may seem trite or over-sensitive, remember that the point of good propaganda, as defined by Goebbels (and who would be more qualified to do so?) is to hide ideological messages in seemingly mundane, everyday, non-confrontational scenes and situations. It's worth noting that I only used the headlines; the bodies of articles contain even more messages that subtly reinforce conventional, pro-economy "wisdom." The list above is only a random sampling. I could make a whole book if I spent time collecting all the ones I found, even over such a short period—and I didn't even include ads (over half the content of most publications these days is reserved for advertising) in my search.[5]

In the future, when you're reading a newspaper or magazine, try to employ this same practice with the headlines and articles you read. Ask yourself: "What are the hidden premises that I must accept before buying the article's content?" If you're having trouble determining the hidden premises, don't worry; that's the whole point of hiding premises. Some of the headlines I found above took me a while to analyze because at first they seem downright mundane, or, in the case of the third one listed above, they even seem to be "hard-hitting" investigative journalism—that is, they seem to be asking tough questions and challenging commonly-held beliefs. When someone reads "Are Stocks Still Good for the Long Run?" she may guess that the author of said article is courageously attacking the culture of Wall Street, but in fact the hidden premises of the headline are secretly working to instill in the reader the mainstream view that Wall Street must be preserved. It must be pointed out that the article in question does not contain a discussion about whether Wall Street should be abolished, but rather a comparison between the yields of stocks and other kinds of investment products, such as bonds and mutual funds. So what is the conclusion of the article? "Stocks are still the best investment for the long run." How revolutionary.[6]

Even "liberal" newspapers start with the premise that the State should exist, especially in its current late-capitalist form, and that all arguments should be concerned with how to make the economy "grow."

My point is not that no one should read any newspapers or magazines, ever. However, looking for unstated premises and questioning them would be a good tool to employ when reading mainstream—or any—news. Remember that all journalism is propaganda of some kind. I also want to make it clear that I'm not claiming that every writer for every major newspaper or magazine is a pro-corporate propagandist with dubious character or intent. While there were (and are) great writers out there, it's the overall combined message of each publication that produces the propagandistic effect (and indeed, in the eyes of the editorial board, letting a few unconventional or critical articles "sneak by" serves as a convenient and effective smoke screen, allowing them to claim that a wide array of views are being presented).

Therefore, despite the gloomy reports coming from this same corporate-funded media about its own demise, the current trend is not something to bemoan, since most print media was in large part not only already inadequate but dangerously deceptive. Hopefully the future of media will see a prevalence of small, independent, locally-produced websites, papers, magazines, and discussion groups that allow good writers, especially those who have been fired by major corporate media outlets, to continue their work and attempt to teach people how to think critically and, above all, strip themselves of the indoctrination with which they're constantly bombarded on a daily basis. I ask you to heed the words of Robert Combs, a professor at the University of South Carolina, in his work *Vision of the Voyage*: "Unquestioned beliefs are the real authorities of a culture." ✯

Endnotes

1 I say "mostly" because there are always those journalists who are the exception and do really great investigative and substantive work, and I don't mean to offend them or belittle their incredible efforts.

2 For a fully elaborated argument on why the government really doesn't want to reduce crime, read *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison* by Jeffrey Reiman.

3 *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* by David Welch.

4 I assure you I'm not making this headline up.

5 *Newsweek* was among the better publications I researched in terms of journalistic integrity—but of course, if you count the ads, it's just as bad as the rest. The same goes for local reporting in *The Sun.*

6 "Are Stocks Still Good for the Long Run?" by Justin Fox, in the June 15, 2009 issue of *Time*.

The Baltimore Brew

baltimorebrew.com

free-photo-gallery.org

One independent news source to another: our Eric Imhof has interviewed Fern Shen, creator of *The Baltimore Brew*. Partly a response to how large newspapers are laying off more and more staff, *The Brew* is an attempt to answer the question of what local journalism will look like in the 21st century.

Eric: *How did you start your project and what were the main motivating conceptual ideas?*

Fern: I inherited the idea of creating a local news website for Baltimore from a friend, Doug Birch, a former Baltimore Sun reporter who is now the Moscow Bureau Chief for the Associated Press.

The initial scale of *Baltimore Brew* isn't as big and broad as Doug's original "Baltimore Bulldog" idea, but a lot of the basic concepts are the same. Great reporting, writing, and multi-media by professional journalists complemented by diverse and robust participation in the site by plugged-in site-users from the community—those two themes are perhaps the heart of this project.

The Brew is dedicated to becoming a next-generation hub for news, commentary, and information, a place where everyone can come together around common goals: improving and enjoying the city, and holding public officials accountable. *The Brew* will be a place for everything that rudderless, cash-strapped newspapers have jettisoned: context, wit, analysis, feisty investigations, stylish writing, and thorough reporting.

I liked this idea and was well situated to pursue it. I had just taken a buyout from *The Washington Post* after 17 years there. There ought be a way, I thought, to do something about the collapse of newspapers and local news reporting besides moaning and pontificating about it. The need for alternatives seemed pretty clear. With the *Sun* (like just about every other US paper) losing revenue and eyeballs to the Internet and shrinking in size and ambition, this town had become glutted with great uncovered stories and incredibly talented journalists who want to keep doing the work they love. At the same time, the web was making it possible for so many grassroots voices to be heard: small neighborhood blogs, crime blogs, public school teachers keeping online diaries of their experiences, Facebook pages for all sorts of causes. There ought to be a way to bring all these cool content producers together. And maybe even find a business model to support them.

So I started thinking about how to do it and what it might be called and how it might look. I looked all over the Internet at other local news websites and I got a fellowship to do a kind of New Media boot camp at UC Berkeley. I went onto Wordpress and started tinkering around, eventually hiring some folks to help me come up with a design. And I talked about it with everyone who would listen.

Eric: *What kind of people submit writing to your site, and how do you collect posts?*

Fern: So far, many of the regular contributors have been journalists who worked originally for newspapers, people like Joan Jacobson, Mark Reutter, Heather Dewar, Doug Donovan, Melody Simmons, and Ann LoLordo. Jennifer Bishop, the former *City Paper* photographer, has been writing and shooting photos for *The Brew*. We've had pieces from Tom Horton, Rafael Alvarez, and Mark Hyman. But we've also reached out to non-journalists with special expertise, like Gerry Neily, a former transportation planner for Baltimore city who has had his own blog and is now a prolific *Brew* writer covering transit, transportation, and urban planning. Jada Fletcher's day job is with the city government, but for us she writes about how to find bargains on stylish clothing and other items you might want and be able to afford. The people who write for us are either people I know or folks who have sought me out because they've heard of *The Brew* and like what we're doing. They email me their posts or sometimes post directly to the site. I write a fair number of items myself, some based on reporting, some more on linkage.

Eric: *How do you advertise your site to otherwise un-knowing readers?*

Fern: A lot has been word of mouth—we haven't really done the big push yet to publicize the site, so it boggles my mind to see how many people have heard of us and read us regularly. Our publicity campaign so far has been limited to some emailing and Facebooking. We've gotten some publicity from press coverage about *The Brew* in various places: *City Paper*, *Baltimore Business Journal*, *Urbanite*. Likewise, when our writers are interviewed on their topics (like, when Mark Reuter goes on WYPR to talk about Sparrows Point pollution, for example) or when *The Baltimore Sun* or other mainstream media link to us, we get some traffic spiking off of that.

Eric: *How big do you want your project to get, and what do you see as the short-term future for both your site and others like it?*

Fern: Well, if you want me to fantasize, I can do that…. It would be great to have a big staff of smart, well-sourced, full-time, salaried writers on lots of topics, not just traditional news but also culture and the arts. Also, multimedia people to really integrate video, audio, and photography into the site and others who can help with some smart aggregation. Having a vast and diverse network of community contributors from across Baltimore's neighborhoods would also be terrific: *The Brew* aims to be a sort of digital town square, wailing wall, and guerilla theater for Baltimore.

We're going to be advertising-supported so, another part of the fantasy is a vast staff to bring in ad revenue, including hyperlocal ads, from mom-and-pop drycleaners and other small businesses.

What else? Partnerships with some other media and with academia. Community outreach to ensure that our reporting and readership really reflect the whole city, including those without access to computers. But all that is pretty blue-sky. I'll be happy when, in the next few months, we get the wheels turning on just a few of these ideas: some ads coming in and some money going to support these hard-working contributors, for starters. The design tweaks we've been working on are going to help us get started taking the Brew to the next level.

I actually feel the short-term future for sites like ours is pretty bright. There may be some Darwinian weeding-out eventually—the quest for a business model is a life-and-death one. Still, I think we're all going to be feasting for a while on the starved public's appetite for local reporting and on small businesses' need for affordable, effective advertising that reaches their customers in the place where they increasingly "live" now, the internet.

Eric: *Are there any drawbacks to this kind of site, as opposed to say, a "regular" newspaper?*

Fern: The obvious drawback is in resources. Newspapers are ailing and failing but they're still paying people a full-time salary to report the news. News websites and bloggers can't compete with that. What we have going for us is that we're nimble and freer, able to jettison some journalistic conventions and retain others. We can weave some point-of-view and edge into our writing, experiment, crusade a bit. That freedom to poke around is what you need to find the magic formula, the kind of local news media model that has a chance of enduring.✯

"There ought be a way, I thought, to do something about the collapse of newspapers and local news reporting besides moaning and pontificating about it."

a brief history of the activists and publications that made the Indypendent Reader *possible*

From Underground Press to Indymedia

by Charles D'Adamo

Early Historical and Political Context: 1967–1973

The time period between the late 1960s and the early 1970s was a high point for the protest movements in the US. Many radical movements and projects were started during this time. Several of these projects were media-based: newspapers, pamphlets, fliers, and other print materials helped independent and underground groups circulate news, ideas, and updates about events.

The Students for a Democratic Society reached its height in 1968 with 350 chapters and possibly 100,000 members or adherents.[1] It then disintegrated into the Progressive Labor Party and Weather Underground factions in 1969. The "Battle of Chicago" occurred when police rioted on protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers was founded in Detroit in 1969. In that same year, Black Panther leader Fred Hampton was murdered by government agents in his Chicago apartment, part of a wide-spread US government attack on radical activists. The radical feminist group RedStockings was founded in New York City. The Stonewall Rebellion of gays and lesbians against police raids in New York City occurred. The Altamont and Woodstock rock music festivals took place. Huge demonstrations against the US government's war on Vietnam's National Liberation Front took place in Washington DC.

Outside the US, 10 million workers and students struck in France in May and June of 1968. Hundreds of students and other protesters were massacred in Mexico City in October, 1968 (exact number is still controversial). Workers struck during the "Hot Autumn" in Italy—massive strikes with over 440 million hours struck from late 1969 into 1970. The election of the socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile occured in 1970; a brutal military coup ended Allende's regime on September 11, 1973. The US government pulled its troops out of South Vietnam in 1973, though the war continued until the mid 1970s.

"The Underground Press"

These years, roughly 1967–1973, were when the so-called "underground press" thrived. In the United States, there have been times when the number of social critical periodicals was extensive. In 1912, there were 323 socialist newspapers or magazines, many published in foreign languages.[2] And by the end of World War II there were about 200 African-American newspapers. However, the Red Scare of 1919–1920 and the Cold War put a chill on radical sentiment in print.

During the early part of the 1960s, only a handful of stable independent periodicals, all with limited circulation, including *The Guardian*, *I.F.Stone's Bi-Weekly*, *Monthly Review*, *Liberation*, *The Nation*, *New Politics*, and *The Progressive*, were documenting events and analyzing them from a left perspective. But, by 1969, the world of radical periodicals had expanded. This was partly a result of developments in offset printing technology. It became easier for a group of self-organized radicals to write, edit, and produce colorful tabloids. These "underground press" papers would be more accurately described as radical and bohemian since the offices were public.

These radical weeklies and bi-weeklies included Atlanta's *Great Speckled Bird*, the *Ann Arbor Sun*, the *Portland Scribe*, New Orleans's *Nola Express*, the *Berkeley Barb*, the *Chicago Seed*, the *DC Gazette, East Village Other,* and Baltimore's *Harry* and *Dragonseed*. By 1971, there were estimated to be between 400 and 800 underground newspapers with a readership ranging from 2 million (according to *Newsweek*) to 30 million people (according to the Underground Press Syndicate). The Liberation News Service had 600 regular subscribers.[3]

These newspapers are now gone. This decline is partly related to the waning of the 1960s movements and the lack of development of institution-building skills, but also to the 1973 decision of the Underground Press Syndicate to be open to advertising in member newspapers, changing its name at the same time to the Alternative Press Syndicate. The character of alternative publishing changed. So, instead of radical papers like the *Great Speckled Bird*—one of the best "underground" weeklies—today, we have entertainment weeklies like *The City Paper*.

However, microfilm collections of these newspapers still exist, as well as print copies in library archives. University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) has many, as its Special Collections department houses the Alternative Press Center collection.

Baltimore's Harry and Dragonseed

Harry was published out of 233 E. 25th Street and later 30 E. Lanvale Street from 1969 to 1971. Its subtitle was "Serving the Baltimore Underground Community." Conceived at Woodstock by Michael Carliner, who knew of underground papers elsewhere, the original group included PJ O'Rourke, who also joined the *East Village Other,* Art Levine, and Tom D'Antoni. Tabloid in format with news articles in front and culture pieces and a community calendar toward the end, *Harry* subscribed to Liberation News Service, College Press Service, and Underground Press Syndicate.

If you review the 1971 issues in UMBC's Special Collections, you'll find articles by William Kunstler on the trials of Baltimore Black Panthers and their lawyer Arthur Turco, an interview with Panther Paul Coates, now publisher of Black Classics Press, an article on the conviction of Marshall Eddie Conway, who remains unjustly imprisoned 38 years later, reports on the US bombing of Laos and related protests, an article on the Winter Soldier investigation in which veterans testified to war crimes in Vietnam, an article on the Philip Berrigan case in which this pacifist former priest was absurdly accused of trying to kidnap Henry Kissinger and blow-up heat tunnels in DC, articles on the 1971 May Day protests in which thousands were arrested protesting the war, a how-to piece on disabling wiretaps, and an article exposing the role of the Goldseker real estate company in selling houses to blacks with up to an 80 percent mark-up.

Harry also published an article by a *Sunpapers* reporter, Nellie Bly, concerned that the *Morning Sun* would be merged with the *Evening Sun*. "That would probably be the end," she said, the *Sun* would go the way of "journalism in the US, littered on the bones of good newspapers like the *New York Herald Tribune*." This was 37 years ago; by 2003 only five corporations owned 85% of US media resources. Unfortunately, *The Sun* has continued its decline.

You can also find in Kuhn Library another Baltimore underground paper—*Dragonseed*. This was published at 1623 Bellona Avenue. Its contributors included peace activist Dave Everhardt, and Bob Goren—who later helped found *The Plain Talker* in 1975, an activist monthly newspaper. But most of the bylines in *Dragonseed* were simply first names or *noms de plume*. The coverage here was a bit more community-based than *Harry;* you find articles on farm workers boycotts, utility rate hikes, the Baltimore Experimental High School, but also Watergate, the 1972 protests at the RNC, and the campaign of George McGovern.

But there is also interesting material about *Harry* being infiltrated by the BCPD "Red Squad."[4] These stories concern *Harry* photographer Glenn Barry Ehasz, who was close to Tom D'Antoni (a contributor to *Harry*—a recent *City Paper* article on D'Antoni does not review this case). Ehasz was discovered as a police agent during the "Freeman Trial." Apparently, Ehasz infiltrated the Peace Action Center, the Baltimore Defense Committee, and the Vietnam War Moratorium organizing committee. This was quite a situation for radical editor D'Antoni to be in. D'Antoni wrote in *Harry* that "Ehasz's photography, writing, and car were effectively subsidized by BCPD" as if by way of justification for *Harry*'s work. However, *Dragonseed* wrote: "Don't talk to grand juries. Don't talk to the FBI. Don't talk to *Harry*!"

While the papers from the 1960s and '70s are gone, left analytical journals continued to publish and the work of their writers has influenced a new generation which came of age in the 1990s. From the radical caucuses in the 1960s academia sprang *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, *Insurgent Sociologist*, *Feminist Studies*, *New Political Science*, *Radical History Review*, and *Review of Radical Political Economics*. While 1960s activists tended to refer their critique to "The System" or "Advanced Industrial Society," relying as they did on maverick scholars, like C. Wright Mills (who wrote under the pressure of the conservative 1950s), activists in today's alternative globalization movement, regardless of tendency, clearly see the "system" as capitalist. While left academics have been criticized from the Left for becoming academics—rather than public intellectuals—their teaching of radical texts has likely had influence on many students activists.

Independent Media Centers and the Indy Reader

The first Independent Media Center (IMC) was founded to report on the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999. This first IMC created an environment for independent media makers of all types (audio, video, print, and internet) to work together covering the protests in a democratic and collaborative manner. It took three months for the Seattle IMC to get organized to provide grassroots coverage of the "Battle of Seattle." Open-source software was used to develop the Indymedia website. It turns out that this was the beginning of a global independent media movement which focuses on reporting on the world-wide struggle against neoliberal capitalism and a range of local issues. There are now more than 170 IMCs around the world. A half million to two million hits per day are logged, according to INDYMEDIA.ORG.[5] The film *"i"* gives a sense of both the global and participatory nature of this media movement as it focuses on Buenos Aires, Argentina, but also visits IMC collectives in New York City and Genoa, Italy.[6]

While direct action protesters were battling with police in Seattle in November of 1999, Baltimore activists organized a solidarity protest of 250 people across from the World Trade Center on Pratt Street. A subset of these protesters later got organized to form Baltimore Indymedia. They were Wobblies, art students, nonviolent peace activists, Greens, and New Leftists. Baltimore Indymedia's website launched in July of 2001 with an account of the 60-day Up-To-Date Laundry strike. Besides local coverage focusing on labor and community struggles, Baltimore IMC has written on the activities in the streets at national protests against the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Iraq War, and Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, in Washington DC, New York City, and Miami.

Like other IMCs, Baltimore Indymedia has recently slipped into a lower level of activity. However, in 2006 Baltimore Indymedia joined with the artist-activist group Camp-Baltimore to launch the *Indypendent Reader*, now in its fourth year of print publication. Its more nationally-oriented solidarity publication in New York City, *The Indypendent*, is approaching its 150th issue.

In a sense, the current Indymedia movement is like the radical weeklies of the 1960s and '70s. Both are or were urban-based. Both have or had high levels of activist involvement. Both report or reported the advocacy of radical social change. Both express or expressed a commitment to independence and free speech. Both were partly enabled by technical innovation in media production. The IMCs, being internet-based, are less costly. However, *The Indypendent* and the *Indypendent Reader* demonstrate the crucial value of print newspapers for radical activism. They also indicate a connection between the 1960s radical weeklies and the IMCs—one which notes the social movement-alternative media connection: broad-based left libertarian politics connecting with a similar media movement.✯

Endnotes

1 Kirkpatrick Sale. "Students for a Democratic Society" in Buhle, Mari Jo, Paul Buhle, Dan Georgakas (editors). *Encyclopedia of the American Left*. University of Illinois Press, 1990, p757.

2 James Weinstein. *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925*. New York: Vintage Books, 1969, pp 84-93.

3 Bob Ostertag. *People's Movements, People's Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements*. Beacon Press: 2006, p 120.

4 More on the red squads can be found in "Political Surveillance in Second-Tier Cities," a chapter of *Protectors of Privilege*, by Frank Donner. In that chapter, he writes about Baltimore under Police Commissioner Donald Pomerleau. Baltimore's red squad was formed on July 1, 1966 when Pomerleau was appointed commissioner, and it was formally known as the intelligence section of the Inspectional Services Division (ISD).

5 Quoted in *Extra!*, July 2009, p 13.

6 *"i": Argentina, Indymedia, and the Questions of Communication*. Directed by Andres Ingoglia and Raphael Lyon. 2006.

A SHORT GUIDE TO BALTIMORE UNDERGROUND NEWSPAPERS 1968-1970

BY JOHN DUDA

This is a very subjective overview of one of the most productive two-year slices in the history of the Baltimore underground press, as represented by the four newspapers included in the Underground Press Syndicate's microfilm collection, produced in 1973. As Chuck D'Adamo notes elsewhere in this issue, the Alternative Press Center's archives, housed at UMBC, make it possible to fairly easily dive much deeper into the history of underground newspapers in the area and beyond. For the casual investigator, however, the UPS microfilm collection is a much easier place to start—in addition to the copies held at most university libraries in the area, the periodicals department at the Enoch Pratt Free Library makes this available for easy consultation by the general public.

The 68 rolls of microfilm in the UPS collection cover an amazing range of underground print projects drawn from the entire globe. Of the hundreds of newspapers in the collection, four were produced right here in Baltimore—*Peace and Freedom News*, the *Baltimore Free Press*, *Harry*, and *Women*. While not every issue of all of these papers made it onto the microfilm rolls, and while some underground papers (like *Dragonseed*) are entirely missing, what *is* there is a pretty amazing four-decades-old time capsule from Baltimore's countercultural left.

PEACE AND FREEDOM NEWS

Microfilm Roll #12, 4/1968,5/1968,6/1968, 8/1968

Peace and Freedom News was Baltimore's first underground newspaper, and was firmly rooted in the activist counterculture opposing the Vietnam War. It was published out of the "Peace Action Center" (at 2525 Maryland), a center for anti-war organizing and draft resistance supported by the Baltimore radical community through a voluntary "peace tax" graduated according to income. The issues present in the collection explore some of the most interesting issues of the day. For instance, the April 25 issue deals in depth with the wave of urban rioting that had rocked the US starting in the mid-1960s, and which came to Baltimore in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. earlier that month. Articles include an extended photo essay on the riots in Baltimore and a review of the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the "Kerner report"). The May 23 issue came out just six days after the famous anti-war civil disobedience action at the draft board in Catonsville, and featured extended coverage both of the action itself and the larger struggles against conscription and militarism.

Besides the revealing radical perspectives on these and other well-known historical events, the paper (along with the two other locally focused Baltimore underground papers discussed here, the *Baltimore Free Press* and *Harry*) includes a wealth of incidental detail which allows today's reader to get a sense for the historical geography of Baltimore resistance and subversion. In addition to the Peace Action Center, the New Era Bookshop (at 408 Park) features prominently in the accounts of day-to-day organizing and political education. The May 23 issue includes owner Bob Lee's account of the *second* right-wing attack on the shop. A thriving network of countercultural stores and coffeehouses, largely in either Mt. Vernon or in the area around 25th St. in what today we'd call lower Charles Village, seemed to make up the bulk of the paper's advertisers. In particular, the "Crack of Doom" coffeehouse (at 103½ 22nd St.) was teeming with everything from political lectures to poetry to avant-garde film.

BALTIMORE FREE PRESS

Microfilm Roll #5, 5/31/1968, 10/1/1968, 10/11/1968

The Baltimore Free Press (BFP) picked up basically where *Peace and Freedom News* left off, proclaiming itself in the masthead as "Baltimore's Remaining Underground Newspaper." *BFP* was a part of the "Liberation News Service", a radical left Associated Press of sorts, launched in 1967, that distributed articles and photographs to and between different underground presses in the US. In style and content, the *Baltimore Free Press* was pretty close to *Peace and Freedom News*—with articles exploring post-riot Baltimore racial politics, the Black Panther Party, and the Catonsville 9. Besides drawing on the counterculture for the advertising revenue needed for keeping the paper afloat, the *BFP* seemed to include more content devoted to underground arts and culture. A large article exploring the work of Beat author and drug fiend William S. Burroughs appears in one issue, alongside the "Silver Screen" column penned by none other than local film hero John Waters.

HARRY

Microfilm Rolls #36 and #57, 22 issues in total from 1969-1970 with a few gaps.

Harry is easily the best-represented paper out of Baltimore in the UPS's microfilm collection, and in many ways, the most interesting. *Harry,* subtitled "Baltimore's Underground Journal" and published by Atlantis Publishing out of an office at 233 E. 25th St., was decidedly a countercultural paper first and foremost, with a heavy focus on the psychedelic underground of Baltimore arts and culture. In the first issue, in 1969, we get coverage of the first annual Read Street Fun Festival—a miniature Woodstock of sorts in Mt. Vernon. A regular film column ran alongside many music articles, like the January 22, 1970 article which sought to define the "Baltimore Sound" in the small but apparently thriving independent local music scene: "you take a bunch of kids born in the '40s and early '50s, shovel the Supremes, the Dells, Otis, Aretha, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson, and all the others down their throats for 10 to 15 years, then turn them on to psychedelia, dope, meditation, folk, blues, rock, and all the other hippie paraphernalia, give it a couple of years to get together, and you get a very strange mixture of music. Hard driving drums, follow the bouncing ball bass, screaming guitars driven by a wall of amplifiers and a desire to feel music instead of just hear it—1,000-2,000 watts who cares, turn it up, more, more…." Many issues featured a full-page comic from Gilbert Shelton's "Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers." And the back page of the newspaper, "Nothing Ever Happens in Baltimore", was a comprehensive guide to the next two weeks of underground culture. It's here that we start to see the transition between "underground newspaper" and "alternative weekly" taking shape—overall, reading back through *Harry* one gets the sense that this was much less the unofficial paper of record for a social movement than *P&FN* or the *BFP.* Or rather that is was that, but also something else, the beginning of a guide to commodify your dissent, as Tom Frank so aptly put it. Hence the slick ads for movies and music produced by large studios and record companies which appear in Harry's pages—the counterculture was becoming less of a threat to capitalism and more of a way to cash in on youth disaffection.

That's not to say that everyone involved with *Harry* was an opportunist excited by the fun of the underground lifestyle getting their journalistic feet wet before moving on to more profitable pursuits in the culture industry—like for instance P.J. O'Rourke, who worked with the paper before turning away from left-wing politics and metamorphosing into a court jester for the libertarian Right. (Or, for that matter, a police infiltrator, as Chuck D'Adamo details elsewhere TK!) The same radical political projects and spaces that appear in the pages of the first two papers discussed appear again in *Harry*, along side new ones—like the February 5, 1970 announcement of the Baltimore Free University (a kind of community extension at Johns Hopkins run by radicals). The paper covers the "Balto Cong," a Maoist/national liberation youth direct action brigade. Sadly, the only overview of just what the Balto Cong was I could find was O'Rourke's self-serving and deeply dismissive account in his *Give War a Chance*. The paper printed dispatches from Baltimore Black Panther Party Lieutenant of Information Chaka Masai, covered the April 1970 anti-war actions at Johns Hopkins (in which Homewood House was surrounded by demonstrators), provided first-hand testimony of the May 1970 Flower Mart police riot when *Harry* reporter Tom D'Antoni got swept up the mass arrests made in Mt. Vernon place. And prominent draft resister Dave Eberhardt (one of the Baltimore Four) was a frequent contributor. A special insert from the "Baltimore Ecology Center" outlined a nascent program of environmentalism. So despite the contradictions, *Harry's* relatively long run and broad focus makes it an invaluable piece of the historical record for anyone curious about social movements in Baltimore during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

WOMEN

Microfilm Rolls #68 (the Pratt online finding aid is wrong!), First six issues 1.1 (Fall 1969) through 2.2 (Winter 1970).

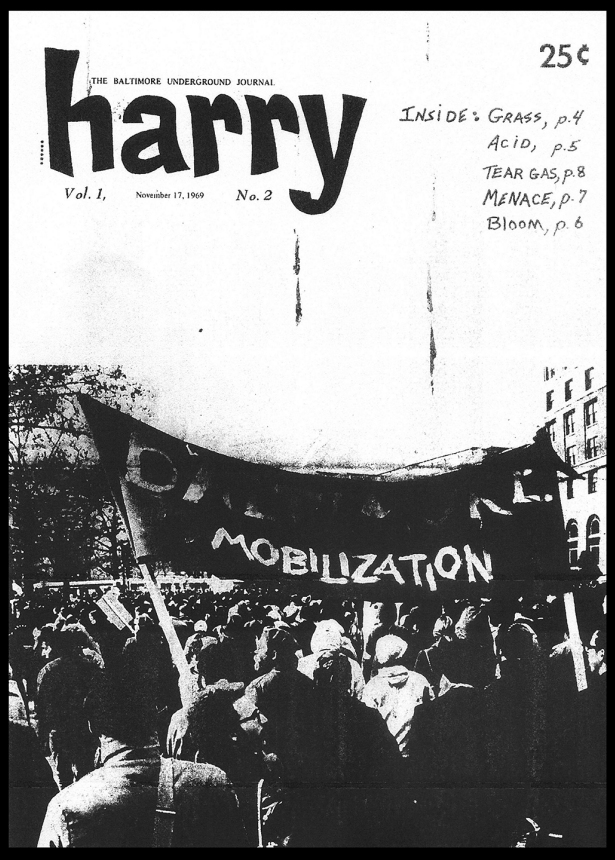
Women is a departure from the other papers in the collection. Rather than a local newspaper, *Women* was a quarterly nationally distributed journal on newsprint, with each issue thematically investigating some aspect of the new feminist critique that had been incubating within (and against some tendencies within) the New Left. Issue topics included women's history, women in the arts, revolutionary women, and "how we live and with whom"(breaking open the domestic straightjacket) and featured articles like Roxanne Dunbar's "Poor White Women." While not embracing the underground aesthetic of cheap thrills and psychedelic intoxication prevalent in some of the other papers in the collection, *Women* was also deeply concerned with cultural production—I'd estimate one-half to one-third of each issue was set aside for poetry and art. Despite being aimed at a nationwide audience, *Women* nevertheless reveals quite a bit about feminist organizing in Baltimore at the time. The journal was published by Baltimore Women's Liberation, whose 50+ members sought to provide, in addition to information and theoretical perspectives, practical services like abortion and childcare as well as pursuing a project of working class organizing. The Spring 1970 issue's contributor list gives you a sense of the diversity of Baltimore's feminist community, listing local contributions from Marilyn O'Connor (who many of us still count as a friend and ally in the lower Charles Village neighborhood!), Jennie Bull (an organizer of the Learning Action Center, another experimental education project), Kay ("kind of small, not very tall. Just plain Kay, but that ain't all."), Barbara McKain ("maoist-liberal librarian"), Beryl Jones ("factory worker"), and Joyce Williams ("high school student"). The paper also provides some insights into the 1970 founding, by Baltimore Women's Liberation and the Baltimore Defense Committee, of the People's Free Medical Clinic at 3028 Greenmount Ave.—one of the few projects in the pages of the archive to have survived to the current day, albeit in modified form as the People's Community Health Center.★

Help Save Social Movement History!

Obviously, this is only scratching the surface of both the Baltimore underground press and the history of local social movements in the late '60s and early '70s—and **this is important history that's in danger of disappearing!** There's really no good reason why this essential printed historical record is hidden away on microfilm rather than available online.

If you've got back issues you'd like to lend the Indyreader so we can scan and post them, please get in touch at INDYPENDENTREADER@GMAIL.COM.

Likewise, if you'd like to help us fill in the details of some of the history we've touched on above, **send us your recollections and we'll post them online as supplemental content to accompany this issue.**


THE BALTIMORE UNDERGROUND JOURNAL
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25¢
Vol. 1, November 17, 1969 No. 2
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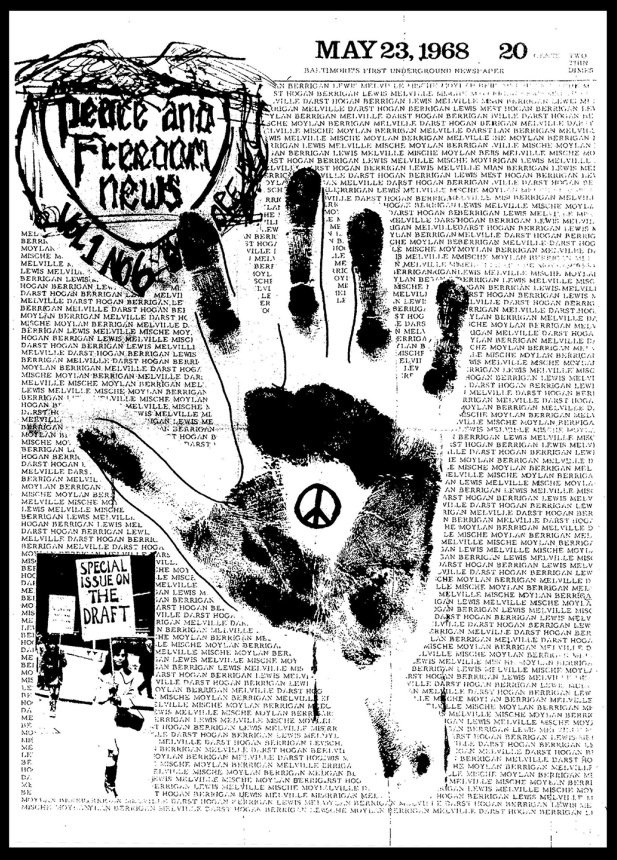
MENACE, p.7
Bloom, p.6
MOBILIZATION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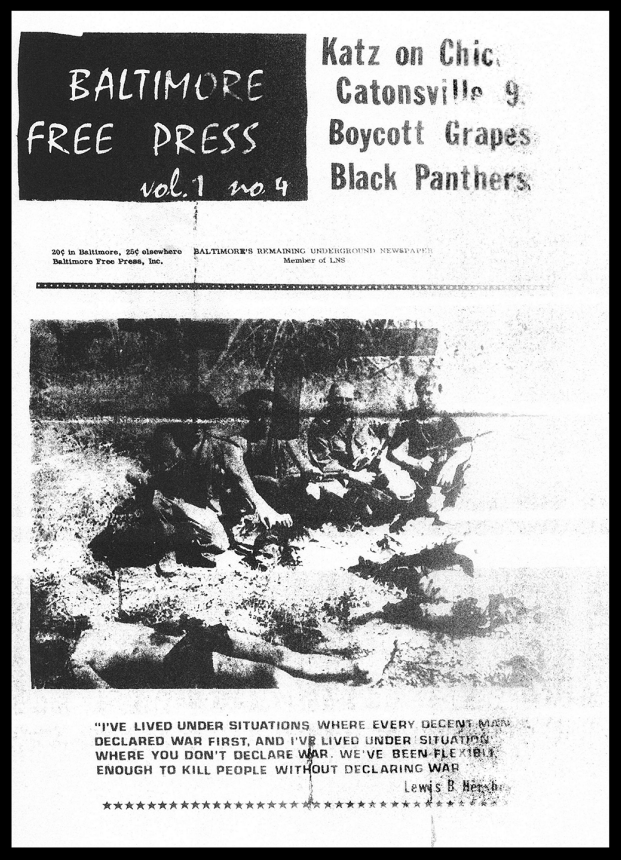
BALTIMORE FREE PRESS
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Katz on Chic.
Catonsville 9
Boycott Grapes
Black Panthers
20¢ in Baltimore, 25¢ elsewhere
Baltimore Free Press, Inc.
BALTIMORE'S REMAINING UNDERGROUND NEWSPAPER
Member of LNS
"I'VE LIVED UNDER SITUATIONS WHERE EVERY DECENT MAN DECLARED WAR FIRST, AND I'VE LIVED UNDER SITUATION WHERE YOU DON'T DECLARE WAR. WE'VE BEEN FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO KILL PEOPLE WITHOUT DECLARING WAR
Lewis B. Hersh


Libr. Copy
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BALTIMORE PEACE & FREEDOM NEWS
Number 7
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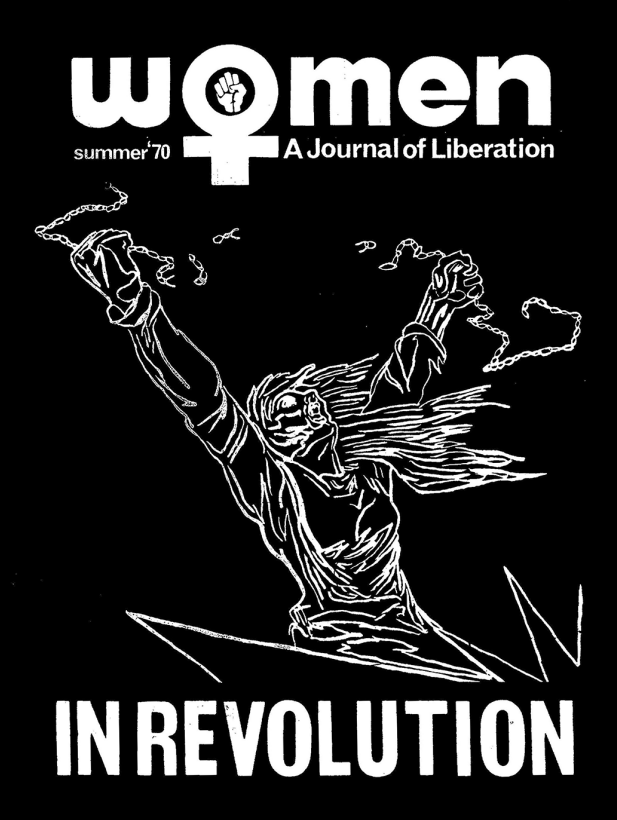
June 6, 1968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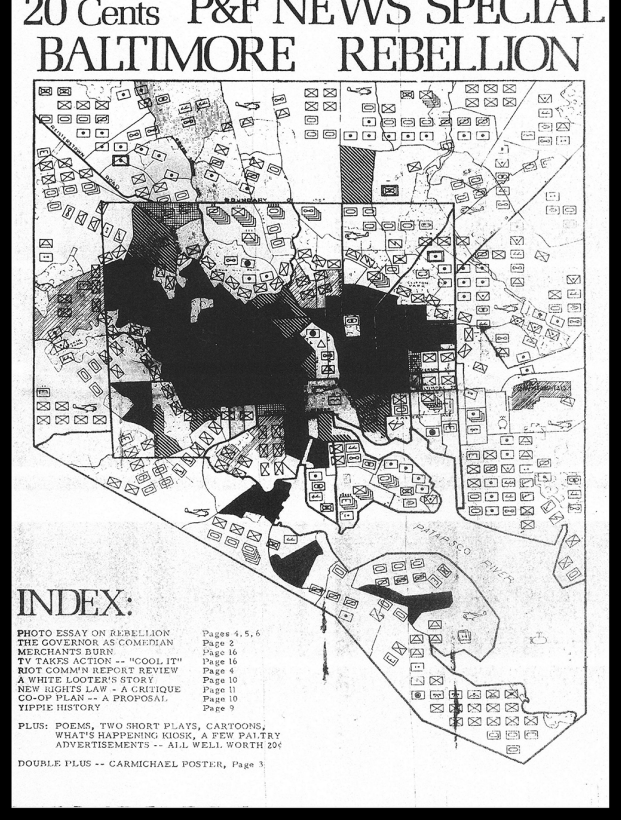
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P&F NEWS SPECIAL
BALTIMORE REBELLION
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MERCHANTS BURN Page 16
TV TAKES ACTION -- "COOL IT" Page 16
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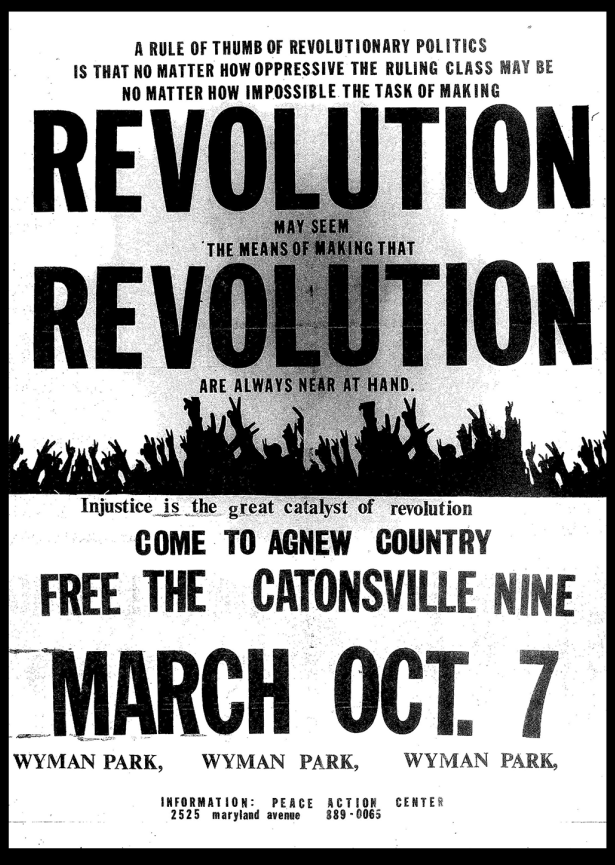
NEW RIGHTS LAW - A CRITIQUE Page 11
CO-OP PLAN -- A PROPOSAL Page 10
YIPPIE HISTORY Page 9
PLUS: POEMS, TWO SHORT PLAYS, CARTOONS, WHAT'S HAPPENING KIOSK, A FEW PALTRY ADVERTISEMENTS -- ALL WELL WORTH 20¢
DOUBLE PLUS -- CARMICHAEL POSTER, Page 3


A RULE OF THUMB OF REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS
IS THAT NO MATTER HOW OPPRESSIVE THE RULING CLASS MAY BE
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ARE ALWAYS NEAR AT HAND.
Injustice is the great catalyst of revolution
COME TO AGNEW COUNTRY
FREE THE CATONSVILLE NINE
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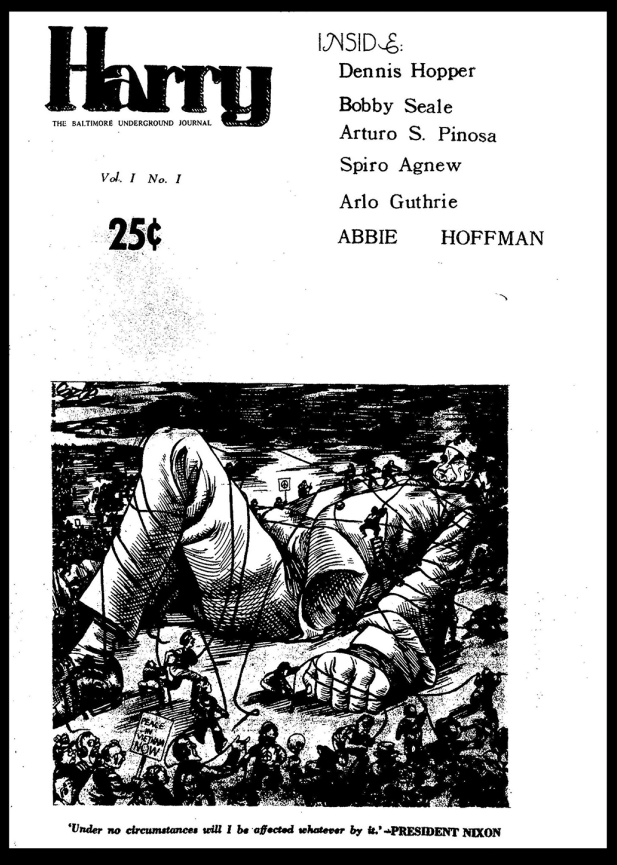
INFORMATION: PEACE ACTION CENTER
2525 maryland avenue 889-0065


Harry
THE BALTIMORE UNDERGROUND JOURNAL
Vol. I No. I
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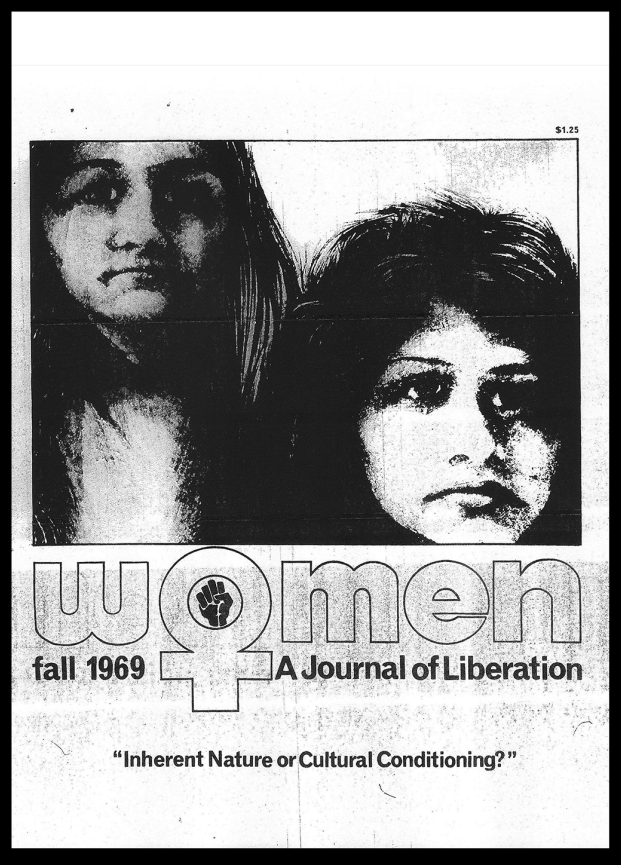
INSIDE:
Dennis Hopper
Bobby Seale
Arturo S. Pinosa
Spiro Agnew
Arlo Guthrie
ABBIE HOFFMAN
'Under no circumstances will I be affected whatever by it.' --PRESIDENT NIXON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women
fall 1969
A Journal of Liberation
"Inherent Nature or Cultural Conditioning?"

In the spirit of the content shared between the underground newspapers of the 1960s and 1970s through networks like the Underground Press Syndicate and the Liberation News Service, we're republishing the following piece on Chicago's underground newspaper,The Seed, which ran in the amazing AREA Chicago *in December 2008.*

The Chicago Seed

Voice of a Community, Center of a Movement

by Alyssa Vincent & Steve Macek

By the mid-1960s, the area around Wells Street in what is now Old Town formed the heart of Chicago's small but thriving hippie scene. The neighborhood housed headshops, record stores, music clubs, coffee shops, and a burgeoning population of bohemian young people. Students for a Democratic Society had its headquarters in the city as well and thanks to their tireless organizing, after 1965 the draft resistance and anti-Vietnam War movements had begun to gather steam. Predictably, local news coverage of both the flower children and the New Left was often antagonistic, factually inaccurate, or openly dismissive. As a consequence, the city in the late 1960s saw the founding of several underground and alternative newspapers that sought to speak for the different currents of political and cultural dissent that the mainstream press misreported. The most important of these was *The Seed*.

Communicating Peace and Love

Launched in 1967 by artist Don Lewis and Earl Segal, owner of a poster and button shop called The Mole Hole, *The Seed* was initially conceived as a community paper for the Wells Street hippie enclave. The paper's main sources of revenue were ads taken out by Old Town merchants (especially headshops and hip clothiers) and big record companies like Columbia. It featured freeform poetry, music and movie reviews, reports on area rock concerts, and a fairly detailed "Dope on Dope" listing of the current street prices of drugs like LSD, marijuana, and hashish. It regularly covered demonstrations, festivals, and community happenings that the *Tribune*, *Daily News*, and *Sun-Times* typically ignored. Occasionally it also published long, rambling personal essays on such subjects as ecology, Zen Buddhism, and masturbation. It set aside a significant amount of space for letters-to-the-editor, announcements from community and activist groups, and an assortment of personal ads.

"We reflected, we energized, we communicated [our] community," recalls Marshall Rosenthal, who began writing for *The Seed* in 1968, "Anti-war, counterculture, pro-love—it was all there." […]

In the lead-up to the Democratic National Convention, writers and editors for *The Seed* not only publicized but helped to organize the counter-convention activities Abbie Hoffman and others were planning, including signing onto the first official permit request for the Yippies' proposed Festival of Life. As the convention grew near, the paper aired the growing debate within the anti-war movement over the Yippies' tactics and the sort of reception protesters could expect from Daley's police. In an article titled 1984, it also covered the passage of an ominous anti-riot bill making it a crime to cross state lines with the intent to incite or promote a riot, the very law later used to prosecute Hoffman and other anti-war movement leaders for their role in the convention protests.

Shortly before the convention, the paper put out a special issue with a schedule of events issued by the Yippies, a city guide for out-of-town protesters and tips on "What to do in Case of Arrest." It included an editorial by *The Seed* editor Abe Peck warning that "the Man is into confrontation" and telling would-be demonstrators "[d]on't come to Chicago if you expect a five-day Festival of Life, music, and love." Alongside Peck's piece was printed Abbie Hoffman's testy rebuttal essentially dismissing *The Seed*'s peace and love ethos as politically inadequate and out of date. […]

Making a Fist

Of course, the police violence during the convention proved to be just as horrific as Peck had expected. In its aftermath, *The Seed*—like the New Left and the counterculture more generally—became more militant and confrontational in its politics.

"The cover of the issue after the convention was a picture of a pig dressed in a Chicago police uniform with Daley's face on it. I think that was our change. We had been radicalized by the convention," said Peck. The police murder of charismatic Illinois Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton in December 1969 and the notorious Chicago 8 trial hastened the process of radicalization.

"The murder of Fred Hampton was a very dramatic event that had a lot of influence. The Black Panther Party was very well thought of in Chicago and Fred Hampton, in particular, a lot of us knew," explained former Seed writer Bernie Farber. "The Chicago police were becoming … vicious."

The Seed itself was a frequent target of official harassment and politically motivated violence. The Chicago Police Department's notorious Red Squad followed and photographed staffers. Editor Abe Peck was slapped with obscenity charges for a surreal sexual illustration in one issue (although, as often happened, the charges were ultimately dropped). Street vendors hawking the paper were hassled and sometimes arrested. Cops pressured drug store and newsstand owners to stop selling the publication. Right wing vigilantes shot out the windows of *The Seed*'s offices (with the alleged collusion of the police). The FBI monitored and assembled lengthy files on several people involved with the paper to disrupt the New Left as part of its COINTELPRO program. As Abe Peck notes in his book, *Uncovering the Sixties*, there is even scattered evidence that the FBI encouraged record companies to withdraw their advertising from underground papers like *The Seed*.

To make matters worse, *The Chicago Tribune* in 1968 purchased *The Seed*'s printer, Merrill Printing Company, who then promptly announced that they no longer wanted *The Seed*'s business. For a time, the paper was forced to rely on a lone independent publisher and printer in Port Washington, WI, Bill Schanen, who courageously continued to print underground newspapers from around the region despite vocal opposition from conservative leaders in his community.

In response to the escalating repression at home and rising body count in Southeast Asia, *The Seed*'s editorial content shifted dramatically, focusing increasingly on hard political news about war, oppression, and their causes. Quotes from Mao and Ho Chi Minh, along with fact-filled critiques of U.S. imperialism, replaced the Beat-inspired poetry and music reviews of earlier issues. Stories about police persecution of revolutionary youth organizations like the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords, profiles of political prisoners being held in American jails, and reports on trials involving anti-war and draft resistance activists took up more and more space. The paper ran investigative pieces on U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, the carpet bombing of Laos, and the appalling conditions in Cook County Hospital. A recurring section dealt with student activism at Chicago high schools and reported on the proliferation of underground high school papers. *The Seed* even became an established outlet for communiqués from armed left-wing groups like The Weather Underground and The New Year's Eve Gang who engaged in bombing of military and government targets.

The paper also underwent significant changes in content and organization as New Social Movements quickly gained momentum in the post-'68 period. Informed by the gender "revolution within the revolution," *The Seed* in the early 70s incorporated more women into its writers' collective, put out special issues or supplements on the women's movement and gay liberation, and made the economically difficult decision to stop carrying ads for the Playboy Theater. The nascent Native American rights movement—and, in particular, protests against the Bureau of Indian Affairs staged by the Chicago group Indian Village—frequently made it into the paper. So, too, did radical groups like Rising Up Angry who were attempting to organize Chicago's poor whites.

The Seed not only reported on the women's, black power, and allied progressive social movements, it shared its resources with them. People from groups such as the Black Panthers, the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, and Rising Up Angry would often make use of The Seed's light table to lay out their own papers or use its darkroom to develop their photos.

"[The paper] functioned as a kind of organizing center," says Farber, "and I think that's the role a newspaper historically and traditionally has played in a lot of eras."

Unlike some underground publications of its era, *The Seed* avoided taking sides in many of the divisive ideological conflicts tearing apart the New Left. Thus, though the paper carefully chronicled the bitter struggle between rival groups of Marxist-Leninists that eventually broke apart Students for a Democratic Society, it never allied itself with any one position, faction or organization. Indeed, even as it became more self-consciously revolutionary in its rhetoric and positions, the paper remained a relatively nonsectarian, open forum for debate and discussion within the Chicago left and The Movement as a whole. If anything, its politics were staunchly anti-authoritarian. A 1969 piece by Bernard Marshall entitled "Eh…What's Up Lenin?" articulated what appears to have been a dominant political sentiment among the staff: "This is what our revolution must be about. Smashing all hierarchies and bureaucracies, all bourgeois hangovers, whenever they appear and for whatever reason."

The Demise and Legacy of The Seed

By 1973 or so, only a few years after reaching a circulation of 30- 40,000, *The Seed* was on its last legs. The advertising that had supported the paper dried up as headshops were shut down and major record labels found other, more politically palatable outlets for their ads. The government campaign against the New Left and the underground press took its toll. Editors and writers quit because of the relentless official harassment, to pursue other careers or over frustration with the paper's sometimes acrimonious internal politics. Many of the movements that *The Seed* sought to serve either accomplished or outlived their goals (like ending the war in Vietnam) or faded for lack of support.

"The papers were never born to be institutions," observes Abe Peck. "They reflected and nurtured and critiqued their movements, however imperfectly, and then those movements either crested or proved unviable or wrong, and people kind of drifted away."

In 1974, *The Seed* was relaunched as *The Free Seed*, a free, ad-sponsored publication along the lines of the increasingly popular *Chicago Reader*. That experiment lasted only a few issues before the paper shut down for good. […]

Perhaps the most important lesson to be gleaned from the experience of *The Seed* is one that was summed up by Bernie Farber in a single word: "Audacity." *The Seed* collective and the community it served attempted to overthrow a sclerotic political and cultural establishment steeped in blood and filthy lucre. Though they failed to attain their ultimate (revolutionary) goal, they managed to stop a destructive imperialist war and transform American attitudes about race, gender relations, and sexuality for the better in the process. That legacy of audacity is something the left, and the left press in particular, would do well to remember. The old Situationist slogan, spray-painted on many a wall in Paris during the May '68 insurgency, is as valid as ever: "Be realistic. Demand the impossible."★

Originally printed at:
HTTP://WWW.AREACHICAGO.ORG/

an interview with Claustrophobia

Claustrophobia was one of the most interesting underground press projects in Baltimore during the late '90s and the early '00s. The collective around the project not only published a roughly twice-yearly newspaper, but put out pamphlets, broadsheets, stickers, and books on everything from Wilhelm Reich to the black bloc (through the imprints "Sex-Pol Editions" and "Insubordinate Editions"). Some back issues and other documents can be found online via the Wayback Machine (HTTP://WEB.ARCHIVE.ORG/WEB/*/HTTP://CHARM.NET/~CLAUSTRO), but by and large the history of the project is not very well documented. And that's why it was fantastic to get a chance to interview Nathaniel—one of the project's founders—over email for this issue.

John Duda: *Moving to Baltimore in the middle of 2003, I feel like I just missed out on* Claustrophobia*—I'm not sure I ever initially saw a physical issue, but I was always hearing about it—in many ways it seemed like the project was playing a fairly central role in holding together the Baltimore radical community.*

I was wondering if you could me fill in the basic history of the project? From what I gather, Claustrophobia *put out 12 or 13 print issues, with the last one coming out in either 2001 or 2002. I haven't been able to figure out exactly when the paper got started (early- to mid-nineties?)*

Nathaniel Taintor: I think we got started around 1994–95, but the first five or six issues were only ever distributed in prisons and maybe at a few infoshops "to the movement." Around '97, after we had moved to Baltimore, we started orienting more to the local street scene. Prison was the guiding metaphor for a while, the way Tupac said, "you ain't gotta be in jail to be doing time" or that prisoners would refer to life on the streets as "minimum security" or "population." So we started telling the stories that would bring out that perspective, trying to bring out the insights that would come to people going through their daily life about how constricted their opportunities were. We worked on trying to generate feedback loops that would reinforce the desire for rebellion and community.

If we helped organize or hold together any kind of radical community, I think that was just a function of the time and place we were operating in rather than any work we actually did. We were certainly pretty ambivalent to the existence of the "radical community" for the most part.

Baltimore's radical community always came in waves. We got active around the end of a major wave of activity in the early '90s, where there were a number of collectives, spaces, and such. During most of the time we were active, there weren't a lot of projects going on with bigger ambitions than handing out flyers at a punk show or drinking 40s at a rowhouse talking revolution. So maybe we helped keep a sense of community alive until the subculture and movement began to coalesce again in 1999–2000, when the anti-globalization movement started to become a point of orientation for a lot of younger radicals.

John: *One of the things that most interests me, looking at* Claustrophobia*'s back issues, is the very definite political stance taken by the collective behind the paper—you all wrote in one of your statements introducing the project that "we call ourselves anarchists, and make no apologies for that." Having worked a bit with the* Indypendent Reader*, which covers a lot of the same Baltimore issues that* Claustrophobia *dealt with (for instance gentrification, structural racism, the prison system, labor struggles), I'm amazed at the difference in tone between the two projects despite the similarities between a lot of their politics.*

In particular, Claustrophobia *was much more self-consciously and explicitly a revolutionary project. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about where* Claustrophobia*'s politics came from and what it saw its political mission as.*

Nathaniel: I guess at the start, we did come from a specific political orientation, but as we grew and started to get feedback and traction and draw more people into the conversation we were trying to start, we kinda developed a journalistic mission which superseded any political mission we had at the start. Even in that same introduction you mention, we also quoted an old Situationist International slogan to the effect that we were only trying to organize the detonation, and that the explosion that came out of anything we did had to escape ours and any control forever. We weren't exactly SI/po-mo nerds, but if anything from the "old politics" defined us, that's probably a more true reflection of our political mission than anything established in the anarchist scene.

So the skills that became important to us were very different than the skills that were important to people inside the activist milieu, who would go to meetings several times a week and learn to remember acronyms and jargon, speak in turn, and win people over in debates. We were more focused on listening to the streets, in writing in such a way that the people we were writing for would recognize their stories, and in visually designing our message so that it would flow out into all the networks we were trying to orient to.

We also grew much more interested in individualist politics as we developed—Nietzschean philosophy, the ultra-left and the insurrectionists, and some of the wilder cultural politics that came out of the '60s New Left. Partly that was a theoretical evolution on our parts, and partly that came naturally out of the politics of the working-class and hipster scenes we were writing from and for. The biggest reasons that the scenes we were moving in didn't orient to the Left were: one, the Left was just plain boring; two, the Left really didn't offer any personal growth possibilities beyond becoming an "activist"—and people who were already being forced to subsume their personal identity for half their day to the demands of their work weren't really willing to give up the rest of their identities to become this alienated individual who lives in moments of past glory (the Spanish revolution, 1968, the Russian revolution) to compensate for the miseries of present-day life.

John: *How did* Claustrophobia *fit into the larger anarchist and radical scenes in Baltimore back in the '90s? What about larger nationwide movements and networks—for instance you also mention being inspired by the Love and Rage anarchist federation at some point in that introductory text I mentioned earlier.*

Nathaniel: Like I mentioned, there really wasn't much activity in the Baltimore anarchist scene during most of the time we were active. Black Planet, which was the germ that later became Red Emma's, kept a physical space open through most of the '90s by sheer force of will, it seemed—there surely weren't enough customers to pay the bills most of the time. We tried to do something different that reached outside the limited political ghetto, and in the process we transformed ourselves into something very outside the Left.

We didn't have a lot of models starting out. There was a tabloid out of Minneapolis called *The Blast* that I thought was pretty cool. That came out of people involved with Love and Rage, with the *Race Traitor* journal, and some radical pro-choice people out there. It was a lot more a product of the established anarchist scene than we were, and more geared at explaining political theory to people than amplifying discussions happening within working-class scenes, but what I liked was that it had some decent writing and layout, and most importantly, it actually tried to write in the language people actually spoke, rather than the political jargon most movement papers used.

Later we found examples of a few experiences where radical publications were trying similar kinds of experiments as we were. The "full fountain pen" theory developed by the Correspondence/Facing Reality group in the '50s, a handful of fringe journals on the illegalist fringes of the '60s New Left, and a few ultra-left agitation projects in out-of-the-way industrial cities in places like India or Brazil. We learned from and networked with some of these people, but mostly our influence stayed in bars and buses and workplaces around the city.

John: *Since this issue of the* Indyreader *is specifically about media, I'm also curious about the actual paper and how that got printed and distributed and so on. What was the paper's circulation and audience like? Who read* Claustrophobia*? Where did you print the paper? Was the project more or less sustainable financially? How did the collective go about putting the issues together?*

Nathaniel: For the six or seven issues that were actually distributed on the streets, we printed and distributed between 1000 to 2500 copies each. Out of those, probably 80 percent were just given away around Baltimore. We developed a list of laundromats, liquor stores, bus routes, and stores that gave us the best response and spent a lot of time covering the city delivering papers to those places. It was kind of undercover; we had to track papers as best we could and it took a while to find out where we could reach people best. Sometimes we'd find the organic intellectuals who worked at liquor stores or barber shops that would hand out the paper to their customers and give us feedback and stories the next time we came in. Other times it was just a gamble and we'd find out down the road that a paper left on a bus seat at rush hour made its way into a factory break room and sparked some discussion.

We basically covered the printing costs out of our own pockets and with donations from friends. We printed a couple ads, but that was never the business model we tried for. We put out maybe two full issues a year, and in between those, we would do several smaller issues—ranging from full-page broadsheets that we'd wheatpaste around town to flyers handed out to intervene in specific situations to stickers with brief slogans.

John: *Why did Claustrophobia eventually come to an end?*

Nathaniel: Well, we were never more than a couple people at the core, and we didn't have enough group momentum to keep us going when there were other things happening—new relationships, new jobs, political differences, legal and financial troubles, all these things wear you down….

A lot of our approach and style was being taken up elsewhere, and it was harder to stay relevant. The *City Paper* started borrowing some of our snarky outsider tone, inside jokes, and in-your-face graphic styles. I don't think that was necessarily an imitation of us, just a reflection that hipsters from our generation had started to take over the editorial departments there. In any case, as we got slicker, the liberal mainstream got hipper, and our papers didn't stand out with that powerful shock of something new and different in the same way.

The movement was also starting to sound more like what we wanted in some ways. A lot of the new crop of activists coming up were active in cultural struggles around them, doing political work where they lived and worked, and held on to some kind or real identity outside the political scene. There was also a whole growing subcultural trend, I guess CrimethInc. was the figurehead for a lot of it, but it went deeper than them and a lot of what was happening was not quite so cartoonish. This was not really the sort of thing we were calling for at all, but it did share a lot of the critiques about the role of activists, the need to be part of lived community, etc., that we were making.

Basically, what we were doing was still valid and necessary. In the subculture, in the activist milieu, and on the liberal fringes of the establishment there were all kinds of people looking for easy answers or a way forward. We would have had to really hunker down and develop a concrete proposal or a clear articulation of our vision in order to set ourselves apart and be a useful part of the discussion, and we never quite managed that.

John: *What's your favorite thing that* Claustrophobia *published?*

Nathaniel: The most fun pieces to do were the shorter ones, the stickers and one-page broadsheets. We'd have to compress as much meaning as possible into one image, or one slogan, and they would have by far the widest audience. We did some stickers right after 9/11 saying things like "God Bless My Ass" and "I Wish They Had Got Bush Instead" … stirred up some interesting shit.

But I think the most useful pieces we did were the running columns. We regularly published people's stories about ridiculous experiences with police, we did a series of pieces about quitting jobs with style. Those fit most closely with our central focus, of listening to people's stories and drawing what we found interesting out of them, and bringing that conversation to wider groups of people.★

The skills that became important to us were very different than the skills that were important to people inside the activist milieu, who would learn to remember acronyms and jargon, speak in turn, and win people over in debates.

REBOOT BALTIMORE INDYMEDIA

Baltimore Indymedia was founded in 2001 by a collective of local media activists and for nearly 8 years provided an open, participatory platform for social justice news and multimedia production in Baltimore City and beyond. But sustaining an all-volunteer collective for nearly a decade is no easy task, and since the beginning of this past year the Baltimore Indymedia website has been more less in a holding pattern, with no new featured articles and an undermoderated open publishing newswire.

With the "Web 2.0" dream increasingly turning out to be a nightmare of corporate control, media centralization, marketer-driven data mining, privacy violations, and uncritical cooperation with law enforcement, Baltimore needs now, more than ever, an independent, open-publishing driven news media site. Baltimore Indymedia needs a reboot—a new editorial collective, a new team of media makers, a new look and updated technology. Baltimore Indymedia needs you!

If you'd like to get involved with rethinking and relaunching Baltimore Indymedia, send an email to: BALTIMOREIMCREBOOT@GMAIL.COM HTTP://BALTIMORE.INDYMEDIA.ORG

OPINION

By Heather Hax

Ten years ago, when I began thinking through the concept of ideology and what we as a collective entity learn from this thing called the "media," the object of analysis was a bit monolithic and it was fairly easy for me to tap into what people were watching, hearing, and reading.

I was obsessed with the monster that was media consolidation, which resulted in the corporatist proliferation of capitalist dogma, patriarchy, and racist ideologies that justify many of the horrors that those on the Left fight against—neo-colonial wars, deepening structural inequality, ecological degradation, lack of access to health care, the recurrent crises of capitalist accumulation. The list can go on and on unfortunately.

Despite little study of the relationship between mainstream media outlets and their current representation of these issues on my part, I can imagine that not much has changed in terms of systematic skewing in the direction of neoliberalism and fierce dedication to the capitalist status quo. The current economic meltdown has done little to help this situation. Mainstream journalist have been termed the gatekeepers of democracy. If you ask David Simon (or watch season 5 of *The Wire*) you will learn that newspapers are in a heap of trouble. The print media languish in the face of increasing newspaper consolidation and collapse. The result is fewer and fewer people looking over the politicians' shoulders and a disturbing lack of resources or interest in muckraking. This shapes the general public's access to a critical consciousness that is a profoundly necessary tool which lends to a politically engaged citizenry.

That said, I largely avoid interacting with mainstream media in any real way. This is in large part because I am clued in. I now know about and have ready access to *Democracy Now!*, Common Dreams, Talking Points Memo, Alternet, Truth Dig, Al Jazeera English, and even *The Daily Show* and Matt Taibbi … you name it, I probably read it, watch it, or download the podcast and listen to it on the subway while shaking my head in disgust. What is striking to me is the extent to which I can choose to avoid the usual suspects. This doesn't mean I am out of touch. Often, I choose to engage media which offers critical analyses of the aforementioned media beasts.

While it is quite easy (and necessary) to put forth an analysis of what is wrong with the media, it is also important to commend those who continue to do the hard work of (for fear of sounding cliché) speaking truth to power. Readers should be outraged by what they see around them. However, they should also congratulate those who continue the tradition of Upton Sinclair, Rachel Carson, George Seldes, Helen Hunt Jackson, Studs Terkel, and I.F. Stone. Thank goodness for Amy Goodman, Jeremy Scahill, Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, and (dare I say it) Michael Moore. Thank goodness for Indymedia! The muckraking tradition does live on. While it is not evident in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or *Baltimore Sun* (though the ground rent series was pretty great), investigative journalism is there for the taking. It's just a matter of knowing where to look or the forums available for its creation.

Comic courtesy of Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness

Media Portrayals of Sex Workers: Protecting Us From Whom?

by C. B. Daring

What is a sex worker? *$pread Magazine* defines a sex worker as "someone who explicitly exchanges their own erotic labor for money, services, or goods. Some examples of sex workers are strippers, burlesque dancers, escorts, hustlers, prostitutes, phone sex workers, porn performers, nude models, professional dominants, and many others. However not all workers in these professions define themselves as sex workers."

While the term "erotic labor" is intentionally vague, it does convey a basic concept. Sex workers engage in a wide variety of labors, for a variety of different forms of compensation. They are not exclusively one gender, race, economic background, or nationality.

A journalist's task is to seek information and perspectives from those most intimately related to a specific story. And yet this is certainly not what is done in all cases, particularly those that involve marginalized communities. This point is explicitly illustrated in stories that relate to sex workers or the sex industry. Media portrayals of sex workers vary dramatically from source to source, but sensationalism is the pervasive theme. News stories concerning the sex industry rarely examine it as a labor issue, but rather as a personal scandal or crime piece.

On the rare occasion that anyone within the industry is included in a story, "power players" are favored over the actual workers. High-cost madams, porn producers, or pimps may have interesting contributions, yet they receive higher incomes and thereby automatically present privileged perspectives. Responsible journalism is dependent on the inclusion of all subjects. There is no accurate portrayal without this inclusion. If the voices of sex workers are not included, there will be no moving forward. Self-representation is one of the first steps towards liberation.

In April 2009, a story shocked the nation, that of "The Craigslist Killer." This killer was hunting sex workers across New England in order to rob and murder them. As a vulnerable and criminalized community, sex workers are often pushed to the margins. The community has historically been seen as an easy target to aim towards for any sort of "need." Trisha Leffler was the first known sex worker to be robbed in this spree. The assailant pulled a gun on her and she quickly surrendered $800. After breaking free from her plastic cuffs, she called the police. Then, in an unconventional move, the police did not press charges against Leffler. Instead, surprisingly, they followed up on her report. (Generally, it is not considered safe for anyone who works in a criminalized sector of the sex industry to report violence to the police, due to the fact that they risk arrest for engaging in prostitution.) There was a man shown on the hotel's security cameras. The police searched him, but they couldn't match him to the criminal. There were no other leads.

On April 14, Julissa Brisman was brutally beaten, shot, and murdered. Although the scope of her services is unclear, it is know that she had been advertising as a masseuse on Craigslist.

Two days later, a dancer in Warwick, RI who advertised on the website was attacked, and a man attempted to rob her; yet, that incident was interrupted by her husband. In Boston, a friend of Julissa's discovered e-mails that were written between her and a client she had scheduled for 10pm on the night of her murder. She quickly passed these on to police, with the crucial Internet Protocol (IP) address, which led them straight to Philip Markoff, who was arrested in connection to the crimes.

In the wake of Markoff's arrest, a collective rage rang throughout the media as they focused on Craigslist. They claimed that it facilitated an "online brothel." A nearly universal condemnation surfaced, apparently in order to *protect* women from online predators. Over time, the story has shifted to illuminate the character of Markoff rather than the violence he has been accused of committing. CBS news recently released a full-length story with a subtitle of "More Shocking Than the Crimes is the Person Accused."

In the following weeks, Craigslist responded to both the pressure from the media and the legislatures. They removed the "erotic services" section of their website and replaced it with an "adult services" section. This change may appear superficial, but in order to post in the adult services section an advertiser must provide their credit card information and pay a fee of ten dollars.

This increased moderation of sex workers—who advertise on Craigslist—does nothing to prevent the violence. Eliminating a tool for marketing is not the solution. If the objective is to keep workers safe, wouldn't it be more effective to have the purchaser under greater scrutiny? A sex worker who has the ability to screen clients online is going to have greater preliminary knowledge of their client and is going to have an IP address to identify them if later needed. While not all sex workers feel they need to use the internet to be safe, they should not be prevented from having the tools.

Since "The Craigslist Killer" story, many discussions have focused on why these women were inviting the killer into their rooms to start. One of the most frequently asked questions of laborers in the sex industry is: "What happened to you that made you do this job?"

There are many people in the industry. They are making money in a large assortment of ways. There is no universal reason for why someone enters the sex industry, just as there is no universal reason for why someone works in a textile factory. In the previous case, Julissa Brisman had been a bartender before becoming a sex worker. When she realized she had a drinking problem, she wisely quit her job. Her family even supported her in getting a tattoo to mark the date of her sobriety. What moralist could say she made an unwise decision?

Poor assumptions and stereotypes often link a sex worker's entire personal history with drug/alcohol use and physical/sexual abuse. While it is not uncommon for these issues to affect sex workers, these issues affect most workers. If it is deemed necessary to assume that all sex workers have a history of abuse, then why not assume the same for secretaries and librarians? Stories of sex workers who organize for union rights or circulate "bad date" directories may not be as gory and thrilling as serial killings of street workers, but they are equally newsworthy.

The media garnered a great deal of mileage from "The Craigslist Killer" story. Yet, in the end they did little to educate people about sex work. Eventually the story morphed into scandalized headlines that discussed "how illegal prostitution was threatening communities." The opposite is what could have been learned from this tragedy, that workers pushed into dark and secretive labor are vulnerable to those who take advantage of that silence. In the US, many forms of sex work and erotic labor are criminalized, creating a population of workers that is isolated from the support network of recognized communities and legal protections. If prostitution were to be decriminalized, those selling sexual labor would have the freedom to create strong community organizations or even labor unions—in other words, we need to make sex workers visible members of the public.

The rebuttal for decriminalization of prostitution usually revolves around a paternal need to control and guard sexuality. This is often done under the guise of "protecting women" from selling themselves to "disgusting men." There appears to be a great fear around the idea of "selling ourselves," which is argued to be intrinsically connected to our sexual selves. Without an analysis of capitalism, this is an easy conclusion to draw: that somehow sex workers are selling some *sacred* part of their being. However, all working-class people are selling themselves in capitalism. People who trade their time for an hourly wage are having their monetary worth extracted from their bodies. This is often referred to as alienated labor. Those that pay us accrue that labor and are then able to continually make profit.

Within capitalism no worker is truly free to choose his or her labor, income, or work environment. Yet, most have at least the right and choice to openly organize for better conditions or higher pay. The labor force of the criminalized sex worker does not.

In light of most news agencies being uninterested in talking to sex workers or examining their struggles, sex workers have created media projects all their own. Since the 1970s, sex workers have been meeting around the globe to organize, in large part to develop media literacy. One major publication is *$pread Magazine*, based out of New York, which features a staff of current and former sex workers. While the magazine does represent the voices of sex workers, they do not take a distinct stand on issues. Instead, they commit to print *anything* by current or former sex workers, regardless of political or opinion-based positions. Many sex worker organizations have committed to cultivating media production skills within the community, to promote self-representation and accurate reporting. Instead of postulating from on high, organizers are educating people to share their opinions and experiences within the sex industry from a first-hand perspective. ★

Resources:

http://www.spreadmagazine.org/
http://www.sexwork101.com/
http://www.sexworkersproject.org/

MYTHOLOGY IN THE AGE OF **SEATTLE**

how we tell our history & why it matters: a review of

The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle

review by Ryan Harvey

History tends to breed mythology, or rather, history tends to be written as mythology. The historian is partly to blame for this, taking stories and gutting them, glorifying the parts that they think should be emphasized, by default defining other parts as non-history. Another factor though, perhaps more to blame, is the immediate mis-telling of situations as they occur; this is the fault of the news-teller, the history-creator.

I witnessed this happening in my own life around the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protests and was affected by it, for better and worse, in multiple ways.

Fifty thousand people converged ten years ago in Seattle and forever changed the debate around the globalization of anti-labor, anti-environmental, anti-democratic "trade" relations. At the same time, media outlets, radical thinkers, conservative pundits, and many others also converged to name the situation in a historical context, to make it *history*.

The illusory image of a city of fire, a battle zone, an insurgency, was broadcast heavily throughout the corporate-press. This led some protest organizers to consider the media coverage a bit of a failure; "anti-trade" or "anti-globalization" was the label given to a movement that was arguably more global than the policies they were battling. A movement that was born in the Global South, led for years by poor farmers, slum-dwellers, human rights activists, and many others was simply painted by the broad brush of the corporate press as "anti-globalization."

This spinning was a public relations victory for the WTO, who wanted people to view a good chunk of the human population as flat-earthers who lived in the dark-ages of the late 1900s. The WTO wanted its policies to be seen as the opposite of this, they wanted to be seen as the path to the future, the frontiersmen of the new millennium ushering in the era of "post-history."

What the WTO was trying to pull off, veiled by the poetics of some of its intellectual defenders in American think tanks, was to push the poisons of American Ponzi schemes onto the world. They were trying to send the message, in the words of Rage Against the Machine, "there is no other pill to take, so swallow the one that made you ill."

Unfortunately for the WTO, the protests were too big and too significant to spin the story too much in the press. Talk of "violent anarchists" was the best they could come up with, and that only took them so far. No one could hide the fact that the WTO was up to something very sketchy, and people were pretty upset about it.

What changed in Seattle, as David and Rebecca Solnit lay out well in *The Battle of the Story of The Battle of Seattle*, was the debate around neoliberal globalization. What was previously a topic only discussed in specific radical activist networks, labor circles, and certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as by the neoliberals themselves in their many institutions, became a subject of household conversation. The WTO was now known to be highly controversial group that was trying to stay under the radar but had been exposed. Even the film *Battle in Seattle*, to which David and Rebecca's book is a response, contains a great line that sums this up well: "Yesterday, no one knew what the WTO was. Today, well, they still don't know what it is but they know it's bad!"

How did this happen? Who changed the debate? What did it take? Would the media coverage have been the same had the black bloc, a loosely coordinated body who participated in the property destruction, not done the amount of damage that they did (a lot of broken windows, mostly)? Was bad press good press?

During a recent conversation, David Solnit responded to this question by explaining that prior to the start of the actions there was already a significant amount of press. It is likely that the coverage would have continued to be big news despite the black bloc. The black bloc's actions may have attracted some young radicals, like me, but may have turned many times that number away.

One could say, and indeed many anarchists do, that the over-hyping of a small group of black bloc militants, and the extensive coverage of police running rampant, was a victory because it made front page news across the world for days. This stance has been taken after many demonstrations like those against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in Miami, or more recently at the G20 protests in Pittsburgh. Hundreds of photos of the one burning pile of trash, the one over-turned dumpster, the one incident of a protester hitting a cop, surface on newspapers across the world. This makes us look more militant, more extreme, and perhaps more serious.

The same city-on-fire image that the corporate press propelled into the world was also broadcast heavily in some of the more militant circles of the radical Left and anarchist groups. Thus, a broad movement of many tendencies was made to seem more anarchistic, more "militant," more simple and spontaneous than it was. And some believe that this is a good thing because it increases energy or makes "militant" folks more interested.

In a short-term view, that is probably true. The false images of the Seattle "riots" definitely got me and many friends interested and engaged. In a long-term view based around organizing to win social movements, it could prove to be a deceptive story with detrimental effects, especially on younger activists and organizers.

The insurrectionary nature of our young anarchist political concepts—which for my generation (the Seattle-Boomers) largely grew from the assumption that Seattle and other similar demonstrations in Prague, Quebec City, and Genoa (among others) were spontaneous, militant uprisings—led to high-turnover and a short-lived "movement." It also led many young anarchists, like little fifteen-year-old me, to think that movements like this are the result of a rupture in society, cracked open by the militant and spontaneous uprisings of small numbers of other mostly young people.

The Myth of Insurrection, as we could name it, produced these concepts and has been spread widely in anarchist circles. Seattle is the ultra-reference, or maybe it has been replaced now by last year's riots in Greece. Either way, Seattle still holds a place in the history of this myth. The myth generally tells that spontaneous uprisings born from the depths of a bitter and semi-politicized society, can be stoked rather easily with the right imagery and energy. The Weathermen of the '60s referred to it as a "prairie fire." It is the anarchist version of the socialist concept that poor people are generally interested in socialism by default, that they only need to be led. Hitler found this to be false, and exploited it to the ends of fascism, which could be considered a small loop-hole.…

Partially as a result of the "militant" mythology of Seattle, many young radicals promote this idea of a society just waiting to burst open at the seams, and this is viewed as a good thing, a "revolutionary window." Perhaps many immigrant communities living in the shadow of a racist and armed country view it differently. Perhaps those living in fear of racist reprisals are not so excited about a sudden unleashing of societal aggression. When spontaneous uprisings—accompanied by strong organizing traditions that were developing in the railroad and industrial unions—exploded in the summer of 1877, they led to massive, well-organized, high-impact strikes and rebellions throughout Maryland, Pennsylvania, St. Louis, and Chicago. However, when they reached San Francisco, they turned into race riots, with white workers beating up and killing Chinese workers in the streets. Spontaneous uprisings do not have a default moral or political ideology. It can be pulled in whatever direction.

When things burst open, it isn't always good for everyone. Some believe a slower, more intentional route of social change needs to be pursued to achieve tangible change.

This is perhaps a major message in *The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle*: nine months of major organizing drives, major education efforts, major cross-political alliances, and major civil disobedience trainings which culminated on November 30, 1999, were just the tip of the iceberg. In fact, decades of hard work by thousands and thousands of people, building small alliances, making trips to various countries, pulling together enormous worldwide social-movement gatherings like the Zapatista Encuentros, creating huge networks like the People's Global Action Network, building huge militant unions like South Korea's Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, doing direct support campaigns like The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador or the divestment movement against Apartheid, these were the on-ramps to the Road to Seattle. And there were thousands of them.

This was the historic context that produced this "movement of movements."

Thus the real victory in Seattle was not the result of tactical victory, surprise, or an explosion of militancy. The victory was really that a big chunk of the United States had solidified their place in perhaps the largest unified social movement the world has ever seen. It was the people inside the belly of the beast joining the world in its fight for justice. The rest of the world was waiting for it, and they were quite excited to hear of the victory. The Americans finally got it. This was a huge boost for a worldwide social movement.

And how was this achieved? Massive, coordinated civil disobedience and a lot of lead-up organizing, coordinated within a global movement backed by huge networks, political movements, radical leadership (like those taking root in Latin America), and strong alliances both within and across borders. You might realize after months of practice and training that you are able to run faster than before, but you don't just wake up able to run faster. In Seattle, a huge social movement expressed itself to the world. It was not born there, though perhaps it was realized there. It was the realization that comes after months of training. This was the tactical victory, which was a necessary ingredient to effect the changes that grew out of Seattle.

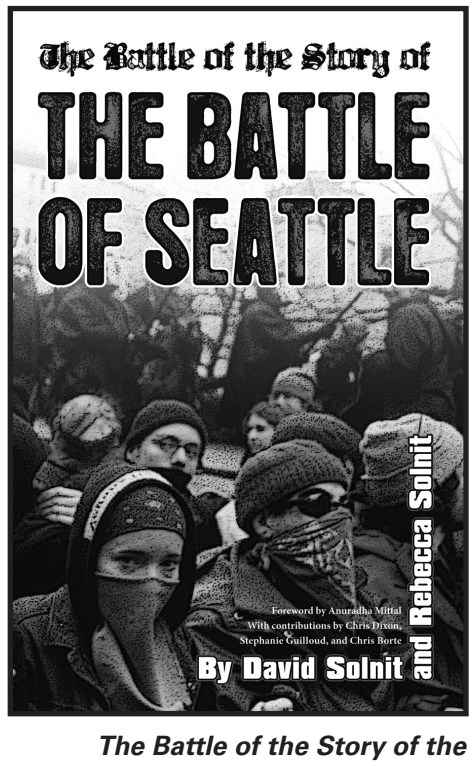
What the real story of Seattle teaches us is that massive mobilization, education, and organization-building are the organic processes of a social movement. When these are mixed with a winnable strategy (with a broadly accepted tactical plan and a massive commitment by participants to stick to it even in the face of repression), and coordinated within a popular social movement with understood values, the result is the ruptures that too many are simply waiting around for. It is the realization of power, but it doesn't just blow in the wind—it is put into the wind purposely by dedicated organizers within social movements. And when such large bodies of people apply themselves in these situations, they send a message to themselves and the rest of the world that it is a time for serious change.

"We found your weakness," Rage Against the Machine said, "and it's right outside your door." The weakness was found, but the instruments used to expose and battle the weakness are not found. They are built by large numbers of people around the world, quite intentionally.

The lessons laid out in *The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle* are very important as we proceed on the path to justice. With a major world-mobilization in Copenhagen for Climate Justice, tension brewing across both Southwestern Asia and the Middle East as well within the U.S. military regarding the U.S. occupations, and radical leadership in Latin America building an alternative economic power-base, we are still in the dead-center of the Global Justice movement, full of both disappointment and inspiration.

The questions for us are: what lessons will we draw from our past? How will we write our history, and how will we learn from past successes and failures? How can our history help us move forward in ways that don't repeat mistakes, but build new victories? And maybe most important of all: how will we sustain our movements through both the great explosions of victories and the sad and lost moments of defeat and disillusion?

We must prepare for and understand the meaning of both. ★



The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle
by David Solnit & Rebecca Solnit
with Chris Dixon, Stephanie Guillod, Chris Borte, and Anuradha Mittal
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CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEXT *INDYREADER*!

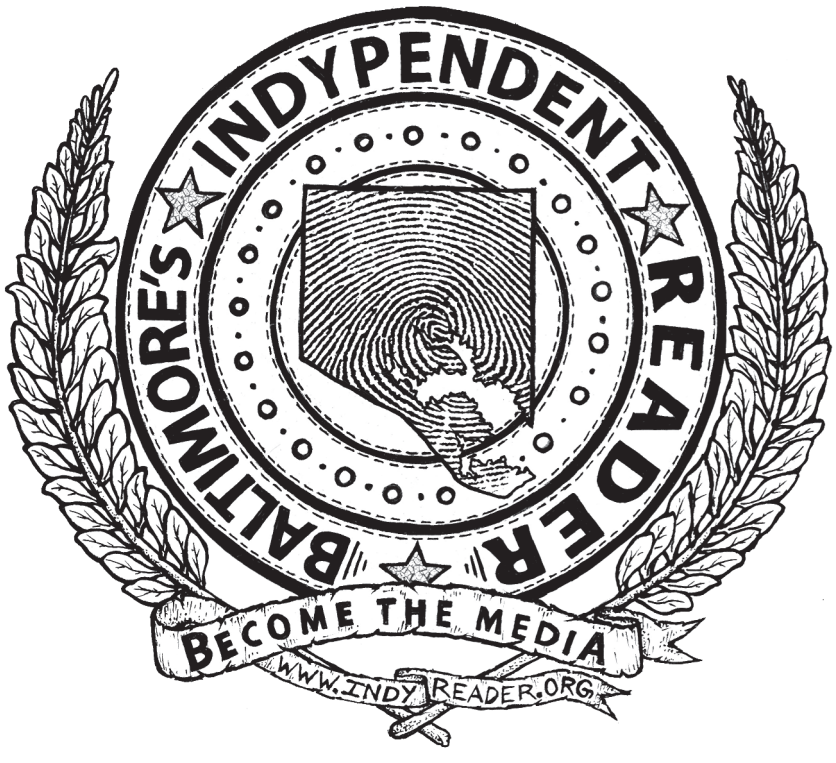
The Spring 2010 issue of the Indyreader will focus on the topic of **WAR**.

The US is still occupying Iraq and broadening its war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the anti-war movement has never seemed quieter. Military recruiters are still preying on youth looking for a chance to escape poverty, veterans are still returning home physically maimed and mentally scarred (if they come home at all), the defense industry is still taking the money our communities need now more than ever, and the US is still trying to maintain its imperial grasp on world power through open wars and covert actions.

Our next issue will explore this situation in depth—how is the persistence of war hurting Baltimore, the US, and the world? What kinds of antiwar organizing and resistance are still fighting for peace and justice? How dependent is our region—from bases and biolabs to unviersity research departments—on an economy based in death and destruction?

And we need your help! If you'd like to write an article, have an idea for an interview, or would like to help out with illustrations, photography, or design, get in touch at:

INDYPENDENTREADER@GMAIL.COM



A Letter From **Iraq Veterans Against the War** (IVAW) to President Obama

President Obama visited Fort Hood today.

He dropped by Michael Kern's barracks. Michael handed President Obama a letter, saying, "Sir, IVAW has some concerns we'd like for you to address."

Obama then dropped his hand and went on to speak to the next soldier. The secret service then took possession of the letter.

This is that letter.

President Obama:

In your recent comments on the Fort Hood tragedy, you stated, "These are men and women who have made the selfless and courageous decision to risk and at times give their lives to protect the rest of us on a daily basis. It's difficult enough when we lose these brave Americans in battles overseas. It is horrifying that they should come under fire at an Army base on American soil." Sir, we have been losing these brave Americans on American soil for years, due to the mental health problems that come after deployment, which include post-traumatic stress disorder, and often, suicide.

You also said that, "We will continue to support the community with the full resources of the federal government." Sir, we appreciate that-but what we need is not more FBI or Homeland Security personnel swarming Fort Hood. What we need is full mental healthcare for all soldiers serving in the Army. What happened at Fort Hood has made it abundantly clear that the military mental health system, and our soldiers, are broken.

You said, "We will make sure that we will get answers to every single question about this terrible incident." Sir, one of the answers is self evident: that a strained military cannot continue without better mental healthcare for all soldiers.

You stated that, "As Commander-in-Chief, there's no greater honor but also no greater responsibility for me than to make sure that the extraordinary men and women in uniform are properly cared for." Sir, we urge you to carry out your promise and ensure that our servicemembers indeed have access to quality mental health care. The Army has only 408 psychiatrists—military, civilian and contractors—serving about 553,000 active-duty troops around the world. This is far too few, and the providers that exist are often not competent professionals, as this incident shows. Military wages cannot attract the quality psychiatrists we need to care for these returning soldiers.

We ask that:

1. Each soldier about to be deployed and returning from deployment be assigned a mental health provider who will reach out to them, rather than requiring them to initiate the search for help.
2. Ensure that the stigma of seeking care for mental health issues is removed for soldiers at all levels-from junior enlisted to senior enlisted and officers alike.
3. Ensure that if mental health care is not available from military facilities, soldiers can seek mental health care with civilian providers of their choice.
4. Ensure that soldiers are prevented from deploying with mental health problems and issues.
5. Stop multiple redeployments of the same troops.
6. Ensure full background checks for all mental health providers and periodic check ups for them to decompress from the stresses they shoulder from the soldiers they counsel to the workload they endure.

Sir, we hope that you will make the decision not to deploy one single Fort Hood troop without ensuring that all have had access to fair and impartial mental health screening and treatment.

You have stated on a number of occasions, starting during your campaign, how important our military and veterans are to this nation. The best way to safeguard the soldiers of this nation is to provide *all* soldiers with immediate, personal and professional mental health resources.

–Iraq Veterans Against the War