

## December 17—Special Three-Week Issue

The December 17 issue of *What's Happening* will cover three weeks of events from December 17-January 6.

The Calendar, Music Calendar, and Classifieds deadline for that issue is **Thursday, December 10 at 4 pm**. The display advertising deadline is **Monday, December 14 at noon**.

The first issue of 1988 will be out on January 7. The Calendar, Music Calendar, and Classifieds deadline for that issue is **Thursday, December 31, 4 pm**. The display advertising deadline is **Monday, January 4, at noon**.

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## OPINION

### ASHES AND DIAMONDS

by Alexander Cockburn



#### Washington's Death

On November 21 I sat in an enormous restaurant in Chicago called Sauer's and along with several hundred other people joined in honoring the 50th anniversary of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and particularly Oliver Law. Up on the stage stood about a dozen Brigade vets, and widows of vets, looking spry, and the following proclamation was read out:

"Whereas, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the entrance of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade as volunteers in defense of democracy in the Spanish civil war; and

"Whereas, over 200 Chicagoans joined this international movement to stop the spread of fascism; and

"Whereas, Oliver Law, a leader of movements for relief of the poor and for political rights for blacks and working people in Chicago in the early 1930s, was a commander in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, thus becoming the first black American to lead an integrated military force in the history of the United States; and

"Whereas, the long-neglected historical significance of Oliver Law is being recognized in a program on November 21, 1987, sponsored by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the 50th Anniversary Committee, which will honor the continuing legacy of international solidarity represented by Oliver Law and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade;

"Now, therefore, I, Harold Washington, Mayor of the City of Chicago, do hereby proclaim November 21, 1987, to be Oliver Law and Abraham Lincoln Day in Chicago and urge all citizens to be cognizant of the special events arranged for this time and the importance of this history.

"Dated this 18th day of November, 1987. Harold Washington, Mayor."

I sat there thinking how fine it was that Chicago had a mayor ready to honor Law and the Brigade in this fashion. It must have been almost the last proclamation Washington signed. He was dead of a heart attack within the week, at 65, which is the average life expectancy rate for black males in the United States. The expectancy rate for black males has been falling throughout Reagan's term, though had the press headline said, "Washington dies on schedule required by U.S. capitalism" it would have no doubt been considered the height of bad taste.

#### Series and the Nexus: The Case of the "Bush Vet"

About 60 miles north of Spokane in eastern Washington is the town of Colville. The country round about is rugged, cut through with glacial valleys sheltering fertile farms. Over to the east across the mountains is neo-Nazi terrain, around Metalline Falls and Coeur d'Alene. The economy of the region is depressed; mines closed up, lumber run down. The Colville region is Vietnam vet country; rural, remote and, best of all, cheap.

About four years ago, some Vietnam vets going to the mental health center in Colville for individual counseling organized a rap group, meeting once a week to have collec-

tive sessions in which each could unburden himself, sharing experiences with others well qualified to understand what was being talked about. After 18 months they went public, debuting with a booth at the Colville County Fair.

This initiative did not pass unnoticed by the local Veterans of Foreign Wars service office, which exerted itself to organize a group of vets less overtly connected with the politically fraught notion of peace. A supervisory bureaucrat from Health and Social Services called Lloyd Humphreys urged the vets to merge with the new group for their weekly sessions and finally a joint gathering was convened. The rap groups were not delighted by the consequences. They had a rule for such meetings: no weapons, no booze. One of the vets in the counter group was half stewed and others carried knives.

The rap group said it would boy-

**The Colville region is Vietnam vet country; rural, remote, and best of all cheap. About four years ago some Vietnam vets ... organized a rap group....**

cott the mental health center and did so for the following 18 months. The bureaucracy—feds twined octopus-like with the Washington Department of Social and Health Services—then announced that they were withdrawing recognition from the rappers as a group, though each of its members could return for counseling on an individual basis.

The rap group jacked up its collective social and political presence in the community, calling itself Vets for Peace, organizing community vigils, leafletting lines for *Platoon*, and so forth.

Earlier this year Dan Rather came to Colville. With him he brought CBS producer Paul Fine and a production unit and began to make a documentary about Colville area vets. It should be airing round about now. Vets for Peace made sure the CBS people knew about its existence and waited eagerly for the opportunity to try to counter the mad dog image of a bunch of Rambo crazies in the hills: the so-called "bust vet," beloved by journalists chirping about PTSD—post traumatic stress disorder—and avoiding politics in any form.

The chance never came. Rather and his crew spent their time talking to the state-sanctioned vet group, and flew off into the sunrise. Still smarting from this experience, Vets for Peace were then approached by the *Spokane Spokesman Review*. The reporter talked with them by the hour. The photographer arrived and they stood proudly under their Vets for Peace banner as he clicked away. One more shot, he asked, just them and no ban-

ner against a mountain backdrop. Innocently, they complied. In the published story they got two paragraphs, buried in blather about the counter group. And the photograph of men without a banner, socially atomized against a bush vet backdrop.

This kind of treatment of Vets for Peace by CBS and the *Spokesman Review* was well summed up by Theodor Adorno in *Minima Moralia* in his words in "Monad":

"[The decay of the individual] must not be deduced individualistically, but from the social tendency which asserts itself by means of individuation and not merely as its enemy. . . . Reactionary criticism often attains insight into the decay of individuality and the crisis of society, but places the ontological responsibility of this on the individual as such, as something discrete and internal: for this reason the accusation of shallowness, lack of faith and substance, is the last word it has to say. . . . (T)he trend of their condemnation is rather to sacrifice the individual himself than to criticize the social *principium individuationis*. As half-truths, their polemics are already the whole untruth. . . . (T)he setting free of the individual by the undermining of the *polis* did not strengthen his resistance, but eliminated him and individuality itself. . . . Freedom from society robs him of the strength for freedom."

Take that, Allan Bloom.

#### Well Done, Bill!

The thought of CBS brings me to Bill Moyers, pissed on here once or twice for disservices to humanity. Now comes the time to give the man a clap on the back and words of hearty congratulations for his *Contragate/Constitution* film, aired on November 4. This was a fine 90-minute docu-

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What's Happening Office Hours  
Monday-Friday 9-4

#### WHAT'S HAPPENING

Weekly News, Arts, Entertainment  
Published Every Thursday

**Publishers:** Elisabeth Lyman,  
Lucia McKelvey, Sonja Ungemach  
**Editors:** Lucia McKelvey, Sonja Ungemach, Elisabeth Lyman  
**Advertising Manager:** Elisabeth Lyman  
**Production Manager:** Sonja Ungemach  
**Office Manager/Production:** Sheri Longobardo  
**Assistant Editor:** Deborah McGee  
**Account Representatives:** Susan Brokaw, Kate Garnhart, Garde Wells  
**Cover Design:** Melanie Pratt  
**Contributing Writers:** Deborah McGee, Jim Stiak, Lois Wadsworth, Garde Wells  
**Distribution:** Daybreak News Co. **Typesetting:** ProtoType.  
**Camera Work:** Graphics Unlimited. **Printing:** Springfield News

335 West 20th Avenue  
Eugene, Oregon 97405  
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