

RENTING THE GARMENT OF FREEDOM

BY D. ARMSTRONG

In the aftermath of the bombing in Oklahoma City, a pervasive black gauze has settled over the people of our embattled United States. Beneath this charred blanket, once striped and starred, a moment of revelation bursts — like an automatic weapon discharging in a schoolyard — upon Americans of all creeds and colors. From shore to shore, from inner-city drive-bys to skinhead fascism, our country is not safe to picnic in. From courtroom to ballfield, something in the good old USA stinks. (Christ, casinos sacrilege the Indian reservations! What is the fucking deal?)

Our drugged and weary eagle pushes its head up through the soiled garment of freedom. It looks right, then left for the source of the odor. Finally, the silly bird realizes it has been eating its own tail feathers. (What's that smell, O.J.?)

The extent of public distrust in the government was demonstrated when rumors begin to circulate that the bombing in Oklahoma City was perpetrated by some covert arm of our own intelligence service, as an action designed to undermine the growing right wing of militant activists. True or false, this level of paranoia grinds at our being. It doesn't really matter what entity funded the enterprise or what individuals are finally made to pay for the crime, because amid all the pointing of fingers, the real problem is the flagging spirit in the people of our country. Our identity is confused. We don't know who we are anymore. There seems no clear line of reasoning that doesn't intrude upon the freedom or livelihood of some special interest group. We have become ensnared in our own egocentric web. Every action we take to free ourselves only twists the grip of that web tighter. Common sense is confounded. (Where do we go from here, Billy Boy?)

Way out in the Pacific Northwest where we dare to argue old growth forests, owl habitats and salmon runs against our own economic backbone, no one need overstate the complexity of protecting Mother Earth for the longterm while taking care of your neighbor in the now. Unfortunately, even were our system of government not polluted with bureaucracy and legalese, even were the halls of Congress not littered with graft and dirty old men, the solutions to the problems at hand would be difficult. The far-seeing and stringent resource management necessary to live in, work with and heal this locale (and/or the rest of the world) invariably goes against the grain of profit. Not until pure air is sold in inhalers and clean water is administered in syringes will big money be interested in the plight of the common person in Oregon. (When the cancer finally gets you, follow the dollars to the doctor's office.)

Within the shackles of high finance, this country is not as free as we think it is. In the years since World War 2 the government intelligence community has grown like a cancer into the constitutional fabric of the United States. As a world wide instrument of manipulation, history shows the work of the CIA in particular growing more and more Machiavellian and free wheeling. The episode of the Iran-Contra scandal exposes the extreme nature to which this has evolved. Acting outside the jurisdiction of Congress, under the guise of National Security, private interests maintain a covert, so-called "Super Patriot" vigilante group to supply strongarm support to American investment properties all over the world. Weapon and drugs sales are used to finance illegal guerrilla wars and topple governments that do not adhere to American corporate design. (Yes, something is terribly wrong here.) When the Congressional investigation into the Iran-Contra affair ended, insult was added to injury. None of the big boys went to jail!

There are some who say the military intelligence community, backed by industrial plutocrats, took over the day John F. Kennedy was shot. A nice neat little coup. We've been silently run by the American mob ever since. Working in the shadows of our rather suspect Senate and House of Representatives, private interests always make sure national policies suit big money agenda. And meanwhile this self-serving element, existing outside the law, has sold our country down the river. The gold and silver reserves are gone. The social security trusts have been looted. The treasury is mortgaged to the Federal Reserve Bank — which is not a part of the U.S. government but an international bank! And this has all happened primarily because we've given them our votes with our souls. The average American seems to think he or she can play the money game with the big boys. Sad to say, just as in Las Vegas, the numbers are heavily stacked in favor of the bank.

Even cursory reflection upon American politics since 1950 is enough to warrant anyone's distrust in the mechanism that interprets our Constitution. J. Edgar Hoover's transvestite FBI, the peculiar and ongoing covert actions of the CIA, the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, the illegal war in Laos, the conflict in Vietnam, Watergate, the Iran-Contra connection, Manuel Noriega and the insult of the war on drugs, these are only some of the most visible lies twisted into the iceberg of deceit that glaciates in Washington, D.C. In no way can the inquiring mind imagine that any form of justice prevails in this country that is not colored green. Factions to the right and to the left may scream in frustration, even wage war in the streets, but the sad truth is that the fat middle of America just pretends that this is business as usual while it eagerly swallows the opiate of material wonder. (That's right. The real drug of choice is our legal tender.)

It can seem overwhelming just to ponder, much less solve, the diversity of ills from ecological neglect to sexual abuse to inner-city slavery that bridle our society. All of them. Every ailment. All of the frustration, all of the violence and all of



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the disillusionment that we face right now is directly related to America's blind addiction to money. "Big Money" interests run the show and the middle class simply goes to the mall in support. The voting masses assuage their frustrations, and thus relinquish their democratic clout, by trading moral values for dollar distractions.

There are those who place a large portion of blame upon irresponsibility in the media for many of our problems. That the media is for the most part conscienceless, propagandized and profit oriented is clear. So what? In the age of information, the challenge to each individual is to process the glut of information. (That is, glean the truth from the media's wide variety of biased voices.) Also keep in mind, the media is really no more than a tempting mirror. It merely reflects what we buy, and we buy sex and violence just as eagerly as we buy fast cars, guns and alcohol. Amid the surfeit of digitalized reality we cannot resist the draw of sanginity

(Blood runs down my arm now as I type these words. A deep and unhealing wound pulses in my forearm. I pull back the gangrenous flesh and suck away the puss. Across the torn muscles and frayed tendons of my interior arm, I see dancing swastikas and dollar signs. The vision expands. I am the consciousness of this country. My etheric body is riddled with vortices of green. Big city ghettos, larcenous insurance agencies, fat daddy healer corporations, game show hosts, lots and lots of lawyers, boil upon the remnant of America's native gown of clear light. In my heart are two hundred millions of men and women wrestling for gender identity, abusing each other with dildoes, strangling each other with condom garrotes — just to determine who gets to be on top! Me, Me, Me screams like incoming rockets arching across the yuppied rainbow of consumerism... *ecstatic violent exultation is our virtual experiential religion. Only the video impingement of violence can touch our buried carnal origins. We are transistorized primitives elbow deep in electronic*

entrails, swooning to the pixelated sight of our brother's bowels blown to kingdom cum. Our primal selves scream through this last conduit of spirituality. Our beings are in rage! Human sacrifice is the sacrament of our obscene material in communion ... My head opens like an egg. A deformed fetus falls out upon my chest. The new being has a penis, a vagina, one nipples and hairy breast, two assholes and a credit card number stenciled upon its palm. There is no scrotum. No testicles. Instead of eyes, simply a video screen. And on that screen, playing in an unending loop, is the collapsing cataract of concrete and glass that faced the Federal building in Oklahoma City — as part of an insurance ad! In dismay, I realize that the zombied actions of my physical being willed this nonsense. I am to blame. I try to cry, but no tears will come. My soul is dead. I am only so much meat, packaged and sold like frankfurters in a pom shop. And I am the spirit of America!

If we can look with any objectivity at our society, we'll see that moral responsibility invariably runs at cross-purposes to making money. (Old news.) In a democratic capitalism, you vote with dollars spent not a ballot. The products you buy, the television shows you watch support particular manufacturing syndicates and corporations that in turn pay lobbyists to determine the outcome of national elections months before the day we vote. The spirit of freedom in this country runs green. It has nothing to do with banners waved left or right, free speech, rights to bare arms, justice, or plain and simple human decency. Bucks up. We buy our freedom. We believe in money. This is not to say money is bad. Money is a societal necessity of exchange. It is merely empty in itself. Yet to wads of money go most of our hopes and dreams and prayers. Our society is glamorous, dazzling and distraction filled, but frighteningly and increasingly meaningless.

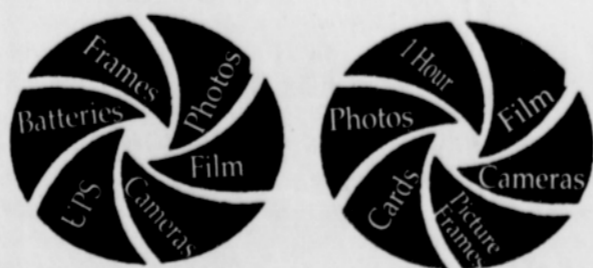
The American is rare today who does not choose the dollar first. And why not? All else that matters follows. From family health care to sex appeal, money is the blood of our society. It is the pulse of power and justice in our nation. It transcends all but ideologies of the far left and the far right. And in frustration those extremes voice their indignation with an explosive version of chemotherapy for a country with cancer of its soul. But what foolishness is this? Where are we headed? Karmic meltdown!

Something is sadly amiss here. Don't look now, but our country's soul is gone. How else could Christian terrorists be bombing Federal buildings in Oklahoma? Symbolically, if we dare, we have loaded the gun and placed it at our own temple. So where do we worship now, Mr. Bush? At the quik-pix machine?

What wisdom might be offered to this desperately material society coming apart from the inside? Oh, probably Jesus Christ, or Buddha, or Mohammed or John Lennon surely said what we all know already — but for some damn reason can't manage to live. The one to blame faces us in our electronic mirror, the way we spend our money determines the cast of that reflection. Hug your child, open your heart instead of your wallet, and know we are more than material being.

Dan Armstrong lives in Astoria. He is a writer and poet. "I must admit to being primarily a writer of fiction, and I'm not certain if this emotional response to the bombing in Oklahoma City is a political essay or just another piece of fiction," he wrote in an accompanying letter. "I don't pretend to be offering any particularly new ideas, but I tried to incorporate a kind of primal scream into an ordinary discourse upon disillusionment in America."

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