

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1993

FE Letters Policy

The Fifth Estate always welcomes letters commenting on our articles, giving reports of events in your area, or stating your opinion. We don't guarantee we will print everything we receive, but all letters are read by our staff and considered.

Typed letters or ones on disk are appreciated, but not required. Length should not exceed two, double-sided pages. If you are interested in writing a longer response, please contact us in advance.

Patriarchal Traditions

To the FE:

I would like to know what the basis is for E.B. Maple's remark in "Was it Anarchy in Somalia?" [FE #341, Spring 1993] that the traditional clan structure was matrilineal and non-authoritarian. I.M. Lewis who is probably today the leading non-Somali authority on the traditional Somali social system, along with all others who have studied the system, clearly demonstrate the system was patrilineal and patriarchal (see Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy, A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, 1961, Oxford University Press and for a shorter version see "The Northern Pastoral Somali of the Horn" in James Gibbs (ed.), *Peoples of Africa*, Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1965, pp. 319-360).

The traditional Somali social order merged the political and kinship realms so that there was no such separate institutional entity as government. Rather, a decentralized, segmentary lineage-tribal system existed in which tribes are segmented into clans and clans into various lineage levels. Membership in any kin group is based on patrilineal descent. Each segment is managed by (male) elders.

The system did demonstrate a certain egalitarianism and ability to discourage despotism. The creation of the Somali state helped to undermine this traditional non-state tribal system and, when the state itself disintegrated, competing gangs headed by warlords and armed with material from the USA and the USSR entered to fill the power vacuum.

In a sense, then, these armed gangs are a multitude of micro-states. They are clearly not anarchy as reported by the press nor are they any return to the earlier tribal segmentary system. If anything is or was anarchy in Somalia, it was most clearly approached by the traditional system.

Harold B. Barclay

Edmonton, Alberta

E.B. Maple responds: Harold Barclay is an eminent anthropologist whose works are informed by an anti-authoritarian perspective. He is indeed correct that the Somalian clans are patrilineal and patriarchal. Other than that, I believe I said the same thing about their function as Prof. Barclay. Thanks to him for the correction.

Don't Knock Marijuana

To the Fifth Estate:

I am disappointed to read a comment made by E.B. Maple in the article, "Somalia: Was This Really Anarchy?" (FE #341, Spring 1993). A partial quotation of the comment in question reads thus: "Cotton, tobacco, coffee, marijuana, coca, cocoa and other such crops grown for the global capitalist supermarket turn once independent farmers into starving, landless peons..."

Any "problem" that stems from marijuana is not attributable to the plant User but rather to the fact that the plant is illegal.

E.B. should leave anti-hemp fascism to the mainstream news media. This letter cannot hope to undo the damage done by Maple's comment, as not all who saw the article will see this note.

Anyone wishing to learn more about how the re-legalization of cannabis and the reopening of the hemp industry would literally save the ecology and the economy by providing non-petroleum gasoline substitutes and other products, send \$3. for a sample issue of *New Ave Patriot*, POB 419, Dearborn Heights, MI, 48127-0419

W.V.

E.B. Maple responds: This is not a thoughtful letter, but an extremely myopic one. It exemplifies those hemp advocates who become so mono-focused as to ignore anything other than their own hobby horse of marijuana decriminalization.

This is not to deny the importance of an issue which generates such an enormous amount of legal repression that it results in over one million arrests yearly for pot violations. The *Fifth Estate* newspaper has consistently called for the end of all laws regulating any and all intoxicants, so there is no disagreement here.

The difficulty with W.V.'s letter results from him/her being unable to see further than one plant. Tobacco and cocoa are legal, yet their cultivation has a devastating effect on local subsistence farming and the soil no less so than the contraband coca and marijuana plants. The problem lies with the "capitalist global supermarket" not the legality of any particular plant. (See my review of books on hemp elsewhere in this issue for more on this.)

Magnus Dumpus

Dear Fifth Estate:

Thanks for the opportunity to respond to your gentle critique of my nagnus dumpus, *The Art And Science of Dumpster Diving*, \$12.95 plus \$4 postage and handling, Loompanics Unlimited, PO Box 1197, Port Townsend, WA 98368 (See Spring 1992 FE). However, I hardly call it criticism for somebody to point out that I believe in "rugged individualism" and the ability of an unfettered market to meet human needs, since I do believe in those things.

The book is its own answer to any implication I turn a blind eye to the needs of others, being a how-to book telling individuals on the edge ways to acquire free goodies. I consistently point out the value and joy of family, tribe and communal structures.

As for being "silly," well, the book does have an Ace Backwards comic in every chapter, so I guess I am silly and all your criticisms are devastatingly accurate. Enjoy this letter—you may never see another one like it from us sensitive authors.

John Hoffman

c/o Loompanics, Unlimited

FE Note: The review in question said right-wing libertarian politics and a "naive confidence in the market" was silly, not Hoffman's book, which is quite entertaining and a useful guide to picking the alleys.

The Warden & @

FE Note: The following was received after the last issue went to press and is a response to our letter of protest sent to Warden Shade regarding an inmate and FE subscriber, Dale Austin, who had been disciplined for using the anarchist circle A.

Dear Mr. Bakunin:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding inmate Dale Austin and the philosophy of anarchy. I am aware of the fact that anarchy is a political philosophy as opposed to a disruptive group affiliation. I have made this information available to my staff.

To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Austin has not been disciplined for use of the letter A with a line through it, the anarchy symbol. Occasionally some of my younger correctional officers may seize a document containing this symbol for review by our disruptive groups coordinator. Once that review has taken place, it would be my expectation that the document in question would be returned to Mr. Austin.

Oscar D. Shade, Warden
Racine Correctional Inst.
Sturtevant, WI 53177

Mr. B responds: Gee, what's next, pleasantries from the switchman for the electric chair? Since free speech is quickly guillotined by prisons systems all over the world, here's a quick, "Fuck off, Mr. Warden," for anyone stuck behind bars.

How about writing us again after trading places for a week (or, a month, a year, a life) with one of your disciplined inmates? Well send you a free prisoner's subscription while you serve your debt for mendacity.

Wisconsin Prisons

Dear FE:

Dale Austin, the prisoner who wrote to you about the outrageous treatment he received for using the A in correspondence, is one of many people in Wisconsin's prison system who's being punished for what are essentially thought-crimes. (See letter, FE #341, Spring 1993)

Adrian Lomax, another Wisconsin prisoner, has been sentenced to a year in solitary for writing a newspaper column that criticized an abusive guard. He has since received more time in solitary for a column criticizing a heartless security director.

In March, a prisoner in the same solitary confinement wing hung himself from the bars with a bedsheet. Several fellow prisoners wrote to the newspapers about it and were punished for "lying." (The official line is that the death was accidental.)

And all this is just in one wing of one prison! Perhaps you could print the warden's address for readers to send letters of protest:

Oscar Shade
P.O. Box 900
Sturtevant, WI 53177
Yours against repression,
Nancy Rost
P.O. Box 845
Madison, WI 53701

Lost Parole

Dear Fifth Estate:

Wow! What a heavy rag you are turning out. I'm in prison in Colorado and a fellow hippie (Deadhead) loaned me his copy. I've been sitting in my cell reading it for 3 hours now. I really dig on every word in it.

I was on parole during the Desert Storm war and was picked up by my parole officer because he saw me in an anti-war demonstration. I had a two-inch pocket knife on me so he violated my parole. Chicken shit of an excuse to get me off the streets.

Colorado's laws are unreal. Anyone coming through Colorado be very careful. I'm doing 6 years for two joints!

It is a pig state and I'm waiting for them to fence it in and make it one big prison. Since I've been in, over 4 years now, they have built eight new prisons.

Hey. Can I get a subscription to The Fifth Estate? I also read the article about Texas Prisons messing with your wonderful rag. Hey—the truth hurts them!

(Gnarley) R.M.

Arrowhead Correctional Center

Canon City, CO

Japanese Anarchists

Dear Comrades,

We are an active anarchist group in Japan and involved in the struggle against the dispatch of Japanese military units overseas by Japan state who plans to make re-invasion to surrounding countries and reinforcement of the state control through Tenno (Japanese emperor) authority.

We had our own space in the periodical paper of Anarchist Federation (Japanese) Libera Volo, but we decided to start publishing a new paper.

The new paper is named WARRIOR and introduces the movements in which we engage and anarchist movements all over the world. An English-language page is included on the back cover to introduce movements in Japan to comrades and friends of the world.

We wish to have relations of anarchists or radical activists all over the world.

It would be glad to exchange our publication and yours. We send you our paper Warrior and Libera Volo. Please send us your publications.

Takeru Kuroki

A.R.P.

P.O. Box 57

Sakyo Kyoto,

606—Japan

Living Primitive

To the Fifth Estate:

I heard your paper has a "primitivist angle." What a coincidence! I live a very primitive lifestyle. Life in a solar village is much different than life in Detroit, I know that much. I've lived in both places.

Let me tell you folks, the day-to-day survival on the land is a much simpler way than life in the concrete jungle. It is hard work. Hauling water by hand, mixing soil, even simply keeping warm in our mild winters takes the work of hauling and chopping wood.

However, we don't have to work for the man to put a roof over our head. We generate what little electricity we need. You've heard of the sword in the stone? We have the hose in the stone and gushing from it is some of the clearest, cleanest mountain mineral water I've ever enjoyed.

I feel that this is as close as I've gotten to living with the land. We are not entirely self-sufficient. We go into town for supplies and to see friends. Most of us feel uncle sam owes us, so many take in gov't benefits to help supplement what we grow or hunt.

Unfortunately, cops are everywhere. When the “hippies” (old english; keepers of flock and fields) moved here, the drug war wasn’t like it is today. Now “Zero Tolerance” policy is making our location near the Mexican Border less and less “tolerable.” D.E.A., D.P.S., U.S. Customs, U.S. Border Patrol, Air National Guard, Forest Service all feel it’s up to them to make sure what us “reds” are really up to.

To us, it’s just life as usual. After all, we are into our third generation here. To them, I suppose it’s some kind of threat. Maybe even a...conspiracy! They beat us, steal from us, lock us up.. same as anywhere. If they can’t find our pot, they break into greenhouses and steal tomatoes. Small planes, big planes, old ones, new ones...and there’s always the chop-chop of a helicopter lurking and ready to pounce. Helicopter surveillance can be very terrifying, especially for the children: .55 caliber machine guns that swivel and a guy leaning out the passenger side taking pictures.

We have thought of moving, but we’re a bunch of hot-headed desert rats. We love our hills and homes. There is no other place we could call home in the way that this place is.

So, let’s have a big celebration with lots of people, lots of music and free speech. Last year 20 bands and 1500 people came out in support of freedom...for all!

In the Spirit of Resistance!

Anarchy Village

POB 27

Arivaca, AZ 85601

Deskilling of Jobs

Greetings:

Over the past few months I’ve been discussing the latest DTP “advances” with several graphic artists, typographers and trades people now that the outlines of it are fairly obvious—scanned photos and computerized manipulation make obsolete the old litho-camera procedures; the strippers craft is being replaced by sophisticated software and soon the press operation will produce “perfect” copies by simply turning the press on.

Several questions are raised by the specter of DTP and the deskilling of jobs is only one. Another is the increased pace of production as if we all must hurry to try to keep up with the tempo set by the manufacturers of the hardware. Still another is the aesthetic consideration—ugliness on a grand scale—ugly, but technically complex printed matter. Design driven by the dollar and made “simple” by the menu.

It’s easy to destroy the argument from the point of view of “democratization” of print technology: Everybody can now have a perfect newsletter, but does that mean we have anything to say?

One last note. You mention the loss of conviviality around the production process: proofreading parties, paste-up bashes that last all night, etc. Well, that’s one of the advantages of people using technology for their own ends, and of course has little to do with the real world of production. But when it comes to printing, the pace I mentioned above—coupled with the highly fragmented nature of the whole process (each with their VDT) contributes to the miserable working conditions that now pervade all print-shops, deskilling is a tangible reality.

Bernard

Ztangi Press

Berkeley, CA

FE Note: We take some pride in asserting that no one on the staff knows what DTP stands for. A definition of the acronym isn’t needed to get Bernard’s point.

Factsheet 5 and Five

Dear F.E.:

E.B. Maple’s review of the book *The World of Zines* [“The Radical Press Today, FE #341, Spring, 1993] cited Mike Gunderloy as publisher of the reviewzine Factsheet Five: unfortunately, he no longer fills this role.

Factsheet Five ("FF") is now called Factsheet 5 ("F5") and is being produced by R. Seth Friedman. The new version is significantly smaller and less comprehensive than the old one. There are no reviews of music recordings or any other media besides printed zines. My unscientific spot check found several crucial long-running publications unmentioned, too. There are no columns or articles except for Friedman's own dull column on food.

Finally, every review in the "Punk" section was copied from MaxitnumRocknRoll, which is cheaper per-copy and has tons of other stuff for anyone into the punk thing, including international scenes and zines. Friedman, by way of explanation, just says he liked the old Factsheet Five "so much, I bought the company"—what, to scuttle it? Or just to make some bucks off the name?

So the new Factsheet 5 is worthless? No, it's still got more zine reviews than you'll find in most any single place: if you just want to explore the realm of independent/underground publishing a random, it's an excellent Introduction, yet, however, Seth Friedman is NOT producing the caliber of encyclopedic reference-work that Mike Gunderloy did, and it remains to be seen whether he can.

Factsheet 5 can be had for \$4 (single issue, bulk rate), \$6 (single issue, first class) or \$20 (6-issue subscription, bulk rate) from: Seth Friedman, P.O. Box 170099, San Francisco, CA 94117-0099. MaximuniRockaoll can be had for \$3 (single issue) or \$18. (6-issue subscription) from MKR, P.O. Box 460760, San Francisco, CA 94146-0760.

Erik Rensberger

Washington, D.C.

Fighting Fascism

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is our latest poster and flyer, "Gegen die faschistischen Zentren Vorgehen!" (Act against fascist centers!). The demo on March 20th was part of our campaign against fascist indoctrination centers. A house in the small town of Adelebsen (Lower Saxony) is becoming one of the most important indoctrination centers for the militant fascists in West Germany and their cadre indoctrination.

You may have heard about the March 7th elections in Hessen where the extreme right-wing parties like the so-called "Republicans" and the "National Democrats" made it in most of the local councils with 5 — 15% of the votes! Now we start a campaign to make their centers and meeting points public and vulnerable.

We would like to exchange our poster, flyer, booklets, etc. on a regular basis with you, so please put us on the mailing list for your publication.

Zusammen kämpfen! Autonome Antifa (M) Buchladen Rote Str. 3400, Gottingen, Germany

No Veggies

Greetings Fifth Estate:

I am an anarchist class war prisoner from the San Francisco Bay Area, doing 15 calendar years in Arizona for commercial burglary. I am locked down in a super-maximum-security Control Unit, in my cell 24 hours a day, and haven't seen daylight in 2-1/2 years. I don't know anyone in this state, have no family, no financial assets, and basically don't have a pot to piss in here.

I've been a vegetarian in this prison system for 7 years and now the prison administration has taken my vegetarian diet away because this fascist petty tyrant fundamentalist Christian pig of a Chaplain here says it's "okay" for me to eat a meat diet again. I am a vegetarian for life, but you cannot reason with these people; it just "does not compute." I have been trying to get re-approved to receive the vegetarian diet as a member of the Sikh religion (it's done as a religious thing), but their civilian Sikh "representative" has arbitrarily denied me my First Amendment rights.

I am surviving virtually on bread and lettuce and a few meager spoonfuls of canned vegetables. I cannot maintain my weight, and they refuse to provide me with proper medical attention or double rations. I'm 6' 1", and they

allowed me to drop to 139 pounds and would not do anything for me. They tell me to “eat a regular diet.” That is not an option for me. So I’m starving.

Contributions to help finance legal action and to purchase food from the commissary to get me by would be greatly appreciated. Even a couple dollars (money orders only) will help out; it adds up. Whatever you’re capable of. If I can be of any assistance to you in return—even just as a sympathetic ear—please feel free to write to me. Your correspondence is most welcome. If anyone has any information, resources and ideas, or if anyone can turn me on to a civil rights lawyer who will help me, please get in touch. Many thanks.

In Solidarity,
Gregory Waleski #47190
Arizona State Prison
P.O. Box 4000
Florence, AZ 85232

TV A Useful Tool

Dear Fifth Estate:

In your article on Malice Green it was suggested that the power of television has been exaggerated (see “The (Last) Rights of Malice Green,” FE #341, Spring, 1993). I could not disagree more.

The notion that the original airings of the Rodney King video did not provoke the community is not accurate. Following the airing of that tape (seen around the world) the people of South Central and of LA as a whole marched in numerous demonstrations and called for the removal of Police Chief Gates. There was screaming outrage both outside and inside City Hall. Various meetings were over run with angry members of the African American community. They were enraged and they shouted for justice.

Yes, it is true that there was no riot. The people were angry but they were still prepared to give the judicial system a chance so they waited for a conviction. There was however talk in the interim of riots if the wrong verdict came down the line.

The wrong verdict did come down the line despite the fact that the whole world had seen that tape and thus because of that tape and because the people had given “justice” a chance the riot exploded. The very reason and the very method via which the human race is now connected is television; it is because of television that people in war torn Yugoslavia were able to see the Rodney King tape and the people of Los Angeles the images of Serb run internment camps. If Goldman and Berkman had only been blessed with the medium of television one way or another they would have found a way to slip their message past all the bullshit!

I could not and will not under any circumstances ever advocate as one of your described books suggests the abolishment of television. Of all the time in history and of all the people to suggest such a foolish and extreme form of censorship.

Such a notion is at the very least as far from the anarchist spirit of liberty as one can get in cultural terms. Today we have the people’s technological revolutions of the personal camcorder and community access cable channels.

Small dish satellite reception which has been popular in Europe and Asia for about four years now is due to debut in North America by 1995. The explosion in channels around the developed world and beyond means that it is now far harder for individual governments to spoon feed their impression of events than it was in the days of three or four channels.

Any medium capable of bringing the world together should never be abandoned or ignored and thus left only to those who misuse it. The libertarian spirit of anarchism should always strive to fill all avenues of information with our truth. By doing so we shall far better honor the memories of such inspirational people as Alexander Berkman, Camillo Berneri and Ella Antolini.

Howard S. Marks
Miami, FL

G. Raffilo responds: Letters like Howard’s make me wonder why there aren’t more anarchist consumer-advocate groups cheerleading television’s wondrous potential. Why aren’t there huge armies of anarco-couch potatoes min-

gling excitedly with assorted camera muggers and viewers for less-violence? They could soak up the latest programming proposals in TV lounges and contemplate the “liberation spirit of anarchism” during commercial breaks or at half-time in sporting events.

Alas, the outright rejection of television is apparently unfathomable for any video audience, including some cursory readers of the *Fifth Estate*. But to declare abandoning TV as a “foolish and extreme form of censorship” is like saying modern warfare can be reformed as a means of free expression.

TV is censorship. Although television programmers constantly censor broadcasts, it is much more disturbing how television, regardless of content, severely cripples a viewer’s capacity to think critically and creatively. Jump cuts to riot footage or reruns of the Rodney King beating ultimately trivialize and patronize. The justified outrage beneath the blood and broken glass will always get lost in the sea of messages reminding viewers that consumption never ends, that TV never stops televising.

Faint images of rebellion might flash between commercials, like the protesters in Howard’s example, who waited for the courts while calling on the Los Angeles Police Chief to resign. TV cannot inspire and communicate what radicals like Berkman and Goldman demanded during their lifetime—the removal of all Police Chiefs and their Police.

Howard’s letter unintentionally reveals the power of TV, but it is the power of acceptance and consumption, not the power of critique and rebellion. His retort to my article skipped a key word. The medium is incapable of galvanizing (or radicalizing) its audience, as critics like Ellul and Mander have detailed, or as a passive citizenry demonstrates daily with a 99.5% (the percentage of American households with TV sets) retreat to the video screen, shutting out the real world of neighborhood violence and police brutality for artificial recreations of the same thing.

Blind faith in the neutrality of technology has viewers like Howard absurdly equating liberty with increased TV channel selection (and a goal of a global, consumption-based monoculture). Even “commercial-free” TV remains a continuous advertisement for consumption, for staying tuned to the screen and the lifestyle it promotes.

A few months ago I made the mistake of visiting a supermarket where the consumption cycle is now complete: each check-out line was equipped with television monitors making viewing compulsory and drowning out any lingering possibility of conversation between shoppers. I couldn’t figure out how to turn the sets off without getting escorted out of the store by a nervous manager.

The revolution will not be televised (Gil Scott-Heron was right). Nor will real communities. No desperate name-dropping of the deceased, however notable the figures, can excuse such shameless ignorance.

Anarcho-Blind Spot

To The Fifth Estate:

In “Grounds for Decolonizing,” FE #341, Spring, 1993, Kathleen Rashid generously explicates how Prof. Ward Churchill and other intellectuals characterize American Civilization as a project that “terminate(s) indigenous peoples and their cultures.”

And, she considers how the pursuit of land rights and recovery among native american national liberationists raise anarchist suspicions about the statist presuppositions of national sovereignty as well as the authoritarian character of national liberation movements. While Rashid treats these issues with the importance they deserve, she also perpetuates two blind spots in the debate: the essentialist and ahistorical thinking of national liberationists and the perfunctory criticisms and thin social-political analysis of anarchists.

National liberationists (of which only some are native american) tend to have pristine notions of their respective community/ culture and one-sided understanding of the communities/cultures that either subjugate them or threaten their security. When Rashid states that “native social organization reflects the fluid complexity of the natural processes that sustain and inform it,” such a description sets up a correspondence between native social organization and nature as pristine ecology, yet it doesn’t suggest what forces and circumstances in history sustain and regulate this relationship.

“Fluid complexity” might either mask or give way to internal group conflict and socially-sanctioned ecological devastation within native cultures. Similarly, she states that “european doctrine, developing as it has out of the

European mind-set of power relationships, ultimately extends those oppressive relations through the revolutions it propagates.”

This assessment encourages one to understand a particular European mind-set (Leviathanic or Victorian) as the essence of the 2000-year development of Western civilization, yet doesn't acknowledge European currents of opposition and resistance within and against the same heritage. Don't we have much to learn from minor European traditions/communities who grasp in equally important ways the myriad truths of genocide, colonization and resistance?

Some anarchist contributions to the debate with national liberationists have tended to be criticisms that palliate suspicions of statism and authoritarianism and, at times, exaggerate them in a way that overshadows the policies of the prevailing state apparatus.

In other words, it often seems some anarchists simply offer a list of politico-ethico do's and don'ts to native American national liberationists without engaging in a social/political analysis that identifies pertinent issues and conflicting interests which could demonstrate how anarchist approaches constitute an alternative to national liberationist approaches to native American self-determination.

Lincoln Hayes

E.B. Maple responds: This letter is too opaque to discern this writer's intent. For one thing, who are these “anarchists” who proffer “perfunctory criticisms” and where is their “thin analysis” to be found?

From Bakunin to Rudolf Rocker, into the modern era, it has been anarchist and ultra-left theory which has made cogent critiques of national liberation movements as the desire of a nascent native bourgeoisie to oust an imperial or colonial power and begin developing capital themselves.

Given the normal amount of leftist and liberal cheerleading for such a process, the fact that anarchists have been vigilant about the power of the state simply changing hands and capitalist production continuing under a new boss seems anything but thin. So, who is Hayes referring to, the *FE*, *Anarchy*, *Love & Rage*?

If he is referring to others, let him say who. I don't believe that all anarchists everywhere have put forth solid critiques, but in the main, they are head and shoulders above anything else going.

Then, what is one to say about an insistence that an oppressed people should see their oppressor in other than one-sided terms? Does he think South African blacks should appreciate the folk music of the Afrikaners or native Americans should have recognized the “multi-dimensionality” of the Europeans who came to these shores and committed genocide?

However, I do agree that against the preponderance of the European tradition, those minority elements of resistance are important to emphasize.

Are primal people exploiting the earth?

Eddie Sabot responds:

Caliban: “...This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren and 1 fertile.
Curs'd be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island.

—“The Tempest”

In Shakespeare’s play “The Tempest,” Caliban refuses to be the “good child” (read: perpetually submissive) to fatherly Prospero who then takes Caliban’s land and “sties” him “in this hard rock” (read: puts him on a reservation). As Richard Drinnon points out in *Facing West*, Prospero “pretended to have no selfish interests of his own and acted toward his words only out of his upswelling benevolence. But also like Shakespeare’s prefiguration of all the paternal colonizers to come, he in fact indulged hidden psychological cravings for absolute power by keeping Indians in a state of childish dependence.”

Like Caliban, the natives of Turtle Island (the Native American name for this continent) at first welcomed and showed the new visitors (Spanish, French, English and Dutch) how to live from the fruits of this land after giving some of it to them to live on. And to repay this kindness the newcomers proceeded to take the rest of it away from them, by gun, governmental law and disease, in a far-ranging and mobile holocaust (from North to South Pole and East to West Coasts) that lasted for 500 years.

But lest we forget, this did not come to an end in 1890 with Big Foot and the Lakota ghost dancers at Wounded Knee, where “history” assigns the terminating point of the wars against the Indians. We today are also responsible for the plight of these people, reaping the benefits of living on stolen land and enjoying its mineral wealth and also, like “good Germans”, not doing anything to change the situation.

As Kathleen Rashid said in her article, “Grounds for Decolonizing,” native social organization “reflects the fluid complexity of the natural process that sustain and inform it.” Lincoln Hayes is looking in the wrong direction in trying to find within this harmonic relationship a masking or giving way to internal group conflict and/ or socially-sanctioned ecological devastation. All evidence that I have read points against this, from the oratory of speakers at tribal councils and biographies, myths, histories, novels and poetry by native writers both past and contemporary, to works of anthropology of primal cultures from around the world.

Contemporary Native American radicals like the people of AIM are immersed within this tradition. When they fought the U.S. government at Wounded Knee in 1973, for instance, that’ had the backing and advice of the Elders with their traditional earth-based views. These views are expressed in one of Native American traditionals: *A Basic Call to Consciousness: the Hau De No Sau Nee Address to the Western World*. “Hau De No Sau Nee” is a word which means “people who build” and is the proper name of the people of the Longhouse. (We have named them the Iroquois.)

As they explain, these papers “constitute a political statement, presented to a representative world body (The Non-Governmental Organizations of the U.N. in 1977), pointing to the destruction of the natural world and natural world peoples as the clearest indicator that human beings are in trouble on this planet. It is a call to basic consciousness which has ancient roots and ultra-modern, even futuristic, manifestations.” But we shouldn’t take these positions without critical thought.

The core of these values is the view of this world as a web of life in which human beings are a part. This is expressed in The Basic Call to Consciousness, Native American “liberation theologies—call it a philosophy or cosmology if you will, but we believe it to be a theology—are belief systems which challenge the assumption, widely held in the West, that the earth is simply a commodity which can be exploited by humans for the purpose of material acquisition within an ever-expanding economic framework. A liberation theology will develop in people a consciousness that all life on the earth is sacred and that the sacredness of life is the key to human freedom and survival. it will be obvious to many non-western peoples that it is the renewable quality of earth’s ecosystems which makes life possible for human beings on this planet, and that if anything is sacred, if anything determines both quality and future of life for our species on this planet, it is that renewable quality of life.” The consciousness of the web—the sacredness of every living thing, that which connects human beings to the place which they inhabit—holds all things together.

This is not to deny that there are some Native Americans, like Dick Wilson (who was the brutal tribal chairman at the Pine Ridge Lakota reservation during the Wounded Knee occupation by AIM the name of the American Indian Movement) who work hand in hand with corporations and governments of the Western World, and they want to develop (read: exploit) the native lands. These people are of the want-to-get-rich mentality and have no desire to upset their lucrative relationship with these western colonizers or the way the native lands are being raped. But they do so precisely by abandoning their traditional values and accepting the outlook and behavior of the conquerors.

Finally, regarding internal group conflict, David Pilbeam, in an excellent little article called “The Naked Ape: An Idea We Could Live Without,” writes about primal peoples in the New World and also Africa and Australia that, “within the group, individual relations between adults are cooperative and based upon reciprocity; status disputes are avoided. These behaviors are formalized, part of culture behavior, in that such actions are positively valued and rewarded. Aggression between individuals is generally maintained at the level of bickering; in cases where violence flares, hunters generally solve the problem by fission: the band divides.”

He also writes, “Relations between bands are amicable; that makes economic sense as the most efficient way of utilizing potentially scarce resources, and also because of exogamy—marrying out—for adjacent groups will contain kinsmen and kinsmen will not fight.” So if we are trying to find a sanction for ecological devastation or internal group violence within primal people’s cultures, we are just projecting on them our own destructive relationship with the earth.



Various Authors
Letters to the Fifth Estate
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