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A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority

September 2000

The Unending War In Iraq

Considering Sanctions against the People of Iraq

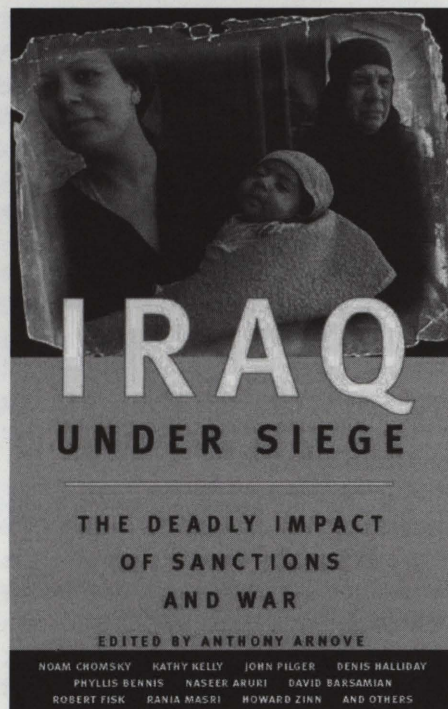
RAHUL MAHAJAN

Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War. Edited by Anthony Arnove. Photographs by Alan Pogue. South End Press. 216 pages. \$16.00 (paper).

They made a wasteland and called it peace. (Tacitus)

I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it. (Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, when asked by reporter Leslie Stahl whether US policy objectives in Iraq were worth the death of 500,000 children.)

The war against Iraq is not over. The past decade, marked internationally by a ceaseless US effort to force other countries to open their markets to First World multinational corporations, has simultaneously seen Iraq cut off from the world, under a state of siege known as “economic sanctions.” The situation is not as paradoxical as it first seems, since both “free trade” and the sanctions involve control of the policies of other countries by the elites of the First World. The sanctions against Iraq constitute the most comprehensive economic blockade of any country in modern times: in actual effect, a war against civilians that preferentially targets



children, the elderly, and the poor.

The effects of this blockade on a country that once imported 70 percent of its food, whose entire infrastructure was reduced to rubble by possibly the most intense bombing campaign in history, have been devastating. The number killed by the sanctions alone since 1990, variously estimated by different United Nations agencies, is likely over 1 million in all. Half of the dead are children under the age of five.

According to reliable international estimates, another 5,000 or more children under five die every month as a consequence of sanctions. These innocent victims are caught between two forces that have repeatedly shown their callous disregard for human rights: Saddam Hussein and the US government.

The effects of the sanctions are becoming widely known. After years of silence, the US media, in response to the efforts of a small but dedicated group of international activists, have recently given mainstream coverage to the conditions of life in Iraq, notably in an excellent feature by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (available at www.seattle-pi.com/iraq/). Although such coverage is not comprehensive, and is generally anecdotal rather than statistical, cumulatively it does paint an illuminating picture of a country in crisis.

One cannot, however, rely on the mainstream media to understand or report the diabolical way in which the sanctions are enforced, the steady stream of lies and disinformation disseminated by the US government, the culpability of the United States, or, indeed, the real reasons for the policy. Over the past several years, much has been written on postwar Iraq. The work spans a broad range: *Out of the Ashes*, by Andrew and Patrick Cockburn, details the inner workings of Iraq’s government and of covert US operations in Iraq; *Endgame*,

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by Scott Ritter, chronicles the saga of weapons inspections; *Iraq: Sanctions and Beyond*, by Anthony Cordesman and Ahmed Hashim, analyzes Iraq as a security issue from a military perspective; *The Scourging of Iraq: Sanctions, Law, and Natural Justice*, by Geoff Simons, is a magisterial analysis and critique of the sanctions and of US motives in Iraq. Interestingly, each of these authors characterizes the sanctions as a cruel and untenable policy, which inflicts massive harm on innocents while offering no chance of attaining any of the US government's stated goals.

Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War, a new collection from South End Press, is a valuable addition to this literature. Like Simons' book, it contains the necessary analysis to see beneath the surface of US proclamations, and adds the vital dimension of personal experience. Most of the contributors have visited Iraq, and among them are some of the foremost activists in the anti-sanctions movement. The book includes pieces by political analysts Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn; journalists Robert Fisk and John Pilger; Middle East experts Phyllis Bennis and Barbara Nimri Aziz; Peter Pellett, head of three U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization missions to Iraq; Iraqi biologist Huda Ammash; and prominent anti-sanctions activists Kathy Kelly (founder of Voices in the Wilderness, which has made over thirty trips to Iraq bringing medicine, in defiance of the sanctions), and Rania Masri, director of the Iraq Action Coalition. The book also includes an interview with Denis Halliday, U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq until he resigned in 1998 in protest of the sanctions. (His successor, Hans von Sponeck, and Jutta Burghardt, head of the World Food Program's mission to Iraq, have done the same.) The result is a sustained, coherent, and comprehensive critique of US policy on Iraq.

The Results of the Sanctions

Kelly describes hospitals full of children suffering from kwashiorkor and marasmus (diseases of severe malnutrition); doctors forced to stand by and watch while these children die because they have no medicine; people dying from waterborne diseases because Iraq has been allowed to import neither enough chlorine to treat the water nor new pipes to replace old, broken



Mothers and children fill the ward at Saddam Hussein's Children's Hospital in Iraq. Many independent authorities assert that at least 500,000 Iraqi children under five have died since 1990, in part as a result of the sanctions and the effects of the Gulf War. Photo by Tina Manley

ones. Robert Fisk describes an estimated 300 tons of depleted uranium ordnance in southern Iraq, and an explosion of childhood leukemia and grotesque birth defects in that region since the war. In pre-war Iraq, the cure rate for leukemia was 76 percent; under the sanctions, leukemia is a death sentence. Professor Pellett covers the effects on the country as a whole: average food intake has declined by one-third; growth-stunting and wasting are now as common as in the worst-off Third World countries; mortality for children under five years old is almost two and a half times the pre-sanctions rate.

Considering these heavily documented, accumulating casualties, the reflexive US response has been that all this suffering is the fault of Saddam Hussein. It is undeniable that Hussein cares more about his own power than about the welfare of his people; that a small elite lives very well while most Iraqis are suffering; and that anyone perceived as a threat to Hussein's power risks imprisonment or death. But it is also true that during the Seventies and Eighties, prior to the Gulf War, Hussein presided over a tremendous increase in the health and well-being of the Iraqi people—illiteracy almost wiped out, education free through the graduate level, health care excellent and free. In addition, most U.N. relief officials confirm that the only thing now preventing mass starvation has been the Iraqi government's food rationing system, imple-

mented shortly after the institution of sanctions. That system has drawn praise for its fairness and efficiency from all knowledgeable quarters.

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It is true that the Iraqi elites—like those in most countries, including the United States—will buy expensive M.R.I. machines despite widespread shortages of basic medical supplies. But the amount of money re-directed by those sorts of transactions is minimal in relation to the needs of the Iraqi people. If anything, in the US the social inequity is much greater: hospitals here glitter with fancy equipment while 45 million people, disproportionately children, remain uninsured and without access to basic preventative care. It is illuminating to see the conventional defenders of the free market and of corporate super-profits, when they consider Iraq, suddenly discovering socialism.

Since the actual facts are far from sufficient for the US government to defend its sanctions policy, the administration has resorted instead to a remarkable array of disinformation. One of the hoariest charges is that Saddam has misappropriated United Nations Oil-for-Food funds to build palaces. Yet the simple structure of these transactions make that misappropriation quite impossible. Under Security Council Resolutions 986 and 1153, Iraq is allowed to sell up to 5.2 billion dollars' worth of oil every six months (that cap was recently raised). Roughly 3 billion dollars of that money goes to meet the needs of 23 million Iraqis (the rest is designated in advance for "reparations" to Kuwaitis and others). As the piece here by Voices in the Wilderness

points out, no funds from the Oil-for-Food program even enter Iraq: all the money goes to a New York account of the Bank of Paris, from which funds are disbursed by the U.N. to pay for specific contracts Iraq has with foreign companies.

Similarly false is the charge, usually accompanied in the US press by photographs of warehouses full of goods, that supplies are being "hoarded" by the regime. U.N. officials in charge of monitoring the distribution disagree. The explanation lies rather in the way the Oil-for-Food program works. Every contract Iraq makes with a foreign company must include a complete specification of the end use of every item contracted for. It must then be approved by the U.N. Sanctions Committee, a body with one representative from each member of the Security Council, any one of whom can veto or indefinitely suspend any contract for any reason. If a contract cannot be fulfilled exactly as written, it is cancelled and the whole process must begin again. This procedure creates many problems for the Iraqis. They are not allowed to import refrigerated trucks because such trucks could have military uses—which means that perishable items (e.g., cancer medicine) cannot be transported. Some warehouses have only a single operating forklift.

Equally serious is the problem of "complementarity." Frequently, the Iraqis receive insulin but no syringes, heart-lung machines but not the computers to run them. They are then forced to keep the

goods they receive warehoused, hoping that the Sanctions Committee will allow the complementary equipment in. This problem occurs so often that many activists suspect that it is done on purpose. The US is responsible for over 1,000 vetoes and holds on Oil-for-Food contracts; Britain is a distant second with 120.

The Stated Motives

Such preemptory behavior suggests we should question closely the government's stated motives. The two primary justifications for US support of the sanctions are (a) that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction make it a threat to its neighbors, and (b) that the US is simply interested in upholding international law. As Anthony Arno points out in the introduction to *Iraq Under Siege*, however, the US has expressed no desire to limit its own weapons of mass destruction, or those of its allies. The US maintains the largest such arsenal in the world, including nuclear and chemical weapons, and it supports and arms allied countries with dismal records of regional aggression and human rights violations, such as Israel and Turkey. Nor is Iraq the only country to use weapons of mass destruction—the US has used such weapons more than any other country.

Furthermore, Iraq is no longer a threat to any of its neighbors. Scott Ritter, once a U.N. official in the weapons monitoring program and no friend of the Hussein re-

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The Unending War

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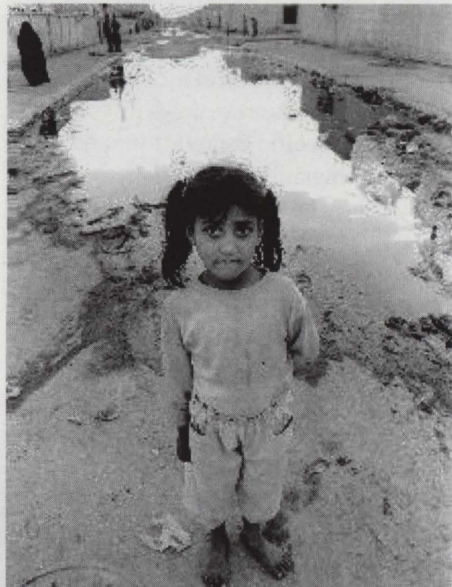
gime, writes, "Iraq today possesses no meaningful weapons of mass destruction," and his claims have been echoed by other weapons inspectors. While Iraq's military has collapsed and its weapons have been dismantled, other countries in the area have engaged in an orgy of weapons-buying, mostly from the US

The international law argument is even more absurd. The sanctions violate the Geneva Convention, which prohibits the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, and also, as Pellett points out, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by every country except the US and Somalia). The December 1998 Desert Fox campaign, and the continuing "low-level" bombing ever since—never authorized by the Security Council—are violations of the U.N. Charter. The so-called "no-fly zones" have no U.N. authorization, and are simply a bi-lateral (US and Britain) exertion of imperial power. The bombing—barely reported in the mainstream media, yet the longest campaign since the Vietnam War—has killed hundreds of innocent civilians.

Another frequent defense of the sanctions is that they are somehow intended to bring down Hussein and his regime. This is an odd claim, since observers across the political spectrum - including the Iraqi opposition—insist that the sanctions have strengthened the Iraqi leader. The sanctions give the regime more control over the lives of ordinary Iraqis, who are now entirely dependent on the government dole, and have shifted the focus of ordinary Iraqis' anger away from their government and toward the US. Moreover, public energy is entirely consumed in the struggle for survival, making political action all the more difficult.

The Permanent Motivations

So what are the real motives driving this policy? It's hard to do more than speculate, but the writers in *Iraq Under Siege* present some plausible possibilities. Arnove argues that the primary motivation of postwar US foreign policy has been to retain its position of extreme privilege - as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman put it approvingly, "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish with-



Sanctions have often forced Iraqis to wade through raw sewage. Photo by Bill Hackman

out McDonnell Douglas." To this general motivation Chomsky adds the first rule of US Middle East policy: that the resources of the region belong not to the people of the region, but to the US. Any development that might imperil that presumed ownership must be met with appropriate force. Given that unspoken and unacknowledged presumption, Chomsky argues, the sanctions make sense. After nationalizing its oil, Iraq had spread the benefits of its oil revenues, creating a significant highly-educated middle class which could not so easily be controlled by a weak feudal elite, such as those that rule in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Under this logic, continuing US hegemony in the area requires the targeting of not just the rulers, but the general populace.

A related question is whether the sanctions can be considered genocide. As Denis Halliday says in his interview, "It certainly is a valid word in my view, when you have a situation where we see thousands of deaths per month, a possible total of 1 million to 1.5 million over the last nine years. If that is not genocide, then I don't know quite what is." The U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (adopted in 1948, ratified with reservations by the US in 1988), includes within its definition: "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." The sanctions do seem calculated to destroy a significant segment of Iraqi society. The

question of intent is less clear—certainly it is not as crude as the express desire to kill all Iraqis.

But practically speaking, the continued sanctions hold the Iraqi civilian population hostage against the (undefined) good behavior of Saddam Hussein. Yet Hussein has no incentive to comply any further—for, as even conservatives like Cordesman and Ritter acknowledge, Clinton and various subordinates have repeatedly indicated that even should Iraq disarm completely, sanctions will not be lifted until Hussein is dead. Furthermore, the shapers of the policy consistently proclaim Hussein's indifference to the suffering of his people—never acknowledging that this supposition entirely obviates their argument for the sanctions.

The basic mandate behind the sanctions is also unreasonably broad—as Chomsky says, "There is indeed a way to eliminate the capability of producing weapons of mass destruction, only one way, and that is the Carthaginian solution: you totally destroy the society." However extreme such a measure might appear, it seems to be, alas, effectively what the sanctions are doing.

Iraq Under Siege concludes on an uncertainly hopeful note, with a description of activist efforts against the sanctions, which sympathetic readers shall wish to pursue. It is mildly heartening to note that a recent letter to the president calling for the lifting of economic sanctions, sponsored by Congressmen John Conyers of Michigan and Tom Campbell of California, was signed by 70 congresspeople (only two of whom, Ciro Rodriguez and Sheila Jackson Lee, are from Texas). Iraq may still be saved, if enough Americans can be persuaded to act on their moral responsibility to put an end to the genocidal crimes of our government. Reading *Iraq Under Siege* is a good place to begin.

Rahul Mahajan is a doctoral candidate in physics at the University of Texas-Austin, and actively involved in the movement to lift economic sanctions against Iraq. This article is reprinted with permission from the Texas Observer (www.texasobserver.org). For more information, see www.iraqaction.org (Iraq Action Coalition) and www.nonviolence.org/vitw (Voices in the Wilderness).

Blowback Exposes US Conduct

Informative Reading for the Activist's Bookshelf

HENRY ROSEMONT, JR.

Blowback by Chalmers Johnson, New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2000.

For anyone interested in the mischief the US government and military have visited on the peoples of East Asia since World War II—and the price the US will pay for that mischief in the years to come—this is a most useful book.

A distinguished scholar of Japan and China, Chalmers Johnson has come to see in a new, radical light what his country has really been doing overseas for the past half-century, as he confesses in the Prologue to *Blowback*, a term first coined by the CIA for unintended consequences of its covert operations. Johnson extends the term to include the overt dimensions of our foreign policies as well, and he now argues that we will shortly begin to pay a very high price for those imperial policies for many years to come.

Although Johnson focuses on East Asia, he sees blowback coming from many other sources as well, in many ways: from the Lockerbie disaster being a retaliation for our bombing of Libya two years earlier—killing Muammar Khadafi's stepdaughter—to much of US materialism and consumerism stemming from our allowing anti-communist client states to import much, and cheaply, as checks on the "red menace" during the cold war, forcing us into patterns of low savings and high consumption which are now running riot.

Policies and Propaganda

The book contains a good deal of important information about the details of our imperial machinations in Chapters on Okinawa, North and South Korea, China, and Japan, with two concluding chapters peering through a glass darkly at the consequences of our actions. What the careful reader will be able to discern in these

pages is that (massive propaganda campaigns to the contrary notwithstanding) US foreign policies in East Asia have consistently benefited our economic juggernaut, and the elites who profit from it, at

Consequence of US Actions

By focusing on the *unintentional* consequences of US actions Johnson evades any hint of capitalist conspiracies on the parts of the "best and the brightest" who formulated and executed foreign policy for the past half-century. But these folk will find little solace in *Blowback*, because Johnson's penetrating analyses must attribute a monumental arrogance and ignorance to them, sufficient in quality and quantity that the universities who awarded them advanced degrees should be ashamed of themselves.

In a sense, Johnson himself demonstrates clearly the ubiquitousness of cold-war

ideology in American scholarship, and the difficulties of overcoming a belief in American benevolence. His earlier works on China and Japan exemplify a first-rate mind, one even willing to go against the grain at times—at least in part. Yet in *Blowback* he employs a conceptual framework for analyzing US foreign policy that has been thoroughly articulated and documented for more than 30 years in the writings of Noam Chomsky: *At War With Asia* (1970), *For Reasons of State* (1973), *Of Power and Ideology* (1986), *Towards A New Cold War* (1988); *Deterring Democracy* (1991), *Year 501* (1993); to name only a few. But Chomsky is never cited in *Blowback*, nor do any of his works appear in Johnson's bibliography.

Thus, for those familiar with Chomsky's work there will be very few big surprises in *Blowback*. But there will be a fair number of little ones, and much useful information for progressives. Welcome aboard, Chalmers Johnson; better late than never.

Henry Rosemont, Jr. teaches philosophy at St. Mary's College of Maryland, and has been a Resist Board member since 1969.

Johnson himself demonstrates clearly the ubiquitousness of cold-war ideology in American scholarship, and the difficulties of overcoming a belief in American benevolence.

the expense of the peoples of East Asia. As the number of pro-Americans in the region continues diminishing, Johnson shows clearly that this is only to be expected.

His accounts of US military adventurism abroad are especially useful, going a long way toward explaining why, for example, we continue to station 37,000 troops to "keep the peace" in Korea, yet remained silent when the two Kims had their historic meeting this past Summer to achieve peace on the peninsula; or why the Okinawans so thoroughly despise the US soldiers, sailors and air force personnel that occupy 20% of the arable land on the island's 454 square miles.

He is equally good on military budgets (p. 222):

For example, the Pentagon's budget for the fiscal year 2000 called for replacing the F-15, "The world's most advanced aircraft," with the F-22, also "the world's most advanced aircraft." The air force wanted 339 F-22s at \$188 million each, three times the cost of the airplane it is replacing. The United States already has 1,094 F-15s, against which there is no equal or more capable aircraft on earth.

Reading “The Boondocks”

Black and White and Hip-Hop All Over

OLIVER WANG

I’m one of those people who buy a paper, flip past all the front sections and go straight for the comics page. Maybe it’s avoidance—this backwards progression from humor to horror. Nowadays though, “The Boondocks” is enough justification for my indolence.

Created by Aaron McGruder, a 25-year-old who is one of less than ten black cartoonists to have ever been in syndication, “The Boondocks” sports striking artwork, a brash attitude, and an unflinching portrayal of racial politics and identity. Focusing on the experiences of two young black boys forced to move from black southside Chicago to the lily-white suburb of Woodcrest, the strip mercilessly shakes up the previously apolitical—read: conservative and reactionary—space of the comics page. Moreover, for a nation struggling with questions of race and identity, “The Boondocks” might very well be the new test of cultural literacy in hip-hop America. What other comic strip expects its readers to understand the humor in a thug wannabe enjoying Lauryn Hill or a black boy indignant that his elementary school is named after J. Edgar Hoover?

Since its April 1999 debut, “The Boondocks” has expanded to over 150 newspapers nationally, one of the comic industry’s fastest and most successful ever—and one of its most controversial.irate and delighted readers have sent hundreds of letters to newspaper editors, showering the strip with either vitriol or praise. Some readers have dropped their subscriptions in protest and a handful of small, local newspapers have cancelled the strip. The national circuit of talk shows and news programs has pulled McGruder into the thick, suddenly thrusting the young cartoonist into the impossible role of national spokesperson. Race, it seems, is no laughing matter, even in the funnies.

Furor From Left, Right, and Middle

It doesn’t take a critical race scholar to note that the comics page is perhaps the most homogenous part of a newspaper—even the advertising is more integrated. In



the midst of all this unquestioned whiteness, McGruder sweeps in to drop a color-coated bomb. The strip’s main character, Huey Freeman (named after Black Panther founder Huey P. Newton) is a self-styled “radical scholar” and “eternally scornful champion of the dispossessed,” a prophet of rage in training who spends his early days in Woodcrest forming a one-man Klanwatch and interrogating random white neighbors with a baseball bat. In the series leading up to July 4th, Huey roundly points out the hypocrisy of a “free” nation founded on slavery, and he incisively lam-

poons the racist fantasy of *Gone With the Wind*. Clearly, this is no “Family Circus.”

Not surprisingly, these kinds of themes have earned “The Boondocks” its share of virulent opposition. K. Barna, in a letter to the *San Francisco Chronicle* writes, “Switch the words from white people to black people and you’d have a lawsuit on your hands. This kind of ‘humor’ only continues to perpetuate hate and racial division, and I, for one, have no interest in participating.” Put more directly by D. Thompson from Minneapolis in “The Boon-

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Reading "The Boondocks"

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docks'" own online guest book, "[The Boondocks'] is a disgusting hateful piece of garbage!!!! Get it out of the paper."

However, it's not just defensive whites who have a gripe with the strip. "The Boondocks" has also raised the ire of those within the African American community, mostly older people and professionals, who accuse the strip of perpetuating stereotypes of black youth. In a critique that seems reminiscent of the castigation that followed Robin Harris' "BéBé Kids" routine, black readers have denounced the portrayal of Riley Freeman, Huey's younger brother, a wannabe gangsta who sports a black hoodie and scowling mug. Consider him a Detroit Red to Huey's Malcolm X.

In reaction to Riley's portrait of a thug as a young man, "Helen" asks in "The Boondocks" online guest book, "Is our entire culture based around poverty and 'jail'?" Baltimore's "Summar" suggests, "As I read the comic, I envisioned a group of Klansmen sharing it over coffee....Although it seems you're 'keeping it real' on the surface, you're selling us all out for a laugh."

McGruder has also managed to offend the multiracial community through the inclusion of character Jazmine DuBois, a biracial (black dad/white mom) girl who moves into Woodcrest soon after the Freemans. McGruder describes Jazmine as someone "struggling to find her identity at the border of the color line." Some have blasted the strip for suggesting that biracial children are inherently confused. In a recent issue of the *Interracial Voice*, (www.webcom.com/~intvoice/), the "voice of conscience of the global mixed-race/interracial movement," editor Charles Michael Byrd accuses McGruder of "wielding [power] in a racist manner that those on the left, the right, and in the middle can plainly see" in his portrayal of Jazmine.

Laughing in Exile

"White humorists have a long history of sharp satire and their audiences have learned to recognize it and understand the

serious issues behind it while still being able to laugh," argues McGruder. "I don't do 'The Cosby Show' [with its] over-romanticized, bourgie portrayals of Black America which spread intraracial classism."

Instead, "The Boondocks" brand of satire leaps backwards over the politically stale black humor

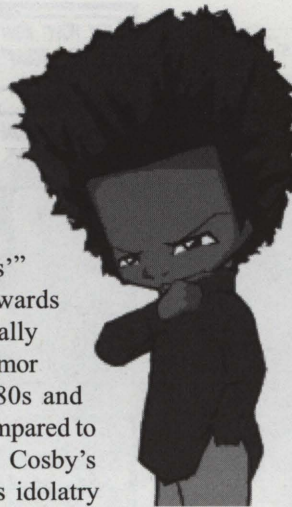
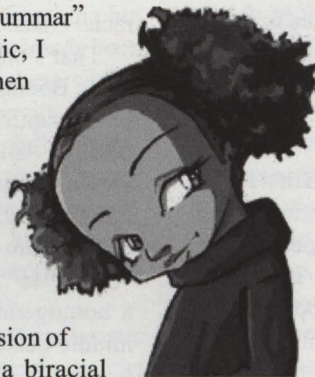
of the 1980s and '90s. Compared to both Bill Cosby's bourgeois idolatry and Eddie Murphy's self-loathing caricatures of black life, "The Boondocks" shares more in common with the radical black comics of the 1970s, exemplified by Richard Pryor, Paul Mooney, and Dick Gregory's embrace of political commentary as well as incisive, humorous celebrations of blackness. As McGruder puts it, "[The Boondocks] presents a nice allegory to this larger notion of the displacement of black people and us being in a foreign land as a people."

Robin D.G. Kelley, black cultural critic and author of *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional*, has closely followed the strip. "That there is controversy over the strip reveals the pitiful state of racial discourse," Kelley says. "It's not as if 'The Boondocks' is taking some kind of militant nationalist stance; the characters speak instead to boundary crossing, hybridity, and the problems young black people in a post-civil rights suburban context must face. McGruder finds humor in alienation and a sort of spatial and racial exile, and this problem has been a source of humor for centuries."

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Is it a Cartoon or is it Hip-Hop?

What's new is the strip's explicit hip-hop attitude. Even the strip's cultural hijacking of newspapers resembles hip-hop's use of the music industry to package and distribute nuggets of black political thought. McGruder is a self-professed hip-hop junkie and his strip got an early pre-



syndication boost by running in *The Source*, the world's most circulated rap magazine. McGruder shares, "I represent hip-hop in the context of it being an evolution of the collective black experience. I look at 'The Boondocks' as being a hip-hop strip in the sense that I grew up loving hip-hop."

University of Virginia ethnomusicology professor Kyra Gaunt says, "Many [of the strip's] detractors from the black and white community may also be opponents

to commercial and underground rap, using a cartoon espousing hip-hop's cultural values as a scapegoat representing a larger and more complex problem that McGruder is not responsible for, in and of himself."

Yet, if "The Boondocks" is a symbol of hip-hop's uneasy position within the American imagination, it also perpetuates some of the same problems for which hip-hop is notorious. In the 1996 parody of black "hood" films, *Don't Be a Menace*, actress Vivica Fox plays a professional black woman who jokes to her son (Jamie Foxx), "You know there aren't any positive

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Seeing Double?

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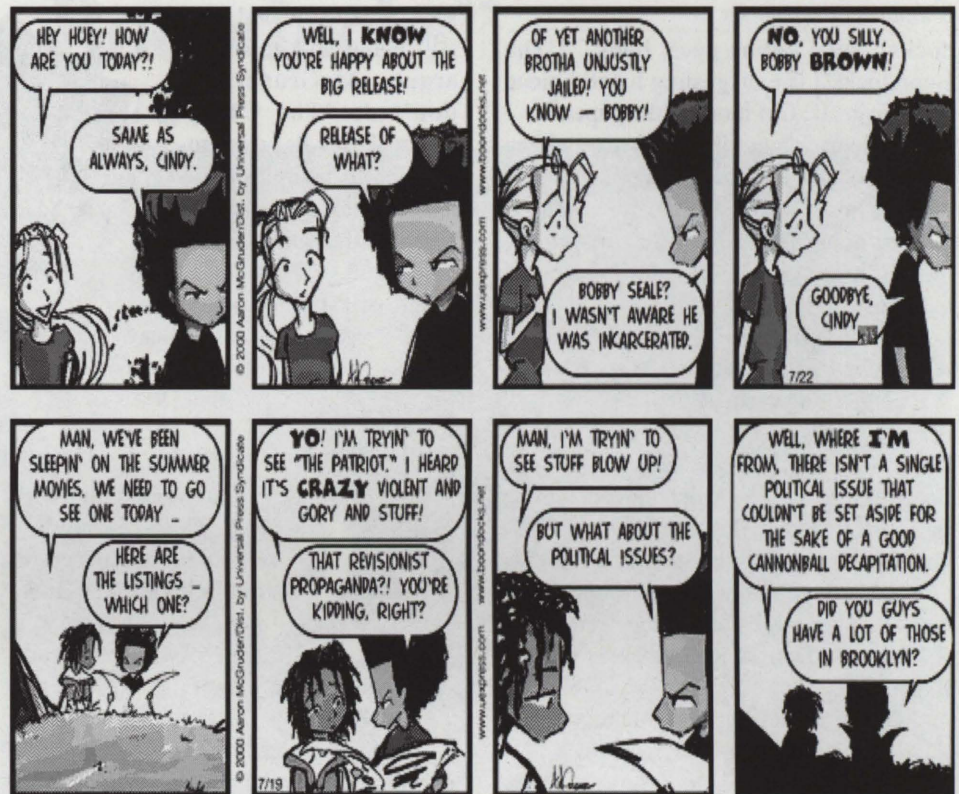
Reading "The Boondocks"

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black women in these films"—then promptly disappears from the rest of the movie. "The Boondocks" goes one better—there are *no* black women in the strip. The Freemans' mother and grandmothers are noticeably absent—their crusty grandfather is the only adult family member present. Save the biracial Jazmine, whose character doesn't self-identify as black, there are no black women to be found in Woodcrest yet.

This erasure of black women from "The Boondocks" mirrors a similar vacuum within hip-hop music, a point raised repeatedly by black feminist scholars such as Tricia Rose and bell hooks. UVA's Gaunt says, "As an African American woman, and a professor of hip-hop...I would voice my own concern about the overgeneralized use of black cultural nationalistic stereotypes and the exclusion of mother figures and non-biracially identified black females. McGruder is a bold voice, but not a wise voice yet."

Gaunt also takes "The Boondocks" to task for its distillation of racial diversity to familiar black/white monochromatics, insightfully observing that "most suburban communities today are multi-ethnic when it comes to hip-hop. McGruder is scripting an imaginary past or a stripped down present where only blacks and whites are the primary playa haters and authenticators." "The Boondocks" engages many of the key issues that circulate in hip-hop America, but doesn't necessarily transcend them. In short, "The Boondocks" presents



a vision of a masculine America in strictly black and white—even if it is published in color on Sundays.

Toppling Sacred Cows

Yet, many fail to understand that Riley's gangsterisms are an internal critique of hip-hop's excesses, especially its penchant for nihilism and materialism. Riley is a walking stereotype of the gangsta rapper, but his own ridiculous extremes are meant to be a caricature, not a promotion. If people miss the point—and judging from the responses the strip has gotten, many clearly have—why is it incumbent upon McGruder to teach readers the finer points of humor, sarcasm, and satire?

Most importantly, "The Boondocks" shares hip-hop's strength in forcing a conversation around race when the national media would rather flatten society into a white-normative standard. Huey's attacks on hallowed American institutions of white privilege—the educational system, July 4th celebrations, suburban life writ-large—encode a not-so-hidden transcript of dissent that speaks to many of the frustrations that people of color share. Compared to the blanched, apolitical spate of cartoons that greet people's morning routine, "The Boondocks" jostles readers from casual complacency; it is an act of resistance in a time of

racial crisis.

That's one of the reasons why I turn to "The Boondocks" first. I take delight in how it confronts and topples many sacred cows of American liberalism and conservatism by putting hip-hop's confrontational attitude front and center. As everything from "For Better or Worse" to "Cathy" to "Peanuts" remains sanitized in a homogenous, static universe of white middle class anxieties, there's something wickedly subversive about "The Boondocks."

Ten years ago, Public Enemy's Chuck D. complained that hip-hop could only get "in the mix, late in the night," but here's "The Boondocks" at 8 a.m., poking fun at everything from buppies to Mariah Carey to telemarketers. If nothing else, the strip has forced people on both sides of the racial divide to register their beliefs and ideals with passion and commitment. Compared to the deafening silence of indifference, if McGruder and his motley crew of misfits bring the noise, it's clear people are listening.

Oliver Wang is a staff person at ColorLines. This article is reprinted with permission from the Winter 1999-2000 issue of ColorLines. For more information, visit their website: www.colorlines.com.

Planned Giving to RESIST

For more than 33 years, RESIST has relied on the support of donors to maintain our grant giving program to grassroots groups. There are many ways to extend that support, including:

1. Make a tax-deductible contribution.
2. Join the pledge program (see page 12).
3. Donate stocks or other securities.
4. Include a bequest to RESIST in your will or life insurance policy.
5. Designate RESIST as a beneficiary of an IRA or pension plan.

For more information about these and other options, contact RESIST: 617/623-5110; resistinc@igc.org.

Working History

Bill Adler on Labor, People, and Loss

MICHAEL KING

MOLLIE'S JOB: A Story of Life and Work On the Global Assembly Line. By William M. Adler. Scribner. 367 pages. \$27.50.

Readers of the *Texas Observer's* June 9 excerpt of Bill Adler's *Mollie's Job* (Chapter Thirteen: "On the Border, By the Sea") will be familiar with the book's attention to the extraordinary details of "free trade" in action, as Adler follows the final stages of the descent of a single assembly-line job from Paterson, New Jersey, to Blytheville, Arkansas, to Matamoros, Mexico. That particular job once "belonged" to Mollie James of Paterson, although by 1987, after nearly 40 years on the job, the ground is shifting radically under Mollie's feet:

[The] Paterson plant was breathing but skeletal—135 workers had already been laid off, with the promise of more to go soon. By virtue of her seniority, Mollie James was still on the payroll, but just then she was out of town; the company had sent her to Blytheville for a week. Like a death-row inmate building her own casket, Mollie was training the workers there to do her job.

That stark metaphor is uncharacteristic of Adler's work. Adler is a meticulous, quiet writer, generally content to follow the facts and let the story tell itself. But by the time the reader arrives at this somber moment in Chapter Thirteen, Adler has more than earned his momentary gesture. We have traveled with Adler and Mollie James and her honest labor from Virginia, to New Jersey, and now to Arkansas, and we are all entitled to an accumulated realization of her loss.

That is by way of suggesting that if you enjoyed and learned from Chapter Thirteen, you will simply be astonished by the whole of *Mollie's Job*. This is a book of impressive historical imagination, akin to Adler's 1995 *Land of Opportunity*, although with even greater range and implication. *Land of Opportunity* was a remarkable journey in the wake of the Chambers brothers, an entrepreneurial group of siblings who trav-



Manufacturing jobs, like those held by these GE workers, have been sent overseas. Photo by Marilyn Humphries, *Impact Visuals*

eled from the abject poverty of the Arkansas Delta to seek their fortune in Detroit. They found that fortune in spectacular and meteoric fashion, in the crack trade—where in a few years the brothers had amassed and squandered millions, on their inevitable way to federal prison. But Adler's interest was not in sensational criminality: "Indeed," he wrote, "their story should frighten not because it shows what made them different, but rather what made them so common." Adler pursued the Chambers' story as a way to examine the broader capitalist culture of the 1980s: "The decade's cult of money, its tone of rising expectations, insisted that the dispossessed aspire to the goals of the dominant culture yet denied them the means to obtain those goals legally."

And it was while researching the South-to-North migration of *Land of Opportunity* that Adler began piecing together the North-to-South migration of *Mollie's Job*. What he found was another story that opens a whole modern era to re-examination and deeper understanding, although this book reaches back even further, to the beginnings of US manufacturing in the eighteenth century (Alexander Hamilton's Paterson-based *Society for the Establishing of Useful Manufactures*). As its central thread, the book follows a single job—as-

holds Mollie's job), as well as many other intriguing men and women who figure inextricably in Mollie and Balbina's story: company founders, working colleagues, union reps, labor gangsters, bankers, investors, politicians, and so on. It's an expanding web of fascinating historical narrative: "a story about the demise of unions and the middle class and the concurrent rise of the plutocracy; about the disposability of workers and the portability of work; about how government and Wall Street reward US-based companies for closing domestic plants and scouring the globe for the lowest wages in places where human rights and labor rights are ignored; and about the ways in which 'free trade' harms democracy, undermines stable businesses and communities, exploits workers on both sides of the border, both ends of the global assembly line."

Yet Adler's introductory summary, accurate as it is, fails to give a full sense of the range and engagement of his work, from top to bottom. From chapter to chapter, *Mollie's Job* reads like a gripping historical novel, with a fully realized sense of people embedded in their time and place that one associates with Dickens or Zola. Here is but one moment with Universal's founder Archie Sergy, part hero, part hus-

continued on page ten

continued from page nine

tlar, as the Paterson company he started (with a few “borrowed” pieces of equipment) begins to take off in the post-War years:

Even as he added production lines, hundreds of employees, and a third, graveyard shift to keep up with the roaring demand, Archie operated as if he were running a corner store in the old neighborhood: He knew and greeted everyone by name, often by their street names—“Hey Munny! Hey Moishe!” Or it was like old times at the caddy shack: Archie dispensing favors like a benevolent overlord. Once he announced bids on a job to paint the plant, and when an old friend’s offer sheet came in only third lowest, he gave him the job anyway. Countless were the employees who came to him with a personal problem—an unpayable debt, an abusive husband, a sick child. And almost always, he intervened, either with a loan or donation or a timely referral or a phone call.

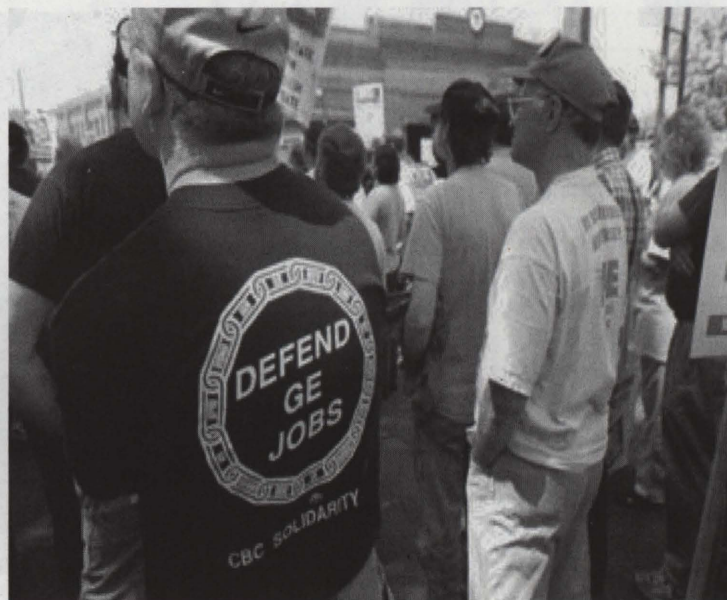
Here is a climactic moment in the life of Louis Carter, a black employee in the Universal plant in Mississippi. By 1973, union steward Carter has seen the company employees (in the context of the larger Southern civil rights movement) bust segregation, yet the union leadership had remained white and reactionary. Now he has just been elected the first black president of the local union:

As Louis headed north toward home on Highway 49, he noticed a couple of “maintenance buddies” alongside him in a pickup truck. ‘I was looking at them,’ he recounts, ‘and all of a sudden this old shotgun pops out the passenger side. I jam on the brakes and the shot goes right across the windshield.’ Asked many years later if he reported the crime to the police, Louis dismisses the question as hopelessly naive. ‘The law around here was about as useless as tits on a bull.’ But Louis was not without his protectors, black and white, and they organized a postwork midnight caravan of at least five cars to escort him safely to his and Dorothy’s isolated country home, ‘way back in the woods,’ some twenty miles outside Mendenhall.

And here is a foreboding moment with Bill Farley, the Michael Milken associate who buys the company which buys the

company which in 1986 buys what was once Archie Sergy’s Universal:

Farley would hold tight to [Northwest Industries, Union Underwear, Acme



GE workers demonstrate the exportation of their jobs as part of the global economy. Photo by Marilyn Humphries, *Impact Visuals*

Boot, etc.]; he was dependent on their generating enough cash to meet his loan obligations.... For Northwest’s three other, smaller operating companies, including Universal (Northwest had already moved to divest itself of Lone Star Steel) Farley had other plans. Their utility to Farley was not as manufacturing enterprises. What mattered to Farley about Universal was not its product line or its commitment to customer service or its employees or the communities in which it operated. What mattered was its sale value. ‘I never planned on owning it long-term,’ he says. In the parlance of the high-flying financial universe Bill Farley and Mike Milken lived in, Universal Manufacturing Company existed only on paper, as an ‘asset’ to ‘spin off’ to raise cash to pay down debt.

Those three passages give some sense of the range and complexity of the story and of Adler’s reporting, as well as his thoroughly unsentimental sense of the complications and contradictions of history: how the New Jersey factories were founded in a sense of great possibility and also great oppression, triggering explosive unionizing (in several senses) over many years; how the unions themselves vibrated between activist idealism and dismal corruption (so that at each stop on the company’s

southward march, and even into Mexico, Universal employees often found themselves caught between legitimate union organizers and corrupt leadership interested only in protecting their perks or their white-skin privilege); how national and international politics filter down to the shop floor, so that the US Commerce Department continues to spend taxpayer dollars to directly sponsor programs making it easier (indeed, tax-deductible) for domestic corporations to move good US jobs abroad, always in search of

larger profit margins. One, of course, was Mollie’s job—at last sight (1997) paying the unlivable wage of about 92 cents an hour to a young single mother living in desperate poverty just outside the fenced enclosure of the new “MagneTek” maquiladora. (“No alcance,” the workers tell Adler. “It doesn’t reach. Over and over one heard this.”) MagneTek is Universal’s corporate successor, now manufacturing ballasts across the border, and already looking longingly across the globe, to places where its labor costs can be even lower.

Mollie’s Job is an extraordinary work of historical research, dogged and sensitive reporting, and contemporary imagination. It appears the book may be in some danger of getting lost in the summer blockbuster shuffle—publishers, like other factories, merge and disappear, in the search for profit at the expense of other values—and it would be a great shame if *Mollie’s Job* became one more casualty of the increasing corporate concentration the book chronicles. Buy it, read it, and enjoy it. It will arm your understanding against a sea of troubles.

Michael King is the editor of The Texas Observer. This article is reprinted with permission from the Texas Observer, www.texasobserver.org.

GRANTS JANUARY-AUGUST 2000

Asia/Africa/International

Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solutions (Washington, DC)
Free Burma Coalition (Washington, DC)
(Freda Friedman Salzman Award)

Central, Latin America & the Caribbean

Brazilian Immigrant Center (Allston, MA)
CISPES-Bay Area (San Francisco, CA)
Committee for Health Rights in the Americas (San Francisco, CA)
Committee in Solidarity with Central American People (Eugene, OR)
Committee on US/Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) (Ithaca, NY)
Promotores de Derechos (Albuquerque, NM)
Witness for Peace - Mid Atlantic (Lewes, DE)

Community Organizing/Anti-Racism

Central City Lutheran Mission (San Bernardino, CA)
Coalicion de Derechos Humanos / Arizona Boarder Rights Coalition (Tucson, AZ) *(Freda Friedman Salzman Award)*
Denver VOICE (Denver, CO)
Family Child Care Association of San Francisco (San Francisco, CA)
Korean American Resource and Cultural Center (Chicago, IL)
Maine Rural Network (Standish, ME)
Massachusetts English Plus Coalition (Boston, MA)
Men's Rape Prevention Project (Washington, DC)
Metro Justice (Rochester, NY)
Nebraskans for Peace/Lincoln (Lincoln, NE)
Sister Spirit Incorporated (Ovett, MS)
Texas Alliance for Human Needs (Austin, TX)
Utah Progressive Network (Salt Lake City, UT)

Economic Justice

Boston Global Action Network (Boston, MA)
Center for Economic Justice (Albuquerque, NM)
Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs (Hartford, CT)
Contact Center (Cincinnati, OH)
Flinthills Living Wage Coalition (Manhattan, KS)
Mobilization for Global Justice (Washington, DC)
People Escaping Poverty Project (South Moorehead, MN)
Santa Cruz County Coalition for a Living Wage (Santa Cruz, CA)

Survivors, Inc. (West Roxbury, MA)
Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) (New Haven, CT)

Environment

Boston Rainforest Action Group (Allston, MA)
Cascadia Wildlands Project (Eugene, OR)
Citizens Awareness Network (Shelburne Falls, MA)
Citizens Awareness Network - CT Chapter (Haddam, CT)
Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping (Albuquerque, NM)
Gateway Green Alliance (St. Louis, MO)
Native Forest Network (Burlington, VT)
Nuclear Free Great Lakes Campaign (Evanston, IL)
Water Information Network (Albuquerque, NM)

Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender

Fed Up Queers (New York, NY)
Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (NY, NY)
Safe Community and Schools Coalition (Athens, OH)
Washtenaw Rainbow Action Project (Ann Arbor, MI)
Wisconsin Research Center (Milwaukee, WI)

Health/AIDS/Disability

Coalition of Montanans Concerned with Disability (Missoula, MT)
Maine Right to Know (Gouldsboro, ME)

Labor

Alliance for Workers' Rights (Reno, NV)
Good Jobs! (Hartford, CT)
Hard Hat News (New York, NY)
Los Angeles County Day Laborer Association (Los Angeles, CA)
Miami Workers Center (Miami, FL)
Montana Community Labor Alliance (Helena, MT)
Nicaragua Solidarity Committee (Chicago, IL)

Media

Activist San Diego (San Diego, CA)
Guatemala Radio Project (Chicago, IL)
Independent Media Center (Seattle, WA)
Missouri Pro-Vote (St. Louis, MO)
Pintig Cultural Group (Chicago, IL)
Progressive Media Alliance (Ithaca, NY)
Prometheus Radio Project (Philadelphia, PA)
Seattle Public Theater (Seattle, WA)
Spiral Q Puppet Theater (Philadelphia, PA)

Middle East

Boston Mobilization for Survival (Cambridge, MA)
Rhode Island Committee for Nonviolence Initiatives (Providence, RI)

Native Americans

Cincinnati Zapatista Coalition (Cincinnati, OH)

Peace/Anti-Militarism

Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice (Gainesville, FL)
Maryland United for Peace and Justice (Bowie, MD)
Peace Action New Mexico (Santa Fe, NM)
Peace Center (State College, PA)

Prisoners

Books Through Bars (Philadelphia, PA)
Critical Resistance (San Francisco, CA)
Michigan CURE (Kalamazoo, MI)
Pennsylvania Abolitionists United Against the Death Penalty (Philadelphia, PA)
Prison Activist Resource Center (Berkeley, CA)
Prison Moratorium Project (New York, NY)
South Dakota Peace & Justice Center (Watertown, SD)
Southland Prison News (Cambridge, MA)

Women

Adbar Ethiopian Women's Alliance (Cambridge, MA)
Appalachian Women's Alliance (Floyd, VA)
Association for Union Democracy - Women's Project (New York, NY)
Hermanas: Sisterhood in Central America & the Caribbean (Princeton, NJ)
Immigrant Workers Resource Center (Boston, MA)
NARAL - Ohio (Columbus, OH)

Youth

Bill of Rights Education Project (Boston, MA)
Houston Committee for Youth & Nonmilitary Opportunities (Bellaire, TX)
Project YANO (Encinitas, CA) \$2,000
South Carolina Progressive Network (Columbia, SC)
Youth Organizing Communities (Montebello, CA)

Loans

US/Guatemala Education Project STITCH (Chicago, IL) \$2,000

Grant totals appear on page twelve.

GRANTS

RESIST awards grants six times a year to groups throughout the United States engaged in activism for social and economic justice. In this issue of the Newsletter we list a few grant recipients from our August allocation cycle. For more information, contact the groups at the addresses below.

Alliance for Workers Rights

1101 Riverside Drive, Reno, NV 89503

In the Fall of 1997, a diverse group of 15 activists met to discuss forming an organization to address workplace issues in Nevada and founded the Alliance for Workers Rights. In the past few years the Alliance has fought for justice for immigrant workers killed or injured at a blast at Sierra Chemical, an explosives manufacturer; developed a living wage campaign; and organized for changes in workplace conditions for agricultural workers.

A \$2,000 grant from Resist will fund a campaign to improve the working conditions of women in the casino industry using the *Kiss My Foot Campaign* which opposes the mandatory dress requirement of high heel shoes and sexually exploitive clothing as a condi-

tion of employment.

Coalicion de Derechos Humanos/ Arizona Border Rights Project

PO Box 1286, Tucson, AZ 85702-1286

Since 1986 Arizona Border Rights Project has sought to strengthen the capacity of border communities to exercise their rights and participate in public policy decisions. In part they have achieved this goal by increasing public awareness of the magnitude of deaths and assaults at the border and by documenting the militarization of the border by US troops.

A Resist grant of \$2,000 from the Freda Friedman Salzman Memorial Fund will provide general support for a program addressing the human rights issues that have developed with the militarization of the US/Mexican border, particularly the vigilante-style actions of ranchers with large land holdings.

Pintig Cultural Group

4750 North Sheridan Road, #481, Chicago, IL 60640

Pintig Cultural Group was founded in 1991 by a group of Filipino immigrants

who were in search of a venue where issues and experiences affecting the Filipino American community could find political and artistic expression. Pintig, a Tagalog word meaning "pulse," has committed itself to using theater as a means to celebrate and express the community's rich history and culture. In doing so, their art empowers the community and renders it a potent force for community change.

Resist's grant of \$2,000 will fund *Nanny Isog and her Children*, a play which looks at multinational corporations in the Philippines and the tensions their operations create between local Muslim and Christian communities.

South Dakota Peace and Justice Center

PO Box 405, Watertown, SD 57201

In 1979, South Dakota Peace and Justice Center was formed to enable grassroots people—motivated by values transmitted to them through their religious traditions—to work across denominational lines for peace and justice. The Center has been involved in campaigns to honor treaty rights in Indian Country, oppose the passage of NAFTA, de-militarize Ellsworth Air Force Base and missile silos in western South Dakota and demand the closure of the School of the Americas.

A Resist grant of \$2,000 will fund the Interfaith Task Force Against the Death Penalty which seeks to build awareness in religious communities about the positions their denominations hold regarding the death penalty.

Join the Resist Pledge Program

We'd like you to consider becoming a Resist Pledge.

Pledges account for over 30% of our income.

By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee Resist a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant-making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded and the other work being done at Resist.

So take the plunge and become a Resist Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

Yes! I'll become a RESIST Pledge.

I'll send you my pledge of \$ _____ every month/two months/quarter/six months (circle one).

Enclosed is an initial pledge contribution of \$ _____.

I can't join the pledge program now, but here's a contribution of \$ _____ to support your work.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Donations to Resist are tax-deductible.

Resist • 259 Elm Street • Suite 201 • Somerville • MA • 02144

2000 Grantees (January - August)

Number of Grants:	87
Number of Emergency Grants:	5
Multi-Year Grants:	\$18,000
Resist Grants:	\$147,200
Emergency Grants:	\$1,500
Loans:	\$2,000
NWTRCC:	\$3,632
Total Grants and Loans:	\$172,332