

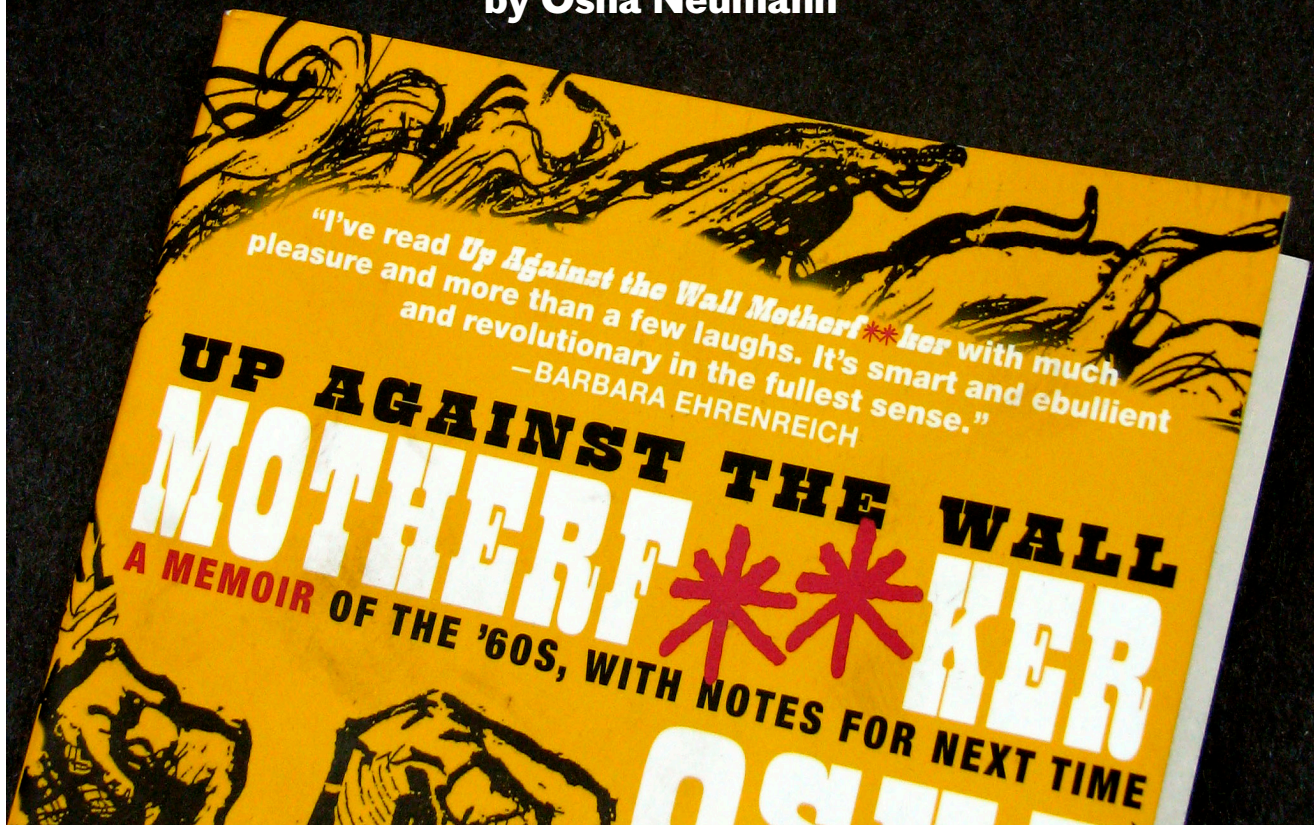
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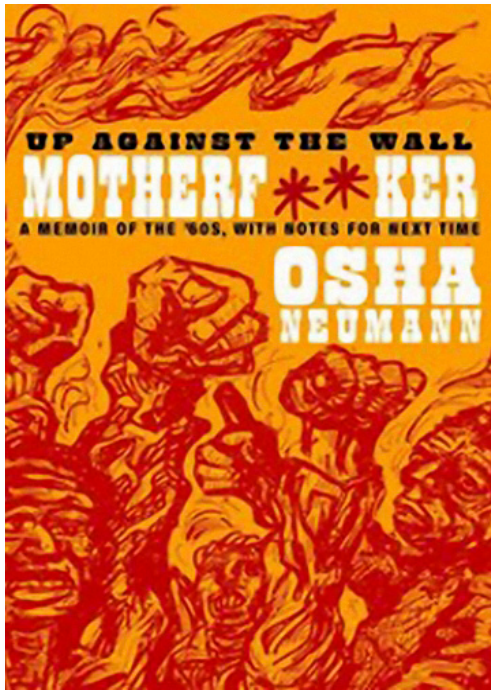
**DAYS OF  
ANARCHY**

An excerpt from

**UP AGAINST THE WALL MOTHERF\*\*KER**

by **Osha Neumann**





## THE AUTHOR

Raised in a family of German Jewish intellectuals, **OSHA NEUMANN** fled academia to live as a painter on the Lower East Side of New York, then became a founding member of an anarchist street gang called Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers. In this book he chronicles the group's participation in a takeover of Columbia University, warring with concert promoter Bill Graham, and protesting the Democratic Convention in Chicago, where Neumann was named an unindicted co-conspirator in the trial of the Chicago 10.

Neumann is now a public interest lawyer in Berkeley, California, where he represents the homeless and victims of police brutality.

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# DAYS OF ANARCHY

OSHA NEUMANN

An excerpt from his book

**UP AGAINST THE WALL MOTHERF\*\*KER**

In 1967, I became a founding member of an anarchist street gang called Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers, an unexpected career move for a nice Jewish boy with an MA in history from Yale.

We called ourselves the Motherfuckers. We saw ourselves as urban guerrillas swimming in the countercultural sea of freaks and dropouts (we didn't like the media term "hippies") who had swarmed to the cheap-rent tenements of the Lower East Side of New York. Those young dropouts were our base, and we attempted to organize them for total revolution through rallies, free feasts, raucous community meetings, and a steady stream of mimeographed flyers. Against the vapid spaciness of "flower power" we proclaimed the need for "Armed Love." Our rhetoric was inflammatory and often violent.

We gave speeches and wrote manifestos, but above all we believed in propaganda of the deed. We engaged in con-

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stant confrontations with the police. We would start riots, get arrested, start another one to protest our arrests, and get arrested again. After one of my arrests I appeared before a judge who called me "a cross between Rap Brown and Hitler." I greeted his summation of my character with a mixture of pride and shame. I felt like a kid whose scary Halloween costume has been more successful than he intended.

As a child I'd imagined I was destined to become a professor and write books. My parents were German Jewish refugees from the Nazis. My father was Franz Neumann, the author of "Behemoth", a seminal study of fascist Germany. His best friend was Herbert Marcuse. Herbert's most famous books, "Eros and Civilization" and "One-Dimensional Man", are philosophical critiques of civilization and its discontents that rejected the rigid analytic framework of dogmatic Marxism. His writing and speeches provided theoretical legitimization to the unorth-

odox countercultural movements of the Sixties and made him something of a father figure to a generation that generally distrusted anyone over thirty.

Herbert moved into our house after his wife Sophie died of cancer in 1951. While living with us he continued a secret affair with my mother that had begun some-time earlier.

Inge, my mother, was a brilliant woman, who sacrificed her own ambitions in order to do what was expected at the time of a mother and faculty wife. Her marriage to Franz was not a happy one. I suspect that in her unhappiness, she vented her frustration on me. We fought endlessly.

I grew up in a Manichean world. Fascism was the expression of the irrational; reason was its opposite. The distinction was clear and unambiguous. By the time I reached junior high school I had already reached the conclusion that our home was the clean well-lighted citadel of reason and I was an irrational foul-smelling insect befouling it. I became obsessive and introverted.

In becoming a Motherfucker I renounced my commitment to ordered discourse, the traffic in abstractions, respect for explanations, the demand for coherence, and the subordination of impulse and emotion – all of which I thought of as characteristic of a life committed to reason. I grew fierce in my scorn for theory. I felt most alive when running in the streets with no thoughts in my head but where the cops were and how to avoid them. But my apostasy was never complete. As the Mafia don longs for respectability, as the dealer in prostitutes and drugs can be the staunchest proponent of family values, so I, the rebellious child of reason, longed for the respectable cloak of rationality and pledged allegiance to



**I grew fierce in my scorn for theory. I felt most alive when running in the streets with no thoughts in my head but where the cops were and how to avoid them**

reason even as I plunged headlong into the irrational.

I'm no longer a Motherfucker and childhood is a distant memory, but I still think of reason somewhat vaguely as a universally applicable method for determining truth and validating judgments. I have never been really sure what it is, but I appeal to it anyway.

Reason or revelation. How else do we decide what's right and wrong? Some of us appeal to the one, some of us to the other. But both have their problems. God has too many spokespeople, each certain he's the chosen mouthpiece, none making a credible argument in the age of cell phones, black holes, concentration camps, weapons of mass destruction, mad cow disease, and reality television. Reason has got some of the same problems God has: too many people appealing to it for too many different purposes. Far too often the powers that be who ask us to be reasonable and not rock the boat act as if they were stark raving mad, hell bent on incinerating their enemies, polluting nature, promoting inequality, and grabbing as much loot for themselves as possible. What they call progress is destruction. What they call democracy is subjugation. The tools for the alleviation of want are turned into the means for its perpetuation.

"Reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form," wrote a twenty-year-old Karl Marx. I would like to think that the Motherfuckers represented reason "but not in a rational form." Although I have written the confession of a Motherfucker, I am the least motherfucker of Motherfuckers. I have been quite tamed by time, and to tell the truth I was probably not much of a motherfucker even back then, though I put on a pretty good show. What I have to confess

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are mainly bad thoughts and crimes of the imagination.

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The Motherfuckers were active on the margins of a marginal movement. We did our work and lived our lives in the streets. We didn't keep minutes of meetings and we didn't own a filing cabinet. We churned out ephemeral fliers, but issued no formal press releases. We shunned publicity and our doings went generally unreported in the press. Therefore there are few records with which to correct, order and solidify failing and imperfect memories.

Our battle with Bill Graham is a partial exception. Because he was rock and roll royalty, our confrontation with him was duly noted at the time and has been mentioned in various memoirs since then including *Bill Graham Presents* and *My Life in Rock and Roll* by Bill Graham and Robert Greenfield.

Two months after I returned from Chicago, we initiated a campaign to obtain a free night for the community at the Fillmore East, which Bill Graham, had recently opened on 2nd Avenue as a venue for the rock acts he was promoting. Bill had begun his career managing the San Francisco Mime Troop for almost no money, but now he had become the top rock promoter in the country and was raking in the dough.

As we saw it he was making big bucks off our culture and it was time for a little payback. We had a meeting with him to present our demands. The meeting took place in his office behind the theater. It did not go well. Ben's pitch was that suburban kids were coming to the Fillmore in droves to get in on the psychedelic experience, while the kids who lived on the



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streets of the Lower East Side couldn't afford the price of a ticket. Bill wasn't impressed. The discussion got heated. We made threats and Bill shouted at us that when he was a kid he'd crawled across Europe to escape the Nazis and if he'd survived Hitler, he'd damn well survive us. So that was it. To Bill Graham, born Wolfgang Grajonca, a Jewish orphan born in Berlin, whose mother died in Auschwitz, I had become the equivalent of a Nazi. I tried not to let my distress show, avoided his eyes and concentrated on his watch that had two dials, one set for east coast time, one for west coast time.

The meeting went on for some time. Ben recalls Bill yelling at us that we'd get our free night over his dead body, to which Ben replied with the little smile he got when he was very serious: "Well, that could be arranged." Bill looked him in the eye, opened a drawer of his desk and took out a pair of bullets with chrome casings, which he placed on the desk in front of him. The bullets, he said, were sent to him by the Hell's Angels, who'd once threatened to kill him. He hadn't been scared of them, and he wasn't scared of us. Ben replied that those guys just talked big, but if we decided to shut him down we'd shut him down. Carole remembers things somewhat differently. She says I jumped up and down and yelled, and that it was I who pulled out the bullets and they weren't silver. I don't remember the bullets at all, but Steve remembers it Ben's way. Despite his angry defiance, I had the feeling as we left his office that Bill thrived on confrontation and rather liked us. That was probably wishful thinking.

We continued our campaign. Judith Malina and Julian Beck's Living Theater was scheduled to perform *Paradise Now*

at the Fillmore East as part of an evening of radical theater to benefit the legal defense of students arrested at the Columbia University occupation. Ben decided the Living Theater's appearance provided the perfect opportunity to show Bill we meant business. *Paradise Now* was a free form controlled improvisation involving nudity and audience participation. Ben met with Judith and Julian and together they agreed that at the end of the performance the audience would stay and hold the theater. We seeded the audience with contingents of our followers. As the play reached its conclusion, we joined the actors on stage. Richard Goldstein, writing in the Village Voice, described what happened next:

Onstage, 100 people were dancing, chanting or stomping away. Many who knew this scenario by heart were stripping in anticipation ... The actors too had bared their bodies; they slipped onstage, formed an even circle, and passed the pipe around. Neighborhood kids moved among the actors, whistling and shouting "Naked City." ... The performance ended in a huge swirling dance of OM ...

At that moment -- as though timing were all that was involved -- Ben Morea grabbed the microphone and announced on behalf of the Motherfuckers that the Fillmore East had been liberated. He proceeded to demand that Bill Graham turn the house over to "the community" once a week, gratis. Graham's eyes did a soft role in their sockets as he walked into the spotlight to make the confrontation complete.



**He responded to our demands by saying if we wanted the theater to be free we should buy it, but if we tried to take it by force we would have to kill him first**

The performance came to a halt amidst much pandemonium and shouting. Ben announced: "The show is over, life goes on. We're not leaving till we get our one free night." The audience stayed. We drummed and made speeches, some more coherent than others. Much the same argument we had had with Bill in his office now took place in front of an audience. He responded to our demands by saying if we wanted the theater to be free we should buy it, but if we tried to take it by force we would have to kill him first. Finally, well after midnight, Bill took a microphone and announced that if we would leave the theater he would agree to hold a town meeting on our proposal the following Wednesday. We had carried a mimeograph machine to the theater from our office. We brought it on stage and before we left the theater cranked out our cautious response to Bill's offer:

The community needs free space.  
It needs to survive, grow freaky,  
breathe, expand, love, struggle,  
turn on. Bill Graham, hippie entrepreneur ... may tonight have been a little liberated or he may not. Next Wednesday will tell. One Nite a Week or the Sky's the Limit.

As it turned out, Bill's idea of what he had offered and ours were not the same.

On the day of the town hall meeting we arrived at the theater and saw on the stage, a table on which sat two microphones. Behind each microphone was a folding chair, one for Bill and one for Ben. Bill wanted a structured debate. He and Ben would talk. The rest of us would listen.

We made sure it wasn't going to happen that way. A Motherfucker event had to include free food, music, spontaneous

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speeches, call and response. Again we brought a mimeograph machine from our storefront. We set it in the center aisle and, as the event unfolded, churned out fliers commenting on the proceedings. In the face of threats and exhortations from all sides, Bill remained adamantly opposed to giving us our free night. He'd seen what our events looked like and would have none of it. As the night wore on without any discernible progress in the negotiations, people drifted away, and we left, promising to escalate the confrontation.

Behind the scenes, negotiations continued. Other more "responsible" parties, including Wavy Gravy, intervened. Bill finally agreed to allow us to use the theater on Wednesday nights to put on free events for the community.

The first one took place in late November. From our point of view it was an enormous success. The theater was packed.

It felt as if 2nd Avenue had tipped on its side and deposited its entire contents -- animate and inanimate -- in the theater. Discarded sandwiches, cigarette butts, cans and bottles littered the carpets. Much wine was drunk, much dope was smoked. The program, such as it was, proceeded amidst a chorus of boasts, threats, brags and rambling fantasies shouted out from every corner of the auditorium. Bill Graham's green-shirted ushers stood by, attempting to make themselves inconspicuous, utterly powerless to control the magnificent chaos of the event. The drug laws of the State of New York were flagrantly violated. There were grievous insults to property. Carpets were stained. Seats were broken. Toilets clogged and overflowed.

After four free community nights, and warnings from the police that they would



**The drug laws of the State of New York were flagrantly violated. There were grievous insults to property. Carpets were stained. Seats were broken. Toilets clogged and overflowed**

yank his license, Bill Graham had enough. He circulated an open letter to the community announcing the end of the free nights and urging everyone "to *accept our predicament* (which is now your *reality*) with intelligence and grace."

We quickly cranked out a response on our church donated Gestetner:

**Situation:** Pigs and Bill Graham stop free night. Why? They say we smoke dope, but we know it's because they are afraid of us. Afraid that we'll learn it's ours. Afraid that we'll get together there to destroy their world and create our own.

The pigs threaten to close Graham down unless he stops our free night. He doesn't have to worry about the pigs. We'll close him down. No free night, no pay night

...

On a more conciliatory note we asked to use the theater on the Monday before Christmas for a community meeting to discuss the use of dope. When we showed up the doors were locked.

Electra records had rented the hall for a free concert the day after Christmas to promote their new acquisition, the MC5, a musically mediocre but politically militant rock and roll band out of Detroit. Its manager, John Sinclair, had been one of the founders of the White Panther Party, a small, Black Panther emulating, anarchist collective, whose rhetoric was a clone of ours. John's White Panther Party Manifesto proclaimed:

We are a bunch of arrogant motherfuckers and we don't give a damn for any cop or any phony-ass authority control-addict creeps who want to put us down. For the

first time in America there is a generation of visionary maniac white motherfucker country dope fiend rock and roll freaks who are ready to get down and kick out the jams -- ALL THE JAMS -- break everything loose and free everybody from their very real and imaginary prisons -- even the chumps and punks and honkies who are always fucking with us.

We demand total freedom for everybody! And we will not be stopped until we get it. We are bad.

The MC5 had played at the last free community night before the shutdown. Radio stations had been giving away free tickets. We demanded 500 tickets for the community. Fearing violence, Graham reluctantly agreed.

On the evening of the concert the theater filled up quickly and when the doors closed there was still a crowd gathered outside demanding to be let in. The crowd chanted, yelled, and pushed. Bill himself stood in the doorway, blocking the entrance. Suddenly, Israel, one of the Puerto Rican street kids who hung out with us, slashed a bicycle chain across his face. Blood began pouring from his nose. Bill fell back.

The concert began. TheMC5 played their big number, 'Kick Out the Jams, Motherfuckers.' We gave speeches. The crowd jumped on the stage. Again pandemonium reigned. The band got nervous and made a speedy exit in a limousine, much to our disgust. Wayne Kramer, a member of the MC5 remembers:

The stage wings were crowded with Motherfuckers waiting for us



**Suddenly, Israel, one of the Puerto Rican street kids who hung out with us, slashed a bicycle chain across his face. Blood began pouring from his nose. Bill fell back**

to give the word to burn the place down. Of course we weren't about to give any such command and their anger started to turn on us ... We finished our set and escaped to the dressing room while the motherfuckers and the street maniacs tried to run out the door with our gear. Our crew valiantly battled to hold on to our stuff and the greatest blunder in record business tactics imaginable happens: two limousines show up to carry the band back to the hotel. The revolutionaries saw red! "Limos!" The symbol of capitalist imperial-ism. Limos. The Motherfucker women were screaming and weeping about how we had sold the revolution out. They were smashing our records against the Cadillac limos tail fins. Crying at the top of their lungs: "Bastards! Pigs! Phonies! Sell-outs!"

After the MC 5 left, the crowd stayed. Before the night was over one person had been hospitalized after being hit over the head with a microphone stand; a Puerto Rican boy had been stabbed; and one of the ushers had his arm fractured with a metal pipe.

That night marked the end of our battle with Bill Graham. Bill offered to provide some financial and other support for the community to find some other place to meet, but it never happened. Times were changing and the very brief heyday of the Motherfuckers was nearing its end. I had watched Bill get hit with the chain and felt a door open between our violent rhetoric and reality. I did not want to walk through it. The vulnerability of the flesh of my opponent gave me no pleasure.



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