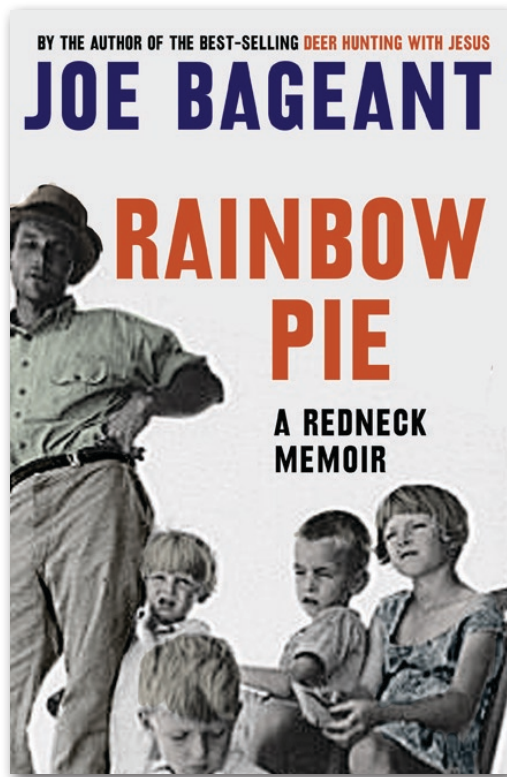


**JOE  
BAGEANT**

**Live From  
the Planet  
Norte**

**Totalitarian  
democracy  
and the  
politics  
of plunder**

**ColdType**



**JOE BAGEANT** is the author of **Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War**. His newest book, **Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir**, deals with America's permanent white underclass, and how it was intentionally created. To be released in September in Australia and October in the United Kingdom. **Rainbow Pie** is available for preorder from Amazon-UK and Amazon-Canada. In Australia, the book may be pre-ordered at [www.scribepublications.com.au](http://www.scribepublications.com.au)

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# Live From the Planet Norte

**JOE BAGEANT**

**S**tarting with the Homeland Security probe at Washington's Reagan Airport, arrival back in the United States resembles an alien abduction to a planet of bright lights, strange beings and incomprehensible behavior. The featureless mysophobic landscape of DC's Virginia suburbs seems to indicate that homogeneity and sterility are the native religions. Especially after spending eight months in Mexico's pungent atmosphere of funky, sensual open air markets, rotting vegetation, smoking street food grills, sweat, agave nectar and ghost orchids.

The uniformity on Planet Norte is striking. Each person is a unit, installed in life support boxes in the suburbs and cities; all are fed, clothed by the same closed-loop corporate industrial system. Everywhere you look, inhabitants are plugged in at the brainstem to screens downloading their state approved daily consciousness updates. iPods, Blackberries, notebook computers, monitors in cubicles, and the ubiquitous TV screens in lobbies, bars, waiting rooms, even in taxicabs, mentally knead the public brain and condition its

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reactions to non-Americaness. Which may be defined as anything that does not come from of Washington, DC, Microsoft or Wal-Mart.

For such a big country, the “American experience” is extremely narrow and provincial, leaving its people with approximately the same comprehension of the outside world as an oyster bed. Yet there is that relentless busyness of Norteniens. That sort of constant movement that indicates all parties are busy-busy-busy, but offers no clue as to just what they are busy at.

We can be sure however, that it has to do with consuming. Everything in America has to do with consuming. So much so that we find not the slightest embarrassment in calling ourselves “the consumer society.” Which is probably just as well, since calling ourselves something such as “the just society” might have been aiming a bit too high? Especially for a nation that never did find enough popular support to pass any of the 200 anti-lynching bills brought before its Congress (even Franklin Roosevelt refused to back them).

On the other hand, there is no disputing that we do reduce all things to consumption. Or acquiring money for consumption. Or paying on the debt for past consumption. It keeps things simple, and stamps them as authentically American.

For example, now faced with what may be the biggest ecological disaster in human history, I'm hearing average Americans up here talk of the Gulf oil "spill" (when they speak of it at all – TV gives the illusion those outside the Gulf region give a shit), in terms of its effect on: (A) the price of seafood; and (B) jobs in tourism and fishing. Only trolls stunted by generations of inbred American style capitalism could do such a thing: reduce a massive ocean dead zone to the cost of a shrimp cocktail or a car payment.

Meanwhile, even as capitalism shows every sign of collapsing upon them under the weight of its sheer non-sustainability, Norteamericanos wait like patient, not-too-bright children for its "recovery." Recovery, of course, is that time when they can once again run through the malls and outlet stores, the car lots and the fried chicken palaces eating, grabbing and consuming. No doubt, something resembling a recovery will be staged for their benefit, thereby goosing their pocketbooks at least one more time before the rest of the world forecloses on the country.

### **Let 'er rip! There's plenty more where that came from**

On Planet Norte nothing is finite. Not even money, which, under the flag of the consumer society, you can keep borrowing forever. Equally limitless is oil, infinite quantities of which are being hidden from us by a consortium of energy companies. Several people here in the States have told me that the size of the Gulf oil spill is proof that



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there is plenty of oil in still in the ground, and that this "peak oil stuff" is a scare tactic, an excuse to keep the price up. They were dead serious.

Considering the inexhaustibility of Planet Norte, it's no surprise its inhabitants have never doubted the "American Dream," the promise that every generation of Americans can be fatter, richer and burn up more resources than the previous one, ad infinitum.

All of which makes folks like me, and probably you too, want to run pulling out our hair and screaming, "What the fuck has happened to these people? From the start, it was clear that Americans were never going to win any prizes for insight. But this is ridiculous. Is it the hormones in the meat? Pollution? A brain eating fungus? How on God's (once) green earth can a nation so frigging 'out of it' manage to survive each day – much less constitute an ongoing threat to the rest of the world?"

However, you must hand it to us that, so far, we have managed to sustain this culture of "I want it all, everything, the whole shebang, and I want it right now!" Except for the liberal and leftie websites and organizations, few seriously question it. When your designated role as a citizen is to live out a round-the-clock materialistic wet dream, why would anybody want to question it? Besides, seeing is believing. So reality is a titty tuck or a Dodge truck, and Ruby Tuesday delivering "falling off the bone tender" manna 24/7. Thank God It's Friday and go ahead, do it, put another trip to Cancun on the plastic. It's a limitless world, baby!

In my little casita back in Mexico, limits are very real. Because price per unit escalates with increased usage, we have to pay serious attention to electricity. So does government. Our municipality is

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so conscious of every kilowatt that traffic lights have no green or orange phase – which saves on expensive bulbs too – and it seems to work out just fine. You get one streetlight per block. Water is available to our village’s neighborhoods only every other day, so it has to be stored in rooftop tanks. Once in the tank, gravity eliminates the need for further electric pumps. Every single plastic bag, large or small, is used for household trash, then hung on the front gate to be collected. You accept limits every day in Mexico and live within them.

But for that twenty percent or so of the planet living in the (over) developed western nations – thanks to colonial plundering for resources, and later, world banking scams – the limits of the natural world have never sunk in. Not really. Oh, ecological limits can be intellectually real to us, and we can have discussions about them. And being comparatively rich, we can build wind turbines and solar panels, and tell ourselves smug lies about “sustainable energy” and “green solutions.” However, in our daily world, the affective one that governs our behavior, the one that tells us what we honestly need to deal with and what we do not, there are no apparent limits or potential end of anything. For example, if you wanted a glass of ice water right now, you could walk over to a refrigerator and get it. Most of the world cannot.

We assume much. We assume that when we get up every morning the coffee maker will come on and the car will start. We assume that everything imaginable is available for a price, even if we cannot come up with that price. But we never really worry about having food or clothing, other than its style and type. Our biggest concerns turn on such things as who will win the World Cup or be eliminated from American Idol. The social and political environment assures us to believe we can afford to be



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consumed by these trivialities. The world of Americans has been like that for generations. So how could it possibly come to an end? Lest one have doubts, every voice of authority tells us that no matter how bad things may seem at times, they always “return to normal.”

This theme of engorgement and spectacle endures, thrives really, year after year, despite even the slowly unfolding world economic collapse. But it is Americans in particular who become stupider by any historical measure of intelligence. Millions pay money to visit Branson, Missouri. Or Holy Land Christian Theme Park, in Orlando, where you can have the improbable experience of “fun with the world’s most popular Biblical characters” (Hmmm, maybe Mary Magdalene) and watch Jesus get crucified daily. And just when you think you’ve seen every possible insult to the democratic process a degraded society can vomit up, some new one comes hurtling in your direction. Like those fat women in pink sweatpants leering from our TV screens, dangling tea-bags and vowing revenge for they know not what.

For a thinking person, a low-grade depression settles in, alongside an unspoken fatalism about the future of the human race, particularly the American portion. That’s the point I reached a year or so ago. I would probably be ashamed to admit it, if I did not receive hundreds of emails from readers who feel the same way.

If nothing else though, in the process of building our own gilded rat cage, we have proven that old saw about democracy eventually leading to mediocrity to be true. Especially if you keep dumbing down all the rats. After all, Dan Quayle, Donald Trump and George W. Bush hold advanced degrees from top universities

in law, finance and business. The head rats, our “leaders,” (if it is even possible to lead anybody anywhere inside a cage), have proven to be as mediocre and clueless as anyone else. Which is sort of proof we are a democracy, if we want to look at it that way. While it is a myth that virtually anybody can grow up to be president, we have demonstrated that nitwits have more than a fighting chance. During my 40 years writing media ass-wipe for the public, I have interviewed many of “The best of my generation”, and believe me; most of them were not much.

Naturally, they believe they are far superior by virtue of having made it to an elevated point in the gilded cage, closer to the feed, water and sex. Because they believe it, and the media echoes their belief, hovering and quoting them, discussing their every brain fart, we tend to believe it too. Nothing shakes our belief, not even staring directly into the face of a congenital liar and nitwit like Sarah Palin, or a careening set of brainless balls like Donald Trump or a retarded jackal like George W. Bush. Americans are unable to explain why such people “rise to the top” in our country. We just accept that they do, and assume that America’s process of natural selection – survival of the wealthiest – is at work. These people are rich; therefore, they should run the country. God said so. It’s a uniquely American principal of governance, which in itself, makes the case for our stupidity.

### **If it’s control you want**

Yet, despite such intellectual and moral torpor, some of the numbest bozos are beginning to suspect that the wheels are coming off their “have everything” society. One clue is that every time they check, they have less than before. “There’s oth-

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**No less a personage than Thomas Jefferson pointed out that, whether for good or evil, controlling the people is the main thing all governments do best**

er signs too,” concludes our bozo. “You gotcher radical Muslims blowing shit up, or plotting to. China holds the mortgage on our asses. Who wuudda ever thunk it? The bodies of our fallen heroes are being tossed out of the revered Arlington Cemetery into the landfill. You got yer freshwater fish with three eyes, obese high school kids droppin dead of heart attacks, meth epidemics out in the boondocks and wild coyotes moving into big cities. It’s all just too goddamned much!” And so, right in the middle of the morning commute, our bozo pulls over onto the roadside berm, puts his hands up against the windshield and screams. “AAAAAAGH! Is anybody in control here, for Christ sake?”

Control huh? Nothing could be easier to obtain. Just sit back allow those who want total control of the government to have it. The GOP is sure to come up a candidate willing to pistol whip this country into shape. And that solution looks more attractive by the day. As violent competition for survival increases and resources diminish, the public demands more government control.

Control of borders, drug lords with entire armies of their own, pillaging by banks. Who else but the government is capable of beating all those sociopathic freaks out there into submission?

No less a personage than Thomas Jefferson pointed out that, whether for good or evil, controlling the people is the main thing all governments do best. Both Jefferson and Stalin understood this. They also understood that government control is a one-way street – it never voluntarily contracts, never shrinks. Government grows incrementally in the best of times, and balloons exponentially during the worst. When the people are anxious or fearful, when the have-nots are coming out of the woodwork for their share and there

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is genuine risk of losing something, the citizens always demand more government control. Given enough time, all government control, regardless of type or stripe, metastasizes – whether it be into the religious control of a theocratic state, or the democratic totalitarianism of the United States.

Although totalitarian democracy is well solidified in the U.S., it is difficult, if not impossible, for its citizens or the outside world to name the beast, due to the outward appearance of freedom. Petty liberties are left intact. The process of orderly elections is maintained, thus retaining the world's general respect as a free country. After all, the people do “exercise their will” by voting.

Beyond that, the people have no further participation in, or effect upon the government's decision-making process regarding the public's will. From that point onward, an economic, political, and military elite interpret the general will as what best fits their own interests. A media elite then sells their decisions, such as war or destruction of the social safety net as the people's choice. Wars are packaged and marketed as “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” fought by “our heroes.” Policies kicking the slats from under the old, the poor and the weak are sold as “eliminating wasteful, unfair entitlements,” such as elder care and child nutrition. Everybody knows that words such as entitlements, elder care and child nutrition are code words in capitalism speak. Elder care wastes money on worn-out old fuckers who can no longer work and pay their own way. Child nutrition is just a nigger/wetback feeding program that causes them to multiply even more, draining off valuable funds the already rich could have put to better use.

Liberty nonetheless abounds in a to-



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talitarian democracy. Open elections verify majority rule. The slaves are free to elect their masters, and that is enough to satisfy most folks in the land of the free. That, along with 100-plus cable channels to keep us entertained inside the cage. We know we are powerless, but better the devil you know than evil socialism, where you are not allowed to take out a second mortgage on your cage.

### **What's a little totalitarian oppression, anyway?**

In the big picture however, the hardening of our totalitarian state is a piffle, compared to what drives the people to accept such a state. That driver is the escalating social pressures of six billion humans, and the ecocide caused by our disastrous hydrocarbon culture. Would that the state and its media allow the public enough information to make the connection between things like global warming, peak oil, desertification and the state's wars we pay for and die in.

From the dawn of agriculture, human civilization has been a net subtraction from the environment on which we depend for life. Consider what once existed, and what little of it is left. Consider the burgeoning hordes everywhere burning, smelting, polluting, and generally devouring what remains. Where is that leading us?

You don't need to call the Harvard's environmental science department for the answer (even though the profs and scientists there maintain the charade that we do, to protect their rackets). Despite the rule of scientism and the fashionable modern disdain for human intuition, common sense is still a viable option. Does common sense and experience tell you that all six billion of us are suddenly going to

come to Jesus and save the planet? Suddenly be seized by the spirit of universal cooperation and pagan love for Gaia? Are those billions going to quit doing what our species has done for 15,000 years – attacking nature first with the stone axe, then the plow, and later with atomic energy?

Call me a grim old fatalist, but I just do not see the human race turning things around. Not because humans are inherently evil (although pimping Gaia to death comes close), but because we are what we are. In any case, we are not going to stop eating, shitting, burning up stuff to stay warm, or following the genetic imperative to breed.

How can we solve the problem when we are the problem, other than by self-extinction?

So here it is, top of the ninth round, and Gaia is on the ropes with cuts over both eyes, and no referee on the mat. Homo sapiens are moving in for the killer punch. It's been an ugly fight. But the truth is that there will be no winner. Certainly not man, considering that his triumph results in the specter of human self-extinction, dieback or die-off, or at least by massive die-back.

### **Turn off your mind, relax and float down stream**

Informed and globally conscious people are sickened, heartbroken by the spectral truth. But to use the same Neal Cassady quote for the second time this year: “To have seen a specter is not everything.”

In fact, it even has a good side. Transformation. Once you honestly accept what you have seen, you are changed, released from the previous stress and fear. Like so many feared experiences, it is its own psychodynamic, and is about



**Pay the money and put in enough university time, and it's relatively easy to end up certified, acceptable, and equipped with the professional jargon necessary to impress yourself and others that you are an expert of some sort**

“coming out the other side” of the experience. Accepting such a truth – especially for pathologically optimistic, cheer stressed Americans – shatters many painfully held illusions. The chief one is that we are the animating force behind all significant change, and that the massive damage we do is “progress”). In their place grows a new inner awareness. Although it does not conform to any popular definition as such, the easiest way to describe it is “spiritual.” Who in these times, you may ask, believes in the spirit as an animating force of mankind? My answer is: Those who can be still enough to see that spirit moving.

With it comes the awareness and acceptance of forces far more powerful than our puny anthropocentric illusions of planetary authority. We can arrive at this understanding by way of thinking, logic and reason. The mind is a cumbersome and inefficient way to go about escaping traps you build with your mind, but yes, it can be done. Most educated people in this science worshipping age prefer the convoluted path of logic and rational exercise, over calmly opening one's eyes and heart to the world before us, as wiser men have done for thousands of years.

I can see why. Pay the money and put in enough university time, and it's relatively easy to end up certified, acceptable, and equipped with the professional jargon necessary to impress yourself and others that you are an expert of some sort.

One of society's answer guys, the kind universities and corporations pay good money to own. But it's downright hard to be calm, to maintain inner stillness. Beyond that, inner stillness does not much impress or frighten others in the rat fight for a good spot at the feeder.



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Worse yet, it's free. No money it.

But stillness of mind opens onto the fathomless void, where we are dwarfed into utter insignificance. It makes clear how little we comprehend – how much we do not know and never will, and that the greater the fire we build, the more darkness is revealed.

Edwin Arnold reminds us that when it comes to sinking the string of thought into that fathomless void, “Who asks doth err, Who answers, errs more,” because, as any searcher by way of mortal mind discovers:



**the universe is busy enough hurling toward its destiny, and does not give a rat's ass what we do or do not like**

*Veil after veil will lift – but there must be Veil upon veil behind.*

Either way, there never was any guarantee that we would like the universal truth. And the truth is that the universe is busy enough hurling toward its destiny, and does not give a rat's ass what we do or do not like. Or whether a smear of biology on a speck of cosmic dust manages to poison itself to death.

So stay strong. Transcend. Find reasons to love.

Nobody ever gets out of this world alive, anyway.

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