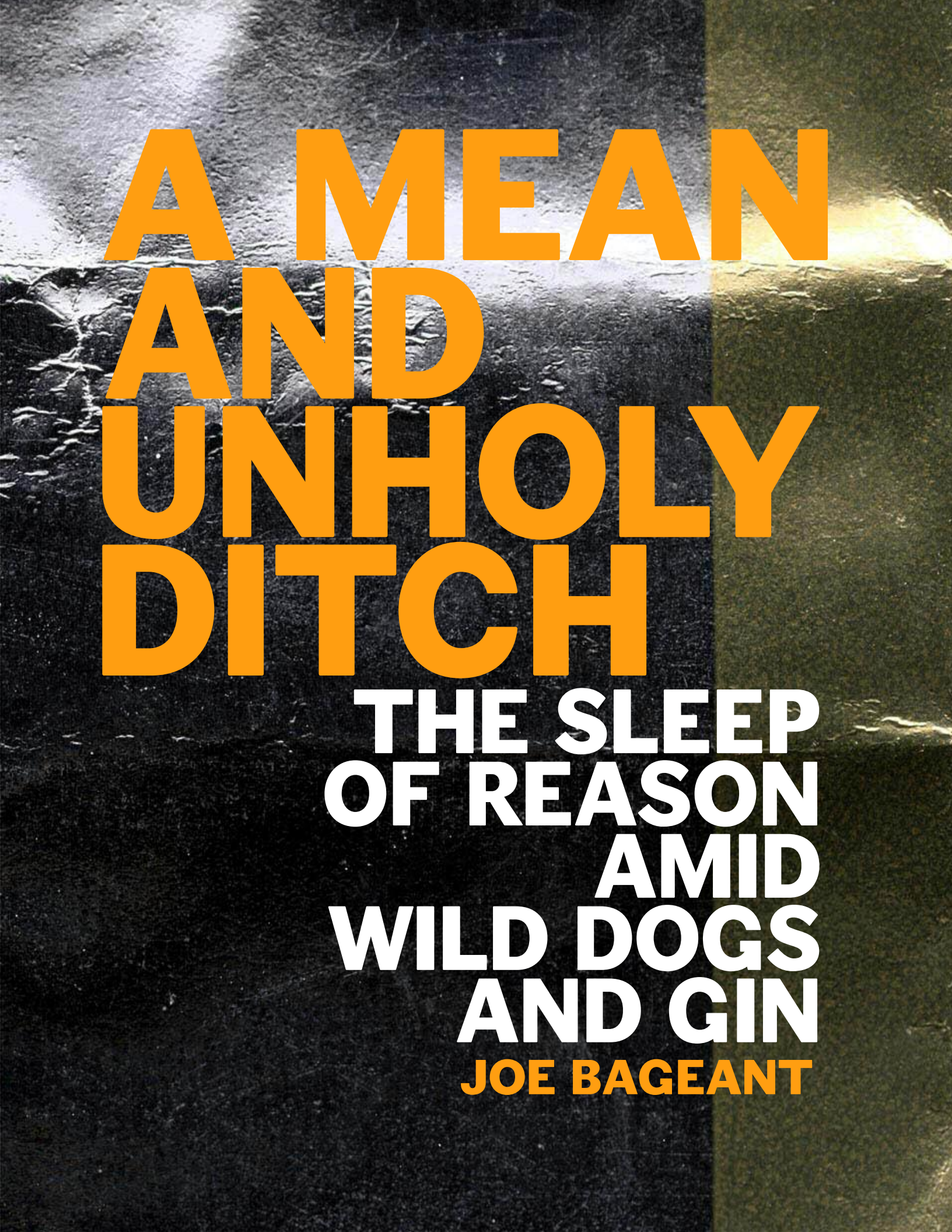
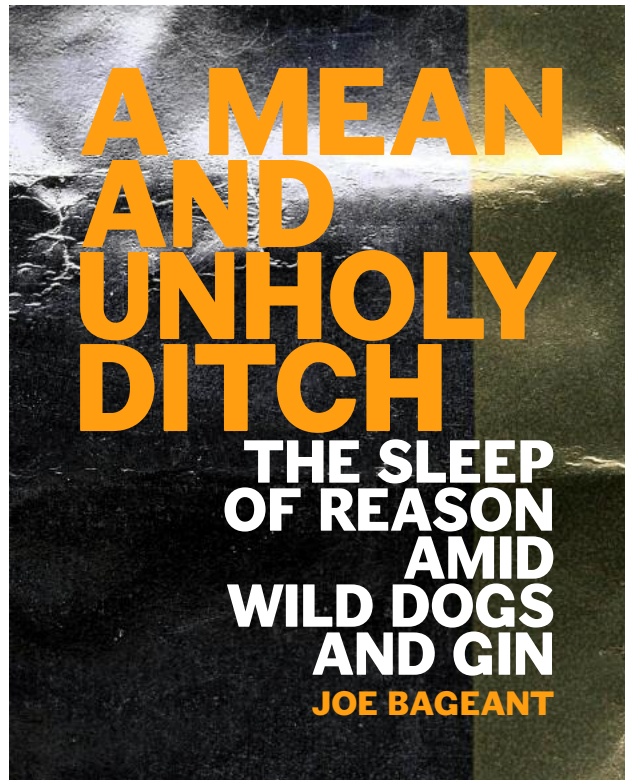




A MEAN AND UNHOLY DITCH

**THE SLEEP
OF REASON
AMID
WILD DOGS
AND GIN**

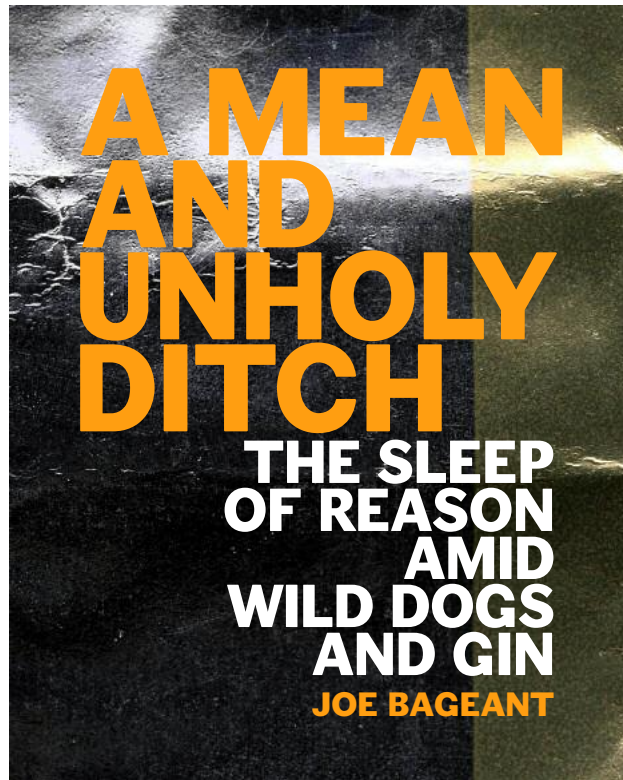
JOE BAGEANT



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THE HARDEST THING for garden variety American liberals to grasp is what a truly politicized and hateful place much of America has become – one long mean ditch ruled by feral dogs where the standards of civility no longer apply. The second hardest thing for liberals is to admit that they are comfortably insulated in the middle class and are not going to take any risks in the battle for America's soul – not as long as they are still living on a good street, sending their kids to Montessori and getting their slice of the American quiche. Call it the politics of the comfort zone.

Ever on the lookout for free food and brand name booze, I slipped over into the comfort zone on New Year's Day, 2005 to a lovely literary party of urbanites who'd flown in from upper East Coast. They all seem to have country places down here in the Shenandoah Valley these days. So as I minced over fresh salmon with a chic liberal book editor, she said: "I am coming to understand how Karl Rove drove so many of the American people to vote for Bush during the election." (pronouncing "people" in that way of overeducated urban liberals everywhere, indicating that she did not consider herself one of them .) And I am thinking: "JESUS CHRIST LADY, IT'S NOT AS IF IT WERE A LONG DRIVE!"

That chic editor may spend her time waiting to see another Dorothy Parker \$10,000 martini at the Algonquin Hotel, but my vantage point on America is less lofty and certainly a helluva lot cheaper. When I look around America's barrooms, church suppers, swap meets and strip clubs, I see that "the American people" like the way things are going. Or at least half of them do. They like World Championship Wrestling and Confederate flags and flat screen television and they like the idea of an American empire. "The people" don't give a rat's bunghole about social programs or the poor or other races or the planet or animals or anything else. They LIKE cheap gas and making life tough for queers. They LIKE chasing Thanksgiving Day Xmas sales. And when fascism comes, they will like that, too.

That is reality. It is all around us and only the liberals, in their noble but blind egalitarian efforts, deny this. "The people" however, do not deny reality – they create it from the belly of their perverse ignorance, even as the left speaks in non sequitur and wonders why the hell they cannot get any political traction. Meanwhile, it is football and NASCAR and guns and a republic free from married queers for the people. That's what they want. That's what they voted for – a moral republic.

Moral values of course had jack to do with anything. What those people were voting for a couple of months ago was hatred of other human beings culturally unlike themselves, particularly gays and lesbians, but also non-born-again Christians. That's why Republicans got constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage on the ballot in eleven states. They suspected the hate was there to be exploited. And it was, passing easily in nine of the eleven states. It was always about hate those who are different. Hating "the other".

Being a Southerner, I have hated in my lifetime. And like most people over 50, it shows in my face, because by that age we all have the face we deserve. Likewise I have seen hate in others and know the thing when I see it. And I am seeing more of it now than I have ever seen in my life (which is saying something considering that I grew up down here during the Jim Crow era.) The neo-conservative hate I am seeing now is every bit equal to the kind I saw in my people during those violent years. Irrational. Deeply rooted.

Now here is the pissar. Ugly as this hateful half or more of Americans are, it's not entirely their fault. Their beliefs are at least partly the result of a sophisticated propaganda system perfected over decades by a consolidated corporate state media. Saturation has never been stronger. As we speak some 72% of Americans still believe there were WMD's in

Iraq, and 75% believe that Saddam was supporting ben Laden. They did not each and independently arrive at such stupid conclusions on their own (if such mindless acceptance can even be called conclusions.) Indoctrinated by state propaganda, they then acted and continue to act accordingly – which is to say grotesquely in the eyes of the world.

I do not have to tell informed readers that the rest of the world has long been repulsed by this sort of American grotesquery, this darkly provincial, arrogant American spectacle. But some of the world still has difficulty openly admitting to what it observes: that Americans, have become belligerent, mean, and downright dangerous to world security and stability. For example, my English cousins, perhaps in an effort to be nice, tell me, “We don’t hate you, but we hate your government.” They echo many Europeans when they do so. Which is disingenuous on their part because, despite our crooked elections, government here is still elected by at least a plurality, and in many cases a majority, of voters. So you cannot piss on the elected government without hitting the people who elected it. Especially considering that a majority strongly support any and all of our government’s wars at any given time.

Nevertheless, except for Israel perhaps, the world wants to hate America. Common sense tells them they should – hell, we’re out of control. But unlike Americans, Europeans seem to have a difficult time letting themselves write off hundreds of millions of other people in one fell swoop. So they tell themselves that our morally corrupt administration is to blame for it all. BLOOOONNK! Sorry folks, but no matter how you skin this woolly-booger, our clown prince was elected with about half the popular vote, and he retains the open support of about half the public. So if you hate Bush’s policies, then you hate the 140 million Americans who continue to back his policies. At the very least, you must hate about half of us. Hell, we hate ‘em too. Quit feeling so bad and admit that Americans have willingly elected a murderous gang of fascist pissbrains. Now doesn’t that feel better?

SO WHAT DOES ONE DO when one no longer loves one’s country? I do not love my country. At least not the one I see around me these days. And, oh blasphemy of blasphemies! I do not “support our troops.” You probably don’t either. Now that we have that out of the way, can we talk honestly here? I may be a baby raping communist by the current war-crazed patriotic standard, but other, more conventional Americans are speaking out about the grotesques we have become. One of them is my friend Margaret Waters-Parmer in Iowa, who gives this example:

Over three years ago I started a book club with a bunch of women. I am the only liberal in this group. We have one born again Christian, and the rest are hardly church-oriented.

This month we read a book called “Florida Road Kill.” Oh the carrying on about

the gore the murders and how truly gross it was! They questioned how anyone could do those horrible things, what kind of mind could think up those gross actions, the awful tortures, etc. Spawn of Satan that I am, I pointed out that our own government tortured people at Abu Ghraib and hid it and now are out-sourcing it to other countries.

Like a group of cows that turn their heads in unison to see what that noise was, they turned and stared at me and silently chewed their cud. That horrible woman (me) was making those weird, stupid, statements again. Nothing was said. They didn't argue. They never do. They just paused and then went on to discuss the lack of remorse of the people in the book! How oblivious and cold-blooded these characters were!

I sat there with my mouth hanging open What are these people? They just shut their eyes, their minds, and hearts, and when I question them the answer I get all the time is "It just upsets me too much." And when they are pushed "I just try to do the best I can in my small area" comes in second.

I have relatives in this group and I am starting to loath them. People I believed were good honest loving people have turned into something I don't recognize. These are the exactly same type of people they had to drag to the concentration camps after the war and stick their noses in the ashes—and STILL they claimed they didn't know it was going on. I can't remember ever being so appalled by my fellow Americans.

I have learned that discussion is not an option here as far as they are concerned. They won't look, read, or think. And these are educated people. The worst thing is that I get the same reactions from Democrats as I do the Republicans. They can't even admit that the voting was so flawed, so stolen.

Rich, poor, educated, uneducated, religious or not, some sort of horrible silence and denial has become pervasive through all strata of our population."

Well, pinch my ass and pass the collard greens, Margaret! You have hit the goddamned nail on the head. It is not the merely the outrageous cruelty of the administration that gives us cause for fear. Moments of awful realization such as yours are more terrifying than any news story. The same thing often happens to me in polite company. That silence you talked about. In not-so-polite company we sometimes threaten to kick one another's asses. Here is the response I got when I mentioned the same American atrocities in Iraq to a local male acquaintance:

"War is hell Bageant. People get killed and wounded. That's the way it is and always has been. Thing is, the US and its allies are GOING OUT OF THEIR WAY to try to prevent killing civilians... to the level that they are in some cases putting their

own people at risk. Also, the cowardly terrorists hide behind ladies skirts and kids because they know the Americans will not kill civilians. Personally, I could give a rats ass about civilians being killed. It's a part of war. So take your bullshit somewhere else, like Iraq, and see how you like it. Go F-U-C-K yourself up your a-s-s, dry, with a big fat donkey dick, and I'll sit back and watch you bleed to death laughing while you take your last breath, piss ant."

Admittedly, there may have been some cheap gin involved. But you get the picture. These remarks are from an allegedly sane American, an ordinary taxpaying, working citizen. I can show you thousands around here with the same opinion, if not the same love of expletives. Something is wrong in this country. Terribly wrong.

But for now, for liberals, it's all about the 2008 elections. There weren't even any 2004 elections and when 2008 rolls around, there ain't gonna be no 2008 elections. Just the ritual illusion of one. Liberals still have not figured that out. They woke up after the train was gone and now stand at the wrong station waiting for the next one, which will never arrive. They continue to "work within the system." They are going to beat a system rigged against them, and this is how they plan to do it: by getting out all those untapped liberal voters who are supposed to be out there waiting to make a difference! Wow! I hope they are right, I really do. Because what I see here in the heartland is a helluva lot more angry conservatives left to be registered. Scads of 'em.

And, oh yes. They will run Hilary Clinton. Yup, that ought to show those dirty neocons! If the impotent Democratic Party decides to run Hilary Clinton we will be treated to the sight of an even larger throng of neocon Visagoths overrunning the polls. As my Republican precinct chairman friend Shuggy was telling me over at the local porn shop/wine store (Yes, it's a real place; I never claimed we had any class down here): "Bill Clinton could give you a handjob with one hand and pick your pocket with the other and the whole world loved him. But NOBODY likes that smug party hack Hilary. Except of course other party hacks and a few ditz liberal doctor's wives. If they decide to run Hilary, the Democratic Party may as well paint a target on its ass and go on down to Tom Delay's next Republican duckshoot fundraiser in Texas."

Blunt guy that Shuggy. But he's right.

THE WORLD IS NOT A PARTICULARLY NOBLE PLACE and never was, but it has become truly difficult to underestimate American crassness in these times. Especially our ability to unblinkingly suck up hate like it was free beer, and call it moral values. As I said, I have seen the face of hate in my day, and this is it. Let me close with this:

Byron de la Beckwith, the guy who shot Medgar Evers, had a "downstairs tenant" who

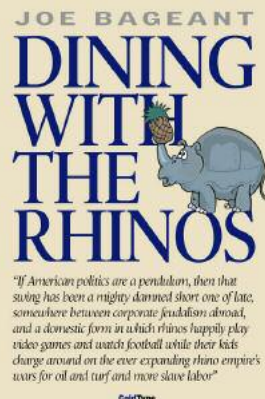
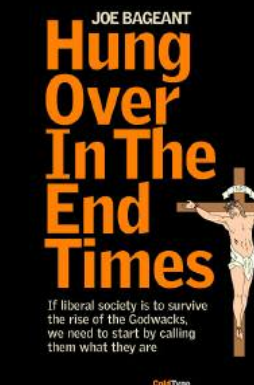
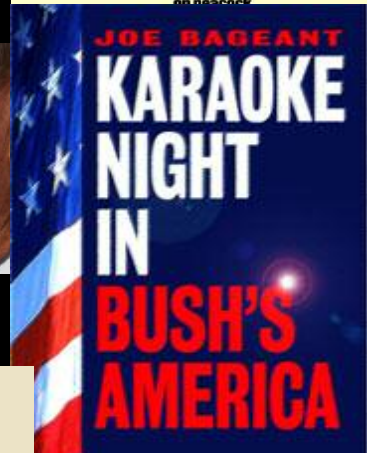
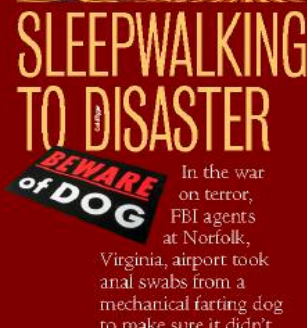
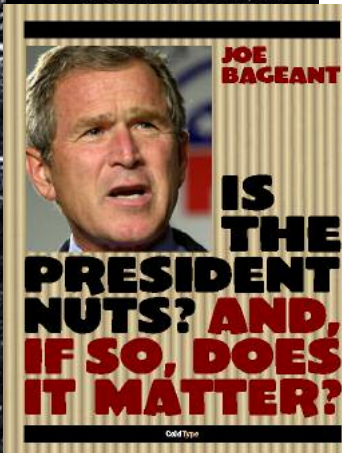
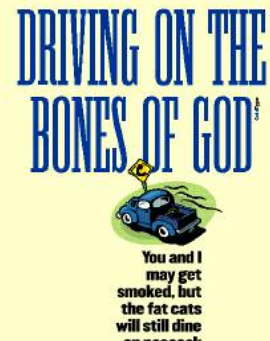
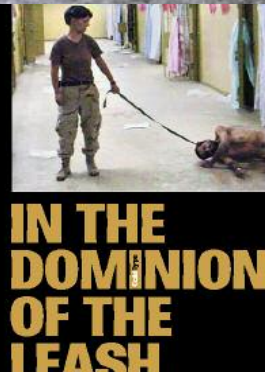
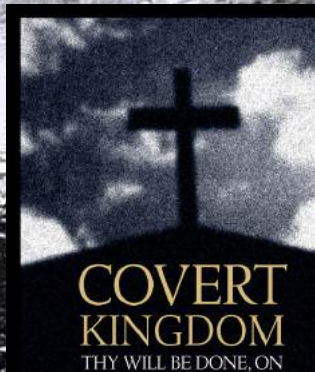
was arrested by the FBI a while back. When the FBI busted in on him he was dressed in full Nazi regalia, shiny brimmed cap, those black boots that come up to the knees and a little Hitler moustache, everything spit-shined and shimmering, without a wrinkle or crease. He was just “lounging around watching Wheel of Fortune” dressed that way when the FBI came for him. Next thing you know he is on the Jerry Springer show, spastic or something (face tremors), declaring himself the DICTATOR OF THE WORLD. Yes, he actually said that. And Hitler’s mother was in the Springer audience, so Jerry goes out amid the jeers and obscenities to ask her what she thought of her son, to which she replied sincerely and in syrup: “I’M JUST SO PROUD HE HAS DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO HELPING OTHER PEOPLE!”

And so it goes. A nation watches with slack jawed attention the spectacle of a nazi fruit-cake and his adoring mom. Matrons in Iowa avert their eyes to the our murder of dark-eyed Iraqi children as they stir their tea. And Shuggy the Republican leaves the wine-and-porn shop not with wine, but a video that promises MORE HOT BLACK BOOTY GETTING JIGGY!

I tell you, America is goddamned weird and getting weirder.
HONK!

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