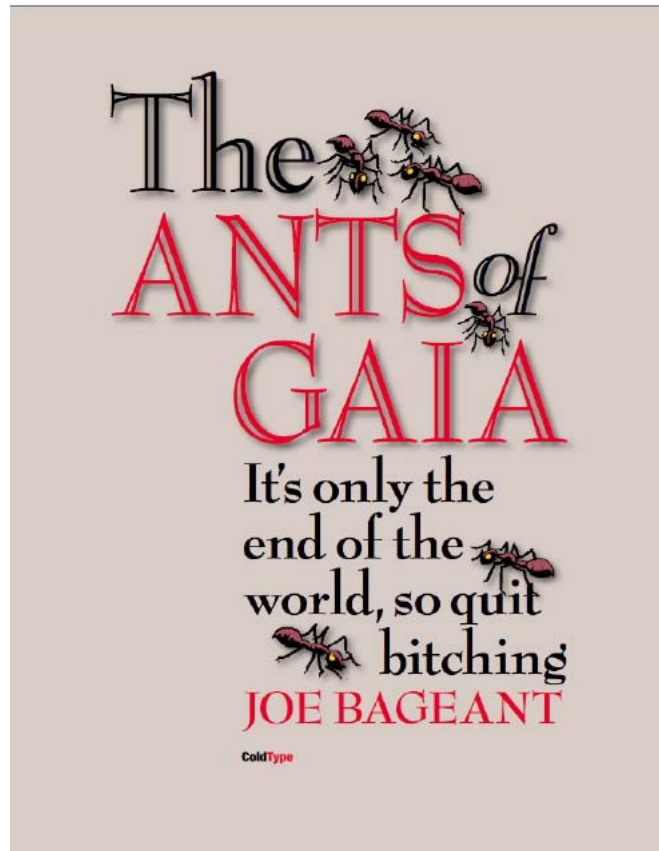


The
ANTS of
GAIIA

It's only the
end of the
world, so quit
bitching
JOE BAGEANT



Joe Bageant is the author of the recently-published book, **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War** from Random House Crown.

A complete archive of his online work, along with the thoughts of many working class Americans on the subject of class may be found at ww.joebageant.com.

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JOE BAGEANT: THE ANTS OF GAIA

The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and tens of thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world.

Thomas Malthus-1798



As a small boy, I once transferred most of an anthill population from its natural digs in our front yard to a gallon jar of fresh dirt, sprinkled it with a little sugar (in the cartoons ants are always freaks for sugar, right?) and then left the ants on their own. Of course the day came when all I had was a jar full of dry earth, ant shit and the desolation of their parched little carcasses. I'd guess that it was the lack of water that finally got'em.

But the most interesting thing in retrospect – if a jar of dead bugs can be called interesting – is this: Up until the very end they seemed to be happily and obliviously busy. They constructed an ant society with all of its ant facilities, made more baby ants and did all those things ants do that the proverbial grasshopper is famous for not doing. Obviously Christian predestinationists to the last ant, they met the grasshopper's grim fate by another route, and did not look at all surprised in death.

Now you'd think that the lesson of the ants would be obvious as hell to any non-intoxicated individual with a grade school education. Never mind that many people since Malthus, as my sainted daddy would have put it, "Done drove the point in the ground and broke it clean off." Never mind that Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* was a best seller and remains a classic. Never mind that James Lovelock, the nerdish forward thinking Englishman who 99% of Americans never heard of, delivered unto us yet one more time the worst

JOE BAGEANT: THE ANTS OF GAIA

truth in human history, the Gaia Hypothesis. Which is a fancy way of saying we cannot continue to devour our planet forever because it amounts to self-cannibalism.

Lovelock also convincingly argued that, due the side effects of this species expiration, now acknowledged as global warming, the equator will look like Mars at some point relatively soon, with the surviving 20% of humans now alive, or perhaps in the next generation, living near the North and South Poles.

As to expected, the few very comfortable elite folks on this earth said of Lovelock: "This guy is full of shit, a nutcase being adored by a bunch of naked tattooed pagans and gloomy intellectual types," both of which number among my favorite kinds of people.

Those pagans who allowed themselves to feel and not just intellectualize about the earth's condition, and those scientists who did not require computer modeling to do simple subtraction, recognized that these are the most challenging of times in human history, "challenging" being a polite term for the fact that that humanity is gonna die off bigtime, if not sooner, then later. Call it the secular version of The End Times.

But not much later, in light of the brief span Homo sapiens hath shat, frolicked, killed and exceeded their MasterCard limits upon the earth, which is less than a second in geological time. Already we are on the way out because we did not have the common sense of lizards, which lasted tens of millions of years longer without so much as a calculator, much less computerized eco models.

A bunch of DNA molecules gave us this aberrant evolution of brain and consciousness that enabled us to dominate everything else and get into the totally fucked situation in which we now find ourselves. The monkey got so smart he took over everything, ate most of it, drove over the rest, then stuck the roadkill on its own dick as a nuclear warhead, and after having threatened what was left around him, set out to destroy even that small remaining scrap of his ruined earthly turf. Is this God's cruelest joke?

Global warming as mange medicine



If mankind were discovered on a dog's hide the owner would give the dog a mange dip. Or if the earth were a Petri dish, we would be called pathology. Problem is though, mama earth tends to shed pathogens off her skin, which for us pathogens, is the ultimate catastrophe.

When forced to look at catastrophe on this order of magnitude, we either go numb in shock or look in delusion to something bigger, or at least

JOE BAGEANT: THE ANTS OF GAIA

something with more grandeur than Mother Nature flushing humanity down the toilet. Otherwise, one must accept the both ugly and the weirdly beautiful prospect of oblivion. Meanwhile, we begin too late to “make better choices.” Grim choices that do nothing but postpone the inevitable, which are called better ones and sold to us to make ourselves feel better about our toxicity. Burn corn in your gas tank. Go green, with the help of Monsanto. But not many can be concerned even with the matter of better choices. Few can truly grasp the fullness of the danger because there is no way they can get their minds around it, no way to see the world in its entirety. The tadpole cannot conceive of the banks of the pond, much less the wooded watershed that feeds it. But old frogs glimpse of it.

Still, there is choice available, even a superior choice – the moral one. Accept the truth and act upon it. Take direct action to eliminate human suffering, and likewise to eliminate our own comfort. We can say no to scorched babies in Iraq. We can refuse to drive at all and refuse to participate in a dead society gone shopping. We can quit being so addicted the rationality and embrace the spirit. Rationality simply turns back on itself like a mobius strip. Too much thinking, too much cleverness on the monkey’s part leads it to believe it can come up with rational solutions for what ration itself hath wrought.

All the green energy sources and eating right and voting right cannot fix what has been irretrievably ruined, but only make life amid the ruination slightly more bearable. Species gluttony is nearly over and we’ve eaten the earth and pissed upon its bones. Not because we are cruel by nature (though a case might be made for stupidity) but because the existence of consciousness necessarily implies each of us as its individual center, the individual point of all experience and thus all knowing. The accumulated personal and collective wounds fester and become fatal because there is no way to inform the world that we must surrender our assumptions, even if we wanted to. Which we do not because assumptions are the unseen cultural glue, the DNA of civilization. If we did so, the crash would be immediate.

So we postpone transformation through truth, and stick with what has always worked – empire and consumption. And we twiddle our lives away thorough insignificant fretting about mortgages and health care and political parties and pretend the whole of American life is not a disconnect. Hell, all of Western culture has become a disconnect. Somebody needs to tell the Europeans too; progressive Americans give them entirely too much credit for the small positive variation in their cultures and ours. We both get away with it only so long as the oil and the entertainment last.

The front page of today’s newspaper tells me that 41 million motorists will gas

JOE BAGEANT: THE ANTS OF GAIA

up and hit the road today, July 3rd. Another five million will sip drinks and read magazines while zipping through the stratosphere, in 747s that burn the day's oxygen production of a 44,000 acre rainforest in the first five minutes of flight just getting off the ground and gaining altitude, adding to the more than 110 million annual tons of atmosphere-altering chemtrail gasses, some of which will remain to hold heat in the upper atmosphere for almost 100 years.

Below it all are the spreading pox like blotches of economic and ecological ruins of dead North American towns and city cores, such as downtown Gary Indiana, Camden, Newark, Detroit...all those places we secretly accept as being hellish because, well, that's just what happens when blacks take over, isn't it? Has anyone seen downtown Detroit lately? Of course not. No one goes there any more. Miles of cracked pavement, weeds and abandoned buildings that look like de Chirico's Melancholy and Mystery of a Street. Hell, for all practical purposes it is uninhabited, though a scattering of drug addicts, alcoholics and homeless insane people wander in the shadows of vacant rotting skyscrapers where water drips and vines crawl through the lobbies, including the Ford Motor Company's stainless steel former headquarters. (See the works of Chilean-born photographer Camilo José Vergara.) It is the first glimpse of a very near future, right here and now for all to see.

The hearts of even our most avowedly thriving cities are just a dead, reduced to nothing more than designated spending zones, collections of bars and banks and overpriced eateries lodged at the center of a massive tangle of overpasses and freeways designed for a nation of soft people hurtling themselves through the suburbs in petroleum powered exoskeletons in search of fried chicken, or into the city for the lonely monetized experience called urban nightlife. Which is no life at all, but rather posturing in lifelike poses amid simple drunkenness and engorgement.

We allow ourselves to imagine the worst is somewhere in yet another future so we can continue without owning decision. Love of comfort being the death of courage, we continue the familiar commoditized life, the only one we have known. Is it not true that our entire understanding of courage as we know it is about braving some unknown? About making the socially unaccepted and dangerous choice? Stepping forward in the face of the wars and evil mechanics of our own particular time?

Empire and its inevitable permanent state of warfare flourishes not because evil men are at the helm, but because the men at the helm are even weaker and more in denial than we are. (Look at Dick Cheney. The guy is a nervous wreck wrapped in arrogance and denial.) And so their uninformed and crude confi-

JOE BAGEANT: THE ANTS OF GAIA

dence is assuring to both them and us. We elect the worst among ourselves in increasing avoidance of ourselves and they are validated by our endorsement. Evil men seeking empire did not make us or the world this way. We made their existence possible through our denial, love of ease and non accountability.

The most dangerous question in the world

Yet, I dare say that comfort is not the most important thing in most American lives. It is just the only thing we are offered in exchange for our toil and the pain of ordinary existence in such an age. Consequently, it is all we know. Meaningless work, then meaningless comfort and distraction in the too-few hours between sleep and labor. But we settled for that and continue to do so. The day will never come when we stand around the office water cooler and ask one another: "Why in the hell are we even here today?" It's the most dangerous question in America and the Western world.

Some few of us are in a hellish limbo, simply waiting for total collapse because it is easier to rebuild from nothing than to change billions of minds not even remotely concerned with the looming catastrophe. A minority of the world, the six percent called America, suffers the mass self-delusion of endless plentitude. A much larger portion is less concerned with the moral aspects of consumption because they are brutally engaged in trying to find enough to eat and a drink of clean water. So plentitude on any terms looks damned good. Escape to America because those fuckers over there don't seem to be suffering at all.

Manifesto of the Damned



I thank the stars for younger men, writers such as Derrick Jensen and Charles Eisenstein. They say what we cannot yet say to ourselves and what the media will never say because media survives by the corporate numbers game. Consequently, the iron rules of being allowed to communicate with significant numbers of people within our empire tend to call for glibness, fake optimism, and the wide net of inclusion of even the silliest sorts of people. Fuck only knows I've participated in the sham over the years. But the truth is never politically or socially correct.

What's left of my own aging hippie optimism dies hard. And as an older guy who has seen both interior and external horror in this life, I often assure those who will deal with this world after I am worm chow that "to have seen a specter is not everything." I've often repeated this theme because it is important to know that many more specters lie ahead of the next generation, the survivors of which will be the new "brave happy few," links in the chain of reason tempered with art. No one yet knows with absolute certainty the outcome of our terrible

JOE BAGEANT: THE ANTS OF GAIA

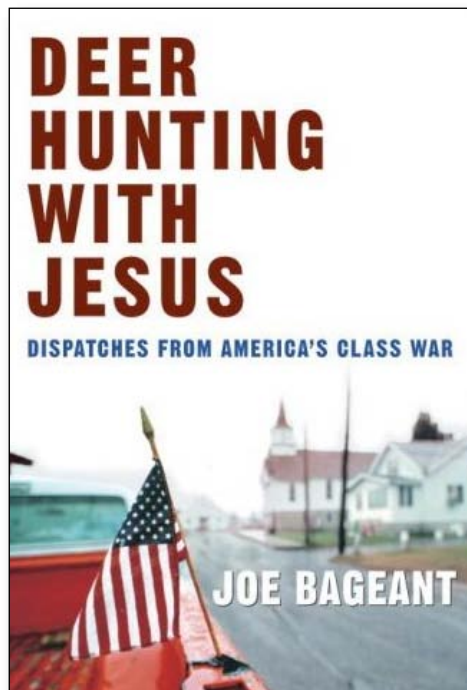
common plunge toward truth. But even in the worst of times, there is glory in the sheer electricity of life, the expression of its juiciness, those moments when the eternal fecundity of the flesh struts by in a tight skirt, or perhaps sporting the perfect unshaven jaw, offering everything and nothing. Life is never completely joyless.

Younger men and women will live to rule or rule the day. So seize it for god sake! And listen to the cellular wisdom of the flesh. I did and do and am damned glad of it. Despite what a police court Jehova, Yahweh or Allah may have told us, the only holy thing existent is this the flesh in which we now walk. It leads us toward both good and evil, but it leads, and most probably will bleed if we are on the right path. Yet, what could be better than a meaningful life during meaningless times? Which is everything, whether we be artistic, queer, altruistic, an unheralded ox in the fields of labor ... or one of the invisible ones out there with a stone cold determination to kill the supposedly deathless machinery in which we are expected to supplicate daily and call that a life.

I am not a wise man, but I dare say that's about all you can hope for. A splash of small glory, or perhaps even a canteen filled with meaningfulness in the desert. It is no small thing.

So here we are. You and me. Let us hang all our laundry out to dry in this tiny corner of cyberspace. I think it is entirely possible that we can be honest cybernetic bards in an unpromising age, possibly even noble amid the ruins.

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