

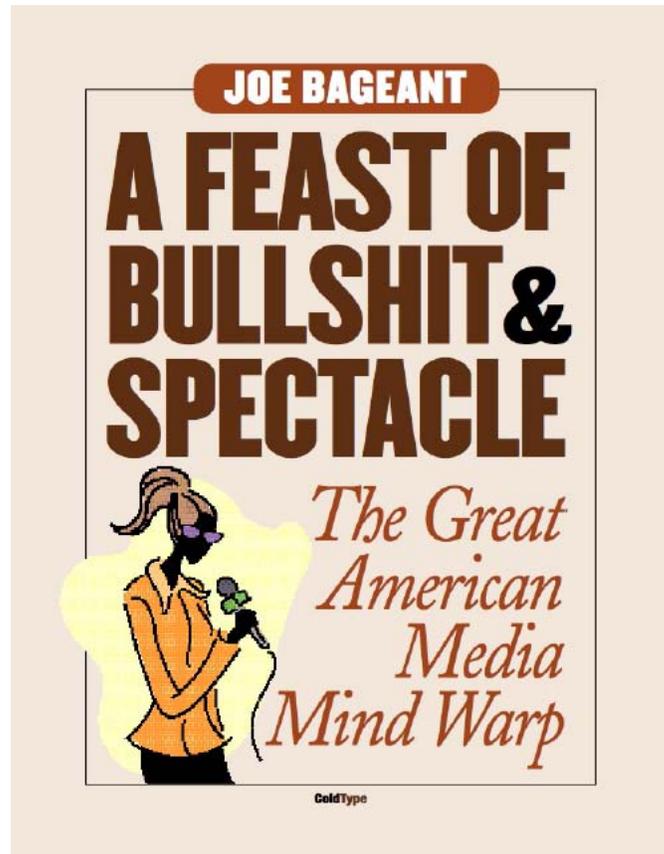
**JOE BAGEANT**

# A FEAST OF BULLSHIT & SPECTACLE



*The Great  
American  
Media  
Mind Warp*

**ColdType**



**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 <http://joebageant.com>.

Feel free to contact him at [joebageant@joebageant.com](mailto:joebageant@joebageant.com)

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**ColdType**

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD  
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## JOE BAGEANT: THE GREAT AMERICAN MEDIA MINDWARP

*On televisions you see police cars surround the car of a "terror suspect." ... When you learn he is a neurosurgeon whose wife and baby were in the car with him, you might think he probably just pulled over when the police seemed to want him to, but only if you were still capable of using your own brain. After all, his name is Mohammed and his wife wears a headscarf. ... So maybe you'll just ignore what your brain was trying to say, which is that neurosurgeons have a lot invested in their careers. ... But the media are so hard to ignore. Even when you make a point of ignoring them, they are always there, flickering around the edges, burning impressions you can't quite get rid of. ... But it was all so tidy and comfortable in that TV/mainstream news site world. Meanwhile, though no evidence of guilt has been offered, the discussion zooms ahead. Why can't everyone else see it? — Jennifer, in Los Angeles*

**N**eedless to say, the Middle Eastern doctors accused of terrorism in Scotland may be guilty as hell. Mohammed Asha may be another one of your standard terror wogs who, as we all know by now, relish the idea of prison or perhaps blowing up their wives and babies for Allah.

But having been in the media business one way or another for almost 40 years, and having watched it increasingly take on a life of its own, I know that nothing of significance in the news is what it appears to be. This is not the result of some media conspiracy, mind you, but rather that the people working in the media have internalized the process so thoroughly they do not even know they are conditioned creatures in a larger corporate/state machine. Put simply, Katie Couric and the dumbshits grinding out your local paper actually believe they are in the news business. In today's system, everybody is a patsy for the new corporate global order of things — the well-coiffed talking head, the brain dead audience, even the terrorists themselves. All play out their parts in our holographic image and information process.

All Americans, regardless of caste, live in a culture woven of self-referential

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illusions. Like a holographic simulation, each part refers exclusively back to the whole, and the whole refers exclusively back to the parts. All else is excluded by this simulated reality. Consequently, social realism in this country is a television commercial for America, a simulated republic of eagles and big box stores, a good place to live so long as we never stray outside the hologram. The corporate simulacrum of life has penetrated us so deeply it now dominates the mind's interior landscape with its celebrities and commercial images. Within the hologram sparkles the culture-generating industry, spinning out our unreality like cotton candy.

The American media hologram forms our subconscious opinions immediately and without our rational participation. Particularly when it comes to generating terrorist outlaws. For example, despite what we were told and most of us believe, Timothy McVeigh was a patriot and a more literate and intelligent person than most Americans; in truth, he more resembled Tom Paine than a terrorist. Chew on that one for a while ... or read Gore Vidal's *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*. Again, nothing significant is as presented by the American media. Watch television in countries with supposedly primitive media, and after a while you will be shocked at the technologically mediated and shape-shifted image of the world presented to Americans — how the hologram makes incongruous parts suddenly fit together and make sense in its own parallel universe.

For instance, a while back I saw a video clip of an ethanol-fueled automobile driving past waves of grain with the Rockies in the background and a rippling American flag ghosted into the sky. These four elements of the clip, food grain fields, the automotive industry, the natural beauty of the Rockies and the national emblem have not much to do with each in the natural world, but they have everything to do with one another in the context of corporate empire. Together, they indicate the national ethos. We accept such an image as naturally as the baby accepts the tit, and the idea of burning the earth's food to create gasses that will turn the snowcapped mountains into desertified mountains is greeted happily as something newer and better than the old system of destroying the atmosphere and environment. Mentally we can identify separate elements, isolate things into categories. But the hologram nevertheless remains seamless in its interconnection of all things that benefit the corporate state generating it. Parsed, divided and isolated, any part contains the entire logic (or governing illogic) of the whole.

In effect, the economic superstate generates a superhologram that offers only one channel, the shopping channel, and one sanctioned collective national experience in which every aspect is monetized and reduced to a consumer transac-

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tion. The economy becomes our life, our religion, and we are transfigured in its observance. In the absence of the sacred, buying becomes a spiritual act conducted in outer space via satellite bank transfers. All things are purchasable, and indeed, access to anything of value is through purchase – ven mood and consciousness, through psychopharmacology, to suppress our anxiety or enhance sexual performance, or cyberspace linkups to porn, palaver and purchasing opportunities. But most of all, the hologram generates and guides us to purchasing opportunities.

### **Propaganda is dead**

Through advertising and marketing, the hologram combs the fields of instinct and human desire, arranging our wants and fears in the direction of commodities or institutions. No longer are advertising and marketing merely propaganda, which is all but dead. Digitally mediated brain experience now works far below the crude propaganda zone of influence, deep in the swamps of the limbic brain, reengineering and reshaping the realms of subjective human experience.

Yet we are the hologram, because we created it. In a relentlessly cycling feedback loop, we create and project the hologram out of our collective national psyche. The hologram in turn manages our collective psyche by regulating our terrors, cravings and neurological passions through the production of wars, whores, politics, profits and manna. Like legions of locusts, we pray before its productive engines of commerce and under the shifting aurora borealis of the hologram's drama and spectacle. It is us. We are it. The psychology of the individual becomes irrelevant as the swarm relentlessly devours the earth.

Meanwhile, those bloody terrorist wogs are still up to no fucking good, that's for sure. They're everywhere these days, so somebody needs to keep an eye on that Palestinian meat dealer down the street. As one reader responded, "The terrorists all look normal. That's the first thing you hear when one of them is caught. 'Oh, but he looked so normal,' his neighbors say. 'You'd never have guessed.'" Now when so many apparently normal people, students, doctors, merchants, teachers, family men with ordinary lives find themselves being accused of wickedness and evil, some even locked away in secret prisons and tortured, maybe it's time to start looking at the accusers more closely. When we do that, familiar terms come to mind, terms such as mass psychosis, along with some less familiar ones such as political psychosis.

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### **Happy in the heart of darkness**

Terrorists aside, the hologram offers us, and we have come to accept, plenty of now standard-issue American fears, such as identify theft and child molesters. My home in Winchester, Va., is located on a corner where neighborhood kids catch the school bus under a large maple tree. So, some neighbors have asked me to keep an eye on the kids during the mornings. In addition, I leave the back door unlocked so they can run inside and call home should a predator accost them under that maple tree. Matters are not made any better by the fact that a guy in the apartment building across the street is on the Internet sex offenders' list. Nobody is safe in a country where, according to at least one "study," about 40 percent of adult men have sexual fantasies about children. It's a damned sick country. Hence the hundreds of child protection organizations, TV shows and pieces of legislation, all of which constitute a billion-dollar industry in this country. Just what are the chances of the kids at the bus stop being abducted by a stranger for sexual abuse or ransom? The truth is that a child is far more likely to be struck by lightning or slip on a rug, breaking his or her neck and dying instantly, than being kidnapped by a malevolent stranger. Last year there were only 115 cases of kidnappings for the purpose of ransom or abuse (Hampel, 2007). About 200,000 kids are snatched away from one parent by the other in the never-ending custody wars that clog the courtrooms and buy summer homes for lawyers. But the odds of pedophilic monsters or ransom artists grabbing your kid are not even worth worrying about, considering that there are nearly 300 million people in this country.

As for the registered sex offender across the street, I came to learn that he is a pothead and a pain in the ass as a neighbor. But he's not a child molester. He got on the list for mooning while drunk one night, which should be a lesson for anyone considering hanging his or her butt out a car window after a rock concert.

Still, it's a sick damned country all right. The government says so. The news says so. Cold Case Files says so. The Today show says so. Oprah says so. Without a Trace says so. In other words, the hologram says so. In the time it took you to read this paragraph, and while millions watch the cathartic media projection of their deepest nightmares, several dozen children died of famine or disease outside the hologram.

### **Mommy, there's a robot in my pants**

If the big picture is ominous, the little picture is comedic kitsch. In the 1970s the hologram offered us "killer bees," a curiously "Africanized," aggressive species that "bred with every other kind of bee" as it moved up from the South —

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remember that seeping red area on the U.S. map indicating the spread of the insect in its killer apiary jihad to sting a nation to death? In truth, the bee's sting was no more toxic than that of any other bee.

In the '80s and '90s we had the decade-long day care sexual abuse hysteria in a dozen states wherein children were reportedly used for prostitution and pornography, tortured or, as in Kern County, made to watch snuff films. According to testimony, they were crawling through hidden tunnels toward Satanic worship chambers while witches soared overhead in hot air balloons at the McMartin Preschool in California, and they were being abused by clowns and robots in a secret room at the Fells Day Care Center, even as peanut butter was being spread on children's genitals at the Wee Care Nursery School in New Jersey. Numerous people spent years in prison before their cases were finally overturned, and they were set free to enjoy their bankruptcy. Again, no one stopped to look at the accusers more closely, or ask, "Does anyone else on the jury think this is too goddamned weird to be plausible? Aw, come on, folks — robots and clowns?" Such is the power of the media hologram. The most expensive jury trial in American history was about subterranean devil worship and witches in hot air balloons.

Another standard media holograph favorite is the case of The Missing Pretty White Girl, in which a young white woman is either missing, murdered or maybe faking her own abduction. The hologram's finest hour may have been when it blended nationalism with armed feminine sexuality fantasy via the brave blonde, Jessica Lynch, in a projection of her going down with automatic rifle blazing, then daringly rescued — oh, poor, wounded, little bird of our desire — by GI Joe action figures. If she had been an overweight lesbian, she'd still be in that hospital, and if she had been black, the media wouldn't have bothered to take the lens covers off the cameras. If the syndrome's annointed white girls turn out to be murdered, then we get the memorial websites, charity foundations and maybe some sort of law passed, based upon the circumstances of the case, and named for the victim. However, you'll never see one called Tawanda Robinson's Law. Hologram don't sell no dark meat. Make a YouTube video, bitch!

And when the hologram gets hold of a real event, whoopee! We get portrayal of a nation marked by school shootings (school shootings of teachers and fellow students took place in the 1800s too, they just didn't have the firepower we have today, not to mention the media), campus shooters or the estranged killer husband or wife (a timeless favorite). None of the above are lurking around every corner, or any corner so far as I can tell. Then too, I don't get out much.

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### **Let us now be administrated**

It never ceases to amaze how the hologram can sell even our own identities back to us in such tantalizing fashion. Regardless of politics, no one escapes it: "Ladies, buy your wardrobe at Target, and you too will be a slim, sexy humanitarian like Susan Sarandon." My eyeballs are in my lap every time that woman twists her stuff against the orange Target backdrop in the TV ad, while my wife growls from her armchair, "Buy me a quarter-million-dollar eye job, chin and butt tuck, and I'll shake all the damned booty you want, buster." I'm seriously considering her offer.

Of course the entire American consumer shiterie is unsustainable. One day soon it will go bust, and the hologram will sell us the bust as a lifestyle. Renunciation of consumer goods and a monastic lifestyle will become a fad and then a major trend in America. Then it will be co-opted by the system and made expensive. The ozone hole will be so big we'll all be pedaling teensy cars that come with iron lungs as standard equipment. Renunciation will become a status symbol. All the beautiful people will be doing it.

Not that it will be the first time a worthwhile idea got at least some small traction in the savagery of the American marketplace. Healthful organic foods and hemp fiber clothing were once merely a holistic hippie thing, but we've see them endure, even grow. And become expensive, of course. (Organic foodwise, I just bought a quart bottle of lemon berry juice with echinacea for nearly eight bucks, though I doubtlessly screwed up its healthful benefits by mixing it with cheap Aristocrat vodka — \$9 a half gallon. I named the drink "The Echinacean Whore.") And hemp fiber clothing is a low-cost, practical solution to dozens of ecological problems. Just the other day I saw a \$60 pair of hemp fiber, bibbed play shorts for the morally superior baby. Market capitalism can co-opt virtually any low-cost alternative and sell it right back at ridiculous prices.

Ah, for the good old days before the hologram and its hyperstimulation of "consumer affluence," the days of "America's teeming masses," that sweat-soaked, beer-farting mob of ordinary working Americans who didn't have a pot to piss in by today's standards, much less a credit card, but still knew bullshit when they saw it. Guys that looked like William Bendix and were unapologetic about earning their bread by their mitts and never heard of the word lifestyle. Women in curlers who would have laughed Martha Stewart off the map. They was Americans, bub!

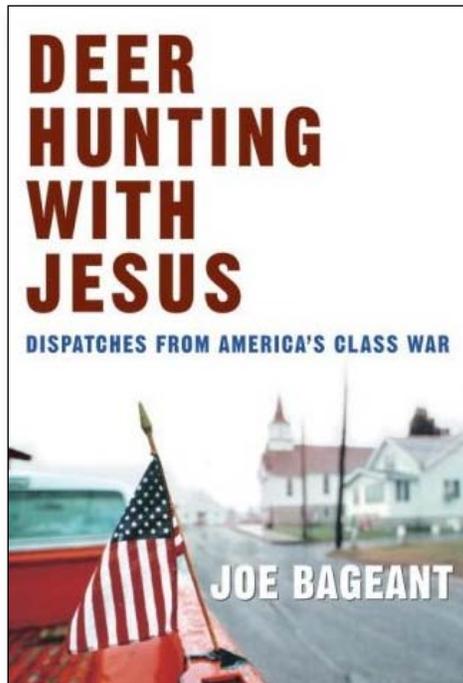
Now, as walking advertisements for Nike and the Gap or Jenny Craig, and liv-

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ing by the grace of our Visa cards, we have become the artificial collective product of the corporately “administrated” modern state economy. Which makes us property of the government. One that is currently coughing blood in its last gasps, helped along toward its end by the rich white boy hubris of a gang of cowboying petro-crooks: “Put some purty muzak on the fog machine, Dick. We don’t want the herd to stampede while we’re packing up the loot. And, fer god sake, turn down that Baghdad gunfire noise in the hologram.” Deploying 250 million televisions which absorb 11 years of the average America’s lifespan, the hologram regulates the nation’s neurological seasons. Football season is delivered with its competitive passions, political election seasons, Christmas shopping season, but especially marketing seasons. It regulates the national mood, stirring our patriotic passions during wars and anxious vigilance against the threat of unseen terrorists who look absolutely normal. Together, we live within a media-generated belief system that functions as the operating instructions for society. It shows us how successful people supposedly behave, invest, and relate to each other. Through crime shows, it demonstrates what happens to us if we don’t behave. It shows us who we should hate (Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro, for starters). Anything outside of its parameters represents fear and psychological freefall.

Well, we can’t have that happen, can we? So let us all close our eyes and let the one voice speak to the many. Take a deep breath, and exhale very slowly. ... Let the soft electrical buzz engulf your mind, let that auroral drapery of flickering light play across the inside of your eyelids.

“This is the hologram speaking ...”



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## **DEER HUNTING WITH JESUS**

### **Dispatches From America's Class War**

"Joe Bageant is a brilliant writer. He evokes working class America like no one else. The account of his revisit to his Virginia roots is sobering, poignant, and instructive."— HOWARD ZINN, author of *A People's History of the United States*

"This book is righteous, self-righteous, exhilarating, and aggravating. By God, it's a raging, hilarious, and profane love song to the great American redneck. As a blue state man with a red state childhood, I have been waiting for this book for years. We ignore its message at our peril." — SHERMAN ALEXIE, author of *Reservation Blues*

"This fine book sheds a devastating light on Bush & Co.'s notorious 'base,' i.e. America's white working class, whose members have been ravaged by the very party that purports to take their side. Meanwhile, the left has largely turned them out, or even laughed at their predicament. Of their degraded state -- and, therefore, ours -- Joe Bageant writes like an avenging angel." — MARK CRISPIN MILLER, author of *Fooled Again: The Real Case for Election Reform*

"Joe Bageant is the Sartre of Appalachia. His white-hot bourbon-fuelled prose shreds through the lies of our times like a weed-whacker in overdrive. *Deer Hunting with Jesus* is a deliciously vicious and wickedly funny chronicle of a thinking man's life in God's own backwoods." — JEFFREY ST. CLAIR, author of *Grand Theft Pentagon* and co-editor of *CounterPunch*

"This recounting of lost lives -- of white have-nots in one of our most have-not states -- has the power of an old-time Scottish Border ballad. It is maddening and provocative that the true believers in 'American exceptionalism' and ersatz machismo side with those stepping all over them. Bageant's writing is as lyrical as Nelson Algren's, and if there's a semblance of hope, it's that he catches on with new readers thanks to the alternative media." — STUDS TERKEL

"*Deer Hunting with Jesus* is one of those rare books that is colorful, depressing, hilarious, and biting all at the same time. Joe Bageant has given us a glimpse into the vicious class war that is too often ignored or hidden by those happily perpetrating this war." — DAVID SIROTA, author of *Hostile Takeover*

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