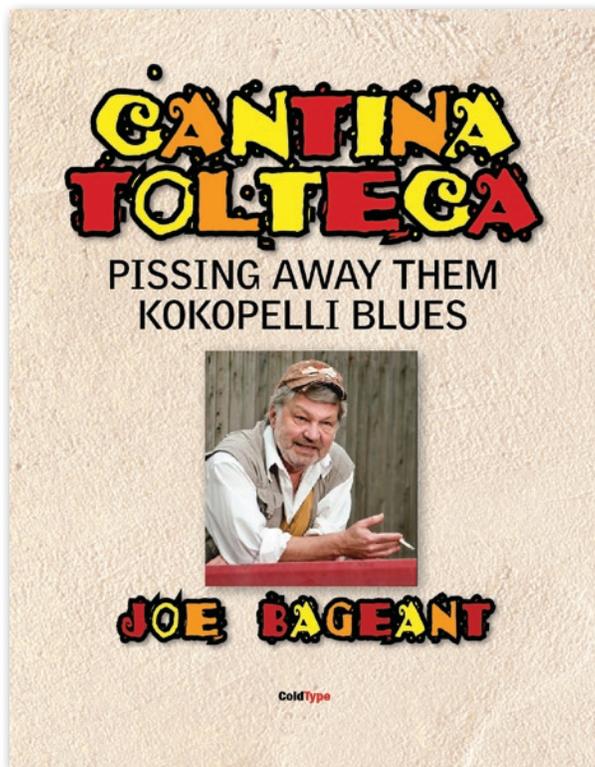


CANTINA TOLTECA

PISSING AWAY THEM
KOKOPELLI BLUES



JOE BAGEANT



THE AUTHOR

JOE BAGEANT is the author of the best selling *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War* (Random House, 2007) and a frequent contributor to the BBC and other international media. A selection of his writings and commentary from working class Americans may be found at JoeBageant.com

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CANTINA TOLTECA IS ONE OF those manly Mexican watering holes, where you piss up against a tile barroom wall while ordering the next round from a passing barmaid. With a beer and three shots of mescal in your sails, and the jukebox playing La Paloma, a man feels about as free and unselfconscious here as he ever likely to in this world. Which is what men's bars are for to begin with.

Aside from a couple of putas (and one puto) who roll in after 9pm, few women and almost no gringos come into the Tolteca. They pass by the Tolteca's plate glass window, the gringo men in their new L.L. Bean Indiana Jones canvas hats, the Mexican mamas with trays of pastries for sale, the gringas in their long tourist shop skirts. Sometimes they glance briefly into the glass, which for them is a mirror, and then keep on walking. Watching them from inside the dim bar is rather like watching a brightly lit aquarium with countless odd fish floating by.

“

Along with millions of other cranky old lefties, I wanted to scream back, Then pick up the fucking phone, damn ya!

Occasionally a cop pauses in the doorway, silhouetted against the outside glare. But “the cop ain't gonna do nothing,” says a tall sixty-something gringo named Larry. “Not unless you get inna fight. And if you don't have sense enough to apologize and get the hell out of here immediately, he'll probably arrest you.”

Larry should know. He's a former Chicago cop. Six two and lanky, he has a quick, darting energy in his eyes, as if he has spent a lifetime noticing things. The eyes are set in a face that has seen several facial reconstructions, thanks to a brick he took in the kisser during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Larry is a man of the old school who still admires Mayor Daley and Philadelphia's Frank Rizzo. He doesn't see one bit of conflict in that he is also a Wobbly in the truest sense. Larry thinks America has become “a god-damned corrupt police state that needs a good old fashioned revolution, the kind where you bust some heads and dare the fuckers to ever try that shit again.” A wife

and a life walking a beat have come and gone. What he has to show for it, he keeps in his left pocket, the black Bakelite police whistle issued him as a rookie, and a brass call box key. Fingering the call box key, he says, “Betcha ain’t seen one of these in a long time.”

“Never seen one in my life.”

“The ex got everything else. But I don’t give a fuck.”

Outside the front window is a tied horse. The horse has managed to get its neck far enough around to tear loose a burlap pack sack of dried foliage, and scatter the contents. The horse’s owner is at the bar. He can see the horse serenely munching away, but does not move. “He don’t give a fuck, either,” Larry chuckles.

Besides the aquarium window onto the plaza, the other brightly lit thing in the Tolteca is the TV screen above the bar, which is tuned to English language CNN, apparently as a courtesy to us gringos. The news today is the murder of US consulate employees up in Ciudad Juarez, which everyone at the bar agrees is drug related. Onscreen, Obama is declaring that he is “outraged,” but also “saddened.” Apparently, the previous 45,000 cartel related murders right next door were insufficient to produce either outrage or sadness in the president. In any case, with these two carefully chosen words, he strokes both the conservatives, whose appetite for outrage is limitless, and the liberals, who in their gutless impotency, must be content with being saddened.

Money, violence and politics, the three jackals that hunt together, and feast on society’s craving for prohibited commodities, alcohol in the thirties and cocaine today. The politicians run the perimeter of the human herd, guiding it this way and that through speeches and legislation, providing distraction, the killers enforce the code



I’m doing my taxes next week. Care to lay folding money on that statement? I’m reading your lips

of the pack, assuring that the money always flows in the direction of the jackal pack. The jackals are a permanent fixture of global life now, whether the commodity is crude oil under indigenous people’s soil, or soil itself upon which to grow palm oil trees in Indonesia.

Theater of Jackals

Narco-trade money/violence/politics depress and frighten everyone on both sides of the border. Mexicans are depressed that their country never seems to escape these things. Americans are frightened that the soft psychological violence of their corporate state could be overshadowed by hard border style violence, that it will somehow seep across like all those brown people seem to have done over the years.

Meanwhile, the corporations drive the politicians who manage America’s political consciousness, steering it around a thousand truths toward extraction of maximum profit from the American herd. The herd, honestly speaking, regards politics mostly as spectacle – some emotionally, others as entertainment, if they think about it at all. Let’s not mistake the Tea Party noise or yammer about sham healthcare “reform,” both of which are theater state productions, for political involvement by “the people.”

Those Americans who seldom give politics (or anything else) serious thought, simply accept whatever is spoon-fed by media and The Complex, an entity so omniscient as to be beyond their comprehension. This is quite OK with most working class Americans. They have much in common with the average working Mexican, who simply ignores politics, out of disgust, and/or semi-illiteracy. Unlike Americas who have not awakened to the slow motion coup that successfully overthrew their government decades ago,

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working class Mexicans here understand such defeat. They've had it for breakfast, lunch and dinner for over a hundred years. I have never met anyone here who did not grasp that drug money and elite business cartels own the government because they paid cash for it. Dope and business elites pay for candidates' campaigns and the politicians in office, the same as corporate cartel money buys our Congress.

The working class folks in my neighborhood here deal with the politics of drugs and government corruption through obliviousness, either purposeful or genuine. Generations of disillusionment with politics seem to have the same effect on poor and working people everywhere, whether it is the black ghetto, the shacks of Appalachia or the hardscrabble neighborhoods of Mexico – Apathy. Voting is compulsory in Mexico, but there is no enforcement whatsoever, lest an angry turnout affect the status quo in times of crisis, of which there are many.

American politicians have traditionally been happy with the American underclass's allergy to the voting booth. Yet some pretense of democracy must be maintained, some false flag of popular consensus held aloft, if the engines of profit are to be kept fueled and running. Which means marketing some pretty unsavory stuff as being part of what is brave, good and right about America? In hyper capitalist American culture, everything, be it cars, cancer or war, every activity, legal or illegal, must turn a corporate profit. That includes even the nastiest activities, such as drug distribution and addiction. So the far-flung network of profitable state sanctioned industries, from prisons and police battalions, to rehabilitation, are marketed as necessary fixtures of the “drug war.” The term Drug War is an empty term to anyone who has even for a moment ra-



Both Goering and Hitler pointed out, then proved, if the bullshit is huge enough, normal people will not believe that anyone would have the balls to tell such a lie, and accept it as the truth. And so The Big Lie is sold

tionally examined it, two words – like Islamo-fascism – married incongruously in a shotgun wedding of political theater. However, for most Americans, those two words work well enough. Our attention spans are briefer than a rabbit fuck. Anything in depth is anathema. Only slogans and brands survive. We do not understand much of anything in depth except the football rating system.

But we do understand war, or believe we do, so “War on Drugs” works as a brand. It has been that way ever since the post World War II military industrialization of the country's economy and consciousness – which are pretty much the same to us. War, of one sort or another, is the solution to most of those things that we are told threaten America – which is to say American capitalism – either directly or indirectly. And according to the long running national storyline, they have always come from outside our borders – Barbary pirates, white slavers, the “Cold War” against anti-capitalist communism, terrorism, Islam, drugs, job loss to Mexicans and to China, swine flu, bird flu. Never-never-never do they result from our own actions, misjudgments or, heaven help us, our own folly.

Misery Incorporated

We were never a people to miss a chance to turn a buck, even on drugs, hopelessness, fear, poverty, criminality and misery. These days there is plenty of misery to go around, especially since drugs generate the others. None of this is news to most of the lefties reading this. However, to the average American watching Jay Leno crack Tiger Woods jokes, the fact that a sizeable portion of our national economy depends upon keeping the drugs flowing across our borders would come as surprising news. Not surprising enough to get up

off the couch for, but nonetheless surprising for a moment.

As for the real numbers in this miserable drama of national affairs, only the pointy heads care. For most of us, national numbers don't mean much these days. Once the discussion soared off into the tens of trillions, average working folks lost any numerical moorings they might have had, which were never very good to begin with. So the numbers regarding the massive industries based on the War on Drugs simply get lost somewhere out there among the trillions. After all, what's \$50 billion a year spent for our narcotics cops?

Well, \$50 billion makes just chasing the dopers an industry the same size as the movie business, and slightly bigger than the telecom industry. Furthermore, the narco cop industry is joined at the hip with the American prison industry – the world's largest – a \$45 billion enterprise based on drug convictions. Which of course entails the court systems and billions to the syndicate of lawyers, the state's officially recognized commissars of peasant conflicts. Standing in the wings are the rest of the commissariat, such as the drug rehabilitation professionals. With such a fat hog of public funds there for the cutting, it was only natural that the Department of Homeland Security would increasingly focus its 225,000 employees and \$42 billion budget on the drug wars. As for the working slob who has never even seen a bag of weed, he gets his chance to contribute to the drug war industry too, through drug testing in the workplace (25 million tests per year at between \$25 and \$50 each). With America now panhandling on the global street corner for international loans, nobody is about to cut loose the domestic profits of the drug war industry – profits sustained, of course, by its dedicated lack of success.



There are always those citizens who will not settle for simply voting based on what they have been fed. They detect the odor of swill, but cannot quite name the ingredients

“It's all in how you look at it,” says Larry, who likes his weed (I've never met a retired cop down here who doesn't). Larry says it “defrags his mind.” “Ever since Richard Nixon declared war on drugs in 1971, drugs have gotten cheaper, stronger and easier to get.”

“My god Larry. 1971? No wonder we look like shit. Can it really have been 40 years?”

I learned 40 years ago as a young reporter that if you do not ask questions, even stupid questions, you do not get quotes and dialogue material. You'll get nothing by trying to play it cool, or pretending to be unfazed by things. So when Josefina the barmaid came twisting her little tattooed ass through the tables, I hastily invented a question to be translated, my Spanish yet being crappy.

“Do men splashing piss off the wall while you serve tables ever bother you?” Josefina laughed and said something too fast for me to grasp.

“What did she say?”

“Roughly translated, she said, ‘Don't men in American bars have dicks?’” (Bingo! Fishing for quotes in the dark sometimes works).

“Usually not,” I told her.

ALONG THE TOLTECA'S PISSING WALL IS a row of tiles, each bearing the image of Kokopelli, the ancient humpbacked Indian god of fertility, sometimes depicted with a huge phallus but always shown playing a flute and dancing. When you piss, you aim for the hump on Kokopelli's back, and if you happen to be four feet tall like the average Mexican, the angle of the stream will be such that there will be no backsplash. If you are an American of average height, you will zip up with wet hands.

Traveling from village to village, Koko-

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PELLI brought with him the spring season. The arrival of the spring breeze, the sound of which is Kokopelli's flute, caused tribal villagers to sing and dance all night. According to legend, any maiden who joined the singing would wake in the morning pregnant. One would suspect virgins were conspicuously quiet.

Prankster, seducer, storyteller, ol' Koke suffered many indignations in the late twentieth century. Thanks to Robert Redford's Sundance catalogues and New Ager infatuation with all things indigenous, the 3,000-year-old Kokopelli has been reduced to coffee mug and tee shirt images.

Worse yet, his name has been linked to the sorry assed pseudo-profession called journalism. Because Kokopelli went from village to village telling his stories, he is has been appropriated by urban white people as the god of journalists, in an effort to give the wet lipped wimps now practicing the dubious craft some air of mystery and depth. It is likely, however, that anyone with as much going for him as Koke would have any truck with what passes as journalism these days.

As you can see from this rambling screed, regulars at the Tolteca have an abundance of time to contemplate Kokopelli's tile image.

High on peyote mountain

Across the plaza from Cantina Tolteca, a couple dozen gringos sit beneath restaurant umbrellas in the shadow of the Virgin of Santiago Church. If you've a mind to, you may cross the plaza and waste precious drinking time talking with the Americans and Canadians about real estate prices and the weather in Duluth or Winnipeg. Or just sit near the Tolteca's front window and look at the mountains.

The mountains tower above everything in the plaza, the restaurant, the church,



**Rest assured
you will be paid
in shrinking
funny money
until you croak**

the ice cream shop and the serape vendor. Bristling with sage and juniper stubble, they are somewhat ominous in their rounded stillness and mass, like a herd of giant sleeping razorback hogs. If you have the lungs, legs and inclination, you can walk up into those mountains. Perhaps at dawn, when the old charros start their day with squirt hot milk straight firm the cow's teat into a tin cup half filled with 180 proof alcohol.

Better yet, go there on a good horse. A man on horseback can just keep on going if he cares to, pushing until the sun and fatigue put him in that state the Indian peyote cults here – who drink tea of the cactus, then ritualistically walk untold miles – fully understand. It is a state where the mind's eye fuses the geography of the imagination, and knowledge of the unseen but horribly real in all directions. Southward lies the American backed repression of Guatemala, and untold murdered Mayans. To the north are the drug wars, driven by an unhappy nation craving escape from the pain of their debt, and delusion, from overwork, or lack of work and the loveless atmosphere that characterizes American life and its circus of despair. Bats erupt from a nearby cave and an ancient Indian granary crumbles on a hillside in the dusk.

On the other side of the mountain, beyond the city of Guadalajara, lies the village of Ixtlahuacan del Rio on a high dry mesa, where five human heads were recently found inside Styrofoam coolers. A note read, "We're coming for you Goyo."

The beheadings are said to be the work of the Gulf Cartel's Zeta assassins operating out of nearby Guadalajara. With all the broken skulls, genocides, cut throats, black site torture chambers and mass graves in this world, the flies of American and Mexican media somehow chose these

five heads, upon which to alight. It was the Styrofoam coolers of course. The horror of opening such an everyday thing as a cooler and finding human heads. Fresh horror served up for the teeming nobodies out there, a reminder of their powerless in the face of the jackals.

And from the Ixtlahuacan mesa, the lights of Guadalajara sizzle like a jeweled bioluminescent squid sprawling across the “Valley of Stones” groping for the cool waters of el rio.

El Rio Ganges

From the mountains you can see the Lerma River, a copper ribbon of toxic chemicals and life giving water, winding toward Michoacan and Guanajuato, disappearing into the horizon with its implications of eternity. Since I came to Mexico, I’ve had a recurring dream of just such a river. In that river flows the toxic heartbreak that attends men’s lives, wars, past wives, love won and love lost, or youth simply thrown away, inseparably mixed in with all that sustains us. A dream of el rio.

To a still mind, every river is a Ganges, in which you can hear the murmuring of all the human souls that have ever been or will be. The river can give rise to great questions, as well as answer them – even questions so great as where we go in death:

“Back,” murmurs the river, “back to from whence you sprang. Back into the common broth of human consciousness, back to the realm of the newly born and the newly dead. You may come with your bowing and shouting, or with your crying and killing. But you will come and you will sink beneath those currents where all men great or puny die alone – to be reborn in the next screaming infant evicted from the river’s womb, into the terrible light of the world. Good luck kid.”



Other nations are already threatening to quit loaning us money, so we’re gonna be paying as we go anyway. Why not claim the high ground now?

For now though, the dusky mountains are beautiful, their canyons as inviting as any woman’s thighs. Tantalizing but unobtainable, therefore evoking aloneness. When a man is most alone in such mountains, he may hear voices. Whispering voices, or sometimes accusing voices, interrogating voices, coming from the chaparral-bearded bluffs, pocked with caves and petroglyphs of fantastic birds, chiseled glyphs of undying love (Pedro loves Socorro, 1971), and the etched footprints of Kokopelli dancing on the cunt of the world. Range upon range of lava mustachioed mountains ask questions.

“Who piled up the ruin at my feet, that thing called civilization? Who dragged all this stuff in here? That junk pile of locomotives, masonry, hair dryers, cathedrals, cathode ray tubes, ballistic missiles and sailing ships and cell phones, the library mausoleums of dead books where homeless old men take spit baths in the toilet, the political temples illuminated by its troupes of flaming whores? Who created this mess and dragged in these dark days? Was it you?”

SNAP TO, BAGEANT! COLLECT YOURSELF. You’ve got stuff to do. Stuff to give a shit about. Like finding Maria.

Oh yeah, Maria, the Indian curanda who sells eight-inch bud in a plastic bottle for three bucks. The bud is drowned in pure alcohol, the same stuff the charros drink up in the hills, and the solution is sold as an ointment to be rubbed on the joints for arthritis pain. Some gringos pour it in Sprite.

Well then. To hell with this brooding over dark days. Let us find Maria. Larry the cop says, “Count me in. Let’s go.”

So goodbye Kokopelli, I’m bound for el rio. And I won’t be back till these dark days are gone.

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