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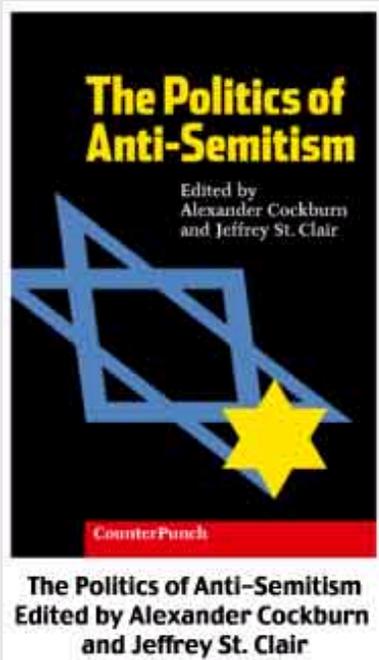
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edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

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September 15, 2003

The Obligations of a New Generation

A Message to the People of New York City

By CYNTHIA MCKINNEY

Remarks at the WBAI September 11 Events, Riverside Church, New York City September 12, 2003

I want to thank WBAI for holding this very important and informative series of events and I thank them for including me.

It is impossible to be in New York City at this time and think about anything--business, politics, or even life--as usual. And perhaps that's true all across America. But particularly here in New York, it is very clear, that people in this City are still very much in pain. And equally, nothing that has happened to us as a nation since that day has been usual, either.

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Two years ago, what began as a normal Tuesday morning for millions of Americans--some commuting to work, others taking their children to school, and many others opening their businesses--soon became a day that found thousands of us plunged into chaos and agony by the criminal actions of terrorists.

These attacks upon our citizens were deeply felt by all the people of our great nation. We became one, and grieved for the thousands who lost their lives that day. Americans displayed their best and responded generously and immediately to the calls for help from our brothers and sisters. And as you here in New York certainly know, too many victims and their families are still in need of help today.

I have thought long and hard about the individuals who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. What could I possibly say to those whose loved ones lost their lives at the Trade Center, the Pentagon, or in a field in Pennsylvania? My words are certainly insufficient.

It must be with this same feeling of pain, emptiness, and inadequacy that Abraham Lincoln searched for words of consolation for the families of those who lost loved ones in the Civil War. In a letter to one such mother, a Mrs. Bixby, who lost five sons in the war to save our Union, Abraham Lincoln had this to say:

"I have been shown in the files of the War Department, a statement that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from your grief for a loss so overwhelming, but I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation which may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save." [I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and the lost, the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."]

The thanks of a grateful nation. That's what we have to give.

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For on September 11th, New York City was very much like a battlefield. The citizens were called upon to display the kind of bravery, compassion, and sacrifice that we generally only can read about in historic battles. But just as many generations had done before them, Americans young and old, black and white, Native American, Latino, Asian, gay and straight, without regard to color, race, religion, ethnicity, or economic condition, Americans responded heroically.

We know a lot about some of these heroes. In New York City and in Washington, DC, we know of the courageous actions by police, firefighters, civilians and military personnel who all acted in the service of fellow Americans--knowing fully well that their actions to save others would almost certainly bring about their own deaths. But they acted selflessly anyway.

Including the clean up crews who worked long hours day and night breathing the dust of the rubble and who now may suffer serious health effects from their time at Ground Zero.

The pain is far from over.

Every one of those lost from our country and from the many other countries are as special as are the sons which Abraham Lincoln wrote about in his letter to Mrs. Bixby.

Today, we need to talk about the thanks of our grateful nation.

Now, how exactly should we show those thanks and what are the challenges that lie before us?

Well, first of all, we must not allow the tragedy of September 11 to create a climate of war and conflict throughout the world. These attacks were the result of the actions of a few. Certainly we can't plunge our country which we all love, and the world that we all live in, into a never ending cycle of war and violence and hate.

Two generations ago, a torch was passed to a new generation. And the leadership of that generation challenged our country to become better in medicine and space exploration, civil rights and ending war.

How dare George W. Bush quote John F. Kennedy today at Fort Stewart, Georgia in an effort to justify his global militarism. John Kennedy specifically rejected pre-emptive war;

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JFK rejected war against a smaller, weaker, poorer country; he rejected Pax Americana imposed by American weapons of war, and spoke instead of constructing a peace, not for our time, but for all time.

And Bobby Kennedy, upon the announcement of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. asked what kind of country do we want. One divided by race? A country of violence, motivated by hate?

And, perhaps, Martin Luther King, Jr. himself explained our current dilemma best when in 1963 he said:

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. . . . The chain reaction of evil--hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars--must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation."

So, as the families of the victims correctly point out, the thanks of a grateful nation can't include a generation of war. It can't include the use of depleted uranium or nuclear weapons.

The thanks of a grateful nation must include universal health care, full funding for a quality education for all our children, especially the children of our reservations, barrios, and ghettos.

The thanks of a grateful nation must include tackling issues like poverty; unemployment, urban sprawl, transportation; protecting Mother Earth; civil rights, the glass ceiling, affirmative action, race relations; drug abuse, the death penalty, prison reform; the way we treat our veterans. Social justice, US standing in the world.

Protecting civil liberties. Ending war and promoting peace. That's the thanks of a grateful nation.

The thanks of a grateful nation includes remembering who we are.

We are America and we have unbounded good to offer the world. The good that we saw deep in America's heartland in the midst of tragedy on

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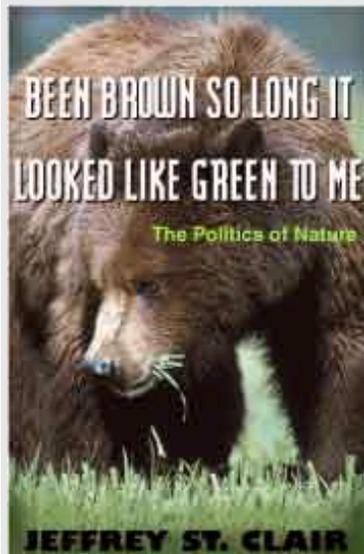
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Been Brown So Long, It Looked Like Green to Me: The Politics of Nature by Jeffrey St. Clair

one particular day in September two years ago.

We are the America that declared its independence from tyranny and instituted the rule of law and our Bill of Rights for all our citizens.

We are the America that sent its greatest generation to fight on foreign soil so that others could be free.

But we are in danger of being that America no more.

Everything we hold dear to us, as the unique American character, the values that we struggled so hard for and won in the civil rights movements of blacks, women and gays, are all being threatened today by a small but powerful group who want to silence you, yet speak and act for you.

We are America and we are family. And yes, we can make gentle the life of this world.

Cynthia McKinney served in Congress as a representative from Georgia.

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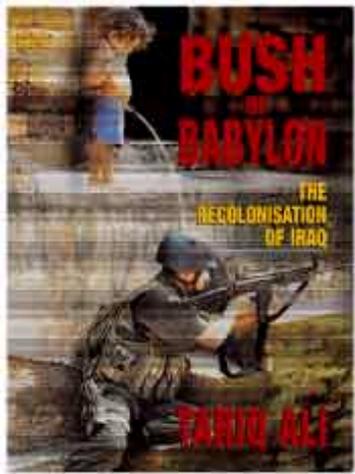
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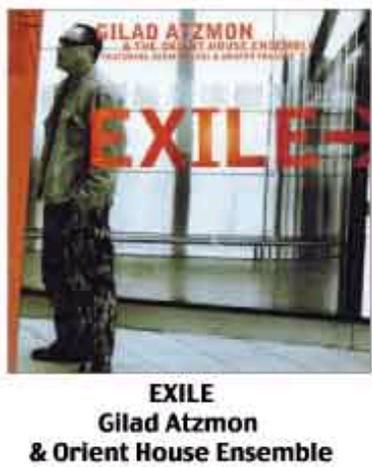
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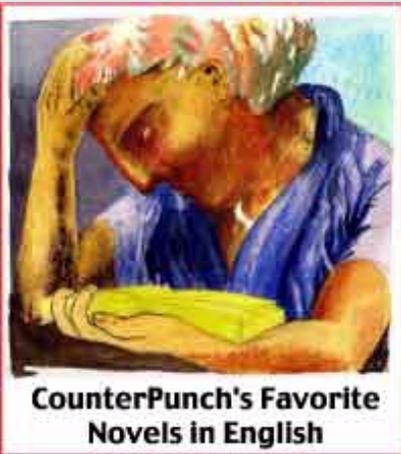
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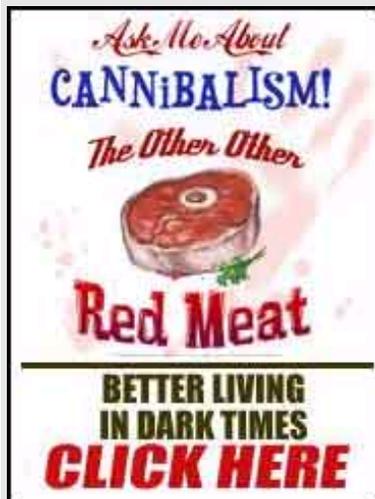
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