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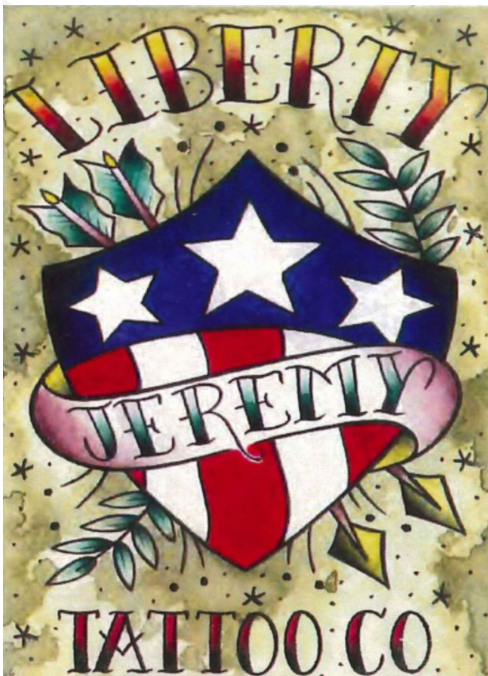
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# THE TALK RADIO PRESIDENCY

In my former life I produced conservative talk radio programming in Seattle. It wasn't the only thing I did for this particular broadcast group but it was the main thing. From 1999-2005 I was immersed in the movement that elected George W. Bush to office in 2000 and used the attacks of 9/11 to further its anti-Muslim agenda. I came to it initially because I could not get a job at one of the non-profit radio stations in the area, as up to that point my six year radio career was entirely in left end of the dial radio. I went into it with an open mind. How better to learn about what being a liberal means to you than to have your liberalism challenged every day? That was the very first lie I told myself to take and stay in that job, though it was not the last.

I learned a lot about the conservative movement and people who called themselves conservatives. For the most part, I learned to humanize this political other. The more I met and socialized with the listeners of the programming I learned that they were not unlike myself. They wanted a lot of the same things that I wanted. Peace, prosperity, family, good times. They weren't all stiff, boring, normie, etc. Some held high-powered jobs at Microsoft and Boeing, some ran their own blue collar service businesses, some were low level grunts bouncing around the nascent dot com industry. Many, if cornered with a drink in friendly conversation, were not as dogmatic about conservative dogma as one would think. I learned that there was not a monolithic conservative any more than there was a trademark stereotypical member of any other sort of group, political, ethnic, or otherwise.

But there were other kinds of talk radio listeners that I met at public events. The ones that you did not want to be in a corner drinking and talking with. Birchers, backwoods crackpots, neoracists, abortion clinic protesters, militia sympathizers, y2k survivalists turned preppers, open carry 2nd amendment nuts...the people who took some of this stuff that the talk show hosts liked to flirt with all the way to the extreme. The talk show host I worked most with had a gesture he'd use at events that I recognized as the "get the mouthbreather nut away from me now" sign. I watched as the average talk radio listener went from being the more pragmatic and interesting sort to the dogmatic sort. I see two events in 2004 as the moments when I realized the switch had been flipped and the extremists had begun to outnumber the thoughtful. In April that year a large gathering of many of the disparate mouthbreather groups banded together to symbolically dump tea into Lake Union to protest tax day. My host did not want to go to the event because of the marginal groups involved but felt like he should put in a drive-by appearance on his way home. Before this event many of these groups did not associate with one another, but suddenly they realized their aims were similar and there was a strength in combining forces that had not been available when the groups were separated. This was the beginnings of the western Washington tea party movement that would overtake conservative politics and consolidate power in the party during the Obama administration.

The other event of 2004 was the "swiftboating" of Senator John Kerry's presidential campaign. In short, a crackpot group of conservative grift train writers used decades-old rumor and questionable eyewitness accounts to suggest that the Purple Hearts John Kerry earned in combat on river swift boats in Vietnam were not truly earned and were given politically, using his murky military career as a reason that Kerry was *Unfit For Command*, as the title of the books suggests. It did not matter that the book turned out to be far less than credible. A group of fringe writers took over the conservative think-tank network and torpedoed a presidential campaign with false information writ large and abetted by talk radio, Fox News, and the mainstream media along for the ride. The switch had flipped.

By the end of 2004 I realized that I was not trying to balance out things for my conservative colleagues. I had become a part of the problem. I could no longer lie to myself and say "but I don't agree with them about the three G's (god, gays, and guns) so I am still intact" because it wasn't true. I was part of the problem and every day I posted up at the producer's station I was giving aid to the cause. I wanted out. It took the better part of a year to finally get out, and that was because I was forced out. Making the mortgage when you are overleveraged in a house you couldn't afford and your wife doesn't work because she's at home with your two babies will compromise even the best of people. But I did eventually get out and, aside from volunteering for non-profit radio at times, I was out of radio for good.

Recently I read a column by David Hopkins, a Boston College poli-sci professor, suggesting that President Donald Trump is the first talk radio president and that to understand how Trump reacts to situations one must imagine that instead of a politician you are seeing an average conservative talk radio listener yanked up from the masses and suddenly given the keys to America. Let's look at how Trump has dealt with the last few years' crises: build an unnecessary and unwanted wall to keep Mexicans out of America unless they come legally then make it extremely difficult if not impossible to come legally; if you are seeking asylum you are the same as any other illegal and who cares if you have children with you, we will separate you from your children and cage them up; everything Obama did will be undone regardless of its necessity; Iran/China/North Korea are bad and we will go to war with them physically and economically even if it hurts us more than them; Russia and Saudi Arabia are cool no matter what they get up to though because they have been spending money influencing and astroturfing the Tea Party movement since the Obama years (not to mention the personal financial strings both countries have tied neatly to the non-presidential version of Donald Trump); there are indeed good people on both sides of the boys marching for gun rights and white pride; and COVID-19 is a liberal media hoax and wearing a mask shows you are weak and politically correct. This is not to mention that Trump's ascendancy also brought along many for the ride that used the movement to mold the judicial branch into a far right policy weapon that will shape the country

for decades to come, cuckold the legislative branch, and empower the executive branch. You see, even though the Goldwater/Reagan right wing grassroots may have abhorred that kind of talk radio listener they were shrewd enough to recognize when a power shift was occurring and found a way to infiltrate it and use it for its own devices. The GOP establishment and the D.C. thinktank/lobbyist system did not support a Trump presidency. It was the talk radio listener and Fox News viewer that rose up from the grassroots and pushed his campaign forward from being a rolling punchline media circus to legitimate and ultimately ascendant.

Where Trump is unlike the average talk radio listener pulled up from the ranks is that *he does not believe in any of it*. He has more in common with the Boomer grass root swamp dwellers in D.C. than he does with Fred from Federal Way, WA or John from Conroe, TX who really and truly believes in it. Trump understood that there was money to be made by making the movement his patsy. To this day I still do not believe Trump ever wanted to be president, that he wanted to use the run for presidency to allow him a ticket to ride on the conservative grift train to easy money. In the waning months of the 2016 campaign Trump, preparing for his eventual loss, began to put together the groundwork and funding to start a new media service even farther right of Fox News, based on the foundation of questionable existing organizations like Newsmax and World Net Daily amongst others. It's hard to believe that there would be a market for anything farther right of Fox News but there is. As he nears another election Trump has already started to criticize Fox News more regularly, has threatened Twitter with an executive order to do something to them (it is unclear what), and talks of that farther right Fox News syndicate has renewed. While Trump is not a movement conservative he understands that he can use their tropes to convince them that he is one of them and use their limited minority located in key electoral regions of the country to turn their minority into a voting majority. And the party power allows it to continue, no matter what they say about Trump in private, because being in power is far better than not being in power and the perversion of constitutionality they slipped in on Trump's coattails can continue while he isn't really paying attention.

In 2004 I couldn't believe that anyone would fall for the swiftboat controversy. In 2016 I couldn't believe that anyone would choose Trump over Hillary Clinton, even knowing how deep both establishment wing and the talk radio/Fox News wing hatred of Hillary Clinton goes. I forgot that even the average liberal and non-affiliated voter has concerns about Hillary that gave them pause. I know there are people who will enthusiastically pull the lever Biden, though I don't personally know anyone like that. It is my hope that we see the other side of the 2016 coin in 2020. A vote for Trump was a vote against Hillary, no matter how unsavory Trump's character may be. A vote for Biden is a vote against Trump, and we now know just how disastrous and deadly allowing a talk radio president to run the country can be. — KELLY MENACE



Late last month frequent 979Rep contributor Jared Tucker passed on to Valhalla after a struggle with esophageal cancer. We take this time to remember the man as we knew him, The Gentleman of Downtown Bryan.

Jared made an art of "insulting" people and was very good at it. He and I would trade barbs at Rev's constantly. I say to you tonight sir, "You fucking left us with a world of shit!" He's going to slap the back of my head while I'm sleeping and I will smile. — STEVO SCHLEMMER

In the summer of 2018 I was packing up my house to move my family from south College Station to Asheville, NC. Over the previous 20 years my wife and I had accumulated four dozen or so bottles of wine. Some were gifts, some were from our day trips around California, Oregon, and Washington when we lived on the West Coast. I've never been a wine drinker, my wife was but then when we started having babies she stopped drinking and never really started back up again. I didn't see the point in packing up this wine to move it somewhere again where it wouldn't be enjoyed by someone. When I thought about who amongst my friends would know what to do with this boon my immediate thought was "Jared will want this or know someone who would." A quick text confirmed that YES INDEED Jared wanted this wine. So I made an appointment to bring it up to his house downtown. Although I had "bar socialized" with Jared for nearly 10 years at that point I had never actually been to his house before. That afternoon he and I sat around for several hours, got buzzed drinking sazaracs, and just talked shit in general. An amazingly pleasant afternoon in a completely different setting than normal. Both of us exclaimed regret that we should have done this more often. As I got up to leave he brought me a bottle of bourbon to take with me. I saved it for just the right occasion because it was a gift from Jared. On the occasion of Jared's passing from this planet onto Gentleman Valhalla I felt the time was right to crack that bottle open and drink to him. Drink to a man who one could only half-jokingly refer to as the Dapper Mayor of Downtown Bryan. Was there an event happening downtown? Jared was there, often dressed impeccably, drink in hand, smile on his face, and a hand out to shake yours and make you feel like a million bucks. Jared always seemed to be living right and it's stupid fucking cruel that his life wound up so short. All of us are the better for having spent the time we did with him, and for the worse for having so little of it. — KELLY MENACE

It's no secret that Jared and I were lovers...of sarcasm, esoteric discussions and TRIVIA! Rev's Monday night trivia—where they let old lady teachers hang out with no judgment. The best was when Jared would be going over the answers to a round and say something like "Oh look, Linda's team knew the Wrigley company started in 1891...because she was ALIVE THEN!" Newcomers would look a little awkwardly my way to see how I took it, but that's how we played. Yet Jared was not only completely respectful to me at all times, he actually actively looked out for my well being. I can't count the

# THE GENTLEMAN OF D.T.B.



Everlasting  
(for Tuck)

They die in plague, poverty, protest.  
Greed grapeshots grace.  
He dies asleep. No touch or goodbye.  
Fuck sunrise everlasting.  
Sunrise to have with him, had with him, gone with him.  
No grimace, no squint.  
Here and now. This moment with you.  
Everlasting.

— BETHANY BEELER

times I'd get a quick call or text that generally began: "Hey look, I'm going to tell you something and it's probably nothing, but..." He would proceed to let me know a concern he had, something he thought maybe I didn't know about that could put me or my loved ones at risk. With every ounce of strength, right up to the end he did that. I'll never forget the day I was sitting on a bench outside of Kristy's and he came up and sat down next to me and said "Hey look, I'm going to tell you something and it's probably nothing, but..." Only this time it wasn't about me. How desperately, how fervently I wish that what he told me had been a "nothing." In Matthew Chapter 7 Jesus said "By their fruits ye shall know them." Well, then I guess our boy is a beautiful tree. — LINDA BENDIKSEN

I've started, deleted, restarted, and deleted some more from this innumerable times over the past five days. How do you sum up one of the top five relationships of your life in a 979 article? What memories of someone who could be the most wonderful human ever and also an asshole do you choose to share? Which stories do you tell and which are still too close to your heart to be told to others. How do you take years of memories and condense them into a few brief paragraphs when the only person whose opinion about them would matter is gone?

I think that the answer is that you don't or maybe that you can't. You simply pick some things to share and trust that others who also knew him will hear them, nod knowingly, smile maybe or perhaps shed some more tears as they too remember someone who truly made a difference in so many people's lives.

I could tell about a billion different stories, but, if I do that, my fear is that this will sound too much about me and not enough about him. He would probably like that, because he hated when he was the topic of others' conversations ... even when it was all good.

Instead, however, I just want to share some things about him that we all pretty much know to be true, but that need to be voiced aloud so that we can remember and so we don't ever forget.

Jared loved and respected the shit out of his dad. He wanted to be like him so very much. He thought he failed at that most of the time. I thought he was incredibly successful most of the time. This was not the only thing that we disagree about in which I was right and he was wrong, but it's probably the most important.

Jared sometimes intimidated others. On purpose? Sometimes, but usually not. It's just that he was wicked smart, physically very strong, and had pretty set lines in the sand regarding what was acceptable in terms of public behavior and what was not. In the not category were racism, misogyny, homo-and transphobia, sexual harassment, and disloyalty to friends.

He was called by several different names ... Jared, Tucker, Tuck. He held several different roles ... son, brother, uncle, lover, friend, trivia master, employee, confidante, confessor. I had multiple names for him depending on my mood and the situation. He was Jared, Mister Man, Tuck, Tuckity-Tuck-Tuck, Sweet Tucker, and,

**CONT. ->**

occasionally, Asshole.

His best friend was Leslie, but there are more than a handful of people, myself included, who considered him their best or one of their best friends. If he was your friend, there is nothing that would keep him from trying to make sure that you were doing alright.

He loved old movies, especially *Casablanca*, which clearly could never be watched too many times. He loved Winnie-the-Pooh, would watch *The Many Adventures of ...* once or twice a year, and knew all the lyrics. He would sing the lyrics along with you if you knew them too. He loved both Star Trek (in all its iterations) and Star Wars (again, all iterations). He'd read most anything worth reading or had it on his "to read" list ... and understood everything that he read in ways that made him seem older than he actually was. He had a receding hairline that helped with that too.

He loved whiskey, knew that there was really only one way to make a good Manhattan, drank responsibly in some situations and not so very much in others.

He rarely said no to good coffee, good cigars, or good people.

Tuck decided that he didn't very much like the early 20s version of himself and worked very hard to become the person that he wanted to be. That Jared faithfully took care of his mom and sisters ... even when they made him crazy. That Jared faithfully took care of his friends and family of choice even when we made him crazy. That Jared forgave and loved me as often I did for him. That Jared was my safe space, my Whistle Pig drinking buddy, my movie-watching partner, my friend.

Once, following what he considered an egregious fuck-up, Jared wrote a piece in which he said, among other things:

*Sometimes we simply can't contend with what we've done. We're embarrassed, proud, and all but forced to move on hoping that once we finally accede to sleep, we'll wake with dry eyes and a guilt more muted than the night before.*

*So, in the blink of an eye, trust falters then fades and relationships crumble. We're left with the agonizing reality that forfeit bestows on us, a lifetime to think about what we would do differently, and, if we're lucky, a scant handful of people that believe we're more than the sum of our mistakes.*

*If we're lucky.*

We were lucky to have a friend who knew that each of us is more than the sum of our mistakes, a friend who almost always gave so much more than he ever expected in return, a friend who loved us in spite of our many fuck ups.

We were lucky to have a friend like Tucker. — PAMALYN ROSE BEELER

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"Oh! That was way outside. This umpire doesn't know

what he's doing."

I invited Jared over for dinner, and I wasn't quite done with it yet, and I had the Yankees game on while I was cooking.

"Put on whatever you want," I said. "They're playing Oakland, and this game is over."

"No, this is great," he said. "Are you going to put milk into those potatoes?"

So, Jared and I enjoyed steaks and mashed potatoes [without any milk // I put enough butter in those motherfuckers, and he was actually impressed] together watching the Yankees game while he feigned enthusiasm for a baseball game that I knew he didn't care about.

This is not a significant story or one meant to capture the entirety of Jared's character, but it shares a little bit about him as a friend. That man had no interest in baseball or the Yankees, but here he was barking about balls and strikes because that's the kind of friend he was — you, his friend, cared about it, so therefore, he cared about it — or at least pretended for about five innings.

I moved from Houston to Bryan in the spring of 2013, and started to come to Rev regularly that fall. Jared was one of my first friends. I can't say we became close immediately, and I wish I was more coherent in those moments to remember things from then.

[Sidebar: I was such a mess back then, and for a while (several years) after. I was sitting at a table with Valmira one night, and my drunk ass heard her talking about New York, and I said, "Shut the fuck up, I'm from there!" to which she said, "Yeah, I fucking know. We've had this conversation five times tonight."] ]

I was too drunk to remember much about Jared and I's first interactions, but I knew we connected from a humor and music standpoint — I don't know many other folks in this town who love MF DOOM, and will then share every single new track on your wall.

I half-jokingly, but actually not jokingly, would say around that time, "I have no clue why these folks are nice to me or want to be friends with me."

I was such a dumb mess, but as we became friends, Jared, among a few others in the community were always there for me. I can't tell you why, but I am so thankful that he stuck with me.

"Hey, man," I would text on a Wednesday, "I get paid Friday, can I borrow \$20 for cigarettes and some frozen pizzas to get there?"

He always had me.

Once I finally began [attempting to get] getting my shit together in 2017, I had to ask the pack-of-cigarettes favor, but it was for my electric bill.

"Give me the account number and I'll make a payment. Will that work?" he said over Facebook messenger.

It's going to be weird to go pay my bill tomorrow and ask if they can switch the email on my account back from

his to mine — I've just always paid it in person since then.

I always paid him back, duh, but he did so much and so many favors like this for me and so many others, and he did so without the motivation of recouping payment. It was always done out of kindness or some sort of obligation to just be a goddamn good person.

Jared is one of my most important people [I just pictured this really great photo of him and Jessica Lemmons at the picnic table when she wore some sort of big sash or sarong, and he adopted it for the night].

Sorry, I was telling you about how Jared is one of my important people.

When I met that guy, I couldn't figure him out. He was Mister-Fucking-Secret Agent. I'd ask him what he did for a living and he was evasive. Even after we were actual friends, I loved that he'd stride through The Village and give these smiles and firm handshakes — he always gave those stupid firm handshakes — like he was the fucking mayor [somewhere, Dave Jones is saying, "Well, actually, at that time, he was the mayor on Four-Square of \_\_\_\_\_ *[a whole bunch of Bryan places]*." *[I always did appreciate that man's competitive spirit]* *[Also, I never understood the FourSquare territorialism]*

By the time we were actually ACTUAL friends, Jared wasn't someone I could expect to see at Rev a few days a week for more than a minute — he had graduated. He might stay out some nights at first — but it was a treat. [You ever see Joe Wegwert at Rev after the sun goes down unless it's Jared's birthday in 2018 and J Goodin is playing? No, you fucking don't]

Anyways, we managed to forge a really fun summer at the pool in 2016 with the motley crew known as the MOOBS — Devin Rosser, Jeremy Stark, Chelsie Scarpinato, and Bernardo Ramirez. We had a fun summer and, sure, bad decisions were made, but I'm sure we don't hold a candle to that OG Summer of Bad Decisions crew.

[golly, i just took too long of a break talking to folks on the phone]

Jared is on my Mount Rushmore of people important to me being better.

That guy always took an interest in what was going on with me.

When I got re-hired at A&M, I called him and we had lunch at Madden's on my first day. I'm pretty sure that was the last time we ate together. I was really looking forward to sharing another meal with him.

When I was between things in 2018, and he'd ask how I was, and I'd tell him, "Oh, I have an interview at A&M tomorrow," he'd respond, "What are you wearing? What pants? Jacket? I'll be over in a minute." And he'd come over and say, "That's a nice shirt, but it's going to clash with your jacket." And then, he had four ties, four pocket squares and two watches to offer. I never used those pocket squares or wore the watches because they weren't me, but like, who the fuck does that? Who shows up to help a friend like that and gives them these fancy options?

In 2017, I was trying to get back in shape and started a Facebook group for us Downtown folks to do things like play basketball. Jared showed up one day, and I was elated. He was definitely the most fit of us there. But, despite being 6'2" and in shape, he was clueless about playing basketball, and ended up jamming his finger at some point. [Tim Horn was there. Rather than letting me throw him (Tim Horn) a pass, he'd run up to me looking for a handoff — any fan of modern basketball knows this ruins our spacing, Tim!!!!]

Whenever I needed help, Jared was there for me.

When I was still a mess [and now when I am a little less messy], Jared set an example for me to aspire to.

Outside of helping me get through a week with some cigarettes, etc., Jared made a million more meaningful contributions in our community. A lot of them, you'd never know because he asked to not be named. I probably haven't even shared my best Jared stories, and there are an entire LARGE segment of people who Jared affected in a positive way.

Please read other nonsense besides mine about this guy. He IS amazing.

I'm laughing, writing this, I can see, hear and feel, me sitting drinking a Lonestar after work and him rolling up in that black Ford in his workout gear, strolling in — sometimes getting a drink, sometimes not — "Hey, bubba, how you doing?"

Jared was and is a role model for me to help others and help others in your community. He did a lot for a lot of people, and I hope that I can keep that going and help folks whenever I can.

I love Jared. He gave me something to look up to. He was a great friend. I hope I can be there for this community like he was because he helped it thrive. I miss you so much, my friend. I was so looking forward to showing you my salsa that was better than yours. I am missing you a whole bunch, you dumb motherfucker.

[No Tim Horns were harmed in the making of this rambling, BUT, where's the Tim Horn invite? Facts: Tim Horn was invited to the steak and potatoes dinner referenced at the top of this, but had Charm Bomb practice] — JOSHUA SIEGEL

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Tucker was my first friend downtown that I didn't have any ties to through anything else. I met him at trivia nights back when it was hosted at Murphy's Law and you didn't want to avoid that place like the plague we find ourselves in now. He was the only one of you folks that I hung out with until one day I mustered up the courage to talk to a few more people at Revolution because I'd seen them all together.

He never would have wanted us to be writing about him. That's who Jared Tucker was. He didn't want to be the centerpiece of the conversation (until he needed to be). He never wanted the limelight (until he did). That gigantic asshole of a man would always be right where he was needed and losing that is not something any one of us will be able to handle for a long time. **CONT. ->**

It's no secret that people around downtown would often come to me or Jared with random financial favors. One of the best parts about that though, was the fact that a sizable percentage of those requests came to both of us at right about the same time. It shouldn't be funny, but we would text the other one if we were unable to help for whatever reason, and probably 90% of those times the other person had already been asked. "Fucking dirtbags asking you after I'd already given them X, should have just asked for what they actually needed."

But that's who he was. He is always there. If it's to watch a dumb football game he didn't care about, or to call you when he's riddled with cancer because your mom passed and he cares about you. To tell you when you're being a fucking moron and to get your shit together. To stand back and pick you up when you keep being a fucking moron and refuse to get your shit together.

Tucker and I went through basically the exact same personal transformation during the same years. From "Socially liberal and fiscally conservative" to actually educating ourselves about the fact that sometimes you just need to shut the fuck up and listen to people who have greater experiences. He may have always needed to be the smartest person in the room, but there's some big dick empathy that grew in that man throughout the years.

We could talk about thermodynamics at a pool. We could smoke cigars in a random parking lot. We could drink whatever the fuck wherever the fuck we wanted to. We even all got dressed up like idiots for A Vintage Affair and #70waystodie.

Tucker, fuck you very much. I love you.

I think reposting Jared's Jackie memorial, included below, would be a good place to start with who Jared was. — *STARKNESS*

We're all in loss mode right now and it's been that way more often than not for a few years. Fathers. Mothers. Friends. Jess, Ray, Randy, Larry, Ryan, Jackie—we haven't had a break. Every time we turn around we lose something or someone we love and I don't know about you, but I'm doing a real shit job coping with it.

I am not taking care of myself.

I am using mechanisms I should not to cope.

I am extending at the expense of my well-being.

It's the only thing I've ever known but that doesn't make it less stupid.

I am the absolute worst at lying to my friends and saying that I'm okay — that I don't need help. That I can disconnect. If I had a nickel for every time I've used the word "fine" to describe my current state these last few years, I could buy us all an island somewhere away from all of...whatever this is.

I am not directing this plea at any one individual because I believe them to have acted any worse than I have, but for the love of our family, friends, and community we have to do better.

I went to my best friend once because I needed help making sense of whatever flavor of shit happened to be inhabiting my head that week and they told me they didn't have the mental capacity to be with me right then but as soon as they could, they would call.

This might be the single most important lesson I've learned about mental health. When you're out, you're out and you don't owe it to anyone to impossibly manifest the will to give of yourself when you know the only thing that awaits you is a deficit of the worst kind. It is an old, cliché, adage but if you can't take care of yourself, you cannot effectively help others.

We need rest. We need time alone. We need time with friends. We need to learn to talk about what bothers us. We need to learn to listen.

The hard part is one of balance because you don't need and you can't do all of these things at the same time but in a group of people as loving, kind, brilliant, and diverse in background and ability as we have in this community, there are enough of us to rotate in and out as needed.

We can get through this and be better once we reach the other side, but it's going to take cognizant effort on all of our parts.

Reflect and contemplate before you act in the interest of better knowing what you really need.

If you need help, ask.

If you can't give someone what they need, ask for someone who can.

Take care of yourselves. If we've learned anything it's that life is more frail than we give it credit for and making good decisions with your health in all forms goes a long way to mitigate that infirmity.

I love you. A lot.

Tucker

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# WAKEY WAKEY

I am haunted by a party I attended three years ago. For his birthday, my friend Jeremy hosted a Lip-Sync Battle that, for two years straight, made me laugh liquor through my nose hairs. Laughing booze through the nose hurts, but I did not regret it. What I do regret, and what haunts me to this day, is not jumping into one particular performance when the audio-track pooped out. During a captivating sign-language interpretation of DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince's "Parents Just Don't Understand" by my lovely friend, Jen, the song simply stopped in the third verse, right about the time that "she had opened up the buttons on her shirt so far, I guess that's why I didn't notice that police car". Everyone in the room moaned in disappointment while Jen shrugged her shoulders and sat down. As equally sad, I could have jumped alongside Jen and rapped — pitifully so — the entirety of that third verse so she could complete her sign-language Lip-Sync. Why I did not come to my friend's aid still boggles me.

But what boggles me more is that each time this story pops in my mind (as it has daily these past two weeks) I instantly hear the whole of Fresh Prince's third verse. Typing now, I "hear" it again, even though a different record spins on my turntable. And this boggles me because I have not listened to that song in well over a decade, perhaps two. Not even after Jeremy's party or since. Somehow I experienced enough exposure to the Fresh Prince in junior high for the saga of his parents' "brand new Porsche" to outlive more pertinent information, such as birthdays, contact information, people's names, due dates, and, worst of all, pithy movie quotes at the primo moment. So why the dadgum Fresh Prince? And why does he hang around *all day* at the haunt of Jeremy's Lip-Sync Battle and Jen's flawed audio track? If only I had jumped in to assist Jen, I would not be so haunted by my failure as a friend or by such ha-ha-larious lines as "they took turns: one would beat me while the other was driving!" The joke grows old.

Neuroscientist Oliver Sacks, in his book *Musophilia: Tales of Music and The Brain*, refers to this phenomenon of cognitively looped tunes as "musical imagery", which is about as quaint and elegant a phrase as one might expect from Dr. Sacks. He begins his essay "Music on the Brain: Imagery and Imagination" by stating, "Music forms a significant and, on the whole, pleasant part of life for most of us — not only external music, music we hear with our ears, but internal music, music that plays in our heads." He continues by exploring the various ways listeners engage music in their minds both in pleasant and unpleasant ways, even examining the peculiar nature non-auditory stimuli may have on our internal jukeboxes. That "ear-worm" that loops inside us and reflects our real-time listening habits, he says, is "the least personal, the least significant form" of musical imagery. He then claims, "We are on much richer, much more mysterious terrain when we consider tunes or

musical fragments we have perhaps not heard or thought of in decades, that suddenly play in the mind for no apparent reason. No recent exposure, no repetition can explain such tunes." He adds, "There must be more emotion, more meaning here than I allow, even if it is of a mostly sentimental and nostalgic kind." The suggestion here is that such musically imagined songs may say more about us than the most recent plays on our iPods. And what that brain-worm says about us, he says, may be more embarrassing than our guiltiest pop pleasures.

Fascinated by the directions of my own mental jukebox, I started a new Spotify playlist this past month titled "Wakey Wakey". The goal is to record the songs playing naturally in my mind each morning. I began the playlist on May 10 when, after several days of waking with either Sade singing "No Ordinary Love" or Bad Brains crooning "I And I Survive", I suddenly woke to the Misfits belting "Angelfuck", which I had not heard in months. Sure, Sade owned my home stereo the previous week while Bad Brains had looped in my car a bit longer, but where did the Misfits come from? And why "Angelfuck"? It's not even one of my favorite Misfits tracks. Could that song's humid-leather meets velvet-swagger have morphed from a late April preview of Glen Danzig's unfortunate *Danzig Sings Elvis?* Provoked by such questions, "Wakey Wakey" was born.

Most "Wakey" songs, so far, remain with me throughout the day, an often welcomed situation (as with Brazilian songstress Roberta Sa) but not always (see the melodramatic deep-cut from Bon Jovi's *Slippery When Wet*). For instance, my wife's daily singing-of-the-hymns could not silence the only three bars of an Eddie Rabbit ballad that seized itself upon my impressionable mind nearly four decades ago as I was carted about — sans seatbelt — in my mother's '77 Ford Thunderbird. How such a tune remained even partially intact when so many other facts of life fell away begs a great mystery. In this, the morning's "musical imagery" jukebox proves as much a time-machine as a marvel.

Obviously, most top-of-the-morning "Wakey" tracks reflect my current listening habits, but, as with the Misfits, some took me off-guard. Like when I woke at 3 AM to a Cannibal Corpse murder anthem only to arise again later to the more hopeful omen of Tom Petty's sweet Florida drawl. Admittedly, several nights I have tried to plant a song in my mind to greet my morning. I succeeded two nights ago with The Ramones, but not so much with a Bill Evans number I imagined to be pleasant in the pre-coffee dawn. Now I lay me down to sleep too titillated for slumber, wondering, "What will it be? Whose voice will meet me first?" I have my raters. But, as I've learned, raters be damned.

Without further adieu, here's my "Wakey-Wakey" playlist from May 10 - May 31.

- "No Ordinary Love" — Sade
- "I And I Survive" — Bad Brains
- "Angelfuck" — Misfits
- "Every Which Way But Loose" — Eddie Rabbit
- "Abyssal Plain" — Pelican
- "Sailin' On" — Bad Brains
- "Going Underground" — The Jam
- "I Got You" — Split Enz
- "Red Before Black" — Cannibal Corpse
- "Here Comes My Girl" — Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers
- "Our Lips Are Sealed" — The Go-Gos
- "Never Say Goodbye" — Bon Jovi
- "Casa Pre Fabricada" — Roberta Sa
- "Maria Tambien" — Khruangbin
- "Cicatrizas" — Roberta Sa
- "White Gloves" — Khruangbin
- "Soledad y el Mar" — Natalia Lafourcade
- "Pet Sematary" — Ramones

As Sacks states, "Sometimes normal music imagery crosses a line and becomes, so to speak, pathological, as when a certain fragment of music repeats itself incessantly, sometimes maddeningly so, for days on end." The sad fact, it appears, is that such pathology is beyond our control. As with the randomness of some "Wakey" songs conjured alongside more predictable numbers. Somewhere beneath the ramble of today's top hits, another story is being revealed in me, a narrative that juxtaposes Eddie Rabbit alongside The Misfits. Where this is going — or where it should end — only wisdom can reveal.

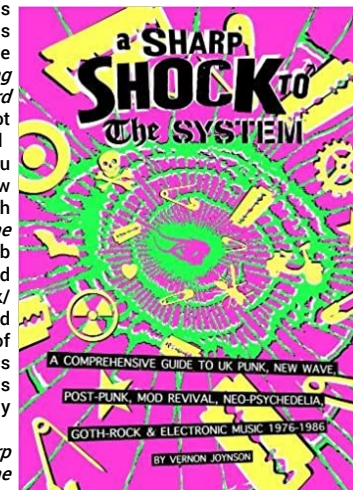
Also, returning to Jeremy's party and Jen's flawed tape, given the choice I would have not chosen DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince to own such real estate in my dadgum amygdala. And maybe that's why I didn't grab the mic next to Jen. To do so would have dared exposure, especially to the people whose names I had forgotten, that "Parents Just Don't Understand" proved more nourishing than making their acquaintance. Perhaps Dr. Sacks is right again. Perhaps emotion and sentimentality — the heart — is more central to memory than even our rational minds. In the voluptuous words of comedian Sarah Silverman, "The heart wants what the heart wants". To that, I will say, Amen and Selah. I just never fathomed the heart could want The Go-Gos before caffeine. Does anybody's heart really want The Go-Gos before caffeine? Dear Lord and Rivers Cuomo, say it ain't so.

POSTSCRIPT: While writing this, I listened to Tangerine Dream's soundtrack for William Friedkin's film *Sorcerer*, which is guaranteed not to create ear-worms. — KEVIN STILL

## READING ROCKS

The title of this massive book says it all. At 1434 pages and over a foot high, the "Comprehensive" part of this book's title isn't hollow bluster. *A Sharp Shock to the System* continues the tradition of record guides set by the previous

music guides such as the *The Rolling Stone Record Guide* (not recommended unless you need to know how much *Rolling Stone* loved Bob Segar and hated punk/new wave) and the series of *Trouser Press Record Guides* (very highly recommended). *A Sharp Shock to the System* presents an alphabetical A-Z listing of punk/new wave bands. Included for each band is a listing of band members, a discography listing, a band/artist biography, and a rarity scale for each record mentioned — from "relatively easy to find" to "mega rare". The 20-page foreword outlines the history of British Punk/New Wave that is as well written as (too) many books on this topic. Included in *A Sharp Shock to the System* are photos of various albums mentioned; twelve pages of these in color and a guide to compilation albums/cassettes. It is clear that in order to keep the size of the book manageable, some hard cuts were made — Frankie Goes to Hollywood made the cut while The Jesus and Mary Chain did not. Skill, given the scope of this book, this is a very minor quibble. Overall *A Sharp Shock to the System* is an amazing achievement and an essential guide for anyone interested in this era of music. Allegedly only 1000 copies of this book were printed so pick up your copy while you can. — RENTED MULE



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# OPEN LETTER TO A CHRISTIAN TRUMP APOLOGIST

Dear Christian Trump Apologist,

I am not a Christian. I was raised to be one, baptized a Catholic into an indifferently Catholic household. I'm pretty sure my baptism was to please my father's parents, as when my nuclear family was together we were never in a church before or since that baptismal day. By age 6 my parents were split up and my mother never set foot in a church outside of a funeral if she could help it. We owned a bible but no one ever opened it. However, as a professional grifter, my mother discovered very quickly that she could hit up church help offices to make groceries and rent instead of having to actually work a job for them. In exchange, those churches wanted to save her soul. Since she had no soul to save she instead sent me to those churches. So I attended many different denominations of church, from Catholic to Pentecostal to Baptist to Church of Christ to Episcopal to snake handling tongue talking home fellowships. I may not be a Christian but I have a fair handle on what Christianity can be at its purest and what it often is at its basic foundation. To cut it short, Christians are generally good people who stray from the teachings of Christ as often as they can get away with it, feel guilty about it, atone, and then do it all over again. Like everybody else on the planet who's not a shithead, they try to get it right, fuck up, try to get it right, sometimes succeeding, sometimes fucking up again. But almost always *trying* to do right.

Since 2015 President Donald Trump has uncomfortably appropriated your culture. He knew that in order to receive the support of the non-establishment right wing he would have to publicly embrace Jesus and look like he meant it. Didn't mean he had to believe it or walk the walk, but he had to shrug his shoulders into the outfit and look like he could wear it for as long as it took to get elected. To be fair to Trump, I don't think this made him very comfortable. I think most people acquainted with Trump's history would understand that Trump was a SINNER in capital letters. Divorced many times, adulterous many times, an asshole of an entitled pretend businessman on a trust fund turned into a reality television celebrity who would have to rent countless storage warehouses to contain all the skeletons rattling around his closets. A few key Christian leaders identified Trump has having a base appeal and the ability, if properly guided, to put power into the churches' hands. Their endorsements gave Trump a platform to stand on that ultimately led to his election to the Presidency.

While the leadership may have often preached Trumpmania from the pulpit, many Christians were appalled at any leader of faith taking a political stance on the church's behalf, let alone this particular stance. But it should have surprised no one that cashchucker money hoarding megachurches would support a man who represented a lot of the trappings of those churches: the tackiness of false wealth and the lie of bootstrap American dream climberism. Never mind that the man is



a pathological liar, racist, sexist, rapist, non-empathetic, corporate baron. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. Most importantly, a Trump presidency could mean that the all-important pro-life movement could finally be resolved against federally mandated abortion rights and perhaps something could be done about gay marriage, prayer in schools, and church school discrimination. While Trump himself could do very little about this, Trump the president could ensure that the courts be packed with conservative judges that would rule favorably to church doctrine. So even some of the church leaders who had reservations about the content of his character it was ultimately the size of his potential presidential rubber stamp that persuaded the majority of Christians to let Brother Donald into the faith, mount a holy saddle upon his back, and ride his presidency into the promised land.

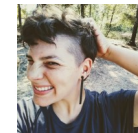
It is important to remember that the church does not a Christian make. It is also important to remember that following the teachings of Christ is what makes one a Christian. Let's leave citizen Trump out of it for the moment, though there's plenty of lies, sexual assaults, bigotry, and unfair dealings to choose from there. When a true Christian looks at the record of the Trump administration that person cannot like what they sees. Trump and company separated refugee families from one another and imprisoned the helpless children in what amounted to dog kennels. Years later these families are still broken. Trump seeks to build a border wall that would keep asylum seekers from reaching this country. Trump is almost incapable it seems of ever telling the truth. The media has caught him in tens of thousands of lies since he took office. And now, when the world has watched the 8 minutes 46 seconds it took former Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin to crush the larynx to death of George Floyd, the world has responded by taking to the streets in protest. And when I say the world, I mean even non-Americans outside of America took to the streets in solidarity with American protesters. For the most part the protests have been non-violent, but there has been looting and destruction of property both commercial and government. Rather than watching this video and then reacting with empathy of watching someone's brother, son, husband, father, friend losing their life to an

authoritarian gone mad Trump instead sees it in the eyes of "law and order", casting out racist dog whistles right and left.

Early this month, after a speech declaring that he was going to use the U.S. military to "dominate the streets", Trump's regime had nearby St. John's Episcopal Church violently cleared of all protesters, bystanders, and clergy so he could stand in front of this church with a bible in his hands for a photo-op. He wasn't there to speak to the press, protesters, bystanders, or clergy. He sent the national guard and private Blackwater goons to clear the way so Trump could take a photo that would appear to make him look like he was a warrior of the good word using its teachings to clear the streets of the heathen wrongdoer. In other words, Donald Trump stood with a bible in hands, not his own (he would not say where it came from but it quickly disappeared into daughter Ivanka's designer handbag after its use as a prop had concluded), as if the words contained therein supported him and his policies as he, in turn, also supported and lived by the tenants captured inside that tome. This is a very different act than accepting the support of Christian leaders in order to get elected and then moving on. This is an attempt by Trump to hijack *your* faith and what it actually offers to Christians and subvert it to his will, as he has done with every other political and social resource at his disposal. The cliché goes that religion is the last refuge of the scoundrel, but considering that Christ would likely be in the streets offering love and empathy to the protesters and the family and friends of George Floyd, Trump's cooption is a perfect anti-Christian reaction. Were we living in truly biblical times that book would have opened itself up and melted Trump on the spot in choice *Raiders of the Lost Ark* fashion.

This should appall you. It should motivate you to take your faith back, not just from Trump but from the powers that allowed him to believe that he could use Christianity as a weapon, or that somehow that bible weaponizes him in Christ's name. The powers that allowed Trump to believe he could get away with separating refugee families at the southern border and cage their children like animals, the powers to allow police forces to wantonly harm the citizens they are supposed to serve and protect. While I am not one of you I know enough of you and about your faith that I know Trump *does* not represent your values. But he is quite willing now to take your faith, twist it, morph it, and *perv*ert it for his political gains. This isn't about morality, shame, or sin. This is 100% about *winning*. Can this possibly be the turning point that you, his infallibly supportive political base, will crack? Only if Christians such as yourself take a long hard look at yourselves in the mirror and ask whether this is what Christ would have done. If the answer is no, then it's high time you do something about it and save your faith and your country before it is too late. I'm not sure that we can survive another four years of this fake Christian. — KELLY MENACE

## ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP



So here we are, four (?) months into the shit-pocalypse and the blades on the fan keep spinning, the whole world is festering and suddenly it's all engulfed in a righteous fire. How are you doing? I'm three days into a vodka binge. I've cried more times this week than I have since the quarantine started. I can barely grit my teeth and bear sitting down to write this article. But here I am. Showing up. Being brave. Existing despite my desire not to. At all. Everything hurts so fucking bad. Everything is heavy. I want to numb it all and make it go away.

It's Wednesday, I think. But I don't know if the days of the week matter anymore as we are ALL living through a radically shifting frame of time. I do not have to make a list to remind you of all the turmoil, corruption, hysteria and chaos that is currently burning a fire through our nation, our world and our hearts. It is completely normal for our minds to feel overwhelmed, exhaustion or even defeat. I don't know how you feel about grief but I am experiencing a lot of it.

I read once that grief is a space where Love once lived. Here is her story.

I will tell it to you, as it was told to me, from the beginning when only the moon was watching. One day Love built a home, deep in the woods, far away. She cut the limbs from the forest trees. She forged her own bricks for her stove. She thatched her roof and fashioned a door upon a hinge that swung to and fro. Each day she built a fire and began the day's bread. She gathered her skirts and walked gently on the earth through the forest floor. Love gathered herbs. Love gathered friends. And the moon was watching. Love gathered community in the spirit of Life surrounding her hand built home. Each day she laid her gifts and dreams upon her mantle and gave thanks for the love and abundance surrounding her. Each day she went out to gather more. Then one day the hand built home burned down. Love sat with the home as it burned and wept with sorrow. Love wept for loss. Love wept for her pain. Love wept with grief until she was empty, soaking the earth with her tears. Then Love stepped into the fire and let it burn her up to. The moon was watching. The moon watched Love vanish into smoke and flames. When dawn approached, only the cob brick stove of Love's hand built home remained.

Grief is a tricky space where most of us don't want to hang out for too long. Sometimes there is a shell of space left over from loss or trauma. We grieve for something that was out of our control. We grieve for good things that may not ever come. We watch our world burning and we grieve. We watch humans suffering and we grieve. We watch our friends lose their battles to illness or addiction and we grieve. Grief is just Love with nowhere to go.

What makes a difference in our lives as we move forward, is whether or not we have a witness to this story. Who is the moon watching you? I write a lot about community because it is the web that binds us all together. I am not me without you. This week we lost a thread in the web of our DTB community and we are all trembling from the vibration. I didn't know Jared the way most of you did but I have been a witness to your stories and they are filled with love. Now that he is gone, where will your love go? As we ride the waves of the apocalypse into the next half of 2020, my prayer for you is to live life with that love and compassion and grace, for yourselves and each other. — HALEY RICHARDSON



JUST AN IDIOT  
NOT A RACIST IDIOT



# A VERY STABLE GENIUS

The meticulously-researched book *A Very Stable Genius: Donald J. Trump's Testing of America* by Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalists Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig reveals that Trump is easily the worst president in modern history.

Rucker won his Pulitzer for work with others at the Washington Post on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Leonnig was also part of the same Post team Pulitzer effort, but she also won a Pulitzer during the Obama administration in 2015 about security failures within the Secret Service.

The book covers the period of time through the transition of power from Obama to Trump up to the revelation that the president tried to extort the Ukraine president to help Trump in his 2020 reelection bid. Trump was impeached for that blatant use of national power for personal gain.

Rucker and Leonnig detail the often-appallingly way that Trump bullied almost everyone he came in contact with over nearly four years in office: with belittling, mean-spirited, and ugly remarks to their faces, in front of others, and behind their backs. This includes his Cabinet, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, foreign heads of state (America's allies), and his own staff including his personal lawyers.

Curiously, the authors found in their reporting that Trump was gracious and even simpering only when talking with Putin, the dictator of Russia, and Kim Jong-un, the dictator of North Korea.

Bellying rages by Trump were the order of almost every day during the past four years of the Trump administration. Invariably, they stemmed from something said on Fox News or other cable news television, something Trump watched hours and hours every day except while playing golf. He always recorded news programs he didn't watch live in order to review them later to hear his name.

Rucker and Leonnig found numerous instances where a Fox commentator – not a news reporter – would suggest something the president should be doing, and Trump would scream at his staff as to why he couldn't do that. In almost all of those cases, the suggestion would be illegal, or the administration was already doing it. Trump just didn't know what was going on, according to the reporters.

Trump's inability to read led to security briefings and other government reports being reduced from several pages to three pages to one page to a series of note cards. At his first meeting at the Pentagon with the Joint Chiefs, his Secretary of Defense, and Vice President Pence, Trump berated the military leaders, calling

them "dopes and babies." Pence, whose son is in the military, said nothing as did the others who were too husband Jared Kushner. The reporters could find nothing to say anything to their Commander in Chief, a draft dodger.

Another key point in this book is the jaw-dropping incompetence of Trump's daughter Ivanka and her ing positive to be said about them by anyone, and they seemed to have accomplished nothing positive while in the administration. As proudly ignorant as the president, the pair's main function was to undermine all others, sow discord at all costs, and curry favor with the president.

Rucker and Leonnig covered much of the same ground as previous books I've read about Trump's inability to comprehend government and common decency: journalist Michael Wolff, Rick Wilson (conservative Republican), Bob Woodward (another Pulitzer winner), and reporter Katy Tur.

One tidbit is when Trump was visiting the battleship Arizona memorial in Pearl Harbor, he had no idea about what happened other than it was a historic battle. Current chief of staff John Kelly had to fill in the details about WWII, the Japanese attack, "day of infamy," and all that. "Dangerously uninformed" was one senior adviser's observation.

These reporters examined the Mueller report extensively in its findings of that Trump made constant attempts to obstruct justice. However, they conclude Mueller was played by Attorney General Barr as well as Trump.

The most astonishing thing about this book is at no time did Trump ever profess any coherent vision for his presidency. Even his friends contend he never had one or has one. They say once he hatches an idea in his head, no amount of facts will shake him as he believes he is always right despite all evidence to the contrary.

The most depressing thing about this book is the authors call upon the Republicans to do the right thing during the impeachment process to corral this obvious danger to American democracy. Sadly, we know how that turned out.

Finally, the truth of Trump's incompetence is laid out in readable prose. This is superior to Woodward's awkward writing – he was never a good writer, just a great reporter. This is considerably stronger than Wolff's sloppy reporting, more measured than Wilson's often-propane tit-for-tat, and more wide-ranging than Tur's individual account. Every American deserves to know this about our president. America may depend on it come election day. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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# READING TA-NEHISI COATES BY THE LIGHT OF A BURNING CITY

I read Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between The World And Me* in the fall of 2016 and rejected both the text and its author. Coates's tone felt too venomous to be constructive, roiling with an anger that frightened me, that set my hackles on the defensive. I much preferred the measured and cool voice of James Baldwin, whose anger translated into something far more cerebral, less poetic and visceral. Coates wrote from the heart. He opened his jugular ink well and released the terror held in his Black American body. The fact that Coates, like James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*, wrote his book as an instruction manual for a teenage boy on navigating the American experience shocked me all the more. It was too violent. Too reactionary. I highlighted one particular episode, somewhere towards the middle of the book, in which Coates remembers sharing beers on a New York City rooftop with friends as they watched the smoke from the Twin Towers rise. He explained his inability to feel sorrow for first responders on the ground. He could not grieve anyone in uniform injured or killed in their work. At the time, in fall 2016, I read this episode and imagined Coates celebrating the death of first responders, holding out a toast to their demise, and, in his telling this story here, instructing his teenage son to do the same. Based on this reading, I wrote Ta-Nehisi Coates off for good and widely pronounced his depravity. Plenty of Black voices in the struggle could be trusted — for instance, James Baldwin, who is so cognitively tidy with his rage — but not Coates. Avoid Coates at all costs.

My initial response to *Between The World And Me* echoes a typical Caucasian response to minority experiences. Caucasian men often have similar responses to female narratives, including Caucasian women, perhaps even women they know personally. And that response is not as evil or hate-filled as it is born of experiential ignorance and a lack of humility. When I look back at who I was in 2016, I do not see myself as evil or hate-filled. In fact, several key factors in my life — several points along the course of my own relational and emotional narrative — illuminate the opposite of evil and hatred in my heart. Looking back, even just three and a half years ago, I see in myself a man eager for social and spiritual unity. A man who sought to digest various narratives, who invited the voices of minority men and women into his spaces and consciousness. I identified as a Black Lives Matter advocate, a feminist, and an ally for LGBTQ compassion. I had even, in the summer of 2015, sacrificed familial intimacy fighting for the honor of Black America. And for these reasons, I refused to be the antagonist Coates railed against. I was a good dude. I was "Woke". Really, Ta-Nehisi, let me buy you a beer. I can show you.

We are taught as young readers to find ourselves in the books we read. This, it turns out, may be terrible advice. Reading books (or consuming any artform) in an effort to see ourselves in someone else's work often leads us to read with colonizing eyes, forcing ourselves into narratives not meant to contain us. In response, we often grow hostile or defensive to stories that do not immediately reflect our own realities. I approached Ta-Nehisi Coates this way three years ago. I did not know how to read his story as *his* story. I did not know how to allow Coates his own perspective as a Black man from Baltimore apart from my own White upbringing in South Arkansas. Also, I could not read Coates's emotional admissions without the filter of my own racial activism, and so I responded defensively. I fought against him. I exalted my efforts towards "Wokeness" above his experience of Blackness, taking offense that this chump would dare be angry at an America I had already hoped

to change. In attempting to see myself in the book I was reading, I built a wall of anger to match the author's and, sadly, infatuated with my own internal reactions, I failed to hear Coates's voice altogether. This was an unfair response on my part. It was irresponsible reading. Worse, it was irresponsible humanity.

Ten days ago, George Floyd died beneath the knee of a Minneapolis police officer. In response, America has been set ablaze. Literally, riots have erupted, causing great destruction to major cities. Figuratively, the nation has flamed with a multitude of reactions, even towards or against the reactions themselves. The news of one more Black man dying in the streets at the hands of law enforcement certainly demands a response. Within the Black community, the response has centered around the repetitive nature of such crimes. However, in the White community responses have proven complex enough — politically, theologically, economically, relationally — to become divisive. But when I think back to my own response towards Ta-Nehisi Coates three years ago, I realize that, for some of my White brothers and sisters, they simply cannot read the death of George Floyd apart from themselves and their own experience. They do not know cognitively and have not experienced personally the fraught history between their own community and flawed authority. They have not felt the crushing heat of marginalization. They cannot fathom that while, yes, people die in this country everyday and while, yes, all lives do matter, few White people have ever questioned how their bodies do or do not fit into the prevailing American narrative. This inability to participate in George Floyd's death apart from themselves leads many to respond in callous, cavalier, even antagonistic ways.

I want more for my friends and family — hell, I want more for myself — than this. And I want more than this because God created us with the capacity for a deeply abiding unity, one that allows us to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. I am incapable of doing so as fully as I am able when I fail to engage my neighbor as a complete and not-me individual. I cannot witness George Floyd's death and Ta-Nehisi Coates's life advice as the unique monuments they are as long as I comb the text of their lives for evidence of myself. As if I need such validation. As if their existence were a stage-light to mine. No. The essence of unity is the fullness of one being colliding with the fullness of another being. For this reason, I want more for Floyd. I want more for Coates. I want more for my community at every shade and hue. Ironically, in giving the fullness of my heart's attention to them, I gain more in the long-run. This is the divine mystery of humility, which is the gravitational force of unity.

I reread Coates's *Between The World And Me* again this week, and I found it to be a very different book than I remembered. Coates's pain and anger made more sense to me now. His battered down, tough-love advice to his son felt more righteous and wise. Even the scene from the New York City rooftop, his beer bottle shrouded with the soot of fresh history smouldering before him, was painted with a touch of confessed shame that made my heart ache. And by finally allowing Coates to tell his story, I felt an empathy that shattered me as much as anything I've witnessed in real-time this past week. The biggest difference was my handing Coates the microphone instead of a mirror. In doing so, I encountered a different book this time around. Except that, and oddly enough, not one blot of print had changed. — KEVIN STILL



# PROTEST ROUNDUP

In the century-long three and a half years of this presidential term, I've attended a handful of protests, something I never did before 2017. The power and strength of collective demonstration wasn't yet known to me before his election, I guess. I first tasted that righteous energy at the Women's March in Houston on Inauguration Day 2017, then again at the Women's March held the next two years. I attended a March for Science in East Texas and a year ago, I dragged my teenaged son to a demonstration outside Bill Flores's office at Briarcrest and Highway 6 to protest family separation at the border. (He later told me he was glad to be a part of it, though he was a bit startled when his picture ended up on the front page of *The Eagle*.) I even got to help a local activist group hang an Impeach banner over the University Drive overpass last fall during the Senate proceedings and could see clearly how many local people despise demonstrators.

At all of the local events, hostile honks were a near constant. There is a certain species of pick-up driver who accelerates aggressively in his jacked-up, extended cab truck to show anger. That guy was always there and he would bring his friends too, to spray the crowds with sooty exhaust fumes. We always heard some positive honks too – "Hullabaloo Caneck Caneck" tapped out on a car horn or a short blast accompanied by a thumbs up – and treasured the smiles and the "Good job!" shouted out the occasional window, but the thumbs down and the middle finger up were more common. I even saw an angry fender bender in the backed-up traffic below the overpass on the banner drop evening. A driver looked up at the enormous painted Impeach banner, leaned his head out the window to scream at us as he accelerated away, then promptly ploughed into the vehicle ahead of him which was stopped in traffic.

This past week was a bit different. I attended another protest, the Justice for Everyone event held at the intersection of George Bush and Texas Avenue, but this time at the urging of my 17-year-old daughter who had gotten herself on a notification list. We were there to share our grief about George Floyd. We were there to bear witness of the value of his life and to demand justice for his death in Minneapolis.

This event was organized by young people and there were scores of teenagers and college students lining the sidewalks and intersection medians. We did see the occasional plume of exhaust as that aggressive pick-up driver sped by, but for every disgruntled heckler, there were nine drivers putting their fists up in a show of support. For every one persnickety driver giving a judgmental ts-k-ts-k of the fingers, there were tens more hollering "Yes!" or "Black lives matter!" or "Amen!" out their open sun roofs and rolled down windows.

One grumpy middle-aged biker managed to slow down enough to scream, "Get a job and grow up!" right at my daughter. She turned to me and said with composure, "Ha! I do have a job. I just worked for seven hours, but it's a Saturday afternoon. Doesn't he know about weekends? And if he were actually grown up, he would be wearing a helmet instead of driving unsafely."

When the first of many giant pick-up trucks rolled by and its driver actually gave a huge smile and raised fist, I got tears in my eyes. It felt like something in the collective

consciousness had shifted. The horror of George Floyd's murder, layered as it is with the horror over Ahmaud Arbery's execution and Breonna Taylor's death and the unjust, terrifying shootings of Atiana Jefferson and Jordan Edwards and Botham Jean by police officers and the scores and scrolls of other such victims, has taken a powerful shape and form. That horror and anger is manifesting itself throughout the country and the world. In some places, it shows itself with violence. In College Station on a hot afternoon, the demonstration was only peaceful. But the righteous anger is here. We are here. — *ERIN HILL*

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La Porte is as typical a MAGA town as you will find in Texas. Therefore, I didn't expect many people to show up to this march. I was pleasantly surprised when 300-500 people braved the Texas heat to march. The police presence, while significant and visible, was discreet. Having seen how badly some of these protests have gotten, I was a bit concerned and frankly a bit nervous about participating in the march. However, as much as the punk rock part of me wants to say otherwise, La Porte PD handled the situation professionally. Amazing enough, if the police don't show up to a protest march in riot gear looking for a fight, there is a very strong chance they won't get one as was the case with this march. The protesters marched to the town square peacefully and without incident. The few spectators watching the march viewed the march with bemused attachment; in the same fashion as they would a parade. Upon reaching the town square the protesters spent 8:46 seconds lying on the ground in memory of George Floyd. I spotted a small group of folks in camo outside the town square looking on during the protest that looked as if they could be trouble. Several police officers, however, were standing by them – whether they were keeping them in line or lamenting the situation with them I'll never know. Overall, this march showed that peaceful protest doesn't have to end in violence. — *RENTED MULE*

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When I heard there was a protest happening in Bryan, (a friend who was later arrested on false accusations sent me a link to the event) I did not know what to expect. I had heard so many horror stories about rubber bullets and brutality in other places like Dallas and Austin. There was a fear of what to expect. But then I got there.

What happened in Bryan on May 31st 2020 was a beautiful demonstration of community coming together. I saw people of all colors, ages, tax brackets, all there to support our brothers and sisters being marginalized. I saw people driving by flailing their fists in support. I saw tears flowing down faces of people driving by.

Unfortunately, I saw an ugly side too. I saw people pumping black smoke from their exhaust into the air. I saw hate. There was even a man who felt so angry, that he got out of his truck and showed hateful hand gestures.

But despite the few cruel individuals, the compassion and unity of the community shone through it all. I am so incredibly proud to be a part of the BCS community. — *TAYLOR HUGGINS*



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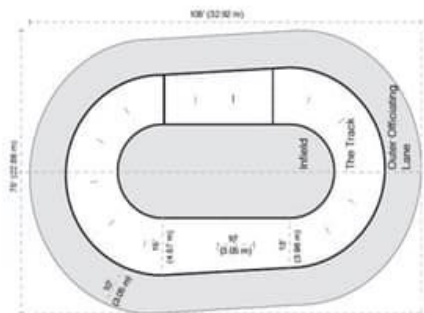
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# RECORD



**Testament**  
*Titans of Creation*

Most metalheads know the Big Four of thrash metal are Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, and Anthrax, but this is a fact any novice metalhead would know. In other words, this should not be a litmus test for determining poser status. While they have their place, and the Big Four's talent is self-evident, any true thrash metal fan knows that the genre expands far beyond them. There are bands who have equal, or in some cases superior, talent in comparison to the Big Four, which often goes criminally unrecognized. One such band is Testament.

Hailing from the renowned Bay Area, Testament's reputation for hard-hitting thrash metal ranked alongside legendary acts such as Exodus, Death Angel, and Metallica. After demo appearances with then lead singer, Steve "Zetro" Souza (who would later go on to front Exodus), the band eventually solidified their place in the thrash metal pantheon with an album, aptly titled, *The Legacy*, which had been Testament's original name before a copyright conflict. Acquiring the incredible vocal talents of Chuck Billy as the official lead singer of the band, Testament's premiere record boasted punishingly fast riffs, creative melodies intricately woven through the songs, and darkly sinister overtones revealed most prominently in the lyrics. The addition of Chuck on vocals truly made the band unique, as his voice is not the harsh bark often heard in other thrash acts; rather, he sings with controlled melody, tone, and ambience.

Since their humble beginnings, Testament has proven themselves one of the best thrash metal bands in history. This year, the band has graced

listeners with a new offering titled *Titans of Creation*. The first thing that stands out is the artwork. Eliran Kantor created a colorful piece depicting literal titans creating the universe. The image possesses the classical appeal of ancient Greco-Roman art combined with an interesting balance of science fiction/fantasy, and mythology (yes, there is difference between fantasy and mythology). Had I not known this was a Testament record, I never would have guessed it to be thrash metal; Kantor's is truly one of the most beautiful covers I've seen in the genre.

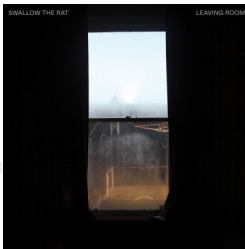
My first impression was that, perhaps, Testament repeated lyrical themes from their previous record, *Brotherhood of the Snake*, which involved aliens, Sumerian mythology, conspiracy theories, and other interrelated topics, but this is not quite the case. The lyrics on *Titans of Creation* cover everything from religious extremists, serial killers, the occult, mythology, and ancient history. In short, it is a slightly different lyrical path than *Brotherhood of the Snake*, but not entirely, and it still possesses a dark, foreboding over each track.

Like the previous three albums, *Titans of Creation* showcases a variety of sounds, tempos, and genre integration. The opening track, "Children of the Next Level" comes out swinging with speedy and crushing riffs, letting the listeners know right away that this is indeed a Testament record. "Night of the Witch" is one of the strangest songs ever written by Testament, which has many changes from the tempo, riffs, and melodies; it also incorporates some death screams that are borderline black metal, which I suppose is appropriate given the lyrical content. "City of Angels" is almost a ballad where Chuck sings a haunting song about the Night Stalker serial killer. Yet more variety is the song "Symptoms" which is slow, groovy, and peppered with Chuck's guttural death growls; it's hard not to headbang to this song, as it is very reminiscent in its approach to Pantera's "Five Minutes Alone". The lyrical direction of this album is also quite interesting, but in particular, the one that peaked my interest was the song "The Healers" wherein Chuck recalls his time in seeking help from a

Native American shaman for the treatment of his cancer; an experience which he claims helped him to defeat his affliction.

The one thing I give massive kudos to Testament for is their consistency. At first, Testament was straight up thrash with an emphasis on melody, but they later experimented with death metal in such a way that made the band feel entirely different (I'm not a fan of that era). However, with the release of *The Formation of Damnation*, the band found a niche which brought back most of Testament's original thrash sound while incorporating new ideas to keep the band fresh. However, I sometimes wish that Testament would just do a stripped down, old school thrash metal album. I don't mind the new elements, as they do add something nice to the mixture, but sometimes fans just want to bang their head and jump into the pit.

With their subsequent albums leading up to *Titans of Creation*, Testament has crafted a sound they, and fans alike, can appreciate. In comparison to recent music by the Big Four, I can honestly say that Testament continues to release work on equal footing, and sometimes better, than their previous efforts. *Titans of Creation* offers a cold, deadly slab of thrash which speaks to the maturity and masterful musicianship of a legendary band. For that, it gets a 4.5 from me. — CALEB MULLINS



**Swallow The Rat**  
*Leaving Room*

As a songwriter I understand that once I've written a song and put it out into the universe that whatever that song means to me, whatever I wrote it about, it may still be about that or still

mean that to me, but that it likely will mean something entirely different to someone else. I also understand that the context of the times can also allow a song written entirely in a different context to take on a new meaning, to symbolize something else to someone else because of what is going on around them. I wrote a song called "My New Normal" about adjusting to the changes in people over a long relationship. "This is just my new normal/ better get used to it/death is the only way out" goes the chorus. In these times those words have taken on a new meaning, an extra layer of depth, than they might have had otherwise. New Zealand noise rock quartet Swallow The Rat sing-shouts "Millennial breakdown/empathy is dead" on "New Cross", the leadoff track on their new album *Leaving Room*, it had absolutely nothing to do with current geopolitics but now it cannot be heard without being placed into the new normal the world finds itself inside. Or when Sam Vercoe chants "This is the time/to not be so unkind" while the band sounds very unkind in "Cold Moon" that describes the weird inhumanity we find in America at a time when it's really not called for...it is almost like Swallow The Rat predicted our current plaque mentality.

There is a sense of menace across the album's ten songs. The band is not melodic nor poppy, but neither do they cross over into pure agro noise either. Brian Purington's slide guitar adds a whoozy atmosphere to the songs while Stephen Horsley's post-punk basslines keeps it all together. Sam Vercoe's vocals have the snotty singspeak punk rock timbre of pre-major label Thurston Moore but the band on songs like "Bird of Ill" the band combines a very Dunedin sort of reverberated verse to their brand of crunchy indie rock. "Echoes of a Tide" bears the definite influence of *Sister* era Sonic Youth.

All told, *Leaving Room* is an excellent debut for a band that kind of has no peer right now, making a dark and foreboding, almost gothic sound without using the obvious trappings and tropes. The songs are unsettling, cinematic, and thrilling. It's not a pleasant ride but it is a gripping one nonetheless and worth the price of admission to climb on. — KELLY MENACE

# REVIEWS



## Warbringer

### *Weapons of Tomorrow*

Just when I thought Warbringer's previous offering, *Woe to the Vanquished*, was spectacular, I was not ready for the beast that is *The Weapons of Tomorrow*. Typically, thrash metal bands have a certain projection where the first five albums are their best, but then, due to refusing to grow, or, worse, by changing their sound entirely to a shell of their former glory, such bands fall from the grace of their once fiercely loyal fans. After exploring Warbringer's discography, and carefully noting the direction of the band's musical creativity, I observed a same pattern. I feared the band reached its peak with *Woe to the Vanquished*, and that this sixth offering would be another *St. Anger*, which is infamously cursed by fans, or a *Youthanasia*, which featured a few memorable songs but is mostly forgettable. But oh, was I wrong...very, VERY wrong! The question that, I suppose, some may ask of a band like Warbringer, who is steadily headed for veteran status, is "What has the band done differently from previous records, if anything?" If the record is even remotely decent, one would think that they have done mostly nothing new, or so little new that no one would notice, and they simply keep to what they know best how to do, but no! With *Weapons of Tomorrow*, Warbringer has managed to strike an incredible balance between their original thrash formula and new musical incorporations that bring a refreshing and creative take to not only the band's sound, but to the band's very identity.

What then is so incredible about *Weapons of Tomorrow*? Firstly, the mix is perfect. It sits plumb on that "golden mean" between rough 'n' tough and polished and shined: the guitars, vocals, and drums get that "crunchy" appeal one hears in early Megadeth

and Slayer records, yet every instrument remains discernible. Then, there is the track order. The arrangement is totally sensible, beginning with a rapid rise and ending with a crashing fall that cumulates with a grim and sorrowful denouement.

So what about the songs? The record opens with an incredibly fast and aggressive track titled "Firepower Kills", the initial *Weapons* single. This track, along with "Unraveling", "Power Unsurpassed", and "Outer Reaches" are most reminiscent of Warbringer's previous work. However, a musical variety emerges slowly with each new song like a thorny black rose unfolding in the light of a full moon.

"The Black Hand Reaches Out" is mid-paced and groovy, built on a similar formula as "Remain Violent" from the previous album. However, the groove really hits home in "Crushed Beneath the Tracks". The riffs here are slower and more rhythmic as the guitars create the sound of tank tracks rolling through battlefields, turning bodies into hamburger. Without doubt, influence from Demolition Hammer can be found straddling death metal and thrash metal, and the grooves on "Crushed" are worthy of a Bolt Thrower reference. So masterfully constructed one can't help but headbang.

Yet another surprise is the black metal influence on "Defiance of Fate" and "Notre Dame (King of Fools)". The former has John Kevill belting a raspy, screechy, half-whispered wail through a darkened, melodic atmosphere which is quite beautifully done. The listener wouldn't recognize it as a thrash song until the riffs kick in. This was a talent I never knew he had! The latter song is a stunning, tremeloping tribute to the Notre Dame Cathedral, told from the perspective of the hunchback from Victor Hugo's classic novel. The song ends with a lament to the cathedral's burning in 2019, mourning it as a lost historic treasure. As a traditional catholic Christian, myself, I can't help but find this tribute refreshing given how many bands usually celebrate the burning of churches.

The final track, "Glorious End", is an absolute masterpiece. It is operatic, heart-wrenching, haunting, and unfolds like a tragic play; the very denouement I mentioned earlier. Warbringer has taken their

story-telling to a new level with this song — on the level of Sabaton, I dare say. It is an incredible closer to a thoroughly incredible record.

I heard one reviewer dubbed *Weapons of Tomorrow* as Warbringer's *Rust in Peace*, and given the predominantly blue artwork, and the sound of the record itself, I can say that this is a perfect description. Warbringer has successfully created a thrash masterpiece that will please loyal fans and attract new ones. This is a perfect example of how a band can grow, yet keep all the elements which made them great in the first place. What's more is that this album catches on very quickly; within two listens, I was able to grasp the pattern and progression with ease. When it comes to thrash, I honestly cannot find anything wrong with *Weapons of Tomorrow*, and for that, it gets solid 5.5, and is a contender for album of the year! — CALEB MULLINS

anything except leaving him.

One of the strongest tunes is the album closer simply titled "Mesa, AZ" about an aching loneliness in a vivid setting as Teichman's rich voice sings "You're my one/My only one." The story of "Moon Song" is as powerful about a man's ill-fated travels even as he tries to stay connected to the woman he loves.

"Race of Life" opens the album with an easy lope and rich lines such as appearing "at heaven's gate with whiskey breath" and "slow and steady wins the race." The urgent "What if I'm Wrong" boasts a snappy drum while "Diamond" is a bluesy change of pace.

Another striking tune is the melodic near-pop of "Silver City" that is again set in the cold with vibrant images while the gentle folk of "Just a Heart" examines "what went wrong/ what went right" in a failed relationship.

Teichman leaves the band behind for the slow acoustic "Hard-headed, Heartbroke and Lowdown" that pretty much sums up the song. The solo setting is particularly effective to me as that's how I first heard his music. Check it out. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

## HEART OVER MIND

JOE TEICHMAN

### Joe Teichman *Heart Over Mind*

This is the first full album by the former Bryan resident whose music holds a special place for me — the record release show for his first recording *Backburner* at Stafford was my second date with the woman who became my wife.

Teichman has been relocated in Colorado for a number of years, and this album reflects somewhat the change of scenery — the almost-rocking "Mountains in the Darkness" about heartbreak is one example. Teichman continues to work in the country Americana vein with his emotive deep voice and comfortable melodies.

The title cut and "Easy Decision" are both lively two-step tunes, the former about not being over a lost love. The latter puzzles over how a woman always had trouble deciding on

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