

The Amazon Trail: Resisting the War on Freedom

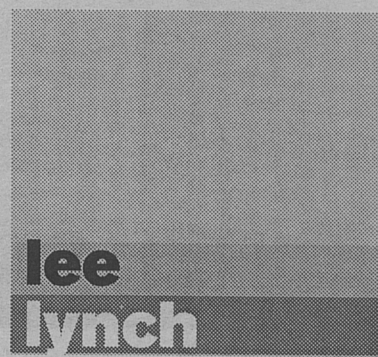
Eugene, Oregon. Sebastopol, California. Burlington, Vermont. Northampton (aka Lesbianville), Massachusetts. Ann Arbor, Michigan. Denver, Colorado. All of these cities and by now more, have passed resolutions calling for a full or partial repeal of the so-called Patriot Act. This act allows the U.S. government to detain without showing cause any person who is not a US citizen. It allows the federal government to enter any American's home or office to search property and computers without a warrant, without probable cause, and without notifying the owner. The act declares that the Federal Government can listen in to client/counsel communications through wire taps that require no judge's order, only a belief that someone is connected with foreign terrorists

We're not just talking suspected terrorists, we're talking about any one of us who steps over a line drawn by the hands of unfettered power, something gay people do every time we fall love. The Bill of Rights and the Constitution have been found irrelevant in the current climate of fear and belligerence. We may not have struck against Iraq

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yet, but we're deep into a war on freedom. And gay people have more to lose than most when our government tells loses sight of protected rights because we are being attacked.

And yes, the U.S. is being attacked, of course we're being attacked, and like any other scared animal I want to be protected, to run and hide in my burrow until it's over, until I feel safe. I had a physical problem a few weeks ago that caused me more pain than I've ever



felt before. Although I have no love for the medical establishment or the pharmaceutical industry, nothing would have kept me from that emergency room and from test results that calmed my fears. I was grateful to the point of tears when they jabbed that intravenous morphine into my hand and increased the amount until the pain stopped.

So I understand the impulse of a nation suddenly in a world of pain, surprised by its vulnerability and at last convinced of its own mortality. A virtual emergency room was set up in Washington, D.C. on 9/11/01 while most of the nation was focused on the recovery efforts in New York. For some months after, we Americans were in great pain,

stunned to acquiescence by our wounds. We gave ourselves over to the supposed professionals who ran with our permission and created not sane policies, but a reign of paranoia marketed as the highest patriotism.

Goodness knows I'm glad to be an American

and glad to be living in a country created as a democracy. What I can't understand is how the enemy without formed a twisted enemy within. Did the initial urge toward protection somehow sour with a desire for revenge? Did the power we gave the administration in our helplessness burgeon into madness? I've received the passage below from more than one e-correspondent since the passage of the Patriot Act and the escalation of the "War on Terrorism."

"Why of course the people don't want war! But after all it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger."

This quotation is attributed to Hermann Goering, Hitler's designated successor. I've read that after World War I, he was admitted to a mental hospital and, in September 1925, to an asylum for dangerous inmates, becoming a morphine addict in the course of his extended recovery. At the Nuremberg Trials he was found guilty of conspiracy to wage war, crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. We've seen the result of his particular combination of madness and power.

The pain of the Patriot Act is not as immediate as the pain that put me in the hospital, but it's bearing down fast. When will the stalwart groups of pacifists be deemed too dangerous to be allowed our dissent? When will the entertainment mega-corporations be enlisted to flood airwaves with propaganda? Can public radio survive more cuts? When will the alterative press find our howls of objection censored? And when the right wing bulldozer rolls over our inalienable rights, who will lie among the crushed, patriot or not, Republican or Democrat, Muslim or Jew, but the time-honored scapegoats, gay Americans.

We have a major stake in prodding our municipalities to pass more resolutions calling for full or partial repeals of the so-called Patriot Act. I suspect it's no fluke that Lesbianville already has. This mostly symbolic campaign echoes the outraged cries that turned the country against the war in Viet Nam and against segregation. Whenever leaders abuse power it is only the voice of the people refusing to do their bidding that can stop their madness. ▼

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University Press, 1984

▼ *The Passion of Emily Dickinson*, by Judith Farr, Harvard University Press, 1992

▼ *Chloe Plus Olivia*, edited by Lillian Faderman, Viking, 1994

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behind a huge number of letters and poems. I shall close with one of her most famous, exciting and problematic stanzas:

*Wild nights! Wild nights!
Were I with thee,
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!*

Further Reading:

▼ *The Anxiety of Gender*, by Vivian R. Pollack, Cornell

Belles

cont'd from previous page

died, Susan did not attend the funeral. Her husband, Austin, was in the middle of his very open affair with Mabel Todd, and although Mabel had never actually met Emily, she went to the funeral with Emily's brother.

It was Susan who washed and dressed the body, and who wrote the eulogy.

Emily Dickinson left

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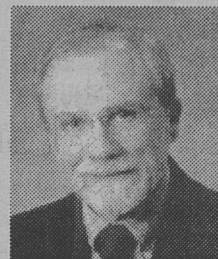
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