

Priest—sexist and paternal. The Angels roll out a stove for the audience's adoration, along with some sacramental Rice-a-Roni (the Saint Francisco treat). Doris the grandmother bids last and wins. Overwhelmed with The Spirit, she can barely mount the stage and gets lost approaching the host. Alas, Doris loses at "Squeeze Play" and the general morale plummets, but cameras pan the crowd, "Applause" signs flash, and spirits soar once more. No place for depression in The Temple!

George ascends next. He sports a natty white moustache, white polyester clothes of the retirement sort, and long, roguish sideburns—the "Fallen Rector" look. In order to gain access to the Church treasury, he must acquire giant tablets by correctly bidding and skillfully drop them into a giant maze. But the Devil seems to have his paws on the huge wafers, for they all fall with a thud into worthless slots. The Rector slinks off, hoping for later redemption at the Big Wheel.

With no contests left, the cameras pan the losers, forcing them to assume courageous smiles while their paltry consolation prizes come up on the screen: Dessert-of-the-Month-Club memberships, multivitamins, and Fi-Bars with semidiscredited oat bran. We have one more go-around at the Giant Prayer Wheel and Doris triumphs. This means the Matriarch must confront the Vestal Virgin in the culminating ceremony.

Priest Barker now presides over the final and most austere ritual of the service—the Showcase Showdown. The first showcase is wondrous—Lakers season tickets, a computer, and a car. Will a bid of \$12,500 get Doris into the *Sanctum Sanctorum*? The second showcase features the disconnected legs of a model emerging from a huge black bathtub, a bedroom set, and, finally, a houseboat.

By the grace of the Television Gods, the more photogenic Vestal Virgin bids closer to the mark and is declared the winner. Canned music swells and, with the bounty of the Church treasury as backdrop, we close out the service with High Priest Barker gazing out over his flock and joking contentedly with the nubile Temple Angels.

We viewers must now brace ourselves for a jarring descent from the sacred to the mundane—the midday news. Our only solace lies in knowing that approximately seven hours later we will be able to reconsecrate ourselves by observing

the austere rituals involving another Sacred Wheel—this one presided over by the great goddess Vanna White.

Stephen Provizer writes from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Guerrillas In Our Midst

by Sarah J. McCarthy

The L.A. Riots Remembered

Grappling with the meaning of the L.A. riots, wondering with Rodney King why we can't get along, I muse about days long ago when I was a terroristette for the women's movement. I cared so much about violence against women that, with a group of my sisters, I participated in a rampage of window-smashing, targeting theaters showing films such as *Dressed to Kill* and *He Knows You're Alone*. I know the thrill of the brick in the hand that smashes the plate-glass window of the oppressor. "I wish we would've known about this in high school," shrieked one of my cohorts, "this is fun!" We ran through the night spray-painting on streets we dare not usually walk, mini-looting by ripping off magazines from pornography stores, and chanting "We're together, we're not alone."

And so you see, I understand the terrorist impulse, or at least the terroristette one, for we would never have carried out such impulses had there been people—men or women—who had their faces or arms or jugulars cut by this rain of glass. The brick that crushes the human skull is what separates the terroristette from the full-blown variety. The rage that fuels the aggrieved rebel can be understood and indulged by society up to that point where the brakes are gone, restraint is thrown to the wind, reason and fair play are smashed, and the oppressed are transformed into monsters worse than the ones they are fighting. Too many blacks in America have reached that point.

I remember the precise moment when I first noticed that oppressed people transform themselves into monsters. It was when Arab terrorists aboard the *Achille Lauro* threw Leon Klinghoffer,

helpless and wheelchair-bound, overboard into the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Enough, I said; I no longer cared a whit what nightmares of oppression had been suffered by these terrorists from the Middle East. A cheer rose from deep within me when Reagan put a missile through Muammar Al-Qaddafi's front door. Ronald Reagan and I knew we were looking at the face of evil, and we both had had enough. My antimilitary, anti-American-power stance melted away. This ex-Jane Fonda wannabe realized that American military power could be used for good as well as bad, used precisely to limit destruction, to remove surgically jets carrying terrorists from the skies.

The people of this great country should not be pistol-whipped and hit with a brick in the head by every punk with a grievance. We have been guilt-tripped enough—we have been sufficiently blamed and held responsible. We have had the word racist taped over our mouths like electrician's tape. The voices raised against black terrorism are now just a trickle, people tip-toeing gingerly on dangerous ground. The voices will rise to a crescendo as the terrorists become more and more outrageous, as the threats about wake-up calls and long hot summers become more disgusting, as the excuses and remorse of the "we are all responsible" apologists begin to sound more and more implausible. Many more will realize there is no appeasing the unappeasable, the permanently aggrieved.

A powerful metaphor for black guilt-tripping can be found in *Meridian* by black poet and author Alice Walker. Written before *The Color Purple*, Walker's book tells the story of a white woman, Lynne, who has gone South in the 60's to work for civil rights, where she marries a black man, Truman. Lynne and Truman have a black friend, Tommy Odds, who had his lower arm shot off in a demonstration. Because he was angry and people owed him and because Lynne was white, he wanted to make love to her. But Lynne was married to Truman and considered Tommy Odds only a friend. Walker writes:

For of course it was Tommy Odds who raped her. As he said, it wasn't really rape. She had not screamed once, or even struggled very much. To her, it was worse than rape because she felt that

circumstances had not permitted her to scream. As Tommy Odds said, he was just a lonely one-arm Nigger down on his luck that nobody had time for anymore. But she would have time—wouldn't she? Because she was not like those rough black women who refused to be sympathetic and sleep with him—was she? She would be kind and not like those women who turned him down because they were repulsed and prejudiced and the maroon stump of his arm made them sick. She would be a true woman and save him—wouldn't she?

... There was a moment when she knew she could force him from her. But it was a flash. She lay instead thinking of his feelings, his hardships, of the way he was black and belonged to people who lived without hope; she thought about the loss of his arm. She felt her own guilt. ... She did not any longer resist but tried to think of Tommy Odds as he was when he was her friend—and near the end her arms stole around his neck, and before he left she told him she forgave him and she kissed his round slick stump that was the color of baked liver, and he smiled at her from far away, and she did not know him. "Be seein' you," he said.

I thought of these characters the morning I watched Spike Lee smirk and swagger on the *Today Show* about the 95 degree heat coming last summer. Spike told us once before about the coming 95 degree heat in *Do the Right Thing*, a movie that sneered at the workaholic pizza-shop owner who was stupid enough to open a business among the hang-loose black guys who were takin' a long time out smellin' the flowers. They were doing something fun, something that made sense. These home boys were definitely not bustin' their butt for chump change. If they needed money they'd just show up on "mother's day" to pick up the welfare check or go downtown to "work" at ripping off food from some Korean grocery stores. Spike Lee, egging on the home boys, says that pulling that white truck driver out of his truck and beating him senseless was no different than what happened to Rodney King. "It's the same

video tape," he said. If the police officers are free, why should the brothers that beat the truck driver not be free, too? Surely a rich sophisticated movie producer like Spike Lee should be able to recognize the complexities of this issue if he really wanted to do the right thing. But he doesn't—he just wants to threaten and misunderstand like any adolescent with an appetite for destruction. Each and every night black men in every major city of this country are doing worse to each other than what was done to Rodney King. The Crips and the Bloods killed nearly one thousand people, mostly other young black men, on the streets of L.A. last year, making Willie Horton a statistically repetitive fact.

I sympathize with the competent professional Bryant Gumbel and other blacks as they squirm and recoil and agonize about these thugs, whose crimes they still mostly believe are our fault. It is more tolerable to blame it on white racism than on blacks who have gone bad, who have become corrupt and cynical and evil. We have been used to blaming white America for these things; and it has been less morally complex to blame them on lack of hope and money and role models. There is, however, a trickle of voices that are not buying these explanations, which have become excuses. Many of us are not accepting the blame or responsibility that is said to be ours. We will not tolerate murderous street punks being glorified into martyrs, victims, or revolutionaries as some of us did in the more innocent and naive days of the Black Panthers. Since then, I have heard black acquaintances laughing about getting their way by "playing poor little black boy" and sneering scornfully about whites "with their heads up their a----."

We watch the Crips and the Bloods on *Nightline*, and we and Ted Koppel are astounded at their intelligence and articulateness as they expound on their sociological perspective, which sounds incredibly like the platform of the Democratic Party. These are not some alien mutants as one might suspect upon hearing of their deeds; these men are con-artists. On *Oprah* they tell us they want money to build their version of Rodeo Drive. They tell us if *they* don't get the cash to rebuild L.A., they will torch it again the day the work is completed. I suspect they could buy and sell many of us with their bushel baskets

of drug money. They are young, strong, muscular, and intelligent and have a fashion sense that is cutting-edge. Some look like GQ models in well-fitted suits, others prefer ghetto chic with green and purple psychedelic silk shirts. No one looks scruffy or poor. They wear tattoos on their faces to remember the people they have killed. They sprinkle their articulate university poli-sci rhetoric liberally with colorful, creative street lingo. It is difficult to imagine why they can't finish school and get a job except that the jobs are too boring and don't pay as much as the drug business.

In my neighborhood there is a little strip-mall with a Lebanese immigrant family's restaurant, a lady who sells chipped ham and eggs, a plumber, a hardware store, an auto-body supply shop, a pizza place, a Chinese restaurant, a dry-cleaner, and an exotic pet store where a young guy in his early 20's sells pot-belly pigs and tropical fish. Surely, the Crips and the Bloods could fix toilets or sell tropical fish. Looking at them, it is hard to imagine what they cannot do.

It is time for them to do the right thing, to quit selling drugs to kids, to go back home and raise their children, to finish high school and make use of the community colleges that the residents of California have so generously provided at a cost to students of only \$90 per semester, to give up the con game of the permanently aggrieved, to quit being a shame and an embarrassment to their people, and to get a job. It is no less than what is expected of the rest of us. To demand any less would be racism.

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A Queer Car Ride by Robert Knight

We were on the same plane out of Dulles, and he was two rows ahead. His head was shaven, except for a tuft at the very top. With large ears and long, bare cranium he looked like the Sesame Street character Bert, as in Bert and Ernie. Bert always looks worried, bored, and anxious, and so did this man. The television studio had sent a limousine to pick up both of us from the air-