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Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

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PRYOR'S TRUTHS

BY LEE BALLINGER

Richard Pryor died on December 10, aged 65. From the October 2000 issue of *Rock & Rap Confidential*: "You should not even get on stage and attempt to be funny", Chris Rock said recently, "unless you realize you're never going to be as funny as Richard Pryor."

Anyone who doubts the truth of that statement is referred to ...*And It's Deep Too! The Complete Richard Pryor Warner Brothers Recordings* (1968-1992), a nine-CD box set just out on Rhino. Especially on the three complete concerts included, Pryor is revealed as not just the funniest man who ever lived, but an actor, a mimic, and a student of American history with few peers as well.

What gets lost in all the hoopla about Pryor's brilliant routines about sex and drugs is that he's also the most incisive political entertainer we've ever had. Unlike today's phony "political" comedians like Bill Maher, Richard Pryor took sides. He was always with the poor against the rich. Above all, he hated the police, whom he saw as inherently vile and brutal. He could sum up complicated realities in a heartbeat: "The Japanese sent people to UCLA and UC Berkeley. There wouldn't have been no Pearl Harbor if they had sent people to the University of Alabama or the University of Mississippi."

Pryor's relentless spotlight on hypocrisy was presented as a challenge to be met, not just cynical poking in an open wound. On a disc of outtakes here, *That African-American's Crazy: Good Shit From the Vaults*, Pryor tells in hushed tones of a conversation with God, who has asked to see Emmett Till. Pryor has to tell God that Till was lynched in 1957. God gasps, takes a step back, and murmurs, "But he was such a good young man."

"Well, then," God finally says, "I'd like to see my son. How's my kid doing?" CP

Bush, a Year Later

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN
AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Was there ever a president in worse shape a year after reelection than George Bush? Nixon, maybe. Was there ever a president more fortunate in the quality of the party opposing him? Bush wins that one in a walk. These days the only Democrat who sounds like Sam Ervin is John Murtha, and if his fellow Democrats had cold-shouldered Ervin the way they have Murtha, Nixon would have served out his second term.

The list of Bush's adversities scarcely needs repeating. On every front he's in trouble: the unpopularity of the war; the onslaught by fellow Republicans on the rendition flights and secret torture centers; the humiliation of Condoleezza Rice in Europe; the abandonment of New Orleans amid the surfacing of more incriminating e-mail traffic from the White House in the early days of the emergency. Even Haley Barbour, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, said in early December that the Bush administration was failing to live up to its obligations.

Each week brings fresh omens of unpopularity. Not everyone opens the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, but everyone looks at their utility bill and for those using natural gas the Christmas tidings are that it's going to cost consumers on average more than \$300 over and above last year's bill to heat their homes this winter.

Larger troubles loom. Outgoing chairman of the Fed Greenspan, broods out loud about the deficit and the air hissing out of the housing bubble. A CounterPuncher in Georgetown in Washington D.C., reports that For Sale signs that went up in the early fall are still there.

In the second week in December *Business Week* took a look at Loudoun county,

30 miles southeast (made one word) of the nation's capital, which has been the hottest real estate market in the country since 2000. The median sales price went from \$506,000 to \$480,000 in just two months. The average time houses stay on the market has increased by 62 per cent and is now at 42 days. Three For Sale signs go up for every two taken down. Spec developers are offering \$10,000-plus discounts on new homes.

Nationwide, *The Economist* reports that prices for new homes rose by only 1 per cent in the fiscal year ending in October of 2005. The previous 12 months saw a rise of 16 per cent. Unsold homes increased by 25 per cent.

We asked CounterPuncher Robert Pollin, professor of economics at U Mass, Amherst, for his take on the likely bust. His ominous response:

"The U.S. housing bubble began in earnest with the collapse of the stock market bubble in 2000, as investors, including foreign investors, moved their funds into housing as opposed to stocks. What will be the effects of the end of the bubble? If housing prices fall sharply, as is possible (as opposed to a "soft landing"), it could threaten the viability of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. These are two of the largest financial institutions in the U.S. and the world, and they are leveraged up to their teeth in mortgages, the collateral for which will collapse right along with the decline in housing prices.

Homeowners have also been borrowing against their newfound housing wealth to sustain high levels of consumption, and that too will decline. A real estate market collapse will not be pretty: Japan has yet (Bush continued on page 9)

What People Endure in This Country 50 Years after Rosa Parks

Your Papers, Please

BY ANN HARRISON

Deborah Davis, a 50-year-old mother of four, was riding the bus to work one morning in Denver when she discovered what happens to citizens who insist on their right to travel.

A security guard boarded Davis' public bus and demanded that all passengers show their ID. This was not the first time Davis had been asked to produce identification en route to work. The Route 100 bus transits through the Denver Federal Center that includes the offices of the Veterans Administration, U.S. Geological Survey, and part of the National Archives.

The Denver Federal Center is not a high security area, and Davis' ID was not compared against a "no ride" list. But the incident bothered Davis because she knew from her high school civics class that there is no law requiring American citizens to carry an ID or produce it on demand.

According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which oversees federal police, passenger ID checks on Route 100 began after the 1995 bombing

of a federal building in Oklahoma City. But forcing U.S. citizens to show an ID is a search without a warrant. It's also an ineffective security tool. Faked and stolen IDs are commonplace.

On this particular morning in late September, Davis decided that she was going to uphold her constitutional rights. When asked, she refused to show the guard her ID. He ordered her off the bus, but she refused explaining that she was simply trying to get to work.

The guard summoned a federal police officer who repeated the orders. Davis again refused and declined to hang up a phone call she had placed to a friend. "The whole thing seemed to be more about compliance than security," Davis told the *Denver Post*.

What happened next is an example of what people like Davis endure in this country fifty years after Rosa Parks took her stand on a public bus. The police officer shouted, "Grab her!" and snatched the cell phone from her hand. He threw the phone to the back of the bus and, with the other officer, jerked Davis to her feet. They dragged her out of the bus, handcuffed her, shoved her into the back seat of a police car, and drove her to a police station inside the Federal Center.

The policemen tried to figure out what to charge Davis with and finally ended up writing several tickets. They then removed her handcuffs, directed her to the bus stop, and told her that if she ever entered the Denver Federal Center again, she would be arrested.

The Identity Project and the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado immediately arranged to provide Davis with free legal representation. My brother, Jim Harrison, is one of several attorneys who stood ready to represent Davis at her scheduled arraignment in U.S. District Court in Denver on December 9. Davis was expected to be charged with federal criminal misdemeanors involving admission to property and conformity to official signs and directions. Davis, whose son is fighting in Iraq to allegedly defend American values, faced up to sixty days in jail.

But on December 7, the government dropped all charges against Davis. They claim that passengers still have to show ID to transit through the Denver Federal Center, but said there were no clear signs to inform them of this requirement.

Davis' lawyers are not going away. Her arrest gives them standing to sue the federal government for false arrest. Her attorneys are now negotiating with federal officials to prevent the ID requirement from being enforced on Denver city buses.

"We are very pleased that they dropped charges against Ms. Davis," her volunteer attorney Gail Johnson told *The Rocky Mountain News*. "But sign or no sign, she and other Colorado citizens continue to have the constitutional right to travel by public bus without being forced to show identification to federal agents. I think if the government is going to insist on continuing to violate the constitutional rights of our citizens, then they are going to find themselves back in court on this one."

On December 8, my brother argued another right to travel case before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of John Gilmore.

I was with Gilmore on July 4, 2002, when he attempted to fly out of San Francisco International Airport without showing an ID. When Gilmore asked to see the law demanding that he "show his papers", he was told that the law was secret.

Secret law is an abomination. Gilmore has asked the courts to rein in this overreach of the executive branch. But a lower court has already ruled that Gilmore has no standing to challenge the ID requirement and rejected his assertion that the right to travel is supported by the First Amendment right to assemble and Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable search.

The appellate court decision in Gilmore's case will show whether the judiciary is willing to enforce laws that don't exist and ignore the constitutional rights of brave people like Deborah Davis. CP

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