

# Wit' a Brooklyn Accent

By Mark Naison

Each fall I get more disenchanted with football. Although I've played the game since I was five years old and have seen every NFL championship since the epic Giants-Colts sudden death game in the mid-'50s, I find it harder and harder to watch a pro-football game for more than 20 minutes at a time.

A good college game can still excite me, but most pro-games, even the "Super Bowl," fail to hold my interest. The offenses and defenses are mechanical and unimaginative, the players lack enthusiasm, and the "hitting," so carefully dramatized for us on instant replay, fails to evoke the waves of sympathetic aggression that it did when I was younger.

My growing awareness of the price the game extracts from those who play it has also eroded my enthusiasm for the sport. Almost every person I know who played varsity football in both high school and college is partially crippled as a result—usually from multiple knee operations—and has difficulty jogging long distances or playing basketball or tennis regularly at a heavy pace.

For professionals, the consequences are even more gruesome. A Canadian physician recently estimated that the life expectancy for a professional football player is 58 years, 12 less than for the average American male.

The game also mirrors class divisions in American society in a manner that makes me uneasy. The overwhelming majority of professional football players come from working class or impoverished families, while the bulk of the stadium audience consists of wealthier sorts. We can expect this contrast to become even more pronounced in the future, as people from comfortable families push their children into non-contact sports like soccer and tennis, and as ticket prices climb even farther beyond the reach of the working class family.

Given all this, what position should sports activists take regarding football? The game is so deeply rooted in the fabric of American culture and community life that to eliminate it would arouse great resistance. The performance of local football teams, past and present is a part of the folklore of many a working class neighborhood, and high school football is an important source of entertainment and community solidarity in small cities and towns.

But the game can be changed in ways that minimize damage to those who play it. Elimination of tackling and blocking below the waist or above the neck, sharp penalties for excessive roughness, prohibition of "spearing" (tackling a person with the helmet directly on the numbers) would help change the game in a manner that places a premium on agility rather

than violence and intimidation, while preserving the elements of strategy and team coordination.

NFL and college commissioners have taken some tentative steps in this direction by banning the head slap and the crack back block, but they need to feel more pressure to change the game from players' associations, fans, and concerned parents and citizens.

Sports activists, if they raise these issues without condemning the game itself, may find broad support for such reforms from a public that is increasingly concerned with questions of health and fitness.

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A new organization has just been formed to protect the rights of the nation's sports consumers. It's called FANS (Fight to Advance the Nation's Sports) and it will concern itself with issues ranging from the high price of tickets to the lack of fan input into the formulation of rules and the operation of teams. The group was begun with a small grant from the Ralph Nader organization and will try to function as an activist body on both the local and national levels.

FANS will be a membership organization, controlled and financed by those who join it. Dues are \$9 per year—the price of a pro football ticket. People wishing to join or obtain more information should write to FANS, P.O. Box 19312, Washington, DC 20036.

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I must admit an error in consistently underestimating the Yankees. I've allowed my hatred of George Steinbrenner and the Yankee organization for their financial dealings and their contempt for the South Bronx community to affect my evaluation of the Yankee players. The results are in for all to see. Sorry folks.

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The IN THESE TIMES sports page is committed, as a matter of policy, to achieving an equal balance in coverage of men's and women's sports. The articles we have printed on women's sports have been high in quality, but too few in number.

We need your help to expand the dimensions of our reporting. We are actively seeking articles on women's experiences in organized sports, on the enforcement (or lack of such) of Title IX, on the problems women face as gym teachers and coaches, on the experiences of people playing team sports in sexually mixed groups, and on the way children are socialized to assume "male" and "female" roles in sports and games. People who would like to write on these subjects should get in touch with me care of the paper.

## LIFE ON THE RUN

By Bill Bradley  
Quadrangle, New York.

Bill Bradley is, or should I say was, a disciplined and supremely intelligent basketball player. He may have lacked grace, speed and strength, but he knew how to shoot off a Willis Reed screen, move without the ball and play aggressive defense.

Bradley's prose has the same strengths and limits as his court play—it's plain, solid, consistently intelligent and never dazzling.

*Life on the Run* is a book about Bill Bradley, basketball player. Bradley provides few revelations about his Missouri and Princeton past or about his personal life. His capsule analyses of his longtime teammates—DeBusschere, Reed, Frazier and Co.—are predictable and protective. Reed is viewed as "startlingly elemental" and DeBusschere "never pretends to be anything but what he is."

Bradley also never tries to entertain the reader with comic anecdotes or play-by-play description. In fact, the book has little narrative; its frame is a few weeks late in the 1973-74 season.

The book's strength and genuine originality lies in Bradley's skill and perceptiveness at unsentimentally evoking and analyzing the consciousness of an athlete. In this case an aging one who has the kind of special sensibility that perceives that "everyday is a struggle to stay in touch

with life's subtleties."

Bradley has clearly won that struggle and he writes with nuance of the loneliness and obsessiveness of being a ball player. Bradley is an ascetic and artist who loves the game. "It's my private world. No one else can sense the inexorable rightness of the moment... And a feeling that everything is in perfect balance."

Ballplaying for Bradley is like playing the trumpet—a game where there is room for both an independent imagination and the collective graces of teamwork.

Team play is what distinguished the Knick championship teams of the early '70s, and Bradley is a fervent supporter of the concept: "What is important is my own judgment as to whether the team plays according to my own estimation of how an ideal team should." Bradley's repeated refrain is that a team needs a sense of cooperation and community, which makes him an admirer of teammate Bill Russell rather than the egoistic Wilt Chamberlain.

The existential commitment of the ballplayer, however, is Bradley's primary passion. There is a sober eloquence in his description of the terror a ballplayer feels when he cannot recapture those "few years of intensified youth," the sense of desolation that the ballplayer feels when he must live without the game.

—Leonard Quart

Leonard Quart is a New York freelance writer.

## CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: Theory and Practice

Christian Bay, Charles Walker

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An examination, by two recognized authorities, of the political, social and moral foundations of civil disobedience (direct action), and its practical application.

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## ESSAYS ON MARX'S THEORY OF VALUE

Isaak Illich Rubin

Translated by Milos Samardzija and Fredy Perlman

\$ 3.95 paper  
\$10.95 cloth (Black Rose)

According to the prevailing theories of economists, economics has replaced political economy, and economics deals with scarcity, prices, and resource allocation.

If economics is indeed merely a new name for political economy, and if the subject matter which was once covered under the heading of political economy is now covered by economics, then economics has replaced political economy. However, if the subject matter of political economy is not the same as that of economics, then the "replacement" of political economy is actually an omission of a field of knowledge. If economics answers different questions from those raised by political economy, and if the omitted questions refer to the form and the quality of human life within the dominant social-economic system, then this omission can be called a "great evasion".

Economic theorist and historian I. I. Rubin suggested a definition of political economy which has nothing in common with the prevailing theory mentioned above. According to Rubin, "Political economy deals with human working activity, not from the standpoint of its technical methods and instruments of labor, but from the standpoint of its social form. It deals with *production relations* which are established among people in the process of production." In terms of this definition, political economy is not the study of prices or of scarce resources; it is a study of social relations, a study of culture.

Rubin's book was first published in the Soviet Union, and was never re-issued after 1928. This is the first and only English edition.

1975 / 275 pp  
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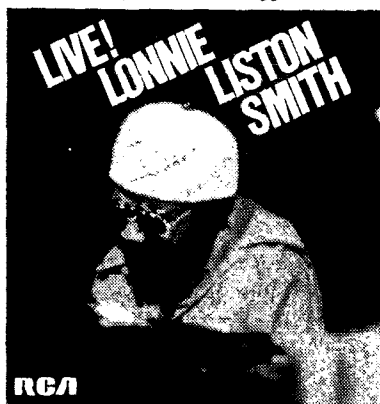


## ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

## Records



Reviews by Carlo Wolff

**LIVE! LONNIE LISTON SMITH**

Lonnie Liston Smith, (RCA)

Fusion music at its best, this album was recorded at Smucker's Cabaret, Brooklyn, in May. It bristles with energy, swirling through all kinds of tempos, never letting up in idea or execution.

Fueled by the rock drive of drummer Hollywood Barker, percussionist Michael Carvin and bassist Al Anderson, keyboardist Smith offers more than 40 minutes of steaming jazz-rock.

Even Leon Thomas, that gifted vocalist who used to help soften Pharaoh Sanders' hard jazz albums, sounds in step here, lyricizing over Smith, Ronald D. Miller (guitar), Dave Hubbard (saxes) and Donald Smith (flute and vocals).

Smith is a sound painter, a master of texture who can shift effortlessly from the slow, dreamy "Prelude" to the furious, complex overdrive of "Expansions."

Thomas sings in a high tenor, soaring on Smith's lovely ballad, "My Love," aided by a percussion kaleidoscope and Smith's lean comping.

Smith's music is in direct line with the fertile field staked out

by John Coltrane on such albums as "A Love Supreme" and "Meditations," but Coltrane worked in an acoustic mode while Smith makes no bones about his electric setting.

But this is true fusion music: It mixes rock rhythm with jazz lines, acoustic and electric (dig the breathless "Watercolors" and "Sunset"), hard and soft.

Smucker's patrons were privileged those nights in late May.

Musically, this is an incredibly fertile time. But fertility can lead to glut, and much fusion music, diluted by disco beat and meaningless vocalizing, is garbage. But this is truly fertile, timeless.

Running the gamut of mood and technique, Smith and his cohorts have crafted one of the best albums of the year.

**LIVE AT THE OLD QUARTER, Houston, Texas**

Townes Van Zandt, (Tomato)

One of the best American singer/songwriters is back in circulation with a double album taped in July 1973.

Van Zandt recorded six albums for the defunct Poppy label around the turn of the decade. Those albums, now difficult to get, are marked by brilliant lyrics, a cosmic country feeling, and a peculiarly sophisticated tenderness.

Maybe Emmy Lou Harris' recording Van Zandt's great "Pancho and Lefty" on Skyliner earlier this year has started the Van Zandt ball rolling again. This live collection, recorded in a small bar, can only whet the listener's appetite. The songs range from novelty ("Fraternity Blues") to deeply touching ("Tower Song")

to terrifying ("Lungs," a strong vision of death).

Van Zandt is a sardonic artist, given to understatement.

But that pithiness and tenderness serve to free his humor and compassion, as in "To Love Is to Fly," a sad, poignant tune about moving on.

There's more than an hour and a half of Van Zandt music here, Townes and his acoustic guitar playing timeless tunes. No flash, no rock pizzazz: Just unassuming, moving music from a man who's labored underground too long.

Welcome Van Zandt into your home. Although you may never have heard him, he won't be a stranger.

**THE ROOTS OF ROCK 'N'**ROLL  
Savoy/Arista

A labor of love and a marvelous historical work, this double album chronicles the rise of rock—from the black side.

It showcases 32 brief tunes, the earliest from 1947 (when swing was turning into bebop), the latest from 1956 (when rockabilly, a white music, was beginning to represent the fusion of rhythm and blues with country.)

This is "race" music—a genre that was pitched to and marketed for blacks. Nowadays there's no such thing as "race" music—everything's crossover, or rock.

But just after World War II, "race" music (for the most part produced and marketed by whites, though performed by blacks) attempted to fuse the elements of jazz—horn riffs, rhythmic piano, improvisatory swing—into a primarily vocal expression. As the first tune on this collection says, "We're Gonna Rock, We're Gonna Roll."

And they did. If nothing else, this collection shows the ongoing vitality of such elements of current music as a melodic, wailing horn section, a call-and-response gospel pattern in the vocals, a cappella/doo-wop singing and a dance thrust.

This compendium of Rock roots could be taken as a period piece, a curio. But it's much more than that: At its best, it presents a unique blend of naivete and knowledge that runs very deep. It rings much truer than the music of today, often characterized by macho aggressiveness hiding behind glossy technique.

The music, in the original mono, is raw. Luther Bond and his Emeralds ("It's Written in the Stars") veer on the out-of-tune. And "You're Down with Me," an early Huey "Piano" Smith tune, includes a fade that doesn't sound planned.

But all the selections have power. Check Mickey Baker's rock guitar break on "Rib Joint" by the Sam Price Band, from 1956. Or 13-year-old Little Esther's singing on Johnny Otis' bluesy "Misery." (Little Esther is now known as Esther Phillips.)

There's Big Maybelle's nonpareil bluesy gasp/scream on "Candy," and the wild sax and trumpet on Paul Williams' "The Hucklebuck" of 1948. These "roots" are accessible to everybody. They've stood the test of time. *Reviews by Carlo Wolff*

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Ed Sadlowski

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