

Confessions of a Mouseketeer

By Craig Aaron

First, I must come clean: I have visited Walt Disney World more than once. I used to be scared of "Space Mountain." The closest I've ever been to Morocco is Epcot Center. And I once went running through the Orlando airport led by an "invisible dog" while wearing monogrammed mouse ears.

My personal "Disneyfication" led me to the excellent December issue of *The*



New Internationalist, which calls Disney "the single most powerful and influential force in the globalization of Western culture." This is nothing new, of course. The company's cultural hegemony and colossal holdings have been well-documented. But *NI* explores roads less traveled—avoiding yet another *Nation*-esque, media-octopus gatefold—with a collection of compelling essays on Disney's cultural, economic and environmental impact across the globe. It really is a small world, after all.

Disneyfication replaces the controversy, diversity and humanity of real life with an idealized, sterilized model that has little risk and lots of gift shops. "Whether in California, Tokyo or Florida, Disneyland visitors need not worry about tripping over garbage [or] being accosted by panhandlers," writes John Hannigan, a University of Toronto sociologist. "Instead, city life means sampling 'old tyme' fudge or listening to a brass band in the town square. Similarly, exotic foreign locales are rendered accessible and safe: no language or currency problems, stomach and intestinal upsets or political instability."

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The larger problem is that Disneyfication has become the model for urban development—as a trip downtown in any American big city demonstrates, with its interchangeable Hard Rock and Rainforest cafes. From Memphis to Minneapolis, cities are forsaking civic improvement in favor of building "entertainment destinations,"

where public culture is crowded out by prepackaged corporate fare. Hannigan traces the rise of the "theme park city," where consumers go for "leisure experiences" that allow them to collect more "cultural capital" than their friends and neighbors. "What is significant is not so much the role of consumption in helping to assert status and identity," he writes, "but the fact that consumption is increasingly programmed by giant entertainment corporations."

But Disneyfication does more than create a taste for tacky T-shirts. Disney's famed "imagineers" also developed an Orwellian system of elaborate but invisible surveillance. Line-cutting or taking off your shoes inside the Magic Kingdom earns you a quick reprimand. And there's nothing more humiliating than getting busted for (barely) underage drinking at Disney's "Pleasure Island" nightclub complex by a bouncer with a smiling Mickey on her lapel (trust me). As Hannigan points out, Disney theme parks are the ultimate in



Walt is watching you.

"urban control zones." And the Goofy Gestapo is coming to your town soon. From shopping mall security systems and the newly sanitized Times Square to the bum-proof benches of Los Angeles, private companies are controlling more and more public spaces. Big Mouse is watching you.

Yet, between the corporate welfare offered to infotainment giants and the

need to constantly build a bigger, flashier "mousetrap," the economic benefits of these "fantasy cities" never reach the poor neighborhoods that surround them—or the Disney workers themselves. In the past 40 years, Disney has transformed Orlando, Fla., from a sleepy town of 20,000 to a bustling metropolis of what seems like 20,000 souvenir stands and fast food restaurants. Disney has created a giant, low-wage service economy with lots of urban sprawl but little public transportation or infrastructure.

NI's Wayne Ellwood goes behind the curtain to talk to the "cast members" (there are no employees or workers at Disney). They describe a caste system at the parks where "pretty young people" get the front-line jobs, old people sell merchandise and people of color make beds and food. Walt Disney World employs 50,000 people at a starting salary of \$5.95 an hour, which hasn't been raised in five years and isn't even enough to buy discounted Disney merchandise. Disney, of course, enjoys tremendous tax breaks and status as a separate municipality. "The real danger here is the growing disparity between rich and poor," one Orlando official tells Ellwood. "[Disney] just won't distribute it to those who need it. It's a colonial relationship. The investment is here, but most of the wealth ends up back in California. The workers are just an expendable resource, another consumable commodity in their fun-filled world."

That world also includes Haiti—a country not recreated at Epcot—where Disney brings new meaning to "Pirates of the Caribbean." Murray MacAdam describes a Haitian sweatshop where workers sew *101 Dalmatians* T-shirts for 30 cents an hour. At this rate, it would take the average garment worker 156 years to earn what Michael Eisner makes in an hour. Disney, which is trying to shift the blame to its independent contractors, has refused calls for across-the-board wage hikes and independent monitoring.

But there is some hope: The National Labor Committee, which successfully pressured The Gap and Nike to make changes, has launched a campaign against Disney. The effort doesn't stand a chance, however, unless the public can stop whistling "Hakuna Matata." ■

The New Face of AIDS

By James B. Goodno
OAKLAND, CALIF.

Gregory Bradshaw lives in an old hotel behind a new federal building in the downtown area here. His room is small and cluttered, yet neat. It's also overheated and poorly ventilated. The bathroom is down the hall, and the kitchen is up three floors. The man at the front desk keeps a baseball bat at his side, and Bradshaw says it's not for show. Bradshaw would like to move to a larger, self-contained studio apartment, but he can't afford to. The \$305 monthly rent consumes a big chunk of his \$740 monthly disability payment, and the rest of his income goes to food, utilities and other essentials. He's happy, however, to be off the streets, where he lived for five years, and the booze that kept him drunk and angry. Bradshaw now has a roof over his head, contact with social service agencies and access to health care. That's important because he has AIDS.

"I'm not proud to say it, but I used to be an IV-drug user," the wiry 47-year-old says. "We used to get together, a bunch of guys and a couple of girls, there'd be six or seven of us and we'd have only two needles, and all we knew was Clorox. Sometimes, we'd be really sick, we'd be jonesing, and we wouldn't even bother with the Clorox, we'd just use water. I guess that's how I caught the virus."

Bradshaw represents what the Department of Health and Human Services calls "the new face of AIDS." Bradshaw is poor and black, and AIDS is increasingly a disease of low-income minority Americans. According to federal statistics, African-Americans account for 40 percent of all new HIV/AIDS cases despite constituting 13 percent of the nation's population; Latinos account for more than 20 percent of new cases and only about 10 percent of the population. African-Americans are eight times as likely to become HIV positive as whites, and Latinos are four times as likely.

"This disease," Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) says, "is killing our community in unprecedented terrifying numbers." Here in Alameda County, especially in Lee's Oakland-centered district, the

extent of the crisis is readily apparent.

"African-Americans comprise 18 percent of the population but 52 percent of AIDS cases," observes Michael Shaw, an AIDS specialist with the county Health Department. "With new cases the disparity grows."

The majority of AIDS-infected African-Americans here are gay and bisexual men, but a growing number are heterosexuals who either used intravenous drugs or had sex partners who did, former prison inmates who had sex with other men while in jail, and the children of HIV carriers.

According to a recent report, the overall number of AIDS cases in Alameda County declined by 61 percent between 1992 and 1997, but the number of cases involving African-Americans rose by 20 percent. And according to local health care providers, a disproportionately low percentage of their clients are African-American.

The federal government, recognizing AIDS emergencies in minority communities, allocated \$156 million last October for a series of initiatives for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment

in such areas. On Nov. 5, Alameda County—which is seeking more federal support—declared its own AIDS emergency after an intensive lobbying effort by an AIDS task force involving community-based service providers, the county Health Department and Lee.

County officials now want to broaden the task force to include civil rights groups, faith-based organizations and other traditional African-American community leaders. The reconstituted task force will draft formal policy proposals for the county Board of Supervisors to consider.

Local agencies also are seeking support from the Department of Health and Human Services' new Crisis Response Team. If dispatched, this group of public health authorities, epidemiologists and HIV experts would help assess existing prevention and treatment services and develop appropriate strategies for responding to the crisis.

Because prevention and treatment take place at the local level—provided by county officials, hospitals and local community organizations that Gregory Bradshaw and his peers turn to for assistance—the Alameda County effort is drawing attention from minority AIDS activists around the country. Local officials are convinced they're setting a good example: "This disproportionate impact on African-Americans," Shaw says, "is simply not acceptable." ■

Terry LaBan



Finding Our Way

A dialogue between Christine R. Riddiough
and David Dyssegaard Kallick

In "Finding the Third Way" (Nov. 29, 1998), David Dyssegaard Kallick writes, "Liberalism and conservatism are limping into the 21st century with less and less of a constituency. A new wave of 'third way' thinking could provide a fresh and coherent approach to politics that is desperately needed." Well, not quite, says Christine R. Riddiough, national director of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Kallick misses the boat on a number of important points.

As he notes, President Bill Clinton, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and others met in New York in September to discuss the third way, but he's quite wrong when he says, "They're not the major thinkers behind the movement—they're just along for the ride." Major thinkers they may not be, but they're more than just along for the ride—by the very nature of their positions, they're in the driver's seat.

This is critical to understanding the real implications of the third way. By Blair's definition, the third way is "not simply a compromise between left and right. It seeks to take the essential values of the center and center-left and apply them to a world of fundamental social and economic change."

When it comes to defining what those essential values are, Blair and Clinton get a lot more sketchy, but their actions as political leaders do the job for them. Their policies, and the values they represent, are little more than capitalism with a human face—the essential values bear little relationship to those of the left. Blair is correct in saying they are not a compromise between left and right; the values of the third way are simply a surrender to the right. Take

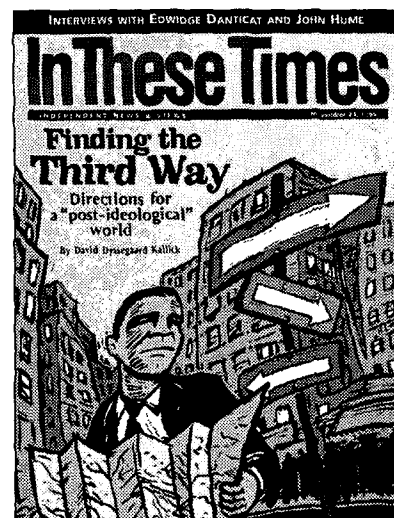
participatory democracy and economic and social justice into a philosophy of government and community. A philosophy that recognizes that government has a unique role to play in society in terms of regulation, social investment and democracy is critical to any better way of looking at the world.

Passing off these governmental roles to civil society is exactly what neoliberals in the center (and, even more so, conservatives on the right) want to do. While government programs like welfare may not always be as effective as they should (and may, in fact, have the characteristics of the "nanny state" that Kallick refers to) they are, nonetheless, less opprobrious than the charity of Lady Bountiful and the volunteerism of a "thousand points of light." Simply laying the burden of human needs on civil society will not solve problems any more than it did 100 years ago. A redefinition of the intersection of government and civil society that focuses on the positive role of each, not one at the expense of the other, is needed.

It is particularly ironic that Kallick downplays the role of government while highlighting the role of community, since this is exactly the compromise with the right that Clinton and Blair have emphasized. It also underscores the second significant weakness of Kallick's analysis: his failure to discuss the

third way in the context of economic globalization. As David Moberg writes in the same issue ("Global Remedies"): "Globalization—through crises such as the one the world is now entering—may not end up wiping out governments and nations but reminding us just how important they are."

If we look at Clinton's role in shaping the global economy, we again see his true colors. From his support of NAFTA and his attempts to gain "fast track" trade negotiating authority to his campaigning for the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI)



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Clinton's record, for example: He killed the possibility of universal health care in the United States, repealed welfare and reappointed Alan Greenspan to head the Federal Reserve, thus reinforcing policies that have led to the widest income and wealth gap in the United States in decades.

In trying to divorce the third way from Clinton and Blair and identify it with the work of community groups and thinkers, Kallick does a disservice to progressives who are actually trying to develop a political perspective that incorporates the values of