

tion Party Chairman R.U. Sirius, which came out in 2000. Sirius is a prankster; he calls himself a “cyber-terrorist.” Especially in an election year, I thought it would be amusing to put out a book that questions the system as it exists politically and to put it out in the format of Mao Tse-Tung’s Red Book. Not that it was a communist tract, but to get people’s attention and make them interested in what he’s saying. The humor element is usually totally removed from politics, and I wanted to put that back in.

John Zerzan’s *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (2002) is another one. He’s a leftist, but he sees the problems with that as well. I’m not a fan of that kind of political structure or belief system, but I am a fan of John Zerzan’s writing. He’s a provocative writer on contemporary problems with technology. He’s an anti-technology anarchist, and for some reason he was picked up on by these anti-globalization kids who threw chairs through the windows at Starbucks franchises.

Also, the Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, wrote to him. Kaczynski was influenced by John’s work, and I found that remarkable too. I don’t even believe in most of what Zerzan is saying, but he’s a provocative and interesting writer. I think it’s a problem when people dismiss or do not want to read something they don’t think they would abide by 100 percent.

reason: Do you think that the work Feral House does is marginalized?

Parfrey: I’d like to indulge myself by saying I’ve pushed the envelope a little farther and some things

are discussed in certain ways more than they would have been if I were not there. But I’m pushed into a pigeonhole called the “underground.” I don’t consider myself underground. My books go into the same bookstores as ones from Random House. My books sit side by side in chain stores with books published by Judith Regan.

They aren’t sold like old erotica, under a coat. They’re in bookstores, man! I have business meetings. I’m this middle-class guy who deals with the same system that the mainstream goes through. But some of the books are just considered “too much” to deal with, yes, even if they are ordered by major stores and in every Barnes & Noble and Borders.

reason: Why do you think that other publishers tend to avoid the more controversial and sensational topics Feral House covers?

Parfrey: There are several reasons. They don’t want to be tied into material that does not look beneficial to their reputation and standing in this small world of publishing. Doing weird, offbeat stuff doesn’t necessarily make them look good. It might be that they don’t even recognize there’s a sales interest in it. Another reason might be a career fear on the part of an editor: What if your boss doesn’t see the value of a more controversial book idea?

reason: How does it affect you being in Los Angeles, away from the center of the publishing industry in New York?

Parfrey: Not being in New York hurts my ability to get reviews. But it helps being outside that world in the sense that I’m not caught up in the mechanism of it. What happens in the publishing world is that a lot of middle management people steal from each other. They always use the phrase “what’s hot”—what does that mean? It’s what people are stealing from each other at that moment.

reason: How have the past decade’s changes in the book business affected you?

Parfrey: The big chains have opened up the possibility of selling more of certain titles. Few titles break even, but a few titles do



Logocentrism
You can trademark words but not meaning.

Vicki Goldberg

In a country that has long been cuckoo for catch phrases—from “Give me liberty or give me death” to “I want my Maypo” to “Whassuupp”—it’s hardly surprising that 9/11 would generate a quasi-official slogan. Or that it would be “Let’s roll!,” the last known words of Todd Beamer, the most widely recognized hero-victim of the terrorist attacks.

Despite its relative inscrutability, “Let’s roll!”—Beamer’s signature phrase, heard by a GEI phone operator who’d been in contact with him during the doomed flight—somehow summed up the courage of the brave souls who mounted a revolt against the hijackers on United Flight 93. By causing the plane to crash in a field in western Pennsylvania rather than some likely target in Washington, D.C., Beamer and his fellow passengers saved dozens or hundreds of lives even as they gave up their own.

Yet as soon as a phrase—especially a heartfelt and serious one—is uttered, it immediately starts morphing into something else, typically a parodic version of itself. »


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better than break even. It's a bipolar situation. I try to put books out that are good as books—that aren't necessarily going to have the same effect if read on the Internet. I'm interested in photographs and books with a lot of illustrations that assist the text. I'm more interested in design now than before. I have to think about what makes a book different from the Internet, about what makes it compelling to own this thing.

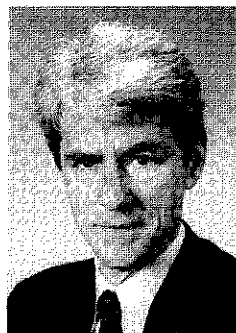
The Internet provides so much more reading matter for everybody that people feel overwhelmed. So in some ways the Internet has not benefited publishing. But in other ways it has, because it gets the word out on our books more prominently, both good and bad. We get a number of orders through our Web site from people who wouldn't be able to find these books in the middle of nowhere. But it's not good if people feel overwhelmed with data smog and can't even bear to look at another sentence.

reason: Have you found the free market to be good for culture and ideas? Obviously, a lot of leftist thinkers don't think it is.

Parfrey: The free market is the least censorious mechanism to put out material. I think it's the best way myself, obviously so. I'm the living example of it.

reason: Markets leave judgments to the world at large, while academia and government leave it to...

Parfrey: A tiny minority, yes. ☐



Perennial Questions of Objectivism

By David Kelley, Ph.D.

From the time Ayn Rand first set forth Objectivism as a philosophical system, a small set of ongoing questions has occupied the attention of people with an intellectual interest in her philosophy—questions about core tenets; interpretations of certain principles; seeming conflicts and contradictions—issues that resist easy resolution.

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Pride and Prejudice

The false choice between patriotism and skepticism

Jacob Sullum

Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism, by William F. Bennett, New York: Doubleday, 170 pages, \$19.95

9-11, by Noam Chomsky, New York: Seven Stories Press, 125 pages, \$8.95

LIKE MANY AMERICANS, my wife and I put out a flag after 9/11. It was not a fleeting impulse; in fact, it took me a while to find a flag holder, since all the local stores had been cleaned out of patriotic paraphernalia. But neither was it something we thought about deeply; it seemed a natural expression of solidarity. So I was surprised by the mixture of bewilderment and scorn I sensed from out-of-town visitors that November. "What's with the flag?" said one.

At the same time, I had a similar reaction to people who seemed to be going overboard in expressing their love of country, trying to outdo each other with electrical displays, multiple bumper stickers, or little flapping flags that made their cars look like they'd gotten separated from the rest of the presidential motorcade. And as the weeks went by, I started to wonder how long our flag should stay up. Some of our neighbors seemed determined to leave theirs out until the war on terrorism was over, and it wasn't clear to me that it ever would be. Then there was the question of what to do on Independence Day. Take the flag down?

But my discomfort with excessive flag waving was a mere quibble compared to the position taken by *The Nation's* Katha Pollitt. "My daughter, who goes to Stuyvesant High School only blocks from the World Trade

Center, thinks we should fly an American flag out our window," she wrote shortly after the twin towers fell. "Definitely not, I say: The flag stands for jingoism and vengeance and war."

In *Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism*, William Bennett cites Pollitt's response to her daughter's suggestion as an example of leftist contempt for patriotism, a knee-jerk reaction so strong that it could overwhelm the feelings of shock, sadness, sympathy, anger, and defiance aroused by 9/11. He has a point. It's obtuse to insist that flying the flag means endorsing everything the U.S. government has ever done. If a Catholic can wear a crucifix without supporting the Inquisition and the Crusades, an American can put up a flag without justifying "jingoism and vengeance and war." In both cases, the person displaying the symbol has in mind particular values, at least some of which Katha Pollitt surely shares. To many of us, the flag represents liberty, tolerance, and the rule of law, the principles on which the nation was founded but which its government has not always honored.

Still, it's no use pretending that flag waving has never been associated with the kind of unreflective patriotism that assumes nothing done in America's name could be wrong. Because of this connection, I must admit that at a certain point I started to worry that continuing to display our flag might be interpreted as support for whatever the Bush administration decided to do in the name of fighting terrorism. Bennett himself reinforces that equation in his book, which blurs the distinction between suspicion of government and hatred of America. He is impatient with critics and skeptics generally, not just the ones who cringe at the idea of flying the flag, and he cannot bring himself to acknowledge that the United States has ever been anything but a force for good.

The opposite sort of blindness afflicts Noam Chomsky, the self-proclaimed dissident intellectual (and best-selling author) who rehearses his litany of America's sins in *9-11*, which endeavors to show that what Al Qaeda did to us was

When's the last time anyone uttered "Ich bin ein Berliner," "I am not a crook," or "I've fallen and I can't get up" as something other than a punch line? "Let's roll!" is itself taking on an increasingly curious afterlife as the specifics of 9/11 recede from public memory.

Ironically, it's the phrase's official guardians who are transforming "Let's roll!" into a generalized "lifestyle" statement. Earlier this year, the Todd M. Beamer Foundation, a nonprofit founded by Beamer's widow, raised eyebrows when it trademarked the slogan, both to control its usage and to raise money for programs that "seek...to equip children experiencing family trauma to make heroic choices every day." But the foundation has done more than just sell its own "Let's roll!" paraphernalia as a fund-raising tool. It's pursued a series of odd licensing choices that strain the credulity of even the least cynical observers.

In June, for instance, the foundation let Wal-Mart use the phrase as an employee motivation slogan and as a theme for its annual shareholder meeting. "It's an inspirational use of 'Let's Roll,'" Beamer Foundation CEO Douglas A. MacMillan suggested to the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, reiterating that the words are "a call to action."

In August the foundation gave its blessing to Florida State University's football team, which has slapped "Let's roll!" on T-shirts, baseball caps, and other items. Each year >>