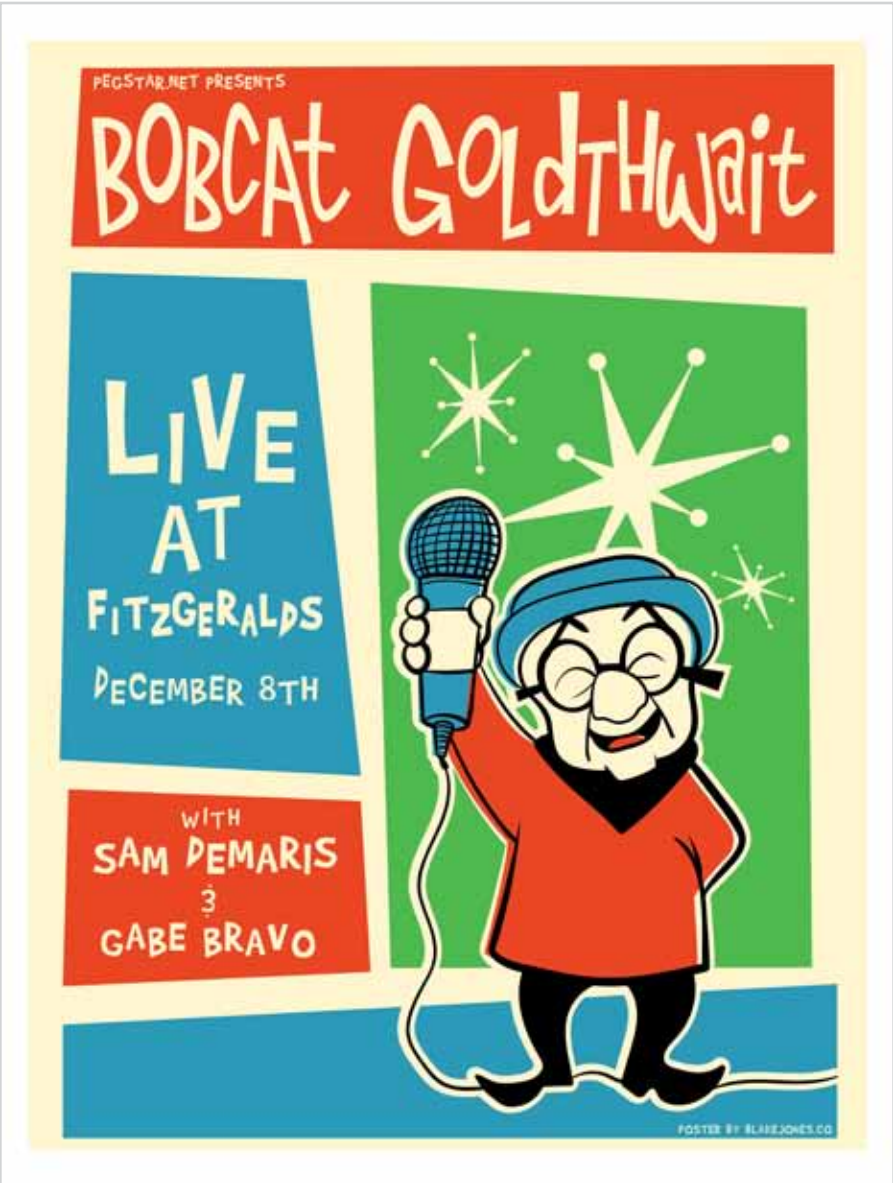
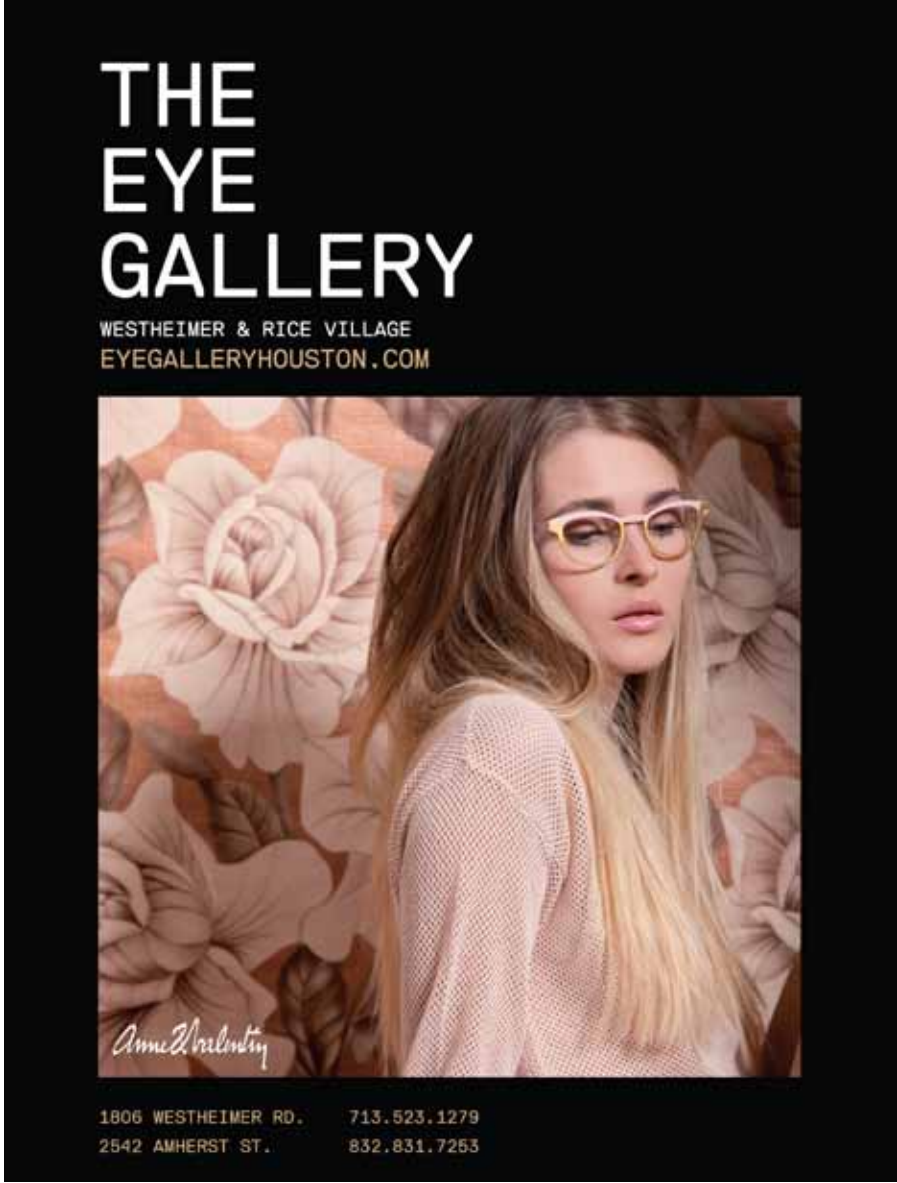






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SAT. 8TH

THE REEN, DUSTIN PRINZ

MON. 10TH

OPEN MIC COMEDY NIGHT

THURS. 13TH

2040 MEETING, OPHELIA'S ROPE

FRI. 14TH

SAVAGE MASTER, THE SWINGIN DICKS,
FUNERAL HORSE, EMERALD HEAVY

SAT. 15TH

DIRTY SEEDS, DESTROYER OF LIGHT, "DOWNER", HYRILLA

SUN. 16TH

LEVEL UP-NERDIST NETWORK WITH DAVID ROSS

MON. 17TH

OPEN MIC COMEDY NIGHT

TUES. 18TH

BOO TOWN PRESENTS: GROWN UP STORY TIME N972

THURS. 20TH

BEER TASTING

FRI. 21ST

RACEWAY, PURAPHARM, EMPTY SHELLS

SAT. 22ND

PLAYING FOR NO ONE, EX-OPTIMISTS, SUNDAE DRIVE,
THE ESCATONES, BRIAN ZEOLLA

MON. 24TH

OPEN MIC COMEDY NIGHT

WED. 26TH

SLIM BLOODWORTH AND SAM DEMARIS,
HOWL AND BRAVO JAZZ FUNK BAND

FRI. 28TH

THE PUNKNECKS, THE BLOODHOUNDS, THE WITHEREES

SAT. 29TH

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What We Do Is Sacred

An Interview with Carrie Schneider on Houston Arts and Equitable Pay

by Michael McFadden

Photo by Cindy Peña, courtesy of Art League Houston

IN EARLY NOVEMBER, Houston artist Carrie Schneider and Jennie Ash of Art League Houston (ALH) co-organized charge, a practicum on alternative economic models and equitable pay for artists. With funds raised by private donors and the support of the ALH board, charge garnered attention for issues artists have always faced and opened up the dialogue at a crucial time for the Houston art scene. Michael McFadden talked with Schneider on the potential future(s) of local artists.

Can you speak a little to the impetus behind charge? What inspired you to organize something in Houston? ■ I felt frustrated that the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston was putting on a show demonstrating how they are supportive of and invested in Houston artists, when actually we [exhibiting artists] were asked to shoulder the costs of putting on our own museum show, as young artists, to make them look good and balance their budget (which is \$3 million annually). I was sharing these thoughts transparently and out loud, and I was told to “watch out” and “be quiet,” which is crazy. Why would the engine of an industry—the artist—be denied a voice in that industry? ■ I heard about the “Valuing Labor in the Arts” practicum at UC Berkeley, co-organized by Helena Keefe and Shannon Jackson, so Jennie Ash (Visual Arts Director of Art League Houston) and I signed up to go. Being in a room of people thoughtfully considering these issues, among incredible thinkers like Julia Bryan Wilson, made me realize that these quiet and invisible negotiations can be a large part of the work itself. I liked the idea of transplanting an event about paying artists from the place most likely to host it—Berkeley—to the least—Houston. But it is a critical time for Houston. We’re topping all these lists, people are moving here from all over, and often its our work put forward when the city is branding itself as an arts and culture center—how “vibrant” and “livable” it is.

As the Mayor works towards a new Cultural Plan, do you feel that the interests of artists are being represented? ■ No, artists are not really invited to these meetings; I crash them and we should all crash them. That was actually a large reason for doing charge right now. The Cultural Plan is being written; Houston Endowment is restructuring;

and the city itself is being touted for its arts; but artists don’t have a voice at the table. We conceived of charge as a way for us to build our own table. With the Cultural Plan, there’s no new money for arts. They’re just restructuring how its handed out, strategizing how to extract more cultural capital without any more investment.

What are your worries/concerns as pertains to this new plan? Your hopes? ■ Houston Arts Alliance is trying to recast itself as an arts presenter of massive master-planned projects which artists get plugged into. I participated in the first one and it is no good for artists. We need our independence. If artists are only chosen to fit the premise and politics of such an agenda, then we’re basically an underpaid PR department, and we lose our free speech and the ability to make work that is truly and thoughtfully responsive to this place. All HAA needs to do is redistribute the Hotel Occupancy Tax to artists and handle public art. They don’t need

to fundraise and compete with organizations that don’t have stable revenue stream, they don’t need to be an arts presenter, they just need to have competent panels and write checks. The Cultural Plan averting this crisis would be a big win! ■ I think the art of a place should be tied to it and fed from it and ultimately for it, not an interchangeable, ubiquitously legible commodity or spectacle for attracting an audience that is always elsewhere. Zach Moser’s idea that the Hotel Occupancy Tax be earmarked for local Houston would foster our own geographically and culturally specific arts community. I’m all about also bringing people here for the exchange and inspiration—but someone needs to take a stand for that we have growing here. ■ I don’t want people who haven’t done their critical diligence on these issues to be determining our field. Artists are so vitally needed. What we do is sacred.

With the audience mainly consisting of artists, do you feel charge has lent itself to awareness of the issues it purports within the context of the city and the current changes? ■ Step one was starting with and centering on the artists, which is a major thing that is not happening. Admittedly, it is only step one, but to my mind there’s no way to move forward without that. Then charge was the initial event for artists in a series of three convenings. Next will be a Fresh Arts hosted event in February for organizations and funders. After that, we need another entity to take on policy as this Cultural Plan is written. Here’s an opportunity where the organizations, institutions, and intermediaries really can be the advocates and supporters of artists that they so often claim.

You chose to present artist-led alternatives to the more traditional organizations alongside lectures pertaining to issues of the larger economy. How did you decide on who to invite? ■ We wanted a full spectrum and simultaneous sessions with different approaches, philosophies, tones, and presenters because there is no one right answer. We also decided that it would be half local and half national presenters, and locals would get equal pay and equal platform as the visiting presenters. We want to make conversations around equitable compensation of artists and artists’ agency over their own labor unavoidable in Houston from now on

but also to avow their complexity in a way that critically considers artists work in the larger economy.

Do you feel WAGE (Working Artists and the Greater Economy) offers a truly fair solution to the issue of artist fees? ■ We can hash out the increments of equity because we finally have a just floor to work from. I think what WAGE offers is much more fair than what was happening before, which was mysterious, individually determined amounts with much more room for the artist to lose, and with room only for artists of privilege who can afford to work for free. WAGE helps catch up funding models to contemporary art practices that may go beyond object manufacturing, and reflects the wider economy’s turn to entertainment and service provision by contingent workers. While WAGE applies pressure from the bottom up, we also need pressure from funders using tools like WAGE and the Houston Area Artists Report to ensure that their support arrives where intended. **FPH**



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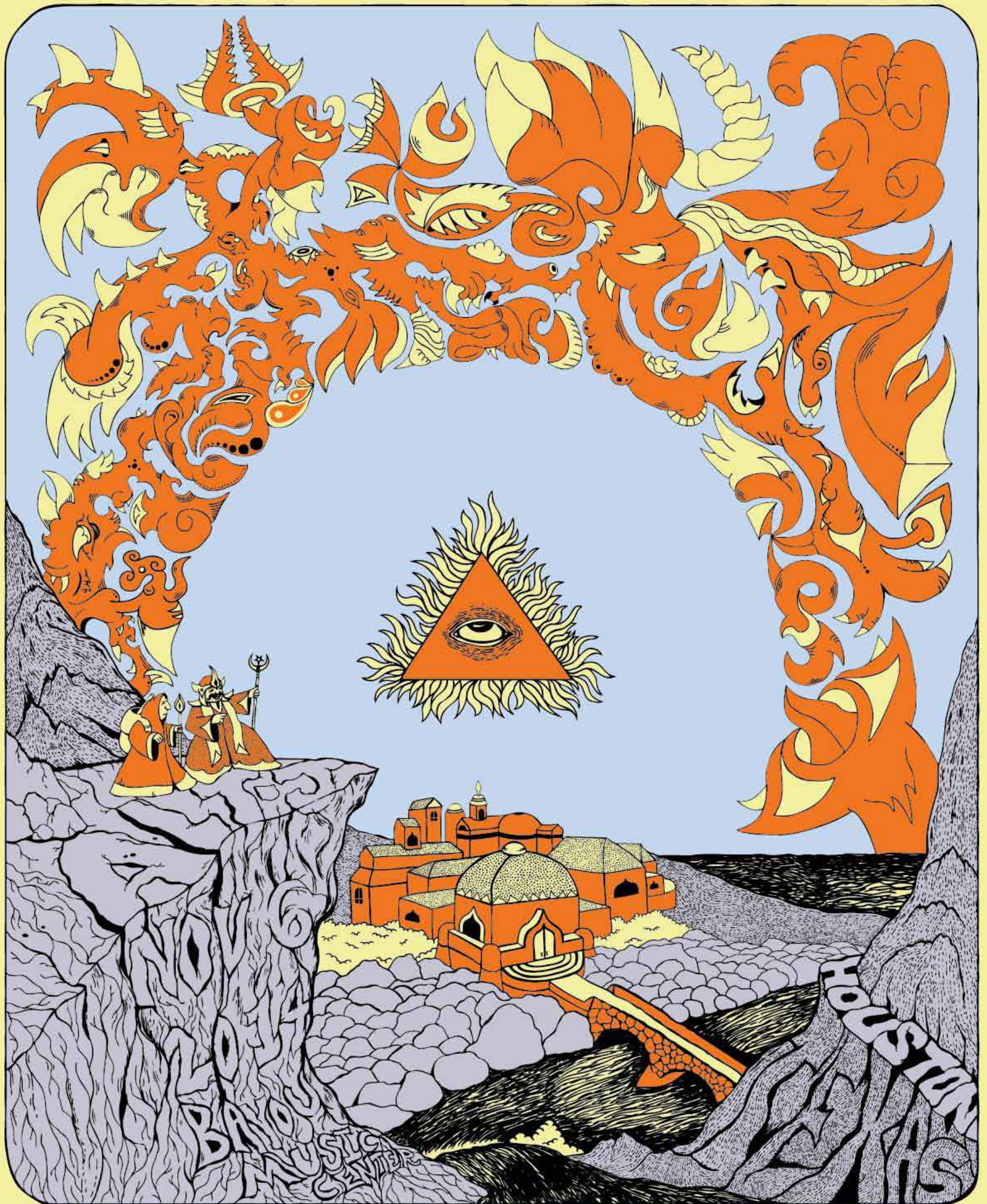
Obama & Immigration: A Dreamer Deferred

By Eric DeBruin
Art by Blake Jones

SEVEN YEARS AGO, when Barack Obama's Hope and Change campaign was sweeping the country there seemed a chance that he was different—after all, he didn't look like any President before him and he was a community organizer before becoming a politician. The honeymoon was short-lived. A month ago it would have been an understatement to say the left had become disillusioned with Obama. ¶ But lo! Right after the Mid-Term elections Obama signed the Immigration Accountability Executive Action on November 20th and took dramatic action to do right by our nation's countless undocumented immigrants. Could there still be Hope for Change? ¶ That's exactly what Obama and the Democrats want you think, but Obama's latest executive action is best viewed as political maneuvering and little else. It is certainly not broad or far-reaching enough to really help immigrants. ¶ 4.4 million parents of U.S. Citizens and green card holders will now be protected from deportation for three years, provided they submit biometric data, register, pass background checks and pay fees. The action also expanded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA). The program will now allow an additional 300,000 immigrants who arrived as minors before 2010 to enroll in DACA (which also grants temporary relief from deportation) and all those previously enrolled in the program have their temporary status in the U.S.A. extended by another three years. The Secure Communities program, which required local law enforcement to do the job of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, has now been terminated. It addresses a host of points relevant to the economy and directs immigration enforcement to focus more on the border. ¶ The termination of the Secure Communities program was the most significant step in the right direction. Originally piloted by George W. Bush in 2008, Secure Communities was expanded by Obama to encompass virtually the entire country by 2011. It

allowed for all immigrants under arrest to be subject to a biometric database shared with the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration Customs Enforcement (Chief Justice Earl Warren estimated the number of immigrants arrested is over 88,000.) and has been widely criticized for breaking up families, including U.S. citizens, leading to unfair deportations. Obama deserves credit for ending the program, if only for shutting a Pandora's box that he should have never opened when he came into office. ¶ Obama's move does protect some immigrants, temporarily. Obama grants four million parents of U.S. citizens the right to pay taxes and assurance they will not be deported in the next three years, yet no right to health care, and no clear path to citizenship. Furthermore, parents of those enrolled in DACA are offered no protection whatsoever, and no green card. By doing this, four million immigrants will enter limbo, where their status would to be determined by the next congressional immigration reform. There is no program outlined for immigrants that do benefit from the program beyond three years yet. ¶ The nut of Obama's executive action is all talk and no substance. There are many who are taking the bait and hailing this as a momentous achievement and a big step in the struggle for immigrant rights. With that Obama accomplishes his first goal: he maintains his legacy as a president who stood for something different and one who accomplished important goals in office. This new action makes the term lame duck president stick in your throat a little more despite a House and Senate that will almost certainly be Republican-controlled. Ultimately, Obama's executive action is a tactic designed more to hinder the Republicans than to help immigrants. ¶ The Republicans now find themselves between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand you have the Tea Party wing, led by Texas's own Ted Cruz. Cruz recently advocated blocking all of Obama's executive appointments for the next two years until the immigration program is rescinded, and our governor-elect, Greg Abbot, plans to sue Obama over the executive action. This is just what Obama wants. ¶ Republicans are forced to be on the defensive. In the next two years they have little time to prove to the country they are able to govern and send meaningful bills to Obama. Every day the Republicans squabble and bicker amongst themselves is one less day that they are doing anything viewed as productive. ¶ Yet there seems to be no correct choice for them. If the Republicans do nothing, if they don't fight, they certainly stand to irritate their waspy base, but if they fight this tooth and claw, they will destroy whatever Latin@ support they may have left. The more Republicans fight the bill, the more Obama looks like the hero of a dramatic action and sets his party up well for 2016. ¶ I admit that I was excited when Barack Obama was elected President. However, you've had to have your head in the clouds if you think Obama has stood for any meaningful change over the last six years; his latest executive action is no different. If you fought for immigrant rights before you should continue to fight for them now; and if you never gave them a second thought before, now is the time to start. After all, thinking Obama has solved our immigration problem is perhaps the worst thing our nation's undocumented immigrants could ask for. **FPH**





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FROM JUNE THROUGH OCTOBER 2009, the Iranian government for 118 days imprisoned Maziar Bahari. Bahari subsequently published a book about the ordeal, “Then They Came For Me.” ¶ One of the charges brought against Bahari had to do with an appearance he had made on “The Daily Show.” While he’s being interviewed by Jason Jones, they joke about his being a spy. Not oddly, Jon Stewart, “The Daily Show’s” host decided to adapt Bahari’s book as his feature film directorial debut. The result is the brilliantly realized movie “Rosewater,” starring Gael Garcia Bernal as Bahari. ¶ Speaking to Free Press Houston from Miami, Bahari mentions he is headed to Austin the following day to participate in “Rosewater’s” regional premiere, along with Stewart, at the Austin Film Festival. Our conversation began with the part Iran plays in modern culture. ¶ “I think Iran has been very important in modern culture and the American psyche for the past 35 years, since the revolution. Before that Iran had very good relations with the United States. I think that Iran and America have a lot in common and that one of the reasons I was put under pressure by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard was because I was quoted as saying that,” says Bahari. ¶ Bahari, a Canadian Iranian journalist, was covering the 2009 elections in Iran for Newsweek. Bahari, born in Tehran, moved to Canada in his early twenties. In Iran his father had been imprisoned under the Shah and his sister had been imprisoned under the Khomeini regime. It was while Bahari was on assignment that “The Daily Show” segment was recorded. Bahari also recorded candid video of a post-election demonstration that was used in international news broadcasts. ¶ “It was hard to get visas to travel to Iran since George Bush said Iran was part of the Axis of Evil in 2003. Then in 2009 the Iranian government gave visas to different media in order to cover the election,” explains Bahari regarding why there were so many Western news reporters in Tehran. While imprisoned, Bahari made televised confessions and signed documents under duress. ¶ “I am vigilant. I don’t take their threats lightly. I cannot let them scare me outside of the Iranian border. To tell the truth the Iranian government has too much on its mind these days to think about me and what I’ve done,” says Bahari. ¶ Bahari has also directed several documentaries, many of them focused on aspects of Iran. Bahari’s first film “The Voyage of the Saint Louis,” about a Jewish refugee boat during WWII, was the first film made by a Muslim about the Holocaust. ¶ “I’ve made many films, mainly for British Broadcasting.” Bahari was on the set of “Rosewater” about 80-percent of the production time. “I had to go back to London for one week, but otherwise I was on the set every day. Basically I was sitting next to the director, advising him on different details, making sure there were no major mistakes. Because of that I think that “Rosewater” is the most authentic film about Iran made in the West,” says Bahari. ¶ Some of the footage seen in “Rosewater” was shot by a second unit team in Tehran and sent to the production surreptitiously. The majority of the film was shot in Jordan, with one day of shooting lensed in London. ¶ As with any representation of the truth you have to imagine that Bahari’s ordeal was far worse than what is seen on screen. “Yes, there was more physical pressure on me than what is depicted in the film. What is presented in the film is what many journalists are going through in China, in Russia, in Egypt, in many countries around the world,” says Bahari. ¶ “What you see in terms of ISIS beheading people or physical torture – those are anomalies these days. Those are not sustainable methods of torture, or institutional methods of interrogation that are carried out by governments on a daily basis. What you see in the film are institutional methods of interrogation that governments in different parts of the world are carrying out every day,” says Bahari. “These are not methods that were created by the Iranian government. They learnt it from the British government; they learnt it from the American government; they learnt it from the Israeli government. These countries are doing the same thing to their own citizens or the citizens of other countries.” ¶ The whole experience of “Rosewater” unfolds like a Kafkaesque nightmare. “When a regime institutionalizes torture and interrogation, and you have people whose job is to interrogate and torture, the whole concept loses its meaning. It becomes a form of entertainment; they are part of the daily habits of the government. As you said the situation becomes Kafkaesque. Sometimes I was thinking this is beyond Kafkaesque. It was as if someone had read Kafka and they didn’t think it was ridiculous enough or surreal enough. And they had to add a bit of Monty Python to the whole affair,” notes Bahari. **FPH**

118 Days by Michael Bergeron



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ALBUMMED

By KM Anderson

I WILL BE HONEST, I hate December record reviews because no one puts out albums in December, with the exception of that Beyonce album from last year, speaking of which, they are releasing a Platinum Edition of that album with some unreleased songs and some more videos. You see? The type of shit that comes out in December is like something that finally got released after being pushed back mad times (Tyga, Nicki Minaj) or some deluxe version, greatest hits, Christmas collection, nothing that compels one to wax poetic about song forms and lyrical musings. So, here are some albums I may not have gotten to, or wanted to, or heard after I already reviewed some. Whatever the case, they are still good, you can buy them for your friends’ Christmas or play them at a New Year’s party or the next day after Christmas or New Year’s.

TV ON THE RADIO—SEEDS (HARVEST)

TV On The Radio is one of the few bands who have no contemporaries. Their music is representative of a scene, aurally anyways; it does not harken back to the sound of anything before they came along. Even when they were huge, they were individual in approach. They always sounded like TV On The Radio; even when they changed their sound, they sounded like a different TV On The Radio, so even as this record is some years after their last, it maintains that quality. But, it is more straightforward. “Careful You” has Nine Inch Nails-ness about it, but Tunde Adebimpe is one of the best male vocalist of this time, and this song showcases that. “Love Stained” is another superb one, Kyp Malone has made a song about the beauty and disgust of PDA, and it is pretty much spot on, it soars and flies, you will want to grab your lover’s hands, embrace them, and quickly retreat when you realize that you are out in the open. “Winter” almost sounds like something PJ Harvey might’ve done, then it gets really head noddy and transforms into pure gold. People want bands to sound a certain way, and TV On The Radio sounds like that at times, but they also buck a lot of that, and that is OK too.

BLAKE MILLS—HEIGH HO (VERVE)

Here’s the thing—you may never have heard of Blake Mills or you might be his biggest fan—but this record is completely boss either way. “If I’m Unworthy” is one of the greatest songs of the last 10 years, if only to say to one you love “What if I’m unworthy of the power I yield over you.” It is fear, it is appreciation, it is concern and conceit, and that is lyrically, musically it is somewhere between Sam Cooke and “What A Wonderful World” done as a sort of psychedelic blues song. The album, generally, is a collection of fractured love songs about fractured emotions between people, it’s sweetness is tinged with sadness, alter expectations, kicked out couch realizations, kitchen arguments, phone conversations that end in hang ups. It is love, real love, blood and bouquets. “Don’t Tell Our Friends About Me” is magnificent in that it sounds contemporary enough to be done by maybe a John Mayer, but it is still intensely uncomfortable, and crescendos with the line “I know I’ve fucked up.” The album ends on “Curable Disease” a conclusion, even as our love is powerful, all encompassing, it is, ultimately, something we will get over, a curable disease. Fucking brilliant.

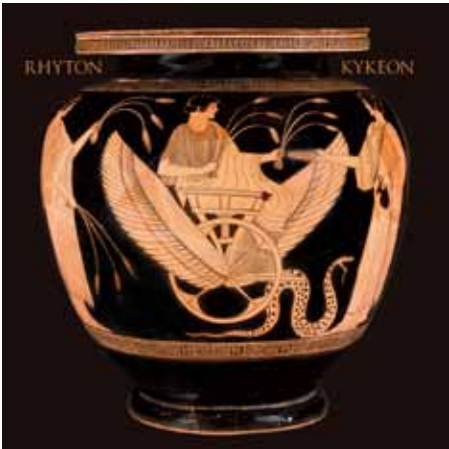
TY DOLLA \$IGN—SIGN LANGUAGE (SELF RELEASED)

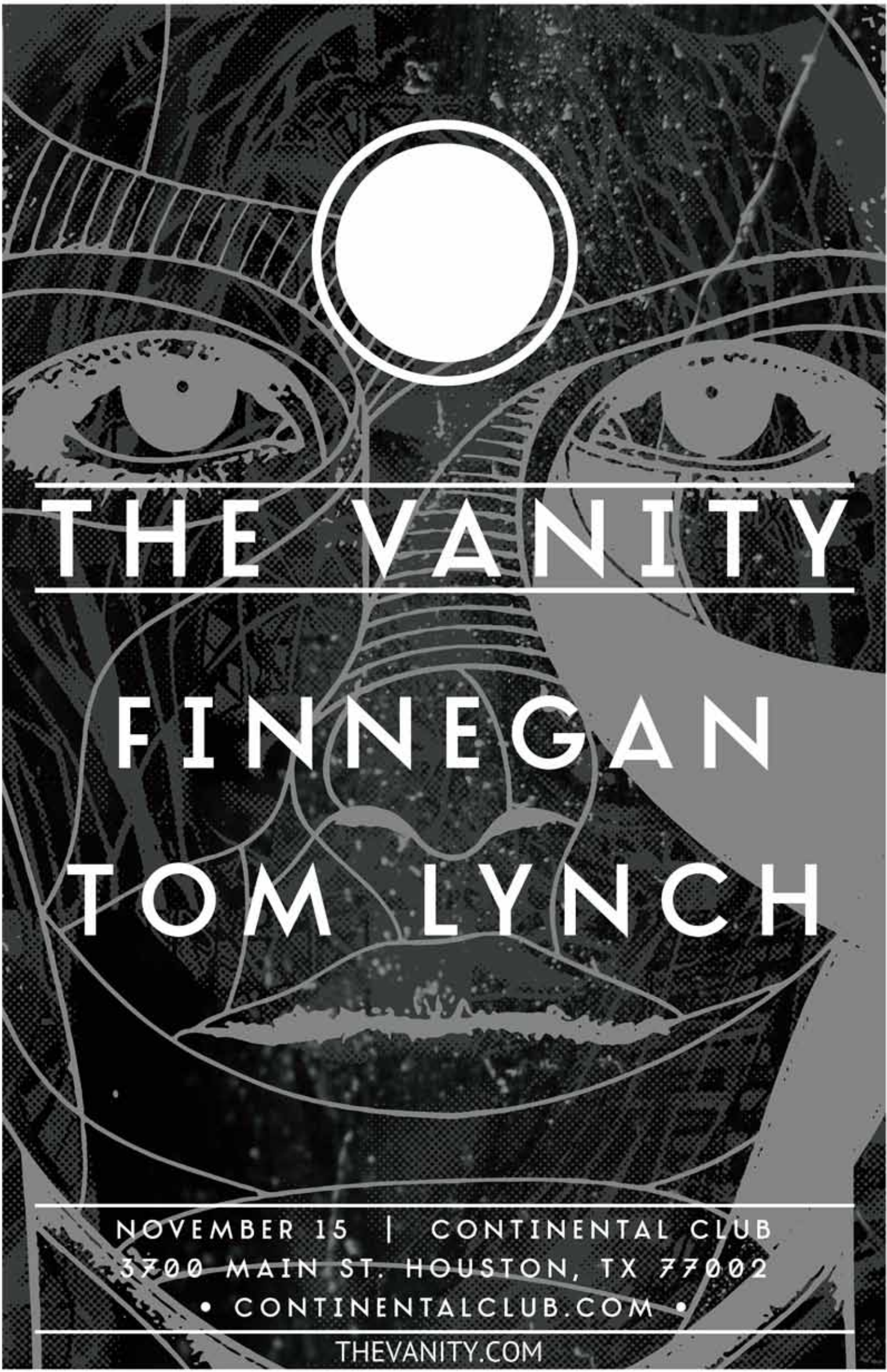
TY Dolla \$ign will fuck your girlfriend because you’re a lame, you’re not hitting it right, and he’s rich. That is awful statement, I am sure some would be put off by

this idea, but, Ty Dolla \$ign makes this sound wonderful. It has the attitude of hip hop, the beats, his favorite producer is J Dilla, “Drank and Cranberry” could’ve been on “Welcome To Detroit.” R. Kelly comes across as sort of an old man now, sort of too old to be chasing ass like that, Ty Dolla \$ign is more of a contemporary take. I am not the biggest fan of Wiz Khalifa “Issue” sort of makes me forget that, pretty much all the rap appearances on this album comes across well, and they’re all here : Rich Homie Quan, Rick Ross, Casey Veggies, Dom Kennedy, Big Sean, YG, Fabolous, etc. But it is a Ty Dolla \$ign show, no one outshines Dolla \$ign. And while I would never imply that these songs are full of derogatory language (several instances to “your bitch”), Ty does say to the ladies get yours, you don’t have to let him treat you that way (now of course, this is all done under the premise, that fucking Ty is the answer, but hey). “Stretch She Better” is sort of romantic, she texts him “I miss your face” after he lets her know “I brought my gun in case, I’ll shoot that nigga in the face,” and what is he going to when gets there? He’s gonna stretch that pussy out. I bet that Badvice is all about Ty Dolla \$ign. Marini’s advice column is pretty much a Ty Dolla \$ign song. “Bitches ain’t shit to a real nigga, niggas ain’t shit to a real bitch,” we shall overcome.

RHYTON—KYKEON (THRILL JOCKEY)

Kykeon means to “to stir, to mix” in Greek, appropriate as the title of this album that is a mixture of various styles—Grecian, classic rock, desert boogie (if that were an actual style). This album is a fade into a distant land, a land beyond, way out shit like that. “Topkapi” from its mystic inception weaves and writhes with the guitar acting as the wind, the bass line acting as scenery affected by light and shadow, as the groove sets in and settles, you move further into a place of serenity and joy. “Pannychis” is a the driving scene in that movie where the landscapes is reflected off of mirrored sunglasses, deserts and lone retail shops, clothes blowing on clotheslines, the occasional lizard on a rock. “Gneiss” is the dark violet lit back room, silhouettes of bodies gyrating, drinks and smoky rooms, something in the window. “The Striped Sun” a magical place, spirits, the painted faced man swigging a concoction, night clouds, main character in resolution, we are here now, there is no before, go forth. Play this at your next party. Drink a lot of water. It’ll be OK. **FPH**





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Eyes on the Prize?

By Bryan Parras

Art by Austin Smith

“OH, ARE WE STILL FIGHTING THAT?” ¶ I remember a stranger saying this after answering a question about what I was doing in D.C. I was waiting to speak at yet another protest rally against the proposed pipeline. That was over one year ago. People were already bored with the same tired rhetoric spouted by pipeline supporters and critics alike. People were already touting this Congress as the worst on record for getting little done, as both sides continued screaming past each other...but don't be fooled. ¶ Have you heard of the lesser-known pipelines in the works? Flanagan South, Seaway Twin, Alberta Clipper, Line 9, Energy East? Have you heard of the other means by which oil and gas companies want to transport tar sands to the Gulf Coast? ¶ Congress, the White House, and all of your elected officials have actually been quite busy. If you keep your eye on the pipeline, you will be distracted and fall prey to a well-orchestrated choreography known as Sleight of Hand. This process, best demonstrated by Penn & Teller, is a set of techniques employed by a magician to manipulate objects and spectator's perception of reality. ¶ Penn & Teller lay out eight principles that can be used in different order to fool the spectator and achieve the desired goal. These techniques are not exclusive to simple card tricks and are often exhibited in the political sphere. This is the case with the infamous saga of proposed tar sands conduits snaking across Indian Territory, sensitive aquifers, and down to the Dirty South. So how do large scale national political battles employ these techniques? Pay attention. ¶ The first technique is holding an object in an apparently empty hand. P&T call this PALM. In the political sphere, we have been told time and time again that the 113th Congress is the absolute worse with very little legislation to show for it. We have been convinced that nothing can get through Congress and signed by the President, but they have actually been quite busy. ¶ EXHIBIT A—WORST CONGRESS EVER ¶ “That's the verdict from two-thirds of Americans about the track record of the 113th Congress, according to a new national poll. And a CNN/ORC International poll released Thursday also indicates that nearly three-quarters of the public say that this has been a “do-nothing” Congress. ¶ “Democrats and Republicans alike say the 113th Congress is shaping up to be the worst ever. Veteran lawmakers are used to partisanship and stalemate, but they say Capitol Hill has sunk to a new dysfunctional low.” (THE HILL, 3-10-14) ¶ The second technique involves exchanging one object for another, or SWITCH. In regards to the proposed pipeline, the President very skillfully side-stepped the final decision for part of the pipeline, and fast tracked the southern portion which stretches from Cushing, OK to the Gulf Coast—rendering the issue moot for communities along that portion and where the tar sands will eventually be refined and exported. ¶ EXHIBIT B—THE SOUTHERN LEG ¶ “President Obama will issue a memo Thursday telling federal agencies to expedite permitting for an Oklahoma-to-Texas oil pipeline that makes up the southern portion of the Keystone XL project, the White House said. He'll also issue a broader executive order demanding faster permitting and review decisions for energy- and transportation-related infrastructure.” (THE HILL, 3-21-12) ¶ The third technique employed by the “Do-Nothing” congress

and “hand-tied” President is to DITCH, or dispose of an unneeded object. As recently as September 4th, other methods of transporting tar sands have been approved, even as the majority of the “pipeline-fighters” have remained faithful to ONE pipeline. In the meantime, tar sands have made their way to the U.S. ¶ EXHIBIT C - TAR SANDS BY RAIL AND OTHER PIPELINES ¶ The fourth principle involves loading the “secret” object (tar sands) to where it is needed, or LOAD. In this case, to refineries in Texas. These guys sure are crafty for not getting anything done. ¶ EXHIBIT D—FLANAGAN SOUTH ¶ “A U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia has ruled that Enbridge's 600-mile-long Flanagan South Pipeline, a Keystone XL “clone,” is legally cleared to proceed opening for business in October. Approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers via a controversial regulatory mechanism called Nationwide Permit 12 (NWP 12), Judge Kentanji Brown Jackson, an Obama-appointed judge, ruled NWP 12 was not a federal government “action.” Thus, Brown posited that Enbridge did not need to use the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulatory process and NWP 12 was up to snuff.” (DESMOGBLOG, 8-19-14) ¶ The fifth principle of sleight of hand gives the spectator the impression that something has happened when in fact, it has not! This is called SIMULATION. These techniques can be used in varying order and this is one that comes back time and time again. For our purposes, we'll take a look at the non-profit sector and how they can also use these techniques to their benefit as well. Let's not mention how many times we have won the same fight over and over again. I thought there was finality to a win? ¶ EXHIBIT E—SELF-CONGRATULATORY PATS ON THE BACK ¶ “After an epic campaign, the incredible coalition fighting the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline has emerged victorious. The pipeline – the fuse to ‘the largest carbon bomb on the planet’ – has been delayed and effectively killed.” 350.org 2011 Annual Report ¶ It is not like NGOs within the non-profit industrial complex have no clue regarding the rail industry quietly burgeoning behind the KXL campaign. Quite the contrary. In the State Department's final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) it is stated that: ¶ “Even in a situation where there was a total freeze in pipeline capacity for 20 years, it appears that there is sufficient capacity on existing rail tracks to accommodate shipping ... through at least 2030.... [S]tatistics from the Department of Transportation ... conservatively estimated that the existing cross-border rail lines from Canada to the U.S. could accommodate crude oil train shipments of over 1,000,000 bpd (barrels per day).” ¶ Note the language used within this paragraph implies rail is an “option,” rather than a reality already in full force. ¶ Finally, I'll leave you with one last technique to which most of the country continues to fall prey—MISDIRECTION—a process by which attention is diverted from a secret move. As many non-profits, individuals, and environmental advocates continue to focus on ONE PIPELINE, tar sand mines continue to expand, boreal forests continue to disappear, and communities living in areas where the dirty fuel is being extracted or refined continue to suffer. It's time to get serious and attack the tar sands at the source; let's help those local communities with minimal resources and capacity to do the heavy lifting. **FPH**



Dance Like Everyone's Watching: Bayou City Burlesque & Circus Arts Festival

By David Garrick

Photo: Blue Print/JSJ

THERE AREN'T TOO MANY TIMES when something comes along that's an adult version of something from our childhood. A circus for adults actually sounds promising. Several years ago, I caught one such circus when I saw Kiki's Sordid Sideshow. The show was a mix of circus, comedy, and vaudeville intermingled with the art of burlesque. ¶ After year-long hiatus, that show's creator, Kiki Maroon, is back with something similar but more grand and over the top with the Bayou City Burlesque & Circus Arts Festival. The show, an all day affair; takes place on Saturday January 17th and will bring the smaller scale of the Sordid Sideshow to a much larger audience. When FPH wrote about another burlesque troupe in June of this year, we had no idea that when we would reach out to Maroon, that she would have this show in store for our second piece in the series. ¶ "Basically, every major U.S. city has their own burlesque festival, but since the Houston burlesque scene is so new; this will actually be a first for the city of Houston," explains Maroon. When she says "new" she explains that it's this current incarnation of burlesque here. "Houston has a rich burlesque history, but one that's been scattered and never really unified. Some cities have had a continuous and vibrant scene for as long as people can remember; and Houston hasn't had that." Under the veil of burlesque I've found that good burlesque shows have aerialists and fan dances, whereas great shows have an added mix of comedy and satire. From what Maroon says, her shows have an added element of the circus arts due to a lifelong obsession with the circus. This includes such acts like jugglers, stilt walkers, and varying other forms of performers that fall under the moniker of sideshow acts. ¶ When asked about the circus element to her shows, Maroon explains, "I've pretty much dedicated my life to the two elements of burlesque and circus arts. I perform at comedy open mics so I can add a comical element to my hosting skills, but I've always been into the world of vaudeville and the circus. For this event, I decided to outsource some of the talent to other cities so we can bring the best of Houston and other places together. My idea is to have these great performers so we can build interest in our scene here, while also putting on a great show." The idea of a great show will include interactive intermissions, crowd performers, and even workshops prior to the show. These interactive intermissions include performers like Miss Lotta Poppa, who will be donned in balloons that attendees can pop to reveal more skin while earning prizes along the way. There will also be midway games like one would find at a carnival, jugglers, stilt walkers, and games that make the audience a part of the show experience. "After every burlesque show I've ever been in, people approach me and always ask a slew of the same questions. Who makes your costumes, how long has this existed in Houston, and how do I get into something like this? The idea behind the workshops is to have performers answer all of those questions and more," she says. ¶ The workshops will take place from 11:00 am all the way up until 6:00, prior to door time for the show. Workshops that cover topics like stage make up, costume design, how to brand your-

self as a performer, and an intro to juggling as well as other circus arts classes. One of the workshops will cover the history of burlesque in Houston, as told by July St. Juniper, Maroon's assistant. These workshops will take place in an area themed "The Bayou Bizarre" where there will be shops that are set up to purchase outfits and varying goods that are commonly used in burlesque shows. This all culminates with a cast of headliners from all over North America who utilize various talents that locals here in Houston may not have ever seen in this capacity before. ¶ Though the lineup has not yet been finalized, the headliners are to include Los Angeles' Kristina Nekyia, a contortionist. The idea of a burlesque contortionist by title alone emotes thought of a titillating performer who mixes the ability to strip while bending her body into all different types of positions while doing so. In fact, when I looked the performer up online, I wondered if she was born without bones, she's so flexible. She's an international headliner with clients like DJ Shadow & Lady GaGa, as well as appearances on Discovery Channel, plus she's never performed in Houston, so her presence is an added bonus. She will be joined by the adonis like physique of Portland's Russell Bruner, a slapstick performer. Bruner looks like a greek god mixed with a silent film villain, and his countless list of awards only magnify his abilities to mix comedy, swing dancing, and acrobatics together while giving the ladies some eye candy in the true definition of boylesque performance. Rounding out the headliner list is the only little person performing acro-pole dancing in the world, the windy city's Viva La Muerte. La Muerte is known as the "pint sized pepper," and she can perform more tricks and feats on a pole than you'll ever witness. From what I saw when I looked her up, is that she mixes acrobatics, gymnastics, and sexuality into a show that's sultry and mesmerizing at the same time. These headliners will be mixed with performances of aerial silk dancing, traditional burlesque, and the art of lyra where performers are suspended from a trapeze using hoops in a very steamy and adult way. ¶ Tying all of this together, Maroon says she has three separate hosts to intermingle the varying points of the show. Mills McCain will serve as the host of the circus arts section of the fest. You may know Mills from varying duties here at FPH, as well as the ring master of Houston's annual Rock N' Roll Circus. On the burlesque side of things, Al E. Cat will perform hosting duties. If you've ever gone to a show that featured the Benefit Betties here in Houston, then you've seen Cat. Her small yet rubenesque size is packed with an energetic spirit that's as intoxicating as it is alluring. Maroon herself will tie the two side together as an inbetween host utilizing her silly and sexy burlesque clown character. When it's all said and done, over thirty different performers both local and from various points throughout North America are scheduled to perform. You can see all of this and more at Warehouse Live when the Bayou City Burlesque and Circus Arts Festival happens on January 17th. The tickets range between \$20.00 for general admission, \$30.00 for reserved seating, and \$50.00 for VIP that includes a goodie bag and a private after-party. **FPH**

Badvice

By Marini Van Smirren

Illustration by Valeria Pinchuk

FUCK SOBER, THOUGHTFUL, LEVEL-HEADED ADVICE. HERE'S THE TRUTH: BADVICE

Disclaimer: You don't have to fucking read this if you don't like it. I know I sound like an asshole. The title states: "BADVICE" which therefore constitutes an awareness that one reading should anticipate the nature of said bad advice.

DUDE I MET ON OKCUPID is funny, attractive, and just sensitive enough. Motherfucker shows up to our first date drunk (fine), talks seriously (?) about us moving in together, and then asks me if I can give him a ride to pick up coke for his friend. And he kept going for my pants when I said in many different ways at many different times "no". So do I ignore the strong connection and allow him a pass (everyone makes mistakes... or 8), or say what normal people think in these situations: "un"? Halp. ¶ Ohh, dude. No. Yeah, I don't know why you need help with this one. I wouldn't bother. You'll end up having to babysit all the time which is incredibly boring. Plus, he doesn't even know "no". My fucking dog knows "no".

I picked out my own engagement ring, is that lame? Me and my old man have never been one for surprises. We tell each other exactly what we want. We have been wanting to get engaged for awhile. Yet I'm sure people will ask about how he chose that ring when we let everyone know (after he asks my dad's permission, cause they're old school like that). Should we be upfront and say fuck off. Or should we come up with some elaborately insane story? ¶ You could do something off that show Downton Abbey that you watch. Honestly, it shouldn't fucking matter. If you guys are happy and want to spend the rest of your life together, fucking tight. You can now include asking BADVICE about this dumb question into your engagement ring story. There. Now it's interesting.

My boyfriend stays up late trolling on Facebook for hours. When I ask him to come to bed and cuddle me (or do me) he says I am nagging him. Should I dump his ass? ¶ Yes.

Have you seen Season 1 of The Knick? Not to spoil you if you haven't, but there's a whole story line where Clive Owen puts coke on his dong and then bones a nurse. Whats that like? Inquiring minds. ¶ Based off of what you're saying, brb. I am watching the Knick because I have to see this. I will follow up.

I have been dating this girl for almost five months and i am thinking about proposing to her. Too soon? we have really connected, I don't think I have ever been with a girl that has connected to me like her. we are living together and its great. we have a lot in common, we like the same activities, her friends are cool, she is responsible and gorgeous. oh yeah, and the sex is AMAZING. everything is pointing to "make it for life". I only worry I might be being overly romantic? I have even bought the ring and know where to pop the question. Did I mention the sex is AMAZING? ¶ Honey, there's no hurry. I would recommend The Coital Challenge: For a year, put a quarter in a jar every time you have sex. For the following year, take a quarter out every time you have sex. When the quarters run out, enough time will have passed to actually start thinking about getting married.

How do I stop thinking about fucking my classmate? I cannot stop thinking about having sex with my classmate, another grad student, who I work with closely on a course project. I see him almost every day in classes. I am in a committed relationship with someone else and I don't even think he's that attractive, but I constantly imagine him fucking me and whispering to me in his thick Middle Eastern accent. I haven't told anyone or done anything about it. ¶ If your commitment to school is anything like your commitment to your relationship, you're probably failing.

Is it cool to mostly eat her because I can't hold my load? I don't mean half assed eat her out. I mean take however long it takes to get her there eat her out. Or will I just not ever truly satisfy a girl because I can't hold my load? Seriously working on it with all kinds of random techniques blah blah, my junk just doesn't want to cooperate. So you know, being the eat her out specialist is fine right? ¶ You, sir, are a hero. At least you're making the effort and not being a selfish prick. I applaud you. ¶ Anyway, maybe try popping one off before you dive in. I've heard it helps for dudes. Or get that lube that porn stars use that numbs your dick.

I recently started hanging out with an old college friend again and I'm crushing on her pretty hard. She's in a relationship and she lives with her boyfriend, but she hangs out with me one on one a lot and often complains about her him. We even went camping recently and shared a tent. We slept in the same tiny ass tent all cuddly n shit for two nights. I didn't make any moves because I don't want to be a home wrecker. Should I just let it be and see if she and her bf break up, or should I be an asshole and make a move? ¶ Have you seen Love Actually? Or Closer? Choose your own adventure.

My boyfriend's acting shady. I feel like he's playing games. He won't say "I love you," or anything, why the change? ¶ I mean, obviously the writing is on the wall. ¶ Could it be that he's at the crib with another lady? If he took it there, first of all, let me say you should not be the one to sit around and be played. **FPH**

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Success, Undocumented

by Adam Peña

art by Kira Slentz

SOPHIA GLARES AT THE COLLEGE BANNER hanging on the wall of her seventh period class. Students are engrossed in their work around her as she is briefly lost in panic. Had her mother made it to work today? Had she been pulled over on her way there for some minor traffic violation? Would the officer question her lack of documentation? Would she be deported? ¶ Her train of thought is interrupted. Refocused, she meets the gaze of her teacher standing in front of her. The instructor hands back a paper with an eloquent series of red streaks across the top, bringing much needed relief to Sophia. A subtle acknowledgment of her great work is exchanged with nods and smiles. Her thoughts settle and refocus on the rest of the work at hand. ¶ After skimming the textbook, she realizes she read this the night before, but there is still much work to be done. Again, her mind wanders. Her eyes fall onto a student focused on the clock, drumming his fingers on the desk in anticipation of the bell. ¶ If only Sophia's worries were as trivial. ¶ "One of my close friends and I were talking and he said 'Give me a reason why I should do my homework.' ¶ So I gave him my rank: 'I'm number nine, what are you?' ¶ He said, 'Well, I'm first quarter.' ¶ 'OK, there you go,' I said, 'You need to beat me.' ¶ He was like, 'Why do you let yourself be defined by a number? Why let it define you and be who you are?' ¶ I told him, 'The reason is, to the government, I am a number. I am an alien number. So to them, there really isn't much to me. The reason I try so hard is because if I become a top number [in school], then I can become more than a number to the United States.'" ¶ Sophia is an illegal immigrant. In fact, Sophia is not her real name – her name and another student's name were changed in this story in order to protect them from the uncertainty that comes from life in the U.S. without legal residency. A status which keeps Sophia from those privileges other students don't think twice about – student loans, acceptance into college, or just the assurance of knowing her parents will be home when she returns from school. ¶ As an undocumented student, Sophia's concerns are difficult to grasp to those privileged with the crest of citizenship. ¶ "If my friend worked a little bit harder, he could go to Rice without having to pay anything; and even though I've been working harder than him, even though I have better scores than him, I can't even apply." ¶ A fellow undocumented classmate of Sophia, Steven (name also changed), shares similar struggles. ¶ "I know there's thousands and thousands of scholarships, but then I look at the requirements: Must be a resident. Must be a citizen." ¶ In June of 2013 the Secretary of Homeland Security gave many undocumented children in the U.S. some sense of hope. Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) allows students – who meet several requirements – to request authorization that allows them to work and attend school, among other things, for two years without fear of deportation. ¶ "You have to be in school, you have to be doing something productive with your life," Sophia says. ¶ And it isn't free. ¶ "I was going through my newsfeed the other day and some girl shared a video of some politician," Sophia said. "She [talked] about how [immigrants] are screwing up the economy and what not. People don't realize the application for Deferred Action is like \$400 plus legal help." ¶ That legal help amounts to around \$300 more. ¶ "It comes to around \$700 every time you renew [every two years]," Sophia said. "But even then, we are considered illegal, undocumented. Even

though we have these privileges, we're still not legal. We don't have residence. We're not citizens. So we're still not – we don't get all the benefits." ¶ This includes benefits such as financial aid and scholarships. There's also added costs if undocumented students want to do anything more than just attend school and get a job. ¶ Last year, Sophia got the opportunity to travel with a school group out of the country. Though her fellow students just needed money for airfare, hotel and food, Sophia also had to pay for permission to exit the country. ¶ It's understandable that after paying all of these fees, Sophia is somewhat confused when she overhears Americans complaining about the financial burden immigrants put on the U.S., such as housing the children currently detained at the Texas-Mexico border. ¶ "If the government is using their tax money [to house those children], then what is the government doing with the money the aliens have given to them?" Sophia asked. ¶ Despite this frustration, both Sophia and Steven said they think the system currently in place is a good one. ¶ "This is a way to citizenship," Sophia said, and adds she doesn't agree with sweeping reform for all. She doesn't believe immigrants should be given assistance without having to work for it – without proving they will be productive citizens. ¶ "That is like suicide," she said. ¶ Sophia, who is also actively involved with the politics of this issue, said the goal is to turn DACA into a process toward citizenship. ¶ "They're thinking that after a couple of renewals, you're going to be able to become a citizen or a resident at least," she said. ¶ Mary Frances Carter, an English teacher at Spring Woods, was recently interviewed along with a former student, by Houston Public Media about undocumented students. Carter's former student came to her his senior year with an acceptance letter to the University of Texas, but not the documentation needed to apply for financial aid. This incident encouraged Carter to establish The Dream Project.

Currently in the early stages, the goal is to provide help to undocumented students at Spring Woods who wish to go to college. ¶ "I wanted to create something specifically designed to support students who don't have status," said Carter. "Initially, it was seniors as they're applying to college, but I'd like it be something that starts in ninth grade." ¶ All of this is appreciated by Sophia and Steven, who are looking for this sort of help as they near the end of their senior year, head to college, and on to their future. ¶ "I did my research, and looked for what was the best career. Biomedical engineering is the number one career. It's growing. I'm not going to be unemployed," said Sophia. ¶ This isn't her first choice, but it is the best considering her family situation. ¶ "If I did what I wanted to do, I would be a music teacher. The thing is, I don't know how that's going to provide for my family. I don't want to just be better for myself, but be able to bring my family along with me. Be able to have enough to where I don't just support myself, but to where I can help my family, just give back to the ones in Mexico. I realized it's not about what I want to do, it's about what I have to do. I have to change the level of economic stability that I have. No one else can." ¶ When thinking of his future, Steven also considers those who sacrificed to get him here. ¶ "My mom is already having problems with her health – high blood pressure and stuff like that, her body aches. Also, my step dad works as an insulator so it's, like, hard labor – since they didn't go to college to get an education or anything – they didn't even finish elementary. So I really want to go to college, graduate, and start my career in about five years and start helping them already. That's what keeps me going." ¶ Meanwhile some of us are still counting down the seconds until the bell rings. **FPH**

A version of this piece was first published in The Streak, the student newspaper at Spring Woods High School.



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ences, geology, geomorphology, and related areas have found that vegetation and sedimentary deposits along meandering rivers are essential to their health. ■ Dr. Mathias Kondolf of the University of California, one of the world's leading river scientists, has done a detailed study of the state of the riparian buffer along our Buffalo Bayou. Dr. Kondolf points to a lack of science underlying the engineering designed by Harris County Flood Control District in their attempt to "save" the Bayou. **FPH**

It is not all bad news, however. The Army Corp of Engineers has not yet issued a permit for the project to start. There is still time to act. If you would like to get involved to help save the Bayou, access <http://www.savebuffalobayou.org> or visit the Save Buffalo Bayou Facebook page for more information.



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Stand Up & Deliver Everything Starts In The Barbershop

By David Garrick

Photos: Impact



HOUSTON HAS A STORIED PAST when it comes to stand-up comedy. We all know about the greats who came and went, but there aren't too many who have stayed and command when and how they leave. When I started this series off, the only comic I wanted from start to finish was Ali Siddiq. I don't think there's a comic in this town who doesn't hold him in the highest regard. Siddiq commands an audience like no one I've ever seen, and he does most of it sitting down. Siddiq won Comedy Central's 2013 Comic To Watch, and he's had appearances on Showtime, NBC, HBO, and Comedy Central; but you wouldn't know that when you talk to a guy who might be the most humble entertainer I've met. It's a true honor to end this series this year with the one guy who could easily be the biggest comic to come out of Houston in the past twenty years. FPH was lucky enough to get an hour with him, and it was one of the best interviews we got all year.

You're from Houston Correct? ■ Yeah, I'm from Third Ward.

You've been at this for a good while, but your backstory is littered with all kinds of hearsay and rumor...you wanna' set the record straight on that backstory? ■ It was in my Showtime piece, I feel like everyone knows it. But I started doing stand-up in prison. I went in for drug trafficking when I was 19, and I got out on October 21, 1997. I was on parole until October 21, 2007.

You've gotten to tour with some heavy hitters and yet you've stayed humble and kept a constant working & touring schedule. Is humility key to success in the world of stand up? ■ I don't know if it's a key, but there's not a lot of it. Everything you do as a comic is a stepping stone to where you wanna' go. There's no reason to celebrate early on and be rude to people. That's like celebrating in the first quarter of the game and you don't know what the outcome will be in the end. When I go to a comedy club, the most important people to me are the waiters and the staff. There's a short time between who's a waiter there and who's a general manager. We all started the same way, Chappelle, Eddie, whoever; we all got our start in the same place. I just try to focus on the craft and be nice to everybody. I think i'm one of the few comics in this town, who, I don't want to say is successful; but one of the one's who has had success, who still goes out to watch new comics. I watch them because I want to try and help

them. When I got started, there wasn't anyone there to help me. How to do a three minute audition, how to change the way a joke is told, how to get an agent; I want to help them as much as I can. And, because I have the contacts now, I can just call the comic they want to work with, or the person at CBS, or whatever. I wanna' help them get to where they want to go, now matter what it is or with who it is.

You can command an audience better than anyone I've seen in my life. Is that something that comes natural or is that something that takes time to cultivate? ■ It's something that you develop over time. The way I structure myself is to set ridiculous challenges to myself. I meet and hang out with people far greater than I, and I just listen to what advice they give me. An example is where I stand on stage. Some comics stand to the left, some to the right, and some walk around. I took a lot of time to structure that and decided I wanted to be center stage and on top of the crowd. I chose that as the primary place to deliver my material. That's where the sitting came from, like Paul Mooney. I look at the room as a grid, and think, "Who do I have to get first to command this room?"

You might be the only comic since Bill Cosby to take a seat when you're on stage. The act of doing that takes away so much of the control you have over the audience, yet like Cosby; you never seem to lose them. Have you always done that, cause' it's incredibly ballsy? ■ It just developed over time. The first time I saw Bill Cosby "Himself," I thought, "you know how funny you have to be to sit?" It's all about the idea of if you can do this, you can get this, and so on. I was out with D.L. (Hughley) and I said, "I wanna' walk out with no music and no intro, and just sit down and start." And he encouraged me to practice it, and I did forty five minutes like that, and I've been doing it ever since. Bill Burr hit me up and said he saw a clip of me on the internet, where I sat down and told a joke about needing noise to go to the bathroom. He said, after I saw that I thought, I gotta' work with that guy. And he hit up Patrice for my info and he gave it to him, and that's how we got to work together.

I read that you're influenced by Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy, is there anyone else from the past who you're inspired by? Anyone presently? ■ From the past there are way more than just those two guys. Rodney

Dangerfield, Phyllis Diller, and Don Rickles. Presently, I really like D.L. Hughley, Frank Ajaye, Patrice O'Neill, Bill Burr, Dave Chappelle; and then comics like Ari Shaffir, JJ Williams, and Dominique. I'm a comic's comic, so there are comics I like who haven't hit yet; but they're inspiring to me.

You have four albums, which is I think more than any other Houston comic. Which one of them is your favorite? ■ "Talking Loud Saying Something" by far. I had seven albums, but the jokes weren't there yet, they weren't polished. Even though I had just wrote the set, the jokes on that album felt polished and ready. I record raw, and all of my albums have stuff in them that actually happened at the show. On "Enjoy Your Life," you hear this lady bugging me, and I left it in. I was nice twice but then the third time I said one of the funniest things I think I've ever said. "Lady, you wanna' talk so bad that you're the type of person who goes to a silent movie and reads out loud." And, the audience was with me, and they gave off that feeling like, "finally." Now, I left that in to show that the audience and I were on the same page. And what better a way to describe someone enjoying their life when you do what I do and the audience is right there with you.

Eddie Murphy once said, "When I started off, every bit I did went from the mirror in my bedroom to the audience in the clubs." Do you have a similar process when you're working out new material? ■ Well, for me, everything starts off in the barbershop. Every premise, every idea, every joke starts out there, and here's why. There's no social status in the barbershop, just like in the comedy club. Thugs, teachers, millionaires, plumbers; they're all there in one place. The only way you can go before me and everyone else is to pay for all of us first. Every ethnicity and background is there, just like in the comedy club. My process is my brain, my mouth, the barbershop, and then the club. I judge how it works there before it goes anywhere else.

What about comedy drew you to it? ■ I liked the art of telling a story and captivating people with it. To have the control, to make people laugh, and to play all of the characters while conveying all of the emotions...progressively.

What's your definition of a successful comedy career? ■ When I got released from prison, they ask you what you're gonna' do; and I said I was gonna' be a stand-up comic. They said, "What? Get outta' here!" I worked at a department store and at a sunglass shop, and I looked at what other comics were doing at that time. So I went and I got a suit and went up in a club, and got booed off the stage in two minutes. Then I sat back and I looked at the audience, and I came back two weeks later in jeans and a T-shirt and killed; cause' I looked like them. I felt like from that point on, I was a success. I haven't had a job since I started, I support my family with this. All of this that's come after has just been icing on the cake. I judge success differently, I get up when I want, and I make more money for an hour's worth of work than most people. I'm already a success, and now I'm just trying to see how far I can go in this success and where I can take it from this point on. ■ You can learn a lot about life, entertainment, and comedy from his words. There might not be another entertainer out there who's as humble as Ali Siddiq. While he enjoys the icing stage of his career, you can catch Siddiq at Houston's Improv December 26th through December 28th, when he records his upcoming album "Damaged Goods." According to Siddiq, it's about how through your past, or your family history, you can be damaged and still be good. However, anyone who sees him on stage, would say that he isn't even remotely "damaged." **FPH**

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The Browning of Baytown Has Already Begun

By G. Medina Mendez

Art by Blake Jones



THIS PHRASE “THE BROWNING OF BAYTOWN” is a sign that the city of Baytown is in the midst of change—a cultural shift—that some folks aren’t ready to accept. On one side you have a set of parents, long-time educators, and detractors upset with the changes made by the recently-fired superintendent of the Goose Creek Consolidated

Independent School District (GCCISD), Dr. Salvador Cavazos. On the other side, you have the supporters of these changes – also made up of parents, students, and educators.

THE BROWN GUY TAKES CHARGE

Go back about two-and-a-half years. On July 19th, 2012, the school board unan-

imously elected Dr. Salvador Cavazos as the 14th superintendent of the district. Then board president, Howard Sampson believed Cavazos would “lead Goose Creek CISD into becoming an even more powerful district in the State of Texas.” ¶ School board member Agustin Loredo remembers, “When we went looking for a new superintendent, it was with intention of finding someone who would come in and shake things up. That’s why we looked outside the district, we needed to stop being stagnant – scores were lackluster and we had two schools that were on the unacceptable list.” ¶ In 2 years, Cavazos made several changes within the district – he swapped high school principals out of their positions with junior high school principals, switched administrator contracts from three-year contracts to a one-year contract—all major changes for many personnel. ¶ Laura Acosta, Project Administrator for the Baytown area National Hispanic Institute program put it this way, “The personnel changes seemed to bother people the most within the professional rank and file in Goose Creek. They felt the moves were unfair, and I heard a lot of comments about how he was bringing in his friends from Alice [ISD]. I believe it was coded language meaning his ‘Latino friends’ from Alice.” ¶ In all truth, Cavazos brought in several people from all over, including Diana Silva, who at one time was in charge of turning around “at risk” schools for the Texas Education Agency (T.E.A.). Cavazos brought her to Alice ISD and then later asked her to come to GCCISD to help make changes. ¶ Cavazos had somehow tapped into a lot of “inherent fear and distrust as he began to deconstruct the status quo that existed for a long time in Goose Creek,” says Acosta. ¶ Loredo echoed her point “Before Cavazos, you had a lot of good assistant principals and coordinators who worked hard for the kids in this district but would get passed up for leadership positions. Many inquired about what was needed to move up within the district. They were told ‘You aren’t ready.’ One African American man interested in an upper-level position emailed administrators; he waited six months with no response. So folks like him looked elsewhere, and you know what happened as soon as they left Goose Creek? They got the positions they wanted. ¶ “They were people of color who wanted to be in GCCISD and they had been treated unfairly. GCCISD under Dr. Cavazos finally starting giving people of color a chance.” ¶ Loredo had heard the phrase “the browning of Baytown” – “I asked Goose Creek to provide the data on the district employee demographics and it’s all bogus.” ¶ The data doesn’t lie – prior to Cavazos , GCCISD employees were 20% Mexican Americans, 15% African American, and 65% were Caucasian. Today’s numbers haven’t changed much – Mexican Americans have moved up a staggering

1%, the African Americans have moved down 1%, and the Caucasian number has stayed the same.

TWO YEARS LATER

As Acosta puts it, “It all had just blown to a head. At the end of [Cavazos’s] second year, he decided to again reassign and shuffle around administrators. He completed all of the changes with the full consent of the school board. The board knew that they needed to make changes in order to make the district great again. But for some it was too much.” ¶ So, almost exactly two years from his hiring, Dr. Salvador Cavazos’ job was on the line. At a July 14th board meeting, the request to fire Cavazos was made very public. This would be the very board meeting where things would turn ugly. A gathering of over 200 “concerned citizens”—community members (made up of caucasian parents and GCCISD employees) could be heard saying “send him back to Alice,” “get rid of him,” and other colorful remarks (think angry mob stuff). Over 25 people signed up to speak at the board meeting, and only two of those—recent high school graduates from GCCISD—were there to support Dr. Cavazos.

SHOWTIME

“There was only tension in the room if you were a Dr. Cavazos fan,” Acosta recalls. “If you were not, there was a lot of camaraderie, so it was overwhelming when I attended. There were over 200 people in the meeting room—they had to make an overflow room filled with TVs.” ¶ Acosta attended the July 14th meeting with a group of National Hispanic Institute program students who had directly benefited from Dr. Cavazos’ leadership. Cavazos had a history of supporting the program and the students who attended its training workshops, as NHI had a history of helping young Latino students gain leadership skills to and through college. Acosta felt it necessary to show up with students onhand as a show of solidarity with Dr. Cavazos. Two of the program students, Jonathan Guajardo and Alfonso Mendoza, also had an idea—they would not only show up to the meeting, they would sign up and speak to the board. ¶ Of the two, Guajardo, a 20 year old Pre-med major at Baylor University, was up first. ¶ “I was nervous and anxious and didn’t want to bomb,” he remembers. “I didn’t know how the crowd would react.” ¶ Almost as soon as he spoke, as soon as he raised his voice to say he supported Dr. Cavazos, he would have his answer. ¶ “The people in the seats, they booed me, they rejected my statements even as I was speaking. I remember people saying, ‘No, that’s not right!’ People shouting over me, calling me names.” ¶ Guajardo spoke, reading his letter to the editor of the Baytown Sun in full (the Sun had over-edited his words) to make the points he wanted to make. He spoke about the good that Dr. Cavazos had done for the district by

way of his support for NHI, the selection of the new principal at Goose Creek Memorial High, his alma mater, and Dr. Cavazos’ (and the board’s) decision to fund the AP exam fees of the entire senior class of 2013. It’s a three page letter. (Take a look on freepresshouston.com.) ¶ Then his two minutes were up. As he walked back to his seat beside Alfonso Mendoza, Jonathan Guajardo looked at the crowd. “People were giving me the evil eye...people I thought I knew, people I do know—teachers and parents. I was astonished at their reaction to me.” ¶ Three speakers later, Mendoza had his turn. His speech was a bit more off-the-cuff. ¶ “I was thinking of the friends I left behind, when I graduated,” he said. “That if Dr. C leaves, they would lose out.” ¶ He was even more nervous, having seen the treatment that Guajardo received from the crowd. ¶ “I was frightened by the reactions, I had never gotten this kind of treatment before – it threw me off. I knew people there, but I didn’t think they would abandon decorum like that. I didn’t know they would be so upset.” ¶ According to Mendoza—a 2014 graduate of Lee High, now an 18-year-old freshman engineering major at Texas A&M University—he decided to take a different angle and not say outright that he was on Dr. Cavazos’ side. He built his case for Dr. Cavazos using logic. ¶ “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” he said. “Give Dr. Cavazos a chance to finish the work he set out to do. We have to be willing to work together. All you see is the short-term, but he has to see the long-term effects of these decisions.” ¶ He remembers the crowd being just as loud yelling “Oh God, here we go again!” and “They’ve been coached!,” or “Not another one!” He tried not to let the crowd or their reactions get away from him. ¶ “Of the two of us,” Guajardo said, “I think Alfonso got it worse.” ¶ As he went back to his seat, Mendoza remembered seeing people all around, murmuring as he walked by, looking at him and whispering to one another, snickering, and he understood: people were talking about him and Jonathan, negatively. Both young men were stunned. ¶ After the meeting was over, both gentlemen took a seat on a bench in the lobby of the school board building. They had to take the time and “check-in”—had this been the treatment they just received for being honest? Had they just witnessed educators flip them off for speaking their minds? Yes, indeed. They had been changed forever – the idyllic sentiment of what their “hometown” was tarnished. ¶ Mendoza said it best “We didn’t do this for us – we did it for the kids we coach [both men now work as mentors for the very NHI program they were once a part of], for our friends, for Jonathon’s little brother. When did this educational system become about the educators and administrators instead of the students?” ¶ Jonathan added “You know, the whole time the other people spoke,

it was about ‘I, I, I...my job this, my position that...’ No one had even asked the parents or the students about what they wanted to do about Cavazos.”

THE AFTERMATH

By the next school board meeting, the deed was done. On August 9th, 2014 – Dr. Cavazos was released from his contract and Deputy Superintendent Randy O’Brien took over. The board has not put in a request or begun a search for a replacement. ¶ But on that same evening, in that school board meeting, something strange happened. Another series of students, this time current students, all students from GCCISD’s Impact Early College High School, which had been recently removed from its Lee College campus base, had shown up. They brought signs and they were angry. ¶ Since their school was no longer on the college campus, it was housed in a less-than-adequate facility and the students demanded an answer from the school board—would they honor “Dr. C” and his wish to build a campus for the students of Impact? ¶ One young lady, Cristine Martinez, a junior at Impact, put her voice to good use. “How dare you embarrass yourselves?” She spoke to the crowd, reminding them how they had treated Jonathan Guajardo and Alfonso Mendoza at the previous meeting. “How dare you say these things to the children of this town?!” Then, with as much fierceness, she turned around and addressed the board “And how dare you let these people get away with that?!” ¶ Acosta was there for that meeting as well. “You could have heard a pin drop when she spoke.” ¶ When the vote came about whether or not to build Impact Early College High School, the board unanimously voted yes. ¶ Cavazos’ legacy was short, but if you ask his supporters, his legacy is long lasting. Just look at the 2014 Accountability Summary results for GCCISD from his time there – all 40 schools in the district met or surpassed the measures needed. Cavazos did his job as he was asked to do. The district has the second highest starting teacher salary (save for Barbers Hill ISD) and the lowest employee turnover rate of any school district in the state. ¶ Baytown made the history books by hiring Cavazos. He was the first Mexican American superintendent in GCCISD (a school district made up of over 60% Latino students) and for a time, he was the only superintendent of color among 51 area school districts. ¶ If the majority of the district is in fear of “the Browning of Baytown,” they might be correct. It took three young adults, all under the age of 21 to shine a spotlight on what was right and put voice to what is needed – and that’s just the beginning. The browning of Baytown has already begun, its just not happening as fast as everyone fears. The brown kids are telling the truth. Scary stuff. **FPH**

THE NATION HAS SPOKEN: Six years of Obama was enough. Apparently the people want Republicans, but who knows what they want specifically. To repeal Obamacare? To cut government spending on education? To lock up returning ebola health-care providers? To stop any regulations on banks and fossil fuels? To prevent the outside possibility of minimal requirements being imposed on gun buyers? The Republican electoral strategy was to attack Obama. In response, the Democrats only conceded the point, distancing themselves from the President. Considering the results, they couldn't have done much worse proudly proclaiming his name from the mountain-top. ¶ The debates of the election were about distractions—both sides criticized the other about the economy, bipartisanship, ebola, ISIS / terrorism, immigration, and Obamacare. It would have been nice to hear actual debate on fundamental disagreements on issues, but instead we became the viewing audience at a elaborately produced play paid for and choreographed by PACs and rich people. In it, Republicans proudly portray the role of xenophobic, fundamentalist policemen of sexual morality who also oppose federal spending on anything other than war machines. Democrats' role is to lose outright, or strike pathetic compromises as they push for reproductive rights, expanded health care, gay rights, net-neutrality, immigration reform, stopping new Israeli settlements, and reducing greenhouse gases. Every few years, the audience gets to vote, choosing between a party that proudly proclaims empty nationalist rhetoric, and a party that stands weakly and ambivalently for some things that matter. ¶ Voting, the only aspect of our system that could be called somewhat "democratic," is not used to make clear demands or promote agendas. Instead voting is a means by which we express our distaste for politicians and each other. The fact that majority of those who bother to vote switch every few years between Republican and Democrat doesn't represent any mass shift of allegiances, but rather a shallow, lazy attempt to try something different. Republican and Democrat voters take turns celebrating every few years that their side has won, while in reality, everyone loses except the richest and most powerful. ¶ Even the possibility of a Clinton / Bush election in 2016 should tip off voters that elections are a charade. Was there some groundswell of public opinion demanding that Hillary lead us into glory? Did she convey a bold vision about what her presidency could bring? Do people identify with her as one of their own? Of course not. Her electability seems to be based on little more than that she has been waiting patiently. She stands for nothing. Candidates like Hillary are puppets, pawns, or candidates on America's Got a President, but we didn't get to watch the real auditions. ¶ Important stuff, like ending the war on drugs, getting money out of elections, fighting climate change, single payer health care, cutting military spending, ending the death penalty, a living wage, affordable housing, sustainable energy and agriculture, ending corporate personhood, prosecuting Wall Street crooks, a fracking ban, taxing the rich, restorative justice, equalizing school funding, withdrawing from "free-trade" agreements, etc. are elephants in the room, mentioned at election time only by the Green Party or occasionally in ballot initiatives. And speaking of elephants, wild elephants are set to be extinct in the next decade. How about a politician opposing that? ¶ Elections are expensive, and the public knows that they are paid for by "interest groups" which end up having influence over their sponsored candidates. We know that wealthy sponsors want specific sorts of favors, but we forget that collectively, they also buy something more fundamental. The system pays for politicians to distract us, to provide the illusion of choice, and to channel our hopes and dreams into a dog and pony show. ¶ Even if elections are nothing more than an empty shadow of true democracy, they still represent democracy, and it is our pro-democratic tendency that makes us defend them. So, it makes sense that folks get defensive when they read a cynical article about voting. However, if elections are worth defending, people should defend them not from criticism, but from the actual threats to free, open, and fair elections, like voter discrimination laws, gerrymandering, and corporate sponsorship of candidates. These threats can be fought, but the venue for that is not found within the framework of elections, especially \$3.7 billion ones. There are important battles that could be won with real effort, but an hour spent voting every couple years isn't going to cut it. ¶ If millions of people were ready to march on Washington and refuse to leave until we have full publicly-funded elections, we'd have them in a few months. Victories could be won in the US without bullets or ballots, by sheer numbers of humans in the streets who refuse to leave. It is hard for us to imagine mass mobilizations. Occupy was relatively small, and the 2003

And the Losers Are...

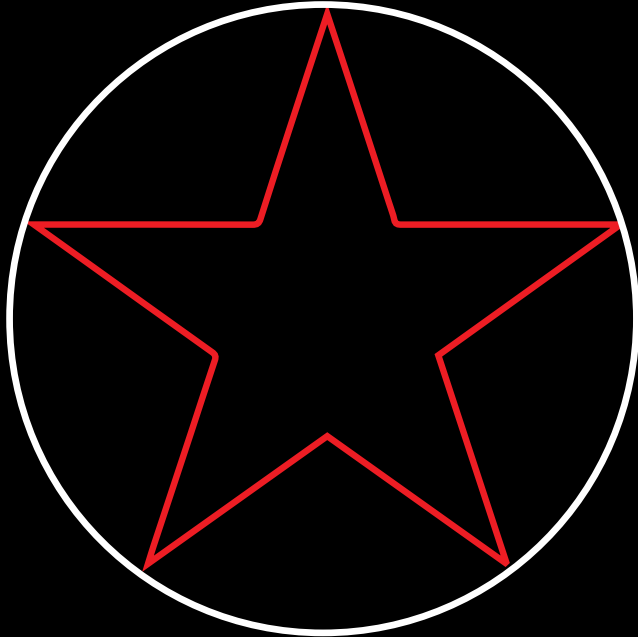
By Nick Cooper

Art by Austin Smith

protests against the Iraq war lasted only one day. It is hard to even imagine what mass movements demanding real changes would look like. Without this imagination, we will be the unhappy audience for perpetual puppet shows. **FPH**



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Sprouting Through Concrete Toward Sunlight: Cavanaugh Nweze and the Marcus Garvey Liberation Garden

By Meghan Hendley Lopez with Harbeer Sandhu

“The very fact that we are having a national conversation about what we should eat, that we are struggling with the question about what the basic diet is, is symptomatic of how far we have strayed from the natural conditions that gave rise to our species, from the simple act of eating whole, fresh food.” – Mark Hyman

“The highways and cars / were sacrificed for agriculture...We used to microwave / now we just eat nuts and berries.” – The Talking Heads, “Nothing But Flowers”

IT HAS BECOME IMPOSSIBLE to go a full day without hearing discussions of food and food accessibility—from “foodies” sharing photos of local seasonal artisanal gourmet mac ‘n’ cheese to gluten-free diet vegan cupcakes to the rising food costs that sparked the Arab Spring. Yet, in concrete sprawls such as Houston, we can still find ourselves stranded in food deserts—whole neighborhoods and communities lacking markets with fresh, affordable food. Since food deserts tend to coincide with lower incomes, and fresh organic produce and meats are sold at a premium, healthy dining is often out of reach for working class families, yet processed “food products” are cheap because their ingredients (such as corn syrup and hydrogenated vegetable oils) are subsidized. ¶ The discussion of healthy eating has turned into constant fervent action for Cavanaugh Nweze, an urban gardener and community organizer in the Third Ward. Nweze runs the Marcus Garvey Liberation Garden, named for the early 20th century Pan-African leader, for which Nweze won an Idea Fund grant and an invitation to speak at the 2013 TEDx Houston event, where he presented his dream of the “Living Grocery Store.” ¶ Poor neighborhoods may lack supermarkets, but there is rarely a shortage of vacant lots. This is where the Living Grocery Store comes in. Nweze’s idea is to reclaim vacant lots and turn them into lush, vital sources of healthy sustenance while simultaneously teaching skills and putting people to work—transforming consumers of junk food into producers of healthy food. ¶ “On this campus in 1962” Nweze says in his TEDx talk at Rice University, “the great JFK made his pledge to take us to space. Today, I pledge to bring us back to Earth.” ¶ Even before Nweze had the desire to start a non-profit or a community garden, he was surrounded by action through the work of his family. These examples shouted louder and spoke deeper to him in his childhood than the negative atmosphere that was brewing around him. ¶ “My desire to give my talents to my community was inspired by both my mother and grandmother,” says Nweze. “My mom once was a member and missionary for The Shrine of the Black Madonna. As I grew up, I had the opportunity to watch her and many other adults sacrifice material, worldly lives to build a better environment for their children. ¶ “My grandmother was always active and outspoken about problems in her community. I followed her to board

meetings. I sat at home with her while she called in to radio shows and they knew her by name. I remember watching the news with my grandfather, and guess who pops up being interviewed by a reporter concerning the most recent issues of her community in Dallas, TX? It was my grandma. She also spoke firmly, eloquently, and truthfully. ¶ “So watching those two women and reading books about Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, WEB Dubois, Albert B. Cleage and so many others, I knew I would use my powers for the betterment of my household, community, and environment. I knew I wanted to do my part of reversing the ‘Brain Drain’ in my community and make it look cool while doing it.” ¶ A vague idea came to him while Nweze studied accounting at Prairie View A&M University—a desire to start a non-profit organization that promoted revolutionary programs or actions that were outside of the mainstream. Nothing too specific. Then, after Hurricane Ike, Nweze and his close companions decided to cultivate a garden to ensure that their surrounding community would never go hungry, and have access to an abundance of fresh and nutritionally beneficial food. ¶ “One of the most important aspects of my gardening projects is economic development and empowerment,” Nweze says. “Even before the garden, I tried to consume the best foods possible. However, I continually found myself driving miles across town, driving to other neighborhoods, to purchase food that would reach my standards of what I felt my body deserved [from corporate supermarket chains]. So, with the gardens I create, one of the most important things is decreasing the transfer of wealth. ¶ “In the African-American community, our dollar stays there for only just a fraction of a second before it departs to never be seen again. Now, instead of only buying groceries, I invest in my community. At least a portion of my grocery bill can now be recycled in my community. We will have the capacity to employ people who can’t earn a living wage due to previous life mistakes, and we get to consume foods that are of fresher and of higher quality than I could purchase at the most expensive and fancy grocery store.” ¶ In addition to presenting an oasis of health to the community, the Marcus Garvey Liberation Garden provides an outlet that can help decrease illegal activity in the neighborhood and replace these activities with positive actions. ¶ “We are able to remove blight and decrease crime, just by planting

a garden,” says Nweze. “I have neighbors who wouldn’t say a word to me before, now they stop their cars long enough to ask what it is that we are doing. Therefore, even if my neighbor may not choose to eat healthier, at least we now have the capacity to give their sons or daughters an alternative to earn a wage. ¶ “I even hope and pray that people see what we are doing choose not to help us. They may choose to go home to their neighborhoods and do the exact same thing, maybe even better than I can. Now that’s what I want!” ¶ Decreasing crime and promoting positive activity has been a cornerstone for Nweze and his garden, inspired by a companion who is attempting to better his own life. ¶ “I have a very close friend who had some run-ins with the law, some years back, that prevent him from securing gainful employment. We have had discussions about the hardships in his life, and how all he wants is to be able to work without taking penitentiary chances. Even before I could compensate him for his time, he was more than willing to volunteer, to help me do something positive rather than something that could put his freedom at stake. ¶ “Being able to help him has helped me understand that we all have a role to play in this grand scheme. I am more than appreciative for his help, and I am proud that I can help put a few pennies in his pocket. So that’s just the first person’s life we have been able to touch in this manner, there are others, and as we continue to grow I know there will be more like him who just want a better way to earn a living and feed their family.” ¶ This past spring, the garden and its leader received a prestigious grant that will help expand the project even further. The Idea Fund grant, funded by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and administered through a partnership between DiverseWorks, the Aurora Picture Show, and Project Row Houses supports projects that exemplify the unconventional, interventionist, conceptual, entrepreneurial, participatory, or guerrilla artistic practices that occur outside of the traditional frameworks of support. Nweze was thrilled to receive one of the 12 \$4,000 grants awarded this year. ¶ Regarding his plans for the grant, Nweze says, “This grant will help us cover the cost of supplies to do this work, but I think the greatest gift of receiving the grant is that it has helped me to think differently in how I conceive, conduct, and present my work. ¶ “I have always loved the arts. So this grant and discussions I’ve held with

other grant recipients have helped me think and work to present my work more creatively and aesthetically. It made me realize that I am an artist, too. Everyone is an artist in their own right. So to me the most important aspect is not only the funds received, but the acknowledgement as an artist puts a huge smile on my heart and will have an impact on my work from here and into perpetuity.

“It terms of a more concrete aspect, the grant has helped me to put people to work. I am grateful for volunteers, but having the capacity to use the skills of my friends and let them know they will be compensated for their assistance is a great accomplishment. The funds from this grant are also helping us to leverage funds from other organizations that are willing to match monies spent to grow and cultivate our particular crops. So, it’s been a blessing to receive the grant and be able to use my professional accounting acumen to be administer the funds in the most efficient way possible.” ¶ As social awareness grows about problems with large-scale corporate agribusiness that requires huge inputs of petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides while poisoning the soil and depleting the water-table, only to deliver plastic food that is lacking in both taste and nutrition (to say nothing of meat from factory farms and genetically modified organisms), people are voicing their desire for wholesome, whole, local, fresh seasonal foods. Foods with spirit, with soul, that are so much more than just fuel for our metabolism. ¶ In his corner of Houston, Nweze and his vision have helped pioneer this discussion and change in a humble and honest way—with “fringe benefits” that go far beyond the tabletop. ¶ “These gardens are our way to fight against this corporate world we live in. Food is just the first step. It’s one of the first things that we all can unite around. It’s the one thing that we share when we celebrate, and we share it in our most trying times. ¶ “I have discovered that while working in a garden, selling produce at one of our stands, or even sitting down and eating this food we have grown, our conversations change. We speak and work to resolve issues that would be either swept under the rug or not even acknowledged publicly at all. ¶ “So for me, food is just a beginning of so much more to come.”

FPH

To find more information about the Marcus Garvey Liberation Garden, visit: www.mglg.net

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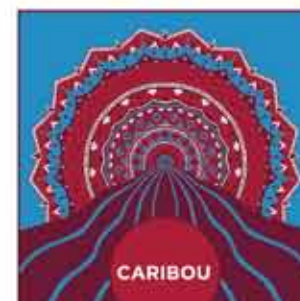
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Tickets are Bullshit

By Remington Alessi

Art by Blake Jones

EVERYONE HAS A STORY about the guy they know who is a friend of a friend of the guy who beat a speeding ticket by fighting it in court, right? ¶ It turns out that I am that guy, and so are countless other Houstonians. I've beaten twenty class C misdemeanor charges in the last five years in the City of Houston alone, so I have a pretty good idea of what I'm about to tell you. I'm not an attorney, just a regular asshole, so this isn't anything that requires a degree in rocket surgery. ¶ Thanks to an inefficient bureaucracy, a little bit of effort has saved me thousands of dollars whenever police officers try to extort me. Of course, the most important part is to remain silent when I deal with the officer. I don't try to talk my way out of a fine by volunteering information or admitting I messed up. I know that no one is ever as smooth as they think they are, and that police officers have already heard every story in the book. I just sign the ticket and come back when it's time for my day in court. ¶ Texas law grants people the right to a jury trial in all offenses, even traffic citations, which are class C misdemeanors in most cases. The few hundred dollars I might be liable for pale in comparison to the cost of having a prosecutor try my case in a courtroom in front of a judge and jury, so merely pleading 'not guilty' and requesting a jury trial can quickly make it so that you are no longer worth extorting. ¶ This sort of case is so common that Roberto De La Garza, a seasoned attorney with the Law Office of Paul Kubosh, estimates that in the past eight years, he's probably tried at least two hundred cases, but stopped counting a long time ago. ¶ "We encourage people to fight it," he said of traffic citations. "Often we can beat the ticket by getting it dismissed, which can save people a lot of money." ¶ De La Garza further explained that many of the citations he sees are for victimless crimes, and that they are disproportionately issued to poor people. This is consistent with statistics that illustrate a nationwide trend of municipalities profiting from what many attorneys have begun calling "poverty violations." ¶ "Some of our clients can't really afford to keep their vehicles registered and they need to get to work. If they stop driving, they can lose their job, and in a commuter city like Houston, that can be a tough hole for a person to dig out of," De La Garza explained. ¶ Putting people into this hole is, unfortunately, a big industry—so big that if you get a traffic ticket in the City of Houston, you can expect your mailbox to be filled with advertisements from countless law firms that specialize in defending people in traffic court. ¶ As big as this defense industry is, the City of Houston lacks the necessary infrastructure to actually prosecute these cases. On any given day, as many as two hundred people can be set for trial in each of the eight courtrooms located in the Municipal Courts building on Lubbock Street, but each courtroom has time to take only one case to trial per day. ¶ If this were not enough, the City can't even get enough jurors to show up for the few trials it tries to run. According to Lilly Warden, Assistant Director of the Houston Municipal Court, about three hundred jury summonses go out on a given day, and only about twenty five to thirty percent of jurors actually show up. This is partly due to the fact that while laws are on the books to provide a penalty for not attending jury duty, the Municipal Court lacks the resources to do anything about people who decide to not attend. They're so desperate for jurors to attend that the City even provides free Wifi,

free parking, and cable TV for jurors while they wait, along with profuse thank-you's from judges, prosecutors, and staff. ¶ On the opposite side of the curtain, a defendant can expect that the court staff, bailiffs, and judges will repeatedly assert that you are in a real court with real prosecutors and real consequences, with the same shaky insistence of bill collectors who insist they can do more than just ring your phone incessantly. Histrionics aside, the math is clear. Eight courts with as many as 200 people per day can only try one person per day, without even enough jurors to accomplish even that much. The rest of the cases get dismissed or plead out, so the prosecutor in the room like a bear – you don't have to outrun the bear, just the slowest person in the courtroom. ¶ When I show up, I usually hire an attorney, and I expect to spend a good bit of time waiting. The system survives the way it does because it pushes its inefficiency on you. It's basically a staring contest to see who is more willing to waste time to win the case. I bring a good book and smile in a way that lets the prosecutor know that I'm good to go all week, even if I'm not. ¶ If the officer shows up, (and they often don't) I eventually get called before the prosecutor. I don't have to talk to this person under any circumstances, but they frequently try to intimidate me, lie, and make demands. It's worth listening to any offers they may make, but I don't like pleading as a personal rule, and it has served me well. Above all though, I know better than to discuss any of the details of my case, because it could be used against me. ¶ Once I have a good idea of what is being offered, I sit back and wait for a while. The one time that I was called to actually go to trial, I asked for a continuance to allow me time to hire an attorney. The judge granted it without hesitation, and I came back a month later, only to have my case dismissed. So far, I haven't had to pay a single penny in court costs or fines. ¶ The courts just don't have the infrastructure to handle actually pursuing the issue, and I'm willing to take advantage of that instead of allowing myself to be quietly exploited. Better yet, the more people are willing to fight their citations, the better the odds as the inefficient bureaucracy crumbles under its own weight. **FPH**



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Go Go Gadget Privacy

By DL Haydon

THE SPY EMPORIUM has sold gadgets and gear in Montrose since 1990, but thanks to the help of whistle-blowers like Edward Snowden, their demand has gone way up. Not only for their audio recorders and nanny cameras, but for Radio Frequency blockers and (surveillance) bug detectors. ¶ Sidney May, who inherited the shop from his father, says that although people ask for protection from being hacked and spied on, there's only so much you can do to keep the government (or anyone else) out of your business. ¶ "They do come here for that. Although we don't have any immediate solutions for them, we have a hacker on board now," May said. ¶ He described their contractor as the ethical type, AKA a white-hat hacker. And although he won't be able to keep Uncle Sam out, he can help keep people off your wifi network. This is a hint at the Spy Emporium's sister company, a private investigation firm by the name of TABOB Enterprises Group. The investigations firm works for insurance companies, schools, small businesses, bail bondsmen, attorneys and yes, the government. But they can also work for you, if you don't wish to risk becoming a spy (or convicted felon). ¶ But why not fight fire with fire? Given the time and money, the Spy Emporium could conceivably turn you into Batman, or at the very least, a poor man's James Bond. The shop has the gadgets and literature to teach you electronic eavesdropping, digital forensics, asset location, domestic infidelity, tracking (and counter-measures), anti-pirating and basically every scheme and trope you've seen or read about, ever. ¶ Now, if you're really worried about being spied on, take a breather. Chances are your grocery store is more interested in what you're up to than the government is. ¶ Let's zoom in to a local level. Picture a trip to your local supermarket. Closed circuit video cameras that monitor inside and outside. Video analytics like gaze trackers that notice things like your skin color and what brands you're looking at. Retailer tracking programs in their computer systems that monitor your phone purchases, your debit card purchases and, if you have one, your in-store card. Return rewards based on statistical models that predict your behavior and ignore your privacy rights. Discriminatory pricing based on age, sex, or ethnicity using data about you purchased from Facebook. ¶ And that's just when you're shopping for milk and cereal. ¶ Granted it's unlikely that Fiesta Mart has the capability to go all Big Brother on you, but bet your bottom dollar that Wal-Mart has their spytech on you like nobody's business. And unfortunately, there's not much at May's shop to keep that from happening. ¶ The government may have the National Security Agency working around the clock to see if you've visited a mosque lately or what kind of porn you like (in case they need to defame you later should you become an activist), but private corporations don't even need to dig for your info—you give it to them. And they, in turn, sell it to Uncle Sam. ¶ Now, that's an extremely simplified explanation of an extremely complicated issue, but fact of the matter is you're supplying them your data. If you want to get around that, delete your Facebook account (don't worry Mark Zuckerberg will back it up for you), kill your smartphone, go find Richard Stallman and join the Free Software Movement. ¶ Aside from that, get used to the government, the grocery store and the spouse spying on you. ¶ Zoom in a bit more. Does your bae spend countless hours scrolling through your Facebook and Twitter posts? Do they go through your phone? Have they ever tailed you on girl's (or guy's) night out? Because, as May pointed out, it doesn't take

much to be a spy these days. ¶ "The younger crowd tends to come in more," May said. "But typically it's the same crowd, 29 to 55 [year-olds]. People who are heavy into a relationship. A lover or spouse cheating." ¶ May also added that the Houston Police Department, as well as private investigators and occasionally, agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigations, will drop by to pick up tools and equipment. But 2014 is the year of Julian Assange over James Bond, and as such, suspecting your neighbor is just as important as suspecting your traffic cop. ¶ "Everyone is aware of other people spying on them," May said. "And that they can conduct surveillance. It's readily available to the public. Not just for people trying to catch their spouses or nannies. Anyone can do it." ¶ Usual items picked up by spy enthusiasts are lock picking tools, wearable cameras and hidden audio recorders, which May says get ordered frequently online and in-store. ¶ "Ever since Snowden whistleblowed about the NSA, people are a lot more paranoid too. We have a solution for that," he said. ¶ Solutions like the Spy Emporium's bug detectors, which can run a couple of hundred dollars, or their metal-lined RFID-blocking wallets for debit cards and passports. ¶ For those with a more "hands-on" approach towards security, May sells stun guns, tasers and other self-defense items. He also hinted at something that has been in demand (and development) among the tech-savvy for quite some time. ¶ "We're about to carry encrypted cell phones. It's going to be very big in 2015 and the coming years," May said. "Not only to keep your phone from being hacked, but to discourage surveillance." ¶ And that's the keyword: discourage. Love or hate spying, it's become a normal part of life and trying to "get rid of it" is futile. Gaining some surveillance skills is probably the best way to avoid being surveilled. So not to be cliché, but if you can't beat them, spy on them. **FPH**



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