

HARGROVE ENTERTAINMENT INC.

P.O. Box 750338 Forest Hills, NY 11375-0338 (718) 657-0542

tvsales@HargroveTV.com

www.HargroveTV.com

Peter M. Hargrove Presents™

Apocalyptic Evangelical Christian Nationalists

You've Been Warned

SILHOUETTE CITY

A film by Michael W. Wilson

A Social Satisfaction Media Production

Running Time 88 minutes, Unrated
United States, 2008

Platform Release Starts: 11 September 2009

Distribution Contact:
Peter M. Hargrove



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For Immediate Release

Contact: Peter M. Hargrove (718) 657-0542

**HARGROVE ENTERTAINMENT ACQUIRES CONTROVERSIAL DOCUMENTARY ON
APOCALYPTIC EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN NATIONALISTS,
SILHOUETTE CITY
SLATES A SEPTEMBER THEATRICAL PLATFORM RELEASE**

Hargrove Entertainment announced today that it has acquired the controversial new documentary film on right-wing apocalypticism, **SILHOUETTE CITY**, by first-time filmmakers Michael W. Wilson and Natalie Zimmerman. The New York-based distributor plans to open the film theatrically on a platform release in September, in conjunction with a tour for the companion book, "A Kingdom At Any Cost," which will be released by Parkhurst Brothers/University of Chicago Press in August.

SILHOUETTE CITY is an immersive journey through the recent history of American religious extremism. Using archival video, movement propaganda and original investigational material, the film tracks the movement of apocalyptic Christian nationalism and its most extreme adherents from the margins to the mainstream, the military and beyond.

In the midst of a sudden loss of power on the political right and a destabilizing economic crisis, an apocalyptic right-wing populism has gathered force. According to Political Research Associates, the leading right-wing watchdog organization:

“When the Right isn’t in power, some right-wing groups become increasingly violent... In the midst of a global economic meltdown, right-wing populism has even greater appeal. We’re watching as the Right mobilizes resentment against gays and lesbians, people of color, immigrants, Muslims - tactics that frequently find a receptive audience among people hurt by a faltering economy. Already, organized White supremacists are blaming Jews, a perennial standby in scapegoating, for Wall Street’s crisis. Today, the conditions are present for a perfect storm of bigotry and reaction.”

SILHOUETTE CITY is an exploration of the apocalyptic style of reactionary extremism in America by providing a unique window into the foundational ideas, organizational structure and psychological dynamics of apocalyptic movements. If current events are prompting a resurgence of conspiracy culture and anti-government paranoia, the future of the American Right is at the fringes of contemporary apocalyptic Christian nationalism. In the age of a networked Christian Right, movement propaganda has the potential to reach a

greater speed and audience than ever before. The film examines the striking ideological and rhetorical similarities between The Covenant, The Sword & The Arm Of The Lord (CSA) - a group that provided the model for militia group activity in the 1990s - and the mainstream Christian Right of today. It reveals how the apocalyptic intensity and rhetoric of final warfare are symptoms of those impulses opposed to cultural openness - and as the formal and conceptual methods of propagandizing their struggle are laid bare - the CSA provides a case study in grassroots response to right-wing apocalyptic impulses. Globalization, rapid worldwide economic expansion and the subsequent decline have rallied religious extremists internationally to join in a fight against a common enemy: modernism and secularism. This sense of urgent desire for radical closure seeks to find its expression - whether it be grassroots organizing, hate speech or direct violence.

The film is structured as a temporal diptych that begins with the story of a Christian survivalist group active in the '70s and '80s, as recounted by one of its former members, and then moves forward to the current post 9-11 era where militant Christianity has become the dominant influence in the lives of millions of Americans.

SILHOUETTE CITY features a wide array of interviews and appearances, including Kerry Noble, a former Christian Militia leader; Mike Huckabee former Arkansas Governor and 2008 presidential candidate; Chris Hedges, former New York Times Middle East bureau chief; Mikey Weinstein, founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation; and Dr. James Dobson, Founder and Chairman of Focus On The Family.

Additional interviewees include former Air Force Chaplain MeLinda Morton; Teen Mania Founder and President Ron Luce; Harvard Medical School lecturer in Psychiatry Robert J. Lifton; Coral Ridge Ministries Founder Dr. D. James Kennedy; World Harvest Church Founder Rod Parsley; best-selling author Tim Lahaye of the 'Left Behind' book series; and Rick Scarborough, Founder and Director of Vision America.

Also interviewed in the film is Michelle Goldberg, author of "Kingdom Coming: The Rise Of Christian Nationalism." She noted, SILHOUETTE CITY "is a transfixing and important film (that) deserves the widest possible audience." Blake Rutherford, a contributor to InContention.com, considers the film "impeccably researched... and a tour de force."

The Co-Founder of Talk To Action (a Religious Right Watchdog organization), Bruce Wilson (no relation), commented, "There have been many superb documentaries in the last few years about religion and politics, but my own personal opinion is that Michael Wilson's SILHOUETTE CITY stands above the pack... I give it the highest recommendation."

"As a filmmaker you hope to find a distributor that will love your film and have the passion and persistence to nurture it into the marketplace with great care," said Natalie Zimmerman. "We are very excited, and feel very fortunate, to have found that distributor in Hargrove Entertainment. Michael and I look forward to working with Peter and his very talented team so that SILHOUETTE CITY can reach the widest audience possible."

Peter M. Hargrove, head of Hargrove Entertainment, says, "One of my goals as a distributor is to discover films that open our eyes and more fully illuminate seemingly familiar subjects and issues. I want to make these films more readily available to the broader public -- to facilitate greater understanding and the potential for a more educated public discourse. Ignorance is not bliss, knowledge is power. Michael Wilson and Natalie Zimmerman have made a film that will make people more aware of the pitfalls of intolerance and totalistic worldviews. We look forward to instigating numerous conversations among friends, families and total strangers in the months to come with the release of this thought-provoking film, SILHOUETTE CITY."

SILHOUETTE CITY received its World Premiere at the Miami International Film Festival. Additional festival screenings have included Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, San Francisco Documentary Film Festival, Bermuda International Film Festival, Kansas International Film Festival, Chicago Underground Film Festival and Little Rock Film Festival.

In their book, "A Kingdom At Any Cost," Wilson expands on SILHOUETTE CITY themes through a broad array of in-depth interviews and photos. The book was officially introduced to the trade during the 2009 Book Expo America in New York. Additional information is available at www.pbros.net, and may be ordered through the University of Chicago Press, www.press.uchicago.edu.

About Hargrove Entertainment

Hargrove Entertainment is a full service entertainment company established in 1988. The company specializes in marketing and distribution, obtaining production financing, licensing and supplies program publicity to both producing entities and licensees.

Contact for the film:

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SILHOUETTE CITY

YEAR OF PRODUCTION: 2008

RUNNING TIME: 88 minutes

PROJECTION FORMAT: Beta-SP, DigiBeta, DVCam, DVD

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Natalie Zimmerman & Michael W. Wilson

DIRECTOR: Michael W. Wilson

WRITERS: Natalie Zimmerman & Michael W. Wilson

CAMERA/SOUND: Michael W. Wilson

EDITORS: Michael W. Wilson & Holen Sabrina Kahn

COMPOSER: Ori Barel

SOUNDMIX: Stereo

ASPECT RATIO: 1.78 : 1

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SILHOUETTE CITY

Film Festivals & Screenings:

2009 California Lutheran University

2009 Pitzer College

2009 University of California, Davis

2009 University of California, San Diego

2008 Chicago Underground Film Festival

2008 Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University

2008 "Age of Terror" Colloquium Film Series – Allen Theatre – Annville, PA

2008 San Francisco Documentary Film Festival

2008 UCLA Royce Hall (presented by The Center for the Study of Religion)

2008 California Institute of the Arts (Film Today series)

2008 Headlands Center for the Arts

2008 Kansas International Film Festival

2008 Anthology Film Archives Benefit for Paul Robeson Foundation

2008 University of California, Riverside

2008 Little Rock Film Festival (Documentary Competition)

2008 Bermuda International Film Festival (Documentary Competition)

2008 Miami International Film Festival (World Documentary Competition)

2008 Big Sky Documentary Film Festival (Sneak Preview)

2007 Hot Springs Doc. Film Festival (Work-in-Progress Preview)

2007 IFP Market (NYC) - Work-in-Progress

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SILHOUETTE CITY

FEATURING:

Kerry Noble (Former Christian Militia leader)

MeLinda Morton (Former Air Force Chaplain)

Ron Luce (Founder and President, Teen Mania)

Jessica Stern (Lecturer, Kennedy School of Government)

Robert J. Lifton (Lecturer in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School)

Mike Huckabee (2008 Presidential Candidate and former Governor of Arkansas)

Dr. D. James Kennedy (Founder, Coral Ridge Ministries)

Rod Parsley (Founder, World Harvest Church)

Chris Hedges (Former Middle East Bureau Chief, NY Times)

Reverend Ed Bacon (Rector, All Saints Episcopal Church)

Mikey Weinstein (Founder, Military Religious Freedom Foundation)

Michelle Goldberg (Author of Kingdom Coming - The Rise of Christian Nationalism)

Tim Lahaye (Author, Left Behind book series)

Mark Juergensmeyer (Director, Center for Global & International Studies, UC Santa Barbara)

Rick Scarborough (Founder & Director, Vision America)

Dr. James Dobson (Founder & Chairman, Focus on the Family)

Gary Bauer (Founder & Director, American Values)

John Hagee (Founder & Senior Pastor, Cornerstone Church)

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SILHOUETTE CITY

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

SILHOUETTE CITY is an immersive journey through the recent history of American apocalypticism. Using archival video, movement propaganda and original investigative material, the film tracks the movement of apocalyptic Christian nationalism and its most extreme adherents from the margins to the mainstream, the military and beyond. The film examines the striking ideological and rhetorical similarities between The Covenant, The Sword & The Arm Of The Lord (CSA) - a group that provided the model for militia group activity in the 1990s - and the mainstream Christian Right of today. It reveals how the apocalyptic intensity and rhetoric of final warfare are symptoms of those impulses opposed to cultural openness - and as the formal and conceptual methods of propagandizing their struggle are laid bare - the CSA provides a case study in grassroots response to right-wing apocalyptic impulses. This sense of urgent desire for radical closure will find its expression - whether it be grassroots organizing, hate speech or direct violence.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

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The film is structured as a temporal diptych that begins with the story of a Christian survivalist group active in the '70s and '80s, as recounted by one of its former members, and then moves forward to the current post 9-11 era where militant Christianity has become the dominant influence in the lives of millions of Americans.

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SILHOUETTE CITY

REVIEWS, COMMENTS & PRESS:

“Brilliant.” - Robert Scheer, syndicated columnist

“A brilliant film.” - Jonathan Kirsch, author of A History of the End of the World

“Impeccably researched... a tour de force.” - Blake Rutherford, contributor to InContention.com

“Made with an artist’s eye and a muckraker’s spirit, SILHOUETTE CITY shows how radical right-wing apocalypticism has wormed its way into the American mainstream. This a transfixing and important film. It deserves the widest possible audience.”

Michelle Goldberg, author, Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism

"Silhouette City is a timely and vital film. By turns subtle, affecting, wry, and mournful, it explores the natural sympathy between religion and violence, between ideals of social or moral perfection and a perceived need for militant force to achieve and maintain that perfection.

Richard Cohen, Director, Program for the Study of Religion, University of California, San Diego

[This] clean-eyed yet harrowing cinematic essay... is neither a verite witness nor a piece of Moore-ish agitprop - it’s an adult investigation of serious themes and the voices selected are invariably thoughtful people with interesting minds... SILHOUETTE CITY shines a light on an ugly part of the American psyche.

Philip Martin, Columnist and Chief Film Critic, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

One of the most incisive and powerful examinations of the Religious Right’s gradual but decisive hold on political power in the United States... Seamlessly weaves the voices and analyses from prominent religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners, and makes its own subtle but persuasive argument about the nature of the politics in a post-9/11 world.

Jeffrey Robbins, editor of The Sleeping Giant Has Awoken: The New Politics of Religion in the US

“There have been many superb documentaries in the last few years about religion and politics, but my own personal opinion is that Michael Wilson’s SILHOUETTE CITY stands above the pack... I give it the highest recommendation.”

Bruce Wilson (no relation), Co-Founder of Talk To Action (Religious Right watchdog organization)

SILHOUETTE CITY presents a well-researched, cinematic study of past and present fundamentalist movement building in our country. This film will inspire dialogue about the imminent threat of right-wing propaganda, and ultimately help audiences shape a future that protects our basic human rights.

Paul Robeson Fund of the Funding Exchange

SILHOUETTE CITY is a timely film that is brilliantly crafted and expresses an important message about contemporary religion, politics and culture. The film traces the development of apocalyptic Christian militancy from an obscure group in northern Arkansas, the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, to the flourishing of many of these same themes today in conservative Christianity, the military, and various forms of popular culture. SILHOUETTE CITY raises profound questions and shows us disturbing views about who and what we are as Americans.

Dr. Clayton Crockett, Department of Philosophy and Religion, University of Central Arkansas

“There is a real journalistic gem in the story of how closely the Christian right is tied to the armed services, particularly the Air Force. The connection is only strengthened by the militaristic language displayed in the film by national ministries like Coral Ridge and Teen Mania. If your favorite kind of horror goblin is exemplified by Pat Robertson, you’ll get the scare you’re looking for.”

P. Scott Cunningham, Film Critic, Miami New Times

“Bizarre, comical and at times frightening, Silhouette City reveals some of the mind-boggling beliefs of the Christian right and how far they have filtered into the American mainstream.”

James Whittaker, Senior Reporter, Bermuda Sun

“This documentary succeeds in demonstrating the easily accomplished demonization of religion. The prevailing “civic religion” in the US encourages such movements to root and grow. My greatest emotion in reaction to the production is sympathy and pity for those who get caught up in wild-eyed militaristically religious fervor. I assume they have great unmet needs which their ignorance permits to sate with destructive devotions. Exposure is one of our best antidotes... so I hope the documentary gets wide circulation.”

Jim Wohlleb, Professor, Tulane School of Public Health

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SILHOUETTE CITY

Key Personnel

Social Satisfaction Media was formed after 10 years of collaboration between Michael Wilson and Natalie Zimmerman. Their projects have included performance, new media, publication, web, video, installation, photography and film. These works have been exhibited and performed internationally in a variety of venues such as festivals, exhibitions, universities, museums, art galleries and alternative art spaces.

Silhouette City is Social Satisfaction Media's first feature film production.

DIRECTOR:

Michael Wilson is a Los Angeles-based artist whose work in video, sculpture and new media has been exhibited widely - including the Rotterdam Film Festival, IFP New York, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, Ars Electronica, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, RealArtWays, ISpace and the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf.

His acclaimed documentary video games WACO RESURRECTION and MEDIA BLACKOUT re-imagine the popular medium in order to examine contemporary political and social phenomena. His short film INVICTUS, constructed by filming entirely within a modified Star Wars video game, has shown internationally. He holds a Master of Fine Arts in sculpture from Yale University. Silhouette City is his first feature film.

PRODUCER:

Natalie Zimmerman's video, audio, and photographic works address the physical and psychological dynamics of the contemporary body in relation to social, cultural and institutional structures. Her work has been exhibited internationally including most recently; The Moscow International Film Festival, La Casa Encendida in Madrid, Spain, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), The Fellows of Contemporary Art in Downtown Los Angeles, and Galeria Santa Fe in Bogota, Columbia. Her recently completed experimental film ISLANDS premiered at SF Camerawork in January 2006 in an exhibition with Jenni Olsen (Joy of Life) and Jem Cohen (Chain). The exhibition is featured in the 2007 Fall/Winter issue of Camerawork where Zimmerman discusses her working process and it's relationship to Los Angeles with filmmaker William E. Jones.

Zimmerman lives and works in Los Angeles where she teaches digital cinema and photography at California Institute of the Arts.

CO-EDITOR:

Holen Kahn has edited and worked on over thirty award-winning and internationally-distributed films, videos, and new media projects. Selected films and videos include HARSH BEAUTY (currently distributed internationally by Frameline, and Journeyman pictures) TE DUROSH, (awarded Soros Foundation and Jerome Foundation Awards), HABIT (Premiered at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art), Walter Phillips Gallery Contemporary Arts Series (produced for Access Television Network, Canada) THE TRANSLATORS (awarded the audience award at L'Immagine leggera: Palermo Int'l VideoArt, Media and Film Festival). She was also the associate producer and editor of the fundraising trailer for REGRET TO INFORM. Ms. Kahn's own media work, including DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY, which was awarded the Film Society of Lincoln Center Grand Marnier Film Fellowship at the 2002 New York Film Festival, has shown in festivals, galleries and theatrical venues throughout the US, Canada and Europe. She is the co-founder of the MadCat Women's Film Festival (founded 1996).

COMPOSER:

Ori Barel, Israeli-born, has emerged as a leading contemporary composer of chamber and orchestral music, collaborative performance, and electro-acoustic taped scores for dance, film, and video installation. Barel's concert works have been performed by many internationally-renowned musicians such as Gan Lev (principal saxophone player for the Israeli Philharmonic), Eran Borovich, and the Berlin-based Cornucopia Ensemble. In 2004, Barel became the youngest composer to ever debut at the prestigious Santandler Festival in Spain. Barel has collaborated with many filmmakers including Christopher Silber, Yoni Bentovim and Sian Hamlett and his scores have been featured in many venues including the LA Shorts Festival, National Film Theatre, and NYU International Film Festival. He currently lives in Los Angeles.

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SILHOUETTE CITY

Director's Statement

Apocalypse means to unveil or reveal that which is hidden. Apocalyptic visions are generally concerned with revealing the true reality behind the deceptive nature of appearances, the face of the Creator unobscured by the Satan's manipulative illusions. A singular revelation occurred to me when I was fourteen years old as I watched a local media spectacle unfold. News reports of a remote group of angry militants, an underclass group of rural Arkansas dissenters driven to radical acts by some profound alienation from the rest of society. This group, The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord or CSA, were portrayed as an isolated but dangerous return of the darkest forces of the Southern psyche (the dual use of the acronym CSA was deliberate and clear). Here was an apocalyptic Christian Patriot cult preparing for the imminent arrival of divine judgement of secular society by building an exemplary city in the Ozark hills called Zarephath-Horeb (after the city and hill to which the prophet Elijah fled after upstaging the prophets of Baal). Although they had moved to the Ozarks to build a refuge in which to endure the tribulation, they trained for the inevitable confrontation with "Babylon" in a mock-urban installation called Silhouette City. Populated by plywood silhouettes of religious, ethnic and sexual others, Silhouette City was the violent shadow cast by Zarephath-Horeb, their City on a Hill.

Silhouette City was, by definition, a theatre of shadows. Erected for the purpose of training for apocalyptic conflict, it was a literal stage on which the drama of spiritual warfare could be enacted. Onto the stage were projected shadowy figures, those they blamed for economic, cultural and social decadence: Jews, Blacks, Latinos, homosexuals, the United Nations, feminists, socialists, secularists and Muslims, the residents of Babylon rendered in silhouette. The mongrel horde of Silhouette City forms the counterpoint to the vision of organic unity embraced in the American Ur-myth of The City on a Hill. Taken from the New Testament Book of Matthew and first articulated on this continent by the Puritan leader John Winthrop, this biblical injunction appeals to those who consider themselves part of a purified remnant in a special covenant with God to advance His Kingdom on earth:

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.¹

In speaking of this apocalyptic victory of Christ, another Puritan, Jonathan Edwards wrote:

“Tis fit, that since he became an inhabitant of the earth, and shed his blood on the earth, he should possess the whole earth: 'tis fit, seeing here he became a servant, and was subject to men, and was arraigned before them, and judged, condemned and executed by them, and suffered ignominy and death in a most public manner, before Jews and Gentiles, being lifted up to view on the cross upon a hill, near that populous city Jerusalem, at a most public time, when there were many hundred thousand spectators, from all parts, that he should be rewarded with universal dominion over mankind; and it is here declared he shall be.”

Edwards pleads here for an understanding of the magnitude of the insult to his liege. He even summons the counter-image of Calvary, a “cross upon a hill” as justification for establishing the future Kingdom. Images of persecution (in this case, a very public humiliation) mobilize resentment and give license to political actors. This is the blueprint for all American reactionary apocalyptic movements to follow: Satan’s insults to the body of Christ will soon be met with violent overthrow and all who maintain allegiance to the Evil One will be defeated. The City Upon a Hill will vanquish Silhouette City in the end.

My recollection of this group continued to resonate through the years, the episode was burned into memory, but had always been an abstraction. After September 2001, however, the echoes of CSA sent me chasing another abstraction, a powerful parallel culture driven by a strident new, media-savvy manifestation of apocalyptic Christian patriotism. This new movement could not be characterized as marginal.

As we attempt to understand the magnitude of the economic, social and cultural shifts caused by globalization, anyone claiming to hold the key to central truths regarding these changes becomes especially attractive. Conspiracy theories explain why our jobs are disappearing, the banks are foreclosing and the government seems beholden to the Federal Reserve. The information is sketchy and Wall Street looms in darkness. The inevitable effect (in a large segment of the population) is reactionary utopian/apocalyptic desire. It would be easy to situate this desire in a particular geographical location or amongst a specific group of people, but the evidence leads to a different conclusion: We all participate in this desire and are subject to its allure.

A significant percentage of the population sees these looming crises through a specific lens: a belief that humanity is waging the opening skirmishes of a war between Good and Evil that will usher in the Kingdom of God. Such belief enables an ever-escalating sense of urgency, very real threats to the middle and lower classes (outsourcing, rising fuel and food costs, etc) combine with perceived threats (secularism, homosexuality, ethnic/religious others) to become overwhelming evidence of the tribulations that signal apocalypse.

While the middle class may be currently experiencing apocalyptic visions, in the late 1970’s and throughout the 80’s, these visions were common among the ranks of the lower classes, specifically, the rural poor. The militia movement arose in direct response to what we now see as the early stages of globalization, and, a fact that is often forgotten, the militia movement was a religious one. The CSA Statement of Purpose explains:

“We believe in all of the Covenants God made with his people, from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Israel to now! We believe the Two Edged Sword of God’s Spirit is coming in judgment to the earth, and that His Arm, that part of His body which will administer judgment, is nearing manifestation now.”

CSA leader James Ellison likened his plight to that of the biblical prophet Elijah, who railed against the decadence of his own time and whose physical trail (hiding in the town of Zarephath and on Mt. Horeb) became the name of Ellison’s community: Zarephath-Horeb. The group was founded on a utopian desire to emulate the early Christians and to be “as a City upon a Hill”Ca shining example of Christian values to the outside world.

Much like the Massachusetts Bay Colony before them, their isolated utopian vision became steadily more exclusionary and puritanical. Convinced of their singular duty, they stockpiled arms and food, adopted a racist, anti-Semitic faith known as “Christian Identity” (originating in the Puritan worldview which foresaw the establishment of a ‘New Israel’ in America, realizing God’s design in confronting the wilderness), practiced polygamy and established the “Endtime Overcomer Training School.” The school offered courses in marksmanship, paramilitary tactics, wilderness survival and “Christian martial arts”. The group financed its activities by training would-be Christian warriors from throughout the country and by selling guns, survival gear and radical “Christian patriot” literature at gun shows. They prided themselves on their revolutionary dedication. One of their pamphlets, titled “Prepare War”, declares:

“The honor of ruling, of fighting, of overcoming (conquering), is one that changes us from glory to glory. Jesus tells us that at the end of this age He will send forth his armies, gathering those who would not have him reign over them, and will slay them before Him!... We desire a better America, a better world, free of the pollutions, bondages and perversities of this evil age... America, in Gaelic, means ‘The Kingdom of Heaven come to Earth.’ The Kingdom of God is now approaching.”

By fusing an overtly apocalyptic worldview with militant activity, the CSA provided the ideological/operational model for the militia movement, in fact, they devised a plan to destroy the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City over ten years before Timothy McVeigh committed the act.² Although the group initially adopted a defensive posture, CSA’s apocalyptic ideology emphasized the need for active involvement in initiating the beginning of the end(times). As The CSA represented the apotheosis of prevailing southern religious, political and military values, yet they adopted an oppositional attitude toward the dominant culture and were, therefore, perceived to be a threat to civil society. The recession of the early 1980s pushed them even further into radical activity. As Kerry Noble states in his book *Tabernacle of Hate*:

Because of financial losses from the timber market shutting down and our not finding enough work in which to make money, we had been unable to make bank payments on our property since the middle of 1983, shortly before our illegal right-wing activities began. Ellison didn’t care about the payments. “The land is mine,” he said, “and no one is going to take it from us.” On December 20, 1983, the bank foreclosed.

The group’s activities and associations ultimately attracted the attention of the government. After a tense standoff, the CSA was forcibly disbanded by the FBI in 1985. Militia groups would continue to thrive throughout the 1990’s, but the viability of a violent, separatist uprising of the disenfranchised right was demonstrated to be futile and counterproductive.

The very next year, however, a much more patient and politically-savvy group of fundamentalists from around the country convened a “Continental Congress” in Washington DC. This group, the Coalition on Revival, was a theologically-diverse assortment of conservatives united by three basic beliefs:

1. A primal golden age of American Christian Nationhood
2. The loss of this golden age through the steady infection of secularist values
3. The need to reclaim Christian nationhood by any and all means necessary

The group’s overriding goal was to achieve a fundamentalist hegemony in all spheres of secular life, an activity they called “advancing the Kingdom of God”, but that could be more properly termed theocratic.³ To this end, the COR advocated a “stealth” approach, revealing little, if any, of their true intentions when attempting to gain positions of power, and a set of blueprints for obtaining and exercising power in the various secular “spheres”.⁴ The congress culminated in a “blood covenant”, a dramatic oath to advance the Kingdom even unto death, if necessary.

The Christian Right has seen an exponential growth in influence since the mid-1980’s. It’s first major electoral milestone, the presidential bid of Pat Robertson in 1988, was intended to illustrate the progress achieved by the COR and other groups. However, his campaign coincided with a wave of sex and financial scandals involving prominent televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart and the movement seemed to be in decline. The first of many subsequent waves of declarations about the “death of the Christian Right” occurred after this seeming defeat.⁵ Instead, the movement spent the next few years re-grouping and nurturing the millions of citizens who were recruited and/or radicalized through the campaign. In the ascendancy of Bush II and in the

religious fervor following the WTC attack, we saw how premature the supposed “death of the Christian Right” actually was.

And yet, we find ourselves in an apparent return, this time Ted Haggard can be substituted for Jimmy Swaggart and Mike Huckabee for Pat Robertson. The striking parallels seem to refute the notion of the movement’s decline and, instead, support a more cyclic notion of progress. But the analogy also offers up another lesson, the overall arc of influence of this movement is increasing. After all, Haggard’s drug-fueled, homosexual prostitution scandal was much more lurid than Swaggart’s heterosexual prototype. Despite this fact, Mike Huckabee, an apocalyptic Christian nationalist, won the Iowa caucus, became the Republican frontrunner for a time and was treated as a serious contender for the nomination, far surpassing the brief but significant effect of Robertson’s campaign. The selection of Sarah Palin as Vice-Presidential candidate further consummated the marriage between the political right and the religious right. A devout neo-Pentecostal believer, Palin’s many disciples saw in her candidacy a re-enactment of the biblical story of Esther, in which a brave Israelite queen appeals to her non-Israelite husband on behalf of the chosen people.

I have been fascinated with the apocalyptic right for many years. I have followed the paths of dozens of demagogues, their writings, their broadcasts and their public appearances, and I have seen the radical effect of their carefully constructed, yet utterly fantastical arguments in the sudden show of understanding in the eyes of their followers. I have seen the emotional effect of their showmanship, an intensity unmatched by any other ministry I witnessed. Men like Rod Parsley and John Hagee preside over large, influential ministries (each has a suburban megachurch of nearly 20,000 members) and have popular television shows and growing political clout. The rhetorical excesses of John Hagee have been widely cited, but his nearly singular focus on the imminence of apocalyptic events has been largely absent from serious discussion. Hagee has been actively lobbying for a war with Iran, a conflict that he believes will trigger the biblical battle of Armageddon. His broadcasts routinely feature detailed, illustrations of end-time events and he often speaks fondly of the rapture that will precede the battle, giving him and the other chosen box seats from which to witness the carnage.

Rod Parsley, like Hagee (his friend and fellow Christian Zionist), is obsessed with the apocalypse. This “spiritual guide” (as John McCain once referred to Parsley) has written that the faithful must “violently seize the Kingdom by force”. Parsley is the logical end product of a Christian Right that has gained access to all “spheres” of life. Not content to methodically work behind the scenes, a new generation of leaders like Huckabee, Parsley and Hagee are aggressively clear about their mission. In his book, *The Days before Eternity*, Rod Parsley wrote:

“We are in the last day and the eleventh hour. We are in a revolutionary war... [God] is transitioning His people away from the milksop, milquetoast institution we’ve called the church into a remnant of overcomers who will do mighty exploits in their homes, in the church and on the job.”

Parsley, like the CSA, sees the struggle as one that will be undertaken by a “remnant of believers”, “overcomers” or “conquerors”. Also, like the CSA before him, Parsley likens the contemporary struggle against Satan to the struggle undertaken by the prophet Elijah. But for Parsley, the isolation of Elijah was vanity.

“Remember, the Spirit of God had so mightily fallen upon this prophet that he personally killed four hundred fifty prophets of Baal... yet he ran off into the wilderness on a pity party, fearing for his life... So when Elijah cried on Mount Horeb that he was the only one left in Israel that served and loved God, the Lord immediately set him straight. God informed him of seven thousand others who were also working for him, and then He sent him on another mission to ensure that Elijah’s forward motion wouldn’t be stopped as the enemy planned.”

The ideological similarities between Parsley's vision and that of the CSA are striking. Both employ warfare mythology to rouse the faithful into action. Where the CSA's militant message was a literal call to battle, Parsley and his ilk work upon multiple levels, political, financial, and through the media. However, a militant faith sometimes requires literal militancy. As Lou Engle, another militant Pentacostal preacher who mobilizes thousands at his TheCall events, puts it in his book *Elijah's Revolution*:

These radical revolutionaries are sick to death of empty religion and the exaltation of human flesh. Hungry for holiness and for the Lord alone, they cry for the God of Elijah to arise and the fire from Heaven to fall. This is a whole new breed of believers who live not for the professional robes of religion but for the camel's hair of self-denial and sacrifice. It is the revolution of a new generation who willingly offer themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to the Lord.

I attended a staging of TheCall in San Diego prior to the 2008 election. The event, billed as an effort to mobilize Southern California youth to pass a ban on gay marriage, was a 12-hour fast that featured an exorcism of San Francisco. At the end of the evening, the delirious participants were summoned, not to an altar call, but to a call to martyrdom.

Over the last twenty years, a militantly apocalyptic Christianity has traveled from the margins to the mainstream of American life. It is important to understand the raw force of its effect upon the minds of the parishioners, youth, politicians and soldiers who've been infected with such a terminal vision of (potentially) violent purification. I hope that Silhouette City allows for that experience. Equally important, though, is an understanding of the collective failures that have given rise to such a movement. If the CSA was an early, rural, underclass symptom of the excesses wrought by corporate capitalism, privatization and the unwillingness of a nation to care for its own, the current Dominionist revival marches freely through the suburbs. The organizational apparatus is exponentially more powerful and its reach has extended into the highest levels of American power. Even though they sometimes appear fragmented and conflicted, the Christian Right has constructed a parallel culture with an authoritarian bias, an ethos that cultivates submission and prepares the ground for demagoguery. Dissatisfied with the dominant culture of Southern Baptist Christianity, Kerry Noble experimented in a variety of subcultures. But he failed to find community anywhere but on the extreme right (in the 1970's and 80's populism was expressed almost exclusively on the right).

In a sense, the entire excluded remainder of corporate capitalism's avarice and power lust have become Christian Survivalists. Perhaps that is why the CSA seem oddly sympathetic to many, they represent a genuine attempt to seek an alternative to the present order. All of us who feel alienated from the values and actions of corporate capitalism are waging an apocalyptic battle with the plutocratic dead-enders, unveiling the truth of political economy in the 21st century and the need for a Second American Revolution. John Todd, a Christian conspiracy theorist who influenced the CSA, emphasized the role of Ayn Rand in a dramatic plot that spanned the centuries, involved the Federal Reserve as the contemporary Illuminati and was all laid out in code in *Atlas Shrugged*. Through a damaged telescope, Todd spied the fuzzy figure of Alan Greenspan (an acolyte of Rand). Could it be that Todd was accurately perceiving the core of the threat and, lacking the tools to rationally articulate the actual contours, filled in the blanks? However, the blanks, in his case, were filled with fear.

Conspiracy theories are a form of theology, attempting to understand and act meaningfully in the world through fantastic stories. To follow the path of the CSA only reinforces these systems of domination, conspiracy theories only further mystify the system in question, instead of stripping the elitism bare to reveal its corrupt core. Throughout the Bush II administration, war and apocalyptic belief became the great distractions through which right wing plutocrats enriched themselves and exercised their geo-political power. These excesses have resulted in economic collapse and the system stands exposed. Movements of this kind, wielding such strong ideological certainty, have shown themselves capable of exerting previously unthinkable influence during chaotic disruptions of everyday life. Right wing apocalypticism stands ready to explain and guide the rage felt by millions. These impulses are ignored, dismissed and eulogized at our collective peril.

¹ From the sermon A Model of Christian Charity delivered by John Winthrop aboard the Arbella, 1630

² According to former CSA elder Kerry Noble, the plan for the bombing of the Murrah Building was originally devised by Richard Snell, a CSA member who was executed for killing an Arkansas State Trooper on April 19, 1995, the same day McVeigh detonated the bomb in Oklahoma City.

³ I am indebted to the pioneering work of Sara Diamond (author of Spiritual Warfare) and Frederick Clarkson (author of Eternal Hostility) for bringing to light the pivotal role of the COR.

⁴ These documents can all be accessed at <http://www.reformation.net>

⁵ See Frederick Clarkson's article Religious Right Reinventing Itself at <http://www.talk2action.org/story/2008/3/10/163621/151> for a concise refutation of the oft-proclaimed declaration that "the Religious Right is dead".

⁶ See the Military Religious Freedom Foundation website for the latest reports on this effort: <http://militaryreligiousfreedom.org>

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Films:

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Death & Taxes (1993) – Dir. Jeffrey F. Jackson [Country People Productions]

Blogs:

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Silhouette of Jesus with a Gun

PHILIP MARTIN

America is a big place, with lots of space and shadow and most of its people clustered around its brightly lit metropolitan areas. Maybe you think you can know it through its media avatar, the image of itself it projects through Hollywood and the 24-hour news channels. But all you really see is what the marketers and the exploitative press want you to see - the sensationalized good, bad and ugly of Jesusland.

But small things happen back in those hollows in the blank sections of the map; dark ideas foment, and little men seek to become large through virtue of personal charisma and a perceived personal connection with God. American religiosity has always had its martial wing - the line runs from the Mountain Meadows Massacre through John Brown to David Koresh.

Michael Wilson's extraordinary documentary film *Silhouette City* examines the violent roots of the ongoing Christian Dominionist movement, by which evangelical Christian fundamentals are seeking to win the hearts, minds and votes of mainstream political conservatives to effectively convert the United States into a theocracy.

Wilson's clean-eyed yet harrowing cinematic essay snakes back to the early 1980s, to an obscure part of Northwestern Arkansas where a paramilitary group that called itself the Covenant, Sword and the Arm of the Lord - or the "CSA," a deliberate echo of the Confederate States of America - was training for an imminent apocalyptic war. Deeply white supremacist and anti-Semitic, they - like many other anti-Semitic conspiracist groups - they referred to the United States Government as the Zionist Occupied Government, or ZOG.

Living in their secluded city on the hill in the Ozarks, members of the cult trained for the coming confrontation with the forces of ZOG in a "Silhouette City" designed to simulate urban warfare. In his research, Wilson was able to obtain fascinating and deeply disturbing images of the CSA training in their ghost town that inform his subsequent tour through the present day apocalyptic dominionist movement. Beneath the back-clapping populism lurks a harrowing certainty and sense of entitlement - while no one talks about "mud people" or cites *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, there's no question that many believe in the concept of the United States as a "Christian Nation," where the followers of Jesus are at least more equal than others.

Neither a verite witness nor a piece of Michael Moore-ish agitational propaganda, *Silhouette City* is an adult investigation of serious themes addressed by thoughtful people with interesting minds. Kerry Noble, once the high priest of the CSA, proves an insightful eyewitness, and renowned psychiatrist and author Robert Jay Lifton offers helpful analysis on the psychological operation of cults. So-called Dominionists no longer occupy the loony fringe of American politics; they have attained marginal acceptability and a voice in the Republican Party and have had some success in the obtaining special privileges for Christian organizations.

In her 2006 book, *Kingdom Coming*, Michele Goldberg - another of Wilson's interview subjects - wrote: "It makes no sense to fight religious authoritarianism abroad while letting it take over at home.... Our side, America's side, must be on the side of freedom and Enlightenment, of liberation from stale constricting dogmas. It must be the side that elevates reason above the commands of holy books and human solidarity above religious supremacism."

Goldberg's book suggested something "dark is loose in this country." *Silhouette City* shines a light on that ugly part of the American psyche.

Philip Martin is Chief Film Critic and Columnist for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

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Is 'Silhouette City' this year's 'Jesus Camp?'

May 18th, 2008 · by Blake Rutherford

Clive James, in his review of "American Movie Critics" for the New York Times Book Review in 2006 wrote, "... it's the movie itself that tells you it means business. It does that by telling a story. No story, no movie."

"Silhouette City," a new film by Michael Wilson, is a documentary about the rapid rise of religious extremism in America. It's a haunting account of where the Christian evangelical movement has been and where it's going, and it is impeccably researched.

The film begins by covering an obscure Christian survivalist group called The Covenant, The Sword and the Arm of the Lord. The CSA created a survival camp near Bull Shoals, Arkansas where they trained, stockpiled weapons and preached an apocalyptic end to the world. "We're storing food," one of the young girls in the film says. "We can't tell you where or how much. We're preparing."

In 1985, CSA faced off with the United States government for four days before surrendering peacefully. They trained 500 people and had a collective annual income of less than \$50,000. They spread their message and recruited personnel at gun shows, via HAM radio broadcasts and leaflet distribution.

And in 1995, when Timothy McVeigh bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City, the CSA resurfaced. The same building had been a CSA target.

I met Mr. Wilson, the film's director, for the first time over the telephone. He was back in Arkansas preparing for the screening of his film at the Little Rock Film Festival. As we spoke, he indicated that when he sought out to make the film after 9/11 because he began to hear a more vicious rhetoric coming from the far right. He was reminded of the CSA. Their language "reminded me of the nature and the passion I had heard," he said. "The right seemed to make their voices louder and suddenly they'd gotten the platform."

Mr. Wilson's film, smartly told without narration, is guided initially by Kerry Noble, a former CSA leader. Mr. Noble comments that the foundations of the group were rooted in a belief that "it was important to take America back" from the sinful Christians. Supported by an acute hate for "queers" and "homosexuals," among many other groups, the CSA operated with a curiously paradoxical purpose: "God teaches us how to love and how to hate."

In looking at the activities of the CSA, Mr. Wilson and his producing partner Natalie Zimmerman seized an opportunity to bring its historical significance into modern day context. "This was supposed to be a smaller film," said Zimmerman. "But it kept getting larger and larger. The stakes got higher and higher."

The film leaps from 1985 to 2001 to Rev. Jerry Falwell's post-9/11 comments: "I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way - all of them who have tried to secularize America - I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen'" in response to the September 11 attacks."

As perceptive documentary filmmakers, Mr. Wilson and Ms. Zimmerman sought to understand how the far right, led by Rev. Falwell, Pat Roberson, Ted Haggard, John Hagee and others appeared to be “radicalizing a group of disciples and evangelizing a nation,” as Mr. Wilson described.

Upon seeing the film I was instantly reminded of “Jesus Camp,” Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing’s astounding portrait of a Pentecostal summer camp in North Dakota called “Kids on Fire.” At the camp director Becky Fischer urged the children to join the growing army of God. It as closed in 2006 as a result of negative response to the film. “Jesus Camp” was nominated for an Academy Award.

In the same regard, “Silhouette City” explores the use of similar words and symbols. Several leaders of the far right movement today, including Ron Luce, the founder and president of Teen Mania; a youth outreach organization whose mission is to “To provoke a young generation to passionately pursue Jesus Christ and to take His life-giving message to the ends of the earth!,” use words like weapons, war, army, front lines and battle as part of their standard rhetoric.

According to Teen Mania, 205,830 teenagers attended 37 live events in 2007. The organization boasts an elaborate Web site, outreach activities, a Center for Creative Media and a social networking site called “Battle Cry.” According to CodyM, whose Battle Plan is one of those featured, “Let’s go out and fight this battle until the end . . . WILL YOU STAND WITH ME?”

But the most startling component of Mr. Wilson’s film occurs near the end and involves the connection he is able to make between the growth of the far right and the increased evangelical presence in the American military.

“What is happening,” Mr. Wilson observed, “is when soldiers are looking for psychological help it is not ecumenical, but fundamental.” Melinda Morton, a former Air Force Chaplain, notes that there is a becoming “an institutionalization of pervasive evangelicalism in the military.” The organization, Campus Crusades for Christ, has an active military ministry.

On March 5, 2008, the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and Specialist Jeremy Hall filed a lawsuit in federal district court against Major Freddy J. Welborn and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. The lawsuit alleges retaliation and reprisal by the U.S. Army against Specialist Hall who, according to MRFF president Mikey Weinstein, “had the rare courage to stand up for his Constitutional rights and guarantees of separation of church and state against a superior officer who was forcefully attempting to intimidate him into accepting fundamentalist Christianity.” Weinstein, a former official in the Regan administration, graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1977 with honors.

“It’s a persuasive piece,” Ms. Zimmerman indicated.

It’s more than that. “Silhouette City” is a tour de force.

RECLAIMING CITIZENSHIP HISTORY AND FAITH TALK TO ACTION

'Silhouette City' Captures Essence of Christian Right as Supremacist Political Movement

By Bruce Wilson

It is the mark of a truly outstanding documentary that it can survive the test of a fast-changing political and religious landscape and remain relevant and even transcendent. There have been many superb documentaries in the last few years about religion and politics, but my own personal opinion is that Michael Wilson's *Silhouette City* stands above the pack, and for one overriding reason Wilson's deep understanding of the dynamic in which the militant, militia movement grounded Christian right of the 1980's has morphed into a political movement that has penetrated the highest reaches of American governmental and military structures.

Because of that, the disappearance of several major evangelical leaders who featured in the film, Ted Haggard and D. James Kennedy most notably, does not noticeably diminish Wilson's documentary because others also featured in the film, such as John Hagee and Rod Parsley, have come to the fore as rising new stars jockeying for the prominence Kennedy and Haggard enjoyed. *Silhouette City* traces the evolution of the apocalyptic and Reconstructionist strands of the militant American Christian nationalist, or supremacist, movement from its militia movement roots in the 1980's up through its penetration of America's highest political and military structures, and that aspect should concern all who have any awareness at all of the Christian right political movement aimed at imposing Christian theocratic government on the United States and on the world.

Christian nationalists do not *need* the support of a majority of Americans or even a substantial minority: the very origins of the movement were profoundly anti democratic and remain so. Power is the overriding objective.

For the nature of what I study and write on, the Christian right of course, my wife is constantly bombarded with minutia on the subject. But for all that, she told me that she did not *really understand* what I was talking about, the larger picture, until she saw Michael Wilson's documentary *Silhouette City* and, because of that, I have to give it the highest recommendation.

As Michael Wilson writes in *Advancing The Kingdom* :

"I began making "Silhouette City" because, in late 2001, I began to hear echoes of the Christian extremism from my childhood in Arkansas. In order to quiet the ringing in my ears, I immersed myself in the contemporary Christian right - the media, music, ministries, books, personalities and organizational apparatuses.... As the economy continues to slide, the energy crisis becomes palpable and the occupation of Iraq appears indefinite, the potential grows for a major disruption of daily life. A significant percentage of the population sees these looming crises through a specific lens: a belief that humanity is waging the opening skirmishes of a cosmic war between Good and Evil that will usher in the Kingdom of God. Such belief enables an ever-escalating sense of urgency - very real threats to the middle and lower classes (outsourcing, rising fuel and food costs, etc) combine with perceived threats (secularism, homosexuality, ethnic/religious others) to become overwhelming evidence of the tribulations that signal apocalypse."



James Whittaker, Senior Reporter
BERMUDA SUN
March 28, 2008

'Mind-boggling Christian beliefs'

Bizarre, comical and at-times frightening, Silhouette City reveals some of the mind-boggling beliefs of the Christian right and how far they have filtered into the American mainstream.

What I can't figure out, though, is what are these people most concerned about - Islamic extremists or gays?

Here's a brief taster of some of the views expressed in the movie.

"Those Babylonians. They're still cutting heads off over there, they're still wild in Iraq, like they were thousands of years ago" - Keynote speaker at a religious rock concert for youth.

"They're complaining we haven't found weapons of mass destruction (in Iraq). Which of course, we have, we just haven't found the 'stockpiles'. We are in the middle of a war with Islamic fascists and we get word games from liberals. "It's anyone's guess as to whether we'll find the weapons of mass destruction before liberals find the right to sodomy in the constitution" - Ann Coulter, best selling author, speaking at the Family Research Council's meeting in Washington.

"Unless Moses comes down with two stone tablets from Brokeback Mountain and says we've changed the rules, let's keep it like it is" - Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee on gay marriage.

At first you want to laugh, then you realize they are for real.

The film begins with a story about a cult survivalist group forming its own army in preparation for the apocalypse before focusing on the preachers, authors, politicians and special interest groups of modern day America. The rhetoric is disconcertingly similar.

Mixing scenes of 70s fanatics preaching holy war and stockpiling weapons with stories of an aggressive evangelical strain within the current US military and images of American soldiers being baptized in the pool outside Saddam's palace, it leaves viewers to draw their own conclusions.

Equally telling are the testimonies of youngsters at the Teen Mania rallies. Best described as a cross between a rock concert and a sermon, Teen Mania's Battlecry concerts attract 250,000 people annually and the 'mission' commands a \$27 million annual budget.

The concerts end with thousands of teens waving their cellphones in the air as foreboding metal music plays in the background. The MC concludes with some prophecies of doom and then asks the kids in the audience to open their hearts and their wallets to the Lord.

"Just ask... how much would you have me give, Lord, in Jesus name?"

Perhaps the best indictment of this aggressive missionary work comes from the kids themselves,

One teenager interviewed in the film says:

"When we die it's just going to send us to that place we're aiming to be any ways. The sooner you get there the better. "If you die in the right cause, isn't the word a mortar or something?"

That about says it all.



by Oscar Jubis
April 11, 2008

SILHOUETTE CITY

I came to incite a riot. I came to affect a divine disturbance in the heart and soul of the Church. Man your battle stations, ready your weapons, lock and load!

Rod Parsley, Founder, World Harvest Church

When he was a 14 year old boy living in Little Rock, Michael W. Wilson became fascinated with news coverage of the siege of the compound of a group called The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord or CSA. It took place in 1985, 14 years after the formation of this white-supremacist, militaristic, Christian extremist group. They trained for what they believed to be the eventual confrontation with "secularist" forces (often referred as "Babylon") in a camp they named Silhouette City, hence the title of Wilson's documentary. It uses the CSA as a point of departure to explore the rise of the religious right in the United States, its philosophy, methods and development into a viable political force. *Silhouette City* benefits greatly from the willing participation of former "high priest" Kerry Noble and access to footage shot by CSA members themselves. It specifically dwells into the propagation of apocalyptic worldviews and instillment of fear as means of recruitment and control of followers. Wilson traces the historical development of the Christian right over the past two to three decades. The overt racism and anti-semitism have been largely abandoned while communication technology has been embraced as the movement became media-savvy. Wilson details how the Evangelical Christian Right became more influential within the Republican Party and all four branches of the military since the 1980s. They've attained new levels of acceptability while remaining focused on what basically amounts to the establishment of a theocracy. Fellow believers in the separation of Church and State, here's a horror movie made especially for us.

*The screening of *Silhouette City* at the MIFF was the world premiere of the film. The documentary was independently produced and it's not clear at this first exhibition stage what kind of diffusion it will have. It would seem to fit PBS's Independent Lens series but maybe they would fear broadcasting it would alienate a portion of their audience.

<http://www.filmworld.com/forums/showthread.php?s=af352a1a209a2bb4ce308884a5a6ae53&postid=19891>

“Silhouette City” (2008)

by Derek Jensen

One of last year's most startling films was “Jonestown,” the tragic story of the notorious cult. This year, audiences might be likewise riveted by another depiction of homegrown religious fundamentalists run amok. “Silhouette City” examines the rise of religious militarism in the United States. Trotting out a series of clips from evangelical ministries may seem tiresome to anyone who has ever set foot into a mega-church, but slowly, the various footage accrues a dreadful weight. Just as the church services on display employ music and lights to grease the wheels on their emotional message, the film soundtracks its images with a haunting industrial score that induces both claustrophobia and near-panic. The festival organizers have put together an enticing panel to supplement the film, “Apocalyptic Christian Nationalism: From the Margins to the Mainstream.” A calm discussion of the hysteria on display will go a long way toward quelling alarmism and digesting the message of this powerful film.

UPDATE: The standing-room-only screening was followed by a well-attended panel, and it was hard not to feel that this is exactly how movies should be watched - first the screening, then an engaging discussion. Move over, France.

Arkansas Times, “LRFF Can’t-Miss List”, May 15, 2008

Arkansas Times, “Little Rock Film Festival recap”, May 22, 2008

The New York Times

April 26, 2008

Soldier Sues Army, Saying His Atheism Led to Threats

By NEELA BANERJEE

FORT RILEY, Kan. - When Specialist Jeremy Hall held a meeting last July for atheists and freethinkers at Camp Speicher in Iraq, he was excited, he said, to see an officer attending.

But minutes into the talk, the officer, Maj. Freddy J. Welborn, began to berate Specialist Hall and another soldier about atheism, Specialist Hall wrote in a sworn statement. "People like you are not holding up the Constitution and are going against what the founding fathers, who were Christians, wanted for America!" Major Welborn said, according to the statement.

Major Welborn told the soldiers he might bar them from re-enlistment and bring charges against them, according to the statement.

Last month, Specialist Hall and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, an advocacy group, filed suit in federal court in Kansas, alleging that Specialist Hall's right to be free from state endorsement of religion under the First Amendment had been violated and that he had faced retaliation for his views. In November, he was sent home early from Iraq because of threats from fellow soldiers.

Eileen Lainez, a spokeswoman for the Defense Department, declined to comment on the case, saying, "The department does not discuss pending litigation."

Specialist Hall's lawsuit is the latest incident to raise questions about the military's religion guidelines. In 2005, the Air Force issued new regulations in response to complaints from cadets at the Air Force Academy that evangelical Christian officers used their positions to proselytize. In general, the armed forces have regulations, Ms. Lainez said, that respect "the rights of others to their own religious beliefs, including the right to hold no beliefs."

To Specialist Hall and other critics of the military, the guidelines have done little to change a culture they say tilts heavily toward evangelical Christianity. Controversies have continued to flare, largely over tactics used by evangelicals to promote their faith. Perhaps the most high-profile incident involved seven officers, including four generals, who appeared, in uniform and in violation of military regulations, in a 2006 fund-raising video for the Christian Embassy, an evangelical Bible study group.

"They don't trust you because they think you are unreliable and might break, since you don't have God to rely on," Specialist Hall said of those who proselytize in the military. "The message is, 'It's a Christian nation, and you need to recognize that.'"

Soft-spoken and younger looking than his 23 years, Specialist Hall began a chapter of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers at Camp Speicher, near Tikrit, to support others like him.

At the July meeting, Major Welborn told the soldiers they had disgraced those who had died for the Constitution, Specialist Hall said. When he finished, Major Welborn said, according to the statement: "I love you guys; I just want the best for you. One day you will see the truth and know what I mean."

Major Welborn declined to comment beyond saying, "I'd love to tell my side of the story because it's such a false story."

But Timothy Feary, the other soldier at the meeting, said in an e-mail message: "Jeremy is telling the truth. I was there and witnessed everything."

It is unclear how widespread religious discrimination or proselytizing is in the armed forces, constitutional law experts and leaders of veterans' groups said. No one has independently studied the issue, and service members are reluctant to come forward because of possible backlash, those experts said.

There are 1.36 million active duty service members, according to the Pentagon, and since 2005, it has received 50 formal complaints of religious discrimination, Ms. Lainez said.

In an e-mail statement, Bill Carr, the Defense Department's deputy under secretary for military personnel policy, said he "saw near universal compliance with the department's policy."

But Mikey Weinstein, a retired Air Force judge advocate general and founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, said the official statistics masked the great number of those who do not report violations for fear of retribution. Since the Air Force Academy scandal began in 2004, Mr. Weinstein said, he has been contacted by more than 5,500 service members and, occasionally, military families about incidents of religious discrimination. He said 96 percent of the complainants were Christians, and the majority of those were Protestants.

Complaints include prayers “in Jesus’ name” at mandatory functions, which violates military regulations, and officers proselytizing subordinates to be “born again.” After getting the complainants’ unit and command information, Mr. Weinstein said, he calls his contacts in the military to try to correct the situation.

“Religion is inextricably intertwined with their jobs,” Mr. Weinstein said. “You’re promoted by who you pray with.”

Specialist Hall came to atheism after years as a Christian. He was raised Baptist by his grandmother in Richlands, N.C., a town of fewer than 1,000 people. She read the Bible to him every night, and he said he joined the Army “to make something of myself.”

“I thought going to Iraq was right because we had God on our side,” he said in an interview near Fort Riley.

In the summer of 2005, after his first deployment to Iraq, Specialist Hall became friends with soldiers with atheist leanings. Their questions about faith prompted him to read the Bible more closely, which bred doubts that deepened over time.

“There are so many religions in the world,” he said. “Everyone thinks he’s right. Who is right? Even people who are Christians think other Christians are wrong.”

Specialist Hall said he did not advertise his atheism. But his views became apparent during his second deployment in 2006. At a Thanksgiving meal, someone at his table asked everyone to pray. Specialist Hall did not join in, explaining to a sergeant that he did not believe in God. The sergeant got angry, he said, and told him to go to another table.

After his run-in with Major Welborn, Specialist Hall did not file a complaint with the Army’s Equal Opportunity Office because, he said, he was mistrustful of his superior officers. Instead, he told leaders of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, who put him in touch with Mr. Weinstein. In November 2007, Specialist Hall was sent home early from Iraq after being repeatedly threatened by other soldiers. “I caution you that although your ‘legal’ issues are yours and yours alone, I have heard many people disagree with you, and this may be a cause for some of the perceived threats,” wrote Sgt. Maj. Kevin Nolan in Specialist Hall’s counseling for his departure.

Though with a different unit now at Fort Riley, Specialist Hall said the backlash had continued. He has a no-contact order with a sergeant who, without provocation, threatened to “bust him in the mouth.” Another sergeant allegedly told Specialist Hall that as an atheist, he was not entitled to religious freedom because he had no religion.

Responding to questions about Specialist Hall’s experience at Fort Riley, the staff judge advocate, Col. Arnold Scott, said in an e-mail message, “In accordance with Army policy, Fort Riley is committed to ensuring the rights of all its soldiers are protected, including those of Specialist Hall.”

Civilian courts in the past have been reluctant to take on military cases, and the Justice Department has yet to respond to Specialist Hall’s lawsuit.

“Even if it doesn’t go through, I stood up,” Specialist Hall said. “I don’t think it is futile.”

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Questions Raised Anew About Religion in Military

By ERIC LICHTBLAU

WASHINGTON - Terry Bradshaw stared intently into the camera, his eyes moist, as the interviewer asked him if his faith in God had helped him through his bouts with depression.

“Oh, yeah,” answered Mr. Bradshaw, the Hall of Fame quarterback. “Well, I’m a Christian for one thing so, yeah, I’d been praying.”

The viewers of this video were military personnel who were watching an official military production dealing with depression, suicide and “the importance of faith.”

The screening of the suicide-prevention video and other recent incidents are reviving questions that the Pentagon had hoped to put behind it years ago: what the proper role of religion should be in the military and whether a pro-Christian culture permeates the armed forces.

Military officials have worked to enforce tougher restrictions on proselytizing and religious bias since a flare-up over religious discrimination in 2005 at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, where the football coach posted a locker room banner for “Team Jesus.” Officials said they had made great strides in the last few years, with training for officers and a concerted effort at the inclusion of all faiths.

“I’d be wrong to state that every chaplain does it right 100 percent of the time, but we work very hard at it,” said Carleton Birch of the Army’s Chief of Chaplains Office. “Chaplains ascribe to pluralism. We represent our own faith while respecting other faith groups.”

Signs of continued friction over the issue still abound, however. In a memorandum distributed last month at the Air Force Academy in response to several recent complaints about religious bias, base leaders reminded faculty members that “the Air Force is ‘officially neutral’ when it comes to belief systems.” The memorandum said cadets should not be made to feel that they would get better jobs by going to optional Bible study sessions.

Still, some military personnel and activists opposed to what they see as “forced religion” in the military said they believed the problem had continued largely unabated, and they said private groups like the Officers’ Christian Fellowship and the Campus Crusade for Christ’s Military Ministry maintained an outsized influence on many bases.

“The Army enforces policies against racism and sexism, but doesn’t bat an eye at these kinds of religious discrimination,” said Specialist Dustin Chalker, an Army medic based at Fort Detrick, in Maryland, who was raised in a Christian home but is now an atheist. “Why is it acceptable that soldiers are unable to serve this nation without attending state-led religious practices they find offensive and false?”

Specialist Chalker is now a plaintiff in a federal lawsuit that accuses the military of ignoring laws and policies banning mandatory religious practices. Specialist Chalker, who earned a Purple Heart in Iraq, remembers returning from the war in 2007 and attending a mandatory ceremony that began and ended with a Christian prayer. The experience, Specialist Chalker said, was “humiliating and dehumanizing.”

Leaders of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit group that brought the lawsuit against the Pentagon, point to episodes that they said represented a pattern of improper religious influence: official military retreats at off-base churches, the appearance of uniformed officers at religious events, displays of crucifixes at military chapels in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the practice of “dipping” the American flag at the altar of the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., among others.

The foundation says the Terry Bradshaw video represents only the latest example of what it considers an improper blurring of secular and religious issues.

Mr. Bradshaw appears in a half-hour interview to discuss his experience with depression, with outtakes appearing in a six-minute video that includes a segment called “the importance of faith.” A suicide-prevention manual, training Army leaders in using the Bradshaw video, includes a “talking point” saying, “Spirituality is an invaluable ingredient in his battle with this disease.”

Chaplain Birch said testimonials like those from Mr. Bradshaw helped soldiers deal with depression. “No one’s trying to force religion on anyone,” he said of the video. “But someone’s personal faith testimony is part of their story, and we’re not going to go around and censor it.”

The prevalence of religious bias in the military remains in dispute. The Pentagon said last week that it had received 50 complaints of religious discrimination from all of the branches from 2005 to 2007. But Mikey Weinstein, the head of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and a retired Air Force officer who has become an outspoken advocate on the issue, said his group now received more than 500 complaints of religious bias a month from members of the military.

David Horn, a former fighter pilot in the Air Force Reserve, is among those who have sought the group’s help. He tells of returning from tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and, like Specialist Chalker, hearing prayers “in Jesus’ name” at homecoming ceremonies. He was so bothered, he said in an interview, that he wrote a letter to his local newspaper complaining about what he called the “unconstitutional” intrusion of religion in military life.

Four days later, Mr. Horn said, he received a negative evaluation - after years of positive appraisals - and ultimately lost his flying certification and his post. With his flying career in jeopardy, he plans to join the lawsuit against the Pentagon.

Last week, the Justice Department got an extension until March 30 to file its response in federal court to the suit brought in December. Under the Bush administration, the department argued in court last July that the accusations of bias raised by the foundation in an earlier version of the suit were “not systemic problems, but isolated instances,” best handled through internal military procedures and not in the courts.

Mr. Weinstein met last Tuesday with the Air Force chief of staff, Gen. Norton A. Schwartz, the first time the group has gotten an audience with a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Mr. Weinstein said of the meeting with General Schwartz that “the thing I found encouraging is that not only did he take it very seriously, but he also acknowledged that there is a problem, which is always a first step.”

But religious advocates said they worried about an overreaction.

“You can’t and shouldn’t eliminate the spiritual component in the military,” said Bruce L. Fister, a retired Air Force general who is executive director of the Officers’ Christian Fellowship, which is active on 200 bases worldwide.

Leaders of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation “would be happy if there were no religion whatsoever in the military,” General Fister said in an interview. “But the problem is that Christians are going to operate one way or the other, and whenever the church has been persecuted, it’s grown stronger.”