

Jello Biafra is one of America's most outspoken supporters of free speech and freedom (constitutional or otherwise.) He has released eight albums of material recorded during the spoken-word tours that carry him across the country. Each of these contains a great deal of legal and social information that he has compiled from various sources over the years. The scope and quality of the information is sure to shock even those who thought they were well informed on subjects they've heard about.

Biafra also ranks as the first musician ever to be put on trial because of the content of a record album. The Frankenchrist album he released with his band the Dead Kennedys contained in its original release a reproduction of a painting by H.R. Giger (best known for winning the Academy Award for Visual Effects for the 1979 film Alien.) It was because of this painting that the L.A. City attorney filed a charge of "distribution of harmful matter to minors" against Biafra and several others. During the trial the DA spent most of his time analyzing the career and lyrics of Biafra in an attempt to incriminate him on subjects other than the painting in order to set legal precedence. Fortunately the jury deadlocked and the judge dismissed the case in lieu of granting a retrial. Even so, the trial spanned over a year and ended up costing over \$100K in legal bills despite the maximum penalty of a \$2000 fine and no more than a year served. The full story can be heard on Biafra's High Priest of Harmful Matter album. In order to avoid corporate

and now US Senator Dianne Feinstein. His effect on the campaign upset the election so much that they later passed a resolution stating that no one would be able to run for office under anything but their legal name. Unfortunately Jello Biafra isn't his real name: it's Eric.

With an abrasive voice and a sarcastic and cynical mind, Biafra speaks his opinions based on irrefutable facts. Like the late Frank Zappa, he is a distinct individual who is willing to go up against the government to fight for those rights that some seem to think of as out of date and disposable.

UGLY PLANET: So, the first thing I want to talk to you about is the idea of DIY, you being one of the mentors of that scene. Can DIY be done today the same way you did it 30 years ago?

JELLO BIAFRA: There's more going on now than there was 30 years ago, by a long shot. Back then, it was basically Dead Kennedys saving up \$15 gig proceeds, and saving it up for years—and then financing a seven-inch record. And eventually, I wound up doing the label because (the band) didn't want to deal with it. Which was a good gift in the long run. Today, there are all kinds of music labels, DIY zines, and even DIY films are becoming more common. Not to mention microbrews for beer, soda pop and even healthier foods.

How does the DIYer survive?

As far as survival goes, each DIY person, or people starting a DIY project, needs to know

impact? Let's say the way you did it.

There weren't so many people doing it back then, so that's why maybe we made more of an impact. The number of people jumping in really mushroomed after Nirvana got so big and after the Green Day boom. And now there are way more people starting cool bands, starting cool labels, but the audience never grew in the same proportion. And now Bush is president, and people's disposable income has shrunk dramatically. So the slices of the pie got smaller and smaller. So it's tough to survive. But we've somehow found a way, at least so far. At least with things like the Internet, curious people can research these things easier. As a teenager in the mid 1970s, I had to rifle through bins at record stores constantly, almost every day. Just to find something weird and interesting. Picking stuff at random and hoping it's good. But the good stuff made it all worthwhile. One of the best albums I ever heard, *Fun House* by the Stooges, I picked up sealed for ten cents.

"Most people are brainwashed in this country to believe that we only have to look at anything as choice A and choice B. Just like a multiple-choice test where you don't have to think out an answer..."

Fresh Ideas for Rotting Vegetables

JELLO BIAFRA

and censorship of Dead Kennedys' music, Biafra started the Alternative Tentacles record label. Every Dead Kennedys album and 45 was originally released on A.T., as were his spoken-word albums. Other groups released on this label include the Butthole Surfers, Lard, D.O.A., Neurosis, and Alice Donut. Alternative Tentacles, along with SST and Dischord, represent some of the earliest and longest-running indie labels in the U.S. that have stayed true to their ideals and origins.

Biafra has always been one to speak his mind and take risks. What started out as a practical joke became a serious campaign for the position of mayor of San Francisco in 1979. While he did not win, he came in fourth with 3 percent of the total vote, forcing a run-off between candidates Quentin Kopp

something in advance as to what they want out of the project. The purpose of Alternative Tentacles was never to get rich, I still have not made a dime off the label in my life. I take no salary, and I've even had to pour money in during hard times. But the reward is being able to offer so many people an outlet completely outside the mainstream music industry, or even the mainstream corporate punk industry. Do what you want, sound how you want, say what you want, and not have anyone slap a sticker on your album, telling you what you can and cannot say.

Production and equipment is so cheap these days, that the streets and the Internet are filled with people doing stuff. Sure, there are more people, but are they really making an

How are things going with Alternative Tentacles? You've done some downsizing...

Somewhat, especially after the former members (of Dead Kennedys) turned into born-again corporate thugs. And sued the shit out of me for sticking to the philosophy of the Dead Kennedys and Alternative Tentacles. Obviously, Dead Kennedys was our bread and butter. Most of the songs, I wrote. So it was very important to me that Dead Kennedys be treated with respect. And now that's out the window.

I've been seeing old Dead Kennedys material being re-released (under new record labels)...

People try to get me to sign that stuff all the time. And I refuse. I have not authorized any of those. I do not support the labels they are on.

“The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and of course the World Trade Organization, the WTO, they are not helping to prevent terrorism, they are causing it. They themselves are making our own country and our own lives less safe. By creating all these conditions that spawn terrorism.”

Do you think punk is dead?

The spirit of punk goes back, way back before punk. You can say there's some of that in Oscar Wilde, definitely in the Beat movement [of the 50s,] antiwar hippies causing trouble in the streets in the 60s and 70s...and as everything got mellowed out and co-opted, something needed to rise and shock the hell out of everyone, including those people. That 's where the original outbreak of punk came in. People weren't starting bands back then to all sound alike. The peer pressure was for all the bands to sound different from each other. And outside this tiny little diverse scene, people were genuinely frightened by punk, especially by hardcore punk. And that made it all the more fun. That spirit is still alive, the political hardcore bands and people pulling genuine pranks. It's where you find it and what you want to call it. One of the people who struck me as having the punk spirit from the moment I met him is Winston Smith, who's done a lot of the artwork on my albums over the years. He doesn't look punk at all, except for the leather jacket. He's got long, whitish hair, beard and all that, but as far as what comes out of that brain and what he does with his art—he's got a hell of a lot more in common with the spirit of punk than most of what you

will find at Hot Topic. One of the good things about punk is that a lot of the people went into it knowing they would never be great big rock stars. And in the mid 70s, punk people like me thought that was all there is. There's us, the pimply faced fans, and then there's great big glamorous rock stars playing the big arenas, and that's all. But with punk, I learned that it was actually more exciting to get so close to the band that you can see the sweat dripping off the guitar strings, and then just being able to hang out with them afterwards, because we are all in the same boat in the same little venue. Playing because we want to play, not because we think we are going to "get signed."

I also remember when I was in high school in th 80s buying records and going to all-age shows, that the bands that dressed "punk" were the most annoying and had the least to say (politically.) My fave bands were Flipper, Black Flag and Dead Kennedys...and none of them looked like punk rockers...

Black Flag made it a point not to look like cartoon punk rockers. That was planned in their case. In our case, I'm not sure. I was enough of an outcast even among other outcasts, before I was a punk, so to speak, that I always held true to my inner self. It's interesting that, 25 years later, young kids who want to find some outlet for their rebellious spirit—and stake out territory to feel good about being different from the mainstream jocks and future Republicans—they would still go towards punk rock. Even though a lot of frat boys listen to punk rock now, too. It's interesting that it has lasted for that long. The hippie thing was pretty well over as a rebellious statement by the mid 70s. I figured that by the mid-80s, punk would be obsolete, too. And there would be a new generation shocking the hell out of us with music we'd think was unlistenable, and just a bunch of noise. For some punk parents, that turns out to be hip-hop. When kids start to listen to rap music instead of the Misfits. I love laughing at those people when they complain to me about that, and the generation gap repeats itself. But I thought there would be several more cycles of that by now. And there haven't been. In a way, I'm honored that people still find my work relevant and it still fires up that same sprit in them. And the lyrics still matter, but it also has me scratching my head wondering, where are all the real wild people who would threaten the shit out of me? They are not there.

I was reading a new review of one of your old records, and the writer was saying how we are reliving the same themes over and over...

Sometimes I wonder if I should stop writing these worst-case scenario songs, because they keep coming true. Like "Islamic Bomb" came true even before the album came out. That exact same scenario is what happened when the Pakistanis started selling gift-wrapped, build-your-own-nuke kits to Libya

and Iran and North Korea for \$60 million a piece. Why were they so desperate to risk nuclear annihilation just to raise 180 million bucks? Well, in part, because they've been beaten over the head by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to pay back all these lovely, not-so-generous loans they've been saddled with. Not to feed or educate people, but build hydroelectric dams and oil pipelines. And people also wonder why there are so many so-called madrassa schools in countries like Pakistan—that teach people a very narrow Wahhabi Muslim interpretation of the Koran—and don't do much else in terms of reading, writing, history and literature...and then crank out these wannabe jihadists. Why are these madrassas multiplying like Starbucks all over Pakistan and elsewhere? Reasons are, number one, the money for them is coming from our good friends the Saudi royal family. But more importantly, it's back to the IMF and the World Bank, where they are sucking so much money out of Pakistan's annual revenue and budget. They don't have money for their own public school system anymore. The public schools and the public universities were largely shut down, and the madrassas are taking their place. The privatization dream of Bush and Schwarzenegger, but look what happens. And this is where those very institutions designed to implement corporate rule and feudalism on a worldwide basis like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and of course the World Trade Organization, the WTO, they are not helping to prevent terrorism, they are causing it. They themselves are making our own country and our own lives less safe. By creating all these conditions that spawn terrorism.

“That’s why I tell people it’s so important to stay curious and search things out and encourage other people to search things out and show them how to do it... We can’t expect our school system, let alone the Internet or television, to make people smarter. We have to do it ourselves.”

I didn't see enough of a difference between the two of them to vote for that guy [Kerry.] That's for damn sure. It's like he deliberately pissed the election away. Refusing to truly take on Bush. Pointing out all the lying, even the telltale hump on his back, during the debates, showing he had a prompter. He

didn't take on any of that...he didn't even take on corporate media for distorting the truth about him when the Swift Boat Veterans, most of whom were never on Swift boats, ran those ads attacking his war record. Basically, in this day and age, King George the Second is the same sort of creature as Ronald McReagan; neither of those guys were ever really president. They were the national mascot. And they knew how to act presidential when their cue card or teleprompter was in front of them. But take away the prompter, and weird things came out of their mouths. And King George the Second is so stupid and delusional that he probably thinks he IS the president. But he's not. And if you have an actor playing president or an actor playing the winner in an election... theoretically, wouldn't you have to have an actor playing the loser as well? How else could you explain spineless, inept campaigns of people like Mondale and Dukakis, and especially Al Gore and John Kerry? They didn't fight; they didn't seem like they wanted to win. Because maybe that wasn't their job. We basically live in a one-party state masquerading as a two-party state. And call 'em what you want, the republicrats, the corporate party—they will basically do what benefits themselves or their financial backers, and that's that.

So where do people get the idea that there are two very different parties?

I think it's because most people are brainwashed in this country to believe that we only have to look at anything as choice A and choice B. Just like a multiple-choice test where you don't have to think out an answer...and that's the way it's framed both in school and especially by the corporate-controlled news media. There are not six sides to this issue, the are only two for you to worry about—right wing and ultra right wing. And that's all the debate you need to know. And a lot of people don't have access or think they don't have access to anything beyond that. That's why I tell people it's so important to stay curious and search things out and encourage other people to search things out and show them how to do it. That's what becoming the media on a one-on-one basis is all about. We can't expect our school system, let alone the Internet or television, to make people smarter. We have to do it ourselves. And if you can help one person be smarter in your life and help them make more intelligent decisions, you are helping fight the corporate Bush agenda.

Whether you are born in this country or you come to this country on a boat, the main thing that is pounded into your head is that if you work really hard, you can have whatever you want, and that's supposed to be the theory behind this country. And you can see that with reality TV, everyone is waiting for their chance to be Donald Trump...

I call it the Big Taste. Preferably for free, with-

out having to work for it. You win the lottery, god blesses you with a miracle, you sue the shit out of your friends and rip them off and wipe 'em out, but at least you win in the end. After all, aren't we taught in grade school that to be a proper American, you should think like Vince Lombardi, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." And that doesn't just mean sports, that also means the business world, and even how you treat your own kids.

Do you think it's getting harder to achieve real revolution, because no one wants to give up their chance for the Big Taste?

But even revolution is, in a way, the Big Taste. Everything will change for the better all at once. It doesn't work that way. I'm not real confident we are going to totally overthrow corporate dictatorship in our lifetime if we keep fighting and making decisions in our own lives about where we are going to spend our money and how we are going to live. Things do change slowly and incrementally over time. You didn't get the Civil Rights Act of 1964 overnight; it took almost a hundred years, unfortunately, but most of the energy that forced it was in the previous 15. I was fortunate that I was enough of a news hound as a child, that I saw the impact of the civil rights movement, the birth of the environmental movement, the pro-choice movement, later, gay rights and everything else. All kinds of boundaries got pushed out, if not blown to pieces from the mid-60s to the mid-70s. And more was done after that, primarily through punk and hip-hop.

But at this point, both punk and hip-hop have become commodified and repackaged by the corporations...

As much as the bling bling culture and money über alles vibe that rules a lot of the hip-hop sickens me, I can also see where it came from. The culture of the Big Taste being dangled before the face of people who grew up being very, very poor. Sure they are going to wanna have more money and maybe get their families moved out of the ghettos so their younger brothers, sisters and cousins aren't at risk of getting shot. Or going to a crappy school, learning nothing but how to sell drugs, at least until they go to war or go to prison. The rap going in the other direction is that "punk is mostly middle-class white people who never grew up as poor as we did; you can put down money all you want, but for us, we can see the real benefits." Unfortunately that's been taken to some pretty nauseating extreme, and of course the major labels would like nothing more than to completely depoliticize hip-hop. And reduce it down as much as possible as gold chains, sexism and guns...there's this whole bullying attitude that runs down from right-wing corporate media that it is irresponsible of an artist to voice an opinion. You are abusing your stardom, unless you are Toby Keith, Mel Gibson or Arnold Swarzenegger, then it's OK.

Did you vote for Nader in the 2004 election?
In the end, I decide to vote for Nader as a protest against all the heavy-handed mafia tactics the Democrats used to get his name off the ballot in so many states. That was really fucking uncalled for. Why call themselves the Democratic Party when they are so fucking undemocratic? If they really believe that Nader cost Gore the 2000 election, which he didn't, why weren't they reforming the platform? Why weren't they addressing why people would vote for Nader instead of Gore, even if Bush might win? They wouldn't do any of that—if they would have spent half the money and energy fighting the Republicans as they did Ralph Nader, Kerry would have won in a walk this time.

When you ran for mayor of San Francisco, did you actually think you'd get elected?
Looking back at that, I didn't think enough. I did it on a dare. I did it as a prank. I had no idea what kind of impact I was really having. Until 6,600 people showed up and voted for me. And I came in fourth out of ten. And helped force Dianne Feinstein into a runoff, which she was extremely pissed about. I actually was a lightning rod for everybody who was fed up with the lack of choice between two corrupt big-city, big-business Democrats. What I didn't know at the time was how much more I needed to do as far as going around knocking on doors, going to neighborhood meetings, different gatherings and organizations. I got invited to so many things, that I didn't think I had the time or know-how to schedule it all. There were also much stronger equal-time laws back then, so I got on the TV news and televised debates.

As far as Nader, they kept him out of the debates...
That's what happens when debates are run by private corporations. Most people don't know that. The Debate Commission is not some government organization that's impartial; the Debate Commission is a private corporation owned by the Democratic and Republican parties who solicit sponsorship for the debates, like Budweiser and AT&T. And if Budweiser doesn't want Nader in the debates, he doesn't get in. After all, he might get through to Middle America how much they are being lied to by the corporate parties, and the fact that there is, in fact, a way out, that in the long run would benefit them. And that's that brick wall that's been put up in this country, that we got to keep finding more clever ways of tunneling under, climbing over or blasting through, just to get through to the mainstream that the alternative ideas of how this country and the

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world can be run are actually beneficial to them, too.

What's your agenda? What do you want to see change?

Like I said in one of my spoken-word albums, I'd like to see our hijacked, unconstitutional government of the people by the corporations for corporations totally overthrown. Annihilate it.

Do you think that's ever possible?

I don't know, I'm more hopeful than optimistic, but I do think it's important to stay focused on what *could* be going on versus what *is* going on. Reach out and show other people what is possible. Versus how things are actually being run. Even pointing out something as simple as how much better the train system is in Europe. You don't have to drive everywhere. You don't have to go to the airport two hours earlier just to be groped and searched and weigh and pay to go up in a plane and get blown around in a cloud and wonder if you are going to make it to the other end and then wait for your luggage and go through another traffic jam to get into town—who knows if it really would have taken you longer if you had taken a train. In Europe, I just put a backpack on my back on my spoken-word tours and head downtown and hop on the train and get to the next town and go to the show. It's so easy, it's so much better, and so much more ecological. So much less wasteful...

That is one of the most obvious issues that plagues our country... and it would solve so many of our problems...yet no one wants to change.

Some people do. It's just that we are not really a democracy at this point. We don't have capitalism, we have feudalism. New corporate feudalism. The corporate world order. Where the barons in high castles are people like Halliburton and Wal-Mart. Every time we buy anything from those people, we are their serfs. And they are building moats around themselves. To protect those castles and everything they think is theirs. But at the same time, one interesting buried fact of the 2000 election is that those very same people in Florida who voted for Gore but got Bush instead also passed a statewide ballot initiative earmarking money to build a high-speed train system between the major cities in Florida. Of course the governor named Bush impounded the funds, and not a dime has been spent on it...but it's not as though people were oblivious to the possibilities.

I wonder if CNN, let alone Fox news or the *New York Times*, are ever going to admit that the health care system is so corrupt, so costly and such a disaster, that even some of the global corporations are complaining about it. General Motors is moving more and more of its manufacturing not to Mexico but to Canada, just because they can save over five grand a year per employee on health care costs. Even the people of Chrysler Corporation have been openly in favor of a so-called single-payer health care system for years—that it would even save the corporations money. But then someone will cry out, "Oh my god, it's socialism! We can't have socialism!" Not to mention this is considered a basic human right, by law, in almost every other industrialized country.

But now, the whole way we've been cultured, so to speak, both the way you culture a germ and create a culture—, I mean both. Especially by corporate media ever since Reagan got in, is that nobody else but you matters, we are not a community, we are a marketplace...and that means it's dog-eat-dog, and if you want to get what we say we think you should be entitled to, and grab your piece of the American Dream, you'd better be ready to kick all your friends in the teeth to get there—because that is the American Way. But I think people are realizing, they are running out of money, we are running out of clean air and water and any place to build and everything else, so the prevailing attitude of the Bush mob is let's fiddle while Rome burns, let's fiddle while the earth warms up and burns. We are just going to indulge in the last big gulp. I may not be able to drive in this SUV tankmobile five years from now, but I'm sure going to waste as much as I can now. And then some of the people at the top are some of these fundamentalist holy-rollers who genuinely believe that it's the end times and Armageddon is right around the corner. And pretty soon Jesus is going to come back and put back all the oil reserves. Put back all the trees, fix up all the land that has been strip-mined; therefore, we should waste as much as we can now. I'd hate to use tired old radical terms like class war, but that's what's going on right now. This is not a blue state, red state conflict, what a myth that is...it's not the left versus right, black versus white; it's the top versus the bottom. And unfortunately the top is waging one hell of a jihad on everyone else on the bottom right now as they try to protect their stolen booty and reimpose a feudal-ist society. ☹

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