

No Innocent Bystanders

An interview with Mickey Z

By [Gregory Elich](#)

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Just out is the latest book by political activist Mickey Z, and like his other works this one is packed with incisive analysis and engaging wittiness. Never reluctant to take on sacred cows, Mickey looks at our political culture and lays bare all of its pretensions and illusions.

[Q] Your new book, *No Innocent Bystanders*, is just out. It's a book amply filled with food for thought and interesting insight. What were you looking to achieve with this book, and what audience do you hope to reach?

[A] I was looking to achieve radical immortality and was hoping to reach all 6.6 billion humans in the process. However, I'd settle for starting a little discussion among those who identify as "leftists" but seem too easily satisfied by Democratic Party propaganda.

[Q] Leftists comprise a tiny portion of the population, but your assessment does appear to be the norm for the U.S. Left. An examination of the post-World War II era would seem to indicate cause for skepticism about the Democratic Party. Yet regardless of how often the pattern repeats, support never wavers.

[A] Sounds like Chicago Cubs' fans, huh? Anyway...it may be that only a "tiny portion" identify as being leftist (because that term has been so effectively demonized), but I'll bet that if you asked most people, they'd often choose what amounts to a "left" stance. They'd want universal health care, a cleaner environment, affordable housing, etc. I think so many Americans cling to the two-party fantasy because - on some level - they understand that to believe otherwise would then require them to take action.

[Q] That's a good point. Your book covers several topics of importance, some of which are eloquently laid out in your chapter, "America's Top Exports: Grief, Sorrow and Loss." The intent of your book seems to be to hold painful facts before your readers and ask them to not turn away. Some of the information you provide lacks nothing for drama, yet the public at large remains largely indifferent. What are your thoughts on this?

[A] That thumping noise you hear is me hitting my head against the wall...repeatedly. All it takes, so it seems, is a modicum of creature comforts and mindless diversions to keep the Average American (AvAm) from displaying even a hint of social consciousness.

The Average American is hoodwinked supporting a sociopathic culture underwritten by materialism and mendacity (SCUMM). Conditioning, propaganda, fear tactics, programming, a modicum of creature comforts and mindless diversions - all designed to dupe us out of both our tax money and our critical thinking faculties thus turning us into a nation of pawns with lawns, scattered across this coast-to-coast mall,

choosing denial over duty. Comfortably numb – as they say (although the “comfort” part is increasingly in question).

[Q] Is it that the corporate culture in the U.S. is so effective at what it does? Or are people here socialized at home and school to conform? It seems that there is more than just contentment with creature comforts at play here.

[A] I’d have to say that the corporate culture has become indistinguishable from the socialization at home and school. The corporate mentality has become engrained in most aspects of daily life. Murray Bookchin said it well: “Our lives prior to that war (WWII) were, to a great extent, pre-industrial. We still had the extended family, communities, neighborhoods, and small retail stores, usually of the Mom & Pop variety. We were not thoroughly absorbed into capitalism in our daily lives...so you had a capitalist economy but not a capitalist society. This was undone by the war as capitalism permeated into every aspect of our daily lives. The family, the culture, the neighborhood have been integrated into the market. People have become atomized and our very language has been corrupted.”

Think about it, we no longer pass time, we spend it. We no longer fall in love, we invest in relationships. Everything we care about has been turned into a commodity. This perception is shaped by institutional structures. Since the power elite does not want people to understand that, yes, they can provoke drastic changes, there is nothing in the official culture to tell us we can inspire change.

We must reinvent everyday life; steal it back from businessmen and reintroduce the joy of living. Stop settling for less pain and start demanding more pleasure. Today’s radicals can provoke dramatic changes simply by refusing to submit to the societal formula they’re presented with. Sometimes, thoughtful introspection is all it takes to move out of the current profit-motivated web and into the realm of free-thinking and individuality. Breaking away from the omnipresent, primitive message of “work, consume, and obey authority without question” is this generation’s way of starting to challenge the status quo.

[Q] Your book comments on the “support the troops” phenomenon, which is generally treated as something sacred and above criticism.

[A] Indeed. I can’t tell you how many e-mails I’ve received over the years that read something like this: “While you sit at home in your luxurious apartment, making money off your writing (insert laugh track here), those brave men and women are putting their asses on the line to fight for your freedom to write your anti-American garbage. To which I say: Bullshit. The troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are not fighting for my freedom. They are fighting to keep the world safe for petroleum. If anything, since 9/11, our freedom has been slowly eroded and the presence of the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan makes it harder for anyone to speak up in dissent. If I were in an airport, and I spoke aloud what I’ve said in this interview, I’d likely be detained or arrested...here in the land of the free.

[Q] Clearly your goal is to bring the awareness to your readers that it is possible to do more than just passively observe and think about the world. One can be an active agent in the life of the nation. As Marx wrote, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.”

[A] Well, Marx certainly did succeed in changing the world. It’s odd to contemplate that someone from his time period could reach so many people while today – with information

having never been more accessible – human thinking is so narrow, homogenous, and downright cowardly.

[Q] Do you see any realistic prospects of that narrowness of vision broadening?

[A] Fortunately, societal norms and habits aren't static and in times of monumental change and danger, things can change rapidly. Perhaps, as the powers-that-be become less and less capable of distracting us from what is two inches in front of our faces, we will witness drastic and previously unimaginable social change. Then again, maybe not.

[Q] You have your own web site. Would you tell us something about that?

[A] Thanks to Nancy Ryan and Mark Hand – two of my favorite people in the world – I've had a blog since mid-2004. For me, it's a cross between a journal and zine and my posts run the gamut from radical articles I've written to personal stories I'd like to share. Best of all, I've been fortunate enough to attract a group of regular visitors (a.k.a. "The Expendables") that have made the site more like a community than anything else.

[Q] It is like a community, and I encourage readers to visit the site. Finally, is there anything that you would like to add concerning your new book?

[A] Yes, thanks. I'd like to say that the book is presented in an unorthodox format...vignettes, lists, stories, etc. This, I believe, makes it more accessible and allows readers to pick it up and start anywhere...read it out of order, so to speak. My style isn't dry, academic writing. It's the kind of book you can pass on to anyone you think needs a little shock therapy about the state of global affairs. Also, in the unlikely event of a water landing, the book can be used as a flotation device.

Mickey Z. can be found on the Web at <http://www.mickeyz.net>

No Innocent Bystanders: Riding Shotgun in the Land of Denial

http://www.amazon.com/No-Innocent-Bystanders-Riding-Shotgun/dp/0978818628/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1233020119&sr=1-4

Gregory Elich is the author of the book *Strange Liberators: Militarism, Mayhem, and the Pursuit of Profit*.

<http://www.amazon.com/Strange-Liberators-Militarism-Mayhem-Pursuit/dp/1595265708>

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