

Empathy in the Middle East: A Journal of Personal Experience

By micahwhite

This report cost \$3,000 to produce. If you would like me to continue on this path of radical empathy, please donate through the website radicalempathy.org.

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¹ This section is, ironically, unpublished and only available if I am asked directly for it. The section is seven pages long and ranges from gender issues to feelings of despair.

Introduction: My Purpose

9/23 - Reflections on my Journey

» Amman, Jordan, September 25, 2002

Well, I've been here a week, established a routine and begun preliminary analysis of the situation. Today was the first day that I awoke at a normal time, and last night was the first night that I went to sleep at a normal hour. But, unfortunately, a proper amount of sleep didn't seem to do my body good and I've found myself with a slight cold. Nothing serious, but enough to decide that I should take a day of rest. So I went to the internet cafe and wrote Olivia and Isabel each an email. On the way back I noticed that there is an appropriately named "Keep Walking" liquor store up the street from my hotel. Alcohol consumption is frowned upon by Islam but I've found there to be ample simple - maybe to satisfy Westerners or the country's Christian population or the less pious Muslims. I also stopped by a small grocery store and bought crackers, water, and pineapple juice (.950JD).

Those who know me, likely know that at various times I've been obsessed with what I term self-analysis. When I first came to college this manifested in constant discussions about how I appeared to others and how this differed from how I saw myself - the likely result of my time in high school. But the self-analysis also played out in a focus on trying to as closely as possible catalogue my interior and show it to the world (or at least my friends). A process of public evisceration, if you will. And that was the original intention behind this journal: the public exhibition of my thoughts while I traveled. Having spent nearly a year of my life constantly studying the "war on terrorism" or more precisely "Bush's war", I naturally predicted that many of my thoughts would be political. But I have other thoughts as well, and as I head into my second week of journaling in Jordan I'm forced to come to grips with knowing that people are reading this journal and that I even know some of those people. An uncomfortable situation when you realize that many of your thoughts will continue to circle around existential crises of sorts while trying to figure out my role here. At times I think it's unfortunate that I'm aware there is an audience for this journal. Ideally pure magic would transport this, my personal journal, online without my knowledge that anyone was reading it. This is the only real way that I'd be able to completely resist acts of self-censorship - which are really just acts of image production and construction.

I've begun to realize that many of the questions I came here with weren't valid. If I were now forced to answer some of what I would have a week ago considered my most basic questions I would have to preface each answer with an acknowledgement that that question carries untrue or naive assumptions. But this has left me with a relatively profound lack of direction. To be frank, I'm unsure of what I'm doing here. What do I expect to learn? What experience is going to give me the life-changing epiphany that I'm looking for? But as I have now been here a week it's clear that there will never be such an epiphany. There will only be a series of small realizations - people shake hands more warmly here and sometimes it feels like the predominate sound in the city is the conversations being had between strangers and friends alike. The problem with such small realizations is that they only slowly begin to change your perceptions, and they often times go unnoticed.

When planning this trip I did three things intentionally: 1) I made relatively no effort to make contacts in Jordan 2) I made the trip as long as possible and planned to

spend as little as possible and 3) I made very few plans as to what I would do once in Jordan. The reason for these decisions was in large part that I saw this trip as my opportunity to forcefully sever myself from anything known to me. I wanted to be birthed into the Middle East (perhaps as a physical manifestation of the way in which 9/11 forced the region in to America's consciousness). But now I have to determine where my first steps will take me.

The analogy of a birth is what I had hoped to approach but I also know that to a certain extent the beginning would also contain a process of forceful forgetting. Forgetting the connotations associated with men wearing "head scarfs" or women in veils. I wanted to see Jordan with innocent eyes. It took me a week to overcome the internal, unacknowledged, prejudices buried within me. Prejudices that could have only come from the American media and entertainment producers - as they were my only eyes into the Middle East, and are therefore singularly to blame for unconscious racisms I had.

It took me a week to feel unafraid to venture from my hotel room in any direction, to ask for help (although I still prefer to do it alone, a trait that I think may be offending people here), and to know that most people here - as everywhere - mean no harm. But now what?

I'm not naive enough to think that one week has been enough. There is no part of me that wants to go home. But there is a part of me that is deathly afraid that every second that passes may have been a wasted one. What did I learn a minute, hour, or day ago? Could I have learned more? Unfortunately, I know now that such questions will likely dominate my trip - the only thing I can do now is begin to try and come up with some questions, newly defined questions, that I'd like to answer.

This trip is of great significance for me. I remember the anguished decision that led me here. The phone call to my parents where I told them that I must take a semester off - and that I would be thrusting myself into the region at the center of world events. The nights spent reading the newspaper almost in tears because of what was going on in the world. But it was perhaps the trip to the foreign study office at Swarthmore College that was the catalyst. I told them I wanted to study abroad in the Middle East or Israel - they told me my grades weren't good enough to acquire financial aide. It was then that it became clear I was daily making a choice to put my activism above my school work - spending 5 hours a day reading the world's newspapers and a few minutes studying for class. I met with a dean and he told me what I already knew - that my passion for the antiwar movement was nearly religious. The significance of such a conclusion for an avowed Atheist cannot be understated. And so I called my parents, talked to my professors and took a semester off - a step I knew was possibly sacrificing a great deal. And now I'm here... was it worth it?

With a sign of relief I can only say an emphatic Yes! So far the one conclusion that really mattered to me has been proven: that people are people and that they universally want the same things - safety and happiness.

But again, now what? Well now I must continue on the same path that led me here. But I must also begin to work harder - there are still thoughts left unformed, waiting only for an articulation. My job is now to increase the purges, to begin to force myself to formulate answers to the questions that were only waiting for detachment from America.

Sometimes I worry that I'm not meeting enough people, or seeing enough of the country - but it is now that I must admit to myself that those things were never the primary goal of my trip. The primary goal has always been to seek a detachment from the epicenter of the Empire and to use that detachment to come to some conclusions about the world, myself and the global antiwar movement.

Chapter 1: Descriptive Narratives

First Post!

» Swarthmore, PA, August 18, 2002

This is my first journal entry. In about 3 weeks I'm going to be on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean for the first time in my life! It really doesn't seem real yet...

Anyway, since this is my first journal entry I wanted to tell you a little of what you can expect from this page in the future. I see this journal as an opportunity to relay my thoughts about being in the Middle East, and I expect the topics to range from the political to mere observations. I'll try to update the journal at least once a week. In addition, I'll be keeping a public record of my expenses to encourage you plan your own trip to the Middle East. If you ever want to write me a personal email - please send it to mwhite1@swarthmore.edu.

That's it for now. Stay tuned.

Second Step

» Swarthmore, PA, August 23, 2002

Well, tonight is my last night in Swarthmore. Tomorrow I'll be in Michigan making the final preparations for my trip to Jordan. I wonder what it'll feel like the night before I leave for Jordan. If how I feel right now is any indication, I think it's going to be a time of great emotional conflict. I'm very excited about going to Jordan - it's the realization of something I've been planning for months - but I'm also anxious. What will be it be like? Will I be safe?

The question of safety is an interesting one because I've spent a lot of time convincing friends, family, and myself that it will be... but how certain am I? At least one thing is for sure, although I know I'm going to miss my friends and that the first week in Jordan may be culturally shocking, I don't want to be in America anymore.

This trip is my opportunity to prove to myself that the world is safe and that what is making the world unsafe is the destructive force of Bush.

In Michigan

» Grand Blanc, MI, August 24, 2002

I arrived this morning in Michigan, where I'll be staying with my parents until I leave for Jordan. While I'm here I'll be buying the supplies for my trip and will try to keep an accurate note of how much everything is costing. So far I've spent \$790 on the trip: \$730 for a plane ticket on Royal Jordanian Airlines and \$60 for a passport. I expect to spend another \$200 on supplies: backpack, bugspray, better walking shoes, some clothes etc.

Coming home I was greeted by the new copy of Adbusters (adbusters.org) which I look forward to reading.

My apologies for the rather uneventful entries thus far, if you'd me to talk about anything in particular feel free to email me.

Sick

» Grand Blanc, MI, August 28, 2002

Well, the unexpected happened and I got sick. I suppose it is better now than closer to when I'd have to leave but it's still a hassle.

Although there are no required shots for Jordan, I've discovered that I am missing one recommended one: Hepatitis A. So I'll be getting this shortly. I also picked up some prescription anti-diarrhea medicine to counter the inevitable travelers diarrhea I can expect, although the travel guide I purchased said it's best to get it out of your system instead of using medicine. In terms of preparation, I still need to buy a backpack and other misc. supplies which I'll have to do when I feel better.

Exciting News

» Grand Blanc, MI, August 30, 2002

Today was a great day.

It started in a funk. I woke up during the middle of the night in the middle of a nightmare about Jordan. Oddly enough, I've been having these lately. The fears usually revolve around not being prepared. In the dream last night I was boarding the plane to Jordan when I realized that I hadn't purchased any supplies yet, as my anxiety rose I realized that I was mistakenly boarding the plane a week early. I'm not too worried that I've been having such dreams, I think it's just a typical response to such exciting times.

After shaking off the remaining feelings of uneasy I went to a camping store in Flint and bought my backpack. It's an excellent bag: large, comfortable, and reasonably inexpensive. Total cost was around \$120. I also picked up a small flashlight (\$15) and some extra-strong bugspray (2 bottles at \$4.99 each). I'll pick up a couple more things in the upcoming week and I should be ready to go. I also got my Hepatitis A shot which cost \$30 from the local clinic. The travel guides say you don't need any shots but they recommend several. Hepatitis A and typhoid being the two I don't think most Americans are immunized against. I'll be getting the typhoid shot later this week.

But what about the exciting news? Well first I came home and received an email from Sharon F., a friend from my activism past. She sent me a very kind email and made an online donation to support my trip (Thanks Sharon!).

And then I found out that Why War will be quoted in an upcoming article in the Los Angeles Times! Yesterday we received an email from a reporter who was looking to do a story on protests against the war on Iraq. She seemed initially disappointed that Why War wasn't organizing any big protests - but I told her about some of the ways I think the antiwar movement is moving beyond protests as a primary organizing tactic which interested her. To cut a long story short, look for a one paragraph quote in the Los Angeles Times that includes Why War's website address (!).

It's funny how good things happen in clumps.

Supplies

» Grand Blanc, MI, September 1, 2002

I purchased more supplies today. Basically the only things left to buy now are some clothes, some extra passport photos, and a book. Those will have to wait until Tuesday.

Here's a list of what I purchased today:

Lip sunscreen - \$1

camping towel - \$3.49 (drys extra quickly)

fleece sleeping bag - \$14.99 (to avoid any bedbugs I may encounter in 'budget' hotels)

9 small plastic jars - 97cents each (to save the essence of various places I visit, such as salt from the dead sea)

excedrine - \$2 (headache medicine)

hat - \$8

5 pens - \$6.99

10 bandaids - free

tylenol allergy and sinus - \$6.29 (not sure if I'm going to bring this)

Dr Bronner's all purpose soap - \$10 (multipurpose soap, excellent value)

2 journals - \$6 (on sale at Border's)

"Rough Guide to Jordan" - \$20

Total cost: 85.49

This brings the total cost of everything needed to get myself to Jordan thus far to about \$1000.

I expect to spend \$30 a day in Jordan, which brings the total anticipated cost for the entire trip to \$3700 for three months! This is less than the room and board cost for one semester at Swarthmore.

Of course this may be a low estimate as I'll also be traveling to Israel/Palestine but I'm going to try very hard to stay on budget.

I packed my backpack today as well which was fun. The weight is manageable, although I'm going to need to figure out how to adjust the straps since it doesn't fit perfectly yet.

8 days

» Grand Blanc, MI, September 7, 2002

8 days until I leave...

I'm starting to get anxious. I spent the last three days in Ann Arbor with my high school friends which gave me a few days of fun to take my mind off the trip. But now that I'm back in Grand Blanc the waiting game begins again. Eight days...

I'm ready

» Grand Blanc, MI, September 11, 2002

Well... I'm done preparing for my trip. I have all the supplies I need and my bag is packed and ready. Hard to believe it's already almost time to leave... a mere four days are left in America.

It's Time

» **Grand Blanc, MI**, September 14, 2002

Still doesn't feel like it, but it's now the night before I leave. I have a long day ahead of me as I need to fly from Flint to Detroit to New York (where I need to collect my bags then check in to Royal Jordanian Airlines) to Jordan. The whole trip will begin at noon on the 15th and end around 4pm local Jordanian time on Monday (Jordan is 7 hours ahead of EST time).

It's 2:48am here now - I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to sleep tonight but I'll try.

I always find anxiety to be an interesting sensation. It's totally unique and can range from slight nervousness all the way to nervous breakdowns. Oddly enough I'd say that I'm not really all that anxious about the trip. Maybe it's because I can't really accurately picture what it's going to be like to finally land in Jordan, but I must admit that I've been more anxious before... most recently prior to giving a speech that I felt ill-prepared for. That must be the difference - now I feel ultra-prepared. I may be naive about what is to come but I've prepared as best I could.

There has been only one slight mistake. It wasn't until late tonight that I remembered that I need to bring a passport photo in order to get a visa once in Jordan. Unfortunately, the only place that I could think would offer passport photos - Kinkos - was for some reason closed. Seems they don't offer 24 hour Kinkos in this part of Michigan. But I'll wake up early, get the photo, and all will be well.

My next entry may not be for a few days as I settle into Amman and try and find the cheapest Internet Cafe around but stay tuned as I will be writing volumes once I do.

9/15 - At the Airport and on the plane

» **New York City, NY**, September 16, 2002

I'm in JFK now and a great calm as enveloped me. The passengers that I've seen thus far are a mixed bag. A group of 20-something males from Yemen whose style is clearly influenced by their notions of "hip-hop", a large group of white elderly passengers who were exceptionally excited to see each other. From the multiple city names they were dropping it seems they are affluent world travelers.

Royal Jordanian Airlines is nice. Each passenger is given a pillow and blanket, free headphones and a newspaper. I haven't seen the food yet but it smells good. The in-flight radio is playing "Royal Jordanian Pop" which is pumping out recent American hits. Ironically, they just started playing a song by one of the Osborne children that hasn't even made it onto the Michigan radio stations yet.

The person next to me is a Palestinian who left with his family in 1989. He owns a supermarket a few blocks from the WTC and also an apartment building in middle-America.

9/16 - In the Hotel

» **Amman, Jordan**, September 16, 2002

I've successfully made it to a hotel. After waiting about thirty minutes for my bag I was whisked through customs, it seems they are very lax and didn't even ask if I had anything to declare. A man approached me and offered to give me a ride to Amman for 20JD, which is the very highest I expected to pay I agreed mainly because he

was so good at playing my ignorance. In the end it was worth it, he convinced me not to go to the budget hotel I had planned - he said the area is unsafe and full of drunks. He called them on the cell phone, and reported with great joy that they had no stars. And that he'd take me to a 2 star place - I agreed because it was clear he really wanted me not to go to the budget hotel, and since he insisted that the 2 star place would cost only 10JD (\$14USD), I accepted again. I've budgeted 21JD a day so if after looking around I find that I can survive on 11JD a day for food and transportation I'll stay here. He, I'm sure, received a commission but throughout the experience he was warm, I was standoffish. There was one awkward experience in the car when his cell phone rang and he began to whisper. He told me he had a "friend" which he explained meant "girls". Then he asked if I had a friend. I couldn't tell if this was some nice conversation or proposition for prostitution, so I said no. That was the wrong answer I suppose because he rolled his eyes and sighed. I didn't try to explain.

The room is nice, to be honest, I'd like to stay here for at least a week. It has a private bathroom and shower which made me very happy.

There are soldiers with assault rifles on every block - or more accurately every half-block. The driver didn't seem too interested in discussing this. Curiosity forced me to ask if the soldiers were really police and although he dismissed my question with a yes, I soon saw that the answer was no. Police wear blue and have assault rifles. Soldiers wear camo-clothing, vests, and have assault rifles. The soldiers also seem to be much more prevalent.

The presence of the military is to be expected - Jordan is surrounded by countries most Americans would label as the source of every ill in the world. But the presence of blatant repression is unfortunate and only augments the point that this country really isn't a "democracy" in the sense that America uses the word. We mean democracy to mean a nation where the people are controlled by subtle forms of persuasion and manipulation, where people believe that their voice does matter, and that good people are on top. But here, in a country that recently suspended elections, people are forced to see that they are being repressed from their own government.

I don't want to give the wrong impression though - in every other aspect the country appears to be just as free as America in terms of the ability to move freely, buy things, etc.

I ventured away from the hotel but only went far enough to find water (250 filas, there are 1000 filas in 1JD and 0.7 JDs in 1dollar). It's hard for me to know where to eat because all the shops are basically empty. It also doesn't help that I'm not exactly in the place I had planned to be, so I haven't read the travel guide as thoroughly about this location - which I'll have to do shortly.

Fortunately there is cheap (1JD an hour) internet access across the street from my hotel. So I'm currently seated in the back room of a grimy shop typing away on a 200mhz machine. But I have no complaints. It's just nice to know that I'm at least an email away from America.

I've been telling people here that I'm American, which hasn't presented any problems yet. People can tell instantly anyways, walking down the streets I'm greeted with the endless honks from Taxis trying to get my business. Most people

that I've encountered thus far speak English very well. Everyone except the guy running this internet shop has been exceptionally nice.

My time is running out on the computer, so I'm going to get going. Tomorrow I need to wake up early, get my money for the week changed, and figure out where to eat and if I want to stay at my current hotel.

9/17 - Unproductive Anxiety

» Amman, Jordan, September 18, 2002

I woke up at 6:30am today in order to find a bank. Banks, I soon found out, open at 8:30am so I walked around Amman until then. After changing \$100 for 70.800JD I went to Al-Quds diner, the travel guide said it was cheap and alright. It was both. I also wanted to get my stomach used to cheap Jordanian food. I ordered Hummus with lamb, which was good but after eating half of it I became very afraid of getting sick. They say travelers diarrhea is inevitable but the prospect of it is obviously unappealing. So I ate half and left hoping that would be enough for my stomach to begin to acclimate. The meal cost 1.300JD, which is about \$2. Such a low cost makes me very eager to get at such a level.

All told I spent 1.900JD today. If I eat three meals a day at Al-Quds or similar level of restaurant I'll save lots of money for Israel and my further travels throughout Jordan.

I'm very much beginning to feel pangs of loneliness. The fact that I can't seem to shake my jet lag (Jordan is 7hour ahead of EST) is adding to the problem because I find myself waking up very early then sleeping through the entire day.

This journal entry is entitled Unproductive Anxiety because that is what today was. I spent much of the day in my hotel room reading or sleeping because I need a refuge from the very new experiences outside. I was, unfortunately, constantly nervous as I tried to navigate through the day.

9/18 - Roman Theatre and My Staircase

» Amman, Jordan, September 19, 2002

I woke up early again today - my sleep schedule is still very confused. Yesterday I discovered just how great a hotel that Taxi driver took me to. A walk down a steep concrete staircase brings you a few meters from the heart of downtown.

I have been slightly discouraged that I wasn't making friends but I stuck to my plan of buying things from the same places in order to meet people and today the guy I buy water from started conversation with me. The surprising thing is that many of the people I run into have been to America. The taxi driver was in New York City for 2 years and the water guy was in Chicago for 6. It makes me sad to think that so many people here have experience America, speak perfect English, and so few Americans care to do the same. If we understood that the myth of America as the center of the world was actually true maybe we'd care just a little more about the world.

After buying water and today's issue of the Jordan Times (a surprisingly good newspaper) I walked down to the Roman Theatre in Amman which was constructed around 1900years ago. I'm not really one for tourism spots - but this place is

stunning. A testament to it's grandeur is the fact people seem to wander in either alone or as a couple. Everyone else is Arab and they arrange themselves in varying levels throughout the theatre - each with great space between any other. And then we all do what I felt compelled to do - sit quietly and think, staring nowhere in particular, watching our brothers, listening to cars honk and the distant sound of a fountain.

The 16th to the 18th of September marks the 20th anniversary of Sharon's war crime in Lebanon. It was remembered by a half page article in yesterday's Jordan Times that was as lucid and well written as any tribute to the victims of 9/11. In clear terms it spelled out the horrible tragedy of the event: Israeli troops stopping Palestinian refugees from fleeing while the Lebanese Christian militia (which was trained by Israel) swept through the camp slaughtering unarmed civilians. The article was powerful for its frank honesty. It didn't need to exaggerate in order to convey the terrible tragedy that occurred. It only needed to tell the facts. But what would happen if the New York Times had published it? Likely, it would have been dismissed as propaganda - it's truth would have been called a lie, and the cycle of psychological repression would continue in hand with the continuing physical repression. "You don't know what you think you know" seems to be the message that the "West" forced on the world. A true tragedy because the article wasn't calling for anything more radical than justice... than remembrance.

In an earlier entry I noted the presence of soldiers, today I found out that this isn't true within the actual city. It seems they are only stationed uptown, I don't yet know why.

There is something about Amman that I really enjoy - it took a couple of days for me to begin to feel at ease but now that I've walked around and learned at least the main roads I feel much more confident. Amman feels safe, and the only time I feel in danger is honestly when trying to cross the street. Cars travel much too fast and there are essentially no cross walks. I've learned to follow the lead of locals as they cross the street but when I find myself to be the only one who needs to get to the other side it's very much a harrowing experience.

I'm sitting in my favorite little nook now, on the shaded steps that lead up to my hotel's street. The steps emerge suddenly onto the street and from my position you can only see directly in front of yourself. This allows me to see Amman as a 6 foot area extending to across the street. The best part is that people cannot see me sitting here and instead walk down the street as they always would. Some notice me, a brown skinned foreigner, but none seem concerned or afraid of my presence.

I saw the effects that tourism has on a place at the Roman Theatre. It takes about 5 minutes to walk there from my hotel but once there everyone wants money. The Jordanian version of a squeegee man is someone who pours you tea (or in Arabic "shy") very quickly and hands it to you. The surprise, of course, is that it costs 1JD. I fell victim to this and could only laugh when he said 1JD because the tiny cup was worth mere cents - and would probably be given away for free in any restaurant in America. But he laughed as well, assuring me it would taste very good. And since he'd already caught me in the very ethical quandary that the squeegee man relies on - I accepted. How can you refuse an already poured cup of tea? While not worth 1JD it did taste quite good.

One of the things I'm, of course, trying to understand is the role of women and of

Islam in Jordan. There is clearly a lot of diversity of people here. From the clearly religiously devout - signified by the presence of prayer beads in their hands - to the young males who seem to want western style - signified by tight jeans and tight t-shirts. The first thing that stands out here is that there are mostly males on the street. It would be premature to make anything of this observation, however. There are a wide range of women on the street too. Veiled and unveiled, with head scarfs and without, in tight jeans and in long body-dresses. It doesn't feel like it is oppressive, the women don't wear it like they are shackles. Instead it just looks like clothing.

It would be useful for all the religious diversity within America to be thrust into one city. Amish next to catholic next to fundamentalist protestant next to liberal protestant next to Mormon etc. Then people would understand that sometimes people choose to follow the dictates of their religion, even if this requires them to "look different" than others. In all honesty, externally, on the street, Amman feels diverse and pluralistic. Sure most people are brown, but that brown colour ranges from nearly white to very black. Sure it is hot and everyone is covering their legs and shoulders but beyond this trivial similarity there is great diversity. The true test will be as I see more of the region. I think I'll stay another 2 weeks in Amman then move on to Israel for a week or so then back to Jordan. I want to see the rest of the country, but first I'm excited to meet my contacts in Israel.

9/19 - The Taxi Driver and The Police

» Amman, Jordan, September 22, 2002

It seems I begin every journal with a recollection of what time I awoke - and today will be no exception: 4:30am. The problem with waking up so early is not that nothing is open, which is true, but that I can't leave the hotel. The night receptionist, a very nice man in his late 20s, sleeps on a mattress in the lobby. The entrance to the hotel is locked. To leave would then require me to wake him up and have him unlock the door - something that is likely allowed but which I cannot bring myself to do. So I spend 4 hours smoking and reading.

I'm constantly smoking here. Everyone is and it's hard to resist when you can smoke anywhere. No smoking signs, even though they are present in diners, seem universally ignored.

Today's task (I must admit that I've been dividing my days into tasks in order to acclimate to this place) was to get my visa extended. When you arrive in Jordan you're given a two-week visa that must be extended at a police station. I had earlier scouted out a station in Downtown and went there today after breakfast at Al-Quds (1.700JD). For some reason police officers in general don't speak English - probably the same reason American police officers are in general poorly educated "macho"-men. After some confusion I discovered that I needed to go to a different station, and for that I'd need to take a taxi or servecee. A police officer who spoke English jumped into help - he wrote the name of the station in Arabic and told me where to find the appropriate servecee. Servecee is what they call white cars that have set routes that shuttle people around. However, I had never taken one and wasn't sure if I was ready for the experience of being crammed into a car heading to a location for which I only had a small slip of paper with an Arabic name. So I opted to take my first taxi ride. Standing on the side of the street I hailed a taxi and this is where I met Waleed. I got into the cab and showed him the piece of paper - noticing that he hadn't reset the meter. When things like this arise there is always a problem for me.

I always feel that arguing over it is more trouble than its worth, so instead I didn't say anything. We conversed about where I was from and why I was going to the police station - his English wasn't great but he was able to carry simple conversation, which put me at ease. As we dove to the station I realized my intention of walking back was impossible because the station was quite high up into the hills of Amman. When we arrived he offered to wait for me, and I accepted.

Aside from the fact that police officers don't seem to speak English there is no attempt made to allow non-Arabic speakers to find their way. Which means that although there are numerous nearly identical offices - all of them are labeled with nothing more than a blue Arabic sign. After saying "Visa" to three or four policemen I found my way to an office with 4 people flipping through endless blue files. I handed one of them my passport along with the business card of the hotel I'm staying at and was told to wait outside with the others who were waiting for extensions. A girl from Indonesia sat silently looking at the floor as two Arab men talked to each other. Although these three were together, the two men were handling her visa extension, it was unclear what their relationship was. From her submissive and sad demeanor I guessed she was either a mail-order bride or a maid. I very much wanted to talk to her - but I was sure this would break numerous taboos.

Aside from these three were Iraqis and an Arab of Canadian nationality. The police station itself was slightly unnerving. The offices surrounded an open air courtyard that was painted green. The police uniforms here look faintly like US Airforce uniforms which added to the sense that I very much didn't want to be here for long. After about 10 minutes someone came out and handed me my passport, I thanked them and walked out to the street to find Waleed washing the Taxi.

Getting into the taxi it was clear that he wanted to earn some extra money. Yet, even though he had been waiting outside for close to 15 minutes the meter had only gone up about 100filas (14cents) so again I chose to appreciate the fact that all of this was very cheap and that I didn't have much else to do. Although I'm discussing all of this in terms of money it is only fair to point out that he was a sincerely nice person. I had coughed earlier in the ride to the police station which opened a conversation about smoking. The first thing he did when we began our return trip was offer me a cigarette. It was my very first cigarette not purchased in America (I brought a carton) and was surprisingly good. We then stopped for coffee. He paid for this as well. From watching the change he was given I believe the coffee cost 100filas. I added this to the taxi fare. He took a long route back, although nothing is really long in a small city like Amman, which gave me a chance to see a lot of the city I'd never been to. We passed signs for Burger King and McDonalds while listening to the Backstreet Boys and other American pop stars. He took me to the Roman Theatre and as the meter began to break the 3JD mark I realized it was time for me to get out. I thanked him for the ride, he gave me his cell phone number and I gave him a 200filas tip. Unfortunately, he wasn't ecstatic about the tip but since the meter was never reset he actually made about 1.800JD extra. It's very hard to escape the effects of the wealthy West when everyone here who relies on tourism sees you as a money bag. I can imagine the sort of tip that 2 cigarettes, a coffee, and a tour of the city would bring from a wealthy "package-tourist". Unfortunately that isn't feasible for me - as I needed to stay under \$14USD a day for expenses outside of my hotel room.

» Amman, Jordan, September 22, 2002

The day started like the others here - I ate first at Al-Quds, for some reason the price of my typical Hummus with meat and coffee increased 400filas, I then headed down to the Roman Theatre. My task today was to visit the highly recommended bookstore and internet cafe in the hills above Downtown: Books@Cafe. Unfortunately, this place doesn't open until 10am so after soaking up the majestic Roman Theatre for an hour I headed downtown. I decided to make a stop at a store advertised as having internet access. One of the few constantly discernable English words in downtown is "Airline" (there seems to be a travel agency every few feet) and "Internet". However, it's impossible to tell what type of internet access they have. This place was typical in that the access was slow and atypical in the fact that it was actually a translation bureau of some sort. It seems that charging 1JD an hour for internet is as profitable as running a business as I was shuttled to the main desk. 15 minutes into the awkward experience of trying to update a political website on the business computer of a woman who now sat in an empty office next to me, the internet connection died. I was unfortunately unable to send an already written email to Olivia so I left and decided it was time for Books@Cafe.

Hailing a cab, I got in and tried to explain where to go. Books@Cafe? The very concept of books and what the driver understood as coffee seemed bewildering as he mimed the contradictory actions repeatedly. Opening my travel book I tried to show him a map - equally incomprehensible for him since there doesn't really seem to be street names around here. So I asked him to take me to what was a nearby location - 1st Circle in Jebel Amman. Somewhere along the way the lines of communication were confused and when he confessed he didn't know where to go, but insisted we were at 1st circle I told him to let me out. The fare was 1JD. Checking my map I realized that what he had called 1st circle, but pronounced as a mix of 1st and 4th was in reality 4th circle. 4th circle is quite a distance from 1st Circle so I took a sip of water, lit a cigarette and tried to figure out how to get out of here.

It was then that a light skinned Arab man with a short sleeved dress shirt walked down the sidewalk. I pounced on him and asked if he knew where Books@Cafe was. It was clear that he had no idea and I gave him the map which he pondered over. He then stopped a taxi. He proceeded to question the cab driver about the location, the only discernable English was "Mango" - the name of the street the store was located on. As the taxi driver pulled into the side street next to us he continued to think about the location. After a brief conversation with the taxi driver he then motioned for me to get in. I figured that he'd remembered the location and explained it to the taxi driver who would take me there. I thanked him but he surprised me by getting into the backseat. "No Problem" he insisted as the taxi driver pulled away with both of us. From the backseat he talked to the driver - from his tone it seemed he wasn't pleased with the speed (or linearity) of the route.

Soon we arrived at leafy streets that looked like what was described in the travel guide. We got out and approached the nearest store. After asking several people where the elusive Books@Cafe was located we finally, with great joy, found it.

But what would this Palestinian, who I had told I was an American, want? He had, after all, completely dropped whatever task he was heading towards on that sidewalk 10minutes, by taxi, away. Money? Taxi-fare back? No. He wanted nothing! I simply shook his hand and thanked him profusely and off he went with a smile.

His kindness was pure and sincere. I asked for help, and for some reason, he truly helped. How many Americans can relate the same experience while being lost on the streets of any of our cities? How many New Yorkers would have done the same? Such kindness is shaming because it forces one to come to grips with their inner unkindness and distrustfulness. It was I who at each step second guessed his motives. Such kindness makes one want to apologize for thoughts unsaid.

The fact that he was a Palestinian is important. Cutting through the rhetoric of the Israel/Palestine situation is the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of refugees in Jordan. Refugees who have fled their former homes and now live here. But the Palestinians are also a people whose image has been slaughtered in the media. "Extremists who don't value human life, better be careful of them" is the message many Americans receive. Today I was shown the utter ignorance of such wide generalizations. His only response to hearing that I was American was to say that he didn't like Bush but liked Americans. A point he was careful to drive home with repeated "You Understand?". And I did, because he showed me.

9/22 - Routine, Money and Television

» Amman, Jordan, September 22, 2002

Routine is what allows me to filter the world, ignoring the things I chose to make "old". I've made my daily existence in Amman routine - eating the same food, buying the same water from the same store, and generally following the same daily schedule. Routine is what allows me to adapt to the situation, so that only things that break that routine stand out.

I have just remembered that today is my one week anniversary in Jordan. It feels like I've already been here a month, which explains why I almost forgot.

The waiter at Al-Quds now recognizes me. Today he joked around, shook my hand, and tried to mimic my English: a relieving change from his previously sullen mood. Perhaps coincidentally my bill dropped to 1.700JD, 400 filas cheaper than yesterday. Games with giving improper change are universal here. Likely because their coinage is very confusing. The most common coins are the 1dinar, the half dinar, the 10pistras (100filas), the fifty filas and the five piastras. The latter two being worth the same, look slightly different. The main problem is that the 10pistras and the 5 look nearly identical, the five is only slightly smaller and the only real way to tell them apart is to examine their backs - on which their value is written in English. The way to avoid continuous confusion, then, is to carry the smallest denominations of coins available so that you don't need to ask for change. I've determined that the \$30USD a day I've budgeted is very close to the bottom of what is necessary, although it suffices. I could, if need be, probably survive in Amman on \$15USD a day, which would cover the cheapest hotel, food, and water. But costs quickly add up when you include taxis (typical rides seem to cost 1JD), the newspaper (200filas for the Jordan Times and 1JD for the International Herald Tribune) and the internet (1JD an hour for slow access and 2JD for fast). I haven't been able to determine what people typically earn an hour here but it must be quite low given how little a Westerner can live on in relative to American standards.

After asking about English language television I discovered that my room should have come equipped with a TV. The Arab man who seems to handle the odd-jobs needed to run this hotel installed one last night and I've since then been able to watch CNN International and sometimes BBC World. The CNN station is far better

than what is received domestically, with a greater range of opinions, a greater focus on actual news, and more interesting commentary but it's still behind the BBC in pure informational value. The most interesting thing is the far different editorial slant that CNN International has - they are far less pro-Israel and even interview "leftists". One report even interviewed the op-ed editor for the Guardian. There are also fewer commercials and interruptions. The other channels available are all Arabic, of course, and include Al-Jazeera, a Syrian soap opera station, sports, and cartoons.

9/25 - Sickness

» Amman, Jordan, September 25, 2002

Sometime a few years ago I became an unhealthy person. Not coincidentally this came about the same time I became a smoker. So unfortunately, I've been holed up in my hotel room the last two days with a chest cold alternatively sleeping and watching CNN (yesterday was actually a good day to be sick because CNN covered, nearly without interruption, both Britian's Parliamentary debate and the Iraqi press conference that followed). Although I'm far from cured I think the climax of my illness was last night and today I mustered the energy to walk to Books@Cafe knowing that if I could make it I'd at least be able to enjoy some Western food, which I've been craving for days (they serve pasta here!).

The one upside of being sick on a budget is that it's a major money saver, so I now have a 10JD surplus I'm going to squander on the internet and better food while at the same time resisting the urge to simply return to my hotel room to sleep. It's an odd experience to be sick in a foreign country. Last night I wandered outside to try and find some food since I'd eaten very little in those two days. By the time I made it to the hummus diner I usually eat dinner at I realized that leaving my bed probably was not a good idea and I felt that I might vomit at any moment. My only desire was to reach out to some of the Western faces and ask them to accompany me back to my hotel room to take care of me, possible serve me some chicken noodle soup. Of course, I also resisted this desire.

I did get a chance to write a little bit the last two days, but it's mostly rambling and private but I'll do my best to excerpt the parts I think are at least passively interesting. Also, if you'd like to email me (please do, because I love reading emails) you can send them to micahwhiteinjordan@hotmail.com.

9/26 - Tipping

» Amman, Jordan, September 27, 2002

Today I decided to venture further around the area of Books@Cafe, which is a very affluent and western learning neighborhood. The waiter at Al-Quds was uncharacteristically cold yesterday so I decided to take that as a hint and to eat breakfast somewhere else. Maybe he was just having a bad day but I also am sensitive to the fact that Israel is currently being extremely aggressive and oppressive - so although I haven't sensed any danger here, I decided to just skip my regular routine. Instead I went to Books@Cafe for an hour then on to a Chinese restaurant that is up the street. Looking for familiarity I ordered what I typically order in American-Chinese restaurants: wonton soup, fried rice, and sweet and sour chicken. It was all good, but didn't taste like what I am used to. Ironically, I don't know if this is because it was closer or further from the actual tastes of Chinese food in comparison to what I'm used to. The only things here that have tasted the same have been the water I'm always drinking (3+ liters a day) and the orange juice I had

yesterday.

It's now about 5:30pm, and I initially headed down to the cheap hummus restaurant but they were pretty full so I went across the street to a place I ate at once before. The restaurant occupies the second floor of a building and where I am seated is something like a covered porch. There is a black stereo playing Arabic music and the rest of the clientele are old males silently seated, eating. I haven't learned to identify all of the different headscarfs here but I can at least tell that the person to my right is Bedouin.

There was a woman begging with her child in here a minute ago. I couldn't understand what she was saying but she gestured to her child that was in her arms and he let out a cough that sounded terrible so I gave her 2JD - not much but about all I have left for today minus the money for dinner.

It's always unclear whether one should be giving a tip in these places. From watching the other customers in this restaurant I've determined you are - their tip looked like a subtly handed over 500filas. The Chinese restaurant clearly stamped onto the check that service wasn't included. But now I think maybe the reason the waiter at Al-Quds was so cold was that I wasn't giving him a tip. Maybe I'll go in tomorrow and try to tip him - but I don't know. The problem comes from the fact that the travel guide only says that "Budget Diners" don't expect tips, however it's nearly impossible for me to tell what is not a budget diner.

I gave the waiter a large tip because he was the person who served me last time, who I didn't tip. I tried to explain but I don't think he understood - but he was surprised and happy which was nice. On my way back to the hotel I stopped by where I buy water and asked the man about tipping since he's the only one I know here who speaks perfect English. I asked him specifically about Al-Quds and he said yes I should be tipping 10%. He said I didn't need to apologize but that I should do it next time. Now, however, I feel ashamed. It's small things like this that make my hyper-self-conscious of the fact I'm probably doing a lot of things wrong, a frustrating feeling. My only recourse is to eat at Al-Quds tomorrow, weather their cold temperament then give them a tip and say "Shukran". That should fix everything. Fortunately, the tipping issue really is probably the only thing I've been doing tremendously wrong since most of my day is spent watching the news, reading, and writing.

Writing that made me feel quite lonely all of a sudden. I haven't really stopped to think about the fact that the only contact I've had with people back in America is through the internet. Writing in this journal, watching the pages fill up and then typing it online everyday has given me a false sense of communicating with someone or thing around me. But the real truth is that the longest conversations I have here are a few minutes. (I know understand why immigrants flock to communities made up of their own members.) Upon reflection however it isn't really the separation that is an issue for me - I like the feeling of being alone in the world (and I'm not very talkative around strangers even in America). The issue is more that I'm without the company of people I know, I have no community. The only place I can feel totally at ease is in my hotel room, because outside of that room I know people see me as a foreigner, I am their "other". Although I'm clearly better off than if I were a white-skinned blond female.

While I was writing all this a man with a cane walked down the steps from behind

me. Seeing that I was writing he asked if I was writing poetry - no, I replied, just thought. He smiled and said Good Afternoon and kept walking. The moral is just that I need to remember I'm surrounded by people, my goal is just to better adapt myself to their community.

It's also interesting to point out my original thought that the waiter's coldness may have been because of political reasons was entirely wrong. Instead it was economic, seems most things are.

9/27 - Moving on From Amman

» Amman, Jordan, September 27, 2002

I've now been in Amman for close to two weeks, after some awkward moments and realizations I've managed to do alright. This morning I woke up and started flipping through the travel guide and discovered another place with cheap hotels, but which is much smaller than Amman: Madaba. So I've decided tonight will be my last night here. The bus to Madaba takes 30 minutes, although the details of when it leaves seems to be excessively sketchy - the only guide is that they leave when full. So I'll use the internet one last time, buy some extra water, pack my bags and get going tomorrow around 10am.

Originally my plan was to move directly from Amman to Israel, but now that violence seems to be sparking up I've decided to wait a few days to see how it turns out. Inevitably when I do go to Israel there is the chance that violence will start while I'm there, this in a way seems much preferable to going when violence has already begun - especially because Israel is stepping up attacks into the Gaza Strip, Hamas' stronghold, so it's logical to assume there will be fierce reprisals. There is also the issue of crossing the border from Jordan which I hear is frequently closed without notice so my assumption is that it will be easier to get into Israel a week or two when things quiet down.

The city of Madaba sounds quite interesting. It's main attraction is a series of Christian murals that are 1,400+ years old. The purported location of Moses' burial is also on a nearby mountain.

9/28 - Arrival in Madaba

» Madaba, Jordan, September 28, 2002

It's noon and I'm settled into Madaba. After a hot bus ride (300filas) with frequent stops I arrived at a bustling small bus station. A man who said he worked for the bus station rented me a taxi (which was really just a service that I purchased all the seats in) for 500 filas and explained my destination to the driver. I'm staying at Lulu's Pension, a bed and breakfast a short walk from the center of Madaba. It's owned by a family that rents out rooms in their beautiful, and huge, home. Originally the price for a room with a private bathroom was 15JD a night but after telling him I would stay for 2 weeks he lowered it to 10JD. He probably would have went lower since the hotel feels largely empty but the room is beautiful, very clean, and he is an extremely nice person who speaks very good English and has been to America. So I was happy enough with 10JD. I paid it all up front in cash - committing myself to two weeks and finalizing that October 11th would be the earliest that I go to Israel. The main draw was really his warmth, he repeatedly stressed he would help with anything I needed - I think the place is heavily geared towards westerners.

The other interesting feature of the hotel is that the downstairs has a communal room, kitchen, and TV. The kitchen is stocked with tea, coffee, bread, and butter which you're free to use whenever you'd like. There is also a sink with filtered water for drinking which should save me about 1JD a day. My hope is that the other boarders congregate there - I'm curious to find out who else is traveling and why. As I've mentioned before I've yet to see any Americans - and the only western looking people end up being from Europe. I'm dying to know what other kinds of Americans are traveling.

I'm writing from an internet cafe called Let's Go, located in a stone building. I got here by walking aimlessly through the city, which is very small. My initial reaction is to say that the place seems wonderful. Madaba is an important site in the history of Christianity - and there is a very large Christian population here. But it's also clearly a tourist site which means there are more western restaurants and more shops selling gifts and souvenirs. But it doesn't seem to be too touristy - in fact it seems to be doing a perfect balance. I'll have to explore more before making any final judgments, but so far I'm pleased.

9/29 - Cartoons and the Body Politic

» Madaba, Jordan, October 2, 2002

Today it is exceptionally hot outside, so I only ventured out briefly to check my email. Not much is new, I spent most of the day so far watching cartoons in Arabic. I was curious what types of children's programming they show here and discovered it's pretty much the same as in America except they also show some Japanese animation. So it's mainly Warner Brother's cartoons interspiced with brief educational segments - all dubbed into Arabic (except for Barney which for some reason was left in English). The TV at the hotel doesn't get CNN or BBC - it seems to only pick up 2 channels. Sports and Cartoons in the morning and Movies in the evening.

I am still confused by what role politics has in the lives of people here. Politics is such a fundamental part of my life that I really can't imagine living in a country that is essentially autocratic - the King even recently dissolved the Parliament 'temporarily'. It's weird because life seems to function normally here. People go to work and school. They listen to the news and read the newspaper. They are surrounded by the politics of the world - geographically near the center but also culturally as there are many books here that have Bin Laden's face on it, or the face of the spiritual leader of HAMAS. But I see no participatory outlet for their political thoughts. In a way they seem to be structurally forced into the apolitical position that most of America seems to adopt voluntarily.

sells them (no one even wears them here). While in one store I was chased by a beggar clutching a letter from the Ministry of Health - a letter I can only assume validates her situation and right to be asking for money. it's a sad thing to see: Madaba is a prime tourist spot and on the surface it looks alright but at the edges you see the poverty of people here. Children in dirty second hand clothing, stores selling the basic necessities of rural life. It's an odd contrast from the tourist oriented shops - a contrast I think secretly delights the tourists because it gives them a brief taste of developing world squalor.

On the advice of my new friend I've decided to head south from Madaba down to the beaches of Aqaba after I'm down here. After staying a night or two I can then cross over to Israel through the southern border, from there it is only a 4 hour bus ride to

Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv. I talked to Immi about Israel and she confirmed by suspicions that it is an aggressive place. She said she could feel the anxiety and aggression in the air. This is something I look forward to feeling because it will hopefully confirm my suspicions that as war progresses America will resemble Israel more each day. She also talked about the tight security - the constant bag checks and police presence. Israel seems to be the pioneer of the science of 'safety' - it'll be interesting to be able to identify the various technologies that Israel uses in order to watch for their steady introduction into America.

There is something about traveling that I find distasteful. There seems to be a spectrum of people out here ranging from individuals in search of something to package tourists that want to see the highlights. There is an invisible path that everyone, myself included, is secretly following. A path delineated by English language signs and the universal brown tourist signs that indicate something of interest to those with money. Even Immi, who has been all over the world and to Jordan 6 times has it, the quality that can list the dozens of places she has been to around the world - but was unable to find one of those countries that I knew little about on the map. It's difficult, if not impossible, to do what I really set out to do - somehow become a Jordanian. You can't just learn a culture by staying in cheap hotels and by forcing yourself to try to approximate the economic levels of locals. Instead you can only watch, listen, and feel how the collective personality of the locals affects their physical space. And then you return home and try to reproduce the positive feelings you found abroad.

The hot springs were wonderful - and the drive to get there was beautiful. The spring lies in the middle of the desert mountains - near the dead sea. I've never seen such a beautiful scenery before. The spring itself cascades down from the rocks, the temperature ranges from warm to scalding depending on what section of the water you're in. (As they say here, you could boil eggs in parts of the water). The other guests range from westerners wearing attempts at modesty and Arabs fully clothed with veils on.

The drive down was slightly uncomfortable because Immi, who speaks a bit of Arabic, kept making comments to me in English in front of the driver about the driver (even though it was clear he understood some English). It was then that I saw the distasteful relationship that develops when you begin to rent the time of locals at what you consider mere change. He played the happy fool and she the aloof westerner. It was a disgusting performance.

10/1 - The Feel of Madaba

» **Madaba, Jordan**, October 2, 2002

Madaba has a very different feel from Amman. The main difference is the presence of tourists and Christians. One way in which their combined effect is evident is in the treatment of females. In Amman it is relatively rare to see unveiled women downtown. Veils in Jordan seem to range from those that only cover the head and hair to those that cover everything except a slit for the eyes. There is even more subtlety in the eyes - some leave about an inch gap for the eyes others cover the eyes with a piece of fabric that light can pass through (similar to the infamous burqua). In Madaba it is rare to see women with the most extreme form of veil, conversely the opposite is true in downtown Amman.

In Amman those females wearing typical American clothing - and by this I mean

clothing that is tight fitting not clothing that reveals any skin - are openly gawked at. The Arab male move is to pass a female and then immediately jerk their head around to share at her ass. This seems to be universally performed by males of all ages. Sometimes, depending on how erotic they find a particular female a faint grin escapes their lips as they share a few choice comments with friends. This is less common in Madaba, but I did see it happen to a female tourist who was wearing very short shorts.

The wardrobe for males is categorically more casual in Madaba, although no one ever wears shorts - instead the fashion of choice is tight jeans, a belt with a designer brand on the clasp, and a tight t-shirt. As for shoes no one seems to wear sneakers, black leather shoes seem to be the norm. A fact I notice because when people stare at me their eyes always seem to travel from my face to my shoes.

It's also interesting to point out that the Queen of Jordan does not wear veil - and her picture is everywhere.

I'm beginning to understand that a certain percentage of people here cannot tell I'm not an Arab. I'm dressed very conservatively, my skin is brown, and I've begun to pick up how to interact in various situations (for example if you want to eat in a restaurant you need only wander in and pick your own table - waiters don't seat you). Although it's obvious I'm not 100% Arab many people either initially begin talking to me in Arabic or inquire if I am part-Arab. My hope is that this will become even more true in Israel so I can get a taste of how it would feel for an Arab to travel freely in the heart of Israel. It'll also be an interesting student because I hold the ultimate pass for Israel - an American Passport.

I saw the tourism industry at work big time this afternoon when I was eating breakfast. They have a wonderful restaurant here in the middle of a tourist complex next to the internet cafe. I went there for breakfast because if you actually examine the menu you find that they sell many things for the exact same price as at a cheap diner. It seems that hummus has a pretty much standard cost all around. The secret however is to never order any drinks. All drinks (water, juice, beer, etc) are about 3 to 4 times as expensive as from a grocery or liquor store. While eating my hummus a group of about 10 white people came in led by an Arab who was wearing the official tourism guide ID card. They had stopped briefly for drinks - after they were done consuming their beers and lemonades the waiter came by to collect their money. It was then that I discovered he was charging them 4JD for a 12oz beer! 4JD is like \$6 USD. If they had walked two stores down the street they would have discovered that a 24oz beer sells for about 1JD. But they just paid and didn't even seem alarmed.

10/2 - Stephen and Susie

» Madaba, Jordan, October 3, 2002

Tonight I met two more travelers - a German couple named Susie and Stephen. Both were fascinating and I had an excellent conversation with them for about an hour and a half - it was nice to open up slightly to some other foreigners especially because they both spoke very good English. Stephen is a journalist so he had a pretty wide ranging knowledge base and our discussions ranged from politics to technology to America. Perhaps, however, the most interesting were his stories about their trip to Israel many years ago. It didn't immediately occur to me the implications of being German in Israel, sometimes I forget about the Holocaust which

is something I doubt any German can do. But he told me that once he was in Jerusalem looking for a bus station and he asked a passerby for directions. The man replied in German. Surprised, Stephen asked him where he learned German. The man replied: "in the concentration camps"! I was stunned by this story. It seems that the Holocaust happened in the dim past - but to think there are many living survivors walking around and living each day gives me pause. Stephen and Susie must have felt an unimaginable emotion upon hearing that reply.

Another story I found interesting was that everywhere in Israel Stephen saw people with guns - civilians on busses, in the movie theaters, etc.

The third story I found meaningful was about his time renting a flat with two other Israelis. One night they were discussing politics and the man stood up and said, "Hit me. Hit me because then you'll see how much pain I can take and you will know we will win this land."

There are lots of things that he said which I found fascinating. The only odd moment near the end of our conversation was when he inquired about my ethnicity. I told him I was inter-racial and there was a clear "oh" of surprise and "that's why you must be interested in politics." He didn't mean anything by the comment but it revealed something about race relations in Germany.

All-in-All it made me contemplate staying here longer simply because its a tourist crossroads. I'm finding the experience of meeting other people who are traveling very interesting. I was thinking about leaving tomorrow but I think I'll stay at least another 1 or 2 nights. I'm really in no rush because now that I'm actually in the country I know it would take only two weeks to see every main tourist attraction. So if I stay 2-3 weeks in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, I'll have about a month and a half to make my way slowly north from Aqaba. I'll go the most interesting cities in the South, then stay in Amman a few days so I can explore the ruins of Jerash. Then I can either find a small town to spend a week in or try to find some place in the eastern desert, or maybe even go briefly to Egypt. I'll figure it out as I go I suppose.

10/3 - Another Traveler

» Madaba, Jordan, October 4, 2002

I met another traveler this evening - this time an Australian woman in her 40s. She returned to school in her 40s to do her post-grad work and is now working on archeology in Jerash. She was a wonderful person and I'm beginning to think the entire world is filled with nice people that its relatively easy to get along with. I find it quite enjoyable to prompt these people for their thoughts on various topics and then to listen to them expose themselves in their answers. It's been an eye-opening experience to talk to these various people. Her comments about America were most interesting. She said that before meeting some Americans in Spain 5 years ago she self-identified as anti-American. She feels that the image that we export is terrible. I agreed but pointed out that for everything we export, Americans themselves are forced to consume much more of it. The last few days I'm beginning to see more clearly that the cultural producers in America don't really represent anyone but themselves. It's been nice to meet these travelers but Madaba is beginning to bore me. I'm sure I'll be moving out of here in a couple days at the latest.

10/5 - First Day in Aqaba

» **Aqaba, Jordan**, October 6, 2002

I'm sitting in the bus station waiting for the bus to Aqaba. The station is like one of those small town Greyhound stations you'll find when traveling through Michigan. The bus isn't due to arrive for another two and a half hours so I picked up a copy of The Star - one of two English language newspapers available here that is Arab run. I haven't read the newspaper in a few days because they are hard to find in Madaba - and opening the Star reminded me why I am here. I can feel the anger building in the editorial staff. Every article was a plea for someone to do something - Americans, Germans, the "Arab Street". They all believe that war is going to happen and I can tell people are not happy. Interestingly enough the paper included an ad publicizing the Not In Our Name march that is taking place in New York City this weekend. That's at least one successful use of globalization.

It was quite a bus ride to Aqaba. As we were rumbling our way through deserts that looked like they were from the movies (that's the biggest compliment an over-media-saturated American can give I suppose) all I could think was this is the first time I've seen real deserts like these. Then the bus broke down and I thought for sure I was going to be stuck here in the middle of the open desert with half a liter of water, a 15lbs. bag, and three cigarettes. Fortunately, an hour or so later they fixed the bus and we arrived in Aqaba safely.

After eating dinner I went back to my hotel room to do some laundry (I've learned how to wash my clothes in the sink). After turning on the TV I noticed they receive some Israeli programming here. Right now they are showing an old Steven Segall movie - Out For Justice, his last good one. It's subtitled in Hebrew and Arabic. But curiously enough the movie is completely unedited - which is interesting because Arabic TV always edits out sex + some violence (just like American TV). I wonder what the purpose of showing an unedited movie with sex and violence and then subtitling it in Arabic is. Is it an example of one culture trying to offend the other? Or just an example of how both people have similar tastes in movies and similar sensibilities about violence and sex? I can't answer that question yet because I don't really know the difference between how Palestine's citizens feel and how Jordan's feel. But it's obvious that such an unedited movie would never appear on the Arab television you receive elsewhere in Jordan.

10/6 - Leaving Aqaba

» **Aqaba, Jordan**, October 6, 2002

Well the day has come - tomorrow I'm leaving for Israel. I'm not really as much nervous as I am excited. And fortunately I already have two contacts in Israel so knowing that I survived in Jordan with no contacts boosts my confidence level. The first real test is going to be getting from Eilat, the Israeli resort town that borders Aqaba, to Jerusalem. To do so requires taking a bus - the connotations of which I'm sure are not lost on anyone.

So today is a day of preparation. I have a bunch of laundry that I need to do and some emails to write. Aqaba feels like an oasis, not just because it feels like the perfect resort - but also because the town itself is a "special economic zone" which means taxes are much lower and everything costs less (which is ironic because I've spent so much time trying to memorize prices so now I have to relearn them). I'm not positive but I think the whole town might be duty free. I already see more electronics, fashion, and perfume stores. The climate change between Amman and

Aqaba is substantial even though they are only a 4 hour drive apart. When I left Amman it was windy and cool - Aqaba is simply hot. But the beaches are beautiful - sparkling water framed by giant mountains. Unfortunately one of the draw backs of traveling alone is that all the fun activities cost more for one person. But when I come back from Israel I think I'll sign up for a day of snorkeling on the coral reefs - another activity I've never done before.

Aside from the heat there are tons of stray, but friendly cats. After breakfast one of them came by my table and allowed me to pet her. I love cats and it is nice to see so many. They look slightly different from most cats I see in America. They are much leaner, with short hair and small heads. There is one very cute black and white one resting in front of me now.

I've now walked over to a small fort built in the 1300s. It's large stone walls provide the perfect cover from the sun. In the distance, across the Gulf, I can see the Israeli town of Eilat. It's so odd to be able to see Israel. It must be equally difficult for the Palestinian refugees that largely make up Jordan to be able to see their once-homeland.

10/7 - Arriving in Israel

» Eilat, Israel, October 11, 2002

I've arrived safely in Israel and I am now waiting for my bus to Jerusalem. The border crossing was a nightmare and I think the woman would have given anything in order to reject my visa - but she grudgingly gave me a 1 month visa, 3 months is the normal visa amount. They are extremely suspicious here - and the fact that I wasn't sure what I wanted to see in Jerusalem was what she took issue with - but if it wasn't that it would have been something else. She essentially questioned me on every possible angle - nothing I said seemed to ring true. But I made it.

The people I've met so far are terse and mean. The taxi driver essentially yelled at me because I dared to ask him to open the trunk so I could retrieve my bag before paying the fare. And of course there was the border lady who huffed and sighed after everything I said. "Aren't you afraid to be in an Arab country, you know America might attack Iraq", she asked in a disgusting tone. "No, they've been nice so far." And the people who searched my bag were so amused by my middle name (Moran) because as they told me, "In English it means something...". Yes, school children always told me if you switch the a with an o it's funny. So far it feels like no one has time, answers come quick and sharp. But I'll get used to it, after all the only difference is I've been in Jordan for three weeks so it feels overly aggressive.

Israel is far more expensive than Jordan and I'll have to be careful not to blow my budget. But I can handle one or two weeks in dormitory style Hostels. Right now I'm just tired and want to find a bed for tonight.

"What the fuck am I doing here" is the only thought that passes through my head now. "What the fuck..." I've never felt so uncomfortable and afraid in my entire life. 'Welcome to Israel, you have brown skin like an Arab show me your passport.' The taxi driver didn't know where my hotel was and dropped me in the middle of Jerusalem after dark. Within two minutes I was stopped by two police-boys with guns. I can only imagine the things they were saying in Hebrew and Arab to see if I spoke either. Like the black man in the segregated south, I was shown my place pretty quick. And now that I'm here I don't know if I can stay.

After an hour of walking in circles I quickly discovered that the darker the skin the nicer the stranger. I remember before I left some pro-war students from Swarthmore posted on a message board cynical advice for my trip. It all focused on the discrimination I would face in Jordan: "Tell them you're an American", etc. Well, I told them and was unafraid - but the words "I am an Arab" would never escape my lips here. I'll give it a few days but then I think I'll have to leave.

For the first time in my trip, I'm unable to admire the scenery - other thoughts dominate my mind.

Writing this helped. I guess I knew it would be like this - I just need to relax and watch - that way I'll never have to come back.

I'm staying in the "Old City" and there are Arabs here which makes me feel better. The room is dormitory style and I think there are two others staying here. One of them was here a few minutes ago but I didn't feel like talking to him. I did, however, talk to one person - a black man who I found out is originally from Kentucky and has been in Israel nine years for "religious reasons". But he had that look in his eye - the religiously crazed look. And I found out he has his own religion which he follows - a strict interpretation of Moses' laws and nothing else.

10/8 - Meeting Khalil

» Old City, Jerusalem, October 11, 2002

It's only 10am now but I'm beginning to understand how desperate the situation is here. Shops are locked and their owners walk the streets looking for business. The price of a necklace that was forced upon me in pressure selling I've never experienced before dropped from 150 shekel (about \$30) to 32 shekel. And while I didn't want to buy it, I made the mistake of even entering his store. That was his first, and probably last, sale of the day.

There are two types of tourist guides here: Zionist and Palestinian. I paid \$13USD to take a 3 hour walking tour of the Old City, offered from the Zionist perspective. And now I'm contemplating paying \$150USD for a trip to Ramallah. It's a lot - but it's a once in a lifetime opportunity I suppose. The problem is it's impossible for me to tell if he is legit - or if I'll end up in a situation I can't handle.

The walking tour of the Old City of Jerusalem was fascinating because while I'm an atheist it was quite moving to walk the stations of the cross and to stand where Jesus was crucified. The guide spared no opportunity to tell us about how bad the Arabs are, of course.

I've decided to leave Jerusalem early. It's both too expensive and too desperate. But before I leave I'm going to pay Khalil. After much internal debate I've decided it's better to go on a personalized tour from a Palestinian than to go alone. I'm paying for his thoughts and I think regardless of the cost it is a journey I need to take. Unfortunately that means I'll need to push myself to save money when I return to Jordan but I think I can do it. To be honest I'm looking forward to returning to Jordan. I think this place feels evil.

And there is the issue of who else is here. I feel like I am surrounded by crazy people and I fear that maybe I am one of them. Going to the birthplace of Christianity and

the holy places for both Jews and Muslims brings you in contact with some... interesting people. But I hate it here.

10/9 - The Tour

» Ramallah, West Bank, October 11, 2002

I just spent more than seven hours in the West Bank. I was led on a tour by a man who lives a short distance from Ramallah and who has intimate contacts throughout the city. He gave me a tour that would have been simply impossible alone. He made Palestine real for me - he made the suffering real. I didn't bring a camera, so I will do my best to portray what happened because I firmly believe that if all of America could have been on this tour, the world would have peace.

At 10:40am Khalil showed up at my hostel. From this minute on for the next seven hours I listened to a man who spoke from his heart and from what he knows. Khalil is a 39 year old Palestinian who works in the Old City of Jerusalem but lives near Ramallah in the West Bank. This means that everyday he crosses two checkpoints to go to work and two to return. He is balding and his hair is beginning to go grey. He speaks excellent English (most Palestinians seem to) but mispronounces some words. He is consistent in asking the correct pronunciation of each word that he says incorrectly or has difficulty with. Our tour started as we walked out of my hostel towards the Damascus Gate which is in the so-called "Muslim Quarter". Through crowded streets we walked as he told me about the original history of the Old City before the Israelis came. Unknowingly he directly contradicted information that the Zionist guide had told me only yesterday. Out of the Damascus Gate we walked and boarded the Palestinian version of a mini-bus or serveece. He continued to tell me about the religious issues surrounding the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd temples. It was then that I began to put together the deeper religious issues that unite the fundamentalist Christians and fundamentalist Jews. They believe, depending on which perspective you take, the Messiah will return once the 3rd temple has been constructed or that the Messiah will return and direct the construction of the 3rd temple. The problem is that they believe the 3rd holiest site for Muslims - the "Dome of the Rock" which contains the rock on which Mohammad ascended to Heaven - is on top of the location that the 3rd temple must be built. This is because the 3rd temple must be built precisely on top of the location of the 1st and 2nd temple. Perhaps most interesting is that Khalil said that the Western Wall, more commonly known as the "Wailing Wall", was discovered in the mid-1800s - however further archeology has not confirmed this is the proper location. So the tour started with an introduction into the first of many ways that religious zealotry underpins so much of the problems here.

We arrived in about 15 minutes at the second check point (the first just waved everyone through because we were entering the West Bank). A check point is an area where concrete barriers force you into lines. There are sand bagged dugouts and towers surrounding you - the soldiers are fully armed with automatic assault rifles and there is ample barbed wire to keep you from straying far. The ground is littered with empty cigarette boxes and soda bottles, a testament to the hours random Palestinians will be forced to spend here on any given day. And if you look around you can see American tax dollars at work in the form of munitions. I saw an unexploded grenade with its pin missing laying on the ground between the barriers - a dud I guess. The soldiers don't talk, everyone knows the routine: show your id card and wait. When they need to give structure to the mass of people that are waiting they bark orders. I couldn't understand what they were saying but it seemed

to revolve around me not handing my passport to the proper soldier. He looked at it and looked at me and waved me through. There are four lines for different classifications of people. Khalil is lucky because he has the proper color id card - blue I believe - that indicates he's originally from Jerusalem. This allows him access (theoretically) to Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv. That is much better than having been born in the West Bank, and much much better than having been born in the Gaza Strip. Khalil finds the classifications particularly disturbing - and explains that even for Israelis there are different levels of citizens, Palestinians are always on the bottom of course.

We are now in a sort of in-between zone. One side of the street is Jerusalem - the other the West Bank. Everywhere there is garbage and rubble. We finish our cigarettes and enter a waiting taxi to take us into Ramallah itself. When I think the word "Ramallah" or the words "West Bank" I used to think "slum". I had always pictured the West Bank as a military ghetto - a place where bullets whizzed by as you passed chanting mobs of HAMAS activists. This picture allows you to sort of shrug of the news of the Israeli re-occupations. If the West Bank is a violent dump, maybe there really are only crazed civilians there. Maybe then the news of so many dead isn't so bad. But if you understand and believe only one thing that I say believe the following: Ramallah was a vibrant and beautiful city. And although this won't make sense if you haven't been to Jordan, but my first thought was "I wish I could stay here, it's so nice!" Less than 10 years ago, when Palestinians who were living abroad thought peace was coming they started moving back to Ramallah because of its climate and location. The brought money and that money was put in to development. Now, Ramallah looks categorically nicer and more modern than any of the places I've seen in Jordan thus far. Large buildings filled with modern fashion stores, a pulsating vegetable market, hundreds of Arab men and women in the streets (many of the women without veils). Imagine a couple mile square of a shopping area in any American city, replace the English signs with Arabic and you'll have an idea of Ramallah's downtown. The point here is that when I first arrived in Jerusalem and saw the wealth, I still had a ghetto picture of Ramallah, and I thought "Well, there can't be two states when one is so rich". And while the West Bank is obviously poorer- you must understand that Ramallah is an advanced city! A city full of people going to nice stores, buying nice clothes, and even checking out cars at the local Mercedes Benz dealership. The foundations are clearly there for an independent and happy state.

But immediately you begin to see the effects of April's occupation, and the occupation two weeks ago. The streets have lines carved in them, light poles are smashed over, cars lay in wrecks in the backyards of some people's homes - all the result of tanks.

We walked up the road and left the city center and began to approach the "Ramallah Compound" which is the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority and the current location of Yassar Arafat. Again I thanked my luck because Khalil knows people in the compound and we were allowed to walk freely on the grounds! I was able to see, with my own eyes, the result of Israel's destruction of the compound two weeks ago. Even now it's hard for me to really understand that I stood at the doorstep of Yassar Arafat's living quarters. I stood there and I walked around and I saw the destruction. Every building was destroyed except a couple. Smashed cars, very expensive cars, were piled in a heap. Sandbags were blocking windows and bullet holes riddled walls. This, the presidential compound of the Palestinian people, had only two guards. Looking up and to the left four windows was Arafat's room. And where I stood - 20

feet from the entrance to the nearly destroyed building is where the Israeli tanks stood.

All around maybe 50 Palestinians were working to rebuild buildings and build walls. It's hard to understand why they even try - it has all been destroyed so many times, they must know it will be destroyed again.

There were a few media people sitting around so we thought that maybe Arafat would come outside to address them so we waited a few minutes, but it didn't look like he was, so we left.

Once outside the compound Khalil told me quite frankly that he doesn't like Arafat, and that no Palestinians do. He feels that Arafat was unsuccessful as a man of violence and a man of peace and that it is time for him to go - 40 years is enough. He also feels Arafat's government is corrupt - that his ministers get wealthy while no real benefit comes to the people. I asked him who he'd prefer and he told me that is part of the problem - that Arafat never appoints a strong number two that can take over. Instead he shuffles ministers from one department to another and calls that change. Khalil was adamant on this point, he wants to see new people and fresh ideas but he refuses to support Arafat's ouster if it is done by the Israeli hand. Even though he hates Arafat, because he also hates Israel, he would not want Arafat to be killed or ousted by Israel. He also said that many times the Israelis try to pick a 2nd leader by giving him media coverage and calling him Arafat's successor. But these people are the ones who are corrupt in the PA - and they are also (not coincidentally) the ones whose homes are never shot at by Israeli troops. One person that the Palestinians do like is the number two man in Fateh, who is currently in Israeli jail. Khalil describes Fateh differently than the American media. The media typically calls Fateh the military wing of the PLO. Khalil pointed out that Fateh is actually the organization that negotiates with Israel on behalf of the PLO. This makes it less the military wing and more akin to the State Department.

As we stopped in a restaurant to eat lunch I asked Khalil about Osama Bin Laden. OBL is a hero here. He is a hero because he is a rich, well-educated man, who gave up everything to help the Muslim people. He is a hero because he slapped the face of the USA. In a sense he is a hero because he cares. Bin Laden has already been mythologized here, and quite logically Khalil thinks there will be many more Bin Ladens to come. "But isn't he a zealot, a fanatic," I asked. This seemed pretty much to be a non-issue for Khalil because he doesn't see divisions within Islam. I think his opinion could be best summarized as seeing Bin Laden as a Muslim on the spectrum of Muslims. But I think what really mattered to Khalil was that something was being done - that someone was striking back. And perhaps such a prelude was the perfect one for the next stop on our trip.

Through small city streets we walked to a modern seven story office building and took the elevator to the third floor. Here Khalil began to tell me the story of 5 Palestinian men aged between 45 and 60+. During the occupation of Ramallah in April, these 5 men sought refuge in this building. One was a cook at Arafat's compound, one a policeman, two were their friends, and the fifth was another civilian. I'll repeat the important points: all were old, all were civilians, all were unarmed. From where we stood at the entrance to the elevator we turned a corner and there I saw the most terrible thing I have ever seen in my entire life. I'm now standing in a short hallway that leads to an office door. The walls have been covered with clear glass and behind the glass you can see the fate of those 5 civilians. Bullet

holes and huge patches and splatters of blood streaked the walls. There was literally blood all over the two walls, and dozens upon dozens of bullet holes. The Israeli soldiers had found the five men here, they bound their hands and feet and then they scared them by shooting the ceiling (these bullet holes were also still visible). Then, they executed them. Discernable beneath the blood was a sign indicating the office I was standing in front of. The sign read "Center for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development".

But what the Israelis didn't know was that there was an independent media organization upstairs. Khalil then took me up stairs and I saw the footage they took: the dead bodies lying in pools of blood.

The owner of the building had wanted to fix the damage and clean the blood. But the renters said that if he did they would move out - and instead a memorial was created. Two panes of glass were installed so now the deaths are still visible and remembered.

I told Khalil that was the most terrible thing I'd ever seen and he told me another story. This time it was about an old man caught by the occupation troops near a cemetery. They tied him to the gates of the cemetery, poked his eyes out, cut off his fingers, strung him up on a tree, and burned him.

We stopped for tea briefly before visiting the location where the Palestinians killed in April were buried. The two hospitals in Ramallah, which are across the street from each other, are small and they didn't have space in the morgue for all of the dead. So they dug two pits in their parking lot. (This is during the occupation so a curfew was in effect and the electricity and water had been cut off in the hospital as well). They then put the bodies in this mass grave - with the intention of giving them a proper burial when the occupation ended. But the families decided to keep the spot as a memorial. So the mass graves are still there and every few minutes we saw small groups of people coming to remember the dead.

I've been walking all day so I'm quite tired. So the last thing I'd like to say is that I also visited Ama'ri refugee camp. And there I saw the desolation of refugee life: children playing in dirt and throwing stones, men sitting around playing cards instead of working, tiny one room houses (although some have been illegally expanded). Each person there, and in every refugee camp, used to live in parts that are now called Israel. Each person there is living in squalor while the world turns a blind eye.

I saw a lot today and wanted to record it before I went to sleep. There is more that I've left unsaid, it's impossible to tell every observation I made or thing Khalil told me - and maybe it's not necessary. Today I saw a glimpse of Palestinian life and spent a day with a man living in an unbearable situation. I left him at 6:30pm and now he must go home. Only, the check point is now closed - it closes at 6. And he must hide in the mountains and run across the border. If they see him, they'll shoot him. And all I can do is hope that he made it back to his children safely, to live another day as a second-class citizen in his own homeland.

10/10 - Leaving Israel

» Jerusalem to Aqaba, October 11, 2002

I'm almost free of Israel. There was an incident in Tel-Aviv this morning, all I know is that a Palestinian told me there was an "operation". So the borders to the West Bank

are closed, meaning I won't see Khalil before I leave. The bus station is crawling with soldiers with loaded guns. After seeing a small percentage of the Palestinian life I find myself angry at these people. Angry at their game of assumed innocence.

It's impossible to explain how horrible it feels to know people see you as an Arab. When the Palestinians said that I looked Arab that said it out of kind surprise. But here only my English disarms the unsaid aggression I feel from the people here. This morning I woke up and was tired of it. So I walked to the bank and returned their states. We both knew what happened in Tel-Aviv, and I must admit I felt slightly happy and proud. Khalil is 39 years old and maybe he'll die in the next re-occupation or maybe his brother or child will. I don't want these Israelis surrounding me to die - I just want them to be sad like Khalil. I want them to be humiliated daily like Khalil and every other Palestinian is humiliated every day.

I think I'm ready to make this my life. I hesitated before to commit myself to the antiwar movement. But now, I am sure.

"I'm sorry, but you look like... uh... Arab." That is both an insult here and a prelude to asking for id papers. In broken English the bus driver has just asked me to validate my right to remain unmolested - perhaps he thinks I haven't already been asked by every other security guard. So he, the driver, must express his domination. "I'm sorry, but I had to," was his form of an apology.

I thought I'd be happy when I got back to Jordan, but I'm not. I'm tired and upset. Khalil's words keep running through my head. One of the last things Khalil talked about was his wish that someday a Palestinian would be born free. He wasn't. His child wasn't. Will his child's child?

But what am I going to do about it? How can I stop myself from forgetting? How can I channel my anger and sadness to make real change?

10/11 - Nightmare

» **Aqaba, Jordan**, October 16, 2002

I had a nightmare last night. I dreamt I was in a house surrounded by landmines and that I couldn't get the medicine I needed because someone was shooting at me. Residuals of my trip to Palestine, I suppose.

I've spent my time since I returned from Israel thinking and relaxing, mostly relaxing. I still have two months left in Jordan, so I think I'm going to spend a week in Aqaba relaxing.

10/12 - Finding My Way

» **Aqaba, Jordan**, October 16, 2002

State-endorsed racism must be revealed - no one ever wants to admit it is there or see it. Political discourse limits our ability to speak the candid truth, statements must be justified, those justifications must be rationalized and so on, until the issue is so abstracted from reality that you can no longer feel it. The worst events in human history have always been politically justified by the perpetrators.

I've lost my way slightly after visiting Palestine, again I find myself in the position of having to redefine the goal of my trip. About a month has passed - where do I go

from here? I didn't expect to leave Israel so soon, but I'm glad I did. Only a small part of me wanted to stay - to stay to say, "I stayed, I saw all of Israel." But the rest of me knew that was unwise, there was a legitimate fear of being shot by one of the soldiers or vigilante civilians. I didn't speak Hebrew and I looked Arabic to them. The only thing that would protect me was my passport, but it was clear from the way they examined it that this document was only barely enough.

I spent two hours online today. Checking email is my favorite activity here because for those brief moments when you receive a new email you feel in touch with the known again. Only two people consistently write me: my mother and my friend. But their emails were short so I didn't reply, instead I took the opportunity to read cursor.org and nytimes.com. Nothing is happening that I can do anything about directly - but it's nice to be able to know the sky hasn't fallen, yet. I then headed over to azzam.com to read what is new from the "other" side: more reports of casualties in Afghanistan and, most interestingly, the text of an Al-Qaeda member interview. I read both and added it to the undigested information in my head.

And then, in a bout of missing Swarthmore I visited the Daily Jolt (swarthmore.dailyjolt.com/forum) to see what the campus is gossiping about. To my surprise, I discovered it was me. Well, not really me - but my words. People were complaining about various aspects of my journals about Israel. Mainly that I didn't see enough of Israel. I thought about replying - but didn't because I don't really care. Palestine is still fresh in my mind - and I have no desire to try and second-guess what I saw. I do, however, wish they'd understand that the reason I didn't see more of Israel was because I was afraid for my life. Afraid that someone would retaliate against "the Arabs" by targeting me. That is probably hard to understand if you don't look brown - but that is the reality if you do. That is what it means to be in a racist state.

So what shall I do now? Well, there's really only one political thing left for me to see on my trip - Jordan's civilian response to the war against Iraq. And for that I need to wait. I'm not sure if the attack will come while I'm here, but since the war seems inevitable I hope it does. In the meantime I'm going to slowly work my way up to Amman then East to Azraq then back to Amman to catch my flight home. I'll probably spend a week or so in each city on the way. So, vaguely my trip will be: Aqaba to Wadi Musa/Petra to Karak to Amman and Jerash to Azraq and back to Amman.

10/13 - One Year Anniversary

» **Aqaba, Jordan**, October 16, 2002

Today I realized that the one year anniversary of Why War is in about a week (10/22). I wish I was at Swarthmore to celebrate it. Why War has grown a lot and probably the best thing in the world is to watch a collective effort grow. Lately, my thoughts have been turning to what I'll do about the war when I return. Maybe I've reached some sort of second phase of being on an extended trip alone. Suffice it to say I'm looking forward to going back to America and get to work directly in the peace movement.

My journals have been short the last few days. I've mainly been sleeping and watching TV. But depending on what time I wake up tomorrow, I'll be going to Petra. I hope the decrease in temperature and the beauty of the place will reinspire me.

10/14 - Arrival in Petra

» Wadi Musa, Jordan, October 16, 2002

I'm now in Wadi Musa/Petra. This is the tourist city extraordinary in Jordan, but the problem is, of course, there are no tourists. At it's high point more than 2,000 people a day visited Petra - an ancient city carved from rock and made famous in the final scene of "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade". I met someone on the bus here whose family owns a couple hotels in the area and he told me he'd get me a good price. The first place he showed me was a dump and the second was too expensive (even though the room was being offered at at least a third of the price according to my travel guide). But it's clear this is a city in need of money - so I decided to see if I could find a better deal. A van with two men pulled up and told me they'd take me to the "Valentine Inn" which a quick look in my travel guide confirmed is supposed to be one of the best cheap hotels in the entire country. I'm pleased to say that so far it seems so. I said I'd stay a week and the room dropped to 5JD a night. But the reason this is a particularly good place is that there are many perks. The most important being an all you can eat dinner for 3JD. I've been eating hummus for breakfast and shwerma for dinner the last few weeks - so the possibility of eating as much dinner as I'd like for only 3JD is enticing. No matter how bad it tastes, it's guaranteed to be more filling than what I have been eating.

The antiwar movement is building in America, and I long to see it. This is going to be an interesting decade.

10/17 - Perched on Another Mountain

» Petra, Jordan, October 17, 2002

Stunning. Breathtaking! Clichés long devoid of power are the only words I can find to describe this view. Sitting at the edge of a cliff, maybe 1,000 meters in the sky, overlooking seemingly endless desert mountains. The wind briskly blowing - reminding me of my mortality. Fall left and I'm only hurt, right and I'm dead. The view taunts with its grandeur, you begin to map out paths to even more distant cliff edges, possibly there the view is even better.

Sitting here I'm reminded that I was once afraid of heights. Maybe I still am, but the view is too much to sacrifice over fear.

Don't write - just look, memorize, enjoy.

10/23 - Going Back

» Amman, Jordan, October 23, 2002

I've decided to return to Palestine to try and work with the International Solidarity Movement.

I'll write more about my reasons when I am there - I'm leaving tomorrow morning.

10/27 - Here

» Bethlehem, Palestine, October 27, 2002

Sorry for the lack of updates. I'm now in the West Bank of Palestine with the ISM

and will be leaving for Nablus tomorrow for two weeks. Soon I'll post a more in depth journal entry.

11/10 - Two Week Break

» **Occupied Jerusalem, Palestine**, November 10, 2002

I just completed my first two weeks in the West Bank. I spent the majority of my time in Awarta protecting the olive farmers from the illegal settlements that surround their impoverished village. But now I will rest and digest the emotional assault of the last two weeks.

I have too much to write and say, and too many things I've yet to digest. Last night I got drunk with friends and celebrated one of their birthdays. Today I sleep, eat, and think.

There is no internet access in the villages, and since I don't know where I'll end up next I'm not sure how frequently I'll be able to update this online journal - but I'm keeping a written version. I've also decided not to post specific information about what I've been doing on the internet until I'm done. So, patience - soon I'll tell all.

I've decided to stay here until December 11th.

If possible I'll write more before I leave Jerusalem.

10/28 to 11/8 - First Two Weeks

» **West Bank, Palestine**, November 24, 2002

I've decided to update this journal with my entries from the first two weeks in Palestine. Initially I had decided not to post specific information about what was happening here because I didn't want to worry people at home, but now that I'm back in Jerusalem and have internet access again I realize that such a decision goes against the whole point of me being here. Below you will find my journal entries from Oct 28th until Nov 8th. In the future I'll put more information up as well.

One of the major problems for me while being in Palestine is that I feel like I can't be completely honest with people about what is going on here because things are so bad and I don't want to worry them. Unfortunately, the truth of what is going on here is scary and unless I lie I know that people will be scared about what I write. So I've decided to no longer employ self-censorship.

Oct. 28

- it's like a birth of fire, like bootcamp
- bird watching has been replaced by military watching

Oct 29 (Awarta, Palestine)

I haven't written a real journal entry in awhile, either online or in the notebook I've been keeping. I'm not really sure why. Last night I began to think it was because I was afraid of digesting what is going on here - but it could just be that so much is happening that I go to bed too tired to write. In any case, I'm trying. After a morning and afternoon that showed, unfortunately, ISM's sometimes less than perfect ability to organize, I have found myself in a valley of olive trees. The trees are owned by

the local villagers - and I'm here to protect them from the local settlement. Two women, one old and one young, are working a few hundred feet away from me. The old woman was recently attacked by settlers who threw stones at her (one stone hit her on the back of the head). She told me this with hand motions as she beckoned me to sit and eat her only lunch.

Maybe the reason I haven't been writing is because you don't need political rhetoric here to see the truth - you only need eyes. These people are terrorized daily. You can see it in some of the children's eyes and body language - they have abnormal fear. My first night was uneventful, in the sense that nothing abnormal happened. We heard gunshots, bombs, tanks, and APCs. We were treated with the utmost of hospitality from adults and amazement and curiosity from the kids who swarmed around us to say "Hello" and ask our names. They are happy we are here and want to learn as much as they can about us and our thoughts. They also want to show off - our host demonstrated all of the channels on his satellite TV and his many pet birds.

When you are here you don't see Palestine as suicide bombers and terrorists anymore. You see it as Israeli tanks, gunfire, and aggression. You see it as long lines at checkpoints that shouldn't even exist (they are within the West Bank). You see it as a people trying to live, to farm, to join the rest of the world.

I've now arrived in Beit Furiek, the tone has changed and I now know that will tomorrow will be tough. Maybe I'm a little scared. I feel as if this is a challenge. We, my affinity group, is now alone - we are now in control. I feel myself wanting to rise to the occasion, to be a voice that directs and a mind that thinks. Being the only American in the affinity group makes things interesting. Slowly, slowly I'm trying to make the group understand we are alone, and that is our power. This organization structure was created because it allows fluidity and quick response - while minimizing the amount of overhead.

[I drew a diagram of Beit Furiek that shows how it is surrounded on 3 sides by settlements.]

Oct 30 (Beit Furiek)

I'm sitting on K****'s roof talking to his younger brother, a twelfth grade HAMAS supporter. We didn't pick olives here today because it was simply too dangerous. 4 ISM'ers were attacked in these hills, farmers are constantly beaten up, and everyone is afraid. "Terrorists" shouldn't be afraid, these people aren't terrorists. Last night soldiers invaded this town while we were with a family.

"You came to protect us but..."

Life rarely becomes reality - usually it is a passively lived experience, like driving a car on an often traveled route, the normal choices and their response is soon forgotten. Life in America doesn't require many life threatening decisions - life in Palestine is life threatening. As we discussed how to protect the farmers of this village from the terrorist settlers, life became real. Suddenly I understood that we were deciding our lives and that perhaps my ideals could lead to my death.

"You came to protect us but we will die for you, in your place."

How do you respond to such a statement? How do you tell someone that no one has ever said that to you and truly meant it in your entire life? How do you explain that isn't what you want - that the guilt of being an American is eating you up inside and that you want to die in their place?

"You came to protect us but we will die for you, in your place. That is very important for us," is what K**** told me last night as F16's flew overhead.

"No," was the only response I could muster.

An APC and military jeep have perched themselves on a mountain overlooking Beit Furiek. Maybe tonight they will really attack. But that isn't important, I'm tired of knowing the truth but having the terror beyond my fingertips. Scare me Israel, make me tremble like the little children here, disfigure me with your weapons, paralyze me with your might. Help me make this my passion - help me defeat you.

Everyday in Palestine is like an eternity in America. Everyday in Palestine makes me forget more of America. But lately, I've been yearning to go back - yearning for the comfort and the known. Palestine is cold showers and squat toilets. I've yet to help directly - other than the Palestinian morale which I'm sure our presence boosts. Mainly, I've discovered that life in Palestine is random. You wait, you guess there will be an attack, you prepare and nothing happens. But when it does happen, it will be sudden, loud, and terrifying.

Oct 31 (Beit Furiek)

My parents called me last night at 3am - the fear must have been too much for them. And although I was sleeping at the time, it was good to hear their voices again. Ironically they woke me up from an intense dream that symbolized my aggression towards Israelis, and oddly enough my uncomfortableness with being in wealthy places.

The frustration of feeling as if I wasn't directly helping Palestinians peaked today as we tried to leave Beit Furiek. There are two check points before you can get from Beit Furiek to Nablus, the nearest city that would otherwise take perhaps 20 minutes or less to drive to. The first checkpoint is at the very edge of town. However, because you must cross the settler road in order to reach this checkpoint, no Palestinian is able to drive there. This is because driving on a settler road is prohibited. In addition, the only people who are permitted to cross the checkpoint are those who have a signed doctors note on official stationary. Around 3-5 soldiers monitor this checkpoint. A 15 minute walk beyond the checkpoint there is another one. A tank is stationed here and the same rules of passage apply. Of course, none of these rules apply to Internationals. Typically when an international approaches a checkpoint the soldiers put on a show. First, things for the Palestinians speed up considerably - and second they usually allow any Palestinians in the company of Internationals to pass. This is one of the ways we can try to help.

K****, our host in Beit Furiek, wanted to visit his friend who is dying of cancer in Nablus. This is not a "valid" reason in the eyes of the Israelis. So, we decided to help him by pretending he was our tourism guide. These types of reasons for crossing checkpoints may seem absurd (who is a tourist in Palestine?) but they work precisely because they are absurd. Soldiers don't really care - their goal is to harass

Palestinians, not internationals... normally. Cross the first checkpoint was easy for the group. Within a few minutes we had given K**** access to beyond the checkpoint, an area he hadn't been to in over 3 months!

The second checkpoint was a different story. At each checkpoint there is a line of Palestinians waiting to pass. Women and children walk to the front of the line and are usually allowed to pass much sooner than the men - which means that a system of active gender discrimination develops and all checkpoints are typically lines of males of all ages. After the ease of getting K**** through the first checkpoint we were perhaps a little overconfident and decided to try and get more Palestinians through the second. When Internationals approach a checkpoint the most desperate people ask for help.

We were quickly assailed by a farmer who wanted to get a truck of olive oil through to Nablus. The olive industry is extremely important in the villages. Beit Furiek is, in fact, practically a village within an olive tree farm. And since the villagers are not permitted to cross the checkpoint to work, exporting olive oil is extremely important. And they need to export a lot since the olive harvest only occurs every two years. We decided to put two internationals in his truck and attempt to pass by saying he was driving them somewhere.

Ole and Jenny got into the truck and drove into the checkpoint. The Israeli soldier freaked out and made them get out. He then swiveled the tank's main gun and pointed it inches from their head.

We then began to argue, but the soldier was clearly pissed off and wasn't having any of it. After looking at our ID's, he took K****'s and held on to it, which meant we were forced to wait at the checkpoint for an hour and a half in order to get it back. But this was not wasted time. The Palestinians who were waiting were suddenly empowered because they saw us actively challenging the authority of the tank. Soon a few Palestinians decided to simply cross the checkpoint without authorization, one taking a tanker of olive oil or water across. Others began approaching the tank to argue - something they'd never do if we weren't there. In the end he decided to only let K**** and Jenny cross but not the rest of us. So once they cross, the rest of us simply crossed the checkpoint illegally a little further down the road.

K**** was clearly happy and proud and told the taxi driver all about it on our way to Balata camp, near Nablus.

Nov 1st

I'm now in the village of Yanoun. This village was made famous a few weeks ago because all of the villagers were forced to flee their homes because of daily attacks by settlers. Now half the families have returned, and a constant International presence is maintained to make them feel safe. It's a temporary solution though, because when we leave they'll be terrorized again. Last week 4 internationals were attacked here - the media picked up the story and again the village was vaulted into the spotlight.

Yanoun is, therefore, an interesting study in how Israel handles bad press. Since there have been many journalists visiting Yanoun, Israel has dispatched special soldiers here. These soldiers put on a big game of being nice and reasonable - and yesterday I saw them at work. Two soldiers approached a group of village elders, sat

down and discussed their concerns and where they'd like to pick olives. It was a depressing moment to watch, especially since I had just arrived from Beit Furiek. But perhaps the most depressing moment was one that could easily symbolize this whole conflict.

When the Israeli soldier went to write down the phone number of one of the elders, he realized he didn't have a pen. The Palestinian man quickly offered him his pen, and when the Israeli soldier was done writing he refused to accept the pen back. No matter the Israeli's protestations, he wouldn't take it back - it was now a gift. The point here is that Palestinians are, without a doubt, the most generous and kind people I have ever met. That such kindness extends even to a member of the occupation shows how truly genuine and cultural it is. How unfortunate and untrue that these people are labeled terrorists.

Nov 2nd (Awarta)

I spent the day watching Palestinians pick olives. I've been sad lately, due mainly to the realization that I'm not sure there is any way to save the Palestinians. It's hard to reach what you once believed was the most extreme and direct expression of your political ideals, only to find that even there you can't do much. And there was the problem of being surrounded by Israeli peace "Activists" - a company that I was disgusted by. For a people who are directly benefiting from the occupation, they are depressingly inactive, it seems. But I don't really care to think about them. So I fled to Awarta to rejoin my affinity group - and to be near to Ceri, a cynical and educated British man. For the first time I find myself appreciating such a cynical but dedicated personality.

As I write this I'm sitting in the Dojo of a Karate instructor. He's demonstrating various strength exercises. Being stuck in a tiny village must give him a lot of time to practice, because while his karate demonstration wasn't very impressive his strength exercises are. I wonder what he fantasizes about while he trains. But I suppose I know. I hope he's never threatened by a soldier, because I'm sure he'd end up dead. Strength during occupation comes from physical weakness. No one person can kill every soldier, but one person can shame a nation through nonviolence. But I say all this - and I don't know if I still believe it. Nonviolence IS power, but not if people are too afraid to use it. Nonviolent resistance must be active - the resistance here is passive, people stay in their homes and fear. Rhetoric, rhetoric. It's all bullshit. It's very hard here.

I think I have dysentery.

[Private thoughts relating to social matters]

But to be honest, it's nice to distract my mind with internal dialogue about trivial social matters.

This trip has really taught me that I am the master of my own destiny. I no longer feel obligated to anyone. Perhaps for now I'm tired of seeing my own powerlessness. I am not burned out - I am becoming realistically cynical. But before I'll ever be able to give up I'll have to try everything..... I'm circling around something - so I'll just try to say it. [Personal criticism about feelings of powerlessness].

What is the source of my discontent!

Sometimes I think I'm on the brink of doing something crazy. I don't feel afraid here - only excited at best and tired at worst. It all still feels like a game, that I'm somehow the central character in a grand story - and that I can't die. But everyone believes this I suppose. Maybe I'm just crazy, although I think anyone who comes here must be.

Nov 4th

Today is a tense day, and I've already run out of cigarettes. Yesterday afternoon Ceri and Ole constructed a road block on the Settler's road and sabotaged their work by pulling up surveying sticks and filling in fence holes. The settlers were waiting for us this morning, and as Ole and I approached the settler road a white truck began to speed towards us. We quickly hid in the olive groves beside the road and began to make our way up the hill parallel to the road. But as we progressed so did the car. We then decided to waste their day by sitting there all afternoon but this plan was quickly scrapped when the settlers began firing shots into the air. So today was another landmark day: the first time anyone has shot in my general direction to scare me away.

War brings out the absurdity of life. And the more intense ones passion the more clearly defined and one-sided their identity. The "goatman" has mastered his particular evil identity. The goatman is a settler who stole around 150 goats from Awarta and now strolls through the olive groves acting as if he is surveying his land while the goats follow behind and destroy the trees. Of course he is armed with a large M16 assault rifle as well. Today the goat man decided to scare the families by walking about 50 feet away from where we were picking olives. It's hard to accept the fact that the people here are terrified because it's a particularly uncommon emotion in America. But when I went to inform the group of males who were picking next to us that a settler was near by I saw their fear. "But there are children here...", one of them said gesturing to a young boy. Admitting you are afraid and asking for help is always a humiliating experience, but for a people who desperately want just to pick olives it is necessary. We all know that if internationals weren't present they wouldn't even be in the fields.

For some reason I didn't think it would be like this here - even though now it makes perfect sense. I've long understood that the reason nonviolence is difficult in Palestine is because the world doesn't care if unarmed Palestinian civilians are killed. But the world will care if I, or another ISM'er, is killed. So we are here to protect the Palestinians with our lives so they can begin to create a successful nonviolent movement, and today I saw progress.

The Israeli soldiers announced today that the olive season is over. They then told the Palestinians in Arabic that they would kill them if they were in the fields tomorrow. They told us that they'd arrest us. Hearing the news was devastating both because there are still many trees left and because without the excuse of picking olives these people will be essentially stuck in their tiny village. But then a Palestinian woman turned to me and asked if I'd come to the fields with them two days from now. "You want to pick olives?," I asked. "Yes, we don't care about the soldiers," she replied. I told her that if they went I'd, of course, be there.

My role has then become clear. I am here to give them the confidence to resist. I am here to show the absurdity of a situation where people are stuck in villages and a

simple piece of paper that says United States of America can liberate them. I am here to be their protector.

Nov 8th.

It's been four days since my last confession. I was sick a few days ago. I was almost arrested today. Tedious descriptions of my day isn't what I need to get off my soul tonight. Tonight I want to cry - because I suddenly found out that the UN passed the Iraq resolution and that the Republicans control the legislature. Today I honestly don't know where my future lies - I'm worried that Palestine has already changed me forever. I'm worried that my discontent will only grow - until I explode.

11/28 - A lived hell

» Tulkaram, West Bank, November 28, 2002

When is the last time I've finished a thought?

Thirty minutes ago a man was shot a few blocks from here. Twenty minutes ago I saw pictures of his wounds on a digital camera. Ten minutes ago I went to visit him in the hospital.

There is truth in war: Truth about life. But it is a truth that stings as it pools in your brain. It is a concentrated truth that each of us can only handle small amounts of before we begin to see life too clearly.

The reason I don't finish journal entries is because the emphasis on daily events is misplaced. Palestine is absurd and random. Events blend into daily nightmares, days into weekly torture, weeks into eternities of hell. Palestine is a lived hell, a constant suffering.

12/6 - Tear Gas Canister

» Tulkaram, December 6, 2002

The last few days have been insane in Tulkarm. On Dec. 2nd one unarmed civilian was killed. And for the next two days the army ran around the city causing chaos and destruction - leaving dozens wounded in their wake. I'll do my best to type up some of what happened, but it'll be in a jumbled order. Now I present the text from the teargas canisters that they fire indiscriminately here. I was privileged (?) enough to experience this tear gas up close and can tell you that about 30 seconds of exposure is enough to make you want to faint and vomit at the same time.

Oh, and of course these canisters are made in the United States of America. Check out the producer's website at <http://www.federallaboratories.com/>

Text of canister:

560 CS
Long Range Projectile
150 Yards
Chemical Irritating Agent

Warning
TO BE USED ONLY BY LAW ENFORCEMENT &

CORRECTION PERSONNEL TRAINED IN RIOT CONTROL TACTICS

Information Regarding Usage:

- For Outdoor Use Only
- Use in 37/38/40mm Launcher only
- Do Not Fire Directly At Persons as Serious Injury or Death May Result
- Do Not Use Where Possibility of Fire Exists
- Do Not Use In Confined Areas

Treatment For Tear Gas Exposure:

- Projectile contains tear gas which is highly irritating to eyes, nose, skin, and respiratory system
- If exposed, do not rub eyes. Flush affected body areas with cold water. If irritation persists, seek medical assistance immediately

Hazard Class: 1.4G

Federal Laboratories will assume no liability for the misuse of this device.

12/12 - Back in America

» **Swarthmore, PA USA**, December 13, 2002

I've returned to the heart of the empire, to the decadence of the nation's leading liberal arts college. I've decided that I will continue to write in this blog, at least until I feel as if I've slipped back into the abyss of the American lifestyle. And fortunately, that hasn't yet happened - although everyday is a fight to resist becoming accustomed once again to the superfluous-ness of our lives here, a superfluous-ness that is bought with the blood of others.

I gave a talk today to around 17 Swarthmore students.

12/13 - Writing

» **Swarthmore, PA USA**, December 13, 2002

I want to write. I want to make permanent my thoughts now - because more so than at any point in my life I feel morally pure, because I see the way in which America sins. But I need to write because these realizations are fleeting. The heavy, raw sensation of America is driving Palestine from me. Each time I retell the stories they lose their power - power not over other people, but over myself. The more we practice and the better we become at reinterpreting our inner emotions and undigested self through the words of the dominant narratives, the less we are able to retain them as real for ourselves. Political discourse is self-defeating - and those who restrain their thoughts to inside the prevailing discourses lose their ability to challenge it.

Each day that I feel a bit of my old self returning, I yearn to go back. It's easy to be moral in Palestine and I miss feeling moral.

Chapter 2: Political Analysis

Full Text Of Comments to LATimes

» Grand Blanc, MI, August 30, 2002

There is a lot of cynicism about the media's portrayal of protests (or as they are called now 'mobilizations') and I think you'll find that people are moving away from this as a primary organizing tactic. The fact that there was a 500,000 person protest against the Gulf War and a 100,000 protest against the war in Afghanistan that didn't bring about policy change has been acknowledged by people within the antiwar movement. There has been, I think, a tactical change since these two events can both be described as relative failures (failures brought about by the difference between how the antiwar movement sees itself and how the media portrays it).

Protests are meant to be a symbolic show of force. One picture of a massive crowd massing in opposition to American policy should refute any assumptions about the mass support of war. As their intensity grows they also threaten to destabilize the government unless the movement is listened to. But the media usually portrays these protests in a relatively uninformed and negative light. While they are organizing accomplishments, they are no longer a successful tactic - essentially they have become "normal", no longer something to be alarmed by. Evidenced by the fact that your initial thought was to look for protests that were being organized.

The way that the antiwar movement is moving beyond this is far more interesting because it shows the fluidity of tactics and the real passion that organizers have.

The first change is towards a direct interference/information gathering role. The International Solidarity Movement did this in Palestine - and has had a tremendous impact on many college students who have gone to their presentations. Essentially the tactic is to bring in "internationals" that because of their foreign status are afforded more human dignity than the indigenous population by the occupying force. These internationals then return to their communities to report on what they saw with their own eyes making their presentations very powerful. This is because this generation's movement (I think antiwar is too narrow a label) has largely accepted the anti-corporatization arguments and the arguments attacking the presumed objectivity of the media (ie Chomsky, adbusters.org, etc). You can interpret the move towards going directly to warzones in order to put your life on the line as both an attack on the role of the media as a sole source of 'on the ground' news and also an attack on the assumption that activists only passively care, or care only because it's part of their identities to care.

The second change is towards the creation of rapid dispersal systems for information. You might find it interesting to look at how quickly seemingly minor articles are circulated within mailinglists and on website of the antiwar movement. One example would be the fact that the original article about the Operation TIPS program appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald and

was immediately circulated within the antiwar movement. The internet allows us to bypass the "bias" of the media by seeking a more diverse/international understanding of the war. Hence, the numerous websites dedicated primarily to archiving the news (Why-War.com, cursor.org, antiwar.com etc). As the military moves towards trying to win the PR battle domestically, so does the antiwar movement - the problem is that the administration mainly wants to win support for the war through domestic "spin" but the antiwar movement relies on sources that are beyond the reach of such spin. You'll find that the antiwar movement is right now creating a pretty complex 'narrative' about this war through the synthesis of various international news sources. I think the reason so few people have yet to act, is because the narrative has yet to be proven entirely correct, the attack on Iraq will be part of that proof (the other part will be continued steps towards the curtailment of civil liberties).

The third thing you should be aware of is that the anti-sanction movement has been going on for nearly a decade. It's unlikely that Bush could have picked a worse target for his second step because there is already so much information that directly contradicts the position of this government. People have been refuting the arguments behind the sanctions on Iraq for many years - and these arguments have long been available to "the movement". The rhetoric behind Afghanistan was much greater if only because it was a country that many people had simply not been paying attention to. Therefore, you should look to contrast pre-9/11 organizations who are organizing against the war on Iraq with those that are post-9/11.

I hope these thoughts help you craft an in-depth article.

Freedom Rides?

» Grand Blanc, MI, September 2, 2002

I've been trying to think of how it is that 'our generation' has come upon the stunning technique of actually going to war zones in order to disrupt the war through civil disobedience. I'm referring to the actions of the Iraq Peace Team (iraqpeaceteam.org) and the International Solidarity Movement. This is a trend that people should pay very close attention to because if you notice there is almost no press about it (except when they are amazingly successful as they were in their entrance into church stand-off in Palestine).

But then it occurred to me... these are the Freedom Rides of our generation. Instead of riding into the segregated South, we fly to the oppressed Middle East.

What does this mean in broad terms? Well, I think it represents the growing passion of antiwar organizers and the fact that great change is coming.

Iraq

» Grand Blanc, MI, September 4, 2002

Well it's about 5am here in Michigan and I'm still awake, turning aimlessly from the internet to TV and back to the internet. I find TV to be unwatchable now and while I'd like to say this is because of pure principal, the truth is it's just stupid. There really isn't access to television at Swarthmore, so when I'm home I usually spend the majority of my time catching up on all the television shows that I'd missed. But as

the 'war on terrorism' comes to dominate nearly every channel almost every minute I find myself unable to watch. Television used to be pleasurable because it was concerned so purely with entertainment. But now, as television tries to put itself into the educational/news role I understand how worthless it really is.

People on television are simply speaking from a different world, the newscasters are nothing more than actors trying to be thinkers by acting like one, instead of simply thinking. There is no thought on TV, just endless slogans and half intelligible rants that only serve to trap the viewers mind within a narrow scope of thought.

The prime example, of course, is the so-called 'debate' on Iraq that television as a whole is obsessed with. But none of it really scratches the surface. Which is unfortunate, because I don't think people understand how serious the current world situation is.

Bush named three countries the 'axis of evil'. Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Some neo-conservatives would also add Saudi Arabia to the list. And so here we are, about to attack Iraq (and make no mistake, we will attack Iraq) and people still insist on treating this as a game. "Everyone agrees there should be regime change", they tell us but what they don't tell us is that the same "everyone" will say the same thing about Iran, North Korean, Saudi Arabia, and any other country that infringes on America's right to dominate the world. This isn't about Iraq. This is about the only superpower in the world doing what Empires must: expand. Yes, America is different now. It's awoken to a world that has silently suffered misery at the hands of our joyous and carefree religion of capitalism. Arrogance won't allow us to renounce our past, so we have to instead conquer the future and the only way a country coming out of a Cold War knows how to do this is to pull out our phallus missiles and macho-suicide soldiers.

But the real unfortunate thing is that we are already losing. You see, Iraq will never need to develop nuclear weapons as long as it can kick our asses by playing off our unabashed aggression. Ask yourself this: what do you do when a bully threatens to beat you up? Well if you live in the media saturated world of today you film him saying that, then you prove your innocence publicly. Iraq may not be innocent but it's already convinced the world that it isn't the bully... America is. And everyone hates Bullies.

Iraq may not win the PR battle, my suspicion is that America will be forced to attack sooner, rather than later. But will America really be able to convince the world it's not an imperialistic, expansionist Empire? Doubtful. And if we can't do that we'll never win the war.

Think of it this way, we have two options if we attack Iraq:

- 1) We attack Iraq and win, in which case the world will understand they absolutely must do more to oppose us
- 2) We attack Iraq and lose, in which case the American empire is over

None of these options look to good to me, and no one is really discussing them on TV.

Pascal's Wager

» Grand Blanc, MI, September 7, 2002

As the "debate" over attacking Iraq continues I'm reminded of my favorite theological argument. Anyone who is even passively interested in arguments in support of theism has probably heard it, it's called Pascal's Wager. Essentially the argument is this:

- 1) If God exists and you are a believer you will go to heaven
- 2) If God doesn't exist and you are a believer you lose nothing because of your belief
- 3) If God exists and you are not a believer you will go to hell
- 4) Therefore, you should believe in God because (to paraphrase Blair and Bush's favorite phrase right now) "the price of inaction is too steep"

It's my favorite argument because of its deceptive simplicity. And yet, upon reflection you realize that the argument is fundamentally flawed for two reasons. The first is that the word deity referenced in the argument could presumably be replaced with any other supernatural being. The argument would seem to apply equally to a Christian God as to Zeus, for example. The second reason is that assumption 2 ignores the fact that a belief in God does influence your life and some could easily argue that it adversely affects your life if in the end you discover you've been holding a false belief.

I bring this up because I sense that the debate on Iraq has degraded into a Pascal's Wager of a different kind. Restated in the same form as above it would look something like this:

- 1) If Saddam has WMD and we force a 'regime change' the world will be safer
- 2) If Saddam doesn't have WMD and we force a 'regime change' the world will be safer
- 3) If Saddam has WMD and we don't force a 'regime change' the world will be unsafe
- 4) Therefore, we should attack Saddam because "the price of inaction is too steep"

And while this argument, like Pascal's Wager, seems persuasive it falls apart when one understands its similarity to the faulty argument above. First of all, Iraq could be easily replaced with any country that America doesn't like. And second it ignores the real result of American aggression towards Iraq. We are naive to think that there won't be an international backlash against what is essentially an unprecedented aggression against world opposition.

I keep talking about Iraq because, to be honest, I think things are going to get a lot worse before they get better. And if we do end up attacking Iraq, I will feel fortunate to see the reaction of their neighbors in Jordan.

We've Learned Nothing

» Grand Blanc, MI, September 11, 2002

As I write this at 9:11pm I'm reminded of the false significance that abounds on this day, the anniversary of itself a slogan - 9/11. After a year's growth this country feels little different, the anniversary played out like 9/12 or 9/13 did when we were confronted by the daily mass-media recycling of emotion. Empty ceremonies led by the empty rhetoric of an empty-headed President made this day almost unbearable. It's not that I wasn't touched today, no... I'll admit that at times, I too wanted to shed tears. But it was not for the reasons that "they" wish. Instead, I wanted to cry because the emotion behind this day is simply too false. I wanted to cry because every message that was pushed into my face neglected to extend the sorrow of 9/11 to the suffering felt by the world, every minute of every day.

We still haven't shaken our self-absorbed superficial understanding of the world and that is what makes me want to weep. As President Bush decries the horrible evil of terrorism it seems as if not even one single person in the media is able to see the blatant hypocrisy. Bush tells us we value every life while he orders the army to decimate nations and prepare for brutal urban occupations. Bush tells us that terrorists don't value life while he funds slick advertising campaigns that drive uneducated youth to the military and their future deaths.

We just still don't get it. And for that reason things are going to continue to get much worse.

9/22 - Globalization, Preliminary Thoughts

» Amman, Jordan, September 22, 2002

What does it feel like to be on the outskirts of the global village? This is a question I'll ponder throughout my trip - but to celebrate my first week in Amman, I'll offer my preliminary thoughts. I'm thoroughly American. Prior to this trip I'd never cross either ocean. My farthest trip had been to Montreal less than a year ago. I had also rarely been to large cities - this year was my first trip to New York City (I ended up making 4). I am an American raised in the suburbs of Maryland and Michigan. Yet I am an American - not a Marylander or a Michigander, because America is the epicenter of the empire. All of its cities are given, or rather subjected to, constant cultural imperialism from our own society. Globalization is felt by everyone, even Americans. Demographics are less regional than they are advertising brackets - what I mean to say is that 15 year olds across America are chasing the same ideals spewed forth from the cultural producers in New York, Hollywood, Silicon Valley, and the other cities that have become less concerned with producing anything more material than culture. Suburbs in Michigan may be months, or years, behind the hippest NY trends but as these trends are cannibalized and digested by the information streams that invisibly guide our lives, they quickly follow behind.

So what does it feel like to now be at the edges? Well... it feels just like that. The message is coming but the competition is far fiercer. Stores sell designer t-shirts and there are those who strut around downtown consciously flaunting their acquired Western tastes but there are still the traditional stores. Only cracks have opened up thus far - only a few have had the opportunity (?) to be converted by the slick American-way. Jordan isn't a cultural exporter - it's an importer. From Qatar it is given AL-Jazeera, from Lebanon the Daily Star (an Arab paper) and the International Herald Tribune (An American paper printed locally in Beirut). And then there is the flow of tourists looking for exotic locals or the Baptism site of Jesus (can you believe that Jesus was Baptized relatively close to here?!). At each step they, like me, force their culture in. English words forcefully introduced - why say "Shukran" when you can say "Thanks" - and ethical standards disregarded - why can't I wear a halter top with my brow showing?. The result is that troops are no longer needed for Imperialism. Bush doesn't need to station soldiers here or change the official language to English through force. Instead time will destroy all that is regional and one side, either thru growing pan-Arab movement or the "West" will win. Jordan will retain its small idiosyncracies but these will slow die away as well. Until one day they'll be forced to establish (they've already begun) programs to revive and preserve traditional knowledge, traditional culture.

But is this all bad? I don't know. I must admit I like the cracks. I like fleeing from the downtown to the West-like Books@Cafe. But I like it because I've already been

converted. I already only learned to speak one language, and have become used to a certain range of cuisine, or books, or TV, or culture, or thought. So for me the cracks are the known, the comfortable.

But there is a deeper reason; secretly I want the imperialism to work. I want to be able to walk across the world, speaking English, eating burgers, and listening to Eric Clapton (he was just playing in the cafe). But then again, what will be the point of such an adventure? To see how losing cultures are fighting against imperialism? When even the remotest corners of the earth have been claimed - will the world really be such a great place? Will we find delight in watching reenactments of traditional culture, in the same way Americans still seem to love the "Wacky" rain dances of our first victims, the Native Americans?

The only upside I can imagine is that we'd be unable to rationalize why this section of the empire was starving while that was fat. When everyone speaks the same language and understands the same culture maybe then our relation to the "Third World" will be revealed as a racist one.

9/25 - Some Thoughts on the Antiwar Movement

» Amman, Jordan, September 26, 2002

How ironic that the first western restaurant I've been able to find here in Amman only serves dishes with cream or cheese - two things I'm highly allergic to. So I ordered the simplest thing they had - pasta with olive oil and garlic. I also ordered an orange juice, which will be the second time I've drank anything other than water in the last week and a half - the total cost is 5JD. I'm sitting here at Books@Cafe, the view is stunning. It's almost time for the sun to set and the hill across from me is lit up with a beautiful orange color. At the crest of the hill is a mosque stripped in black and white. This trip (and the tremendous money saving effort that went into it) has given me an opportunity to simplify my life and my consumption, something I hope to carry on after the trip is over.

I don't want to be part of a regional or local antiwar movement - I want to be part of a global one. Nor do I want to be part of a passive, symbolic antiwar movement - only an active and forceful one. Nor will I quit when Bush, Blair, Sharon, Hamas, and Al-Qaeda lay down their weapons - this war is the symptom of the systemic inequalities of this world and those need to be solved before the antiwar movement can claim victory. I'm in this for the long haul, each step America takes in furthering isolating itself from international opinion is one step closer to the possibility of a global movement for a drastically different world.

There are at least three ways in which the world has become interconnected to the benefit of today's antiwar activist: 1) Global media conglomeration (most useful of which is the emergence of global newspapers, and to a lesser extend 24hour news stations) 2) The Internet 3) Physical transportation links that make the entire world less than 24 hours away. The first allows largely institution knowledge, or knowledge that the 'system' permits, to be transported globally. Because of its traditional role as the voice of the state, whatever events it covers or opinions it allows define (usually) the domain of permitted discourse. Let's take two examples. Few states have openly and strongly opposed America's wars - save one: Germany. Because the media is obligated to carry the opinions of the head of state of a major European country the antiwar position is allowed to be voiced in the mainstream. You'll notice however that this is the minimum most media did in covering Schroeder. Few,

except possibly the New York Times in its perspectives series, gave any deeper analysis of his opinions other than that it was an election campaign. Which is particularly absurd because many argue that Bush's war talk is also an election campaign. The second example is that of the Guardian and the Independent - two UK papers who have used their position as media outlets to syndicate in-depth antiwar analysis. This analysis is largely used in the Arab world's press - each day the Jordan Times seems to have an article from at least one of those papers. The point here is that there are small cracks through which the antiwar position is allowed to speak with the voice of authority and legitimacy that the major media outlets have. However, it is not analysis but events that are the strength of the media. This is how terrorists have been able to get their message covered. If it weren't for the fact that they are brutally killing people, their opinions would be ignored precisely because they speak from a position too far outside the permitted discourse. This can be seen in other movements as well - the Seattle WTO protests for example. Spectacles are unignorable by the mainstream media - which allows a certain amount of discourse hijacking to take place media the media is forced to at least attempt an analysis of the motives of that spectacle. However, this analysis always works to reaffirm the 'system' because the act of paraphrasing destroys the original meaning. Ask a participant of a spectacle to explain their agenda or motive then ask the observer of that spectacle through the eyes of the media to do the same and you'll inevitably find the message was muddle, or distorted. Put simply, then, we can say that the media does not just portray the news - it distorts it. Relying on the media to give an accurate portrayal of the motives behind the antiwar movement is therefore doomed to failure.

The internet allows the pure transmission of the message. The clarity of that transmission is entirely in the hands of the producers. Aside from problems relating to the fact that outside forces can sometimes disrupt this transmission is the fact it's very difficult to draw an audience. Again big money is winning the battle and has sectioned the internet off into a series of big name 'portal' sites. These sites work to limit the range of discourse available through the positioning of search results, the creation of all-in-one sites that people rarely leave, and the dumbing down of analysis and news by lowering peoples understanding and expectations of the depth and range of analysis available online. However, if people can begin to find the site they will be privy to uncensored opinions.

The third aspect is transportation links. These are mainly important because they teach tolerance and global understanding since they facilitate world travel and most importantly because they allow a relatively small overall world demographic to quickly mass in particular locations. This means at least theoretically that enough planning could result in millions of people, from all over the world, passing in one place to protest one thing. Right now this is very much limited to those who can afford to travel, but I think we're already seeing the result in the fact it's now feasible to encourage westerners to join the protests at the environmental summit in South Africa (something Adbusters.org did). This should at least give us pause because there are many people alive today who remember a time when this was quite simply - impossible.

In fact each of these three aspects are relatively new and untested. Through understanding how to link them we can begin to answer the more fundamental question: How do you translate a local protest into a regional protest into a national protest into a global protest?

One conclusion that must be underscored is that there are many different types of antiwar people, meaning that a certain percentage of any given political persuasion/label has an antiwar contingent. This creates the interesting situation of Neo-Nazis holding antiwar marches because they are anti-Semitic and progressive activists holding marches because they support the rights of Palestinians, an occupied and indigenous population. In less extreme examples you have conservative republicans and liberal democrats who are antiwar for similar reasons of protecting the sanctity of American soldier's lives but who have different social agendas. This demonstrates the futility of political labels (which really just serve the process of dogma-creation) and it also shows there are multiple ways to get to the antiwar position.

So the situation would seem to be nearly impossible. How can you build a cohesive movement if those who self-identify as antiwar come from a wide-range of sometimes contradictory agendas and political groupings. Well, first I think its important to point out that this critique used to be commonly levied by the media against the 'anti-globalization' movement (the anti-globalization movement being the first manifestations of this, our, generation's political agenda). I bring this up to say that often such a critique means that the deeper connection is simply unclear to outside observers - and my suggestion is that such a connection transcends traditional political definitions. We are in a time of political change and the fact that the antiwar movement may contain groups that any of us individually may have previously opposed isn't really relevant - instead it means that the current political situation is flushing out political similarities that may have been obscured before. It also points to the fact that while the traditional political groups weren't paying attention certain assumptions have become more universally shared. One example of this is the much higher percentage of people, across political lines, who are much more suspicious of business and corporations now. The reasons for this are varied, the collapse of big corporations, the loss of individual's 401Ks and the clear global climate changes are some reasons. It's also useful to point out during each antiwar movement there is an anti-corporate underpinning - a fact I discovered while reading the antiwar positions of those who were attempting to stop the start of WW2. In wartimes, corporations profit and humans suffer.

The second thing worth point out is that political labels themselves are isolating and serve instead to keep less active members of the political organization in line with the dogma-creators at the top. Both characteristics that shouldn't be introduced into the antiwar movement. Additionally, political labels are hard to translate into contemporary and global terms because they are both regionally and historically determined. How can you possibly be an American Democrat in any country other than America? You can share similar principles but you cannot simply transplant the political platform of American political parties to other countries. Instead basic shared assumptions should be transferred - assumptions that lead to nonviolence, individual freedoms, and economic security for all. It is the analysis of how to get there that can (and should) differ in each local interpretation, as long as that analysis stays true to the shared assumptions.

This is why the greatest ally of the antiwar movement is the United Nations - but I'll leave this for another journal entry.

9/28 - On Being a Student and the IMF Protests

» Madaba, Jordan, October 2, 2002

I've thought a lot about my role as a student since I became active in Why War. Being an antiwar activist brought up in a generation fed the pop-culture re-historicizing of the Vietnam protest era is difficult because there is so much of that legacy that I try so hard not to imitate. For me the fundamental conflict between Academia and political activism is that both require hours upon hours of work in order to be successful. The conflict is not that Academia isn't relevant to political activism - a fact that is especially true at Swarthmore.

As my level of energy increased in antiwar activities, my level of academic study decreased. But this is because there is a steep learning curve when it comes to antiwar activism - there are volumes of information that need to be digested in order to see quickly the fallacies within the pro-war arguments. My hope is, and so far this seems true, that once you reach a certain level of understanding it is easy to maintain. I want to be an academic - a politically active one, because I don't think that anti-intellectualism (which is often the guise of anti-authoritarianism or anti-elitism) will lead anywhere but backwards.

My disappointment with Swarthmore, and Academia in general, is that the professors should have been the first to take their knowledge and apply it to helping their students understand the war. Professors should be out intellectual leaders - but few seemed willing to take up this task and instead simply continued classes as normal leaving their students no recourse except to watch the jingo-media. Those who did make a profound effect on me - namely my film teacher, Professor Simon, who led a class discussion analyzing the media coverage of 9/11 the following day. That discussion was one of the best I've listened to since and flushed out many of my initial thoughts that have become more strong as the war has progressed.

I'm bring all this up because the book I'm reading now is "Revolution as Theatre" written by a Yale drama professor in the early 70s. It's not a particularly good book. Essentially it is an attack on various aspects of the then student movement, which he sees as mainly playacting and performative without real substance. His points resonate although I can see many ways he ended up being wrong.

The Anti-IMF/World Bank protests are raging in DC. I've long held that this movement is the beginning of something very important and that it's relation to the antiwar movement is a key one. I think that the two can work independently, feeding off of each other in order to accomplish something grand: the ushering in of a new political and cultural movement. What the anti-corporation movement lacks, the antiwar movement either has or should develop - and vice versa.

Unfortunately, for many observers the movement known as the anti-globalization movement, more accurately known as the anti-corporation movement, is opaque. Few in the mass-media understand it's objectives or its agenda. This is true even though the media has begun to offer a semblance of an articulation - the anchor on CNN who was interviewing the spokeswoman for the World Bank summed up the agenda as something along the lines of being concerned about globalization's effects in making rich nations richer at the expense of poor nations. This is a simplistic explanation - and one that is highly biased if it is the only summary given before interviewing an official from the World Bank, since no person (especially a highly trained PR person) will ever say their goal is to create such an economic divide. It's a summary that should have been backed up by the many examples.

But it also misses another important agenda of this movement - an agenda that I

think is both far more important and resonates much more with our generation. It's the part of the agenda that answers the question of 'what are you going to do about the world situation;'. I'm referring here to the anti-corporate/anti-consumption agenda.

An important thing to point out is that there has always been an anti-capitalist/anti-corporate sentiment since the dawn of corporations and capitalism. While the critique developed by Marx et al has traditionally revolved around the effects of both on the 'worker' - the new critique concerns the effects of both on the consumer. As globalization evolves workers begin to be literally pushed further away from the consumer. To the point where, as a recent NYTimes article revealed, you have people in Africa handling the parking tickets of New York City - while being paid wages that will never allow them to visit it. This has the effect of making workers and production invisible to those in 'developed' nations. This will become ever more true as America continues to move into placing the service industry as it's main industry. But what I think is new now is that a sustained critique is beginning to be made about what the effects of corporations, and their minions the advertising industry, have on people.

Advertising works by replacing abstract ideals such as beauty, health, intelligence, skill, etc with the acquirement of material goods. Instead of health being signified by rigorous workouts it is represented by wearing a pair of Nike shoes. Happiness for children is represented not by exploring their physical location but by buying a McDonalds "happy-meal". The point is that essentially any product can become the representation of any ideal or subculture through advertising and targeting. People are sold an ideal and then they buy the product.

This understand has become well accepted by some but the importance of such a conclusion is quite large because once one begins to critique the targeting of humans as consumers, you begin to see how consumption is the driving force of economics world wide. The simple fact is that corporations must sell a certain number of products per year or they will go bankrupt. By simply cutting down our consumption (and in some cases getting rid of completely as in the case of fast food) we are able to make a political message. This is an interesting thought because not buying is probably a more potent tool than protesting, decreasing consumption is the precise antithesis of our current society. And perhaps most fortunately now is the best time to do so since corporations are already reeling from the stock market decreases.

9/29 - Still Afraid

» Madaba, Jordan, October 2, 2002

I'm still afraid for America. I'm afraid because I don't think people yet understand how fundamental a change the regime of George Bush will have on America. I'm afraid because while more and more say they see the fallacy of attacking Iraq, I've yet to see a coherent attack on what Bush is really doing: using the specter of terrorism (which is just political violence done in response to a perceived wrong) to make Americans afraid in order to carry out his agenda and further the politics of violence that led to 9/11.

Some have pointed out that the way Bush wins policy debates is by constantly changing his message until he finds one that resonates with the public. How this has played out in terms of Iraq is vitally important to understanding how and why the

antiwar movement has yet to escape from peril. Iraq, Iran, and North Korea were introduced as the 'axis of evil'. Nearly 9 months later we are beginning to see how this plan of attacking evil will work. First, the concept of evil is taken as an unquestioned one. The meaning of evil for Bush is an entirely Christian one, it is a thing devoid of good - something that doesn't merit any consideration or human concern. Evil is a danger to good - just as Satan's only agenda is to overthrow God, so is Al-Qaeda's only agenda to overthrow America (or so the narrative goes). Just as Evil is without any Good, so too can no good person try to understand the presence of evil - to do so would be a form of justification. This is all intrinsically understood by Christians - calling something evil has an unarticulated significance that will bring dire consequences.

What is truly scary is that Al-Qaeda has been relegated to the abstract role of representing pure evil. Thus, Bush began his argument for regime change by using the same-old arguments (Saddam gassed his own people etc) but as the debate against war has grown, you'll notice he has begun to equate Al-Qaeda with Saddam (something he'll likely do for every single future 'enemy' that he creates). And while logically this would mean people who didn't take seriously the threat of Saddam would begin to take lightly the threat of Al-Qaeda, it has played out the opposite.

What I mean to say here is that because the reasons behind the existence of Al-Qaeda, which has really just become our name for terrorism, have yet to be analyzed - Bush is still able to position Al-Qaeda as the ultimate evil that wants to irrationally destroy us. He can then in turn use this assumption to call for the destruction of any other country, or group, that he would like.

10/15 - Perched on the Mountain

» Petra, Jordan, October 16, 2002

The tourist industry is the lens through which we can analyze ourselves. Outside money has committed local populations to servitude - they fulfill our desires for the 'perfect exotic trip', and they receive a few cents more than they'd make working in sweatshops or on the farm. In Thailand and elsewhere this service to white people is sex, sex notoriously with children. But watching my fellow foreigners navigate the mountain city of Petra I notice two predominant tourism ploys. The first is, of course, random cheap trinkets - a universal. The second is children riding donkeys while shouting, "Taxi?". There's no tough climbs on this route, only ancient stairs tracing the way up the mountain. But, only the strongest willed are able to resist being led on donkey while the local walks.

It takes about 40 minutes to climb the mountain to Petra's "High Point of Sacrifice" but once there you find yourself surrounded by the most stunning cliffs and scenery. I've found a quiet nook in the shade of a small tree growing from the rocks. The scenery is larger than your field of vision, and each time you turn your head you discover another breathtaking view. It is here that the people of Petra sacrificed animals. But it is also place where you begin to understand that time moves so slowly, civilization has been working since the dawn of humanity to get us here. In the valley below you can make out the caved facades of houses built into the mountains nearly 2,000 years ago.

If I took this trip to gain perspective, I am succeeding. Walking through these majestic ruins of a civilization that used to control this entire region, all the way up to Damascus, makes you challenge the very desire to build an empire. So many have

come and gone - is it worth the human misery necessary to create it? The emperor always tries, of course, to justify this misery in terms of what benefit it'll bring "us". But instead of simply saying treasure, he now says safety.

There is something endlessly distasteful in seeing a fat westerner ride a donkey while a guide runs behind. That and seeing people take pictures of Arabs wearing traditional clothing - as if they were frozen in the past. These two distractions aside Petra is wonderful and I'm glad I came. Unlike the other tourists I have enough time to sit and think while looking at the scenery. I already feel better than I did last night. Again I feel like it's nice to have some detachment from America - some time to see that the rest of the world moves and lives even if we don't ever think of their existence. I'm endlessly amazed by how it seems as if the world is reading the same news, but because we continue to hold onto absurd notions of nationalism some are powerless while others have the power to be complacent.

10/18 - Antiwar Thoughts

» Wadi Musa, Jordan, October 19, 2002

The war continues its slow and mainly predictable march forward. It's been more than a year since 9/11 and the first bombings of Afghanistan. Soon we'll be reminiscing about the fact it was only a year ago that we destroyed Iraq - and at this pace perhaps it won't be long until we are remembering some country named Iran, and another named North Korea.

But as opposition to the war is raised by the people and ignored by the Bush regime, we are all beginning to wake up. And while that is occurring, more effort must be put into developing a cohesive anti-corporate/anti-war platform. It is through the intersection of these two movements that a new social agenda can be realized.

The movement is still too reactive, acting as if each new Bush transgression is surprising - instead of what it is: the realization of a preestablished agenda of international ignorant arrogance, domestic repression, and corporate worship. For the movement to be strong, we must force a response - instead of always running to respond. It's time to stop second-guessing ourselves, and to begin to build upon already established facts.

What are those facts? Here are some:

- 1) The election of George W. Bush is highly suspect and can legitimately be called undemocratic
Why?
 - a) Bush lost the popular vote
 - b) Because Bush received only half of the votes and less than half of registered voters voted, only 25% of registered voters voted for Bush
 - c) Bush spent 10 times as much on lawyers for the Florida debacle than Gore
 - d) As reprinted in Harper's, a large number of black democrats were prohibited from voting because of possibly intentionally sloppy felon blacklists. This includes people who were blacklisted because of 'future' crimes the database said they would commit
 - e) Bush's campaign was at its core undemocratic because of the tremendous, and previously unheard of, amount spent on it
- 2) Bush only cares about the rich
 - a) His tax cut at the expense of the nation

(Does this fact even need justification? Has he done anything positive for the not top 1%?)

3) The environment is suffering, global climate change is a reality, and Bush cares more about special interests than humanities own living space

4) The war is a distraction from domestic concerns

a) Can you name the last domestic issue that Bush has really made an effort to address?

5) The domestic situation is rapidly degrading

a) Unemployment rates are climbing, and long-term unemployment is at epic levels

b) Stock markets are way down, effecting all workers who have been forced into putting their retirement money into 401ks

6) Bush is systematically dismantling international law and human rights conventions

a) He withdraws from key treaties, such as Kyoto, International Criminal Court, ABM, etc

b) Guantanamo Bay is illegally holding around 600 people without any rights whatsoever

c) America has exported people to be tortured in other countries

d) He is forcing the world to accept a contradiction: the unequal application of international law, by backing Israel's nuclear arms and illegal occupation while attacking Iraq for even attempting to acquire nuclear arms

7) Bush is making the world hate us not because they hate 'our freedom' but because his policies mean oppression, suffering, and poverty of much of the world - either directly through our callous foreign policy or indirectly through our lack of action in fixing problems whose solutions have already been identified by NGOs

a) The fact that it cost more to wage war on Afghanistan than it would to rebuild it should mean something

b) America gives a smaller percentage of its GDP to foreign aid than any other 'industrialized nation' (and how much of the aid is given to Israel?)

8) The White House is more private and tight lipped than any previous administration - in itself an undemocratic trait, but also one that allows their ultimate vision to never be revealed, instead political opponents are forced to respond to each development as it occurs and not the overall agenda

9) The anticorporate movement is still strong and growing. Increasingly the threat of terrorism is being used to repress this movement, signaling that it is striking a core issue

These facts, and more, are things we all seem to know but are unable to internalize in such a way that it dramatically changes our lives. It is as if we are hesitant to believe our own conclusions, conclusions that seem confirmed by every new Bush decision. There is no use in longing for the comfort of the pre-9/11 world - we can only fight to insure neither Bush nor Bin Laden are victorious.

History is an unpredictable process - times of peace are put into flux and new narratives battle for dominance. Social change is difficult in peacetime, when one narrative is dominant, because the boundaries of that narrative are so difficult to see. It's hard to ascertain from what eyes you see the world until your perspective is

challenged. But now, at a point when no one can be sure what will happen tomorrow and when even the smallest spectacle can spread a powerful meme across the world - it is time to act, not follow, but to act. Trust that you share more ideals with others than will ever be clear. Know that what is important now is not to dig for reassurance by following in step with pre-9/11 notions. Instead, create your own narrative, fashion it from the elements that give our generation shared ideas - and distribute it. Cloud the pre-scripted war-"debate" by offering another option. No to Bush, No to Bin Laden, No to Nationalism, No to fanaticism - Yes to what? What is the source of your discontent? Attack that discontent by offering an unraveling counterpart. Tired of being only an ignorant consumer? Refuse to be, decrease your consumption - reclaim for yourself an identity other than a source of money. Think it's now time for a drastic change in our criminal justice system? Study how to connect it to the anti-corporate/anti-war movement, make it an unsaid but agreed upon aspect of the movement. The point is now is the time to fashion a cohesive social change agenda. It's not hard - you must only attempt to analyze the source of your angst, and articulate it. Once articulated, people will agree - your fight will become theirs, and theirs yours.

You don't need to go to protests to be an activist, in fact if all you do is go to protests than you aren't an activist. Being an activist requires one thing: action, intelligent and dedicated action. It doesn't require the go-ahead from anyone. Instead, it requires waking up and deciding passivity is the same as complacency. It requires the rejection of dogma - all dogma, including that of the "left". It requires intelligent action aimed at convincing people of something small (Palestinians are humans) or something large (we can accomplish a nonviolent social revolution). You don't need to be part of an organization to be an activist. Speak what you think, listen to others, and adopt their truths and correct their falsehoods. Activism is a process - a process towards a blurry, but shared, ideal of peace and justice. Of no starving kids and illiterate adults, of no toxic dumps and deformed babies. It's a process that looks to find what is wrong with the world and tries to fix it. But it is also a process that requires times of flux, of an uncertain future. Articulate your vision for that future - convince others, resist dogma, and sacrifice.

But what if you feel useless? Or feel too busy because of legitimate time constraints such as children or multiple jobs? Then sacrifice in other ways. Find an under funded organization you agree with and give them the money you were going to spend on sweatshop shoes, or put them in touch with your uncle - the all star lawyer - and convince him to do some pro-bono work. All of us have something we can contribute. For some it is time, others money, others a place to stay for traveling organizers, others legal help - we all have something to give. Open yourself up to the movement, share what you have to give, and watch it grow.

12/12 - Introduction to Swarthmore Talk

» **Swarthmore, USA**, December 12, 2002

Thank you for coming. Before talking about Palestine, I must ask for your patience and understanding. Regardless of what you think about the situation there, please understand that the things I will tell you about tonight are still fresh in my mind and soul. I returned to America only two days ago from a place so directly the opposite of Swarthmore that I don't yet feel I've fully re-adjusted. The reason I came back to Swarthmore was because I thought that this school, the first place that I ever found a true yearning for intellectualism and dedication to ideals, should be the place that hears

my initial thoughts about the situation: my honest and uncensored thoughts.

Tonight I am speaking as an independent member of the movement, a representative of no one other than myself. But I must be frank and tell you that I am a nonviolent supporter of the Palestinian resistance movement and I support their right as humans to be free of military occupation.

My goal is not to convince you about the situation through the use of political rhetoric. If anything my goal is to convince you to go there yourself. I'm not here to speak with the correct political voice or to give authority to the official lines of the left or right. Instead my goal is to trust you with my true beliefs. And I do this with an understanding that even my political allies, let alone opponents, may not understand, like, or appreciate some of the things I may say. The world is not black and white, and some of the positions I have come to were difficult and in response to situations that are so far removed from life in America that they may be unexplainable. But I will try.

The global social change movement is at a crucial, and desperate, stage. Thus far the right-wing has been able to impose their rule over the most of the governments of the world, and if America has its way and attacks Iraq the world will be changed for the worse forever. Unfortunately the fault is solely that of the antiwar movement and traditional left. We have grown lazy, un-intellectual, passive, decadent, and most tragically: ineffective. Our rhetoric has ceased to be powerful or thought-out, instead it relies on recycled clichés of previous movements without any of the original passion or dedication. It seems as if we've become more concerned with how to say what we believe, than what we actually believe. I feel that unless we begin to speak honestly, to ignore any feelings of allegiance to all dogma (including that of the left), the world will continue to degrade. The left must adapt, and the only way to do that is to practice what we preach, to feel solidarity with the oppressed not by creating symbolic protests but by aiding them in their resistance. Only then are we as the privileged able to truly see the daily reality that breeds powerful movements for social change. We need create a new political philosophy borne out of our generation, and our world today.

Tonight I refuse to abstract the discussion to the level of mere political dialogue. Instead I will focus on trying to paint a picture for you, a portrait of life under occupation - life in the west bank. What we are discussing tonight is not idle conversation - it is life and death for millions of people half a world away.

I will now speak extemporaneously about life in Palestine. I will then take as many questions as time permits.

12/29 - Pledge

» Grand Blanc, Michigan, USA, December 29, 2002

I have come to a personal decision about the direction that I'd like to take in the antiwar movement. I'd like to share this conclusion in an attempt to encourage those who agree with it to embark on a similar, but unique path. The strength of the new

movement, the movement that all of us are attempting to build in our own ways, is a diversity of perspectives and narratives coupled with the technology to disperse them widely. Today I am releasing my own narrative in the hopes that it will be mutated and improved upon by those who agree that this new antiwar movement must, and will, stop the aggressions of both America and Al-Qa'ida. We are the third element in this war, an element that can be widely unpredictable and with enough ingenuity can become an integral part of the formula that will determine the outcome of our lifetimes. With whom does the future lie in times of contestation? It lies in the hands of those who most capably bend the hearts and minds of the public.

There are many paths to this persuasion, this ideological conversion of the public. Paths that play off of each other, paths that must be fluid and responsive while at the same time strong enough to demand a reaction.

During my trip in the West Bank I thought very deeply about the course I'd take upon my return. And I have come to grips with the fact that I have seen enough suffering to know that suffering itself is inhuman. Were I a believer I would call it a sin. I have seen enough violence to know that I will not stand idly by while it creeps into my life. I will not watch the initial stages of mass arrests, arbitrary bombings, economic depression, and worldwide death, without acting strongly to resist it.

Therefore, I believe that nonviolent direct intervention in the course of history is needed. Let us seize our own power as members of the cultural, and economic, elite riding at the peak of the empire and force it to falter. Now is the time to target the joints of our society, time to widen the cracks. Now we must place our bodies in active disobedience, to use our nonviolent presence as a sledgehammer against the status quo.

I hope that you will join me in pledging to do just that the instant you hear we've attacked Iraq. I am now committed to make the following pledge:

No matter where, or when, I hear the terrible news that we've attacked Iraq I will stop what I am doing and disrupt the flow of society. Perhaps I will stop a busy intersection with my body. Or throw blood on the windows of the local army recruiting office, or maybe I'll, together with friends, occupy a media building during the local news. What ever I do, I pledge, that it will be nonviolent and direct while still intervening in the functioning of the society that has brought us to war.

I urge you to make this pledge publicly, or privately, but to make this pledge.

micahwhite
December 29, 2002