

# Another Emerald City?

*We must learn to blaze our own trail, not follow Yellow Brick Road*



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Money. Power. Fame.

The Jag. The House. The high, six-digit salary. A white picket fence. A perfect marriage, with 2.3 kids and a dog named Spot. You get a job and work your hours. Have some barbecues on the weekends and yell at the tube when the home team screws up. That's the American dream and the way it looks today.

Here we are at the state university, pursuing a degree as we're supposed to do. We study, hang out with friends, and try to cut a slice out of the big pie for ourselves. Everybody I know is either in a relationship or looking for one, has a job or wants one. They all say: "If I had the coin for it I would."

Does it all seem a bit cookie cutter-ish to you? It's time to stop and ask, "why?"

Do we do it for the cash? The *stability*? And why are we doing it anyway? So you can take a nice family vacation with your 2.3 kids to Disney World? Bullshit. I don't buy it.

We're all told that there's this blueprint to "success." Success. What is it anyway? Why do I have to follow the Yellow Brick Road? Why do you? Do we do it because of obligations and pressures?

Screw it — burn 'em.

I'm gonna throw a punch at the CBA. Every time I'm in there there's some frick'n thing on the power tie, how to work the interview and how to work up the corporate ladder. Can you hear it?

"Follow the herd — be a sheep — keep your mouth shut and your eyes forward. Don't ask questions and don't let the doorknob hit you in the ass on the way out."

I may seem incredibly anti-institutional (I feel so), but look at my hypocrisy. My father: a high-level exec in a finance firm. My mother:

several degrees in political science and law. And me: the worst of it — I'm in advertising. Am I getting sucked right down conformity lane?

Why is it that I can't escape? Has modern culture won out over free will? Are we victims of the beast's insatiable appetite to smooth out the wrinkles? I have too much faith in the human spirit to think so. That leaves you and me to find out why we've been brought up to think it's 95 percent blood, sweat and tears; 5 percent laughs, smiles and cheers.

After a summer of workshops, internships, travel and vacations, while meeting some of the more successful people around, I thought I would be more clearly set on the issues of where my life was going. You know what? Now I'm scared.

I lose sleep over it. It's like I've tasted the forbidden fruit and nothing will ever be the same again. Fruit like this only makes you hungrier — you are never filled or satisfied. And in the end, you could choke on it while rushing to consume it all before the clock runs out. That's how I feel about realizing how big the world really is. And how small I really am.

That's why people just plug along and don't ask questions, man. They keep their world small and manageable. If they trip, there's a wall close by to hold them up. The view isn't that great, but they don't know it because the rooms are too small to have an outside window. So we conform and 9 to 5 it. We fear the burden of the forbidden fruit.

Is the world getting smaller? That's a pathetic cry for comfort. It's getting bigger. In older times your life was the tribe and the world was flat. Now, we may colonize Mars. It seems like now is the time: We have the time to ask questions, we have cutting-edge technology to discover the answers, and we have the ability to connect with other worlds. Yet we put on our wool coat and try to stay away from the big bad wolf like everybody else.

It seems that we do whatever we can to order things, to sequence them. We create governments to order our lives on earth and create religions to make us feel as though we're heading for some place with order. We do this because it's easier to live this way. We set up the world to make our decisions for us. We've become too proficient at being human. We've created a society that

now creates us.

The question is this: If we don't follow the Yellow Brick Road, what is there? Nothing, and that's the beauty of it. There is no road. We must blaze our own trails.

Ask yourself: Am I getting this degree simply to be more marketable? To whom, and for what? How effective will you really be if you're only doing something you like, and are just good at, and not doing something you love, and for which you have passion? For what will your life stand?

We need the institutions we have — rather, we can no longer function without them. Like the honeysuckle and the hummingbird, we have evolved inseparably — for now. We may need the honeysuckle, but do we need the same one every day?

Why not try a new one? Maybe in a new garden, a new place, or up the side of an 18,000-foot mountain! Understand that I believe in competition. Paying the price provides its own value, and in any job it's how you do that job that brings meaning. But can we improve the meaning of the job while we're at it? That would make the world that much better and mankind that much worse.

I invite all those reading to look at the road ahead of them. See if it's well lit and well paved. If so, stop the car, get out, and toss a match in the gas tank. Use the light from the past you've just left behind to illuminate the way to your greatest adventures ever.

See yourself with some drama and wonder at the marvel of your imagination. F--k the Yellow Brick Road. Your biggest fear in life shouldn't be trying and failing, but waking to the day when the alarm clock is your worst enemy.



MATT HANEY/DN

## Brutal force

*Minorities seek safe house in a society where not all law enforcers serve, protect*



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It's a safe bet to say that Abner Louima has a stereotypical view of police. If he is anything like other victims of police brutality, no doubt a range of emotions (hate, anger, fear) will accompany any encounter he will have with a police officer for the rest of his life. Why? Because a few weeks ago, several of New York's finest took it upon themselves to punish Louima's alleged transgressions with a toilet plunger. As a result, Louima now has a severely damaged colon and bladder to accompany his mental scars and

wounds.

In retrospect, he apparently got off lucky. He could have suffered the same fate as Brother Guadalupe in Omaha, or Brother Francisco right here in Lincoln. He could have died in police custody, as countless other men and women of color do in precincts all across the country. But he didn't; he survived — so that he could look over his shoulder for the rest of his life.

What was it that Louima did that so enraged the cops? Did they first sodomize him with a shaft of wood and then place that same shaft of wood in his mouth for breaking up a fight, which is what he was doing when New York's finest first came upon him? What is it that Brother Guadalupe and Brother Francisco were doing? What were their crimes?

Their only crime was being a person of color in a white world.

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It's ugly truth time. The role of police in the Divided States of America is to maintain the status quo. (If you don't know what the American status quo is, you have an academic deficiency in history and should take remedial readings.) Just like the systematic denial of opportunity in the economic and educational spheres, the American police state regulates the social mobility and mainstream integration of the American Minority. Police presence in the inner city — typically populated with minorities who have the least invested in the system, and thus, who are the most revolutionary — exists not to stop crime and maintain order, but to

keep the ghetto residents “in their place” — acting as a modern-day poll tax or grandfather clause. The police force's weapon of choice, blind, violent suppression, effectively “beats” the will to struggle out of the American Minority and replaces this pride and resistance with fear and hopelessness, resigning them to quiet acceptance.

Thankfully, not every police officer enforces this strategy. Like any other cross section of society, there is variation: There are good cops and bad cops. The catch, which will haunt Louima for the rest of his life, is figuring out who is which. If Louima didn't have any stereotypical views concerning cops before, he undoubtedly has some now. He, like many other people of color

(irrespective of whether they themselves have been attacked by police), will assume that all police are racist, even though this is not true. His stereotype is created out of self-defense. As many other people of color, he will develop a mistrust of law enforcement officers, perhaps to the point where he will even refuse their help if a crime has been committed against himself. This kind of prejudice is no more wrong than believing that all blacks love watermelon, but it is easier to understand. It's also easier to stop.

The police just have to stop beating up minorities. Or at least offer a counter example.

After all, when was the last time a white person died in police custody?