Who's to Say What's Obscene?

Politics, Culture and Comedy in America Today

by Paul Krassner

Introduction by Arianna Huffington

Praise for Paul Krassner

"Thanks to Paul Krassner for continuing to be the lobster claw in the tuna casserole of modern America."
—Tom Robbins

"The FBI was right; this man is dangerous—and funny, and necessary."
—George Carlin

"Krassner is one of the best minds of his generation to be destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked—but mainly hysterical."
—Art Spiegelman

"I have been a fan of his since I was a snot-nosed kid, and his words have been a driving force and influence on my life . . . . If you have read his work before, you know the joys that you are in for. If you haven't, start reading, and consider this your lucky day. For Paul Krassner is an activist, a philosopher, a lunatic and a saint, but most of all he is funny."
—Lewis Black

"Paul taught me that extreme stylistic accuracy could make even the most bizarre comedic concept credible . . . .He is a unique character on the American landscape. A self-described 'investigative satirist,' he straddles the lines between politics, culture, pornography and drugs—in other words, the land where all of us, were we really honest with ourselves, would choose to dwell."
—Harry Shearer

"Krassner loves ironies, especially stinging ironies that nettle public figures. He would rather savor a piquant irony about a public figure than eat a bowl of fresh strawberries and ice cream."

—Ken Kesey

“He is an expert at ferreting out hypocrisy and absurdism from the more solemn crannies of American culture.”
—*New York Times*

“Krassner has the uncanny ability to alter your perceptions permanently.”
—*Los Angeles Times*

“I told Krassner one time that his writings made me hopeful. He found this an odd compliment to offer a satirist. I explained that he made supposedly serious matters seem ridiculous, and that this inspired many of his readers to decide for themselves what was ridiculous and what was not. Knowing that there were people doing that, better late than never, made me optimistic.”
—Kurt Vonnegut

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Introduction by Arianna Huffington

Seven years after 9/11, seven years after Ari Fleisher warned Americans that they "need to watch what they say, watch what they do," seven after Graydon Carter declared the death of the age of irony, seven years after *Politically Incorrect* was pushed off the air, and 279 years after Jonathan Swift made his *Modest Proposal* that Irish children be sold as food, we seem to be living in a Golden Age of political humor—and especially political satire: Jon Stewart, Bill Maher, Stephen Colbert, viral YouTube videos, and after 33 years on the air, the rebirth of *Saturday Night Live*, which went from "Is that still on?" to MustSeeTV (or at least Must See on YouTube TV).

They are all standing on the shoulders of the great comedic bomb throwers of the past: Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, George Carlin, the Smothers Brothers, the gang at *National Lampoon.*

And Paul Krassner—confidant of Lenny, co-founder of the Yippies, defiler of Disney characters, publisher of *The Realist*, investigative satirist extraordinaire.

As soon as we decided to create the *Huffington Post*, I knew I wanted Paul Krassner involved. His irreverence was just what the blog doctor ordered. He posted three times during the week we launched and has been at it ever since. One hundred and fifty-seven posts and counting. But who's counting?

For the longest time, American humor had lost its bite. Punchlines with a purpose, satire in the tradition of Jonathan Swift, savage wit at the service of passionate conviction had given way to the domesticated yucks of sitcoms, late night jokes, and official Washington dinners where politicians and the media skewer each other in harmless ritual

combat without any fear that things might be different in the morning (Stephen Colbert's legendary scorched-earth performance at the White House Correspondents' dinner in 2006 was the exception; Rich Little's painfully bad 2007 follow-up the rule).

All the while, Krassner was toiling away, tilling the comedy soil and planting the subversive seeds that would flower into the bumper crop of satire we are harvesting today.

Katie Couric's multi-part interview with Sarah Palin was the turning point in how the country saw Palin—and by extension John McCain. But it was Tina Fey's pitch-perfect take on Palin, replayed endlessly on YouTube (and *HuffPost*) and passed along virally online, that delivered the *coup de grace*. It was a comedy mugging for the ages.

Jon Stewart is now the most trusted name in news for the Facebook set. Stephen Colbert's "truthiness" perfectly defined the Bush administration's denigration of facts. *South Park* and *Family Guy* routinely draw blood with drawn characters. *Doonesbury* still regularly delivers a knockout punch.

And Paul Krassner keeps delivering incendiary journalism. This collection includes some of his best. Don't miss the bit on Palin Porn ("No anal required").

Lewis Lapham identified the satirist's work as "the crime of arson, meaning to set a torch of words to the hospitality tents of pompous and self-righteous" cant. And that great satiric arsonist Mark Twain wrote that exposure to good satire makes citizens less likely to be, as he put it, "shriveled into sheep."

The great satirists have always been passionate reformers challenging the status quo. I once called up Paul for a column I was writing and asked him how he saw his job. "Sometimes," he told me, "humor is just a way of calling attention to the contradictions

or the hypocrisy that's going on officially. That's the function of humor—it can alter your reality."

Krassner has been altering our reality for going on 50 years. In the process, he has inspired the work of many—including John Cusack, who says that Krassner's radical approach to truth-telling informed his film *War, Inc.*—a savage, reality-altering take on Iraq.

When, in 1729, Jonathan Swift wrote *A Modest Proposal*, he was seeking to turn a spotlight on the indifference toward the twin Irish crises of over-population and hunger. His proposal was to feed young children to hungry men. "I have been assured," he wrote, "that a young healthy child, well-nursed, is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked or broiled; and I make no doubt in that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout."

In this book, Krassner carries on that savory tradition.

Read it and laugh. And wince. And become outraged. And laugh some more.