

# Rock and the cultural war against Panama

by Leo F. Scanlon

The ugly spectacle of U.S. military forces in Panama blaring explicitly satanic rock and roll music at ear-shattering decibels at the the embassy of the Vatican in Panama City, where Panama Defense Forces chief Gen. Manuel Noriega was in sanctuary, has justly evoked international disgust and outrage. Not only was the action deliberate and authorized at the highest levels, but it typifies what was morally reprehensible about the invasion as a whole.

The “rock assault” was conducted by elements of the 4th Psychological Operations Group from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, which accompanied the 82nd Airborne troops who invaded Panama in December. According to knowledgeable sources, the decision to engage in such a provocation would likely involve the State Department and the U.S. Information Agency, as well as the military commanders directing the campaign on the ground.

The incident is cavalierly dismissed in Washington—by apologists as a harmless prank, by the White House as an expression of “the American sense of whimsy,” and by the Pentagon as “an effort to prevent eavesdropping on the conversations of American soldiers.” But the operation was truthfully characterized by an American colonel interviewed by ABC-TV as part of a “secret psychological warfare program” which utilized rock and roll to attempt to destabilize Noriega, who is known to be an opera lover. Such activities will likely be the hallmark of the coming civic action campaign to “stamp American influence” on the puppet government being created in Panama.

“These guys are the fingernails on the blackboard,” an Army official told the *Washington Post*. “They are very sophisticated in the psychological aspects of war. . . . They are engaged in propaganda.” The *Post* went on to report that the official was describing the psychological operations forces which have been shaping the events leading up to and following the massive invasion. “They are the troops roaring through the streets of Panamanian communities in tanks for a show of force. The troops roaming door to door in the countryside passing out pro-American leaflets, the men pumping ear-piercing music into the Papal Nunciature.”

An Army official says, “We call them nation builders.”

Since the earliest days of the Vietnam War, real nation building, in the meaningful sense of large-scale infrastructure

development, has been outlawed by the protégés of Robert Strange McNamara in the Pentagon and other government bureaucracies. Instead, there is a deliberate policy of “nation destruction.”

The military still pays lip-service to the “nation-building” idea, and the 352nd Civil Affairs Command will be sending a number of doctors and other useful specialists to Panama; but the main focus of these operations will be to build a new synthetic government and social structure.

According to Pentagon officials, one main objective of the invasion was to isolate the leaders of the PDF and political parties associated with the Noriega government from the population. Most of these individuals are now detained in prison camps established by the U.S. military forces; some have disappeared and are presently unaccounted for. In the meantime, the effort to create a government congruent with American “popular culture” is the prime focus of the civic action teams.

## Methods of ‘community control’

A declassified Army document describes the methodology involved in a model “Citizenship-Training Program of ‘Psychological Operations’ of Interpersonal Communication Designed to Achieve National Identification, Motivation, and Constructive Community Action”: “The core of the program . . . consists of group interaction. . . . The organizers must include persons knowledgeable in the universal principles of human interaction (social psychology) and in . . . [cultural anthropology] . . . the graduates of each course will be organized as an Action Group that will keep meeting permanently every two weeks. At the fortnightly meetings each member is expected to report on his success and problems in teaching the course to new groups, as well as his success and problems in promoting community civic action aimed at environmental improvement. As a sociologist would say, the Action Group meetings provide a ‘reference group’ . . . an ongoing source of continuing civic action.”

This sociological schema is taken directly from the community control experiments run by the New Left in the United States in the 1960s.

According to the *Washington Times*, a pro-administration mouthpiece on such issues, “A Springsteen concert is a patriotic event. Bruce is at the forefront of what America does best—produce trash culture. We have not exactly bowled over the world with classical musicians, sculptors, and poets, but America has produced Hollywood movies, fast food chains, television shows, jazz and rock. . . . America’s trash culture is a whirling dynamo. . . . Its anarchic energy and its ‘give the people what they want’ ethos make it incompatible with Communist culture.”

A columnist, disparaging efforts to censor pornographic and satanic rock lyrics adds: “Rock and roll does not threaten the American way. More often than not it has supported what we cherish.”