

Featured Commentary from www.engagewithbobavakian.org

The following featured comments are from individuals who have signed the Engage statement speaking to their view of Bob Avakian's work and what it has provoked in their own thinking.

from Ula Taylor, Associate Professor, U.C. Berkeley*

"I think it's important that Bob Avakian and other critical voices are willing to engage in well-researched analysis and that they are developing a complete understanding of the interconnectedness of oppression. People need to see their own strength in order to transform their conditions. Voices like Bob Avakian's should have maximum volume."

from Rev. Richard Meri Ka Ra Byrd, KRST Center of African Spirituality*

"Bob Avakian brings forward brilliant and radical ideas around which to struggle and debate. He makes extremely complicated concepts accessible to people at all levels of education and advocates for the people at the bottom rung of societies in the U.S. and around the world. Bob Avakian has been bringing forward new and important ideas that are vital to contemporary discourse. I signed in order to be true to my calling to advance spiritual healing by supporting the voice of Avakian because he alone, of all the national voices, including even all the black leaders, is not afraid to open a dialogue on the racism that drives so much of the policy of American society. If we pretend it is not there we cannot heal it!"

from Gordon J. Alderink, PT, PhD, Grand Valley State University*

"I signed on with Engage because it has become increasingly clear to me that we need a major paradigm shift in how America is led. Infringement on individual freedoms, loss of integrity in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches, coercing Americans using fear, etc are examples of how far we have strayed from a truly free, democratic society. We need individuals like Noam Chomsky and Bob Avakian to call into question rigid ideologies, uncontrolled power, capitalistic hegemony, sources of alienation, and lack of reason. I would hope that reasonable people would attend to the kinds of questions Avakian is asking and not write him off simply because he is a 'communist.'"

from Mark LeVine, Professor of History, UC Irvine*

"I have had the opportunity to read some of Avakian's writings, and regardless of whether I agree with them, it is important that they remain accessible to the public in an era where the government and its corporate sponsors spend untold sums of money to "create realities" that the rest of us are forced to live--and in many cases, die--in. Progressives can profoundly disagree about what the appropriate solution to the horrific mess the Republicrats have gotten us into, and what kind of revolution--if at all--is necessary to achieve such a large scale social transformation. But one thing's for sure, we need as many voices out there as possible offering different visions of the future to those offered either by the Bush administration or the jihadis. Bob Avakian is one such voice that deserves to be heard and engaged, regardless of whether we agree with his prognoses or not."

from Dr. Donald E Winters

"I am very pleased to see Bob Avakian stepping forward to make a powerful statement for revolutionary change. I feel strongly that the present administration represents the closest America has ever come to fascism. As a current member of the I.W.W. and past member of the S.W.P., I am greatly moved by political courage in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds. America greatly needs to see the courage of a Joe Hill or Leon Trotsky to confront the present illegal, immoral, and self-serving regime of George W. Bush."

from Tony Jackson, Psychologist, artist, activist

"It is my belief that Avakian offers a seldom heard perspective in this society. Hearing such a strong and clear historical analysis of the social/political quagmire, we Americans find ourselves in, at this juncture, is germane to how we develop a process for moving forward."

from Charles Williams, Professional Boxing Coach in the City of Long Beach, CA on why he thinks people should sign the Engage statement:

"He has proved he is about it. I have known about Bob Avakian for a long time. He shows more love for the people and you know where his heart is at. What he is doing is for the good of the people. You know he cares about you. This is a good opportunity for people to come together and unite."

from Fr. Lawrence Lucas, Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church*

"Since the foolishness called democracy here and so called two party system, is simply one party of the rich and powerful at the expense of the majority, Bob Avakian's sincere commitment to the common folks is most refreshing."

from Harry J. Lennix, actor, instructor

"In a time where we see many of our most precious freedoms threatened, and no convincing voice from either major party speaking on our behalf, it is reassuring to know that irrespective of labels we have advocates like Bob Avakian who is speaking on behalf of the people. There is certainly no more American precept than this."

from Fr. Daniel Berrigan on why he's added his name to the Engage statement, "Dangerous times demand courageous voices. Bob Avakian is such a voice:"

"In reading Bob Avakian's memoir, From Ike to Mao and Beyond, I felt very attuned to Bob in what we're both seeking – a decent international order that takes into account the poor at the edge of life, resists domination and war, and an end to the prospering of the few at the expense of many."

from Michael Slate, correspondent for Revolution newspaper and host/producer of the Tuesday edition of Beneath the Surface on KPFK 90.7 fm Los Angeles.*

I've been discussing the importance of Engage! statement with all sorts of people who are considering signing on to it and this is an issue that has come up repeatedly. I have thought about this question a lot and wanted to share some of this thinking with others. Hopefully these comments will contribute to the discussion and work to project and protect Bob Avakian.

The logic of this argument, especially in today's highly repressive atmosphere, is deadly. This government has a pre-emptive doctrine in how they deal with revolutionary leaders. It is tested throughout history and has been heightened and sharpened today.

It is naive and wrong to look around and in the absence of open and easily recognized attacks from the state, conclude there is nothing to worry about and no need now to join the network of Engage! signatories. Moreover, it has been shown to be a disastrous dynamic to wait until they bring down the force of the state. By that time, many things would already be in motion. Consider the fact that the first "outward" evidence of the plot to go after and murder Malcolm X came with the firebombing of his house three weeks before he was killed. Later on, what came to light was that the FBI had orchestrated a whole campaign of vilification and marginalization in the press and in other ways - in addition to the surveillance and suppression it carried on - and those acts were aimed at creating a climate where

Malcolm could be targeted in this way. It is clear there were all too many people who only spoke up for Malcolm X and what he had brought forward after he died who should have stood up for him earlier.

Now we're in a time where people are tortured for "thought crimes" and anyone can be declared an enemy combatant, be sent to Guantanamo or to a CIA torture camp through extraordinary rendition on the President's say so. You cannot wait for an attack to occur before setting into motion a movement of people declaring that they intend to defend Avakian's right to freely advocate and organize for his views. This is like arguing that they should wait until a second Katrina hits before they fix the levees in New Orleans.

This is in line with the painful and bloody history of how they have viciously and ruthlessly repressed, imprisoned and even outright murdered revolutionary leaders - from the 60s through to today. There is also a history of repression towards Bob Avakian in particular. He discusses this in detail in his memoir, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*. His garbage was picked through, phones tapped, the FBI had drawings and blueprints of his home and he was facing 241 years in prison for a bogus arrest at a demonstration. Ask yourself what reason the FBI could have for drawing up detailed floor plans of someone's home? To take just one example, floor plans were drawn up of Fred Hampton's apartment before he was murdered by the Chicago police. Today vicious lies and slanders about Bob Avakian circulate and make their way into circles of people who consider themselves progressive and enlightened. There is a need, as the statement says, to call on people to engage with the work of Bob Avakian and for many people to serve notice they intend to defend his right to express and engage broadly with people about his views.

As a part of this overall program, those currently in power are working very hard to fortify the ideological ceiling on what people think is possible and to rule critical thinking and dissent out of order. In this situation, Avakian's revolutionary analysis and solutions are "a necessary part of the ferment and discourse required in this society and world at this dark time." And he is playing a unique role in society today. As the Engage! statement puts it, "...he not only theorizes about the world, but plays a special role in organizing and leading that change."

Many people from all walks of life who have been introduced to Avakian's vision of socialism and analysis of the possibilities for a revolution in a country like this feel it has opened up questions that have otherwise been ruled out of order. I encourage everyone to read over the statements from different signatories to the Engage! statement about why they have signed and what they find provocative about the work of Bob Avakian. And I would also encourage people to have a look at a seven minute video on YouTube, "Next Stop... Revolution" which contains street interviews with people in Watts and South Central Los Angeles about the necessity, possibility and desirability for revolution - and how they see Bob Avakian in that light.

People have signed onto the Engage! statement for many different reasons and each been provoked in their own ways by what Avakian is contributing, without agreeing with all of his work. But they all agree this voice should be heard and defended.

from Henry Silverman Prof. and Chairperson Emeritus, Dept. of History, Michigan State Univ.*
On why he signed the Engage! statement. "First, I am a free speech fanatic; second, I followed some of his writing in *Revolution* and, while I am not a Marxist, found it worthwhile. I also think it's a good statement."

from Hal Perry, USF Dons Basketball Team, NCAA Champs, 1955-56, Team Captain 1956*

"It's important in this day and time to explore every possible intelligent approach to life. I encourage everyone to listen to Bob Avakian. He has the right direction we should all try our best to emulate and follow. Bob Avakian is a truth teller."

from Bob Weick, National Touring Actor of Howard Zinn's, "MARX IN SOHO"*

"History is not over! The truth of these opening words from Benjamin Barber's book "Jihad vs. McWorld" are obvious, and yet this simple fact also serves as a compelling call to action. It is a hopeful reminder that we the people can continue to shape the future and work towards a truly just world. In order to achieve that end, we must engage all the great thinkers of the past as well as those in our current epoch. Bob Avakian, with his informed critique of the history of Capitalism and his vision of the future of Communism, deserves a place at the table of any National discussion seeking tools to create a better world for the mass of humanity."

from Adam Shapiro, "Current Events," WRFG, Atlanta, Georgia*

"It is important during these dangerous times that informed dissenting voices be heard. Bob Avakian possesses one of these voices. Avakian possesses a rare ability to integrate his extraordinarily extensive knowledge of history with his critique. One example of this is his discussion of how the electoral process had no effect on the beginning and ending of the Vietnam War. Many of the critiques presented these days lack true historical context. Bob Avakian fills that gap."

from Cornel West, Professor of Religion, Princeton University* on From Ike to Mao and Beyond:

"Bob Avakian is a long distance runner in the freedom struggle against imperialism, racism and capitalism. His voice and witness are indispensable in our efforts to enhance the wretched of the earth. And his powerful story of commitment is timely."

From Robert Keith Collins, Ph.D. Homalusa: Center for African and Native American Research*

The importance of critical thinking is an important theme of Ike to Mao and Beyond. This approach influenced Bob Avakian's development in the transformation he went through as an individual. He was going along with his life, with a middle class background, then he began to change. There were 3 main themes that influenced his life: communism, socialism, and the civil rights movement.

One example of Bob Avakian looking for the truth was described in the book when Kennedy made a speech during the Cuban Missile Crisis incident in Cuba. He said the U.N. charter forbade the Soviet Union from having missiles in Cuba. Bob Avakian went to look up the U.N. Charter, read it several times and found out he had been lied to.

As a professor, I and other professors want their students to be critical thinkers. This book can open people up to an approach of how to look at things with a critical eye. My mom who is from the South has commented that growing up there you understood where you stood because people would just come out and say what they thought. People like George Wallace (an extremely racist former Governor of Alabama) would just outright say he thought Blacks were inferior. Whereas in the North there would be a covering up of how people thought.

During the Civil rights period, people felt deeply that there needed to be a change and they were willing to do something about it. They had to "step outside of the box" in willing to go out and dare to struggle for something different with different people. They did not know the outcome of what would happen if they did this. That is what is needed today. People need to take risks and not accept what's going on. Bob

Avakian did this with his life. He was looking for the truth and he has pursued that, not knowing where that would lead him, taking risks.

I was talking to a friend about the memoir, and my friend said, "Dude. This is communism you're talking about." I said, "Look into it. Did you ever read the Communist Manifesto? Communism on paper is a beautiful thing. Just because things happened in Russia or China that weren't good, you shouldn't reject it. Capitalism has very wealthy people, a middle class, but a lot of people are two paychecks away from poverty. Under capitalism there are a few people who hoard all the wealth." After this back and forth, my friend is now reading the book. I believe people can get drawn into the story from a humanistic approach. If you go through Bob's story, you get to see how he came to discover socialism and communism. The students need to read this.

From Hal Perry, USF Dons Basketball Team, NCAA champions in 1955 and 1956, Team Captain 1956

"The NBA: Marketing The Minstrel Show and Serving the Big Gangsters" by Bob Avakian: That's right, he's good, that's fantastic, ooh boy, that's a powerful statement," these were some of the things I said while listening to the talk by Bob Avakian, "The NBA - Marketing the Minstrel Show and Serving the Big Gangsters." I really appreciated hearing this talk. Everything he's saying about sports, I lived through it.

While listening to Part 1 of the talk, I couldn't believe how deeply and accurately Bob Avakian described everything. Anyone who listens to this talk is put in a better position to understand what really went on. It's unbelievable how it describes what happened to Black players. It is so excellent and incredible, I can't begin to express everything I think about it and I need to listen to it again. If you took a group of high school kids and had them sit down and listen to this, they'd never be the same again.

There's so many aspects of what the talk takes up that need to be exposed. People have no idea what Black athletes have gone through. I went through similar experiences in breaking the color barrier. In high school I was involved in track, basketball and football and when I became a quarterback, this went up against the views of many who didn't think Blacks had the intelligence to be a quarterback. I played on an all-white team against other all white teams where the opposing players tried to knock me out then kneed and kicked me when I was down. My brother, who was a very good football player, could have become a pro player in Baltimore, but he could not get hired as a quarterback. It just was not done in those days. When I got into college basketball, there were very few Black players. I was one of the first Black starters on my college team. Go see the movie "Glory Road" to understand what it was like.

From the talk I learned for the first time that there was a conscious shift of moving the NBA stadiums to the suburbs out of the inner cities where more Black people live. This is going on now in moving the S.F. 49'ers to the S.F. suburban Peninsula area and the Oakland A's to Fremont, another suburb.

It describes the treatment Hank Aaron got when he was about to pass up Babe Ruth's home run record. I have talked to Hank Aaron about what he went through. There was one game where someone jumped out of the stands and tried to shoot him. Avakian refers to the big controversy in sports about putting an asterisk after Barry Bonds' name once he surpasses Aaron's record. I really agree with Avakian's insight that there should be asterisks put next to the names of all players during the years that Black people were forbidden to play in the major leagues.

I am very pleased that Bob Avakian spoke to the Barry Bonds' controversy. I couldn't believe how deep his views were in examining Bonds' story in the context of the history of the exclusion of Black people from baseball. I know enough about athletes that I know some are using drugs, yet it is Bonds who is getting vilified, while others admitted to using supplements, even though it was during a time that use of such supplements weren't illegal, but it's Bonds who has faced such wrath. I think they want to embarrass Bonds because he is outspoken. Avakian's take on Barry Bonds is a very different perspective than what is being heard.

He made a good point in the story about Julius Irving where Larry Bird started a fight with Irving, yet the media manipulated what was shown on t.v. so Julius Irving was portrayed as the one who started the fight. This thing of changing the story is done all the time. A similar thing happened with the Joe Louis - Max Schmeling fight. I also agree that Larry Bird was built up as the "Great White Hope" when many Black players were as good, if not better.

Blacks were excluded from sports for years. They weren't allowed in the Industrial League and the story of Don Barksdale (one of the first Black players in the NBA) is an example of that. I played with the Harlem Globetrotters in one of their last series and I agree that the Globetrotters were very good as serious basketball players. The existence of the Globetrotters was influenced by the lack of Blacks in pro-basketball.

In my experience as a basketball player, Avakian makes a good point that there's a need for leadership and coaching. I don't agree with Bobby Knight's approach that the players don't know anything about the game and I think the players can understand more than the coach. I highly recommend that people listen to this talk and spread the word about it.

from Reverend Earl Kooperkamp, Pastor, St. Mary's Church, Harlem, NYC* on Revolution: Why It's Necessary? Why It's Possible? What It's All About

"In times like these, this clear voice for social change is a welcome relief from all the confusion and lies. Listen, and you will truly hear a voice of reason, with sharp analysis and deep understanding, going up against the tide of injustice and oppression. Of crucial importance is the fearless opposition to the rise of the Christian right and its pernicious effect on the political and cultural life in this country. While you might not agree with everything he says, he will challenge you with his insights and a clarion call to what must be done. "

from Rev. George W. Webber, President Emeritus, New York Theological Seminary* on Marxism and the Call of the Future: Conversations on Ethics, History, and Politics by Bob Avakian and Bill Martin

"This brilliant, lively, and scholarly attempt to define communism's present role in addressing the need to remake our world is especially timely in the face of the policies and actions of the Bush administration. Bob Avakian and Bill Martin are to be commended for their steadfast endeavors to bring about a new society. We owe them both our gratitude for this monumental effort to move our world toward justice and righteousness."

from a professor from Chicago on Preaching from a Pulpit of Bones: We Need Morality But Not Traditional Morality

"What is ethical thinking in a time of social fragmentation and imperialist globalization? Bob Avakian convincingly argues that morality has to be tied to a vision of a good society, a society free of exploitation and every form of domination. Even more does morality have to do with the struggle to

create such a society. Avakian points the way toward what some doubt is possible, a materialist ethics. Like Mao's, this is a Marxism that aims at a social analysis that is clear and systematic but not 'cold' – a Marxism with heart."

*for identification only