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The Power Team

Muscular Christianity and the Spectacle of Conversion

Sharon Mazer

It is good that the divine is associated with the Virgin Mary and a blissful Jesus, but we can sense how different it would be for young men if we lived in a culture where the divine also was associated with mad dancers, fierce fanged men, and a being entirely underwater, covered with hair.

—Robert Bly (1990:26)

Jesus Christ was no skinny little man. Jesus was a man's man.

—John Jacobs (TBN 1991a)

At the center of a nondescript auditorium stage, John Jacobs, a thick-necked muscular man wearing a red-white-and-blue, stars-and-strips nylon athletic costume, stands in a spotlight. His wrists have been first wrapped in silver duct tape and then locked into handcuffs. Another similarly dressed man—Mike Hagen—stands a step behind Jacobs and demands silence so that Jacobs can concentrate on the ordeal of breaking the handcuffs. Hagen holds a microphone to Jacobs' face. Jacobs tells us, "I am going to flex my arms and chest and upper back and push my body to the limit." His breathing is amplified as he strains against the handcuffs, first one way and then another, for perhaps as long as five minutes. At last, screaming, he breaks through the cuffs and triumphantly holds his now-separated hands above his head. The spectators cheer. Hagen, exultant, shouts: "Let's give Jesus a hand! Come on!" Jacobs takes the mike and chants: "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord" (JJE 1991).

The "chains of the devil" have been broken. Once again Jacobs tells the audience that his exceptional strength is both a sign of his faith in Christ and a demonstration of the power of God. The breaking of handcuffs is the final act in a series of feats of strength, testimonials, and

pitches for money, orchestrated and performed by John Jacobs and his Power Team as part of an evangelical crusade. Jacobs' success will be measured in the number of spectators who, moved by the performance, will decide to dedicate themselves to Christ. During the altar call, in what may be termed a spectacle of conversion, these spectators will step forward to receive a more personal blessing and to affirm their commitment to a born-again life by filling out the "decision cards" offered by the volunteers who stand ready to embrace new converts.¹

Performing the Word

Evangelical preaching has always been a highly visible form of performance in American culture, but never more so since the advent of cable television. The tradition it follows is rooted in the revival tents and medicine shows of 19th-century America. Today's evangelical ministers are pragmatists who extend their evangelical range with secular performance practices and the electronic media. The dramaturgy of each performance is carefully calculated to transmit the Word to large numbers of people as it finances evangelicalism's far-reaching efforts by way of the collection bucket and by mail. Through modern communications technologies, the "flocks" of these 20th-century preachers have become the world at large. Many no longer lead site-specific churches or congregations; instead, they minister to what have been termed "parachurches."²

Parachurch preachers offer themselves "for hire" to churches around the country as well as broadcast their "services" via satellite from churches, tents, auditoriums, and television studios. As such, their performances of exhortation conflate the quest for Christian salvation with a more secular brand of show- and salesmanship. According to Hadden and Shupe:

When Johnny Carson breaks for a commercial, even if Ed McMahon is hawking the product, there is a psychological distance between the "real" program and the selling of a sponsor's product. For religious broadcasters, the tasks of preaching, entertaining, and selling are all intertwined. (1985:130)

Or as another historian puts it: "If 'sin' advertised itself in sensational terms, then God must be advertised still more colorfully. If the Devil offered amusement, so must the angels" (Weisberger 1958:230). Indeed, the spectacle of conversion has become theatricalized to such a high degree that we must now consider such performances as part of secular performance culture, and their followers more as audiences than as congregations.

John Jacobs and his Power Team explicitly acknowledge their calculation in conflating popular performance practices with evangelical proselytizing. In Jacobs' own words, he is a "soul-winner," a "fisher of men" who performs feats of strength in order to attract non-Christian audiences to the evangelical message. In *People Magazine*, Jacobs explains the Power Team's "melding of circus and religion" as "bait" (in Grant 1988:111). Team members reiterate this theme in their own interviews. Mike Hughes tells a reporter for the *Repository*, a Canton, Ohio, community paper: "God doesn't care about us breaking rocks. This is just a tool. He told us to be 'fishers of men.' This is only the bait" (in Goshay 1992:B3). In another interview, Craig Lemley echoes: "It's a bait to

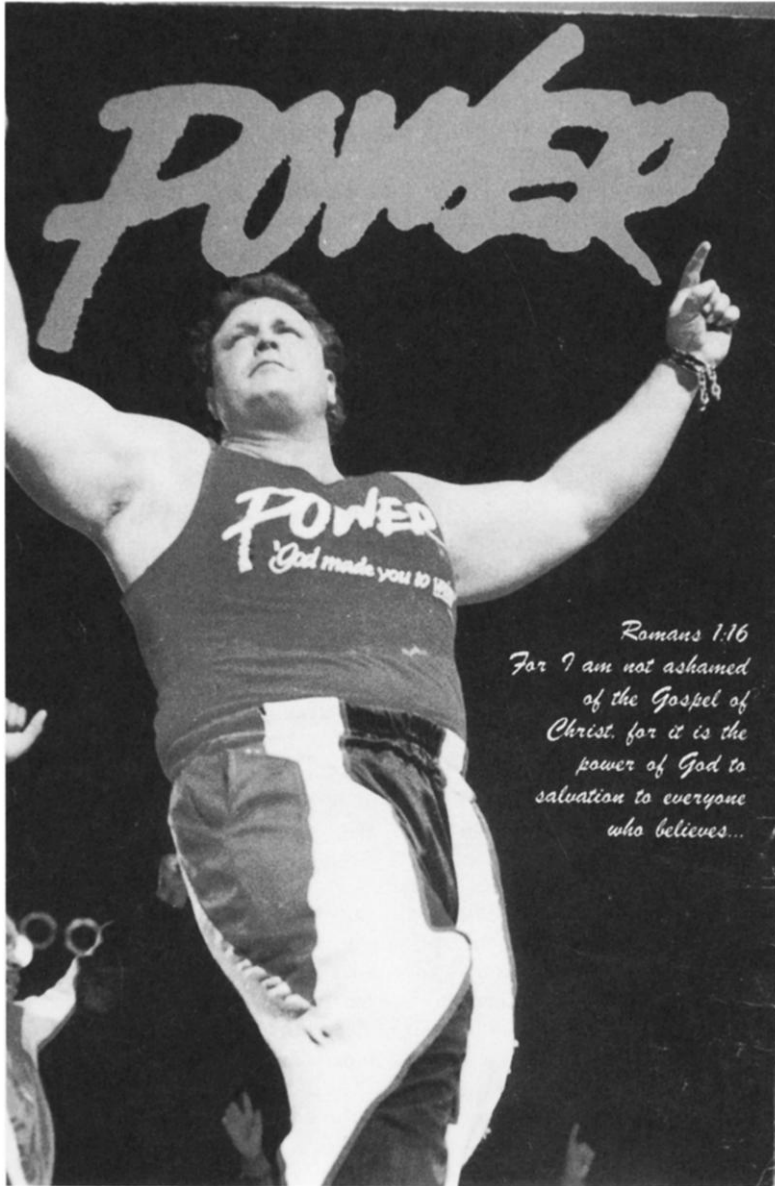
hook the people who would never come to a regular church service" (in Korten 1993:14). And John Kopta tells a reporter for the *Galveston Daily News*: "All we do on this stage is bait. [...] People won't go to church, but they'll come to see us do these crazy things" (in Yewman 1993:15A; see also Pritts 1992:9). Furthermore, the pastors who invite the Power Team to perform are equally comfortable with the fishing metaphor; Pastor E.C. Damiani at the Faith Assembly of God in Poughkeepsie, New York, told me the Team's exhibition was an effective "hook" for drawing young people into the church (1991).

By buying tickets, spectators agree to listen to the Team's testimonials, to its pleas for money and its prayers for their redemption. In return, they are offered the spectacle of muscular young men ripping phone books, bending steel, lifting logs, exploding hot water bottles, and breaking all sorts of odd objects including blocks of ice, burning cinder blocks, and handcuffs. These "muscular Christians"—the phrase was first coined in this country by baseball-player-turned-preacher Billy Sunday (1862–1935)³—display their bodies as a sign of spiritual power, poised against the imprecations of vice, itself defined, in large part, as society at large. Their ability to break things represents the strength necessary to resist the lure of drugs, alcohol, premarital sex, gang violence, and generalized despair. Members of the Team often claim a primary role in preventing teen suicides. Mike Hughes articulates the Team's agenda in the public schools: "We're not able to mention the Gospel in the schools, but we warn kids against the dangers of drugs, alcohol and teen suicide" (in Goshay 1992:B3). In another report, Keith Davis tells a group of young people: "Many of you are thinking of giving up too soon" (in Wilson 1992:8A). Elsewhere, Berry Handley points to "the teen who was considering suicide but changed her mind, that makes all the hours of working out with weights and practicing stunts worthwhile" (in Holland 1993:182).

Indeed, the Team's performances can be breathtaking at times, a testament to the potential power and grace of the human body. But these exhibitions are also deliberately designed to manipulate and sustain a highly programmatic spectator response. That is, everything that happens on the stage is calculated to induce large numbers of people to come forward, to leave their seats and step to the edge of the stage where they can dedicate (or rededicate) themselves to Christ at the end of the evening.

The John Jacobs Evangelistic Association offers live performances of the Power Team across the country and around the world. In the United States, the Team is generally booked by a host church for a "crusade." Promotional materials include inch-thick stacks of recommendations from other churches, as well as from government and school officials. Warning that "Power Team crusades can last anywhere from 3 to 7 days, and require much preparation and planning to ensure a successful event for the Kingdom of God and your community" (Bryant 1991), the Association provides a "Crusade Questionnaire" to aid in figuring the cost of sponsorship, promising converts in exchange for the church's investment. The Team actually performs in civic centers, hotel ballrooms, sports palaces, fairgrounds, or under tents during a week that culminates at the host church's Sunday services where members of the Team lead the worship before a now substantially increased membership.

The Power Team's circuit is generally rural, but it does make appearances in more urban areas such as Tacoma, Orange County, and Chicago, in addition to appearing around the world—for example, London,



1. The chains of the devil have been broken. Handcuffs dangling, John Jacobs—evangelist and Power Team founder—proclaims the power of God. From a Power Team promotional brochure. (Photo courtesy of Sharon Mazer)

Cape Town, and Jerusalem—in performances cosponsored with other evangelistic associations. On the Power Team's promotional video (JJEA 1991), for example, much is made of the Team's six-day crusade in Russia, where they claim to have performed for over 70,000 people and to have won 50,000 converts. The video repeatedly conflates the images of the victory over communism—the Berlin wall crumbles, Havel and Walesa speak to crowds of joyous Eastern Europeans, candles are lit and people dance in the streets—with images of the Power Team crashing through bricks and breaking ice. While not claiming credit for the collapse of the communist block, Jacobs clearly exploits the emotional resonance of world events, equating the defeat of the secular satan with the Christian version.

The Power Team claims the “power to move a generation” in most of its promotional materials, and while its audiences are, in actuality, a mixture of the faithful and the curious, old and young, its stated target is in fact young men in their teens and early twenties. In his interview with Meg Grant of *People Magazine*, Jacobs claims to have spoken “in person to over one million teenagers” in the previous year. Grant goes on to note: “On this night in Tacoma, Jacobs calls down the converts for their public rebirth. About a thousand teenagers come forward to proclaim their newfound faith” (1988:112). To attract these young audiences, the Team positions itself in competition with, and employs the tricks of, other performance practices aimed at teens. All live performances are videotaped for later broadcast over the Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN), which is owned and operated by evangelicals Paul and Jan Crouch, who reserve a regular place for “The Power Connection” in the Saturday lineup in direct competition with cartoons, MTV, American Gladiators, and professional wrestling. The Team also offers inspirational educational programs at no charge to public school administrators. These school programs are necessarily stripped of explicit references to God, Christ, the Spirit, Christianity, and salvation. Nonetheless, the Power Team’s ostensibly secular exhibitions increase its mainstream visibility and serve as promotional events for the evening performances. The *People Magazine* reporter describes school performances simply and uncritically:

During the day, Jacobs and his Power Team have been visiting schools to put on a teaser—ripping phone books and bending steel—and delivering a motivational speech that includes warnings against drugs, liquor and sex. Then they invite the students to an evening performance at a nearby church, where the pitch is religious. (Grant 1988:111)

Endorsements from public school officials are scrupulous in reassuring others, as in this letter from the principal of Woodway High School in Edmonds, Washington: “Though an avowd [*sic*] fundamentalist Christian group, not one single reference or allusion was made to God, church, religion, or Christianity” (Sankey 1987). At school assemblies, the Power Team performs a few of the feats in its repertoire, shares its “self-esteem” message—i.e., say no to drugs, alcohol, and sex before marriage—and promises a bigger and better spectacle in the evening. The young spectators then go home and convince their parents to take the entire family to the local civic center to see the Power Team uncensored.

That the 20th-century trade in souls requires increasingly sophisticated machinery to attract participants and to sustain itself is evident in the Power Team’s live and televised performances. What we see is essentially a pastiche that visibly mimics many of the most popular, most secular forms of performance. In the words of one newspaper reporter: “The popularity of championship wrestling and ‘American Gladiators’ with national audiences is a strong indication that men mixing brawn with theatrics will find large audiences wherever they perform” (Holland 1993:182). He later adds: “Americans like muscles, and they like to be entertained” (1993:182). In one interview, John Kopta calls what he and other Team members do “three years worth of ‘That’s Incredible’ packed into an hour and 15 minutes” (in Yewman 1993:15A). In another interview, Kopta directly points to the influence of professional

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TEAM**

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Promotional flyer for John Jacobs' and the Power Team's evangelical crusade from 17–21 July 1991 at the Everett (Washington) Civic Auditorium. (Courtesy of Sharon Mazer)

wrestling: “What attracts people to our shows is the same reason Wrestlemania packs thousands into auditoriums. [...] It's a good way to get their attention” (in Jackson n.d.:C1).

As in professional wrestling, the Power Team's display of its pumped-up male bodies and what those bodies can do becomes a sign for less-visible values, its televised broadcasts are in large part advertisements for live performances, and the entire setup is calculated to attract ever

larger audiences who are pushed to spend ever-increasing sums of money both for merchandise and for the opportunity to see the stars up close again and again. Like American Gladiators, the Team displays powerful bodies dressed in patriotic colors performing feats that ordinary people cannot.

Borrowing a large part of its syntax from MTV, the Power Team performs its acts against a musical backdrop, particularly in the TBN broadcasts, where breakthrough moments are collaged, replayed in slow motion, and underscored with choruses of "Gospel Rock":

Our God is an awesome God.⁴
He reigns from heaven above.
With wisdom, power and love,
Our God is an awesome God.

In addition, John Jacobs frequently flexes his muscles against performers such as Prince and Madonna directly: "And I tell you, Mr. Prince, there isn't going to be any Purple Rain. There's going to be a reign of power from Heaven!" (TBN 1991b). Like characters in the children's cartoons against which the TBN broadcasts are positioned, each member of the Team has superhuman qualities which are proved against apparently immovable obstacles. Indeed, one newspaper headline blares: "Move over Batman, God has a new team of Superheroes" (Brown 1992), and the Power Team even markets its own comic book. In Jacobs' words:

America loves a hero, but the hero Americans should love most [...], a comeback story bigger than Rocky, that makes Rocky look like checkers [is Jesus Christ] who died on the cross on Friday. Jesus Christ is no little fairy-tale. [...] He whipped the devil on his own turf. (TBN 1992a)

With their explicit evocations of popular performance, the members of the Power Team present themselves as bonafide stars in terms recognizable by a wide, secular audience. Jacobs is extremely savvy in making his performances visible outside the evangelical community and in using that visibility to promote himself as a successful evangelical performer. Beyond the Team's regular TBN appearances and its international tours, members are frequently interviewed in the secular press. Countless examples of newspaper and journal coverage—notably the spot in *People Magazine*—are included in the materials used to promote the Team to potential church sponsors, and Jacobs has appeared on local television stations, on CNN, and on the BBC, where he told one interviewer: "We're just Christians who happen to be strong" (JJE 1991). For the Team's audiences, therefore, seeing John Jacobs and his Team-mates "live" and "in person" is equivalent to seeing a film, TV, or rock star live and in person. To see members performing up close and to be seen by them, to be touched and blessed in the most literal way, is to be welcomed into a magic circle defined by the aura of celebrity that the Team very deliberately projects. And while Jacobs is adamant in his self-presentation as a missionary, a person who rejects the lure of lucre and fame for the selfless goal of saving souls, it is clear that he thrives both on attention to his celebrity and on contributions to his coffers.

Men on a Mission

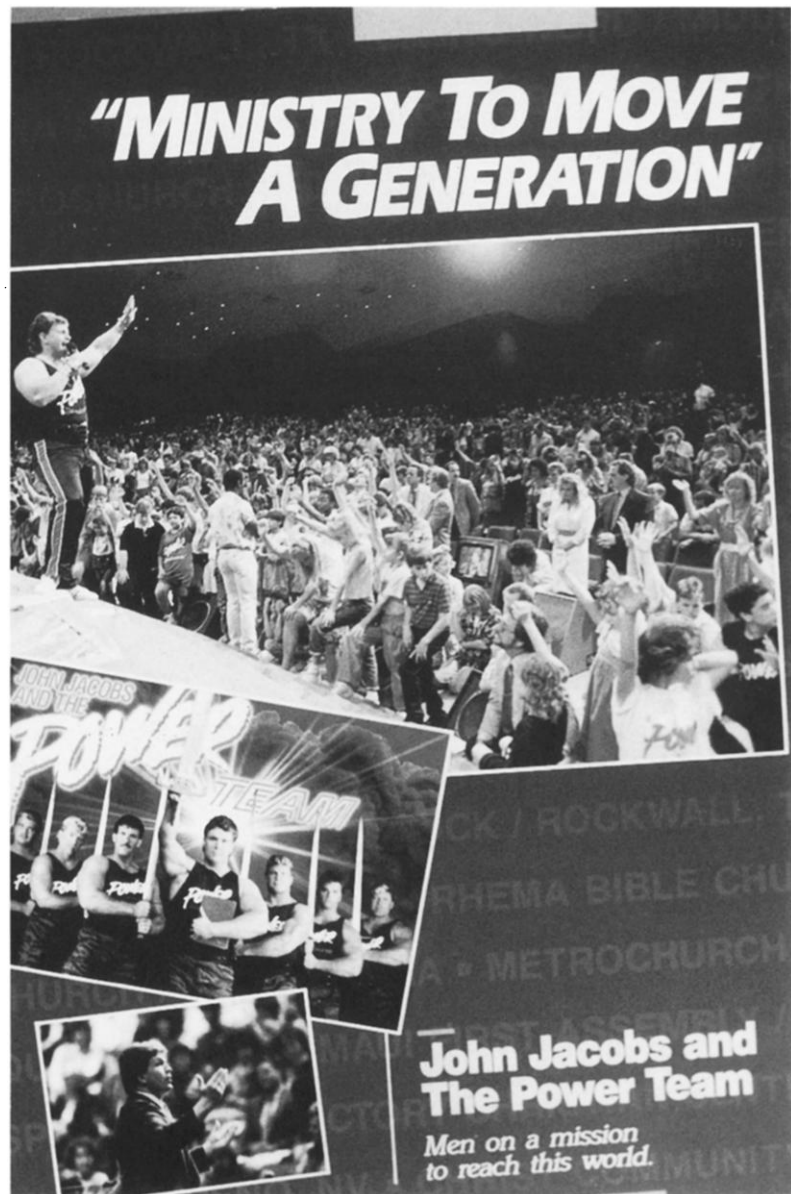
The Power Team's performance resembles nothing so much as a psychomachia, a morality play in which human actors stand in for virtue and vice in the struggle for the soul of man. However, in the Team's dialectic, the opposition is not human, but rather inanimate, unspeaking objects which lack voice or volition—unlike the expressive range and passion of medieval vice figures. The confrontation is thus one-sided. The Team represents the forces of virtue as heroic men who, glistening with the sweat of their struggles, challenge apparently immovable objects that are variously articulated in the Team's discourse as representative of vice, the devil, or other antichristical forces. They are, in their own self-presentation, "Men on a mission to reach this world" (JJE 1988), crusaders who carry the signs of faith in their bodies rather than on medieval banners.

The Team is very explicit about the significance of breaking concrete. For example, Mike Hughes claims "Our program illustrates the barriers and stumbling blocks that can be overcome through Jesus" (in Goshay 1992:B3; see also Holland 1993:182). Or as one less-than-secular newspaper headline crows: "Satan and concrete beware" (Korten 1993:14). In this modern psychomachia, then, when the men break through the cinder blocks, ice, handcuffs, etc., they symbolically defeat the obstacles to faith and clear the path to redemption.

The iconography and rhetoric of the Power Team's performances is explicit: the display of the disciplined male body is a stand-in for the less-visible soul. The Team members' hypermasculine bodies, their bulky muscles—"biceps the size of small children," says one newspaper reviewer (Yewman 1993:1A)—along with their ability to perform what appear to be extrahuman feats of strength, are signs both of the men's devotion to Christ and of His power as it is manifested in man. That my body is powerful, Jacobs tells his audiences, that I can perform as other men cannot is due to God's grace, which I have earned by dedicating myself—soul and body—to Christ. For example, Bart Desendel tells an interviewer: "What we do is not miraculous. It's a result of hard training and preparation. Our prayer and faith help us sustain our high level of training" (Jackson n.d.:C1). In the vernacular of the Power Team, the male body, as it is recognized and defined by its muscularity, literally enacts a promise to Christian men that their bodies can be likewise powerful at the same time that it acts as a manifestation of the Spirit which would otherwise remain invisible.

The Team's equation of masculinity with spiritual and physical power would be unremarkable but for the degree to which Jacobs and his fellow Team members are explicit in their repudiation of what they consider to be the "feminization" of Christianity.⁵ They repeatedly attribute to the dominant (i.e., non-Christian) culture the idea that Christian men are somehow less "manly" than non-Christian men and then dare nonbelievers to question their masculinity. In the words of Team member Mike Hagen: "What makes me sick is when people say that Christians are sissies" (TBN 1992b). Jacobs himself often elaborates upon the proclamation that "Jesus was no skinny little man. Jesus was a man's man." Evangelical zeal, in Jacobs' terms, becomes what "separates the men from the boys" (TBN 1992a). Moreover, the Team's display of masculine muscularity is derived from, and provides a model of, an idealized Christian patriarchy. The battle for converts is to be fought in masculine terms, man to man, with men on earth as stand-ins for God-

2. *The Power to move a generation is conflated with the ability to bring in new congregants (from a Power Team promotional brochure). (Brochure courtesy of Sharon Mazer)*



the-Father. According to Jacobs: "Satan is trying to steal this generation of children. Their Father wants them back!" (reiterated during various broadcasts and on the 1991 video).

It is tempting to offer a psychoanalytic explanation for Jacobs' missionary zeal in repeating his rather limited thematics. In almost every appearance, live and taped, he refers to his parents' divorce when he was ten years old, to his despair at losing his father, and to the power of God to be a "father to the fatherless." Addressing his audience as husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers, Jacobs urges men to reclaim their families' spiritual lives from the feminine realm.⁶ According to Jacobs, too many fathers have relinquished to mothers their roles as both models and authority figures for their sons. A real man takes his family to

church, leads his family in prayer and devotion, and otherwise ensures that the lives of his wife and children conform to Christian doctrine. Every man in the audience, Jacobs insists, has the potential to become like God the Father. Not only is each man's body and spirit subject to control and constraint, but a truly devoted husband and father should build his family—and his community—in h/His image; he should, that is, control and constrain them as well as himself.

Making Everett "too hot for the devil"

In addition to scrutinizing a videotape purchased directly from the John Jacobs Evangelistic Association and watching numerous Power Team broadcasts over the course of a year or more, I witnessed a live performance of the Power Team at the Civic Auditorium in Everett, Washington, on Thursday, 18 July 1991. This particular crusade was sponsored by the Living Word Christian Center with performances in the Civic Auditorium for five consecutive nights. In addition, the Team toured local schools during the days and led the Sunday service at the Christian Center. Each appearance was videotaped for future broadcast and was also photographed for publicity purposes and souvenir distribution. What follows primarily outlines and analyzes the Power Team's performance during the Everett crusade, which was consistent with everything I have learned from conversations with pastors and from watching its various programs and videos before and since.

The audience waiting patiently on two lines outside the Everett Civic Auditorium is excited but orderly, relatively homogeneous, white and apparently lower middle class, but then this is a relatively rural town, not New York or even Everett's more urban neighbor, Tacoma. It is a warm, glowing evening, a few hours before sunset. Families predominate; casually dressed, they pile out of their cars in groups of four or five or more, join the lines, and converse with their neighbors as their children dart around. Many seem to have already seen the Power Team perform, either the previous night, in school, or in earlier crusades. Many are already wearing Power Team T-shirts. Some carry Bibles. Certain male spectators stand out as body-builders: their stance on line is somewhat self-conscious, their sculpted muscles bulge from their T-shirts; their equally sculpted, bleached, gelled, and moussed hair is crew-cut short on top and punk-rock long down their backs, and their voices are raised a little louder than the others discussing how much they can lift and what it takes to break bricks. Admission is a remarkably inexpensive two dollars. But opportunities to spend more money are in evidence: souvenir tables loaded with posters, autographed pictures, T-shirts, and other Power Team memorabilia (including miniature Louisville slugger baseball bats and handcuffs) as well as flyers for future Living Word Christian Center events (one features "Soldiers for Christ," two men of color in shades with lots of gold, who appear to be a rap group out of Chino, California). Volunteers from the Christian Center wearing Power Team T-shirts are easy to spot. They cheerfully greet the crowd, encouraging people to purchase souvenirs even as they point the way to the auditorium and to the restrooms.

In the auditorium, the stage is already lit as people scope out the best seats. Scaffolds of varying heights are positioned behind blocks of ice

covered in blue quilts, stacks of cinder blocks, and other paraphernalia. On the stage, members of the Power Team—easily recognizable in their red-white-and-blue stars-and-stripes sweats—mingle with other men wearing black Power Team T-shirts, as well as with church officials and other privileged members of the community, including a few uniformed police officers. Stationary television cameras are also visible about five rows from the stage at house right and left. As house lights dim, the audience comes to attention. Still and video photographers begin to circulate at the edge of the stage. Over the loudspeakers, the Power Team's theme song is played at a decibel level worthy of a rock concert:

We are destined to win,
Surrounded by His love,
Guided by His power.
Destined to win.
We . . . are . . . destined . . . to . . . win!

A series of introductions and acknowledgments marks the shift from the secular world of the Civic Auditorium to the sacred performance of the crusade. First to appear is Pastor Frank Pina of the Living Word Christian Center. He offers a welcome and a benediction, then introduces the county sheriff. The sheriff admonishes the youth present to mind their manners, to be respectful of the performers, of their parents, and the church, and to "just say no" to drugs. Finally, Jacobs takes over as emcee. He greets the spectators and is loudly welcomed with applause and cheers. He praises the pastor and his church for their evangelical commitment, introduces Team members, and reminds spectators

3. & 4. Power Team global crusades are documented in their newsletter, the Power Line. (Photos courtesy of Sharon Mazer)



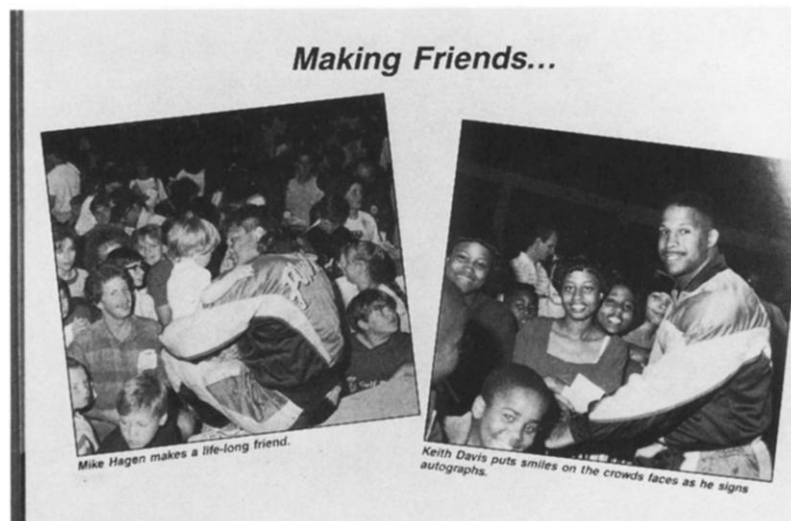
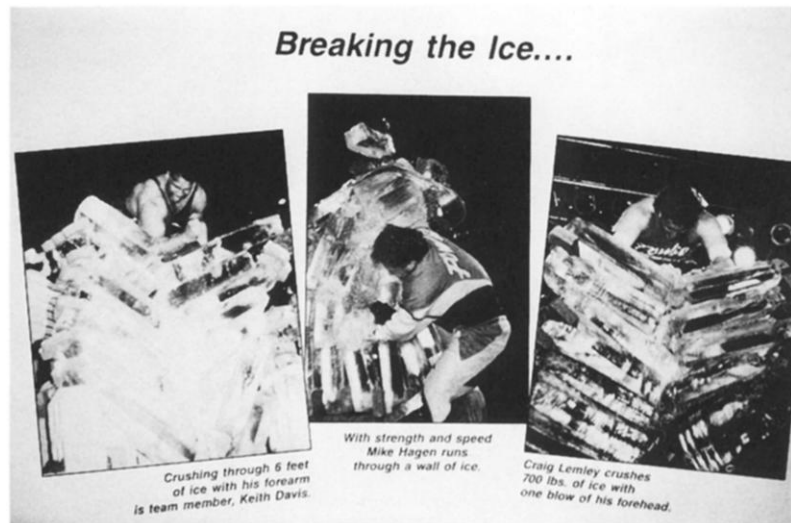
that their reason for being present transcends the spectacle. Asserting his authority in a manner much like that of the sheriff, Jacobs then singles out a young man, who appears to have been whispering and laughing with his buddies, as a scoffer, warning him, along with the other young men in the audience, to take this performance seriously. The Power Team is here to lead spectators in witnessing, worshipping, and otherwise demonstrating their devotion to Christ. To be disrespectful of the performers is to offend the Higher Power. The audience applauds this forceful demonstration of paternal authority. Finally, Jacobs promises that, with the audience's support, the Power Team can make the city of Everett "too hot for the devil." The spectators roar their approval.

The Power Team's exhibition of strength is patterned in a consistent, ever intensifying cycle of anticipation, exhortation, engagement, climax, and reflection. Like professional wrestling, the setup, which is verbal, is extended to create desire for the payoff, which is action. Jacobs first points to the areas of the stage and the objects which have been readied—to the sweating ice, stacked bricks, hot water bottles, etc.—as he paints a picture of the feats the audience will soon see performed: "With no fear he will slam his forehead into this block of ice. [...] With lightning speed, he crashes his skull straight through." Jacobs outlines the dangers faced by the performer: "Blowing up this hot water bottle, the air can rush back and rupture your lung." Jacobs then initiates a sequence of testimonials which culminate in a homily and a prayer. He reiterates the promise of the spectacle to come, but pauses to perform one of a variety of homiletic pitches for money. In his pitches, he calls on the Christian Center volunteers to pass the collection buckets or pushes spectators to purchase souvenirs or "artifacts." The money collected, Jacobs offers another prayer. Finally, the feats are performed. The spectators cheer. Jacobs leads them in prayer, then begins to describe the next set of feats.

"Look how strong we are. Let us tell you why."

By separating words from spectacle, Jacobs stands against the inherent tensions between his mission and the seduction of his own performance. Throughout the performance he explicitly points to the Team's bodies: "Look how strong we are." He then explains the source and significance of the men's strength. The exchange between performers and spectators is simultaneously evangelical and economic: both in paying attention to the Team's sermons and in paying dollars in donations and purchases, spectators are to be rewarded with an exciting demonstration of strength along with the added bonus of a chance at eternal life. The talking part of the cycle seems to take a very long time—at least 30 minutes—while the action itself is very brief—perhaps 3 to 5 minutes at most. The extended period in which the spectacle is promised but not yet performed is clearly calculated to elevate and sustain a high degree of suspense in much the same way, and with about as much subtlety, as a circus ringleader teases his spectators with the idea that they will soon be treated to the sight of a man putting his head in the lion's mouth. The time that elapses from the first description to the actual action, along with the constant presence on the stage of the objects to be confronted, permits spectators to build an elaborate picture of the feat in their imaginations.

That the picture Jacobs paints faithfully matches the action the Team performs implies an equivalent connection between words and deeds in



5. & 6. From a Power Team souvenir program, the gentle giant imagery is calculated to amaze and draw in audience members. (Photos courtesy of Sharon Mazer)

relation to the evangelical agenda. That is, if what Jacobs claims is manifestly true of the Team's power, then it must also be true of God's power. That he truthfully represents the spectacle to the audience signals the authenticity of his representation of the sacred. That the Team member performs the feat without serious injury is a manifestation of God's power as it protects him at the moment of duress. Furthermore, the relationship of word to deed literally mimics the theological relationship between the eternal and the temporal: the Word of God, it is clear, lasts far longer than any body-bound spectacle.

It is difficult to remain unimpressed by what these men can do, but it is also difficult to resist skepticism. It is most apparent that the spectacle itself is an elaboration upon sideshow strongman standards when one man lies on a bed of nails while another, lying on the first man's chest, lifts a barbell. These feats demand both brute strength and precise skill, to be sure, but many also—according to my informants—employ no small amount of illusion and not a little deception.⁷ Perhaps the most

conventional trick is the breaking of huge stacks of cinder blocks. With the Team member perched on scaffolding—his concentration as he bends toward the blocks several times and the explosion of debris as his arms or forehead make contact—the appearance of power is striking indeed. But by looking closely, it is possible to see that the blocks are individually separated by small shivs of wood, so that the force of the first block breaking actually causes a chain reaction. That is, the performer has only to generate enough force to break the first block; momentum dispatches the rest. Moreover, the way in which the blocks crumble upon contact indicates a strong probability that they have been baked; past a certain point, the drier the brick, the less “concrete” it becomes. Similarly, when the ice blocks appear in stacks, they are separated by shivs, so that to break one is to cause the stack to collapse. Ice, in particular, requires only a precise tap for cracks to spread. Then too, the huge singular blocks of ice that appear so formidable on the stage may have equally huge air-cavities frozen inside.

Phone books, hot water bottles, and steel bars can be baked, scored, or otherwise prepared, as can handcuffs—although a deception here is harder to discern. Breaking baseball bats is relatively simple when pressure is placed on the proper point. It is, in fact, possible that the only genuine, nonillusory display of strength occurs with the lifting of heavy objects—in Everett, a tree log. Even then, the impression of strength is enhanced by the apparent effort with which two or more men, either other members of the Team or stagehands, lift the object into place for the performer. That Team members are strong is not in question, of course, but neither is the degree to which the feats are staged rather than “natural” and the effects upon the audience calculated rather than naive.

“Look me in the eyes!”

Audience response is remarkably controlled throughout the Power Team’s performance. As with his initial confrontation with the young scoffer, Jacobs immediately and directly attacks any outburst of laughter or talking out of turn. He stops in midsentence, points to the offender, challenges him to admit the truth of the homily in progress and to acknowledge both the power of the preacher and the power of God. It is an effective technique for commanding renewed attention from everyone in the audience. From where I sit in the balcony I am never quite sure that there has been a real infraction—I never see the disruption, never hear the laughter or the chattering—but I can feel spectators around me straightening up, perhaps wanting to avoid being singled out, or perhaps in what is simply a sympathetic, reflexive response to hearing someone being scolded. The message is unambiguous and not unlike Christian doctrine in general: behave according to the script or risk exposure and censure.

Beyond this directly confrontational, explicitly authoritative stance, Jacobs also deploys a wide range of strategies for structuring and containing our responses to the performance and to his message. Many of these strategies, particularly his mode of direct address, are recognizable from evangelical preaching practice present and past.⁸ The lights in the auditorium are constantly being raised or lowered, so that the audience moves from high visibility to relative invisibility. Jacobs puts spectators on the spot, looking at us directly as he asks us to respond to repeated, generally rhetorical questions, which invariably begin with “How many of you know...?” as in “How many of you know that to have your fa-

ther walk out on you when you are only ten years old is a terrible loss?" He explicitly directs spectator response to segments of the performance, telling us when to cheer and when to be silent, when (and how) to pray, when to put money in the plate, when to be impressed and on what terms, and so on. Moreover, Jacobs frequently demands that spectators "look [him] in the eyes" in a manner that recalls the vaudeville hypnotist, as he repeats the crux of his homily.

Spectator response to the Power Team's performance is situated within a closed system in which no alternate or outsider position is visible. The live performances employ a group of ten or more men whose role is to set the stage and then to act as model spectators, demonstrating respect and reverence by listening to Jacobs and watching the action. Because these stagehands are visibly less muscular than Jacobs and the other Team members—for example, it takes four of these men to position the log into place so that a single Team member can lift it—they make the Team seem even stronger in contrast. When not clearing the breakage from the previous action and preparing the stage for the next phase, these men, wearing Power Team T-shirts, sit on scattered cinder blocks upstage. As such, they reflect and model audience response throughout the performance, much as a church choir might, by bowing their heads or cheering as Jacobs commands. In the televised broadcasts, the role of this onstage audience is mirrored by the auditorium audience, which has been filmed along with the performers; that is, those of us attending the performance at the Everett Civic Auditorium will have been captured on tape by the Team's crews, in effect becoming part of the spectacle that the at-home audience will then watch on TBN. The onstage audience at the live performances are, of course, completely engaged and responsive to the Power Team's actions. What spectators see, if they happen to be looking instead of praying, are rapt, devoted faces, eyes shining with inspiration or humbly closed in prayer.

The Team's rhetoric is always repetitive, easy to hear and easy to remember. The hyperbole is inflated but simple. If the theme of the evening is "Who can stop the pain?" Jacobs will repeat the question perhaps 20 or 30 times: "A girl came up to me, her arms scraped raw. She told me she was trying to erase herself. And I cried to God, 'Lord? Who can stop the pain?'" (JJEA 1991). Jacobs reminds the audience that the Team's strength is fueled by faith in the power of God—a refrain familiar to those who watch the TV broadcasts: "We don't need anabolic steroids; we got the Holy Ghost" (TBN 1992a). Throughout the Power Team's promotional materials and in interviews, members reiterate that they have "been tested by blood, urine and polygraph by licensed physicians for the use of steroids or drugs, all the tests have been returned negative" (JJEA n.d.).

Throughout the Everett performance, Jacobs echoes the sideshow barker as he teases: "In a few minutes, Berry will use his arms to destroy two 6-foot-high walls of ice, while Mike breaks 12 feet of ice with his head." Later: "In just a moment, you will see John, Keith, and me bend these pieces of steel, each an inch in diameter, with our teeth." Closing his tease with an implied, or actual, "But first," Jacobs begins to testify or introduces another member of the Team to tell his story. The stories are apocryphal and repeated from performance to performance: "I idealized my father, but he abandoned me when I was ten. [...] When I found Jesus at age 12 I found my true father. How many of you know that Jesus is a father to the fatherless?" (Jacobs). Or,

Anointed by the Holy Spirit, John Jacobs and The Power Team, united with the local church, have reached deep into the lost community across America and around the world.

When they come to your city the results will be eternal!

John Jacobs Exangelistic Association
 P.O. Box 1088 / Rockwall, Texas 75087
 (214) 225-0000

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 PRINTED IN USA

7. The Power Team promises both to entertain and to redeem, even teenagers with punk haircuts. This is from a Power Team brochure. (Photo courtesy of Sharon Mazer)

"When I was in high school I did all the things a kid does to be part of the crowd—drugs, sex, drinking—but then my wrestling coach shared his faith with me, and I got down on the mat with him and dedicated my life to Jesus" (Handley). Or, "I was a professional football player, people wanted to get next to me, and I thought I was somebody [...] but when I was injured, I was a nobody. [...] My love for Jesus is bigger than fame or money, it makes me a winner" (Hagen).

Jacobs closes each testimonial phase by calling for the audience's agreement: "How many of you know that Jesus is a father to the fatherless, that when you give your life to Jesus you don't have to please the crowd, that loving Jesus makes you somebody, it makes you a man?" (JJE 1991). The spectacle of manly men sharing their feelings,

fears, and ideals perhaps runs contrary to clichés of manhood, but beyond the expected born-again narrative of “I was lost and now I’m saved” is a performative strategy for creating a sense of immediacy, intimacy, and authenticity. The enactment of personal revelation justifies each man’s participation in the performance as missionary rather than exhibitionistic. The narratives explain why the members of the Team are there to be looked at and why we are looking at them.

The Law of Increasing Returns

In Everett, the promise of the spectacle is regularly put on hold so that Jacobs can make a surprisingly unsubtle pitch for contributions. Jacobs repeatedly informs us that the Living Word Christian Center has covered only a small portion of the Team’s expenses. In one pitch, he worries that the Team must raise at least \$40,000 in order to continue bringing their wives and children with them on their crusades. He invites Mike Hagen’s five-year-old daughter to the stage as an example, providing the following dialog: “Do you love your daddy?” “Yes!” “Do you love Jesus?” “Yes!” The buckets are passed by volunteers. In another, his homily turns to the idea of “increasing returns” with the story of a boy who spent his last few dollars on a replica of the Louisville Sluggers bats that the Team regularly breaks in their act. As Jacob tells it, hearing about the Power Team’s need for money to continue its ministry, the boy thought for a moment, then returned the bat so that he could put the five dollar refund into the collection plate, whereupon a woman sitting behind him was so touched by his devotion that she went out to the lobby and purchased the bat for the boy. Praise the Lord. The collection buckets are passed. In another pitch, Jacobs pushes the souvenirs even more directly by showing us a couple of T-shirts as he again reminds us of the Team’s urgent need for funds.

In the biggest pitch of the evening, Jacobs presents three pages of the “original 1613 King James Bible.” Each page is framed with a certificate of authenticity attached; for a \$1,000 contribution three individuals in the audience can actually own these sacred artifacts. For this one, we are told to close our eyes in prayer to the Holy Spirit as three members of the Team circulate the auditorium: “I know that the Spirit will move three people in the audience to raise their hands and write a check. [...] This is a private matter, between the individual and Jesus. [...] Oh Lord [he prays], let there be three people moved by your Spirit tonight.” In time, three people do raise their hands, checks are written, the Lord is praised, and the show goes on. It is easy, of course, to assume that at least the first of those check writers was planted to inspire spectators to mimic his actions. Still, it is a display of reverent expectation that a miracle will be performed by members of the audience as part of the larger performance of devotion.

The commodification of salvation is unrelenting. Jacobs is not Christ chasing the money-changers from the temple; neither has he taken a vow of poverty, although much of the Team’s public remarks point to their common-man lifestyles. All donated money goes toward financing crusades, John Kopta tells one interviewer, who assures his readers: “They fly tourist, drive in regular cars, and have regular homes. [...] Extravagance is not the name of the game for this group of dedicated people [...]” (in Brown 1992). Nonetheless, in Everett Jacobs tells stories of big game hunting in Alaska with the same energy that he devotes to reminding the audience that crusades are costly. Without

apology or obfuscation, he attaches the call for contributions to the Power Team's larger agenda. It is the Power Team's devotion to sharing the Word with people around the world that has brought them to Everett, but there is a price; that there are spectators willing to pay that price is a sign of the power of God and the righteousness of the mission. According to Hadden and Shupe:

[W]hat critics of televangelism demean as the "continual begging" for money does more than simply raise the revenues needed to continue broadcasting. Contributions go to a cause, and the contributors are bearing witness to that cause every time they give. (1985:53)

The same ethic is in evidence more than a year later when I call the John Jacobs Evangelistic Association requesting a videotape; for a \$25 donation the tape is mine, as is my eternal place on a mailing list from which I now receive offers of enticing items, notably the "Power Sword Bible" if I send additional donations.

Destined to Win

The shift from words to action is frequently underscored by the Power Team's theme song, "We are destined to win!" or other similarly evangelicized rock music, although on one or two occasions Jacobs calls for silence. The acts themselves happen relatively quickly, taking less than three minutes for the stage to be littered with debris. Each man demonstrates psychic preparation as he approaches his station, repeatedly running and stopping just short of the block of ice, or bending toward stacks of cinder blocks, or testing the weight and heft of a tree log (this was, after all, Washington state) before actually breaking through. Guided by dramatic shifts in lighting and the swing of the follow spot, the focus moves rapidly from one man's feat to the next. During each man's preparation we are told either to cheer him on—"Let's hear you cheer for Berry and for Christ!"—or to be silent to preserve his concentration—"This feat is so dangerous that any sound you make may cause grave injuries." Each man's preparatory moments, his breathing pattern and whoosh of energy, may be amplified by another Team member standing behind, holding a microphone to his face. At the moment of breakthrough, music again bursts from the loudspeakers, the Team shouts "Praise the Lord" or leads the audience in a cheer: "Give me a J! Give me an E! [...]" The cheers and applause are quickly followed by a call for silence and prayer.

What we see may best be described, then, in terms of the heroic or epic ordeal: at once a test of faith and proof of God's power made manifest in the men's straining, sweating bodies. They concentrate, strive, and break through barriers which are both concrete (literally) and abstract. That is, each man is a hero who demonstrates his purity of body and spirit in confronting obstacles which are both physical and spiritual.⁹ The objects to be broken are presented to the audience both in their literal manifestations—here is 1,000 pounds of cinder block, notice how heavy it looks, how solid it appears—and as symbolic of vice, stand-ins for the Devil, Satan, and the Beast, or on occasion for more mundane vices such as drugs, lust, and suicidal despair.¹⁰ In the Team's promotional materials, the boundaries between the objects and what they represent are totally collapsed:

Edelweiss Mountain Lodging

Where "Make-Believe" is a Reality...



"These Walls Must Come Down!"

Edelweiss Mountain
Lodging
is proud to support
John Jacobs
and
The Power Team



Suburban Route Box 220
Rapid City, South Dakota 57702
(605) 341-1172

8. Local commerce meets eternal salvation in a Power Team souvenir program. (Photo courtesy of Sharon Mazer)

Breaking handcuffs and spiritual chains that bind, tearing down walls of ice and walls of deceit, destroying phone books and Satan's book of lies, that's what The Power Team is all about. Motivated by the Ultimate Power, The Power Team battles the ultimate lie of Satan and brings to the world the message that everyone can be a spiritual champion. (JJEA 1988)

To break through the cinder blocks, or the ice, or the hot water bottles is simultaneously a demonstration of actual physical strength and a confrontation with spiritual danger. The courage and determination with which the Team member confronts the onstage obstacle represent the courage and determination with which each spectator should face

the more ephemeral obstacles to faith and salvation. The feeling of release which accompanies the moment of breakthrough is a model of the release, the breaking through of everyday cares, that the person who dedicates himself or herself to Christ is sure to experience. Then too, the seriousness with which Team members confront the physical obstacles on the stage is staged explicitly to mirror the sincerity of their message. The moment of breakthrough is, on these terms, a prediction of victory in the struggle for souls.

Given the Team's emphasis on masculinity and patriarchy, it is clear that the struggle for dominion over the flesh is also a struggle to reassert the dominance of a man-centered ethic. The Everett performance operates within a homo-social continuum; what is presented and sustained is a series of interactions between men, and between men and objects, in which the feminine "other" is introduced only at very precise, carefully circumscribed moments. The Team's few references to women are predominantly attached to its ongoing plea for funds: "We need \$40,000 beyond what our sponsors have contributed so that our wives and children can continue to travel with us." In this presentation, wives and children are clearly dependents, representative both of the Team members' hidden lives and, given the homosociality of the performance, a verification that these are indeed "real"—that is, heterosexual—men. Indeed, Jacobs' wife, Ruthanne, frequently makes appearances in the drawing room setting of Trinity Broadcast Network, and she is remarkably skilled at keeping her eyes on her husband. Her role is to be awed both by what her husband has accomplished and by her own part in the drama.¹¹

In Everett, when Mike Hagen's little daughter is brought out to reinforce this plea for money, her diminutive size and squeaky, girl-child voice are overshadowed by the bulk of Jacobs' body and his deeper, adult male voice as he gently questions her. These are, after all, men who can restrain their violence and direct it only toward deserving opponents. It is appropriate, then, that the only other appearance of the feminine in the performance is when two teenage girls are invited to come up onto the stage where, in exchange for Power Team T-shirts, they are invited to touch Mike Hagen's chest through his light T-shirt to verify that he is not wearing any armor as protection from the bed of nails on which he is about to lie. Giggling, they poke at the man. Literally, they represent what he is not.

Breaking the Chains of the Devil

The final feat in the Everett performance, and frequently in the broadcasts, is also the Power Team's signature: the breaking of the handcuffs. It is astonishing both because of its apparent difficulty and because it is rhetorically and performatively paradoxical. The feat apparently originated in 1979, when Jacobs was preaching in prison. As one writer tells it:

John Jacobs had been preaching the Gospel back in 1979 to about 10 prisoners each week when he tried something new. After a guard had showed him the technique of breaking out of the handcuffs, it was announced to the entire prison that he would be demonstrating just that. Instead of the usual 10, about 800 prisoners came out and heard the Gospel being preached. Nearly all of them raised their hands in response to the altar call that he gave. (Pritts 1992:8)¹²

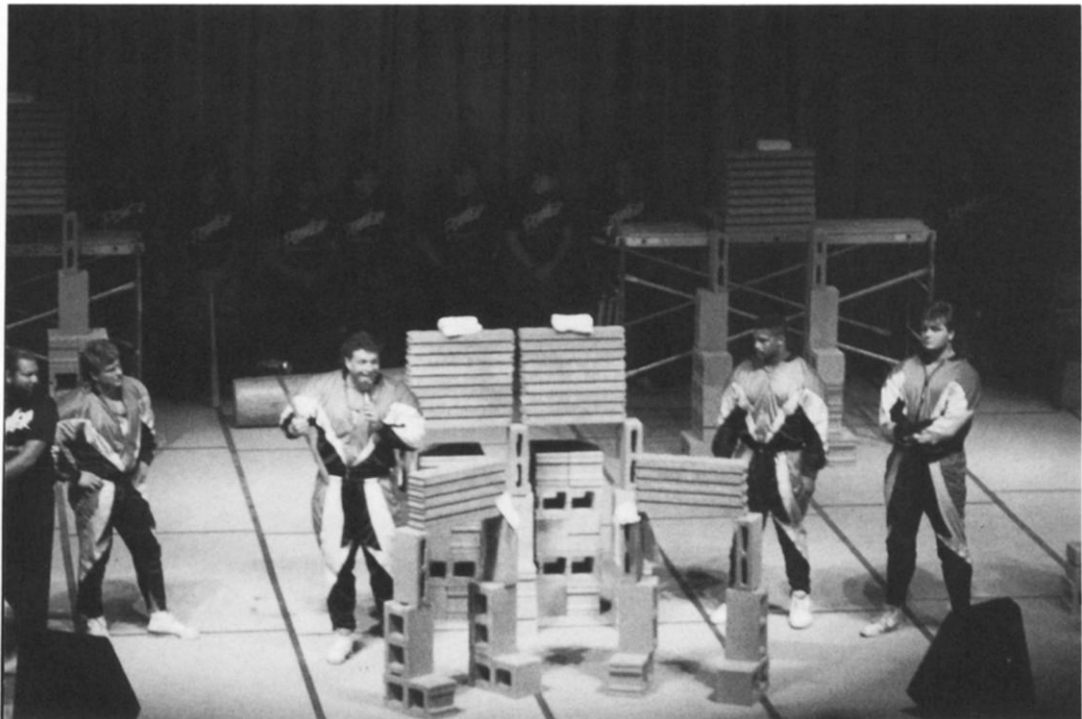
The same county sheriff who began the evening with a lecture about respect for authority returns to the stage and handcuffs Team members one to another so that they form a human chain. Once handcuffed, Jacobs tells the audience that the Team will now strive to break the “chains of the devil”:

Chains. Chains. Chains. How many of you know that before you become a Christian the devil can put you into chains? Chains of bitterness, lust, hate, guilt. The devil leads you around by these chains. Let’s break the chains. Let’s break the chains. Let’s break the chains. (TBN 1991b)

This rhetoric converts the handcuffs, which conventionally represent the righteous restraint of the law, into a marker for anti-Christian forces. There is no homily attached to this iconic shift, no explanation. It simply happens.

Only by considering that Jacobs initially learned the trick while proselytizing in a prison and by remembering his repeated urging that the young men in his live and televised audiences become “rebels for Christ,” is it possible to come to terms with the ambiguous positioning of the handcuffs—and the sheriff—in the Power Team’s discourse. According to Jacobs, to be a born-again Christian is to step outside mainstream American culture, to risk the censure and taunts of one’s non-Christian peers. A young Christian man is, in essence, the James Dean of the ’90s. The ambiguity of the handcuffs, along with the emphasis of the performance on acts of destruction, allows Jacobs to station himself between authority and rebellion in the same moment. At the same time, the handcuffs literally bind the men together in an unnatural way. In the Jacobs lexicon, men must stand together but indi-

9. John Jacobs (second from left) describes the next set of feats, as members of the Team and assistants stand by. This Power Team crusade took place at the Everett (Washington) Civic Auditorium, 18 July 1991. (Photo by Sharon Mazer)



vidually; they must seek the community of the Spirit, but find the Spirit in their own hearts. Then, too, for these heroes of virtue to be handcuffed together is clearly an injustice; breaking the cuffs reasserts the world order.

The sheriff locks the handcuffs into place. Much like an escape artist at a carnival sideshow, Jacobs then urges him along with Pastor Pina to verify that the cuffs are both authentic and secure. This is the real thing, Jacobs warns us. The men risk serious injury by putting so much pressure on their wrists and bodies. Winning this battle against the physical constraints of the handcuffs and the limitations of human strength, he adds, represents the Power of God to transform our lives. As the music again swells and the audience cheers, the men brace themselves against each other in various gymnastic poses—one man's feet against another's chest, one standing on another's shoulders. They push against each other, breaking away one at a time until all stand separate again. Jacobs takes the microphone again, repeating: "Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord..." The audience is ecstatic. With the broken handcuffs still dangling from his wrists, John Jacobs calls for silence and offers a benediction.

The Spectacle of Conversion

The curtain call is, in effect, an altar call. Jacobs urges those who have been moved by the Holy Spirit during the performance to approach the stage. In this final, and crucial, test of the Team's powers, far more than half of the people present do step forward to receive a second, more intimate, hands-on blessing directly from the men. These self-selected acolytes print their names, addresses, and phone numbers on decision cards, checking a box that indicates either that they are dedicating themselves to Christ for the first time or that they are re-dedicating themselves to Christ. They are told that will soon receive a congratulatory letter from the Power Team. Many will return subsequent nights, and by the end of this crusade, many will have become members of the Living Word Christian Center.

Those of us who do not come forward at the altar call are effectively excluded from the culmination of the performance. All evening, we had been made to feel highly visible to Jacobs and his Team. Now, at the moment of closure, we are ignored. No one is looking at us. No one is demanding acknowledgement or asking for concurrence. No one is telling us what to do or shaping our experience. What we do, whether we remain seated or leave the auditorium, has become irrelevant. We have become invisible, onlookers to the spectacle of conversion. From the balcony, I can see members of the Power Team, along with Pastor Pina, standing at the edge of the stage greeting, embracing, and praying with the masses assembled there. It is difficult not to feel desperately left out, difficult to resist the desire to be a part of the community that is forming on the main floor. I can see small groups of people scattered throughout the auditorium: some beginning to stand and gather their things, some still seated. For a long, disconcerting, uncomfortable stretch of time, my companion and I debate what to do, whether we should leave or stick around and see what happens next. The penalty for not stepping forward is clear. We are literally stranded. To be unmoved by the Spirit is to be at a loss, without direction, cut off from the loving embraces of Jacobs and his Team-mates.

Thus, to exclude the unconverted is, in the end, the Power Team's



DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible and authoritative Word of God, without error in the original writings.
2. We believe in one God, creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. We believe that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that for the salvation of lost and sinful men, regeneration by the Holy Spirit through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely essential.
4. We believe in the deity and virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he died upon the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of the world, that he rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, from whence He will return with Power and glory.
5. We believe in the doctrine of justification by faith, realizing that it is impossible for man, through works, to save himself. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)
6. We believe in life after death, "...that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." (Acts 24:15)
7. We believe in the resurrection of the saved into everlasting life in heaven and the resurrection of the lost or unsaved unto eternal punishment.

The Doctrinal Statement of the Power Team, included in materials usually sent to churches considering sponsorship of the Power Team. (Courtesy of Sharon Mazer)

John Jacobs Evangelistic Association

Post Office Box 1088 † Rockwall, Texas 75087, USA † Telephone: (214) 226-8888

most powerful trick. The Power Team offers its audiences born-again Christianity as the reassurance of divine order, firm boundaries, and eternal victory against the imprecations of contemporary, temporal gratifications. The secular world is, conversely, represented as chaotic, purposeless, and inclined to decay and despair. The evangelical world is well mapped, sharply focused on Christ and the Word of God, and inclined toward reclamation and celebration. Unlike the freewheeling world from which the audience enters, the world in the auditorium is visibly and carefully stage-managed by John Jacobs. Outside, each individual must struggle to create and sustain a place for him/herself, to make countless decisions with little guidance and few guarantees. Inside, the individual is offered a clearly outlined role to play, with explicit guidance and fervent guarantees. Outside, attachments to others

are precarious and provisional; an individual is constantly at risk of being cut loose, left to drift alone and uncomfited. Inside, the bond is absolute; the individual who dedicates him/herself to Christ, who enters into the contract with the Power Team by signing a dedication card and becoming a member of the sponsoring church, is assured of a perpetual communal embrace, protected against isolation, confusion, and disorder.

What was promised has been delivered. Bricks have been broken along with audience members' resistance to the Spirit. What began as an echo of popular performance now claims its place as an act of worship. In the Team's own terms, the bait has been taken, the trap snapped shut. The dedication cards will be counted, and the numbers used both to assure the Living Word Christian Center that it has gotten its money's worth and to promote future crusades.¹³ The Power Team's display of strength and devotion itself has been superseded by a spectacle of dedication directed by Jacobs and performed with the spectators. I can see it clearly from the balcony; thousands of others will see it, and perhaps me, in subsequent broadcasts. My image has been captured along with those of other spectators by the Power Team's lenses. The live performance, which I have paid for and in which I have participated, will be archived, edited, and integrated with other such performances into the Power Team's broadcasts and promotional materials. It will become part of an ever-growing *überspectacle*, a testament to the power of the Team's performance of physical strength and spiritual salvation.

In a final bit of irony, even my choice to remain outside the benediction fixes me within the Team's spectacular and discursive frame. Whether or not I have been moved to the Team's embraces, I have played a role in its performance. My role becomes that of the unconverted, defined in the Team's homilies and pressed upon me by the fact of my exclusion. Furthermore, by observing the apparent conversion of hundreds of others and, later, recounting what I have seen—at this moment, for the readers of *TDR*—my description of the spectacle and my own response to it fit into the Power Team's discourse; regardless of my own skepticism, I am bearing witness. That is, I am cast within the Power Team's rhetoric, which is comprehensive and relentless in its mapping of believer and skeptic.

Indeed, I am as necessary to the culmination of the performance as are the newly "saved"; it is my resistance that makes their yielding all the more moving, more dramatic. By choosing to remain in my seat, the choice of others to come forward is made more visible. In sensing my exclusion, the moment of inclusion can be more strongly felt by those at the edge of the stage. All they have to do is turn and look back. But unlike Lot's wife, these men and women will be called again and again by Jacobs and the Power Team. For the next week, the "born again" can return every night to the scene of their redemption. When the crusade is over they can continue to participate actively in the programs offered by the Living Word Christian Center. If over time their faith weakens, they can be restored through the interventions of the church, by another such spectacle, or even by a return performance of the Power Team. Or they can drift away, in the evangelical vernacular, becoming lost once more, once more awaiting redemption. But the decision cards and donations will have been tallied, incorporated into the church's annual report and into the Power Team's promotional materials. For now, in Everett, John Jacobs and his Power Team appear to have won.

Notes

1. At the beginning of this century, Billy Sunday became the first evangelical preacher to consistently employ the decision card, although variants had appeared throughout the 19th century. Sunday's Sunday services would close with an altar call whereupon congregants would come forward and sign cards on which "[t]here were spaces for the convert's name, his address, and his preferred church or pastor" (Bruce 1990:19). Bernard A. Weisberger notes: "Once, the salvation of a soul had been a miracle, recorded for certain only in God's book of life. Now, it was a nightly crowd performance, registered on cards" (1958:271).
2. See Hadden and Shupe, *Televangelism: Power and Politics on God's Frontier* (1988:43–44). This historical survey of the "electric church" points to the first television broadcasts of Billy Graham in the early 1950s, recognizing Graham, along with Oral Roberts and Rex Humbard as innovators (119–21). This account, and others like it, clearly valorize certain parachurch preachers such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, while condemning others—for example, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart—as charlatans. For Hadden and Shupe the problem is simple: "The medium is not neutral to the message" (1985:131). For a statistical summary of the spread and effect of televangelism, see the Gallop Organization's *Religion in America: Fifty Years 1935–1985* (Gallop 1985:148–64).
3. According to Hadden and Shupe: "Sunday was a showman. He would skip, gyrate, slide, and do cartwheels. He would stand on chairs, peel off layers of clothing as he worked himself into a lather, and do burlesque-style imitations. He was bombastic, loud, abusive, rancorous" (1985:45). Note also that Jacobs sometimes refers to God as "The King who leads His people to victory" perhaps echoing the use of the term "rex athleta Christi"—the king who is an athlete for Christ—in late-medieval Europe (Hobeman 1984:53).
4. Songs quoted in this article are not credited in performance or in promotional materials.
5. On the masculinist ideology of modern sport, see Michael A. Messner: "In promoting dominance and submission, in equating force and aggression with physical strength, modern sport naturalized the equation of maleness with power, thus legitimizing a challenged and faltering system of masculine domination" (1992:15).
6. In this Jacobs echoes the "wild man" proclamations of Robert Bly and others like him (see, for example, Bly 1990:26).
7. Thanks for these incites to Mike Goldman and Tony, the kickboxer.
8. Hadden and Shupe describe Charles Grandison Finney, a very influential 19th-century preacher, in this way: "Finney's strategies for working a crowd's emotions included lengthy meetings to produce fatigue; long mesmerizing intercessory prayers; sermons instilling fear and hope alternately; and personal harangues at those wavering on the brink of conversion" (1985:44).
9. Says Arthur Brittan in his discussion of *Masculinity and Power*, "Perhaps the most popular image of masculinity in everyday consciousness is that of man the hero, the hunter, the competitor, the conqueror" (1989:77).
10. Satan is a very real figure to the evangelical ministry. For example, in one letter of recommendation, Pastor Richard Vaughan of the Fletcher Emanuel Baptist Church (Beaumont, Texas), guarantees the Power Team's ability to attract large numbers of converts and adds: "Among those converted, were three Satanic priest [*sic*] and a seventeen year old girl who had become heavily involved in witchcraft, even to the point of participating in the human sacrifice [*sic*] of little babies to Satan" (n.d.).
11. See, for example, the Team's promotional video (JJEA 1991).
12. This tale has variations. Jacobs has told another interviewer, "They said whoever wants to see John Jacobs break a pair of handcuffs come to the (prison) yard...I expected maybe 15. [...] All 800 of them came to the Lord" (in Faught n.d.:10A). In another, quite different version of his performance's genesis, Jacobs told *People Magazine* that "when as a student at Oral Roberts University he saw

- a karate expert dazzle an audience" he realized that the exhibition was appealing to non-Christians as well as to Christians. In his words, "I liked that. I had gotten tired of all those all-Christian events, and I wanted to bring the sinners in" (in Grant 1988:111-12).
13. The evangelical community visibly quantifies its work. For example, the Trinity Broadcast Network holds frequent telethons to finance a crusade or to support its share of a broadcast satellite; in these telethons Jan and Paul Crouch frequently display a pair of toteboards, one showing the amount of dollars committed and the other showing the "Number of Souls Saved." The Power Team promotes its own efforts with the stacks of endorsements from church officials, most of which use numbers to assure future sponsors of massive conversions. Typical is a letter from Pastor Tony Scott of the Cathedral of Praise in Toledo, Ohio, who praises the Power Team as "without doubt the most prolific evangelists of our time" and notes: "More than 1,000 cards were filled out by converts with over 60 percent in the adult age category" (1993).

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