

NUDISM

FROM THE VOLLEYBALL NET TO THE INTERNET

I WAS BORN NUDE, and unless you popped out of your mama's snatch wearing a tuxedo, you were born nude, too. But they wrapped up our naked infant bodies pretty quick, and in the end, they'll likely bury us in clothes.

As a kid of around three or four, I'd sometimes do a little dance after getting

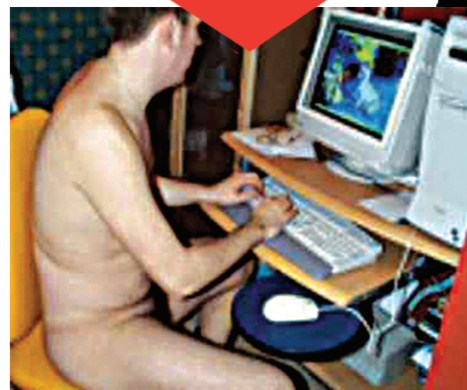
out of the shower before getting dressed. I called my dance "The Nude Dance," and it consisted of a basic two-step with my arms swinging back and forth in front of my wee naked frame. Amused by my naked jig's gleeful innocence, my teenaged brother even wrote a song called "Do The Nude," whose lyrics consisted entirely of the mantra "Do the nude, and a-do the nude" repeated while I danced. Even my parents were amused by my Nude Dance, because I was obviously too young to realize people shouldn't be nude at all, much less *dance* about it.

I grew up fascinated by cheesy nudist culture in the 1970s, dovetailing as it did with long-gone trash-sex phenomena such as streaking (running nude in public—sort of a form of nudist terrorism), wife-swappin' swingers, and male "flashers" in trenchcoats (what the hell happened to them?).

As an adult, I've been publicly naked at an all-male health club in Stockholm (keep your wisecracks to yourself), a nude beach in Copenhagen, and sundry "clothing-optional" hot springs across the American West. When co-workers weren't around, I've even had occasion to trudge through the *Exotic* office naked as a porn-peddlin' jaybird. Unless it's too cold, I always sleep naked and spend much of the time in my apartment without one thread of evil textiles to cover my pink skin. I often lift weights nude while looking at myself in the mirror. For lucky naked partners, I will even sometimes perform my hilarious "penis dance," and a good time is had by all.

BUT IT'S TOUGH BEING NUDE in a world where everyone wears clothes. Everyone who's "civilized," at least.

Clothing. You either wear it or you don't. Clothes change everything. Clothes are so anthropologically important, it's silly. Clothing is a social dividing line almost as all-encompassing as gender. More social significance is accorded clothing than just about any other material item. So many invisible walls fall to the ground along with one's clothes. We attach so much absurd importance to clothing to the point where we've convinced ourselves that nudity, rather than clothing, is what's unnatural or deviant.



Nudity. So simple and yet so powerful. The naked body, when revealed, is both more and less than what we had imagined. So much hinges on its suppression. If the world were to suddenly turn all-nude, catastrophic social meltdowns would result. Clothing, since it cages our sexuality, is essential to our idea of being civilized. God may not have always told us that nudity is bad, but the King does. He always does. He needs us to quit fuckin' around, get dressed, and start building the roads.

But mandatory social clothing has only been a very recent blip in human development. It has existed for less than one percent of the entire time span of the slapstick comedy called Humans on Earth. It wasn't until the loom was invented in China about six thousand years ago that clothing became an option. Until then, the whole world was a nudist colony.

Nearly all cultures of antiquity, and many world cultures today, practiced public nudism. Most pagan societies incorporated nudity into their rituals. The ancient Egyptians walked around nude, as did as the Greeks, especially in their homoerotic-by-inference nude sporting spectacles. The Greeks were even known to WAGE WAR in the nude. The Roman public baths were all-nude, as were many European public baths throughout the Middle Ages. European families often slept in the same bed naked.

Ferocious, repressive anti-nudity sentiments grew as Protestantism took hold throughout Europe, culminating in the Victorian Age, when people didn't even talk about body parts in mixed public. Even piano legs were often required to be covered, lest they suggest the shamefully seductive female leg.

ALTHOUGH THE PRECISE MEANING ELUDES ME at the moment, there is surely great significance in the fact that the country which invented the modern nudist camp also invented the modern concentration camp.

In 1903, a German named Richard Ungewitter published a 104-page treatise extolling the virtues of mixed-gender public nudity. The same year, inspired by Ungewitter's book, Paul Zimmermann opened "Freilichtpark," (Free Light Park) in Lubeck, Germany. Considered the world's first modern nudist camp, the park remained in operation until 1981. Faithful to Teutonic control-freak tendencies, the park's overlords dictated ironclad laws for its members. Meat was forbidden. So were cigarettes and alcohol. All park guests were required to wake up early and undergo two rigorous hours of exercise under an instructor's whip.

Germans referred to the nudist lifestyle as "Free Body Culture." The nudist meme proved infectious, and twenty years later, experts reckoned that 50,000 Krauts were practicing a lifestyle which included marching around naked at least some of the time.

In 1929, a German nudist named Kurt Barthel immigrated to these shores and founded the American League for Physical Culture, whose purpose was to spread the nudist Gospel. Nudist colonies emerged across America in the early 1930s, aided by the 1933 formation of The National Nudist Conference, which later changed its name to the American Sunbathing Association. By the mid-1930s, there were an estimated eighty nudist colonies in America, some of which are still operating. Camps such as the "Sea Island Sanctuary" (founded on Cat Island off South Carolina's coast in 1932) "Sunshine Park" (established by a Baptist minister in New Jersey in 1935) practiced a cooperative lifestyle with vegetarian diets and lotsa nude sports. But despite nudism's utopian/egalitarian pretensions, membership in many early camps was only within reach of the wealthy.

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LIFESTYLES OF THE NUDE 'n' FAMOUS

Proponents of social nudism, eager to prove that their lifestyle is not solely the domain of utopian cuckoo birds and shady-minded swingers, point to a strong historical tradition of nudism among the famous and powerful.

They reach nakedly back toward antiquity and point to pro-nudist sentiments expressed by classical giants such as **Plato** and **Thucydides**, the latter of whom argued that nudism elevated the Greeks above the fur-clad barbarians.

They cite favorable comments and glowing reminiscences of bein' nude amid the work of fruity Jersey poet **Walt Whitman**...Italian ceiling-painter **Michelangelo**...self-absorbed Frenchman **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**...pious back-to-nature goober **Henry-David Thoreau**...insufferable playwrights **George Bernard Shaw** and **Eugene O'Neill**...and obsessed-with-giant-white-things novelist **Herman Melville**. They note that throughout **Mark Twain's** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, considered by many to be the greatest novel written in English, Huck and Nigger Jim [hey, pipe down, that's what **TWAIN** called him, not me!] raft down the mighty Mississippi' buck-naked, and nobody has a problem with it. They say that even one-man kiddie-book factory **Dr. Seuss** was a practicing nudist who published positive comments about his so-called "naturist" lifestyle.

Many influential American politicians practiced a nudist lifestyle. **Benjamin Franklin**, one of our country's Founding Fathers and a singularly unattractive man, took daily naked "air baths." **John Quincy Adams** was said to have taken a swim sans clothes in the Potomac every day while he was president. **Theodore Roosevelt**, also a habitual presidential skinny-dipper, once swam naked with a visiting French diplomat. *Bully!* Slain chick magnet **John F. Kennedy** is alleged to have held high-ranking meetings while naked in his bathtub and surrounded by assistants, all of whom were clothed. Jowly goat-roper **Lyndon Baines Johnson**, purportedly proud of his endowment, also would meet with his clothed subordinates while he was in the nyood. LBJ also reportedly held skinny-dipping pool parties at the White House and would frequently greet outside guests such as Frank Sinatra while defiantly unclad. Greasy morose tragic clown **Richard Nixon** was also alleged to have held White House meetings without a stitch of clothing on him. And in an intriguing meeting of the political and entertainment worlds, there is also a rumor that crazed-with-world-domination **General Douglas MacArthur** and pro-Nazi cartoon mogul **Walt Disney** once skinny-dipped together at a beach in the 1960s. Modern celebs known to have practiced social nudism include neurotic chick singers **Alanis Morissette** and **P. J. Harvey**...sun-poisoned good-timey musician **Jimmy "Cheeseburgers in Paradise" Buffett**, who claims that his whole family practices nudism...superdupermodels **Elle MacPherson** and **Christy Brinkley**...forgettable actresses **Lynn Redgrave** and **Bridget Fonda**...and Muslim-slurring animal-rights lunatic **Brigitte Bardot**. X

