

THE DANGERS BEHIND LUMBERJACK PORTLAND POLICE FEAR A FASHION TREND MAY TURN DEADLY CHIC BY ORVILLE REDDEN



“Right now they’re only chopping down telephone poles. What’s to stop them from chopping off people’s heads?”

ities of their hard-bitten racist ancestors. Newitz said that just as prior generations had rejected such tuff-white archetypes as the cowboy, the trucker, and the lumberjack, a coming generation would embrace them. But she said that the movement, already tainted by postmodernist thought, would be set adrift between mocking irony and dead-serious homage—lost in the woods, so to speak. She cautioned that such aesthetic tensions could inevitably turn violent.

Newitz’s essay proved prophetic. Almost simultaneously, tough-guy white culture started making a comeback. In Portland, former Nazi skinheads and racist rockabillies went for Lumberjack Chic in a big way. At first it was cute and campy: logrolling parties in backyard swimming pools and theme music nights at local clubs featuring a program exclusively consisting of songs by Buzz “The Singing Logger” Martin.

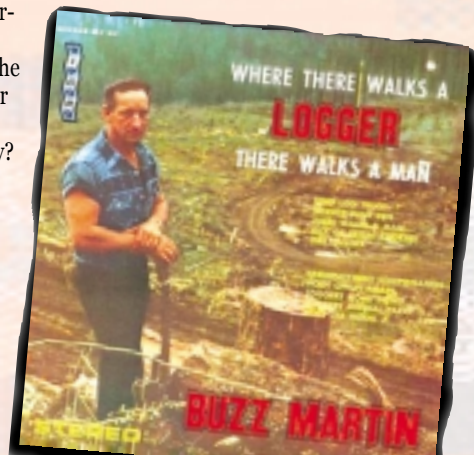
But soon thereafter it started adopting all the trappings of a genuine gang culture. Different-colored flannel shirts started meaning different things. The way one wore his suspenders also signified which “loggin’ crew” he “jacked” for. A logga-gangsta crew in Southeast Portland named itself after an obscure logging song from the early seventies: “Brute Force and Ignorance.” Another crew from St. Johns, the Ripcords, named themselves after Buzz Martin’s record label.

And then came the axes, and along with them, the fear.

Raul Luis Garcia is a sociology professor at Clackamas State University. Garcia is the author of *America Up My Ass* (Steve Schultz Press, 1996), which prophesied that America’s melting-pot culture would inevitably break down into a violent “anti-nation” of warring tribal factions. Garcia acts unsurprised by the logga-gangsta phenomenon. “This generation has witnessed an emergence of nonwhites in all areas of popular culture,” he says. “And these kids grew up seeing blacks dominate in sports. The black male is our mythic Superman. He’s starting to get all the white chicks. And so then Paul Bunyan comes along! Ohmigod! These restless kids who are seeking some identity see this forty-foot-tall burly white male, and they feel empowered,” Garcia says.

“The Brawny Guy, too, is a good example of this sort of exaggerated white-male masculinity. These logga-gangstas co-opt the phrase PURE WHITE for their own questionable ends. And who is the Brawny man, really? He’s a big white man with a PURE WHITE paper towel, sopping up all the ethnic undesirables.”

Rick is a dedicated Jack who’s been jackin’ for three years. He agrees to meet me at The Matador, a local bar and well-known logga-



BUZZ “THE SINGING LOGGER” MARTIN: Logga-Gangsta Icon

gangsta hangout. Rick is an intimidating grizzly bear, to be sure: tall, barrel-chested, bearded, and gruff. Trying to break the ice, I make a passing mention of Monty Python’s “Lumberjack Song,” which seems to get Rick’s goat. “Those Monty Pythons said that lumberjacks are faggots. They should come to Portland, and I’ll show them who the faggot really is.”

Like many Portland logga-gangstas, Rick’s arms are sleeved in lumberjack-themed tattoos: a full-color Paul Bunyan surrounded by the phrase WHERE THERE WALKS A LOGGER, THERE WALKS A

MAN in old-school sailor-style script; another one where a lumberjack’s face is superimposed over crossed axes; and the most striking of all, a beautifully detailed color reproduction of the Brawny paper-towel logo, which features a blond mustachioed white man smiling amid tall timber, the word “Brawny,” and the phrase PURE WHITE. The Brawny logo seemed familiar to me in another context...an innocent

context...not on the muscular bicep of a racist Portland gang member. I ask Rick whether the PURE WHITE phrase is intended as a racist statement. He just smiles and says, “Do I look black to you?”

Rick’s girlfriend Marsha is a pretty twenty-year-old Lumberjill with black Bettie Page bangs, a red flannel shirt, and a self-satisfied smile. She’s been jackin’ for about a year. She used to be a Goth, but she was drawn into the logga-gangsta lifestyle about a year ago when she met

Rick. When I mention Rick’s Brawny Guy tattoo, she becomes defensive. “The Brawny Guy is a handsome man. A strong, handsome, *white* man. I mean, I’ve got a boyfriend, but I’d do the Brawny Guy in a second. And Paul Bunyan? Puhhh-lease!” Marsha proceeds to arch her eyebrows and make a kitty-cat sound.

“But what about the axes?” I ask her.

“What *about* them?” she counters, meeting my challenge.

A leisurely afternoon drive takes me down and out of Portland’s urban environment, with its sex workers and logga-gangstas, through tall-timber country down to the quaint logging town of Estacada, Oregon. I pull into a rustic coffee shop, complete with fly swatters on each redwood picnic-style table, and meet logging storyteller Bart Krutchmann. Known as the “Literary Logger,” Krutchmann has written about his real-life logging experiences in several humorous self-published pamphlets such as *Outta My Noggin ’Bout Loggin’* and *Bend Over, Paul Bunyan*. But unlike almost all of the logga-gangstas, Bart Krutchmann is a real lumberjack. He’s been a timber-faller for over thirty years, and he has the haggard features and missing fingers to prove it.

Krutchman says he’s never heard of Portland’s logga-gangsta underground. When I briefly describe it, he angrily snorts, “They don’t stand for what the average lumberjack thinks or believes. If they ever set foot in Estacada looking like that, they’d get their asses kicked. What do any of them know about high-head logging? How many of them have ever set a choker? Hell, how many of them have ever seen a *tree*?” When I tell him that there are plenty of trees in Portland, he says, “Yeah, well, I never go there, anyway, so *I wouldn’t know*.”

What can normal citizens do about the problem? Fight back, that’s what. Portland’s public schools have already banned students from wearing lumberjack clothing. And the Portland Police Department’s Special Gangs Task Force Unit has opened a folder on the logga-gangstas. “Everybody has the right, within certain limits, to dress and act the way they want,” says Portland detective Max Stuttgart, “but when people start carrying axes around, that’s when I get involved. Right now they’re only chopping down telephone poles. What’s to stop them from chopping off people’s heads?”

