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## INTERVIEWS

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# **‘I was writing about racism long before I was making fun of presidents’: An interview with cartoonist Keith Knight**

The interesting thing about interviewing the African American cartoonist Keith Knight is that one gets the feeling that he is working on his strips even when he is not sitting at his desk, drawing. When I called him one early morning in August 2010, he asked me to postpone the interview for a few hours because he and his wife had just ‘had a rough night with the little one’. Having followed Knight’s autobiographical ‘The K Chronicles’ strip, in which he frequently depicts scenes of his family life that feature himself, his wife Kerstin, and his young son, one can easily imagine what a

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future instalment of 'The K Chronicles' might look like: Knight sitting bleary-eyed on the phone, trying to focus on the conversation with the caller from Germany, when his son crawls through his legs and reminds him of the fact that the joys of fatherhood outweigh a rough night and other early-morning distractions.

We decided to push the interview back for a few hours. When I called at noon, the little one was sound asleep, and so we had time to talk. But even then, Knight warned me right away that he might have to interrupt the interview at some point because he was listening to the radio, waiting for an announcement by Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a white American radio talk show host who a few days earlier had made a series of racist remarks on her show and was expected to resign from her job. Responding to a call from an African American woman who was concerned about her white husband's tendency to tolerate racist remarks from his friends, Dr. Schlessinger had gone into a tirade against what she labelled black hypersensitivity towards matters of race. African Americans who complained about racism, she had opined, had 'too much sensitivity and not enough sense of humour', and she had gone on to suggest that this hypersensitivity was 'being bred by black activists' whose influence had allegedly grown under Obama. In order to drive home her point, Schlessinger had uttered the 'n-word' ten times during the conversation, arguing that she could not understand why it was okay for black comedians to use the word on HBO but not okay for her to use it on the radio. When the caller confessed that she was taken aback by Schlessinger's repeated use of the word, the talk show host had replied: 'Don't NAACP me'. In terms of practical advice, Schlessinger had suggested that people should not 'marry out of (their) race' if they are hypersensitive to such language. Considering the political nature of Knight's one-panel cartoon '(Th)ink', I was not surprised that he wanted to tune in to her show to hear what she had to say about the heated debate that had followed her incendiary remarks. In fact, as he told me a few moments later, he had already done a cartoon about this issue and was interested in how the controversy would develop.

Keith Knight was born and raised in the suburban city of Malden, MA, near Boston, which is famous for being the home of shoemaker Converse. He holds a degree in graphic design from Salem State University and moved to San Francisco in 1990 to pursue a career in cartooning. His first major strip was the autobiographical 'The K Chronicles', which he began while he was in college and which has appeared in a number of independent weekly newspapers such as the *San Francisco Weekly* since 1993. Today, the strip can be read in print newspapers and online publications such as Salon.com, Tonic.com, Buzzle.com, *Salt Lake City Weekly*, *Seven Days* (Burlington, VT), *Anti-Gravity* (New Orleans, LA), and *Funny Times*; past instalments are collected in *The Complete K Chronicles: A Comprehensive Collection of Keith Knight's Award-Winning Comic Strip* (Dark Horse Comics, 2008). Since 1999, Knight has been the creator of the political single-panel cartoon '(Th)ink', which is currently featured in *The San Francisco Chronicle* and is available in three printed volumes, *Red, White, Black & Blue* (Manic D Press, 2004), *Are We Feeling Safer Yet?* (Keith Knight Press, 2007) and *Too*

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*Small to Fail* (Keith Knight Press, 2011). Since 2008, Knight has been a syndicated daily cartoonist with his strip 'The Knight Life', which reaches a national audience through newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Herald* and *The Seattle Times* and has been collected in *The Knight Life: 'Chivalry Ain't Dead'* (Grand Central Publishing, 2010). Knight has also contributed to *Mad Magazine* and *ESPN the Magazine* and has received a number of awards for his work, including the 2007 Harvey Award, the 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2010 Glyph Awards for Best Comic Strip, and the 2010 Inkpot Award at Comic Con International. For more information, including a selection of his latest strips, visit his website at [www.kchronicles.com](http://www.kchronicles.com).

What follows is an edited and expanded version of a telephone interview I did with Keith Knight on 18 August 2010. I want to thank 'Keef' for taking the time to talk to me by phone, for the valuable clarifications and additions he supplied by e-mail afterwards, and for the permission to reprint the strips that accompany this interview.

**DS:** *Could you say a little bit about your motivation to become a newspaper cartoon artist? Did you know early on that that's what you wanted to do as a career? And how did you get started in the business?*

**KK:** I knew pretty early on that I would be a cartoonist. I was always drawing, and as I was doing this in school, my grades were better if I incorporated comics into my assignments – except in math (laughs). And also, I was always able to make fun of people, and they wouldn't beat me up. They were actually happy just to be drawn and because of the fact that I could get away with that, I said, 'Gee, swell, if I could actually do this for money that would be great. So I just constantly made my own comics and passed them around class. I then got them into my school newspaper in junior high and later into my college newspaper'.

**DS:** *What were some of your formative influences? I know you've mentioned Charles Schulz's 'Peanuts' and Gary Trudeau's 'Doonesbury' in previous interviews, but I would be interested in what exactly you found inspiring in these and other comic strips.*

**KK:** 'Peanuts' and 'Doonesbury' were big influences mainly because those were the only books the library that was near my house had as far as comics went. So I read this simple strip about kids that actually has all these adult themes – you know, that's the great thing about 'Peanuts': The strip is all about not getting what you want, it's all about longing, from Charlie Brown's longing for the little red-haired girl and trying to kick the football, to Lucy's lust for Schroeder, Sally's crush on Linus, and Linus's fruitless search for the great pumpkin. 'Doonesbury' was all about the politics, and the fact that it mixed fact with fiction was really interesting to me. Trudeau was the first white cartoonist who created black characters that were actually black, you know, that weren't exactly the same as the other (white) characters. One of my favourite 'Doonesbury' cartoons was from, I think, Trudeau's

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college strips. He had a black character knock on Doonesbury's door and ask: 'Would you be interested in donating to the Black Panthers on campus?' And Doonesbury replied: 'I'm sorry, man, I don't have any money, and the other guy in the room says, 'I don't have anything to spare'. Then the black guy goes, 'okay', and writes a little X on the door. It was so funny (chuckles). And Doonesbury thinks, 'I don't like the looks of this'. Seeing that as a little kid in the 70s, I got a real kick out of it and followed it. But I was influenced not just by strips on the comics page but also by editorial cartoons. And then there were Jules Feiffer's cartoons in *Parade* magazine. Feiffer was a big influence because he didn't use panels a lot but would just draw stuff. He was talking about a lot of different stuff too. And *Mad Magazine*, especially Sergio Aragonés. Plus Parliament/Funkadelic albums – Pedro Bell was the name of the artist. He did elaborate crazy, trippy drawings. I just loved to sit there, listening to the albums and looking at all those drawings.

*DS: And years later, you did the illustrations for your own band, the hip hop band The Marginal Prophets.*

**KK:** Folks would approach me at shows and say, 'You got "The K Chronicles" cartoonist to do all your posters!' I'd always tell them, 'Yeah, but he's a dick!' Being in a band is the perfect hobby for a cartoonist. Cartooning is a very solitary profession, whereas being in a band is very team-oriented. Plus you got immediate feedback when you played live shows. It was a nice combination of stuff to do.

*DS: Where did you get your sense of humour and your talent for funny punch lines?*

**KK:** Richard Pryor and Bill Cosby. And old school hip hop as well as Chuck Jones Warner Brothers cartoons. Pryor and Cosby were great at telling stories. I wish I could do what they did (and still do!). Hip hop and Warner Bros. cartoons are similar in the fact that they make so many cultural references within each song and cartoon. I try to do that with my comics.

*DS: When did you become aware of African American cartoonists? There weren't that many around when you were growing up, but there were some.*

**KK:** There weren't a whole lot. I knew Morrie Turner who did 'Wee Pals', but he wasn't in any of our local papers. But I remember his cartoon *Soul Power*, the animated version of his comic strip, which I watched a little bit. More importantly, there was this young black guy who was a substitute teacher in my class every once in a while. He wouldn't teach anybody anything; he would just have a study class for everybody. What he would do is he would be doodling the whole time, and it turned out he was this cartoonist; besides being a substitute teacher he was trying to make a career as a cartoonist. So I would bring my chair up to his desk and draw beside him. He was so important

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to me, just the fact that there was, in flesh and blood, a young black guy, someone who looked like me and was doing what I did. I don't think a lot of folks from a white perspective can understand how important it was just to see that. There was such a limited scope of what you saw in terms of what black people did. They were either athletes or performers or something like that.

**DS:** *What would you say about the situation nowadays? You wrote the introduction to a collection of works by African American artists that just came out, Black Comix: African American Independent Comics Art and Culture, edited by Damian Duffy and John Jennings (Mark Batty Publisher, 2010). The book contains essays on topics such as hip hop and comics, black manga, humour and satire in black comics, and black superheroes as well as a large collection of artwork by well established artists such as yourself and Lance Tooks and a great number of people I had never heard of before.*

**KK:** I was really psyched to be asked to write the introduction and contribute some of my 'K Chronicles' and '(Th)ink' strips because I had never seen more than a few of the artists collected in there either. I know of about five or six guys on the daily comics stage (Robb Armstrong, Cory Thomas, Darrin Bell, Steve Watkins, Jerry Craft), and then there's a ton of black indie cartoonists, and so it's really cool and inspirational to see a book like *Black Comix*. I just came back from the San Diego 2010 Comic-Con, where I participated in an event called 'the Nappy Hour', which had all these black cartoonists talking about the industry, and there was a lot of turnout (and it wasn't just black cartoonists, it was a great combination of people). We discussed everything from scary fan interaction, kickstarter.com (the Internet funding platform), what character would you love to write for, and will Comic-Con stay in San Diego for the long haul. And then there's the exhibition 'Coloring Outside the Lines: Black Cartoonists as Social Commentators' at the San Francisco Public Library's African American Center, which featured some of my work. It came about after I chatted with the curator at a Morrie Turner retrospective he had put together. I think he was new to the comics scene and was surprised by how colourful it was, and it's great to be part of that.

**DS:** *When you first started doing your own comics, were you aware of the history of racist depictions of African Americans? If you look, for instance, at the material assembled in Fredrik Strömberg's Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History (Fantagraphics, 2003), you'll see how long and pervasive certain visual codes, such as thick lips, bulging eyes, jungle garb, and so forth, have been. Was that something you had to take into consideration or consciously steer away from? Where visual stereotypes such as Sambo and the 'coon' a problem for you when you created your own characters?*

**KK:** I never really thought about it, at least not when I set out to create my own stuff. But I always knew these images existed and was always fascinated by them, by how bizarre they are. Yet I never really considered them. With 'The K Chronicles', I wanted to make a cartoon that I could relate to, a cartoon about a black guy who is into hip hop and could also be into *Star Wars* and wasn't necessarily

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Figure 1: 'The K Chronicles', 'One Black Kid'.

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a gangster rap type of guy. There was this negative portrayal of what rap music was. That was the conscious thing. I knew if I wrote something that I would be into, that I'd like to read, then there would be a bunch of other people who would like to do the same thing. It's like that 'One Black Kid' strip (Figure 1). Everybody has experienced that one black kid thing. Just last night my dad told me about being that one black kid in his classes in high school.

*DS: 'The K Chronicles' started long before Aaron McGruder's 'The Boondocks'. So when 'The Boondocks' strip became nationally syndicated, you had already developed your own characters and narratives as well as your own visual style. 'The Boondocks' received a lot of media attention because it was so controversial, and I was wondering what your feelings were when that happened. You used to refer to yourself occasionally as 'that other black cartoonist', and you also did a 'K Chronicles' strip about being mistaken for McGruder. Was it annoying for you to see McGruder dominate the national spotlight as a spokesperson for a new black hip hop generation of cartoonists and their readers, or did you think 'The Boondocks' were helpful in bringing more visibility to the work of African American cartoonists?*

**KK:** It was never really annoying. I understand the fact that Aaron got a lot of attention because he was doing a nationally syndicated daily strip, whereas I was in independent weekly newspapers. The strip about being mistaken for him was more of a joke about people getting us confused. I just remember going to my first National Cartoonists Society event, and some guy came up to me and said: 'Wow, Aaron McGruder, yeah'.

*DS: You have repeatedly made reference in writing as well as in your drawings to Harvey Pekar. It seems to me that you're following in the footsteps of underground comix artists like Pekar and Robert Crumb, who established autobiography as a major genre of comics, but that you're taking a somewhat more light-hearted approach to this genre. Perhaps you could say a few words about your understanding of the relationship between the autobiographical underground comix of the 1960s and 70s and your own work, both in terms of the topics you cover and the autobiographical perspective through which you approach these topics.*

**KK:** I was hugely influenced by the underground comix, but honestly, I didn't even really read R. Crumb's comics until I got to San Francisco after college. I do remember as a little kid going into the local head shop in my town and seeing these wacky posters of a guy's head melting and the Keep on Truckin' guy and that old guy with the beard. All the iconic Crumb characters I saw on posters in the weird shop with the incense. I didn't understand any of it at the time, but he was just part of the subculture, part of my subconscious. I remember *Fritz the Cat* coming out. I had a strip that was a knock-off of 'Peanuts' when I was in grade school, and I called it 'Fritzie the Cat'. It was probably because of *Fritz the Cat*. My dad said to me, you know, there's *Fritz the Cat*, and it's an x-rated animated cartoon (by Ralph Bakshi, based on Crumb's comic character and released in 1972). But it

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Figure 2: 'The K Chronicles', memorial strip for Harvey Pekar.



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really wasn't until I got to San Francisco that I saw all the underground comix. When I was in college, 'The K Chronicles' was shaped like a daily strip, like 'The Knight Life', but when I got to San Francisco, I changed it the weekly nine-panel format that I knew from Matt Groening's 'Life is Hell'. That's when I started to add all the drug references and the partying and politics. Harvey Pekar meant a lot to me, too. He provided the words for the opening strip in my first collection *Dances with Sheep* (Manic D Press, 1997), and I did a memorial cartoon about him when he passed away (Figure 2).

**DS:** *Let me follow up on this by asking you about the playful use autobiographical storytelling in 'The K Chronicles' and 'The Knight Life'. The Dances with Sheep collection opens with a two-page, tongue-in-cheek confession:*

*People are always surprised when they finally meet me & discover I'm a short, heavy-set Korean girl named Soon-Yi. But I didn't want to do another comic strip based upon the life of a young asian female ... Please ... no more ... it's been done to death already ... Okay? Jeezus. I like to consider the K Chronicles akin to hearing a story from that weird uncle of yours that visits once a week. The one your parents tell you not to take too seriously ... yet you wonder if what he says is really true.*

(1997)

*How significant for your development and continuation of the strip is the mixture of serious autobiographical reference and deliberate fictionalization?*

**KK:** My life isn't as exciting as I'd like it to be, so it's nice to add some twists and turns to it via my comic strips. 80 per cent of the strip is true, but I've never let the truth get in the way of a good story!

**DS:** *Unlike most artists in the newspaper comic strip business, you've been working in two different genres for quite a while now: multi-panel weekly comic strips since 1993, daily strips since 2008 and single-panel political cartoons since 1999. I'd be interested in getting your take on the differences of these formats in terms of your selection of subject matter, the different angles/perspectives from which you approach the subjects, and different vocabularies/grammars you choose as you create them.*

**KK:** It's totally different. I see 'The K Chronicles' as something like a blog before there were blogs. It's usually about me, me, me, and I usually go on these rants, and instead of linking stuff via the Internet, I just draw the visuals. 'The Knight Life' as a daily is a more character-driven strip. As I was beginning to work on it, I was thinking that my favourite strips, 'Peanuts', 'Doonesbury', (Berke Breathed's) 'Bloom County', (Bill Watterson's) 'Calvin and Hobbes' were all about the individual characters. So I knew right away that I couldn't make 'The Knight Life' like 'The K Chronicles', where it's mostly me. So I developed my wife's character more, developed Gunther's character, came up with more characters such as Clovis and Dexter and his son. You know, the syndicate advises you: 'Don't have

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more than four characters'. But I need to have all these characters and situations to work on a daily strip for five years straight. That might be my 'Doonesbury' influence. And that's the way it works: I work with these characters this week, so let me work with these other characters next week.

*DS: Do you get a lot of feedback from readers and fans? Does reader feedback influence your decision on which characters to develop further and in what direction you will take them?*

**KK:** I always like to hear what people like, but I don't let that influence me too much. I usually get a good feeling about which storylines and which characters go well. I generally have a pretty good sense about where I'm going with my stuff.

*DS: What about '(Th)ink', your single-panel political cartoon?*

**KK:** There will be times when there's a little bit of crossover between 'The K Chronicles' and '(Th)ink'. I might be thinking about 'The K Chronicles' and have a subject matter that won't give me enough material to fill up the strip but that will have a good enough gag that will work for '(Th)ink'. You know, '(Th)ink' is pretty much always straight from the news. It's nice to think and draw in so many different ways. I just wish I wasn't so dependent on all of these different strips for making my living. I wish one of these strips would be enough. But with the recent economic crisis, I have lost about half of my clients (i.e. newspapers that run his strips). Newspapers are going out of business or are cutting pages. Hopefully, it'll come back, it seems like it's coming back a little bit.

*DS: Is the Internet a way for you to reach new audiences and sell your material?*

**KK:** That's something I'm working on. I've got some pretty amazing guys around that have been able to do that. Dave Kellett, who is one of the Halfpixel guys and who has done webcomics like *Sheldon* and *Drive*. He also put out a book called *How to Make Web Comics* (with Scott Kurtz, Kris Straub, and Brad Guigar, Image Comics, 2008), and he does great business, selling a lot of stuff. But it's a lot of work. The store on my website still hasn't all the products that I have to sell. But there are a few other things. I know some other cartoonists who just make their money off of reprints. I want to be the go-to guy for people who want a comic about race issues or something like that, I want them to say: 'Let's go to Keith Knight's site and find a cartoon that we can reprint'.

*DS: Have you ever thought about doing a 'graphic novel' that is not organized as a serial narrative, but a self-contained story, autobiographical or otherwise?*

**KK:** I was actually working on one, but it sort of fell through as a book deal, mainly because I could not get it done in time. The graphic novel I was working on was about my time as a Michael Jackson

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impersonator in high school. I'm still gonna finish it. It's funny and scary and an homage to the 80s all at the same time. But I'm doing nine strips a week at the moment, so I didn't have the time to turn it over fast enough. But I have a couple of solid ideas, and I would love to do a graphic novel at some point. I am big fan of (German comics artist) Ralf König; he's got this super cartoony style, and he makes these great graphic novels that get turned into films (e.g. *Der bewegte Mann*, 1987/1994; *Kondom des Grauens*, 1987/1996). That's what I want to do. I want to do a graphic novel that gets turned into a film.

**DS:** *What do you think of Aaron McGruder's animated cartoon version of 'The Boondocks'?*

**KK:** I saw the Peabody award-winning MLK 'Boondocks' episode, which was brilliant. But I haven't seen much of it since. I don't have cable. And I barely have time with nine deadlines a week and a 2 year old.

**DS:** *Moving on to a different issue, I would like to ask you how important race and racism are for your work, both as a topic and as something that shapes your outlook on the world? And what do you think is your role as a black cartoonist in terms of addressing this issue in and through your work?*

**KK:** First of all, I think cartooning is one of the best ways to approach any issue because you can approach it with humour. You don't have to approach it with humour; you can do it completely the other way, too, but the visual aspect of it and the simplicity of it make it easy to make a point. So why not use that ability, that platform? Now, anybody who has read my stuff knows that I don't pound it every week. I always mix it up. I never do two political strips; I never do two baby strips; I never do two racism strips in a row. Hopefully, it'll surprise people every week. If there's a new angle I can come at it, if there's an idea that I think will work, then I do it. Recently, there was this transit cop in Oakland, Johannes Mehserle, who shot a young black man in the back and killed him. His excuse was that he thought he was reaching for his taser. It's funny, you know, when that happened, I didn't do a comic on it because I've done so many police brutality comics, it's exasperating. But as soon as his trial ended, I had some pretty good ideas, so I did a couple of '(Th)ink' strips about it. At some point, you just throw your hands up in the air and think, 'god, how many of these things am I going to have to do in my lifetime?' Mehserle ended up getting involuntary manslaughter, which is the lightest possible sentence. Think about it: Not only did he shoot the guy in the back, but he was on top of him. He had the guy subdued. And it was caught on video. The trial ended right about at the time of the end of the Soccer World Cup, and people were discussing whether they should consider instant replay, and I had two guys talking about that and had one of the guys say: 'Well, instant replay didn't help Oscar Grant any', referring to all the video footage of him literally being executed right there (Figure 3).

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Figure 3: '(Th)ink' strip, Oakland police brutality case.

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**DS:** *This makes me think of the Rodney King beating and the subsequent acquittal by the police officers in 1992. Not that much seems to have changed since the LA riots.*

**KK:** Yes, and people still defend that kind of brutality, saying things like, 'You don't know what happened before the video or after the video'.

**DS:** *I also wanted to ask you about the way in which Barack Obama's election to the US presidency has challenged the visual vocabulary of American cartoonists and their colleagues around the world. I noticed that while you have done many caricatures of George W. Bush in 'The K Chronicles' and '(Th)ink', you haven't done too much material on Obama. What is the reason for that? And what's your assessment of Obama as president in terms of race relations and beyond?*

**KK:** I think there was a learning curve with cartoonists regarding drawing Obama. But that's the same with every new president. It took me a year and a half before I came up with a satisfactory Bush. But, you know, plenty of people are criticizing Obama. Here's the thing: I started criticizing Bush, and a lot of other cartoonists criticized him, because no one else was doing it. After 9/11, they were giving him carte blanche to do whatever. You know, before 9/11, I wasn't really on Bush that much because he didn't do anything. All he did was be on vacation. But after 9/11, I started asking certain questions and people would say: 'You shouldn't be doing this'. I was getting these e-mails by people who now would probably be ashamed to see what they sent me back then, things like: 'You shouldn't question our president in times like this'. And I thought that this is the time when you should be questioning the president more than anything. But there are plenty of people questioning whatever the president is doing this time around. I have my frustrations with Obama, but just the idea that people are saying that this has nothing to do with the president being black is incredible. You know, people are showing up at protests with guns!? Imagine what would have happened if that had ever happened at a Bush protest. I went to plenty of protests when Bush was in office. If anyone had shown up with a weapon, they'd have been shipped off to Guantanamo. It would have been insane. It's really interesting that people are saying, 'we have a black president now so racism doesn't exist anymore'. Believe me, I was writing about racism long before I was making fun of presidents. I think that the idea of a post-racial society is completely and strangely absurd. That's why I'm so interested in this whole radio thing that went down (i.e. the Dr. Laura Schlessinger controversy introduced above). It wasn't even so much about her using the n-word ten or eleven times; it was the other stuff she said. She said that you would think that since we have a black president now, no one would complain about racism anymore. It's the idea that with a black president, racism doesn't exist anymore. When Obama got into office, threats against him, I think, tripled or quadrupled from the Bush years. I think they've mellowed out now and have gotten back to normal. But so many people wanted to take him out. There's so much I could get into. But it's true, I haven't

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done a whole lot on Obama because there's plenty other people doing it. You know, so many people were so psyched that everything was going to change once he was elected. But it's probably going to take three terms of presidencies to even steer the country remotely back to a decent direction. It's more like, who would want this job after what Bush did? These four years (i.e. Obama's first term as president from 2009–2013) people are just going to completely forget. Maybe not the next term, but the term after that, whoever gets that term after will be given credit for turning the country around. That's twelve years from now. That's crazy.

*DS: It's actually quite amazing to see how much the Obama Administration has done and on how many points it has reversed what Bush was doing. If you look at how difficult it is in the political system of the United States to accomplish major change, I think Obama is doing fairly well, whether you think it's enough or not. On so many issues – Guantanamo, Iraq, torture, health care, finance reform – they have started to move into a new direction.*

**KK:** Exactly. And think about all the little things that you may not have heard about outside of the county. He ended drilling in national parks; he ended the policy of not funding non-faith-based organizations like family planning centres; he is lightening the restrictions on travelling to Cuba and things like that. They also just changed the huge disparity between crack cocaine and powder coke. Crack cocaine is an inner-city drug. They've put a lot a people away for crack cocaine. If you get caught with crack, you get 40 years in jail as opposed to ten years if you get caught with powder cocaine. And they just changed that. So all these little things that you just know are so wrong have been changed with this presidency. And still people (on the left) are saying, Obama's not doing anything, he's not doing enough. That's always been his thing. If you look at his track record, he's always been a centrist. And all these stupid (right wing) talk shows go: 'He's Hitler, he's Hitler'.

*DS: To me, associating Obama with Hitler, as Glenn Beck keeps doing on Fox News, or calling him a socialist, as many of the right-wing pundits and the Tea Party people are so fond of doing, suggests the worst kind of demagoguery as well as an incredibly low level of political awareness, both of which do not speak all too well for America's political culture.*

**KK:** My (German) wife always asks, 'What's this fascination in the United States about World War II? All they do is talk about the Holocaust, but no one ever wants to talk about Jim Crow and all the racism that used to go on in this country'. It's something that Germany straight up addresses with students, but here, you're lucky to get a page and a half in a history book. When I was coming up, they would say, the white slave owners would often treat their slaves as one of their family. That's crazy stuff. And I'm just trying to make a tiny bit of sense of it all with my messy scribbings.