

Emma Goldman for Sale

1993

everyone has long known that nothing is sacred in the modern era so only a few are shocked when everything is marketed. currently, a mini-debate is raging over the propriety of selling a large range of products bearing an "X" on them with the advent of the release of "Malcolm X," Spike Lee's cinematic depiction of the slain black leader's life.

it is ironic that the symbol taken by members of the nation of islam to their "slave name" and widely publicized by a man reviled by white society and parts of the black community as well, now appears on everything from baseball caps to potato chip bags. Betty Shabazz, Malcolm's widow, even has a lawyer tracking down those who use the trademark "x" without compensating her and director Lee who hold copyrights on the mark.

can you copyright a letter or a roman numeral? that's a question for their attorneys and the potato chip processors.

in a smaller version of the same hustle, Candace Falk, curator of the Emma Goldman Papers collection in Berkeley, CA, offers "Emmarabilia" for those who view the radical anarchist as merely an "interesting rebel or feminist." not content with cornering the market on goldman's papers, falk will sell you coffee mugs bearing emma's face as well as posters and buttons adorned with her militant (but never anarchist) statements.

falk recently has been asked by a consortium of 28 los angeles high schools to develop a "goldman curriculum" to "show how goldman maintained a vision of hope while expressing the alienation of a marginal member of society." couldn't you puke? the invitation came following the LA riots, but falk will undoubtedly hide goldman's anarchy as she usually does and ignore her support for such events as alexander berkman's armed attack on the industrialist frick and leon czolgosz' assassination of mckinley.

LA kids, like any others, would greatly benefit from exposure to goldman's life and anarchist writings, however it wouldn't be to any school principal's liking nor would falk be able to pick up her consulting fees if she was to present the "real" emma. what would have been goldman's opinion of the recent LA riots?

one of her quotes suggest the answer: "ask for work. if they won't give it to you, ask for bread. if they deny you that, take it!" we've always thought the equation would be best practiced in a reversed form, but a domesticated emma, now in service the state, is unrecognizable to us.

if you want to see the hideous emma-rabilia catalog or just tell candace what you think of her efforts, the address is: the emma goldman papers,
uc berkely,
2372 ellsworth,
berkeley ca 94720.

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