

# Activist explains the 'Value of Nothing'

Marlena Chertock  
Design Editor

With a sense of humor, seemingly flawless memorization skills and no concern for offense, activist and writer Raj Patel spoke at Elon Sept. 28 about the fundamental flaw in America's free market economy.

That fundamental flaw is actually in the free market itself, said Patel.

"What we have now in America is consumer choice, not democracy," Patel said.

He said our current market system would work better if there were many buyers and sellers, but when there is less of each, the market collapses.

"We need a level playing field for the little guy," Patel said.

Patel offered an example of the ineffectiveness of the free market economy system in other countries.

Prior to the 1990s, Haiti grew its own rice, according to Patel. After that, U.S. presidents and the World Bank imposed policies on the country that would allow the free market to control the food market. But the market could not take care of itself. It wasn't a good system for Haiti.

Today, Patel said, Haiti grows none of its own rice.

To show that this doesn't always happen in countries where the government tries to control the land, Patel pointed to another agrarian country: India. He said one in six world farmers are Indian. In India, farmers own their land.

But many farmers are extremely poor Patel said. He told a story of

one farmer who had to borrow money from a local lender to build wells on his property, five separate times because the wells kept coming up dry.

"So he mixed a pesticide (that is banned in the U.S. with water," Patel said. "His nerves asphyxiated. And all for a debt of \$325."

Patel said this story has been passed around India to raise awareness of the flawed system and sometimes desperate conditions of people.

He also said that Indian farmers have been requesting their government to

help them. To combat the failing nature of a fully government-owned property or a fully people-owned property, Patel proposed the idea of the commons, a balancing act between no ownership of the land, people owning the land and the government owning land.

This idea comes from a theory, the tragedy of the commons, that explains

if people are given a public space, they will destroy it, trying to own and control it. Patel said this doesn't have to be accepted as fact, adding that people have negotiated public spaces

in the past.

"We can manage a commons in a way that discriminates against a group," Patel said. "With hatred, exclusion, xenophobia. But we're all built to have to work together."

While Patel admitted that he didn't know exactly how this would look, he said he was excited for the next generation to keep these ideas and

dialogues going.

Patel said some communities have been better at managing their resources than the government has been. He gave an example of a sort of commons in effect now in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Oakland Food Policy Council involves the government, nongovernmental organizations, teachers, unions, activists, farmers, workers and prisoners. The council tries to create an equitable and sustainable food system in the area, according to the council's website.

"The main thought going into (the council) was, 'We need to make sure that everyone in our community eats,'" Patel said.

Patel said he believes a food movement in the U.S. is possible. He listed several organizations working toward similar goals: Slow Food, the Oakland Food Policy Council and local food co-ops.

"I love the idea of free, uncoerced exchange between people," he said.

Patel said that people need to communicate ideas on how to promote social change.

"If we're going to have social change we have to make it enjoyable," Patel said. "Otherwise, no one's going to do it."



PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKI-MEDIA COMMONS

"The main thought going into (the Oakland Food Policy Council) was, 'We need to make sure that everyone in our community eats.'"

— RAJ PATEL  
WRITER AND ACTIVIST

## John Lennon's 70th birthday marked by world-wide celebrations

Libby Dean  
Reporter

Songwriter. Founder of the most successful musical group of all time. Peace activist. Artist. Writer. Icon. Many words can be used to describe John Lennon, but one fact is certain: he was and remains to be one of the most influential figures in popular culture.

John Lennon would have turned 70 on Oct. 9. Celebrations and tributes will take place all around the world to celebrate the music icon's birthday and honor his memory.

"John Lennon was the voice of a generation," said Michael Frontani, Elon professor and author of the book "The Beatles: Image and the Media." "He matured with his audience and his accomplishments expanded the palette for rock and roll and celebrities in general." Michael Frontani is an Elon communications professor who teaches a Beatles class. He will be teaching one in the spring.

On Oct. 5, in honor of the musician's birthday, John Lennon's solo albums will be re-issued and re-mastered in solo and boxed sets. In addition, the John Lennon biographical film "Nowhere Boy" opens in limited U.S. release Oct. 8.

In New York City, a John Lennon tribute concert will be held at the Beacon Theater on Nov. 12, where performers such as Aimee Mann, Cyndi Lauper, Patti Smith and Jackson Brown, among others, will pay tribute to Lennon. Tickets are currently on sale and proceeds go to the Playing for Change Foundation, an organization that promotes peace with music.

The concert is just one of the events across the world planned in memory of the former Beatle. In Los Angeles, a two-day concert will be held. In Iceland, Lennon's widow Yoko Ono is planning a series of peace-promoting events. On Oct. 9., Ono will continue the annual tradition of lighting the Imagine Peace Tower, a column of light to symbolize hope for peace in the world. The light will stay lit from Oct. 9 to Dec.

8, the 30th anniversary of Lennon's death. After the lighting of the tower, Ono will hold a special concert of the Yoko Ono Plastic Ono Band. The Peace Tower lighting can be viewed around the world via live feed at imaginepeace.com.

Lennon's hometown of Liverpool, England is holding a series of events to honor him. Jackie Spencer, Beatles tour guide, has been giving Beatles tours throughout Liverpool for fifteen years and will hold a special "All About John" tour Oct. 9. Places in the tour include Lennon's childhood home, the schools he attended, Strawberry Fields and Penny Lane.

"John is still such an icon all of these years later because he was so outspoken and was never afraid to speak his mind and he fought for peace," Spencer said.

Also Oct. 9, a peace monument dedicated to Lennon's memory will be unveiled in Liverpool. Lennon's first wife Cynthia and eldest son Julian will attend the unveiling of the monument called "Peace & Harmony," which is commissioned by the Global Peace Initiative, an American arts organization whose goal is to promote global peace.

Frontani said one of the reasons why he admires John Lennon is because of the musician's intensely personal music. Lennon had the quintessential rock'n'roll voice that directly reflected his emotions, he said.

"Lennon made some of the most personal albums ever," Frontani said. "He had such pathos in his voice and he just poured his heart out in a way that was and is still unusual for a musician."

Though John Lennon's life was cut short, recent efforts to honor his memory show he is still revered and loved as an icon.

"John Lennon's music was so personal to him but he made his music universal to everyone," Elon junior Sarah Small said. "Even thirty years later, everyone can relate to his music. His music is timeless and his legacy will live on forever."

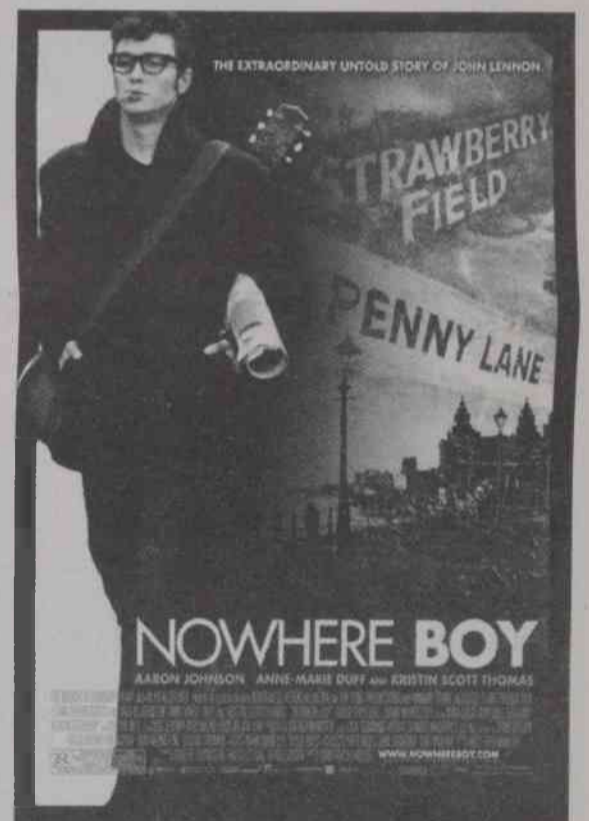


PHOTO FROM IMDB.COM

On Oct. 3 the movie 'Nowhere Boy' was shown in the Music Box Theatre in Chicago and several other theaters to mark the celebration of John Lennon's 70th birthday. The movie, directed by Sam Taylor-Wood, tells the story of Lennon's childhood. There are several birthday celebrations for Lennon occurring worldwide. Examiner.com listed and described the events.

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