

the best examples of the form—pieces by Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and others.

Sent by *Rolling Stone* magazine to Cape Canaveral in 1973 to cover the final Apollo launch, he found himself immersed in the world of the astronauts and embarked on a project that occupied him for the rest of the decade. *The Right Stuff* (1979) was an emotion-packed testament to the quality of courage and was his most sustained work of non-fiction. A film version followed in 1983.

He published other non-fiction books, including attacks on modern art (*The Painted Word*, 1975) and modern architecture (*From Bauhaus to Our House*, 1981), and a collection of his drawings and verse (*In Our Time*, 1980); but for most of the 1980s, he was occupied with writing a novel on deadline. Figuring that Dickens and Balzac had serialized their novels in the publications of their day, Wolfe secured a deal with *Rolling Stone* to serialize his big, realistic novel of New York. When the biweekly installments began appearing in 1983, Wolfe was roundly criticized, but when his revised version appeared in book form in 1987, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* was hailed as a masterpiece (it became a movie in 1990). *A Man in Full* (1998) had an initial press-run of 1.2 million hard-cover copies.

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**“Wolfman Jack”** (Robert Weston Smith) (1941-1995), broadcasting from stations along the Mexican border and later via Armed Forces Radio, howled and growled through rock and rhythm & blues classics, making generations of fans throughout the southwest, then around the world. From his presence in the movie *American Graffiti* (1973), the Wolfman became the disc jockey most associated with the “greaser” revival of the 1970s.

Young Bob Smith had a reputation as a hoodlum in his Brooklyn neighborhood. To keep him out of trouble, his father gave him a radio, which he used to tune in the disc jockeys who championed rhythm & blues music. “Smitty” eventually headed to Nashville to learn radio from “John R” Richbourg, of WLAC, a white champion of black R&B since the 1940s, and then began a series of radio sales and announcing jobs.

Bob became interested in the “border radio” stations in Mexico, which could blast an unrestricted 250,000 watt signal back to the U.S., selling faith cures and patent medicines that would cost stations their licenses back in the States. He took over management of XERF, south of Del Rio, TX, in 1960. To get the station’s lineup of radio preachers to pay their bills, Bob temporarily replaced them with a licentious R&B show hosted by his new alter-ego, Wolfman Jack (Smith later recalled that had played “the Wolfman” when roughhousing with his sister’s children, and that “Jack” was a beatnik affectation of the time). By day, Bob

Smith sold time on both KCIJ (Shreveport, LA) and XERF, but by night, it was the Wolfman who howled on the airwaves as far out as the Soviet Union.

Once Smith pulled XERF into the black, the absentee owner decided to cut him out of the action. Smith staved off a literal gunfight by selling out his interest. After an unsuccessful stint with KUXL in Minneapolis, he headed to XERB in Tijuana, with access to the Los Angeles market. His sales staff and announcers worked at a Sunset Boulevard office, then ran each day’s programming on tape to the transmitter in Mexico. There, Wolfman became a radio legend in the western U.S.

Wolfman Jack’s guttural delivery borrowed from blues singer Howlin’ Wolf, baying R&B slang and double entendres, telling listeners to “get nekkid” and coining “watching the submarine races” as a euphemism for necking on lover’s lane. He responded to records like a revival chorus and dropped sound effects of wolves into the middle of songs.

Mexican officials saw radio profits escaping north, and forced Smith to sell his interest in XERB. Smith and the Wolfman were on the outs for a short time, until he got a morning-drive gig at Los Angeles’ experimental album rocker KDAY. In 1970, he took his old XERB tapes, edited his segues and phone dedications to remove dated references and L.A. locations, and became the first rock DJ to go into syndication. The show ran for 16 years across the country and on 600 Armed Forces Radio stations worldwide.

When the movie *American Graffiti*, with the Wolfman’s bit part as himself, came out, breaking box-office records, the Wolfman’s show became more popular than ever. He became co-host, with Helen Reddy, of *The Midnight Special*, a live music show airing Fridays after Johnny Carson on NBC.

Wolfman Jack was everywhere in the 1970s. He had a religious show, pitched dozens of products, and did guest shots on TV series. His voice is heard on Top 40 tribute songs like the Guess Who’s “Clap for the Wolfman,” Flash Cadillac’s “Did You Boogie (With Your Baby),” and the Stampede’s cover of “Hit the Road, Jack.”

Bob Smith cut back the Wolfman’s workload in the 1980s, working small venues and corporate meetings, and hosting *Rock ‘n’ Roll Palace* on the Nashville Network. He exceed oldies concerts and sold record collections through TV infomercials. He had begun syndicating a live oldies record show from the Planet Hollywood restaurant in Washington, DC, when he died of a heart attack in 1995.

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