The World Science Fiction Society presents

News From Outside Omelas: Close to Home

A Leaflet Curated by

The WSFS Clarion

And Published

Aug 13, 2025

Comprising the following articles:

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In celebration of "Why Don't We Just Kill the Kid in the Omelas Hole" winning its well-deserved Hugo Award for Best Short Story, WSFS and the Seattle WorldCon are delighted to present this edition of the "News From Outside Omelas"–some curated pieces from a variety of authors to help you think through Kim's piece (and Le Guin's) as it applies to your life.

In today's edition, we start with history. Pat Cadigan's brilliant "Patterns" begins a meditation on the nature of spectacle, followed by deep dives into two of the most influential (and spectacular) organizations of the last century (one local to Seattle!). After that, we present several snapshots of where we are and where we might go, coming from all over; we even have an Episcopal priest's homily from this past Sunday.

We end with a promise.

Happy reading, and enjoy your time at the Seattle WorldCon!

Patterns

Pat Cadigan

Aug 1, 1987

Originally published: https://archive.org/details/omnimagazine/OMNI_1987_08/page/n135/mode/2up

I have this continuing fantasy of assassinating the President. Any President.

To step forward within a crowd, raising my weapon and aiming it at the President's head. Sometimes in the movie unreeling in my mind, my hand comes up holding a Luger Parabellum P08 with the ridiculously long 190mm barrel. Other times I am holding a more likely Mauser Military Pistol. Twice I have found myself clutching an Uzi with the stock detached, three or four times I held a .357 Smith & Wesson Magnum. Once – only once – I stared down the length of a crossbow at the chief executive.

In the fantasy, I am not scared or angry. I don't think about the fact that I am taking a human life – the President, after all, is not so much human as manufactured, a product made flesh by the bipartisan system and the media in accidental conjugation. Is it wrong to fire at the dot pattern on a TV screen? I feel nothing beyond a mild nervousness, the slight (very slight) stage-fright I used to experience during my acting days. That my stage-fright was never acute enough to give me the cold sweats or send me vomiting into the handiest receptacle probably contributed to my lack of success in the theatre. In a one-person show, I could have been overlooked.

I know what you're thinking. I dream of assassination as a way to become visible at last. You are wrong. There is far more power in invisibility than in fame.

In fact, my fantasy movie has never proceeded beyond the point at which I raise my weapon and train it on the President. The action freezes when the President's gaze rests on the instrument of his/her destruction. But I know the rest of it:

I brace myself and fire. The President falls backwards, face a red ruin, body jerking in every direction. He/she is caught by aides and Secret Service agents and lowered to the ground. The crowd is completely silent. They are neither frightened nor in shock, just passive as the dot pattern rearranges itself. I lower the weapon to my side, then turn and walk away without hurry. Nobody looks at me. I walk some unmeasured distance to a car I recognize as mine, parked at an innocuous curb. I get in, twist the key waiting in the ignition and drive off.

In the days to come, there will be no mention of what happened to the President, ever, nor will there be any news about the government again. With one shot, I have obliterated not just the President but both Houses of Congress, the Supreme Court, Social Security, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Government Printing Office, the Gross National Product, the FTC, the CIA, the HEW and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, among others, as well as postponing for-ever the next election year. But life goes on anyway. I drive an endless highway across the United States and through the windshield I observe the permanent status quo I have visited on the American people. They don't know what has happened and they don't find it odd that they keep living in the same homes, working the same jobs, hearing the same music on the radio, watching the same dot patterns. Like me, they travel without destination. The days melt into each other with no distinguishing characteristics. The seasons come in and go out as they were meant to do in textbooks, but no one grows older. The treadmill has achieved a state of being both in motion and at rest simultaneously. Test pattern. Entropy.

All because I shot the President's dot pattern.

Seen in close-up, the dot pattern could almost be taken for a collection of organisms, very cooperative organisms which have discovered a choreography that will produce patterns pleasing to the eyes of much larger and much less cooperative organisms.

Quotation from Chairman Busby Berkeley and Miss Amy Lowell: *Christ! What are patterns for?*

I'll tell you.

The screen crackles when I put my finger on it. Static electricity; the dots warning me off their pattern. I pull my finger back and make it a pistol barrel pointing at the President, who is giving the State of the Union address. The President looks directly at "me" and hesitates. The dots at work on his pattern burble and boil and show me the red ruin that could be the result of my gun hand. Then the President's head re-forms and he goes on with his speech. We are in great need of re-form in this country, he says, but even so, the State of the Union in general is most hope-inspiring.

Now. While there's still hope.

I cover the President's face with my finger. Loud crackling, followed by a close-up which put my finger absurdly on the President's moving mouth. He doesn't bite, but there is some mild electricity running up my arm.

"It was all them cop shows," his mother said. "All that violence, they oughta get it off the tube." She said it on television, at his televised trial. Christ! What are patterns for? First-degree murder.

"Always such a good kid," my mother would say. "Never a moment's trouble. Helped around the house and never answered back, either. Good-natured, you know. And when all the other kids were hanging out on the streets or chasing each other around and getting into trouble, *my* kid was studying. *My* kid always wanted to be somebody."

How true. I could have had my own show, in fact. If the technology had been good enough in those days, I might have lived in a suburban dot pattern, walked to school to my own theme music, mouthed dialog to my own laugh track. And achieved endless childhood in syndication. I could have been syndicated; I could have been a contender. Instead of a COMMERCIAL INTERRUPT FOR STATION IDENTIFICATION. It is often necessary to amputate a frame or two for the sake of format. So sorry, apparently the program director spliced this one a little early. But since it happened anyway, you have sixty seconds to contemplate your mantra. *Now* how much would you pay?

Late at night, the patterns change and rearrange. I can't sleep. Two, three, four in the morning, the dots perform before my dry eyes. Slices, dices, juliennes. How much would you pay? Don't answer yet ... stainless steel never needs sharpening. Now how much would you pay? Don't answer yet ... act now and well throw in the fabulous Kalashnikov rifle, the most successful automatic rifle ever made! Gas operated, simultaneous bolt action and cocking, with a handy selector lever for single shot or automatic at a rate of 100 rpm, that's 100 rpm! *Isn't that amazing?* A mere 8 pounds with a folding metal stock, perfect for the murder of the head of state of your choice! Call now, operators are standing by!

I blink. When you awake, you will remember everything.

I want to call friends to ask if they have just seen this, too. Then I remember, all my friends are electric.

In living color.

A Famous Actor has shot himself. When they found him, the television in his townhouse was still on, murmuring merrily to itself as it played one of his old movies. I see it on the six o'clock news. Dot pattern of a dot pattern.

Now how much would you pay?

I have taken to dreaming in dots. Reruns. I raise my arm. I am holding a Browning GP_{35}. I know nothing about guns. Its rate of fire is 25 rpm with a muzzle velocity of 1110 feet per second and it is going to make cheap chuck of the President's face. I know nothing about guns. The dot pattern knows. Point-blank range is that distance at which the bullet achieves its highest velocity, the distance the President is from me now. And it's on every channel, even cable.

Cable?

When I awake, I remember everything, in dot patterns, in living color.

A soap opera actress reports being assaulted in a restaurant by an irate woman wielding a Totes umbrella, shouting, "You leave that nice lady's husband alone, you slut! Hasn't that poor woman had enough trouble without you trying to steal her man?" The actress's companions manage to pull the woman away. The rest of the people in the restaurant-diners, waiters, waitresses, busboys, maitre d' – all watch. They are neither frightened nor in shock.

And now, what will I do?

I consult the schedule. It is not time to run all the drug dealers out of Florida. Last night, the score was evened for the right-thinking on the mean streets of New York, it won't have to be done again for another week. I think I will defend my heavyweight title against the challenger in Las Vegas. I double up my fists and inspect the knuckles. Yes, these can go fifteen rounds, piece of Duncan Hines cake.

I press my knuckles against the screen. Wild crackling. The dots swarm in liquid patterns around each point of contact. Electricity is flowing up both arms, dancing through the nerve endings which sizzle into life and join the pattern.

My hands are being taped as I hold them out. I got to keep my fuckin hands up, do I hear, just keep my fuckin hands up and let him dance himself out and then jab his motherfuckin head off. The dots pulse, live from Caesar's Palace, more live than life. Fitted out with this dot pattern to wear, I could strike sparks in the moving, living air.

Now I know it can be done. The fight goes by in a swirl of dot pattern light. I keep my fuckin hands up and let him dance himself out and then jab his motherfuckin head off. The fight is not important. Now I know it can be done.

But I have to wait until the swelling goes down and the black eye fades. Never mind. You should see the other dot pattern.

More on that story from our correspondent in Washington.

Dot-pattern Washington snaps under the scanning line. The White House looks a little fuzzy. So does our correspondent. I touch her microphone; the dots leap in frenzy as I reshape their pattern into a 127mm barrel version of the Gyrojet pistol and then back into a microphone. Not yet. Tonight there is a press conference.

Brought to you by, sponsored in part. The whole world is waiting and watching. Ladies and gentlemen on every channel, the President of the United States. The reception has never been so good, it must be me. The dots dance for me now and we know each other; tropism. Whenever they appear, I turn to look and my looking excites the patterns.

What are patterns for?

I'll show you. I'll ... *show* ... you. As I show myself.

The dots sparkle around my hands in the continuing fantasy shown live on every channel. I run my fingers through them like a helping of stardust and reshape the pattern. They know what I need here. The Colt Commando with telescopic butt fully extended for shoulder firing, as used by the Green Berets, who have also been on this channel. The dots remember the pattern and here it is.

I step forward in the crowd of reporters demanding to be called on. The President's dot pattern scans the room, looking for a likely questioner. Then he sees "me" and hesitates. I have raised the Colt to my shoulder. Everyone is watching.

I touch my finger to the screen. The President's head disappears in a red mist, dot patterns gone insane. The room is completely silent, neither frightened nor shocked. Behind the podium, the Great Seal, the curtains, the President's aides, and Secret Service agents begin to unravel from the hole where the President's head was.

Embarrassed, puzzled anchorman. We are sorry for the interruption in transmission. Apparently we are having technical difficulties. We'll have more information for you after this.

No, we won't. That is all the information we are ever going to have, ever.

Fade to commercial. Dogs pounce on bowls of food. I sit on the couch, nodding. It's all over now. It wasn't quite how I expected it to go but it was, after all, adapted for television.

The commercial is followed by another commercial and then the embarrassed, puzzled anchorman. Apparently we are permanently cut off from our hook-up in the nation's capital. We will try to have some news on the rest of the press conference as soon as possible.

A fast recap of the statements and questions up until the moment I murdered the President's dot pattern, when things unraveled like celluloid melting away, a promise of an update soon. They patch the foreshortened evening schedule with a made-for-TV movie. Time to go,

I leave my apartment, go down to my car parked at an innocuous curb. The key is not waiting in the ignition but in my pocket. Such a good kid, never a moment's trouble. We can live in the same homes, work at the same jobs, hear the same music on the radio, watch the same dot patterns. We travel without destination. What are patterns for?

Nothing, any more.

There used to be too much violence on TV. But not now.

How ACT UP Changed America

Michael Specter

Jun 7, 2021

Originally published: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/06/14/how-act-up-changed-america

One day in June, 1990, at the height of the *AIDS* epidemic, I sat in the auditorium of San Francisco's Moscone Center and watched as hundreds of activists pelted Louis W. Sullivan, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, with condoms. Sullivan had been attempting to deliver the closing address at the 6th International *AIDS* Conference. The protesters, from the *AIDS* Coalition to Unleash Power, or *ACT UP*, were there to stop him. Shouts of "shame, shame, shame" were accompanied by whistles and air horns. Like many people who were in the audience that day—I was there as a Washington *Post* reporter—I remember everything about the speech except what Sullivan said. Which was exactly what *ACT UP* wanted. The group had been formed to force a negligent government to take *AIDS* seriously. Not every federal official came under attack that day. Just an hour earlier, Anthony S. Fauci, the country's chief *AIDS* scientist, had received a standing ovation after he essentially endorsed the protesters' agenda, warning his colleagues that they "cannot and should not dismiss activists merely on the basis of the fact that they are not trained scientists."

It was a triumphant moment for *ACT UP*, which had become known for its outrageous stunts. Behind what seemed like radical unity, however, the organization had already begun to split into two distinct camps. One believed that the best way to advance the cause was to continue to protest—loudly. The other did not reject public actions but didn't focus on them; it was known as the Science Club, and had formed a kind of academy within *ACT UP*.

In "Let the Record Show: A Political History of *ACT UP* New York, 1987-1993" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), Sarah Schulman, a novelist, journalist, and activist, chronicles the early years of a vigorously oppositional group that was itself riven by discord and factionalism. Any history of a movement presents an argument about its identity—about which internal tendencies most faithfully represent its mission and which betray it. Schulman has strong views on this subject. On one point, though, there can be little disagreement. When *ACT UP* began, its founders could not have guessed how high the group would soar; they would have been even more surprised by the particular conflicts that brought it down to earth.

By the time *ACT UP* was born, in 1987, tens of thousands of Americans—mostly gay men—had died of *AIDS*, and more were dying every day, even as the government remained largely indifferent. Early that March, Larry Kramer, the writer and activist who had helped found the Gay Men's Health Crisis, delivered a speech at New York's Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, on West Thirteenth Street. "O.K., I want this half of the room to stand up," he later recalled saying. "I looked around at those kids and I said to the people standing up, 'You are all going to be dead in five years. Every one of you fuckers.' I was livid. I said, 'How about doing something about it? Why just line up for the cattle cars?' "

The *AIDS* Coalition to Unleash Power was formed two days later. Its members met at the Center on Monday nights. They came to plan actions and to socialize but also to get answers. More than anything, it was a safe place for people who had nowhere else to turn. They were, Schulman writes, "a despised group of people, with no rights, facing a terminal disease for which there were no treatments. Abandoned by their families, government, and society." The New York membership expanded from an initial hardcore cadre of several dozen to several thousand, including many people who were neither infected with H.I.V. nor at much risk of becoming so. Although plenty of other cities started their own chapters, *ACT UP NY* was always at the center of the movement.

ACT UP members lived by a creed set out by Ann Northrop, one of the organization's more media-savvy leaders: "Actions are always, always, always planned to be dramatic enough to capture public attention." The activists delivered. They wrapped the home of the North Carolina senator Jesse Helms in a giant yellow condom; invaded St. Patrick's Cathedral during Mass; laid siege to the Food and Drug

Administration ("Hey, hey, F.D.A., how many people have you killed today?"); and dumped the ashes of comrades who had died of *AIDS* on the White House lawn. These and many other high-profile interventions raised awareness about *AIDS*. But the group's most important accomplishments were not as easily captured in headlines. Because so many people with *AIDS* were forced to live on the streets, *ACT UP* members founded a philanthropy that evolved into Housing Works, which directed resources (including money raised by a chain of thrift shops) toward *AIDS* services and homelessness. *ACT UP* helped establish the first successful needle-exchange programs in New York City. It also took on insurance practices like the exclusion of single men who lived in predominantly gay neighborhoods.

Nothing the organization did had a more lasting impact, however, than the work of the Science Club, whose members served on *ACT UP*'s Treatment and Data Committee. They would congregate each week at the East Village apartment of Mark Harrington, who, though he had no formal scientific training, eventually won a MacArthur "genius" grant for his work on *AIDS*. Harrington, a wiry man with reddish-blond hair, seemed both constantly in motion and unusually deliberate. As Schulman recounts, the gatherings in his apartment were like a "doctor's weekly rounds," where attendees discussed a particular problem and "assigned themselves immunology and virology textbooks."

Harrington was hardly averse to public demonstrations: he helped organize *ACT UP*'s "Seize Control of the F.D.A." protest, in 1988, and its "Storm the N.I.H." event, in 1990. But he believed that anger had to be allied with expertise. He and other members of the Science Club came to know the arcane rules and the impenetrable bureaucracy of the F.D.A. better than most of the officials who worked there. They prepared a detailed assessment of N.I.H.-sponsored clinical trials, and argued that people facing almost certain death should have access to experimental drugs that had been shown to be reasonably safe, even if they had not yet demonstrated efficacy. By 1990, the F.D.A. had adopted this approach (known as the "parallel track"), which would make selected drugs available to H.I.V.-positive patients. The slogan "Drugs Into Bodies" moved from placards to policy: *ACT UP* had forced a fundamental change in the way clinical trials are conducted in the United States. Today, drug candidates for life-threatening conditions are frequently put on a parallel track for "expanded access."

Eventually, in what Schulman refers to as *ACT UP*'s period of "distress and desperation," the Science Club broke away from the organization, and, led by Harrington, it formed the Treatment Action Group, to focus on accelerating the pace of research. Although the *TAG* defection involved fewer than two dozen people, it was a painful divorce, with unexpected repercussions. *ACT UP*'s ferocity concealed a genuine fragility. The group fearlessly hurled itself against the medical bureaucracy, the Catholic Church, even the White House; what proved much harder to weather was its own crisis of identity.

Although "Let the Record Show" bills itself as a history, Schulman maintains that "a chronological history would be impossible and inaccurate." She does hope to offer contemporary activists "general principles and takeaway ideas," but her book is best approached as a sort of modified oral history, a curated archive of nearly two hundred interviews conducted over the course of two decades. One can open this seven-hundred-page book at random and find something interesting to read: a mini-biography, firsthand recollections of major events, contentious perspectives on the goals of different groups within *ACT UP*. (The interviews—which Schulman did along with the filmmaker Jim Hubbard—are available online, as the *ACT UP* Oral History Project.) Schulman draws, too, on her five years as an *ACT UP* member, but largely eschews other people's research, and the book provides scant interstitial narrative; some readers may struggle to put these passages into context. Still, her labors will provide an invaluable resource for the social history of the movement that remains to be written.

That's not to say that the book lacks a thesis. Schulman is intent on widening our understanding of what it meant to be part of *ACT UP*. Instead of a colossus run largely by a small cohort of white men, she argues, it was more of a loose confederation of affinity groups. Although *ACT UP* is often remembered for its extreme measures, it never committed an act of violence (despite enduring many). When we think of *ACT UP*, Schulman wants us to think of the fight for universal health care, racial justice, and radical democracy —and to recognize that "a few committed activists, when focused on being effective, can accomplish a lot."

Early in the epidemic, people with *AIDS* were routinely described in the press as "victims." (In the nineteen-eighties, I was as guilty of this sin as other reporters.) Schulman dispels that portrait of passivity. She spoke at length to a number of *ACT UP*'s leaders, at least those who survived into this century. But her most inspiring interviews were with rank-and-file members like Aner Candelario, who was born in Puerto Rico and graduated from the Bronx High School of Science. In 1976, as a teen-ager, Candelario was

riding the No. 6 train when he had a "revelation" that he was not bisexual but gay. "Being a practical person," Schulman tells us, he searched the phone book and found something called the Gay Switchboard. Candelario dialled the number and asked if there was a group for teen-agers. There was, and he attended one meeting, then another, and for the next five years he led a gay youth group.

Vito Russo, another *ACT UP* stalwart, is best known for "The Celluloid Closet," his 1981 book about homosexuality and homophobia in film. In 1988, Russo delivered a spellbinding speech, in Albany, called "Why We Fight." (You can, and should, watch it on YouTube.) As Russo told a crowd, he had *AIDS*, but that wasn't what was killing him:

> If I'm dying from anything, I am dying from homophobia. If I am dying from anything, I am dying from racism. If I'm dying from anything, it's from indifference and red tape, because these are the things that are preventing an end to this crisis. If I'm dying from anything, I'm dying from Jesse Helms. If I'm dying from anything, I'm dying from the President of the United States. And, especially, if I'm dying from anything, I'm dying from the sensationalism of newspapers and magazines and television shows, which are interested in me as a human-interest story—only as long as I'm willing to be a helpless victim, but not if I'm fighting for my life.

The politics of *AIDS*—"gay-related immune deficiency," or *GRID*, was an early designation, as if a medical condition might have a sexual orientation—was inevitably a confrontation with homophobia. In March, 1986, William F. Buckley, Jr., wrote, in a syndicated column, "Everyone detected with *AIDS* should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common-needle users, and on the buttocks, to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals." That same year, by a vote of 5–4, the Supreme Court upheld a Georgia sodomy statute, in a case involving two men having sex in a private home. Several years into a harrowing epidemic, gay Americans were told that an act of consensual sex could not only infect them with a fatal disease; it could also, at the will of a state, send them to prison. The fears of internment were not easily dismissed as hysteria.

In a section of the book titled "When an Image Leads a Movement," Schulman shows how such threats led to what became *ACT UP*'s most arresting symbol. Around the time of Buckley's tattoo column, an art director named Avram Finkelstein read something in the newspaper about the silence of a community being deafening. He and some friends had been tossing around ideas for a poster. As Finkelstein told Schulman, one day he said, "What about *Gay Silence Is Deafening*?" A colleague responded, "What about *Silence Is Death*?" Another person said, "Oh, no, it should be *Silence Equals Death*." Another offered, "We should use an equal sign." Finkelstein recalled, "It was literally that fast. It was four comments."

They also discussed the graphics that would accompany the slogan. "We talked about the rainbow flag," Finkelstein said, but "it was too friendly and, I'm not going to lie, just too ugly." They hated the pink triangle, too, for its suggestion of victimhood, "but it seemed like it might have the most chance of being clear enough to the lesbian and gay community, more clear than the other images we were discussing that were abstract, and graphic enough to be intriguing, interesting, compelling to people outside of the community who didn't know what it was."

The group decided to turn the pink triangle upside down, "thereby permanently connecting the *AIDS* crisis visually to the legacy of the Holocaust," Schulman writes. During the late eighties, countless T-shirts bore the logo, and "Silence = Death" stickers could be found on what seemed like every newspaper box or wall in New York City. In a blinkered era, signage was significant, and merchandise mattered.

"Let the Record Show" argues that *ACT UP*'s success arose from its genuine diversity, and its truly democratic approach to making decisions. The book highlights the contributions of women, many of whom came out of the reproductive-rights movement of the seventies. Some, like Maxine Wolfe, who was a psychology professor and a central figure in *ACT UP*, had a long history of feminist and lesbian activism.

And many of *ACT UP*'s campaigns were created for the particular benefit of women. In the late eighties and the early nineties, it became common to hear the *ACT UP* slogan "Women don't get *AIDS*; they just die from it." That was because the original list of the conditions that the C.D.C. used to define *AIDS*—a definition with implications for what insurers would cover and who might receive disability payments—did not include chronic infections that were specific to women. This kind of neglect should hardly come as a shock. Women have rarely been given equal consideration or representation in medical research. (The map

of the human genome—the foundational blueprint of modern biological research—was initially based largely on the genetic sequence of an anonymous man from Buffalo.)

Yet there were reasons for *ACT UP*'s prevailing image. A 1989 survey of the New York chapter showed that more than three-quarters of participants were younger than thirty-five and that eighty per cent were white gay men. Many were well educated, even well-off. Larry Kramer, who died last year at the age of eighty-four, certainly fit that bill. Recalling his early attempts to enlist help from public officials, he told Schulman, "You learn very fast that you're a faggot, and it doesn't make any difference that you went to Yale and were assistant to presidents of a couple of film companies, and that you had money." The early *ACT UP* firebrands never forgot that Ronald Reagan hadn't so much as uttered the word "*AIDS*" in public until September, 1985, just a couple of weeks before it killed his friend Rock Hudson.

Kramer made it clear that the unexpected pain of spurned entitlement helped fuel the movement. "We were mostly white and privileged, and there was a lot of flak against us in the *community* because of that," he told Schulman. As one would expect, this account doesn't sit well with her.

"*ACT UP* was predominantly white and male," she acknowledges. "But its history has been whitened in ways that obstruct the complexity." Kramer, she thinks, "never really understood the wide range of people who were in *ACT UP*, where we were coming from, and what we were doing." She is angered by the attention that has been lavished on him. "It is remarkable how many people in high places, of all ages, in multiple spaces, think that Larry was 'the leader of *ACT UP*.' " In fact, as she concedes, Kramer never pretended to be the leader of *ACT UP*. He was its sharpest spear, though, and spears are needed in times of war.

Schulman's trouble with Kramer reflects a deeper fissure within the organization. *ACT UP* certainly contained affinity groups, including the Majority Action Committee, for people of color, and the Women's Caucus. But did members who were white and male have an advantage in swaying a bureaucracy that was also overwhelmingly white and male? That's what Kramer implied, and, though Schulman doesn't dispute the point, she thinks that the group's true power lay in a concerted display of strength through diversity.

ACT UP's biggest problem, in her opinion, was to be found not in the movement but in media depictions of it that played largely to a straight and white middle-class audience. She assails David France, whom she accuses of using her research to "nefarious ends" in his powerful documentary "How to Survive a Plague." It won mainstream approval, she thinks, precisely because it promotes a "heroic white male individual model" of activism, in contrast with the "diverse grassroots movements" revealed in the less celebrated documentary "United in Anger," which she produced with its director, Jim Hubbard.

Schulman's indictment of how *AIDS* and *AIDS* activism have been portrayed extends to the Oscar-winning film "Philadelphia." It errs, she says, because it depicts a gay man with *AIDS* (Tom Hanks) being helped by a homophobic straight lawyer (Denzel Washington) who overcomes his prejudice, rather than by the man's own community. More surprisingly, she lambastes the Pulitzer Prize-winning play "Angels in America," which came to Broadway in 1993 and was, she maintains, yet another work "that made straight people into the heroes of the crisis." Tony Kushner's dramatic diptych "is strangely disconnected from the reality of people with *AIDS*, relying on the conventional trope of a cowardly gay person who abandons his lover." It's a curious interpretation, requiring the erasure of Jeffrey Wright's role as Belize, a gay nurse and the play's centering sensibility. (The performance won Wright a Tony.)

That's not the only erasure in Schulman's book. For her, setting the record straight means emphasizing *ACT UP*'s broad vista of coalition politics. Yet of the nearly two hundred interviews that she draws upon for the book, only a few are with Black people. The voices of important activists of color who didn't survive the plague are absent, owing to her reluctance to use archives other than her own. Even in a chapter describing the plight of H.I.V.-positive Haitians interned in Guantánamo, all her interview subjects are white. Early in the book, she says that her subjects spoke with her openly because, as New Yorkers, "they were used to telling their thoughts and feelings to a middle-aged Jewish woman." In the context of her argument, the shrink joke, with its caste and class presuppositions, cuts a little close to the bone.

"*ACT UP* is a racist organization," the late Keith Cylar, a prominent member of the group, told *Spin* in 1990. He wasn't condemning *ACT UP*; he was saying that racism was an inevitable feature in a mostly white organization, and required vigilance. The sociologist (and *ACT UP* veteran) Deborah B. Gould, subtly probing the group's racial politics, has written about a "scarcity mentality" fuelled by desperation.

When people of color raised issues of particular concern to them, they routinely met the rejoinder "What does this have to do with *AIDS?*" or were told, "We don't have time." But Schulman hurries past such conversations, more concerned with scrutinizing the group's media image than its complicated reality.

In the end, what Schulman calls *ACT UP*'s "tragic split" was precipitated more by dissension over research than by disagreements over race. Any list of the most important medical trials of modern times would have to include the *AIDS* Clinical Trials Group Protocol 076 study, which was launched in 1991. That study was designed to determine whether the antiretroviral AZT, administered during advanced pregnancy, would prevent H.I.V. transmission from mother to infant. And it led to a decisive rift between those in *ACT UP*, like Harrington, who argued for the study's critical importance and those, like Maxine Wolfe, who wanted it stopped at all costs.

AZT was the first antiretroviral that received F.D.A. authorization to treat H.I.V. For a while, it would bring down a patient's viral load, but H.I.V. is a fast-mutating virus, and the drug, when used on its own, as a "monotherapy," typically lost efficacy within months. For a woman about to give birth, however, a temporary drop in viral load could be enough to reduce the risk of transmission. At the time of the study, between a quarter and a third of infants delivered to women with H.I.V. were born infected, and most died. Would the therapy help?

The A.C.T.G. 076 study—which enrolled nearly five hundred pregnant women—demonstrated that a brief regimen of AZT administered to a mother before and during delivery, along with a small dose for the newborn, decreased the perinatal transmission rate by nearly seventy per cent.

That trial, and others that followed, helped doctors throughout the world prevent the deaths of millions of children, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where infection rates were exceptionally high. Still, AZT was a poison that had to be used wisely, and the trial raised thorny ethical questions. Was it fair to give poor women drugs that could cause resistance later and, in theory, hinder subsequent treatment? Or did the immediate threat to all the children who might be born with H.I.V. take precedence? Was it ethical to use a placebo group? Many women in *ACT UP* wanted to shut the trial down, or substantially alter it. The Science Club fought forcefully for the trial. (So did many Black women, who knew that it could be particularly helpful to hard-hit communities of color.)

Wolfe, who brought Schulman into the group, and who emerges as a major opponent of Harrington and his approach, considered the trial too dangerous. She has never swerved from her conviction that it was immoral. "I regret that we couldn't stop 076," she told Schulman. "To this day, I think it was a big mistake." Schulman—who uncritically presents Wolfe's false assertion that the risk of viral transmission to infants was "minuscule"—condemns the trials as privileging the "imagined future" over the present; unborn babies over their mothers. She implies that some of the mothers later died because they were "rendered resistant to some subsequent classes of new medications."

Yet, since trial subjects almost invariably received a higher "standard of care" than would have been available to them otherwise, participation could save *their* lives, not just the lives of their offspring. And Schulman's concern that these mothers wouldn't benefit from new classes of medicine has long since been laid to rest. Newer antivirals—notably protease inhibitors, which won F.D.A. approval a year after the trial results were published—became part of an updated standard of care. These regimens proved widely effective for people who had previously taken AZT.

It's nearly impossible to assess the value of a medical trial without at least exploring the consequences of not carrying it out. I travelled to Africa to write about this issue nearly twenty years ago. I could hardly find an African physician or researcher who didn't consider the A.C.T.G. 076 study to be of immense value. I found none who thought it should have been stopped. White feminists like Schulman and Wolfe, who understandably saw the study through the lens of reproductive politics—and the way anti-abortion advocates have elevated the welfare of a fetus over that of its mother—failed to grasp what these trials meant to vulnerable communities around the world. Almost three decades later, Schulman refuses to acknowledge that, on a deeply contentious issue, the Science Club was right.

Inevitably, personalities as well as principles played a role in *ACT UP*'s subsequent split. As Schulman observes, Maxine Wolfe and Mark Harrington deserve a great deal of credit for the group's successes; the two were equally responsible, she contends, for what she calls its "self-defeat." Although Wolfe is at pains to distance herself from the antagonism that arose toward the Science Club, people within that group had

their own perspective. The estimable Garance Franke-Ruta, who joined *ACT UP* as a teen-ager, and followed Harrington to the Treatment Action Group, spoke bluntly to Schulman: Wolfe, she said, "was awful to me."

The grievance that Wolfe and her allies had with the Science Club went beyond the battle over a single drug trial. They were concerned that the Club's members had increasingly pursued the "inside strategy"—working with pharmaceutical researchers, N.I.H. administrators, and other public officials. This meant that, as Wolfe put it, they "were meeting with the very people who we were fighting against." Her allies discussed a moratorium on letting anyone in *ACT UP* meet with government officials, and the prospect deepened the sense within the Science Club that *ACT UP* no longer valued its agenda. Although *ACT UP* didn't collapse after the schism, it was badly damaged, and it never recovered its centrality. When the inside-outside strategy was largely reduced to an outside strategy, the organization became far less consequential.

In retrospect, one can ask whether *ACT UP*'s victories on the research front pushed the F.D.A. too far. The drugs-into-bodies approach to fast-tracking—the use of "surrogate endpoints" (like T-cell counts or viral load), for example, rather than clinical benefits in actual people—can be valuable, especially for patients who are facing death and have no good alternatives. This approach at least offers desperate patients a chance, while allowing scientists to gather meaningful data. But, today, a number of drugs, for everything from asthma to periodontitis, have won approval before benefits in human patients were established, and critics argue that drug approval is too often based solely on benefits shown in biomarkers rather than in bodies. "Right to try" legislation, meanwhile, enables the sale of drug candidates without even involving the F.D.A. When restrictions are weakened, experimental drugs—many of which end up proving useless or worse—become harder to distinguish from effective medicine.

Today, Franke-Ruta is a journalist, and she spoke to Schulman about the wider implications of some of *ACT UP*'s success. "I don't think that we realized at the time that this was part of the broader gutting of the FDA that we've seen since; that there was a lot of political agendas that we just happened to be in sync," she said. After President Donald Trump touted the promise of hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for *COVID-19*, the F.D.A. issued an emergency-use authorization for the drug, which was shown to be useless for the purpose. (The agency withdrew the authorization three months later.) "Sometimes it seems like it's gone too far in the other direction," Franke-Ruta went on. "But there's a really strong pharmaceutical lobby against the FDA as well that I don't think we were aware of."

ACT UP's legacy is hardly restricted to the realm of research. "The movement for Black lives would look very different if its thought leaders—many of whom are self-identified Black queer people—hadn't been able to draw on the example of *ACT UP*," the legal scholar Kendall Thomas, who joined the group in 1987, has observed. "Black activists and their allies now understand that the struggle for Black freedom has to make connections across many different constituencies and concerns that used to be seen as different and disconnected." At the same time, Schulman implicitly reprimands many contemporary social-justice movements and their emphasis on allyship and "accomplices" (who must take direction from a marginalized community) over coalitions of shared interests and values. She plainly considers call-out culture a distraction. *ACT UP* members who were women or people of color, she says, directed resources to projects that were specifically of concern to them. They "did not stop the drive toward action to correct or control language or to call out bias," she adds pointedly. "The language and behavior of racist and sexist *ACT UP*ers was not the focus."

There are lessons in *ACT UP*'s failures, of course, as well as in its successes. If the group were the richly coalitional grassroots organization that Schulman describes, how could the departure of two dozen people —Harrington's *TAG* team—have derailed it? Her institutional analysis is rather cryptic. The way *ACT UP* dealt with the differences among its members "was to practice a kind of radical democracy," she says. "Subverting this range of difference and trying to channel it through open and hidden moves was ultimately its downfall."

One notably disaffected voice in "Let the Record Show" is that of Charles King, who (with his partner, Keith Cylar) helped start Housing Works. King told Schulman that *ACT UP* was, at its heart, "gay men and their allies fighting for their lives." By the mid- to late nineties, the demographics of death were changing: "It was now a Black disease, not their disease."

Schulman promptly dismisses King's unsettling critique: "True to the *ACT UP* tradition of alienation, Charles was defining '*ACT UP* by the people he disagreed with, not by himself and his allies." Her insistence on *ACT UP*'s diversity is important and correct. Still, the group's most famous image—the inverted pink triangle of the "Silence = Death" logo—didn't just link *AIDS* and the Holocaust; it was also an assertion of a gay identity, as not incidental but integral.

King suggests that an easing of desperation within the gay community may have caused *ACT UP*'s undoing. As long as the core cadre felt that they were fighting for their own lives, *ACT UP* could accommodate vigorous internal disagreement, even as the group secured advances for women, people of color, and the homeless. After medical advances meant that, for most H.I.V.-positive Americans, the infection was no longer a death sentence but a chronic condition, the forces of fragmentation could no longer be managed.

ACT UP was always argumentative, though, and "Let the Record Show" remains faithful to that spirit. If Schulman's record-keeping sometimes projects her own ideals and aspirations, she never fails to make one truth eloquently clear: "how brutal debates within the *AIDS* community could be, how high the emotional and literal stakes were, how desperate people were, how little anyone else was listening, and how truly destructive the pain and frustration could become."

The Black Panther Party in Seattle

Kurt Schaefer

Jan 1, 2005

Originally published: https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/Panther2_schaefer.htm

The Seattle branch of the Black Panther Party was the first group established outside of the state of California. Its existence is an illustration of how peripheral branches of an organization would both adhere and diverge from the program established by the national headquarters. The evidence suggests that the Seattle Panthers often respected the Party's national leadership and worked hard to follow the national agenda. However, to say that the Seattle BPP was completely dependent on Oakland's guidance and dictates would be an error. The behavior of the Seattle BPP was also influenced by its local leadership and local circumstances in the city of Seattle.

Two and a half years before the start of the Seattle chapter, the Black Panther Party was born in Oakland, California. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale started the organization on October 15, 1966, and it was originally called the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Its goal was to prevent police brutality as well as establish a new social, political, and economic order, heavily based upon Marxist doctrine, to improve the Black community. These goals were spelled out in the Panthers' Ten-Point Program. It contained ten demands for Black power, independence, access, protection, and rights. In effect, it was a demand for equal participation for Blacks in every aspect of American society.[1]

Aaron Dixon notes that the Ten Point Program was the framework for BPP chapters across the nation. All activities were to fall within the realm of that mission and weekly reports were sent to Oakland to inform personnel at the headquarters how the Seattle Panthers were adhering to that program. Dixon adds some discretion was allowed.[2] But for the most part the Seattle Panthers did not diverge far from the goals and expectations of the Oakland branch. This was due in part to the Seattle leaderships' belief in the worth of the BPP program. Members of the Seattle Panthers even helped create some of these strategies. Elmer Dixon recalled:

> There was a close connection [between Seattle and Oakland]. We often would travel the I-5 Corridor, it was our subway to the Bay Area and we'd often go there two or three times a month, if not more often, just to sit down and talk shop with Bobby. [We'd] talk about strategy and what we're going to do [and] what direction we were heading.[3]

The Panther agenda involved constant training. Members were expected to become experts in weapons usage and they were also required to attend political education classes. Upon being accepted into the party, each member had to participate in a six-week training program that included reading a list of twenty five books. One of the Dixons' tasks was to organize and run these classes. Aaron Dixon stated that they were "used to make sure that everybody understood the ideology of the party and that we were on the same page in terms of the theory and the rules of the party." It was the goal of the party, Dixon said, to have informed and articulate members.[4]

Recruiting members was one of the Party's most important tasks early on, and one of the target groups was Huey Newton's notion of the lumpen. Newton had incorporated significant portions of Marxist theory into the BPP program. Marx had discussed the existence of the lumpen proletariat, which he defined as the lowest order of society, the criminals, prostitutes, and malcontents of the streets.[5]Marx eschewed their participation in any socialist movements due to what he believed was the lumpen's inability to take direction. Newton understood the lumpen in a different light by applying a more liberal definition to the group. He believed that the extremely poor who tried to earn a living wage but could not because the shortcomings of capitalism were also part of the lumpen. Newton believed that it would be from this social stratum that the BPP-led revolution would find its most dedicated followers.[6]

Aaron Dixon guesses that early on some 300 hundred applications were made to the Seattle BPP. Among these potential members were a large number of Seattle's "lumpen." He stated that many who joined the BPP were friends of his and were good organizers as well as serious and devoted members. However, the lumpen also introduced a criminal element to the party that was detrimental to the organization. "A lot of people couldn't change old behaviors and even though we read and studied, we still didn't have anything to address a lot of the negative elements..." Dixon added that one of the tenets of the party as listed in the Ten Point Program was to never steal property from the masses.[7] Yet, some BPP members still ended up committing crimes such as robbery, vandalism, and assault. These activities tainted the reputation of the entire organization and were fodder for critics who saw such behavior as evidence that the Party was more of a street gang than a civil rights organization.[8]

Of course, there were applicants from outside the lumpen who sought membership in the Party. One such person was Leon Valentine Hobbs. Hobbs was raised in east New York City. He states, "I grew up with morals... Our parents were very conservative. We were taught to respect authority... We knew right from wrong. Most of [my friends] had mothers and fathers...My mother didn't even work because my father was in the navy and made a good salary." Hobbs said that living in a northern city and coming from a "good" family did not shield him from the affects of racism. He remembered hearing of Blacks being killed in New Jersey. His parents tried to dissuade their children from associating with white people. "We knew our history and it's like stay in your place. My great grandfather was killed in Macon, Georgia. [We were] watching our leaders getting wiped out...getting shot down in the streets...[As] we grew up that is what we saw."[9]

Hobbs' most striking experience with racism occurred while he was a young man serving in the army. At Ft. Dix, in New Jersey, he was called a "nigger" and was then locked up when he took offense. He was likewise angered by a stint at a military post in Georgia. "We could not even go off the [post] because they were still killing and lynching black soldiers if they were caught off base. They still had separate bathrooms and water fountains...in Georgia...And here we are getting ready to go [to Vietnam] to fight. So what am I fighting for?" [(10)] Hobbs' experiences with racism had steered him toward the separatist ideas of Malcolm X. For Hobbs, white America had given little indication that it was concerned with black rights. He believed strongly that integration was anathema to black welfare and progress. [(11)]

Hobbs came to Seattle in 1969 when he was hired to work in the Model Cities program. He first met Aaron and Elmer Dixon while in the midst of a contentious discussion concerning the BPP's use of allies. Hobbs was attending a birthday celebration for Huey Newton being held at a club in Seattle. While there he had a run-in with a White Panther leader.[12] Hobbs recalled, "I was asking [the White Panther] questions. What are you going to do when the white people come down, when things get thick? You are going to thin out, right?" At that point, Hobbs said Aaron Dixon approached him. "Aaron...tried to explain to me about the coalition. I said, 'Man, I don't care about no coalition...' I wasn't in the Party then, [but] I was for Black people. Aaron said we're for Black people too, but we need to care about all oppressed people in the country."[13]

Aaron Dixon's argument was in line with Newton's belief in the creation of an alliance of disaffected people. Newton, and others within the Party, concluded that for the BPP to succeed, especially politically, a large membership was necessary. Newton believed that there were numerous segments of the America's disaffected population, who might be willing to unite with the Panthers and their agenda. These groups included the Peace and Freedom Party, the White Panthers, women's and gay groups, the Brown Berets (Chicano), and the Young Lords (Puerto Ricans).[14] At the same time the Panthers were adamant critics of Black cultural nationalism espoused by groups such as United Slaves (US).[15]

Hobbs said that he continued to talk to the Dixons and became interested in the Party. He recalled that he was "intrigued with the Ten Point Program... As human beings we have a right to housing, clothing, shelter, medical care and anything everybody else is supposed to have." Hobbs knew that if he wanted to join, he had to compromise his anti-integration beliefs. He said other Panthers shared his point of view, but he adds, "Everybody finally realized that we were all going in the same direction and we should not let... certain ideas that you have take you off the course. I understood that we needed coalitions because we are in a predominantly white country...[Still] I was not very trusting of white people."[16]

Hobbes' willingness to temper his personal inclinations in order to fit the requisites of the BPP represents some of the decisions that members had to make regarding the alignment of personal and Party ideals. These same decisions had to be made at the institutional level. Seattle was not Oakland so not all of the

dictates emanating from headquarters were transferable. Thus, there were incidents large and small where the local branch took its own counsel and acted accordingly. One involved a visit by the BPP to Seattle's Rainier Beach High School. It is illustrative of the role that the Seattle Panthers came to find themselves as having within the community. It also exemplifies a level of autonomy that a local chapter could have. Aaron Dixon stated that after the Seattle BPP had first opened its office it received a large number of telephone calls from people within the Central Area who would ask the Panthers to attend to various problems such as landlord issues, domestic violence, and numerous other problems that arose in a typical community. Dixon said that he and his fellow Panthers became overwhelmed by these requests so he eventually spoke to Bobby Seale about it. Seale said the BPP was not the police and therefore should not be responding to those types of calls. Dixon said the Panthers therefore began to ignore requests. This moratorium did not last. Dixon said the office started to receive calls from a particular woman whose son was being accosted by white students at Rainier Beach High School. During her first call she was told that there was nothing that the Panthers could do. But she proceeded to call day after day. Then one day she called and it was obvious she was in tears. Around the same time three other mothers called and voiced the same concerns. Dixon said there were over a dozen Panthers in the office when this particular set of calls came in and they decided to take action. So they grabbed their guns, piled into several cars, and drove to Rainier Beach. When they got there the Panthers walked into the school with their weapons and found the principal. Dixon said they told him why they were there and that he needed to start protecting students. Dixon said he assured the principal that if the Panthers received more calls regarding the problem, they would return. Before long the police arrived but the Panthers left without incident.[17]

The visit by the armed Panthers provoked an outcry. One newspaper accused the Panthers of responding to "rumors."[18] Seattle's Mayor, J.D. Braman, charged the Panthers with vigilantism by "taking the law into their own hands." The mayor also painted the Panthers as a threat to stability. "It has boiled down to about one or two percent of our black population causing all our racial troubles. This cannot be tolerated. I am very proud of the vast majority of our black population for their cooperative attitudes. But people who seek trouble are in for trouble."[19] Numerous parents of predominantly white Rainier Beach students planned a boycott of the school to protest the BPP's appearance. One parent stated, "Something should be done to prevent the Black Panthers from walking into school grounds carrying rifles."[20] Dixon said, he also received comments from Oakland 's Panthers. "When [BPP] headquarters found out about this [incident], they thought we were pretty wild and crazy." Despite these reactions, Dixon said the Party's action was effective. They never received another call from the mother of the victim.[21]

Besides illustrating the Seattle BPP's occasional autonomy, the Rainier Beach incident was also emblematic of the Panthers' use of the gun as a practical and symbolic means to realize their goals. From the very beginning of the Party's existence in Oakland, the gun was used as a tool for self-defense as well as an iconic representation of the Panthers' commitment to their program. This symbolism overshadowed virtually every other characteristic the Party had.

The use of the gun was born of necessity. One of the first priorities of the Oakland BPP was to put a halt to police violence in the Black sections of Oakland. To do this, Black Panthers would patrol the streets of Oakland carrying a firearm and a law book. Their strategy was to appear at incidents that involved blacks and police to make sure that they followed the letter of the law. Besides openly carrying guns, the Panthers also dressed in black leather jackets and berets. They held weapons training sessions and drilled in public. The group purposely projected an armed, militant persona, and the media eagerly portrayed them in that manner. One observer noted, "These guys weren't like the Elijah Muhammad guys, who would sell you a two-week-old paper and laugh behind your back. They weren't like...Martin Luther King or any of the others. These guys were scary."[22] The BPP's portrayal as armed militants grew out of its rhetoric, platform, and armed confrontations between Panthers and the police. For example, in 1967, Newton was involved in a shootout with Oakland police, in which he was wounded and one officer died. Then, of course, there was the shootout with Oakland police that resulted in the death of Bobby Hutton. In reality, the Panther's use of the gun represented but one aspect of the Party. The move away from that symbol, in 1969, indicates an evolution within the Party. This change in policy was not welcomed by all of the BPP chapters in the country, but it was generally embraced in Seattle.

The Dixons recognize that the armed persona of the BPP was controversial and did present problems for the Party. Still, for both men there was value in its application. Aaron Dixon said, "The virtue was that people knew that we were really serious...and we were ready to defend ourselves and use our weapons if we had to."[23] Elmer Dixon adds that the gun indicated that:

> We [black Americans] were no longer going to be hosed by police, bitten by police dogs, bombed in our churches... We were a symbol. The impression we wanted to give was that we were not cowards. We were men...We were not going to beg for our rights...We were trying to forge change by whatever means we could.[24]

Leon Hobbs echoed the Dixons in stating, "...Our lives were in danger and...we had a human right to defend ourselves against bodily harm, as opposed to when Martin Luther King...would demonstrate and people would hit him...and sick dogs on them. We weren't going that way."[25]

Aaron Dixon concedes that despite the power of the gun's symbolism, it did have its obviously negative aspects. Both he and Elmer were arrested numerous times as the police constantly were watching them and stopping them for minor traffic violations.[26] Elmer Dixon adds that the situation also cast an aspect of fatalism upon the Panther members. He said that when he joined the Party at age seventeen,

> ...I had two bodyguards who were with me most times and I had to carry a gun with me every place I went...I knew I was a target and I could be killed at any moment...I had police hold guns to my head and people call my mother in the middle of the night and say, 'We're going to kill that nigger son of yours.' I don't think any of us thought we would live past twenty-five...[27]

Because of the negative attention armed militancy brought to the Party, Aaron Dixon said that the BPP realized that such an image had a shelf life. "In a very short period of time it became somewhat clear that persona was doing us more harm than good. This led the party to change tactics." He said the party put away its uniforms and guns and tried to give the appearance of a more "mainstream" organization. Dixon believes this was the right move because it fostered relations within the community. People came to see that the Party was not focused on violence but on confronting prejudice.[28]

The transformation of the Black Panther Party away from the symbolism of the gun to that of what Dixon called a "mainstream" organization took place around 1969. While Huey Newton was in prison for his 1967 shootout with police he called for a new strategy based upon his theory of Intercommunialism.[29] Part of this strategy included the establishment of survival programs which were designed to help the Black community gain the confidence that it could take care of itself, as well as help people within the community obtain their basic needs. Once basic needs were addressed the community could concentrate on more abstract concerns like political theory.[30]

The Seattle BPP was supportive of the idea of survival programs and displayed both its unity with the Oakland BPP and its independence by actively developing and creating these programs in the Central Area of the city. One immediate consequence in this shift in emphasis was a schism that occurred among the Panther Party at both the national and local levels. In Oakland, Eldridge Cleaver believed that escalating rather than minimizing the Party's armed militancy was the more appropriate path, and thus broke with Newton and Seale. This schism was to have violent ramifications. A less contentious split took place in Seattle. The Dixons and several of their fellow members, including Leon Hobbs, decided that the vision of Newton and Seale made sense. But, numerous members of the Seattle branch of the BPP were unwilling or unable to jettison the use of the gun from their day-to-day activities so they were expelled from the Party.

Despite the split, Elmer Dixon believes this change in focus was for the better. "There's no way we could win an armed revolt, so it wasn't about having an armed revolt it was about having a mental revolt...so that we changed the mentality of the people in the community where they would in fact stand up for their rights and take control...within their community."[31] Aaron Dixon believed that the survival programs were an affective alternative because they not only benefited the community, but they helped soften the image of the BPP, which gave the Party more community support. According to Aaron Dixon, the survival programs were something that the government should have been doing all along. "...We were exposing the contradictions in this country."[32]

The Seattle survival programs were designed to provide marginalized members of Central Area with basic needs for survival. But though the Party phased out its open display of firearms, it still maintained a high degree of militancy. A case in point was the Seattle Party's attempt to procure donations for their breakfast program. Elmer Dixon recalled challenging Central Area Safeway grocery stores to become more active in giving back to the community. He said that the Seattle Panthers had concluded that Safeway was profiting handsomely due to the patronage of Central Area customers. In return the company should therefore donate eggs and sausage for children's breakfasts. In July of 1969, Elmer Dixon presented a letter requesting

$100 each week for the breakfast programs. The letter added that if the stores did not comply, the Party would raise the request by $25 each week.[33] The stores rebuffed the demand so the Party set up pickets and attempted to institute boycotts.[34] Safeway management reported that after the BPP request was denied, Aaron Dixon stood outside the stores with a megaphone, chastising the company and making threats. Also, some vandalism was incurred at the stores after the BPP request was denied, though there was no official link made between the BPP and the damage.[35]

One of the most significant and groundbreaking survival programs created by the Seattle BPP was the establishment of a Central Area medical clinic. The responsibility for this program was given to Leon Hobbs. Hobbs admitted that he had no experience in such an endeavor before he got started.

> I was getting arrested a lot and someone said we have got to direct this guy's energy in a positive direction...Not that what I was doing was not positive, but there was a lot of confrontation with the police...So Aaron and the Central Committee said they wanted a medical clinic, [and] I was given the task, to organize it.[36]

One of the first concerns was gathering funding and supplies. Since the BPP did not allow itself to accept any federal monies, all financial resources had to come from private donors. Hobbs said he did a lot of asking and his requests bore fruit. Hobbs believes the amount of the donations served to show the level of community support that the BPP was able to procure. Aside from contributions from groups and individuals within Seattle's medical community and private sectors, he was also able to receive money from entertainers Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, Greg Morrison, and Buddy Miles. Hobbs also adds that funding, material, time, and expertise donations came from white as well as black sources. He explains that the clinic started small, beginning with well-baby checkups a couple of times each week, and soon added adult care. According to Hobbs, one of the most important contributions of the clinic was the establishment of a sickle cell anemia testing and genetic counseling program. Bobby Seale stated that the Seattle sickle cell testing program was the most affective of all of the BPP's sickle cell programs in the nation.[37] The clinic is still in existence in the Central Area and today it is known as the Carolyn Downs Medical Center.[38]

With the creation of the survival programs in Seattle, it could be argued that the Dixons had not really diverged from the methodology of Larry Gossett and the BSU after all. As previously stated, it became clear in the minds of Panther members in both Oakland and Seattle that the public display of firearms could be detrimental to the organization's ultimate goal of a political and economic presence in American society. So alterations to the Party's public persona were made. The guns were not discarded, but they were tucked away from the public's view. However, public perceptions of the Panthers did not change as quickly as their methodology did. As a consequence there remained calls for the destroying the Panthers at the national and local levels.

[1]: The Ten-Point Program @ marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm

[2]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[3]: Elmer Dixon Interview.

[4]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[5]: Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, edited by Frederic L Bender, New York: WW Norton and Co., 1988, 65.

[6]: For a more in-depth discussion on the lumpen see: Chris Booker, "Lumpenization: A Critical Error of the Black Panther Party," In *The Black Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones, 337-362. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998, 341, 345, and Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, 95-99.

[7]: See: "Rules of the Black Panther Party", rule number #8: "No party member will commit any crimes against other party members or black people at all, and cannot steal or take from the people, not even a needle or a piece of thread." @ marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers

[8]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[9]: Leon Valentine Hobbs, Interviewed by Kurt Kim Schaefer, February 25, 2005, Seattle, WA.

[12]: The White Panthers was a radical group started by Jon Sinclair in Detroit. In 1968 Sinclair issued the "White Panther Party 10-Point Program" that was somewhat analogous to the Black Panthers program. Its first point in fact called for support of the Black Panthers' 10-Point Program. The WPP unlike the BPP mixed attributes of the drug and music culture into its agenda. See: Doug Rossnow, "The White Panthers' 'total assult on the culture,'" in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

[13]: LVH Interview.

[14]: Charles E. Jones and Judson L Jefferies, "'Don't Believe the Hype': Debunking the Panther Mythology," In *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones, 25-55, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998, 32.

[15]: This disagreement was to lead to violent confrontation with the US and the BPP. United Slaves (US) was led by Maulana Karenga. US was based in Los Angeles, and in 1968 the BPP opened an office in that city. US believed in Black cultural nationalism, the idea that a return to African culture would contribute to the realization of Black civil rights. US had a militant wing known as the Simba Wachuka (Young Lions). And US was protective of its LA "turf." When the BPP appeared in L.A. a confrontation between the two groups occurred on January 17, 1969. A BSU meeting was being held at UCLA to discuss the hiring of a new director for the school's Black Studies program. Some BPP and US members were students at the school and they began to argue with each other. Guns were drawn and two BPP members, John Huggins and Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, were killed. See: Floyd Hayes and Francis A. Kiene, III, "All Power to the People": The Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party," In *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones, 156-176, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998, 168-169.

[16]: Leon Valentine Hobbs Interview.

[17]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[18]: "Armed Panthers Appear at School," *Seattle Times*, September 6, 1968, 1.

[19]: "Mayor Warns Black Panthers," *Seattle Times*, September 13, 1968, 1.

[20]: "Rainier Beach Parents Plan Boycott of School Tomorrow," *Seattle Times*, September 8, 1968, 19.

[21]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[22]: Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*, Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1994, 116.

[23]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[24]: Judith Blake, "Panthers' Progress," *Seattle Times*, October 24, 1986, E-6.

[25]: Leon Valentine Hobbs Interview.

[26]: Blake, E-6.

[27]: Elmer Dixon Interview. In fact two Seattle Panthers were killed due to confrontations with the police: Sydney Miller who died while involved in a robbery and Welton Armstead who was shot while pointing a rifle at a police officer. See: Youth Pointing Rifle Slain by Policeman," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, October 6, 1968, 1. and "Youth Fatally Shot in Struggle With Police," *Seattle Times*, October 6, 1968, 1.

[28]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[29]: Intercommunialism was the idea that capitalism had created a situation where neither national boundaries nor national interests existed. Newton theorized that corporate bodies had colonized nations and regions creating a myriad of oppressed populations throughout the globe. In response, Newton believed that the oppressed needed to unite and attempt to reverse the advances of the capitalist leviathan. Newton and Seale concluded that before any revolution could occur, the oppressed would need to have their basic

physical and psychological necessities taken care of. From this belief emerged the Panther survival programs, which represented a tangible shift from militancy to social assistance. See: Mumia Abu-Jamal, "A Life in the Party: An Historical and Retrospective Examination of the Projections and Legacies of the Black Panther Party," in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy,* Editors Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, 40-50. Great Britain: Routledge, 2001, 49 and Hayes and Kiene, "All Power to the People", 169-171.

[30]: JoNina M. Abron, "'Serving the People': The Survival Programs of the Black Panther Party," In *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones, 177-192, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998, 178-179, and Charles Jones and Judson Jeffereis, "Don't Believe the Hype", 31. BPP survival programs that were instituted by BPP chapters around the U.S. included, free breakfast for school children, free clothing program, free bussing to prisons, free medical care, *The Black Panther* newspaper, sickle cell anemia testing, free pest control, free shoes, free food, free ambulance rides, and a youth institute.

[31]: Elmer Dixon Interview.

[32]: Aaron Dixon Interview.

[33]: "Elmer Dixon; Black Panther Party Breakfast for Children Programs, Seattle, WA, Information Concerning," (F.B.I. File), July 30, 1969, University of Washington Archives.

[34]: Elmer Dixon Interview.

[35]: *Hearing Before the Committee on Internal Security, House of Representatives* (Black Panther Party, Part 2, Investigation of the Seattle Chapter), May 12, 13, 14, and 20, 1970, 4332, 4366-4367.

[36]: Leon Hobbs Interview.

[37]: Bobby Seale, Interviewed by Kurt Kim Schaefer, May 14, 2005.

[38]: Leon Hobbs Interview.

We Are All Very Anxious: Six Theses on Anxiety and Why It is Effectively Preventing Militancy, and One Possible Strategy for Overcoming It

The Institute for Precarious Consciousness / Plan C

Apr 4, 2014

Originally published: https://www.weareplanc.org/2014/04/we-are-all-very-anxious/

[[1]]

1: Each phase of capitalism has its own dominant reactive affect. [[2]]

Each phase of capitalism has a particular affect which holds it together. This is not a static situation. The prevalence of a particular dominant affect [[3]] is sustainable only *until strategies of resistance able to break down this particular affect and /or its social sources are formulated.* Hence, capitalism constantly comes into crisis and recomposes around newly dominant affects.

One aspect of every phase's dominant affect is that it is a public secret, something that everyone knows, but nobody admits, or talks about. As long as the dominant affect is a public secret, it remains effective, and strategies against it will not emerge.

Public secrets are typically personalised. The problem is only visible at an individual, psychological level; the social causes of the problem are concealed. **Each phase blames the system's victims for the suffering that the system causes.** And it portrays a fundamental part of its functional logic as a contingent and localised problem.

In the modern era (until the post-war settlement), the dominant affect was *misery.* In the nineteenth century, the dominant narrative was that capitalism leads to general enrichment. The public secret of this narrative was the misery of the working class. The exposure of this misery was carried out by revolutionaries. The first wave of modern social movements in the nineteenth century was a machine for fighting misery. Tactics such as strikes, wage struggles, political organisation, mutual aid, co-operatives and strike funds were effective ways to defeat the power of misery by ensuring a certain social minimum. Some of these strategies still work when fighting misery.

When misery stopped working as a control strategy, capitalism switched to *boredom.* In the mid twentieth century, the dominant public narrative was that the standard of living – which widened access to consumption, healthcare and education – was rising. Everyone in the rich countries was happy, and the poor countries were on their way to development. The public secret was that everyone was bored. This was an effect of the Fordist system which was prevalent until the 1980s – a system based on full-time jobs for life, guaranteed welfare, mass consumerism, mass culture, and the co-optation of the labour movement which had been built to fight misery. Job security and welfare provision reduced anxiety and misery, but jobs were boring, made up of simple, repetitive tasks. Mid-century capitalism gave everything needed for survival, but no opportunities for life; it was a system based on force-feeding survival to saturation point.

Of course, not all workers under Fordism actually had stable jobs or security – but this was the core model of work, around which the larger system was arranged. There were really three deals in this phase, with the B-worker deal – boredom for security – being the most exemplary of the Fordism-boredom conjuncture. Today, the B-worker deal has largely been eliminated, leaving a gulf between the A- and C-workers (the consumer society insiders, and the autonomy and insecurity of the most marginal).

2: Contemporary resistance is born of the 1960s wave, in response to the dominant affect of *boredom*.

If each stage of the dominant system has a dominant affect, then each stage of resistance needs strategies to defeat or dissolve this affect. If the first wave of social movements were a machine for fighting misery, the second wave (of the 1960s-70s, or more broadly (and thinly) 1960s-90s) were a machine for fighting boredom. This is the wave of which our own movements were born, which continues to inflect most of our theories and practices.

Most tactics of this era were/are ways to escape the work-consume-die cycle. The Situationists pioneered a whole series of tactics directed against boredom, declaring that "We do not want a world in which the guarantee that we will not die of starvation is bought by accepting the risk of dying of boredom". Autonomia fought boredom by refusing work, both within work (using sabotage and go-slows) and against it (slacking off and dropping out). These protest forms were associated with a wider social process of countercultural exodus from the dominant forms of boring work and boring social roles.

In the feminist movement, the "housewife malaise" was theorised as systemic in the 1960s. Later, further dissatisfactions were revealed through consciousness raising, and the texts and actions (from "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" to the Redstockings abortion speak-out) which stemmed from it. Similar tendencies can be seen in the Theatre of the Oppressed, critical pedagogy, the main direct-action styles (carnivalesque, militant, and pacifist), and in movements as late as the 1990s, such as the free party movement, Reclaim the Streets, DIY culture, and hacker culture.

The mid-century reorientation from misery to boredom was crucial to the emergence of a new wave of revolt. We are the tail end of this wave. Just as the tactics of the first wave still work when fighting misery, so the tactics of the second wave still work when fighting boredom. The difficulty is that we are less often facing boredom as the main enemy. This is why militant resistance is caught in its current impasse.

3: Capitalism has largely absorbed the struggle against boredom.

There has been a partial recuperation of the struggle against boredom. Capitalism pursued the exodus into spaces beyond work, creating the *social factory* – a field in which the whole society is organised like a workplace. Precarity is used to force people back to work within an expanded field of labour now including the whole of the social factory.

Many instances of this pursuit can be enumerated. Companies have adopted flattened management models inciting employees to not only manage, but invest their souls in, their work. Consumer society now provides a wider range of niche products and constant distraction which is not determined by mass tastes to the same degree as before. New products, such as video-games and social media, involve heightened levels of active individual involvement and desocialised stimulation. Workplace experiences are diversified by means of micro-differentials and performance management, as well as the multiplication of casual and semi-self-employed work situations on the margins of capitalism. Capitalism has encouraged the growth of mediatised secondary identities – the self portrayed through social media, visible consumption, and lifelong learning – which have to be obsessively maintained. Various forms of resistance of the earlier period have been recuperated, or revived in captured form once the original is extinguished: for instance, the corporate nightclub and music festival replace the rave.

4: In contemporary capitalism, the dominant reactive affect is *anxiety*.

Today's public secret is that everyone is anxious. Anxiety has spread from its previous localised locations (such as sexuality) to the whole of the social field. All forms of intensity, self-expression, emotional connection, immediacy, and enjoyment are now laced with anxiety. It has become the linchpin of subordination.

One major part of the social underpinning of anxiety is the multi-faceted omnipresent web of *surveillance*. The NSA, CCTV, performance management reviews, the Job Centre, the privileges system in the prisons, the constant examination and classification of the youngest schoolchildren. But this obvious web is only the outer carapace. We need to think about the ways in which a neoliberal idea of success inculcates these surveillance mechanisms inside the subjectivities and life-stories of most of the population.

We need to think about how people's deliberate and ostensibly voluntary self-exposure, through social media, visible consumption and choice of positions within the field of opinions, also assumes a performance in the field of the perpetual gaze of virtual others. We need to think about the ways in which this gaze inflects how we find, measure and know one another, as co-actors in an infinitely watched perpetual performance. Our success in this performance in turn affects everything from our ability to access human warmth to our ability to access means of subsistence, not just in the form of the wage but also in the form of credit. Outsides to the field of mediatised surveillance are increasingly closed off, as public space is bureaucratised and privatised, and a widening range of human activity is criminalised on the grounds of risk, security, nuisance, quality of life, or anti-social behaviour.

In this increasingly securitised and visible field, we are commanded to communicate. The incommunicable is excluded. Since everyone is disposable, the system holds the threat of forcibly delinking anyone at any time, in a context where alternatives are foreclosed in advance, so that forcible delinking entails desocialisation – leading to an absurd non-choice between desocialised inclusion and desocialised exclusion. This threat is manifested in small ways in today's disciplinary practices – from "time-outs" and Internet bans, to firings and benefit sanctions – culminating in the draconian forms of solitary confinement found in prisons. Such regimes are the zero degree of control-by-anxiety: the breakdown of all the coordinates of connectedness in a setting of constant danger, in order to produce a collapse of personality.

The present dominant affect of anxiety is also known as precarity. Precarity is a type of insecurity which treats people as disposable so as to impose control. Precarity differs from misery in that the necessities of life are not simply absent. They are available, but withheld conditionally.

Precarity leads to generalised hopelessness; a constant bodily excitation without release. Growing proportions of young people are living at home. Substantial portions of the population – over 10% in the UK – are taking antidepressants. The birth rate is declining, as insecurity makes people reluctant to start families. In Japan, millions of young people never leave their homes (the hikikomori), while others literally work themselves to death on an epidemic scale. Surveys reveal half the population of the UK are experiencing income insecurity. Economically, aspects of the system of anxiety include "lean" production, financialisation and resultant debt slavery, rapid communication and financial outflows, and the globalisation of production. Workplaces like call centres are increasingly common, where everyone watches themselves, tries to maintain the required "service orientation," and is constantly subject to re-testing and potential failure both by quantitative requirements on numbers of calls, and a process which denies most workers a stable job (they have to work six months to even receive a job, as opposed to a learning place). Image management means that the gap between the official rules and what really happens is greater than ever. And the post-911 climate channels this widespread anxiety into global politics.

5: Anxiety is a public secret.

Excessive anxiety and stress are a public secret. When discussed at all, they are understood as individual psychological problems, often blamed on faulty thought patterns or poor adaptation.

Indeed, the dominant public narrative suggests that we need more stress, so as to keep us "safe" (through securitisation) and "competitive" (through performance management). Each moral panic, each new crackdown or new round of repressive laws, adds to the cumulative weight of anxiety and stress arising from general over-regulation. Real, human insecurity is channelled into fuelling securitisation. This is a vicious circle, because securitisation increases the very conditions (disposability, surveillance, intensive regulation) which cause the initial anxiety. In effect, the security of the Homeland is used as a vicarious substitute for security of the Self. Again, this has precedents: the use of national greatness as vicarious compensation for misery, and the use of global war as a channel for frustration arising from boredom.

Anxiety is also channelled downwards. People's lack of control over their lives leads to an obsessive struggle to reclaim control by micro-managing whatever one can control. Parental management techniques, for example, are advertised as ways to reduce parents' anxiety by providing a definite script they can

follow. On a wider, social level, latent anxieties arising from precarity fuel obsessive projects of social regulation and social control. This latent anxiety is increasingly projected onto minorities.

Anxiety is personalised in a number of ways – from New Right discourses blaming the poor for poverty, to contemporary therapies which treat anxiety as a neurological imbalance or a dysfunctional thinking style. A hundred varieties of "management" discourse – time management, anger management, parental management, self-branding, gamification – offer anxious subjects an illusion of control in return for ever-greater conformity to the capitalist model of subjectivity. And many more discourses of scapegoating and criminalisation treat precarity as a matter of personal deviance, irresponsibility, or pathological self-exclusion. Many of these discourses seek to maintain the superstructure of Fordism (nationalism, social integration) without its infrastructure (a national economy, welfare, jobs for all). Doctrines of individual responsibility are central to this backlash, reinforcing vulnerability and disposability. Then there's the self-esteem industry, the massive outpouring of media telling people how to achieve success through positive thinking – as if the sources of anxiety and frustration are simply illusory. These are indicative of the tendency to privatise problems, both those relating to work, and those relating to psychology.

Earlier we argued that people have to be socially isolated in order for a public secret to work. This is true of the current situation, in which authentic communication is increasingly rare. Communication is more pervasive than ever, but increasingly, communication happens only through paths mediated by the system. Hence, in many ways, people are prevented from actually communicating, even while the system demands that everyone be connected and communicable. People both conform to the demand to communicate rather than expressing themselves, and self-censor within mediated spaces. Similarly, affective labour does not alleviate anxiety; it compounds workers' suffering while simply distracting consumers (researchers have found that requirements on workers to feign happiness actually cause serious health problems).

The volume of communication is irrelevant. The recomposition – reconnection – of liberatory social forces will not happen unless there are channels through which the public secret itself can be spoken. In this sense, people are fundamentally more alone than ever. It is difficult for most people (including many radicals) to acknowledge the reality of what they experience and feel. Something has to be quantified or mediated (broadcast virtually), or, for us, to be already recognised as political, to be validated as real. The public secret does not meet these criteria, and so it remains invisible.

6: Current tactics and theories aren't working. We need new tactics and theories to combat anxiety.

During periods of mobilisation and effective social change, people feel a sense of empowerment, the ability to express themselves, a sense of authenticity and de-repression or dis-alienation which can act as an effective treatment for depression and psychological problems; a kind of peak experience. It is what sustains political activity.

Such experiences have become far rarer in recent years.

We might here focus on two related developments: pre-emption, and punishment by process. Pre-emptive tactics are those which stop protests before they start, or before they can achieve anything. Kettling, mass arrests, stop-and-search, lockdowns, house raids and pre-emptive arrests are examples of these kinds of tactics. Punishment by process entails keeping people in a situation of fear, pain, or vulnerability through the abuse of procedures designed for other purposes – such as keeping people on pre-charge or pre-trial bail conditions which disrupt their everyday activity, using no-fly and border-stop lists to harass known dissidents, carrying out violent dawn raids, needlessly putting people's photographs in the press, arresting people on suspicion (sometimes in accord with quotas), using pain-compliance holds, or quietly making known that someone is under surveillance. Once fear of state interference is instilled, it is reinforced by the web of visible surveillance that is gridded across public space, and which acts as strategically placed triggers of trauma and anxiety.

Anecdotal evidence has provided many horror stories about the effects of such tactics – people left a nervous wreck after years awaiting a trial on charges for which they were acquitted, committing suicide after months out of touch with their friends and family, or afraid to go out after incidents of abuse. The effects are just as real as if the state was killing or disappearing people, but they are rendered largely invisible. In addition, many radicals are also on the receiving end of precarious employment and punitive benefit regimes. We are failing to escape the generalised production of anxiety.

If the first wave provided a machine for fighting misery, and the second wave a machine for fighting boredom, **what we now need is a machine for fighting anxiety** – and this is something we do not yet have. If we see from within anxiety, we haven't yet performed the "reversal of perspective" as the Situationists called it – seeing from the standpoint of desire instead of power. Today's main forms of resistance still arise from the struggle against boredom, and, since boredom's replacement by anxiety, have ceased to be effective.

Current militant resistance does not and cannot combat anxiety. It often involves deliberate exposure to high-anxiety situations. Insurrectionists overcome anxiety by turning negative affects into anger, and acting on this anger through a projectile affect of attack. In many ways, this provides an alternative to anxiety. However, it is difficult for people to pass from anxiety to anger, and it is easy for people to be pushed back the other way, due to trauma. We've noticed a certain tendency for insurrectionists to refuse to take seriously the existence of psychological barriers to militant action. Their response tends to be, "Just do it!" But anxiety is a real, material force – not simply a spook. To be sure, its sources are often rooted in spooks, but the question of overcoming the grip of a spook is rarely as simple as consciously rejecting it. There's a whole series of psychological blockages underlying the spook's illusory power, which is ultimately an effect of reactive affect. Saying "Just do it" is like saying to someone with a broken leg, "Just walk!"

The situation feels hopeless and inescapable, but it isn't. It feels this way because of effects of precarity – constant over-stress, the contraction of time into an eternal present, the vulnerability of each separated (or systemically mediated) individual, the system's dominance of all aspects of social space. Structurally, the system is vulnerable. The reliance on anxiety is a desperate measure, used in the absence of stronger forms of conformity. The system's attempt to keep running by keeping people feeling powerless leaves it open to sudden ruptures, outbreaks of revolt. So how do we get to the point where we stop feeling powerless?

7: A new style of precarity-focused consciousness raising is needed.

In order to formulate new responses to anxiety, we need to return to the drawing board. We need to construct a new set of knowledges and theories from the bottom up. To this end, we need to crease a profusion of discussions which produce dense intersections between experiences of the current situation and theories of transformation. We need to start such processes throughout the excluded and oppressed strata – but there is no reason we shouldn't start with ourselves.

In exploring the possibilities for such a practice, the Institute has looked into previous cases of similar practices. From an examination of accounts of feminist consciousness raising in the 1960s/70s, we have summarised the following central features:

- **Producing new grounded theory relating to experience.** We need to reconnect with our experiences now – rather than theories from past phases. The idea here is that our own perceptions of our situation are blocked or cramped by dominant assumptions, and need to be made explicit. The focus should be on those experiences which relate to the public secret. These experiences need to be recounted and pooled — firstly within groups, and then publicly.

- **Recognising the reality, and the systemic nature, of our experiences.** The validation of our experiences' reality of experiences is an important part of this. We need to affirm that our pain is really pain, that what we see and feel is real, and that our problems are not only personal. Sometimes this entails bringing up experiences we have discounted or repressed. Sometimes it entails challenging the personalisation of problems.

- **Transformation of emotions.** People are paralysed by unnameable emotions, and a general sense of feeling like shit. These emotions need to be transformed into a sense of injustice, a type of anger which is less resentful and more focused, a move towards self-expression, and a reactivation of resistance.

- **Creating or expressing voice.** The culture of silence surrounding the public secret needs to be overthrown. Existing assumptions need to be denaturalised and challenged, and cops in the head expelled. The exercise of voice moves the reference of truth and reality from the system to the speaker, contributing to the reversal of perspective – seeing the world through one's own perspective and desires, rather than the system's. The weaving together of different experiences and stories is an important way of reclaiming voice. The process is an articulation as well as an expression.

- **Constructing a disalienated space.** Social separation is reduced by the existence of such a space. The space provides critical distance on one's life, and a kind of emotional safety net to attempt transformations, dissolving fears. This should not simply be a self-help measure, used to sustain existing activities, but instead, a space for reconstructing a radical perspective.

- **Analysing and theorising structural sources based on similarities in experience.** The point is not simply to recount experiences but to transform and restructure them through their theorisation. Participants change the dominant

meaning of their experience by mapping it with different assumptions. This is often done by finding patterns in experiences which are related to liberatory theory, and seeing personal problems and small injustices as symptoms of wider structural problems. It leads to a new perspective, a vocabulary of motives; an anti-anti-political horizon.

The goal is to produce the *click* — the moment at which the structural source of problems suddenly makes sense in relation to experiences. This click is which focuses and transforms anger. Greater understanding may in turn relieve psychological pressures, and make it easier to respond with anger instead of depression or anxiety. It might even be possible to encourage people into such groups by promoting them as a form of self-help — even though they reject the adjustment orientation of therapeutic and self-esteem building processes.

The result is a kind of affinity group, but oriented to perspective and analysis, rather than action. It should be widely recognised, however, that this new awareness needs to turn into some kind of action; otherwise it is just frustratingly introspective.

This strategy will help our practice in a number of ways. Firstly, these groups can provide a pool of potential accomplices. Secondly, they can prime people for future moments of revolt. Thirdly, they create the potential to shift the general field of so-called public opinion in ways which create an easier context for action. Groups would also function as a life-support system and as a space to step back from immersion in the present. They would provide a kind of fluency in radical and dissident concepts which most people lack today.

Anxiety is reinforced by the fact that it is never clear what "the market" wants from us, that the demand for conformity is connected to a vague set of criteria which cannot be established in advance. Even the most conformist people are disposable nowadays, as new technologies of management or production are introduced. One of the functions of small-group discussions and consciousness raising is to construct a perspective from which one can interpret the situation

One major problem will be maintaining regular time commitments in a context of constant time and attentive pressure. The process has a slower pace and a more human scale than is culturally acceptable today. However, the fact that groups offer a respite from daily struggle, and perhaps a quieter style of interacting and listening which relieves attentive pressure, may also be attractive. Participants would need to learn to speak with a self-expressive voice (rather than a neoliberal performance derived from the compulsion to share banal information), and to listen and analyse.

Another problem is the complexity of experiences. Personal experiences are intensely differentiated by the nuanced discriminations built into the semiocapitalist code. This makes the analytical part of the process particularly important.

Above all, the process should establish new propositions about the sources of anxiety. These propositions can form a basis for new forms of struggle, new tactics, and the revival of active force from its current repression: a machine for fighting anxiety.

Footnotes

[[1]]: The discussion here is not fully relevant to the global South. The specific condition of the South is that dominant capitalist social forms are layered onto earlier stages of capitalism or pre-capitalist systems, rather than displacing them entirely. Struggles along the axes of misery and boredom are therefore more effective in the South. The South has experienced a particular variety of precarity distinct from earlier periods: the massive forced delinking of huge swathes of the world from global capitalism (especially in Africa), and the correspondingly massive growth of the informal sector, which now eclipses the formal sector almost everywhere. The informal sector provides fertile terrain for autonomous politics, as is clear from cases such as the city of El Alto (a self-organised city of shanty-towns which is central to social movements in Bolivia), the Zapatista revolt (leading to autonomous indigenous communities in Chiapas), and movements such as

Abahlali baseMjondolo (an autonomous movement of informal settlement residents in South Africa). However, it is often subject to a kind of collectivised precarity, as the state might (for instance) bulldoze shanty-towns, dispossess street traders, or crack down on illicit activities – and periodically does so. Revealingly, it was the self-immolation of a street trader subject to this kind of state dispossession which triggered the revolt in Sidi Bouzid, which later expanded into the Arab Spring. Massive unrest for similar reasons is also becoming increasingly common in China. It is also common for this sector to be dominated by hierarchical gangs or by the networked wings of authoritarian parties (such as the Muslim Brotherhood).

[[2]]: **Affect:** emotion, bodily disposition, way of relating

[[3]]: When using the term *dominant* affect, this is not to say that this is the only reactive affect in operation. The new dominant affect can relate dynamically with other affects: a call-centre worker is bored and miserably paid, but anxiety is what keeps her/him in this condition, preventing the use of old strategies such as unionisation, sabotage and dropping out.

A Note on "Trump Derangement Syndrome"

Mike Brock

Aug 11, 2025

Originally published: https://www.notesfromthecircus.com/p/a-note-on-trump-derangement-syndrome

"Hysterical." "Alarmist." "Trump Derangement Syndrome." "He'll be constrained by institutions." "There are adults in the room." "You're overreacting." "The generals won't let him." "Stop being so dramatic."

Every single person who said we were being hysterical about Trump being an existential threat should be forced to explain how the President seizing control[1] of the capital's police force and deploying military units to forcibly relocate citizens represents normal democratic governance.

They called us hysterical when we said he'd use the military against civilians. He's literally doing it right now.

They called us alarmist when we said he'd seize control of law enforcement. He just placed D.C. police under the direct command of his Attorney General.

They called us deranged when we said he'd create fake emergencies to justify authoritarian power grabs. He's invoking emergency powers while violent crime is at a 30-year low.

They said the institutions would hold. The institutions are being commandeered in real time.

They said the generals would refuse illegal orders. The National Guard is already deployed.

They said we were exaggerating the fascist threat. He's literally declaring "Liberation Day" while seizing control of the capital.

Remember who told you this was hysteria.

They told you that those of us warning about fascism were being hysterical. Now the President has seized control of the capital's police force, deployed military units against citizens, and announced forced relocations of undesirables—and these same voices are explaining why it's not really that bad, why it's technically legal, why we should wait and see how it plays out.

The "hysteria" was prophecy. The "alarmism" was accuracy. The "derangement" was simply seeing clearly what was coming while others chose comfortable blindness.

They'll never admit they were wrong. They'll just keep moving the goalposts. "Sure, he seized control of D.C. police, but it's only for 30 days." "Yes, he deployed the military, but it's just the National Guard." "Okay, he's forcibly relocating citizens, but he says they'll be given places to stay."

This is how normalization works—through the reasonable voices who explain why each new outrage isn't quite outrageous enough to justify the alarm we're expressing.

We weren't hysterical. We were right.

We weren't alarmist. We were accurate.

We weren't deranged. We were paying attention.

And now, as military units patrol the capital under presidential command, as police forces answer to the President's personal authority, as citizens are forcibly relocated for the crime of poverty—now they want us to remain calm, to trust the process, to avoid inflammatory language.

No.

This is fascism. We told you it was coming. You called us hysterical. And now it's here.

Remember who saw it clearly. Remember who denied it. And never, ever let them forget that when American democracy needed defenders, they chose to police the tone of those sounding the alarm rather than confront the threat itself.

The existential threat wasn't rhetorical. It was real. It's here. It's happening.

And everyone who called us hysterical for warning about it is complicit in its arrival.

Footnotes:

1. https://www.cnbc.com/2025/08/11/trump-washington-crime-fed-national-guard-homeless.html

You Went to a Drag Show—Now the State of Florida Wants Your Name

Rindala Alajaji

Jul 28, 2025

Originally published: https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2025/07/you-went-drag-show-now-state-florida-wants-your-name

If you thought going to a Pride event or drag show was just another night out, think again. If you were in Florida, it might land your name in a government database[1].

That's what's happening in Vero Beach, FL, where the Florida Attorney General's office[2] has subpoenaed[3] a local restaurant, The Kilted Mermaid,[4] demanding surveillance video, guest lists, reservation logs, and contracts of performers and other staff—all because the venue hosted an LGBTQ+ Pride event.

To be clear: no one has been charged with a crime, and the law Florida is likely leaning on here—the so-called "Protection of Children Act" (which was designed to be a drag show ban)—has already been blocked by federal courts as likely unconstitutional[5]. But that didn't stop Attorney General James Uthmeier from pushing forward anyway. Without naming a specific law that was violated, the AG's press release[6] used pointed and accusatory language, stating that "In Florida, we don't sacrifice the innocence of children for the perversions of some demented adults." His office is now fishing for personal data about everyone who attended or performed at the event. This should set off every civil liberties alarm bell we have.

Just like the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)[7] and other bills[8] with misleading names[9], this isn't about protecting children. It's about using the power of the state to intimidate people government officials disagree with, and to censor speech that is both lawful and fundamental to American democracy.

Drag shows—many of which are family-friendly[10] and feature no sexual content[11]—have become a political scapegoat. And while that rhetoric might resonate in some media environments, the real-world consequences are much darker: state surveillance of private citizens doing nothing but attending a fun community celebration. By demanding video surveillance, guest lists, and reservation logs, the state isn't investigating a crime, it is trying to scare individuals from attending a legal gathering. These are people who showed up at a public venue for a legal event, while a law restricting it was not even in effect.

The Supreme Court has ruled[12] multiple times[13] that subpoenas forcing disclosure of members of peaceful organizations have a chilling effect on free expression. Whether it's a civil rights protest, a church service, or, yes, a drag show: the First Amendment protects the confidentiality of lists of attendees.

Even if the courts strike down this subpoena—and they should—the damage will already be done. A restaurant owner (who also happens to be the town's vice mayor) is being dragged into a state investigation. Performers' identities are potentially being exposed—whether to state surveillance, inclusion in law enforcement databases, or future targeting by anti-LGBTQ+ groups. Guests who thought they were attending a fun community event are now caught up in a legal probe. These are the kinds of chilling, damaging consequences that will discourage Floridians from hosting or attending drag shows, and could stamp out the art form entirely.

EFF has long warned about this kind of mission creep: where a law or policy supposedly aimed at public safety is turned into a tool for political retaliation or mass surveillance. Going to a drag show should not

mean you forfeit your anonymity. It should not open you up to surveillance. And it absolutely should not land your name in a government database.

Footnotes:

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Pentagon plan would create military 'reaction force' for civil unrest

Alex Horton and David Ovalle

Aug 12, 2025

Originally published: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/08/12/national-guard-civil-unrest/

The Trump administration is evaluating plans that would establish a "Domestic Civil Disturbance Quick Reaction Force" composed of hundreds of National Guard troops tasked with rapidly deploying into American cities facing protests or other unrest, according to internal Pentagon documents reviewed by The Washington Post.

The plan calls for 600 troops to be on standby at all times so they can deploy in as little as one hour, the documents say. They would be split into two groups of 300 and be stationed at military bases in Alabama and Arizona, with purview of regions east and west of the Mississippi River, respectively.

Cost projections outlined in the documents indicate that such a mission, if the proposal is adopted, could stretch into the hundreds of millions of dollars should military aircraft and aircrews also be required to be ready around-the-clock. Troop transport via commercial airlines would be less expensive, the documents say.

The proposal, which has not been previously reported, represents another potential expansion of President Donald Trump's willingness to employ the armed forces on American soil. It relies on a section of the U.S. Code that allows the commander in chief to circumvent limitations on the military's use within the United States.

The documents, marked "predecisional," are comprehensive and contain extensive discussion about the potential societal implications of establishing such a program. They were compiled by National Guard officials and bear time stamps as recent as late July and early August. Fiscal 2027 is the earliest this program could be created and funded through the Pentagon's traditional budgetary process, the documents say, leaving unclear whether the initiative could begin sooner through an alternative funding source.

It is also unclear whether the proposal has been shared with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

"The Department of Defense is a planning organization and routinely reviews how the department would respond to a variety of contingencies across the globe," Kingsley Wilson, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said in a statement. "We will not discuss these plans through leaked documents, pre-decisional or otherwise."

The National Guard Bureau did not respond to a request for comment.

While most National Guard commands have fast-response teams for use within their home states, the proposal under evaluation by the Trump administration would entail moving troops from one state to another.

The National Guard tested[1] the concept ahead of the 2020 election, putting 600 troops on alert in Arizona and Alabama as the country braced for possible political violence. The test followed months of unrest in cities across the country[2], prompted by the police murder of George Floyd, that spurred National Guard deployments in numerous locations. Trump, then nearing the end of his first term, sought to employ active-duty combat troops while Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper and other Pentagon officials urged him to rely instead on the Guard, which is trained to address civil disturbances.

Trump has summoned the military for domestic purposes like few of his predecessors have. He did so most recently Monday, authorizing the mobilization of 800 D.C. National Guard troops[3] to bolster enhanced

law enforcement activity in Washington that he said is necessary to address violent crime. Data maintained by the D.C. police shows such incidents are in decline; the city's mayor called the move "unsettling and unprecedented[4]."

Earlier this year, over the objections of California's governor and other Democrats, Trump dispatched more than 5,000 National Guard members and active-duty Marines to the Los Angeles area under a rarely used authority permitting the military's use for quelling insurrection. Administration officials said the mission was necessary to protect federal personnel and property amid protests denouncing Trump's immigration policies. His critics called the deployment unnecessary and a gross overreach. Before long, many of the troops involved were doing unrelated support work, including a raid[5] on a marijuana farm more than 100 miles away.

The Trump administration also has dispatched thousands of troops to the southern border in a dramatic show of force meant to discourage illegal migration.

National Guard troops can be mobilized for federal missions inside the United States under two main authorities. The first, Title 10, puts troops under the president's direction, where they can support law enforcement activity but not perform arrests or investigations.

The other, Title 32, is a federal-state status where troops are controlled by their state governor but federally funded. It allows more latitude to participate in law enforcement missions. National Guard troops from other states arrived in D.C. under such circumstances during racial justice protests in 2020.

The proposal being evaluated now would allow the president to mobilize troops and put them on Title 32 orders in a state experiencing unrest. The documents detailing the plan acknowledge the potential for political friction should that state's governor refuse to work with the Pentagon.

Some legal scholars expressed apprehension about the proposal.

The Trump administration is relying on a shaky legal theory that the president can act broadly to protect federal property and functions, said Joseph Nunn, an attorney at the Brennan Center for Justice who specializes in legal issues germane to the U.S. military's domestic activities.

"You don't want to normalize routine military participation in law enforcement," he said. "You don't want to normalize routine domestic deployment."

The strategy is further complicated by the fact that National Guard members from one state cannot operate in another state without permission, Nunn said. He also warned that any quick-reaction force established for civil-unrest missions risks lowering the threshold for deploying National Guard troops into American cities.

"When you have this tool waiting at your fingertips, you're going to want to use it," Nunn said. "It actually makes it more likely that you're going to see domestic deployments — because why else have a task force?"

The proposal represents a major departure in how the National Guard traditionally has been used, said Lindsay P. Cohn, an associate professor of national security affairs at the U.S. Naval War College. While it is not unusual for National Guard units to be deployed for domestic emergencies within their states, including for civil disturbances, this "is really strange because essentially nothing is happening," she said.

"Crime is going down. We don't have major protests or civil disturbances. There is no significant resistance from states" to federal immigration policies, she said. "There is very little evidence anything big is likely to happen soon," said Cohn, who stressed she was speaking in her personal capacity and not reflecting her employer's views.

Moreover, Cohn said, the proposal risks diverting National Guard resources that may be needed to respond to natural disasters or other emergencies.

The proposal envisions a rotation of service members from Army and Air Force National Guard units based in multiple states. Those include Alabama, Arizona, California, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan,

Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Tennessee, the documents say.

Carter Elliott, a spokesperson for Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (D), said governors and National Guard leaders are best suited to decide how to support law enforcement during emergencies. "There is a well-established procedure that exists to request additional assistance during times of need," Elliott said, "and the Trump administration is blatantly and dangerously ignoring that precedent."

One action memo contained in the documents, dated July 22, recommends that Army military police and Air Force security forces receive additional training for the mission. The document indicates it was prepared for Hegseth by Elbridge Colby, the Defense Department's undersecretary for policy.

The 300 troops in each of the two headquarters locations would be outfitted with weapons and riot gear, the documents say. The first 100 would be ready to move within an hour, with the second and third waves ready within two and 12 hours' notice, the documents note, or all immediately deployed when placed on high alert.

The quick-reaction teams would be on task for 90 days, the documents said, "to limit burnout."

The documents also show robust internal discussions that, with unusual candor, detail the possible negative repercussions if the plan were enacted. For instance, such short-notice missions could "significantly impact volunteerism," the documents say, which would adversely affect the military's ability to retain personnel. Guard members, families and civilian employers "feel the significant impacts of short notice activations," the documents said.

The documents highlight several other concerns, including:

> - Reduced Availability for Other Missions: State-Level Readiness: States may have fewer Guard members available for local emergencies (e.g., wildfires, hurricanes).
> - Strain on Personnel and Equipment: Frequent domestic deployments can lead to personnel fatigue (stress, burnout, employer conflicts) and accelerated wear and tear on equipment, particularly systems not designed for prolonged civil support missions.
> - Training Disruptions: Erosion of Core Capabilities: Extensive domestic deployments can disrupt scheduled training, hinder skill maintenance and divert units from their primary military mission sets, ultimately impacting overall combat readiness.
> - Budgetary and Logistical Strains: Sustained operations can stretch budgets, requiring emergency funding or impacting other planned activities.
> - Public and Political Impact: National Guard support for DHS raises potential political sensitivities, questions regarding the appropriate civil-military balance and legal considerations related to their role as a nonpartisan force. — *National Guard planning documents reviewed by The Post*

Officials also have expressed some worry that deploying troops too quickly could make for a haphazard situation as state and local governments scramble to coordinate their arrival, the documents show.

One individual cited in the documents rejected the notion that military aviation should be the primary mode of transportation, emphasizing the significant burden of daily aircraft inspections and placing aircrews on constant standby. The solution, this official proposed, was to contract with Southwest Airlines or American Airlines through their Phoenix and Atlanta operations, the documents say.

"The support (hotels, meals, etc.) required will fall onto the general economy in large and thriving cities of the United States," this official argued. Moreover, bypassing military aircraft would allow for deploying personnel to travel "in a more subdued status" that might avoid adding to tensions in their "destination city."

Footnotes:

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The Culture Wars Are Still Worth Fighting

Rev. Brooks Cato

Aug 11, 2025

Originally published: https://brookscato.substack.com/p/the-culture-wars-are-still-worth

Maybe it's all the heat getting to my head, but I think our world's a lot like that stone wall of mine. We build on top of layers that came before, trusting gravity to hold the thing together while adding more weight on top. Wisdom passed through generations of wallers created sturdy art that lasted lifetimes. But while we try to build, someone else's yanking out foundation stones and destabilizing the whole thing. A destabilized wall wants to fall over. And a wall of falling stones is dangerous. And then, when that destabilized wall finally topples, the opportunistic stone yankers say "I told you dry stone walls weren't safe. Coincidentally, my brother-in-law's company makes mortar." That's a real political strategy. Critique a service enough to justify decreased funding; decreased funding weakens its effectiveness; ineffectiveness proves earlier critiques; and then you can replace it with a privatized option someone profits off of and question the loyalty of anyone who argues along the way. Same goes for people. Identify a group outside the tall part of humanity's bell curve, and say they're bad. Critique 'em until people agree; make space for those people to target the outsiders; push hard enough for them to fight back; push harder until no peaceful option remains; and when they turn to something more disruptive, crush them under the auspices of keeping the peace while reiterating how bad you said they were at the beginning.

Some say Culture Wars are a distraction to keep us from paying attention to what billionaires're doing. We should be critical of billionaires but not at the expense of what's also important in other places. Do you remember what the most recent battles of the ongoing Culture Wars were about? Black Lives Matter attempted to get the nation to see how black people are treated, targeted even, by the American policing and justice systems. The cry's literally "we deserve to live." The critique is "why don't you think other lives matter?" Look at trans folks. One side of the argument is "hey, so we die violent deaths at a higher rate than the rest of the population, and we're threatened every time we go to the bathroom. Could you maybe stop beating us to death?" And the critique is "why must you take so much away from women?" Look at immigration. One side of the argument is "hey, so legal status is a real thing, but could you maybe not torture, sterilize, and kill us?" And the critique is "maybe you should've thought of that before you came here." Look at Gaza. One side of the argument is "hey, we'd really like it if we could eat, have access to drinking water, and not fear for our children every time they step outside to see sunlight or stand in a food line." And the critique is "we have a right to defend ourselves by shooting you while you starve."

Now, admittedly, I might've mischaracterized those arguments. So, I'm gonna be (even more) blunt. For Black Lives Matter, "they may be killed at a disproportionate rate by police who rarely face consequences, but have you considered that they are black?" For trans folks, "they may die by suicide and get singled out for gruesome deaths at an alarming rate, but have you considered that they are queer?" For immigrants, "they may follow the rules, get scooped up by multinational companies, and forced into modern slavery while risking their own lives to support their families in countries destabilized by our own empirical past, but have you considered that they are brown?" For Gazans, "they may face cultural extinction on a daily basis thanks to our own draconian approach to subjugation under the guise of warfare, but have you considered that they are brown, too?" "That group deserves to live" is repeatedly shot down with a simple but clear "No."

The pleas from the people being crushed are not met in good faith. Those in power aim to isolate and then crush anything outside the proscribed norm. But let me remind you of the arguments again: on one side, "I just want to live past twenty;" on the other, "the liberal agenda's so oppressive and naïve. Why are you trying to make everyone gay?" The anti-billionaire bandwagon is great, but focusing on class does not make other issues matter less. And it doesn't mean that people with power get to stop protecting those with

none. Trans people, shoot, all those categories have it worse now than a year ago, but some argue it's best to shift to the middle where it's okay to trash them under the guise of "hey, I'm just asking questions." It's gotten so bad that other countries are considering accepting trans refugees 'cause they're learning all too clearly that it's not just the Son of Man's one who comes knocking at an unexpected hour. Yes, billionaires are a problem, and yes they stoke the flames of division, but that does not mean that marginalized people suddenly don't matter anymore. I guess I'm concerned that all this talk about shifting the focus onto oligarchs will also mean tossing minorities of all kinds out with the bathwater. It's a fallacy that, I don't know, holding arsonists accountable, say, means we have to leave the fires they've already set to burn. Sure, the oligarchs did it, but the world's still on fire and people are dying. This isn't about being woke. This is about fighting the immolation of entire peoples while immolation's still a metaphor.

The Bible's never been a governing document of this nation, but it's often used to justify targeting certain people rather than inspiring care. The hypocrisy's blatant. Theocrats harness their tongues to lies, and our nation and our people crumble. For Isaiah, blatant scriptural hypocrisy leaves God so disgusted that not even worship brings God joy. Hypocritical people of faith aren't just bad, they're abominations. Solemn assemblies without justice and equality are unbearable. God pleads, "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." Over in Luke, Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The incredible breadth of humanity's a treasure in itself, but if acknowledging that doesn't make billionaires another buck, why should they care? Their treasures are elsewhere, and their false gods of wealth and power harden their hearts to the needs of people and the demands of God. The way things should work is all upside-down from this. Jesus is the master who serves the underclass. It's a complete inversion of the world's way of doing things, and it's absolutely at the core of our religion. Jesus, the King of Creation, is also the suffering servant prioritizing people over profit. The world would be an altogether better place if we could break the structures that require masters at all, but I'm happy to start with leaders that'll wash our feet.

Back at my stone wall, it occurred to me that it's all hopeless. Stay with me here. Left on my own trying to save the world, the whole situation's hopeless. And that's exactly why I have to have hope. Hope that I'm not doing this on my own. Hope that other people in Hamilton, in Madison County, in thousands of little places like ours all over this gasoline-soaked burn pit of political omnishambles are doing this, too. Hope that faithful Christians are calling for Christianity to be Christian again. We're learning firsthand how necessary that old saying I love so much is: Pray as though everything depends on God; work as though everything depends on you. I have hope because I have to, because I need the assurance of things not yet seen. I will keep on working like the world depends on me, but I believe that it doesn't. The more we have to rely on things outside of ourselves the better. We have to turn to other people, have to rely on God, have to build communities into resilient oases. It's a terrible time, but there's a silver lining that we get to look for and find hope in the many faces of God borne by others.

Love God, love your neighbor. It's the same thing. Without caveat, without exception, open your heart to the treasure of actual human beings. Nearly everyone desires a better country. I pray we find our way there together, and with the many faithful who've fought tyranny and hypocrisy before us, may we give the God of Christianity every reason to be proud of being *our* God.

You'll Be Back

Orange Julius Caesar

Aug 13, 2025

You'll be back, soon, you'll see
You'll remember you belong to me
You'll be back, time will tell
You'll remember that I served you well
Oceans rise, empires fall
We have seen each other through it all
And when push comes to shove
I will send a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love!

You say our love is draining, and you can't go on
You'll be the one complainin' when I am gone
And no, don't change the subject
'Cause you're my favorite subject
My sweet, submissive subject
My loyal, royal subject
Forever and ever and ever and ever and ever

You'll be back like before
I will fight the fight and win the war
For your love, for your praise
And I'll love you 'til my dying days
When you're gone, I'll go mad
So don't throw away this thing we had
'Cause when push comes to shove
I will kill your friends and family to remind you of my love.

"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist." — Fr. Hélder Pessoa Câmara

"When life closes a door, throw knowledge through a window."

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