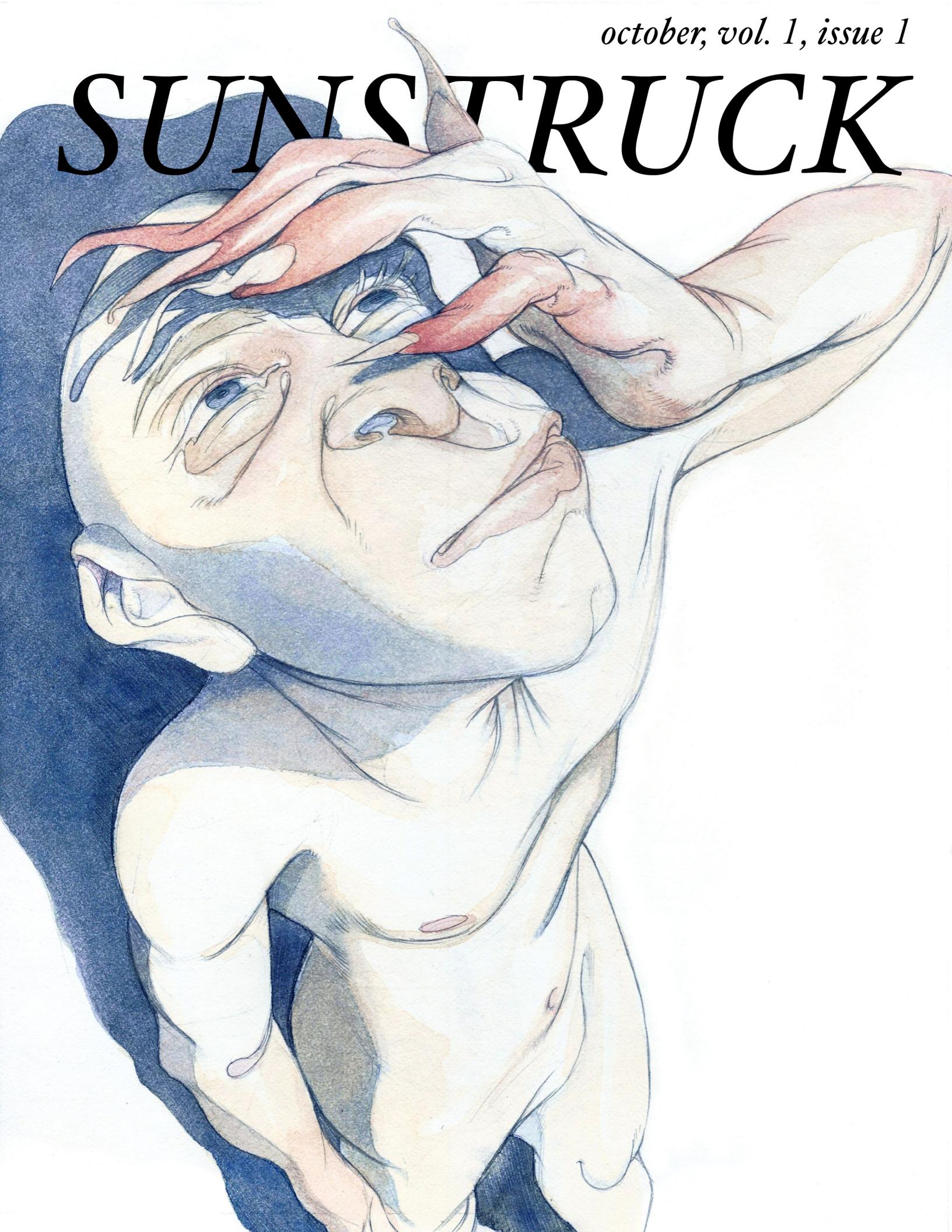


*october, vol. 1, issue 1*

# SUNSTRUCK



# Dear Readers,

SunStruck Magazine was founded on a simple idea.

It's the idea that through dialogue, one might come to know something one previously hadn't. Further, and perhaps more importantly, dialogue has the ability to expose falsities and irrationalities in notions that one might've previously thought true.

The idea is known as the Socratic Method, named after the ancient philosopher whose life most perfectly expressed it: Socrates, a poor, unemployed Athenian, sentenced to death by his own community 400 years before Christ's birth.

Radical new systems of morality, governance, religion and education evolved because of Socrates' dialogues with Athenian citizens. These systems require a strong foundation on which to be built. A foundation constructed not of matter, but of ideas and concepts.

Justice. Piety. Truth. Human Nature. Socrates believed that these words were not just linguistic constructs. To Socrates, the true nature of these words was eternal and unchanging. Although his life was cut short by the very community he was trying to help, his rejection of the prevailing philosophies in Athenian culture helped develop ideas that would later reorient Western civilization towards a more just existence.

But the work is not yet done. Conceptions about the human condition must continuously be discussed in order to safeguard the virtue of one's society.

At SunStruck, we believe that a society's proper orientation rests on its education. In the "Allegory of the Cave," Socrates refers to education as the process of aligning one's soul with the Good. SunStruck aims to facilitate that process through the use of the Socratic Method and its primary components: discourse, analysis, open-mindedness, and creativity.

More than a magazine, more than a group of individuals laying out arguments or telling stories, SunStruck was designed to be a platform for discussion about the topics most important to our society. While readers may disagree with some of the statements made in this first issue, it should be understood that these works are meant to be conversation starters and not the final word on a given topic.

The articles, stories and poems included in this issue will not orient our society towards the Good on their own. In order for them to have any value at all, they must be read, discussed, and acted upon.

We are excited to witness the change inspired by the simple idea on which we were founded.

Sincerely,

- Co-Founder, Art Director  
*Adam Emerson*

- Co-Founder, Editor in Chief  
*Caleb Downs*

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“The Truth does not change  
according to our ability to  
stomach it.”

- Flannery O'Connor

# NO COMMON GROUND

by

Jared Jones

The United States government is once again under threat of a shutdown. Since the idea of a long-term spending bill has apparently fled the congressional consciousness, it's likely the same threat will arise again in December when the next stopgap spending bill comes up for a vote.

Whether or not to fund Planned Parenthood is the reason for congressional discord this time; in 2013 it was the Affordable Care Act. But these individual conflicts are part of a larger trend of political polarization in American government and society. Legislators seem altogether incapable of compromising on policy decisions, and American citizens are more starkly divided between liberals and conservatives than any time in recent memory.

However, the extreme political polarization that the U.S. is experiencing at present is a relatively recent phenomenon. That's not to say that our system has always been rainbows and butterflies in the past. It certainly hasn't.

From the mid-1860s until the beginning of the 20th century, enmity between the North and South similarly reflected the relationship between today's liberals and conservatives. However, that was immediately after the Civil War. A heightened level of discord was all but inevitable. Partisan disdain steadily diminished from the end of the 19th century until just after World War II, where it leveled off and stayed at historically low levels un-

til the 80s. But polarization in American politics has been on a meteoric rise since then, and it shows no signs of slowing down.

But so what? That's politics, right? A bunch of old, White men clinging to power, grandstanding, demonizing the other side and making extravagant promises on which they rarely follow through.

Well, no. Politics is supposed to be a contest of ideas. It's *supposed* to be a competition between our best and brightest minds to compete for the opportunity to represent and lead citizens in the challenges that we face together as a municipality, a state, and a nation.

It sounds trite, and to most, this conception of politics is nothing more than idealistic naiveté, but, in reality, it is the foundational idea on which our system was meant to operate. The fact that one might be embarrassed to make such a proclamation in public is an indication of just how cynical we've become towards politics. This cynicism from politicians and citizens is both a cause and an effect of the rift between the U.S.'s two dominant political factions, and it has the potential to severely handicap our progress and threaten our standing in the world.

There are certain necessities for a modern nation if it is to prosper; things like an educational system that gives its children the best chance to



*The Intervention of the Sabine Women* by Jacques-Louis David

succeed, ongoing investments in infrastructure that allow goods and services to be moved efficiently, and a range of effective social services to protect the old, the sick, and the weak. But all of these basic necessities in the U.S. have had their funding threatened and their implementation retarded by political gridlock.

In his book, “*The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*,” Jonathan Haidt claims conservatives and liberals in America have two different sets of facts, two different moralities, and two different Constitutions. The consequences of this hyper-partisanship include things as seemingly innocuous as an increased tendency for the average American to defer to their respective party’s position on policy debates, rather than think them through on their own. But there are also destructive consequences, such as the near paralysis of the federal government, leaving it unable to deal with pressing matters of national interest and occasionally causing it to shutdown entirely.

Another less direct, but equally troubling consequence of maintaining the status quo, is the erosion of public trust in government. As voters and politicians begin to define themselves in relation to a certain party, those on the other “team” are increasingly seen as an enemy rather than merely a rival. Polls show that Americans are less likely than ever to approve of their children dating someone with differing political views and more likely than ever to believe that the other party is a threat to the country’s future. Beyond personal interactions, our negative perceptions of those on the other side of the aisle also affect how we view the government more broadly. As our trust diminishes in public officials who do not share our particular convictions, important confirmations for judgeships, cabinet posts, and a variety of other essential positions of civil service become more likely to be held up, and their occupants are more likely to be regarded with suspicion. Moreover, public trust of the legal system, an absolutely vital component of the rule of law, declines. The public increasingly evaluates judicial appointees based on their political preferences, and judges become more inclined

to rule in a partisan manner.

These sound like abstract, theoretical concerns, and it's tempting to believe that none of this will seriously impact our day-to-day lives. But when the federal government shut down in 2013 for just 16 days, federal employee furloughs amounted to 6.6 million days in total. Several hundred thousand Americans missed a paycheck. Overall, the shutdown cost the U.S. \$24 billion, but that hasn't stopped congressional infighting from threatening another one this year.

Congressional productivity in this century has been historically low. And while the 113th Congress passed slightly more bills than the 112th, a full tenth of those were resolutions to rename post offices – probably not the most productive way for our elected officials to be spending their time. Also inflating Congress' productivity statistics is an increasing reliance on stop-gap measures to fund programs for only months at a time. Depending on these quick fixes isn't just inefficient governance. It leads to uncertainty in our markets, deters investment and disrupts our ability to effectively plan and execute badly needed infrastructure projects. Even when Congress is able to pass substantial legislation, the losing side now makes it their mission to see that legislation repealed. Regardless of your opinion on Obamacare, to hold 55 separate votes for its repeal borders on absolute lunacy. It's a game of tennis that nobody can possibly win.

While the underlying hyper-partisanship is a complex problem with no simple solutions, understanding how we got into this mess may at least point to a way out.

## The Primary Process

Primaries take different forms in every state, but two aspects are fairly consistent nationwide. First, citizens most likely to vote in primaries are far from being a representative sample of the public at large. Rather, they are the most ideological voters of either side. The extreme rhetoric of Republican primary debates is a direct consequence of the candidates swerving to the right in order to

win the support of the die-hard voters just so they can stay in the race. Of course, the winner of the primary invariably retreats back toward the center for the general election, but the lack of diversity in the primary electorate gives a definitive edge to politicians with more extreme political views. This pattern is even more visible in the House and Senate primaries, where the size of the electorate is further diminished.

The second means by which the primary process encourages polarization is through so-called "Sore-Loser Laws." These laws, which exist in some form in 47 states, prevent candidates who lose in the primary from running in the general election as an independent or third party candidate. By exercising this measure of control over the ballot, the parties are able to thwart challenges that may cause internal fissions and force candidates to accept party-approved positions, thereby maintaining their stranglehold on the political process.

## Gerrymandering

The Constitution states that every ten years the lines demarcating congressional districts are to be redrawn, with each state's legislature being responsible for drawing their own new map. The parties in power in each state have done their best to draw district lines in such a way as to ensure the maximum number of seats will be safe from any challenge. This is achieved by corralling opposition voters into as few districts as possible. Opposing party members win their own district by an enormous margin, but don't pose a threat to the incumbency of the state's majority party representatives. In essence, red districts become redder and blue districts bluer. Further, the party who wins the most seats is often not the party that wins the most votes. In fact, because so many votes end up being superfluous under this system, it can take three times as many votes to elect a Democratic House member as it does for a Republican in states whose legislature is controlled by Republicans. The same holds true for electing a Republican representative in a state controlled by Democrats.

## Money in Politics

This is an issue that has received more attention in recent years, but generally not in the context of its role in increasing political polarization. As is the case with voting in the primaries, the pool of people who contribute financially to political campaigns is generally comprised of the most active and ideological members of the electorate. It takes a certain amount of commitment to a cause to sacrifice time to vote in a primary. Even more so to sacrifice one's money to help elect a candidate. Imagine what it takes to be willing to part with hundreds of thousands, or even hundreds of millions of dollars to influence an election. In 2012, 86 percent of those elected to the House and 61 percent of those elected to the Senate took more in contributions from the top 1 percent of the 1 percent of wealthiest donors than they did from all of their small donors combined. While this is perfectly legal, it raises serious questions of accountability and integrity in our election system. Modern campaign finance laws force candidates to give serious consideration to the policy preferences of a select few individuals, if they want access to the resources necessary to compete in the U.S.'s absurdly expensive elections.

## Have-It-Your-Way News

Fox News has proven that a successful business model for news organizations is catering to viewers with ideologically biased coverage. This is a formula that MSNBC tried, albeit less successfully, to copy. And while Fox News gets far too much credit for its impact on the conservative movement, it is undeniable that the rise of partisan news outlets, in conjunction with the proliferation of web-based news outlets holding varying levels of credibility, has fundamentally changed the our relationship with the news media. The shifting media landscape has created a pair of echo chambers in which those with partisan leanings can have their beliefs verified without ever being exposed to an alternative point of view.

Debates featured on modern news outlets usually center on the partisan messaging these sources offer, but more concerning is the transition from primarily objective, fact-based journalism to editorialized programming and opinion pieces masquerading as straight news. The distinction between these two is extremely important in determining the lens through which one interprets a given message, and it is a distinction that has become increasingly blurred as news sources become more numerous and varied.

## Income Inequality

The Great Recession of 2008 and the Occupy Wall Street movement brought income inequality into the national spotlight. Since then, those two words have remained on every politician's lips, though few have made a serious effort to combat it. Meanwhile, the disparity between rich and poor continues to increase, as it has been for the last four decades. The gulf between rich and poor recently surpassed that of the period leading up to the Great Depression. Analyzing the link between inequality and polarization is extremely difficult given the complexity and sheer volume of factors that contribute to each, but the fact that political affiliation divides along economic lines is beyond dispute. And while it isn't particularly shocking that income inequality contributes to political polarization, what is incredible is just how closely correlated the two phenomena are. Income is an increasingly reliable predictor of how a person will vote, which makes sense considering the rift between the economic interests of the rich and the poor. Compounding the problem is the fact that the wealthy are more likely to see their economic priorities signed into law, which further exacerbates tensions between the classes and counters the policies that exist to deal with inequality in the first place.

## Voter Turnout

You wouldn't know the U.S. is the birthplace of modern democracy by looking at its current voting statistics. The U.S. ranks 138th in the world in terms of voting age population who make it to the polls, averaging a paltry 44.7 percent turnout since 1945. While most Americans are at home or work, exercising their right not to vote on Election Day, guess who is out en masse? That's right, the hyper-partisans on both the left and the right. This is where the rubber really hits the road in terms of America's political polarization. Whether it is due to inconvenience, a lack of adequate transportation, a busy schedule, or just plain apathy, most Americans can't be bothered to go to their local polling place. As a result, the victor in both the primaries and general elections are decided almost entirely on the ideologues' terms. Take, for example, Chris Murphy's election as Senator from Connecticut in 2012. Murphy won 67 percent of the primary vote and went on to win the general election by a landslide. But because of the disturbingly low turnout in the primary, that 67 percent of primary voters translates to just 3 percent of the eligible voting population. Chris Murphy went on to be named the most liberal member of the Senate by the National Journal. Murphy's case is not an anomaly. The average Congressional primary turnout nationwide in the 2012 election was just 12 percent. We are, as a nation, allowing an ever shrinking and more radical handful of people choose our pool of potential leaders for us. Then we complain because we don't like our options.

## The Two Americas

A quick glance at an electoral map is all that's needed to recognize the dichotomy of experience in the U.S. In 2010, 39 percent of Americans lived in counties directly on the coastline, with that number expected to increase to 47 percent by 2020. That's close to half of the country living in 10 percent of its land area. Consider the impact such a sharp demographic contrast has on the day-to-day life of the average person, without even taking into account their distinct values, beliefs, and experiences. This lack of a shared context between two

halves of the population manifests itself in a general lack of understanding, which is perfectly exemplified in the debate over gun control. A gun represents something entirely different to most people living in a large city than it does to those in rural areas. In less densely populated regions, where violent crime is extremely rare, but recreational activities like hunting and fishing are common, a gun is a piece of sporting equipment. In a metropolitan area though, seeing a gun usually means you're about to lose your wallet, or maybe your life. But rather than examining these differing perspectives and attempting to reach an amicable solution, we resort to name calling and extreme rhetoric, completely mischaracterizing the position of the other side. This tension between rural and urban life is nothing new. But as a nation's population and modern technology grow, the disparity between the two do so as well, and it becomes ever more difficult to understand the perspective of those living in a manner different from our own.

\* \* \*

Of course, these issues are just the beginning of the conversation. There are many more factors contributing to political polarization beyond the scope of this article. One in particular that deserves at least a mention is the 'first-past-the-post' voting system itself. But that's something none of us can change; not directly anyway. Truth be told, most of the issues that factor into the problem are either structural issues within our government or are issues driven by forces largely beyond the control of any individual.

However, there is one thing you can do that will make a difference: vote. Not just in presidential elections, but in primaries, midterms, state, and local elections as well. Take the time to learn about the candidates and issues that matter to you and use this knowledge to make an informed decision regarding who you want to represent you. Whenever possible, support candidates who have a history of bipartisanship, who support campaign finance reform, and who have a serious plan to combat income inequality. Again, it sounds trite, but that is how change happens in a democracy. When enough people get fed up and use their votes

to demand change, change inevitably comes. In our cynicism, many of us have been convinced that this is not the case. And while it may be more difficult to affect change today than it was in the past, ultimately the power in our political system still lies with the voters. It's only when we let our differing perspectives be used to separate us that our power becomes diffused and special interests are able to gain a foothold. The truth is that we have far more common interests than most of us realize. When we finally learn to prioritize those interests and make an effort to acknowledge the validity of alternate points of view, the cynics will be proven wrong and we will see the dynamics of power in the U.S. shift back to the people. ☀

# SHOOTING THE BREEZE

by

*Chris Campanioni*

“It’s really not so bad, you know, once you get past the taste.”

We are in the desert, talking about eating dog biscuits between camera flashes and the sunrise—once again—the sun is about to rise, but it hasn’t yet. It’s a long story but I’ll fill in the most salient details.

*March 17*

We drive everywhere here. The crew rented three black vans—nearly identical, except for the license plates, of course—with power locks and tinted windows, and a built-in GPS in case we ever get lost in the desert.

We drive in circles.

The houses and the trees—and the streets—the long, wide air-brushed streets look like scenes from *Chinatown*, from *Mulholland Drive*, from a movie I’d had, once, in my head, the kind of movie you sometimes only dream about—the kind that replays every three or four months. Dust clouds, manicured lawns, a chemical sunset.

It looks like that.

I imagine all the pornography that has been filmed in these homes, these palatial all-white sculptures of 1950s concrete.

March 18

“I want to capture everything.”

This is what Jared Garrett keeps saying, shouting, demanding. But the same issue keeps coming up. The budget. The issue of the budget. Jared calls up Mega to call up *Voidyeur*, to call up their art directors, to implore the finance team for MORE MONEY.

They deliberate. A day passes. There is talk of a hunger strike when the call comes in: as long as they can capture my abs in the morning light, as long as those abs are slicked with enough moisture—natural or otherwise—then the editorial is golden. “The abs—” my abs, which cost nothing, I remind them, “—the abs are absolutely essential to the editorial.”

But the money comes anyway. Money for makeup, money for strobe lights, money for more reflectors, and lassos, and moisture, and caravans wrapped in burlap; money for the dog treats they use to tip the housemaids at the hotel. “Says it tastes like filet mignon,” Ronnie, one of the lighting assistants, says. “Says it right here.” (He points to the bright yellow package: the dog, a black lab, smiling wide-eyed and apparently sated.)

“Would you eat it?” I ask. “Would you eat the dog biscuits?”

“If I was a housemaid,” Ronnie says, laughing like a hyena, jiggling his rotund torso, looking at the brown bone like it’s a fossil he’s found at the Museum of Natural History, clutching it between his thumb and middle finger, squinting and still wiggling. “If you paid me.”

Every morning we drive to the same spot. El Mirage. We park in the same lot; we walk the same distance and then I take off my sneakers. I take off my clothes.

“I want to capture everything,” Jared says, and he says this even as we get

the news that the eight-page spread is now a four-page supplement. Curses ring out, several objects are thrown. Not even the biscuits are spared. The money keeps coming.

*March 19*

They've rented out the whole kingdom for us. That means seven rooms at the Desert Princess bed and breakfast, with complimentary newspaper service (*The Beacon*) thrown in.

There are two TVs in each room that are never turned off; there is one room filled completely with camera equipment. Camera equipment and dog biscuits. Articles of clothing are strewn everywhere, forming an archipelago from A1 to C1 to the Jacuzzi and swimming pool that separate the three apartments.

Breakfast is served in a quaint kitchen adjacent to the lobby, so I routinely see the faces of rejected guests when they are casually informed by Jeff and Tom, the couple who own the property, that *the entire hotel has actually been rented out this week*.

Jeff and Tom are always smiling and asking if we'd like more coffee; if we'd like more cream for the coffee. The gold-wrapped rectangles of butter house yellow bricks, rows and rows of yellow bricks in a ceramic casket.

There are many moments afforded to things like *self-reflection* in a place like Palm Springs. But just as often, my cell phone rings.

Dave Goldstein—again.

He was having a moment of self-doubt—he had been having the moment for a while now—a prolonged bout of hysteria in which he asked himself (and then me) whether or not it was right—if it was morally sound—to refuse the role of Artiste Savant. And why does everyone care so much about the fact

of his being a Genius? It isn't the first time he's asked the question.

It is becoming impossible to live up to the expectations bequeathed unto me.

I would like to respond. I think about responding. I start to form a response.

Bequeath? Really?

*March 20 (morning)*

Jared Garrett wants to know what my story is. You know, like what I do when I'm not modeling. "Example: I am a surgeon," he says. "Jared Garrett isn't even my real name. Jared Garrett is my BRAND. The kind of art I'm creating. The medium of my message. (He pauses here.) My true voice ... but at my OTH-ER job, I operate on people's MOUTHS. 'Open up.' (I don't think he can shut his.) 'Bite down hard.' Et cetera, et cetera. Lots of gagging and spitting. (Laughter like an infant's whimper.) Imagine that. So what about you? ... Everybody does something else; wishes they did something else. You really need to reinvent yourself these days, you know? Master multiple fields. Like Ronnie—you know he's a deejay right? And Marissa (makeup)—well, she does A LOT of makeup. Roger is a singer. Rhythm and blues, right, Rodge? And we are all finding ourselves."

Unless we are losing ourselves, I think. But I don't say it. I don't say anything.

*March 20 (afternoon)*

“So what *is* your story?”

They always want to know. They always want to hear you tell.

Pieces of something that would never (not ever) be what they were expecting you to say, pieces of something you hardly knew you’d say (now or ever), as if anything ever came out just the way it was supposed to—supposing any of it could ever be told anyway.

“You mean, the one I’m writing?”

And the whole effect would be like speaking Russian without having any knowledge of the language. The whole effect would be nothing but big signboards blaring VACANCY.

“Or the one I’m living?”

Or maybe what would follow would be epiphany, unbearable resonance of anti-thought, which is to say FEELING, lingering deep in the marrow below the skin and suffocated almost immediately by canned laughter and tired phrases, preset selections played at random. You’ve read that chapter before. A feeling like a door slammed in your face, and yet ... and yet, a long hall, another door at the end ... a walk that resumes.

I have the vague sense the same thing that happened to me is happening to other people, everywhere.

“What’s the difference?”

March 20 (evening)

Jared Garrett (why didn't he pick a better name?) talks the whole way from El Mirage to the Desert Princess, turning his head from the front passenger seat, smoothing out his thin eyebrows with his slim fingers and saying things like, "It's not easy to explain the difference between 'fun' and 'pleasure' since they are quite similar ..."

We pass the Champion Institute of Cosmetology. We pass two golf courses. We pass a gymnasium with the name "Golden Age" etched across a neon-lit sign with the first "G" completely dark.

"I have been trying to figure out the difference between things that are 'fun' and things that are 'pleasurable,'" Roger returns. "For instance, (we pass the Desert Princess, but the van hurtles on) lying around all afternoon reading mags and drinking coffee while wrapped in a warm blanket is one of my most delicious of pleasures, but I wouldn't call it *fun*. When I think of all the things I like to do (performing on stage comes to mind), I don't think of these things as 'fun,' particularly. They are richly satisfying, enjoyable and engrossing, but there is often a lot of resistance going in. They require discipline, you know?"

"Example: I told you already—right?—I'm actually a surgeon," Jared Garrett interrupts, craning his neck, smiling wistfully. "Back home—back in New York—that's what I do. And when I go to Cornell Medical to analyze X-rays, maybe to rehearse a few different techniques, I feel completely powerful. But it's often mentally frustrating when I can't get it *perfect*. So I think the way I would distinguish fun from pleasure is that fun is novel. Fun takes you out of your routine."

"For me," Roger picks up the thread again, "fun is when I'm practicing a number twenty-thousand times and I'm performing it not thinking about mak-

ing a mistake but simply enjoying it because I've mastered every move, there's nothing to worry about but to simply have fun ...”

The day grows darker and more clear. I stare out the window of the van as it races on: the long, wide streets, the purple sky, the tumbleweed, the stucco homes, the homes that look like palaces, gated entrances, driveways that spiral forward like a wave ... and think about lines to a poem I will probably never write<sup>1</sup>.

“‘Pleasure’ is sublime,” someone says. “It speaks to a state of mind.”

“It’s all about entertainment, people.”—Another voice. Another mouth. “Fun happens when one switches off the brain.”

Jared Garrett turns to me. I see another palm tree pass, leaves swaying like a stream of rushing water in my eyes. “Do you do that? Do you like to sometimes turn it off?”

“I can’t,” I say, still looking out the window. “I sometimes can’t even think one thought at a time. Thoughts overlap other thoughts, interrupt and bleed across, cancel each other out, sometimes combine or curtail thought

#### <sup>1</sup> Shot On Location

On the way to El Mirage we passed the windmill farms, each fan turning almost indiscernibly. I felt the wind come in from canyons, a montage of scorched earth, rust and fungus clouds, rolling hills, *The Sun Never Sets On the Mighty*, arid, shrill heat of a California morning rising higher when I stepped outside: vista of a million Jeep commercials in the drive-in of my mind. *There's Only One.*

Cut to white noise on the screen.  
Cut to a man in the waiting room  
acosting the maid who only came to clean  
up the mess. *Desert Princess*.  
67967 Vista Chino, Cathedral City. Cut  
to some passerby’s careless spit, the ice-scorched sand,  
my saliva and sweat, the director’s demands,  
hands on hips, altering after every other  
“How The West Was One”  
—interruptions—  
(my head in one place,  
my body in quite another) ...

the Ferris wheel I rode all night,  
one night in childhood, back flat to feel  
the world move. And then I stopped too,  
halfway there, halfway not,  
paralyzed at the apex of the loop,  
frozen in a half frown to hover,  
helpless, above the ground where

we come around,  
we come around,  
we come around.

Palm Springs was a dream  
I’d run along: long, wide streets, wide-eyed awake and still longing  
in the moments before sunrise:  
Manicured lawns, espaliers, trestle-table patios, palm trees,  
1950s swimming pools and the despair  
of a milion zigzagging fantasies  
dissapating the moment they arrived  
at El Mirador, or Araby Cove.

All of us and everything are brorn  
in desperation and hope, and the swarm.

completely ... like the sentence with its original goal of moving across the page in a single direction (always down, I think), moving swiftly and sometimes without punctuation, and how it all comes crashing the minute you pause to consider a thing like posterity.”

I wait for a response but they’re already talking about pleasure again; pleasure and fun.

“Doing doing doing, I find myself all the time insistent on DOING things—for no other reason except to do them.”

(We turn at the traffic circle, going down a long stretch of asphalt, sand, neon lights, as it gets darker. The purple sky.)

Language is a valley. Words rise and fall, too, I think. We make and remake them.

They make and remake us.

### *March 21*

You’re invited to: Dave Goldstein—A Retrospective  
Celebrate the smash hit—four years later. On October 6, be prepared to be shocked all over again. Featuring a round-table discussion by Mr. Goldstein and several special guests and industry experts, including leading academics in film theory and cinematography. RSVP until March 31 by including your first and last name, and a donation (suggested) in the box below.

I click out and turn inward, thinking about replying, about saying I’m out; I’m out of town; I’m stuck in Palm Springs, if you can believe it, I’m still shooting; I’m still not sleeping if you can believe it; I can’t make it; Thank you, I’m honored but—I don’t do anything.

*March 22*

Idyllwild was the greatest thing I'd never seen.

The village is located in the mountains above Palm Springs—about fifty miles from downtown on Highway 74. But the one thing the crew on this job doesn't have is patience.

"An hour and a half? In an hour and a half, we could CREATE Idyllwild on a computer screen."

So that's what Jared Garrett did. And it was great—the greatest—thing I'd never seen. Tall pines, sweet-smelling cedars, legendary rocks. I'm reading from a tourist brochure (we picked one up, too, in the Desert Princess lobby), and it sounds about right, because the image they've created on the massive iMac—the new backdrop for Page 1 (eventually, they'll stick my body somewhere among those pines)—makes tears form, just a little, in my eyes.

*March 23*

"Ours is a generation with empty ambitions, unfulfilling experiences. Ours is a generation of delayed growth, stilted maturation, Emerging Adulthood; we are in permanent limbo."

Ronnie is riffing on what he calls "the plight of our generation." He's taking online courses at the University of Phoenix—I know, because he had an exam during a coffee break yesterday afternoon—and he's been riffing since we've met.

"That's exactly what I was saying the other day," Jared Garrett slides into the van, slides over to me. "Our generation is in constant need of re-invention. Like—what do you want to do now? WHO do you want to BE?"

Jared is going bald and the hair he does have is wispy and dark gray but

still, he says “our generation” and when he asks his questions, I know that he doesn’t expect—that he doesn’t even want—a response, and maybe that’s what he’s doing after all, re-inventing himself. Jared Garrett.

After all.

“Can we please—can we just talk for a moment, can we linger on the question that’s just been killing me lately.”

“Which is?” Roger perks up, twists his baseball cap sideways, rubs his pointed chin. We pass a twenty-six foot tall Marilyn Monroe on the corner of Palm Canyon Drive and Tahquitz Canyon. “Forever Marilyn” is inscribed on the sculpture. Seward Johnson. Marilyn’s white dress forever fluttering in the still air of a desert afternoon; a frieze-frame from *The Seven Year Itch*.

“Beauty and attraction. Same or different?” Jared answers. “And if so: how do we define *beauty*? ”

*March 25*

“It looked better in pictures.”

We passed the windmill farms and I tried to watch each fan turning almost imperceptibly. We drove too fast.

Then we stopped, reversed, parked in a grotto nearby.

“It looked better in pictures,” Marissa repeats, dabbing my forehead with some kind of powder. Fairy dust.

“Well—that’s exactly the POINT,” Jared Garrett intones audibly, slapping his right thigh with his left hand and laughing too loud. “Hence the whole Edelweiss Village situation.”

“Idyllwild,” I correct, craning my head above Marissa’s gaze, trying to see the windmills, trying to see the motion of each fan. “Not Edelweiss.”

*“Every morning you greet me ... small and white, clean and bright ... You look happy*

*to meet me ...”*

We take some shots. I try for stoic, solitary; maybe I try for bored.

I remember the graffiti slapped across the Desert Princess's patio fence:

ALL HORRORS ARE DULLED BY ROUTINE

I think about the repetition of a pushup; I think about the moment I stepped into J&P Talent's dilapidated offices. I think about the news and it terrifies me.

*March 25/26/27/28 ...*

“I want to capture everything.”

“I thought we captured this already?” I ask. We've been shooting in El Mirage—this exact spot—for the last nine mornings.

“We did. We have. But the lighting ... I didn't like the ... It didn't feel as if ... You weren't exactly ...”

Ronnie says Jared Garrett's inability to complete his thoughts stems from our culture's overabundance of communication; the multiplicity of communication channels at our disposal.

Ronnie (he also works as a DJ, in Vegas) says the dog biscuits really do taste like filet mignon, and I wonder how music can be Ronnie's forte, music, mixing music, when all he finds on the radio is Miley Cyrus and Lana Del Rey.

“Should I try AM? Should I try talk radio?”

Dog biscuits. Filet mignon. We've come full circle, I think.

Someone's phone rings and more curses ring out. A coyote howls in the distance. The sky is beginning to turn purple again. That deep, violent purple that maybe characterizes every evening in Palm Springs. The order for the foggers we will never use has been delayed.

We'll be here for another week, at least. Probably we'll never leave.

"Do you think I can capture the silence?" Jared asks, and I know—I already know—nothing in Palm Springs requires an answer. The hours rise; time slips past.

Now we are standing, huddled around the van, waiting for the sun to rise. It's a fleeting moment, you know. We have only eight or nine minutes each morning. Sometimes only seven.

Jared keeps talking while the sand burns my feet—the sand is so cold in El Mirage at 4:35 that it burns; my feet are on fire. I wish I had my sneakers on. I wish I had all my clothes.

"Or—is silence more about the sculptural values of SOUND?" Jared continues. "The flexible medium of the future and the nascent breath of something like ... a sentence?"

Nothing. Not even the breeze. Not even the rustle of limbs, in and out of a torn pair of blue jeans.

"Could I capture it? Could I even articulate it?"

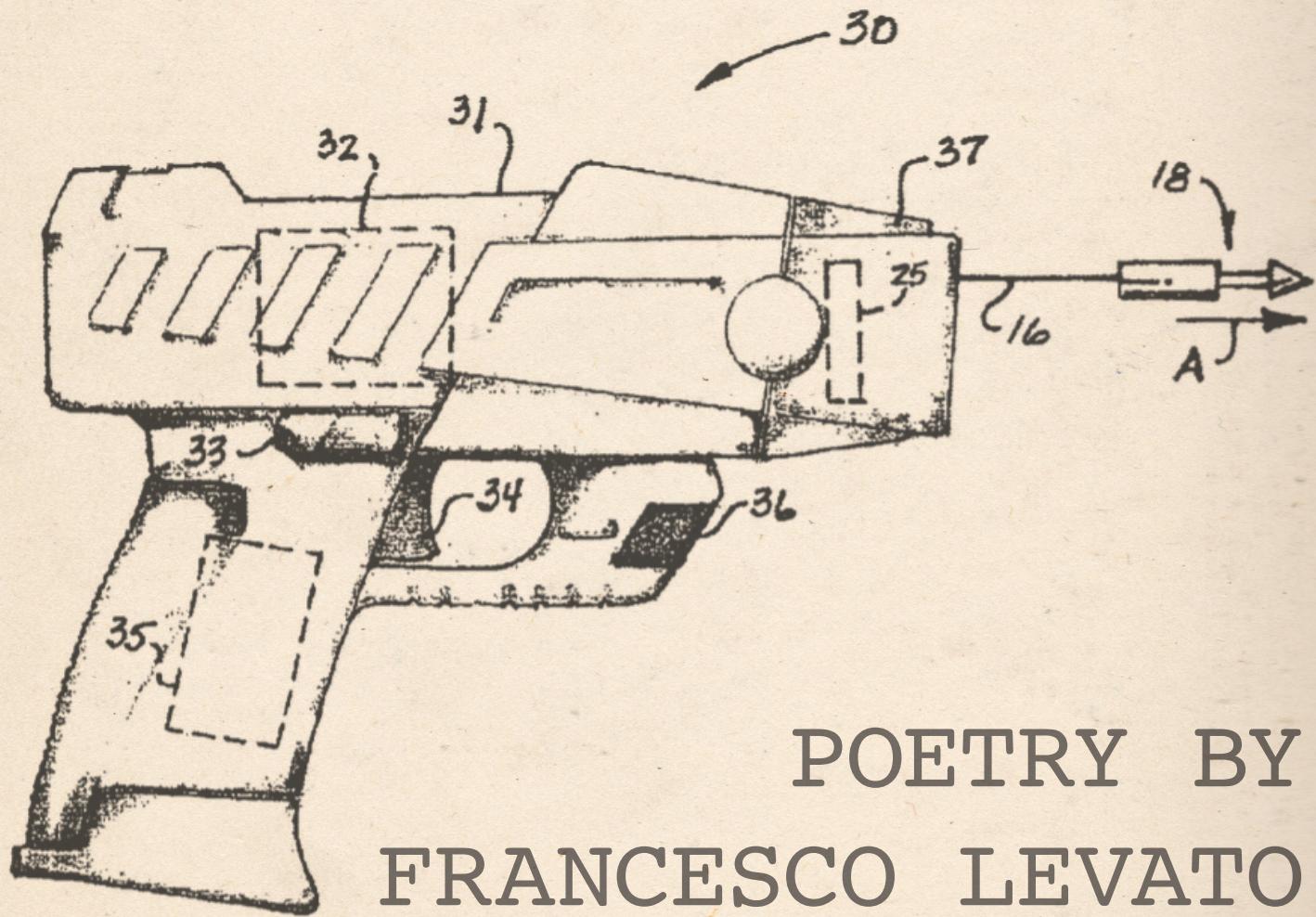
For the first time all week—all week-and-a-half—I laugh. The feeling could best be described as a smile, or the mystery of a smile—or right before a smile—the melancholy expressed by the tilt of a body stretching toward the sun.

We are still shooting the breeze. ☺

---

The following is a selection from a series of related documentary poems composed of appropriated language from U.S. government documents such as: Customs and Border Patrol handbooks; the Immigration and Nationality Act; State Department travel warnings and human rights reports for countries in Latin America; and materials from the Office of English Language Programs designed to help immigrants assimilate.

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POETRY BY  
FRANCESCO LEVATO

## Es fácil comprender lo que el agente está diciendo

---

The word *comprender* means to understand something after watching,

listening to, or reading it. Hence,

response C, *entender* ("to understand"), is the best synonym.

Response E, *desentender*, is the exact opposite of the correct answer;

in fact, it is *entender*, but with a negative prefix added to it,

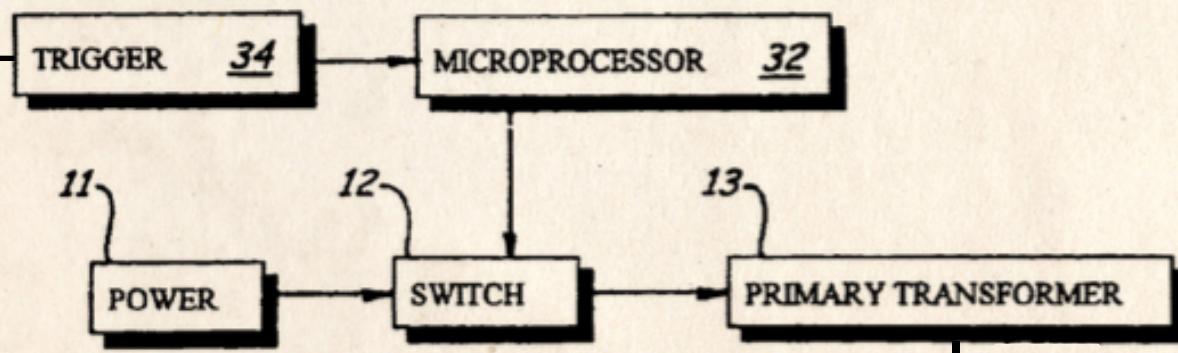
thus giving it the meaning of "to misunderstand."

Responses A, B, and D ("to respond," "to verify," and "to pretend")

are completely unrelated to the meaning of *comprender*.

---

— From *Preparation Manual for the U.S. Border Patrol Entrance Examination*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection.



## Priority 1 (threats to national security, border security, and public safety)

---

Aliens engaged in or suspected of terrorism or espionage, or who otherwise pose a danger to national security;

aliens apprehended at the border or ports of entry while attempting to unlawfully enter the United States;

aliens convicted of an offense for which an element was active participation

in a criminal street gang, or aliens not younger than 16 years of age

who intentionally participated in an organized criminal gang;

aliens convicted of an offense classified as a felony in the convicting jurisdiction,

other than a state or local offense for which an essential element

was the alien's immigration status; and

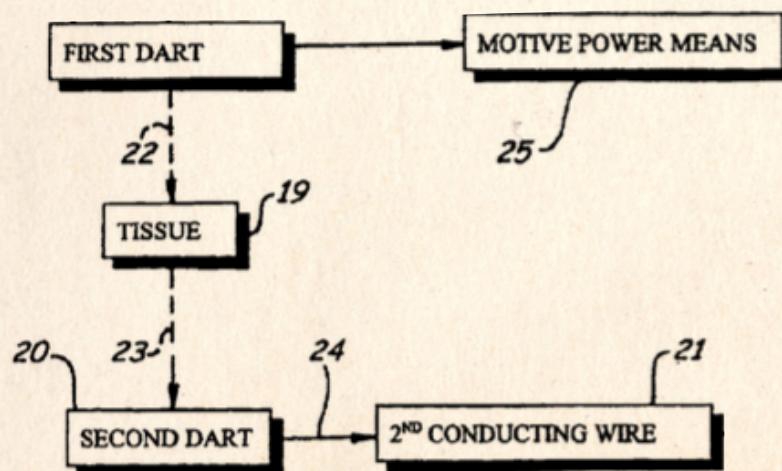
aliens convicted of an "aggravated felony," as that term is defined

in section 101(a)(43) of the Immigration and Nationality Act

The removal of these aliens, must be prioritized.

---

— From *Policies for the Apprehension, Detention and Removal of Undocumented Immigrants*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.



## **from Hand-Held Stun Gun for Incapacitating a Human Target**

---

In practice, it is critical to produce contractions of skeletal muscles sufficient to prevent the voluntary use of the muscles encountered during normal locomotion of an individual's body.

Twitching of the skin  
does not indicate that contractions necessary  
are taking place

...

Fig. 1

Trigger, microprocessor, power, switch,  
primary transformer, capacitor, output transformer, first con-  
ducting wire,  
first dart, motive power means, tissue, second dart,  
second conducting wire,  
ground.

...

*Determining whether the force used was constitutionally  
excessive,  
we begin by considering the nature and quality of the force.*

...

If contractions are not produced, the apparatus is not functioning in the manner desired.

If there are no contractions, the individual can "walk through," or be trained to walk through, being hit with darts which conduct electricity through the individual's body.

Compressed nitrogen to propel aluminum darts,  
tipped with stainless steel barbs connected by  
insulated wires  
toward target at over 160 feet per second.  
On striking, a 1200 volt charge, the impulse  
overrides  
central nervous system, paralyzing muscles, rendering  
target limp  
and helpless.

...

*An incredible burning and painful feeling, a locking  
of all joints and muscles, a falling hard to the floor.*

...

In operation, trigger is pressed to send a signal to microprocessor. Microprocessor opens switch. Power flows through primary transformer, capacitor, and output transformer. The output goes into wire and dart. Once the current flow reaches dart, current is directed by wire to motive power means (i.e., black powder) to activate motive power means to project the first and second darts through the air to the individual who is the target.

...

*There are only so many ways that a person can be extracted  
against their will,  
and none of them is pretty.*

...

When the darts contact the individual's body, pulses from dart travel into tissue, from the tissue into the second dart, from the second dart into the second conducting wire, and through the second connecting wire to the ground in the weapon.

*Subject was obstinate to the bitter end, "resist[ing] being handcuffed by keeping her arms tense."*

*The officers nevertheless defused the situation without causing serious harm:*

*Subject suffered only minor scars, her daughter was born healthy and subject's counsel confirmed that the child remains healthy.*

...

Without admitting to having committed each of the above offenses, by signing this document I acknowledge receipt of this notice of infraction, and promise to respond as directed.

---

— From *United States Patent US 6,636,412 B2, Hand-Held Stun Gun for Incapacitating a Human Target; and Mattos v. Agarano, United States Court Of Appeals For The Ninth Circuit* ©

# NATURE IS SPEAKING



A TRIUMPH OF  
ENVIRONMENTALISM

BY  
NORA WARD

J

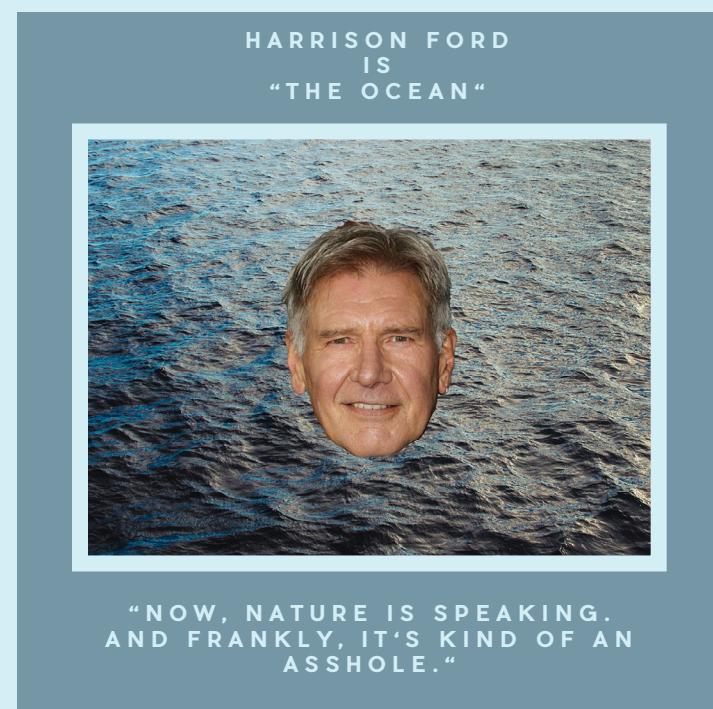
James Murray, editor of Business Green, an online publication that aggregates environmental news for business executives, argues in a 2012 article that a “different response” to our environmental issues is needed, as our past methods have “proved wanting.” A similar sentiment was delivered in a recent piece by M. Sanjayan, executive vice president and senior scientist of Conservation International, a non-profit environmental organization. Sanjayan writes that current environmentalism is in desperate need of “re-branding.” Certainly, the figures are far from encouraging: global emissions continue to rise, biodiversity is dropping at alarming rates and ocean acidification is increasing. Perhaps recent calls for a ‘new environmentalism’ are a timely nudge in the right direction: out with the old, in with the new.

The Nature Is Speaking series, a recent Walmart-sponsored project in association with Conservation International, attempts to do just that: re-frame the environmental debate and define a new kind of environmentalism. The series was produced by Lee Clow of TBWA\Media Arts Lab — the creator of Apple’s iconic “1984” and “Think Different” campaigns — and his team. The series has collectively amassed over 10 million views online and has been subject to much critical acclaim. The series features the voices of a host of Hollywood A-listers over the backdrop of stunning visuals, personifying indifferent and daunting elements of nature. Harrison Ford, as the ocean, asks “I am the ocean. Who do you think you are?” Kevin Spacey, as the rainforest, snidely reveals that he would like to see people make air, like him. The redwood, via Robert Redford, claims: “I’ve seen just about everything. You don’t impress me.” Julia Roberts, as Mother Nature, is not to be messed with as she quips: “My planet, my atmosphere, my rules. Any questions?”

Now, nature is speaking. And frankly, it’s kind of an asshole.

The message, however, is clear: nature is not vulnerable, fragile or even benevolent. It is a

strong, formidable force, apathetic to human concerns. We need it, not the other way around. The rhetoric of necessity is part of the wider movement of “new environmentalism,” and is reflected in the mission statement of Sanjayan: “Today our mission is based around the ethos that people need nature to thrive – and we work on that part of nature that provides the most for people.”



Nature is valuable and worthy of protection because we need it, because it is essential to our survival, because of its instrumental value.

Consequently, the parts of nature that humans need most are the ones most worthy of protection. This instrumental approach marks a purposeful move away from an older branch of environmentalism, namely the intrinsic approach. The intrinsic approach, sometimes called old environmentalism, gained traction at the beginning of the modern environmental movement in the 1960s, and bears similarities to ways of valuing nature that can be perceived in many religious traditions, as well as in indigenous cultures around the world. Proponents of this argue that nature should be protected – not because of its direct benefits to

humans – but because it has inherent value in itself. It calls for an appreciation of the sanctity and value in nature, independent of human needs and concerns.

New environmentalism, however, is moving in a different direction. Instead of appreciation, it promotes a discourse of necessity that seeks to place environment valuation firmly in the grasp of market politics. Rather than valuing nature for its intrinsic value, it proposes that the most effective way to protect nature is to clearly demarcate its

instrumental use. Sanjayan argues that “for too long, environmentalism and conservation have been focused on saving nature for its intrinsic value.” Intrinsic value may have some appeal, he recognizes, but “love alone is not enough.”

What is important is to make people understand that “we need this place.” This instrumental, utilitarian method of valuing nature is further connected to the ever-increasing popularity of similar market-based approaches under the rubric of ‘new environmentalism.’ A poignant expression

## JULIA ROBERTS IS “MOTHER NATURE”



“WHAT ABOUT AN ETHIC OF THE ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES A DIFFERENT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE, A RELATIONSHIP NOT OF HIERARCHICAL SUPREMACY, OR OF STRONGER VS. WEAKER, BUT OF HARMONIOUS CO-HABITATION?”

of this is the concept of ecosystem services, which was popularized by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, an organization created to monitor the effects of climate change, in the early 2000s. The framework of ecosystem services seeks a systematic organization and monetization of the various benefits humans can glean from ecosystems, ranging from aesthetic, nutritional and spiritual. This approach aims to preserve nature by quite literally ‘putting a price on it.’ According to this perspective, nature is a product that we need; a very valuable product, but a product nonetheless.



New environmentalism, displaying a Prometheus-like optimism in the ability of the market to affect environmental change, argues that the best way to protect nature is to demarcate its instrumental and economic value and integrate it into the workings of the free-market system. It is being heralded as the answer to many of our environmental woes and its growing acceptance is reflected in recent statements from Jane Potocnik, European Commissioner for the Environment, who urges us to embrace the free market as an agent of change. Potocnik claims that the desire to make profit is “normal behavior” and that new environmentalism “must find a way to harness the power of the market.”

But before we embrace new environmentalism in all its star-studded glory, it may be important to look a little more carefully at what we may

lose. The Nature Is Speaking series, with its dazzling visuals and familiar voices, may be effective for those who are currently estranged from environmental concerns. It may be an important tool to bring the concept of environmental well-being to a wider audience. It is difficult, however, not to feel a little disconcerted upon hearing Ian Somerhalder describe the coral reefs as a “protein factory,” or Kevin Spacey compare the rainforests to a “medicine cabinet.”

Have we lost hope in ways of valuing nature that are not rooted in human selfishness and need? What about an ethic of the environment that promotes a different kind of relationship to nature, a relationship not of hierarchical supremacy, or of stronger vs. weaker, but of harmonious co-habitation. These kinds of environmental ethics – existing in cultures today and in the past – do not emphasize that we need nature, but that we are nature; they urge us to protect nature not only because it is in our enlightened self-interest, but because it has inherent worth, because it is worthy of protection in itself.

Maybe it is overly optimistic that this kind of relationship can exist into the future. Maybe it is naïve to think that the status quo can be changed. Perhaps, it is absurd to think that nature can be protected outside of the market system. However, with corporate sponsorship increasingly invading environmental organizations (Conservation International alone partners with BP, Shell, Monsanto, Exxon, Coca Cola, and many others), I can’t help but feel that Harrison Ford et al. are selling me something. And wasn’t it the incessant selling, exploitation and commodification of our natural resources that got us in this mess in the first place? Perhaps we do need something new, but perhaps this isn’t it. ☺

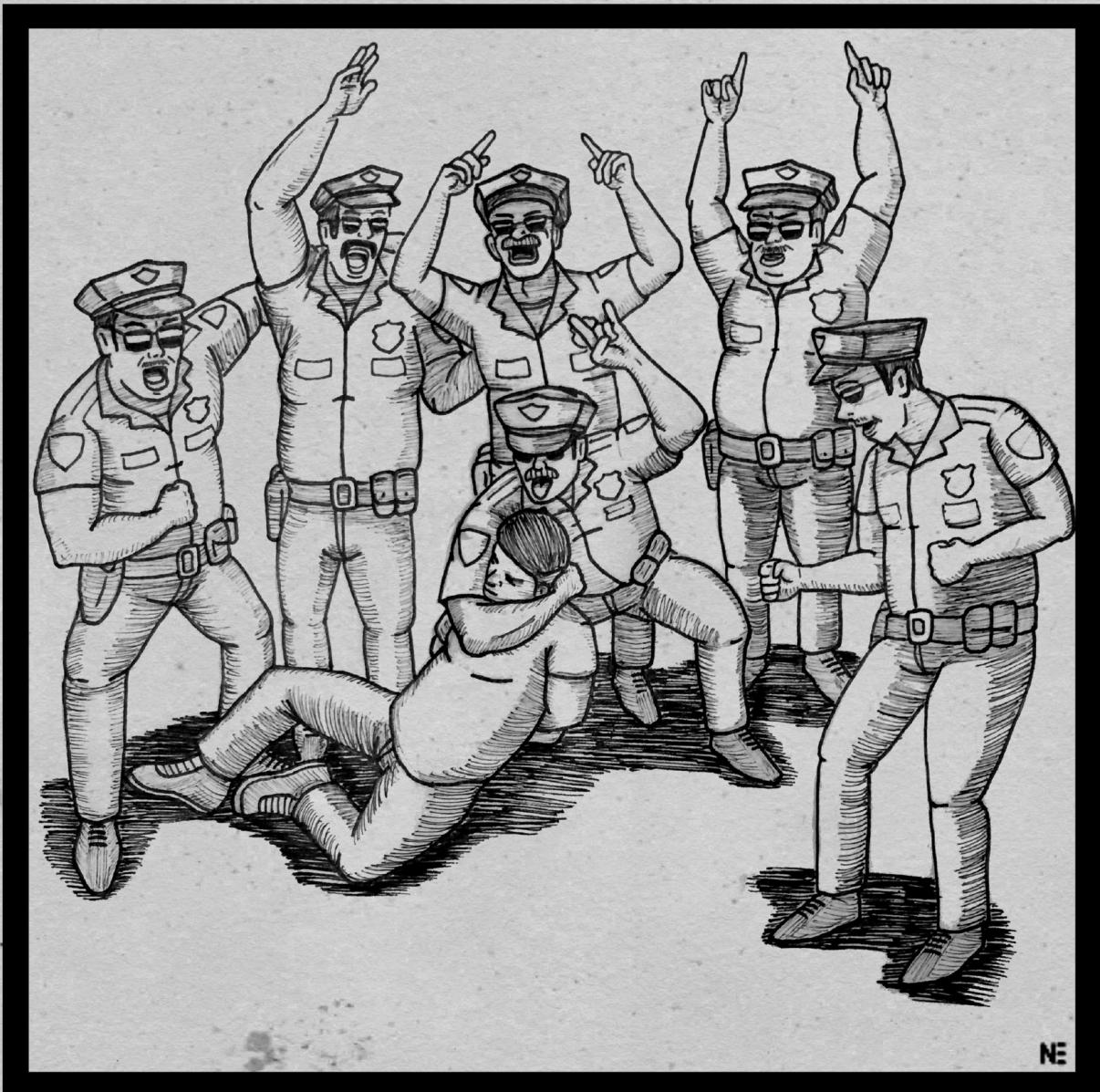
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REALLY GOOD.**

# THE ELITE'S BLUE SHIELD



NE

JOSHUA  
CHANAY

**O**n August 9, 2014, Michael Brown was murdered by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson. In the aftermath of the tragedy, many activists and organizations worked to bring the issues of police brutality to the forefront of discussion in America. Thanks to the efforts of #BlackLivesMatter, activists and American citizens armed with cameras it has become more apparent to the American population how often police brutality occurs and how often the officers involved are given nothing more than a slap on the wrist.

The question is now shifting to whether these instances of police brutality are the acts of a few bad apples or if the issue is more systemic. The Department of Justice report on Ferguson and the New York Police Department's implementation of its Stop-and-Frisk policy lead one to believe that the latter is closer to the truth. However, these reports only discuss the current manifestation of law enforcement. In order to truly understand their role in society, which the numerous instances of police brutality in the past year have necessitated, a deeper examination of police is required.

A firm understanding is only possible through historical and contemporary analysis of how police utilize the power with which they are endowed. Further, by examining the purpose with which law enforcement agencies were founded, its possible to see how that purpose has transformed into its current state.

Unfortunately, such an analysis reveals that their function is nothing more than protecting the powerful and punishing those who threaten the stability of an unjust system.

\* \* \*

Discriminatory law enforcement agencies have existed for centuries. However, the current manifestation of racist police departments in America grew out of colonial and pre-Civil War era slave patrols. Historian Sally E. Hadden, notes:

"In the countryside, such patrols were to 'visit every Plantation within their respective Districts once in every Month' and whenever they thought it necessary, 'to search and examine all Negro-Houses for offensive weapons and Ammunition.' They were also authorized to enter any 'disorderly tippling-House, or other Houses suspected of harboring, trafficking or dealing with Negroes' and could inflict corporal punishment on any slave found to have left his owner's property without permission. 'Slave patrols' had full power and



*Anti-Slave Almanac - 1839*

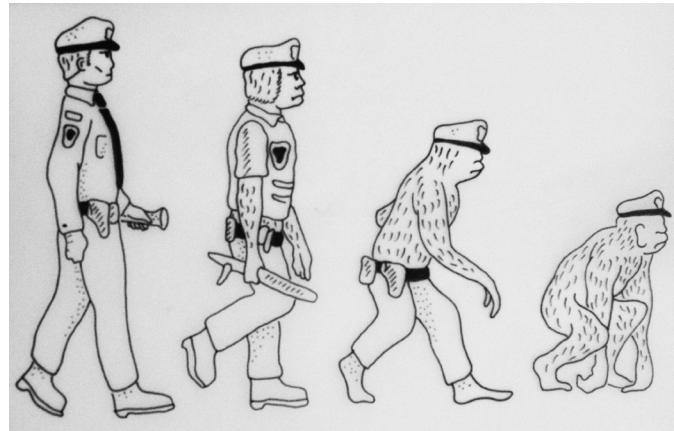
authority to enter any plantation and break open Negro houses or other places when slaves were suspected of keeping arms; to punish runaways or slaves found outside their plantations without a pass; to whip any slave who should affront or abuse them in the execution of their duties; and to apprehend and take any slave suspected of stealing or other criminal offense, and bring him to the nearest magistrate."

Slaves, free Black people, and even Whites who associated with Black people were watched closely, and the brutality of Civil War era slave patrols instilled a sense of terror among them. Additionally, as the slave population increased, White paranoia of slave rebellion increased with it. Slave patrols and other vigilante groups began to protect White communities from slaves, free Blacks and Native Americans. The slave patrols served the wealthy slave owners and protected their interests, in this case, returning the slaves that were considered property so that the plantation could continue to produce cotton. Joined by vigilante groups, slave

patrols also began maintaining social order, protecting White communities by keeping non-White people out. Racial profiling was the dominant principle of this early form of policing.

Law enforcement evolved into groups of White men harassing and abusing people, a tendency that continues to this day. The lawful aspects of these slave patrols, such as arresting people and limiting mobility, became the duties of what would become Southern police departments. The more brutal and lawless aspects were taken up by the Ku Klux Klan.

Although it is difficult to establish when modern policing tactics were first conceived, most scholars agree they emerged around the mid-1800s in various American cities. Following the rapid



*De-Evolution* - Grady McConnell

industrialization and urbanization of post-Civil War America, European immigrants began arriving in mass numbers. These new immigrants, along with working-class Americans, were economically exploited and socially deprived. Poverty was rampant, and the gap between rich and poor widened. In response to the economic inequality and class stratification of the time, people began to protest and riot. The coalitions of working-class immigrants and Americans were protesting for workplace rights, fair wages, safe working conditions, an end to child labor, and many other rights that are taken for granted today. Scholars Eitzen Stanley and Doug Timmer in "Criminology: Crime and Criminal Justice" remark:

"The process of capitalist industrialization led to increasing economic inequality and exploitation and class stratification. Rioting became an essential political strategy of an underclass (a surplus population) and a working class suffering this increasing economic deprivation. The modern system of policing evolved to control this riotous situation."

City police departments were authorized by the state to use excessive violence to break strikes and protests. Furthermore, police made enormous numbers of arrests. According to sociologist Sidney L. Harring in his book "Policing A Class Society," the Chicago police force was "viciously anti-labor ... On a day-to-day basis it hauled nearly a million workers off to jail between 1875 and 1900 ... for trivial public order offenses." The same description could be applied to police forces in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, New York and a number of other cities. This pattern of continuous suppression and violence began the police's long history of protecting the wealthy at the expense of poor, working-class people.

From slave patrols to strikebreakers, it's clear the role of police has historically been to operate as the elite's boot on the neck of the oppressed. They have routinely attempted to stifle working-class resistance, and instead force them to submit to the status quo. It's important to understand the fact that police have always been on the side of the powerful, because this trend continues today.

Think of all the images of protests, revolutions, resistance movements and rebellions around the world in the past several years. The Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt; indigenous movements in Canada and Latin America and Africa; peasant and labor unrest across Asia; anti-austerity movements across Europe; enormous social unrest in Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal; Indignados and Occupy Wall Street; student movements in Quebec, Great Britain, Chile, Mexico and Hong Kong; urban rebellions in Turkey and Brazil; and the civil unrest in the U.S. sparked by Ferguson.

What is the common thread uniting them all? In each of these cases, large segments of a nation's population rose up against oppressive institutions, dictatorships, state violence, poverty, racism, and other forms of exploitation.

These people are fighting for the realization of democracy and justice. Yet, all of these movements have met with brutality and violence from police. Tear gas, batons, pepper spray, non-lethal rounds and bullets are the tools police use to accomplish their goals. They arrest, assault and murder people in mass numbers, all in the name of law and order.

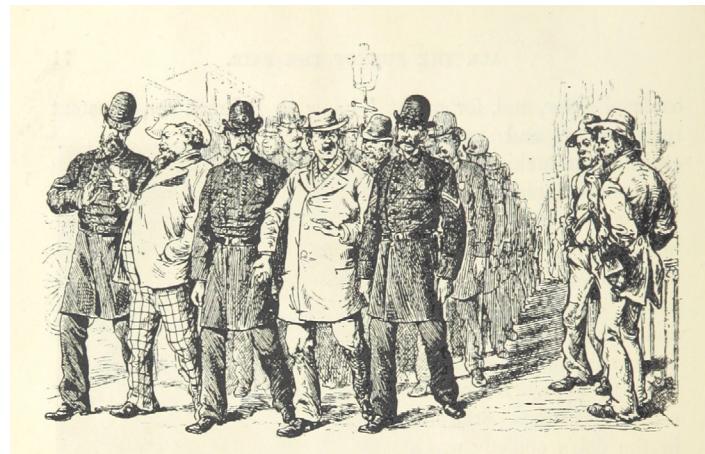
As a writer from Crimethinc, a decentralized anarchist collective, explains:

"You might never see the CEO who profits on fracking your water supply, but you'll see the police who break up your protest against him. You might not meet the bank director or landlord who forces you out, but you will see the sheriff who comes to repossess your home or evict you. As a Black person, you might never enter the gated communities of the ones who benefit most from White privilege, but you will encounter the overtly racist officers who profile, bully, and arrest you."

In America for example, the media and police actively demonize #BlackLivesMatter as a divisive and destructive force. They are now using the repulsive tactic of blaming the murder of every cop on the #BlackLivesMatter movement in an attempt to paint the police as victims and further demonize the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Again, this isn't new. Police and governments routinely discredit and marginalize movements that bring issues to light that expose the injustice in our society. During Occupy Wall Street, the Department of Homeland Security monitored Occupy Wall Street activists, police infiltrated the

movement to dismantle it from within, and, as a last resort, brute force was used to clear out Zuccotti Park.



*America Revisited... Illustrated, etc. - 1882*

movement that seeks to take power away from themselves.

Movements for justice, equality, and freedom have all been met with the brutal force of the police, historically and currently. Understanding the function of the police makes it clear that police forces, as institutions, are oppressive. Thus, all struggles are inherently against the police, because the police are the primary tool used by the dominant paradigm to maintain its supremacy. To fight the power, you must also fight the police. There is no way around this truth.

Abolitionists. Labor movements. Suffragettes. The Civil Rights movement. The anti-war movement. The LGBT movement. All of those movements challenged injustice. All of them were met with police violence. Now police violence is the reason for the movement. ☰

*Cover Illustration: "Put Him In A Body Bag, Bro!"  
by Nathan Eclavea*



**POETRY  
BY  
BENN  
JOHNSON**

# VIBROPHONES

---

I live in a vibe culture.  
Send vibes.  
I need your vibes.  
Let go of vibrancy, let go of vividity;  
Vibrations are really all I need.  
Just some good vibes,  
I can subsist on them or something.  
You can send them via text.  
Vibes are just good feelings, transmitted through a short buzz in my pocket.  
I live on them.  
Send me some.  
I need your vibes right now, guys.  
Not food, not water, not air,  
Not love,  
Not harmony,  
Not a self-conscious life,  
Not intertwined flesh and multiple minds molded around shared and debated ideas.  
  
Not connection,  
  
I just need to feel some vibes.  
The pleasure is the buzz, not the life.

# BUMHANGERS

---

I would slice through your plump, juicy tomatoes  
And drench your crisp fries in oil  
Until the skin bubbled slightly  
And the yellow turned gold.  
I would gently toast your buns,  
Slam your pucks into a cutting board until my hands were numb  
So you'd have the most tender patties in the state,  
And I'd dip your rings in batter, slipping them dangerously into hot oil with my bare  
fingers.  
I would peck against sticky, clacky keys;  
Six ninety-five.  
One seventy-five.  
Two seventy-five.  
Six ninety-five.  
Subtotal.  
Out of twenty?  
I would taste the white potato pulp as it showered upon my face while I smashed behemoth russets into dainty strips;  
I would do it all for seven twenty-five an hour.  
And if you gave me a free burger like you did this week, I'd probably do it with a smile.

---

# TOBACUUM

A wisp of smoke spirals into infinity,  
A curl of hair frames her weathered pores.  
She balances her cigarette on her tinted lip;  
A contrived daintiness, a dark eyelid,  
A gold fleck in her upturned glance.  
A deadness in her little finger, which rests lightly  
against her cheek  
Reveals the posed effortlessness of her situation.  
The romanticism of her cigarette  
Is the cliché nihilism of contemporary art;  
The aloof smoker, the cool death, the nobody special  
Is the only beauty in this world.  
The muse of the cheaply uninspired is not the lady's form or color,  
But the trail of smoke on which her essence escapes her,  
And the ashy footprints she leaves behind.

# ROBOPHOBIA

by

*Kenneth Gaskell*

**A**rtificial Intelligence. AI. The terms, to many, conjure up visions of chrome-plated robots marching across a war-scorched terrain, hell-bent on world domination, wiping out any life-form that crosses their path. Long perpetuated by the sci-fi entertainment industry, this seemingly age-old fear has recently moved back into the spotlight. Films like “Ex Machina” and “Avengers: Age of Ultron,” which both hit theaters this year, are perfect poster-children for the growing paranoia surrounding the idea of artificial intelligence. At their core, these films imply that should an artificially intelligent entity ever be allowed to arise, it will mean only one thing: the end of its organic counterparts.

As of late, Hollywood isn’t the only one preaching this anti-AI doctrine. Early this past August, an open letter was issued by the Future of Life Institute, a volunteer organization that researches the societal impacts of technology. The letter voices the institute’s concerns with the future development of AI. The letter received a large amount of media coverage, and has garnered the signatures of over 17,000 qualified experts in tech and engineering industries. Signatories include names like Stephen Hawking, Elon Musk, Steve Wozniak, and Noam Chomsky. In accordance with internet tradition, sensationalist headlines and outlandish comments via social media ran amok as soon as the letter went live. Comparisons to Skynet, the AI antagonist of the Terminator series,

have been flung around haphazardly, only serving to further prove the impact that the mass-media has had on the public’s opinion regarding artificial intelligence.

The Future of Life Institute as an organization, has taken upon itself the somewhat daunting task of “working to mitigate [the] existential risks facing humanity.” According to the FLI website, their efforts are currently focused on the risks that may arise from the continuing development of artificial intelligence.

The Institute’s letter is little more than a call for global powers to consider the true cost associated with developing weaponized artificial intelligence. More specifically, the FLI is proposing a global ban on “offensive autonomous weapons beyond meaningful human control.” The letter argues artificial intelligence could be considered the third revolution in warfare - the first being gunpowder, and the second nuclear weapons - and that autonomous weapons would change the way we wage war forever.

Within the letter, the Institute touts autonomous weapons as the “Kalashnikovs of tomorrow,” pointing out that unlike the nuclear variety, autonomous weapons do not inherently require rare or hard to obtain materials. This makes them easy to mass produce, if so desired. Proponents of the ban share the view that weaponized AI will ultimately lead to a lower entry threshold for violent confrontations. Since human soldiers won’t have to

risk their lives on a battlefield, nations will be more likely to declare war on each other.

Throughout all of this, no one seems to argue with the fact that there are countless ways artificial intelligence can and does benefit humankind. Most of the concern exhibited relates specifically to the consequences of weaponizing AI, if and when the technology is ready. The letter attempts to make the point that should autonomous weapons be developed by global powers, they will ultimately make their way onto the black market where they could then be purchased by terrorist organizations and be used for all sorts of heinous crimes (ethnic cleansing, assassination, etc.). While this sort of scenario may be plausible to some degree, supporters of the ban fail to realize a crucial point. The distinction between weaponized and non-weaponized technology is a false start, for all artificial intelligence has the potential for weaponization.

To illustrate this point, let's move into the realm of the hypothetical. Suppose that an artificially intelligent robotic personal assistant becomes commercially available sometime in the near future. Perhaps this is some sort of clerical robot for use in the business world, or maybe it's a simple household assistant. Regardless of its intended function, in order to maximize productivity, it would need to be able to make work related decisions without direct human input. In order to be practical in today's world, this personal assistant would need to be able to interact with the pre-established infrastructure and everyday objects that are have been designed for humans. The robot would most likely need something similar in form and function to a human hand. This way it could open doors, prepare food and perform other basic human functions. For obvious reasons, this personal assistant would ship with security protocols to prevent consumers from modifying the robots programming and hardware. This is standard procedure in the tech industry.

Unfortunately, just as the latest iOS is inevitably going to be hacked or jail-broken, it is conceivable that given enough time, a hole could be found in any robots security, at which point the robot could be reprogrammed with malicious intent.

Now, with a little manipulation, the commercially available robotic assistant becomes a semi-affordable, gun-toting autonomous soldier.

Perhaps self-driving cars, an often overlooked form of AI, are a more practical and culturally relevant example. The potential benefits of self-driving cars are enormous. It is known that 90 percent of car accidents are caused by human error. When everyone on the road has a self-driving vehicle, car accidents will be virtually non-existent. Speed limits could be increased, translating to less time spent in transit, and families could make do with using just one single car for all of their transportation needs, reducing emissions nationwide. Best of all, long waits at the DMV would potentially be a thing of the past, because driver's licenses would no longer be necessary. The potential gains for society are enormous. But, with that said, there is nothing to stop a "terrorist organization" from placing an IED inside a self-driving car and sending it to any desired location.

Artificial intelligence will always have the potential to be dangerous in the wrong hands, regardless of whether it is shipped as "militarized" or not. Attempting to place a ban on the development of such technologies is not only impractical, but ignorant. It's safe to assume that autonomous weapons are being developed by various global powers around the world. The "arms race" has already begun and the very existence of the FLI's letter is proof of that. If artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons are something that the general public can openly discuss as an inevitability, then research and development has more than likely been in the works for years.

For example, groups like the U.S.'s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency have historically been known for being ahead of the technological curve. Specifically the agency is credited with inventing a Google Streetview-esque technology 23 years before Google, as well as inventing ARPANET in 1969, which led to the creation of what we now know as the internet. With that in mind, it's easy to believe that autonomous weapons are already well within man's reach.

Due to the imperfect nature of human beings, artificial intelligence will always have the po-

tential to be abused. Short of a ban on not just militarized artificial intelligence, but all artificial intelligence, the threats that exist today will inevitably manifest themselves as a real danger in the future. Is a ban on all forms of artificial intelligence practical? Do the risks really outweigh the reward? And even if a ban was instated, how do you ensure that it is upheld?

Unfortunately, these questions don't have simple answers. Perhaps a more rational approach than the one currently under discussion, which seems to be motivated by a fear of what we don't yet fully understand, would be imagining new ways to safely integrate artificial intelligence within our society. The ban would do nothing to serve those who intend to uphold it, but would give an advantage to those who perhaps have more nefarious intentions. 



*Doldrums* - Angie Samblotte



# FESTIVAL

by

*Eric Ceballos-McGee*

**T**

he old neighborhood was nearly unrecognizable. Trees that had filled the park and blotched the sky had been hewn and hauled off. They were trees on which we used to measure how grown up we were by jumping and trying to grab the lowest hanging branches. Now, the stumps were strewn about the park like over-sized, crushed soda cans. The trees used to hide us from one another, but now, from the middle of the park, you can see the closed pool, the playground with the swings slightly swaying with the memory of old flights, the field where every event in town was held. Even Festival.

The field was the only part of the park that looked like it did in my mind. The small hills around the field formed a natural amphitheater to all the things that happened on it.

Dad pointed to the lack of trees and waved at the open air, telling me about how the town turned out to see the park lose its decorum.

“We were over there when they started cutting it all down.”

He pointed to the far side of the park, over where the streets eventually wound themselves to our home.

\* \* \*

The day turned to those last moments before the sun flips the sky into one heavenly bruise. Below us, on the wrinkled surface of the field, a number of the neighborhood kids played sandlot baseball, sweaters on the grass as bases. Around October a certain weed sprouts delicate globes of white flowers. We called them snow globes. They aren’t dandelions, that much I know, they aren’t as fragile. No breeze ever took the snow globe’s petals anywhere. In fact, snow globes overtake the grass in the fall until the field is mowed.

It was strange standing in the middle of the park and being able to see houses. They used to have patio equipment in the front yards all year long and host parties that sprawled into the park. Honeycombs of steel wire fencing now stand along the perimeter and signs along the fence warn visitors of guard dogs. It was hard to imagine the same people living inside.

I haven't told my parents, but I've known for a while Festival wasn't for me. I don't know if I will ever be old enough to tell them.

When I was a kid, I was told I wasn't old enough to participate. But Grandpa told me that when I was old enough, I would wish I wasn't.

"It's an obligation we live with too long," he would say.

In our town, the responsibility of teaching the children how Festival works falls on the Grandparents. Festival itself is for fathers and their sons. Grandpa used to ramble about past Festivals, but he was also known to stretch stories like taffy from his teeth. But only some of the things Grandpa taught me about Festival don't align with what my friends learned from their Grandparents.

Grandpa said this was an old mining town that never found its worth in the ground. Investors came in and laid out everything they had. They put too much into the ground, and they couldn't ever leave again.

"That's why we're all here," he would say. "A legacy of failed people who had eyes for gold."

The failed investors became paid miners when the next band of hopefule came through. He said the miners and the investors didn't trust each other. The miners were always jealous of any success the new investors had and eventually that jealousy bred into hatred.

"It was like those tunnels," he said. "We kept going down into them knowing it got darker and darker, but still expecting some light down there."

The story he told me was the same one we learned about in school. The same one that is on murals in the town center.

"No one is sure who started it all," Grandpa said. "But one day there was this great big brawl down in the shafts. And when it all died down, they looked at each other like new people. We don't fight in the mines anymore. But everything else is mostly the same."

\* \* \*

Childhood melodies floated across the fall air as an ice cream truck drove up on the far side of the field. The kids playing baseball rushed to the truck. The first kids there pointed to pictures glued to the side of the truck. The ice cream men were good for that kind of thing, leaning halfway out of the window to see what they wanted.

Dad knelt over the grill pit building a fire. The bag of charcoal and two packets of firewood from our store lay at his feet. This store was the crux of the family, the thing that bound us more than our lineage. I was known more from it than anything I could have done at school. This was the other expected legacy of my adulthood, the reason I was able to leave to school. I'm supposed to graduate so I can step in and take over.

The campfire smoke rose and took off through the park like a stretched ghost.

I forgot I promised that I was coming home for Festival for Mom. I knew I had come for Dad.

I called home when I felt that I should. I knew Festival was coming, but I hoped that since I was in school Mom would beg Dad for me to stay on campus. But Festival is an obligation, and hoping does not often lead to reality.

Nevertheless, I had hoped Dad forgot about it until I saw him outside my dorm, leaning against a row of windows. He pursed his lips when I told him I still needed to pack. I couldn't tell him that I forgot or even that I hoped he had. Even if I had said something, he wouldn't get angry with me at my dorm. It wasn't the time for that yet. He waited in the car as I packed a few things into a bag. We rode in silence to the park where we unloaded two sleeping bags, a cooler, and what I was able to stuff into my bag from the dorm.

"Ever wonder what I did before Festival?" Dad asked. "This is it."

I should have followed up with something. Asked him questions about when he did this with Grandpa. Instead we sat and watched the fire. The charcoal started to dim from silver to a dull gray. Dad grabbed himself a can of beer and cracked it open. Some people I knew in high school would talk about how their parents would give them beer at dinners, wine on special occasions. My parents did not.

People say my Dad and I looked alike at identical ages, but I can't tell in the pictures. I can see Dad in Grandpa well enough, but now Dad's wide face looked less like a midpoint between Grandpa and me. Around us, at some of the tables other men were completing similar camping tasks: fires in the pits, sitting in chairs or benches. Smoke, rather than conversation, spread across the area. No one went from site to site and we all pretended we couldn't see each other.

We sat and Dad finished his beer. Someone brought a radio, but I couldn't tell from what site. I couldn't hear the ice cream truck any more. Dad took a large piece of bloodied meat from the cooler and tossed it on the grill. He grinned at the sizzle it made and he smacked his hands across his thighs.

"I ever tell you about beer time?" Dad said.

I shook my head. He leaned back, putting his elbows on the table.

"I learned about beer time from your Grandpa," he said. "Only fools count minutes while cooking steaks. Counting is what they waste. We'll flip this steak after one beer and take it off after the next."

"What if it's still raw?"

Dad sat back on the bench with a new beer. He sighed and wheezed a little after the first gulp.

"It's not science," he said. "It's meat. It won't be raw, if that's what worries you. It's beef."

He stretched an arm toward the grill.

"We could eat it now, it'll just be tough."

I nodded and lowered my head down to avoid the smoke hovering over the site until the wind picked it up and took it away. We sat in silence watching the flames burst with each drip of bloody grease from the meat. Dad cleared his throat and tossed the spent can into the trash.

"And time to flip," he said.

He pinched and lifted the beef slightly to show the stitches of grill marks on the underside.

"Perfect," I said.

He pulled another beer from the cooler. I asked about Mom.

"She coming down for this?"

Dad shook his head.

"You know," he said. "She'll be at church with your sisters."

My sisters and I used to whisper theories about where Dad was on Festival

mornings as we knelt in church. Mom would hush us and never tell us anything.

Dad wouldn't be home the nights before festival either. In the morning, Mom would make us breakfast in the park, but Dad would already be in the field. I guess we would forget to ask him where he was.

Simple towns have simple churches. Ours had these floodlights that spiraled over the altar like a kind of field chandelier. Black wires stretched up to the ceiling and were taped along the rafters to a partially hidden surge protector.

Our priest was into the ceremony of things. This was his way of distracting everyone from the fact that we worshiped in a converted barn. No one ever remembered the sermons. They only remember how it was delivered. I remember the sermons being full of rhetoric: a man should do this, because of this and this; and a man should do that, because of that and that. During the service, the congregation stared at the ground as if we were being scolded for breaking a window or dinging the car.

But that was the time for prayer, with our heads down low, our foreheads against the pew in front of us. We didn't have time to pray anywhere else. We were told prayer would provide answers. That was the only way we found absolution.

"I just thought I would see her," I said.

Dad finished his beer and tossed it into a pile of the other spent cans. He pulled the meat from the grill and put it onto a plate, which already had two dinner rolls on it. He gave me a stern glace as he placed a steak knife next to my plate.

"You knew she would be at church," he said. "She didn't tell you anything different on the phone, did she?"

Dad cut off slices of the meat and put them over the dinner roll. I didn't want to say anything, in case I said something about not wanting to be here. He might've let me leave had I said so, but I said nothing. We sat in silence for a few minutes as we began to eat. The food seemed to soften him.

"Thanks for calling Mom every week," he said. "You've gone through a lot and you know she worries about you."

We looked more around the park than we did at each other, but that was normal for us.

"She tells me lots of things about you," Dad said. "She says you made some new friends up there?"

I nodded. I made sure there was constantly food in my mouth or about to go into my mouth. He kept pausing for a few moments at a time, waiting for me to say something.

“She said something about Jimmy and a Ray,” he said. “I can’t really keep up with what she says.”

The “Jimmy” and “Ray” I tell my mom about is Sweet Jimmy Ray, known for his aerial work, in particular a slam from the top rope. I watch him wrestle Monday nights on TV. Ray is an occasional villain, but mostly the fans can see he is just sneaky, which is why I like him. He never really wrestles, just progresses other people’s storylines.

I tell Mom all about the wrestler’s stories. Ray is supposed to get married to this female wrestler, Mona, so I tell Mom about the time he wrote her name in flowers in the ring. But to Mom, Ray is my trickster friend, constantly pulling pranks on me and Jimmy.

“I got close to a couple of guys up there,” I told Dad.

When Dad and I tried to talk when I lived at home, he sometimes did this thing where he would open his mouth like he was about to say something, but close it quickly thereafter. It became much more common over the last year. It was like he was trying to catch his words before they tumbled from his mouth.

Packs of people were walking through the park. It occurred to me that this is what the park had become: a thoroughfare. Joggers now cut through it instead of taking the different paths around the park.

The sky slowly muted the bruised purples until the light had gone. Overhead lights came on and summoned swarms of bugs towards the light.

Most of the camp sites started to settle into tents and sleeping bags. One guy walked back and forth along the path nearest to us to his car a few times. It took me some time to recognize him. Charles Collins. In school he was known for springy hair which seemed to defy all laws of gravity. He walked around school solely with girls my grade and lower. After he graduated, I found out Liz Collins was his sister.

The way Liz and my names fell on attendance sheets always had us sitting around each other in class. It wasn’t until biology, when I turned to ask her if she had a lab partner, that we actually started talking to each other. She liked to talk with her hands covering her chin. At that time, many girls my age did that. But she looked at me like she thought I had important things to say, and when she listened, I felt like I had those things inside of me. Before long, she would nudge me in P.E. when we ran laps.

Charles now walked with the kind of limp one gets after they outgrow their childhood. His head was neatly shaved, which is why I didn't recognize him at first. He continued walking back and forth to his car. Every time he passed, he looked over towards Dad and me. He didn't set up too much at his campsite, only a large cooler, a sleeping bag, and a pair of foldable chairs.

"It's good that you're making friends up there," Dad said.

I wondered if Mom told him in detail about "Jimmy" or "Ray" or any of the other wrestlers who she thought were my friends. She probably did. Wrestling was on three times a week so I always had something new to tell her.

"Do you talk to them about Festival?" Dad asked.

I nodded. Dad looked like he was trying to catch his words again.

"Yeah, or anything else," I said.

I didn't feel like explaining everything. It was better to just go along with it.

For most of the night, we watched the flames lick the grill, until they burned themselves down to nothing. Dad took the rest of the meat and tossed it in the furthest garbage can he could find.

As I lay in my sleeping bag, I thought of past Festivals instead of the current one. This one would probably be uneventful for me.

\* \* \*

Sophomore year, I asked Liz if she watched wrestling one day in P.E. I had only seen it a few times, I told her. I was prepared to make fun of it to defend myself, but she was an expert. She knew all the story lines and all the wrestlers, even their trademarked moves.

We never watched wrestling together, though. The day after fights, we would meet at school and debrief with each other. It was always yesterday's events with wrestling, but we still talked all about it.

But Festival became our live event. This was our title match. We knew Festival didn't have crowds that chant the names of their favorite fighters. The only audience members were kids who look on, learning to accept what was ahead of them.

Back then we would watch Festival up in the trees that no longer exist. Being up in the trees with Liz was what I imagined being an adult felt like. Everything changed up there.

"It's taboo to do someone else's move," she said. "Like, career-long vendettas have happened because of it."

She nodded as she spoke, and strands of her hair slid out from behind her ear. Throughout our friendship, she kept her hair chin-length. She always tried to keep it tucked behind her ears, but it always unfurled.

She'd point to someone and say something lie, "That guy kinda looks like Jumbo Jerry, right? Imagine him doing that whiplash kick just now."

"Oh look at that! It looks like he was gonna get clotheslined."

"Did he do the Sumo Slam? The Gigantoid would be pissed if he did. Oh look, he's celebrating like the Gigantoid. He's gonna start a feud."

\* \* \*

I woke up in the morning to find Mom standing over a camping stove. Ribbons of smoke rose around her. Dad walked around and sipped from his oversized mug. He wore the same clothes as the night before. Mom noticed I was awake.

"Did you dream? You always told me you had the sweetest dreams when you were littler."

"If I did, I don't remember it," I said, a slight tone of incredulity in my voice. "I thought you were going to church?"

She smiled and stirred something on the camping stove.

"I was too nervous," she said. "Every morning you used to tell me everything that happened when you slept. You were such a cutie."

I closed my eyes and had to raise my brow to get them to open again before uncurling myself from my sleeping bag.

"Don't change clothes," Dad said, "You'll want to afterward."

Mom wished us luck and smiled like she did when she and Dad dropped me off at college.

Dad led me down to the field. Sleeping bags lay scattered and crumpled around tables and under trees like husks of forgotten fruit.

Fathers and sons spilled out of campsites as everyone walked down to the field. Sunlight hadn't quite taken full hold of the day. Everything was still a little tinted by night's darkness. When we got to the field Dad and I waited close together.

I recognized many of the people around us. Liz's commentary of their past performances had etched them into my memory. I imagined her up there, watching me, but it was hard without the trees. I could almost see her getting the kids on the hill chanting my name, like a spray or a mist that echoes from a crowd.

I copied what Dad did, because I felt like that's what I should do. Everyone was huddled around, shifting their weight between their feet, eyes meeting eyes, taking account of who was in their immediate vicinity.

Dad rolled up his sleeves, so did I.

"There might be no one here for you," Dad said. "But you should be here anyway, just in case you need to see someone else."

He added, "And in case there is someone here for you."

Festival was not for show, and it wasn't until the first men started shouting at each other that the reality of it started to sink in. There are no signature moves here.

There wasn't much to the yelling. People had things to say that they couldn't communicate with language. It would only cause arguments, and arguments are far too polite for what one feels. When one argues, you wait for the other to say something. It's like taking turns to go on the swings or leap from the diving board.

Someone started pushing. The sooner this all started, I thought, the sooner everyone repays someone for what they did, the sooner this would all be over.

The crowd ebbed and pulsed. Dad and I stood off to the side, like most other men. Someone came up to Dad and stared right into his eyes. A blade of morning light shone through the sliver between their noses.

It turned out to be nothing, but for the few tense seconds after the man stepped up to Dad, I thought he would hit Dad. The man instead shouted that Dad sold him green meat and it made his kid sick. Dad stood there, just as I was taught to. Defend yourself if needed, but this isn't about you. Festival is a confession, a soliloquy. This is a visit to the therapist. This is how the town healed.

The man sulked off, bracing himself against the crowd of people shuffling about in the middle of the ring.

Suddenly, Charles appeared from a void left by two men who had been pried apart from each other. I saw him kick someone on the ground. He slipped in and out of view until our eyes met and he rambled toward me.

Condolences are most of what I've heard in the last year. I smiled at Charles, expecting maybe another condolence. But before I could say anything, Charles Collins punched me in my face, right across my cheek.

People struggle to describe what it's like getting hit. Long before I felt anything, before I heard the impact, there was the flicker of the world quickly turning to catch up with me as I spun and sank to the ground.

He stood over me as I rolled onto my back. I felt blood come out of my mouth.

Charles landed on me with his knee. I sucked in air, but because he was pressing down with such force, nothing came in. I raised my hands to stop him, to tell him that it was enough, but I could only gasp.

I didn't do anything to stop him, mostly because I couldn't. Both sides of an argument flooded my mind, and I waited for both to finish their presentations.

This is Festival. This is his right, but I never expected him to say anything, to do anything. But I've done nothing to him, I thought to myself. Never did. I wanted to say something to him, but when I tried to speak, I coughed and sputtered out bubbles of blood.

Charles hit me in the ribs one, two, three times and again across the face. There was no emotion in his face.

Finally, he stood and backed away. I slowly got to my knees, coughing because I was trying to take in more air than I could handle.

This was not televised, I told myself. No one stood around us watching for entertainment. There was no crowd cheering. No story arc. I wiped blood off my lips and put my hands in front of me again.

"She was going to see you," he said.

I couldn't reply.

"She left a note. She was going to see you."

\* \* \*

First, Mom tried to help me the only way she knew how. She took me to see the priest the week after everything happened. It was still so fresh. The newspaper reporting the accident hadn't even yellowed. The priest told me it was God's will to take the good back to heaven.

"Think about it," he said. "You play sports right? And don't you always pick the best guys to be on your team first?"

I nodded because that's what you do when someone tells you something like that. I was still crying then. I kept my mouth closed for him and everyone else that gave me tokens they had received when grandparents they couldn't even recognize passed away. They didn't know what they were saying to me.

The worst part was that there would never be anyone at Festival for me. The guy who hit Liz died in the crash as well.

"It wasn't my fault," I had said to Charles.

Grief counselors at school that year told me the same thing over and over with the intention that I might believe it. I still say it to myself when no one is around.

And Charles must have known that too. He kicked me in the stomach and I doubled over.

"Don't say one more thing," he said. "Not one more."

He kicked me again and stood over me for a moment before disappearing back into the crowd. I stayed curled on the grass until Dad came back and helped me to my feet.

As soon as I could walk, I remember going from table to table with Dad, watching as he shook the hands of people who had yelled or hit him at Festival. He would offer them a beer from the small cooler he made me carry. They would give him something from their table. I left confused after every encounter.

Dad would expect me to do the same thing once we had completed his rounds. He would expect me to go over and sit in the empty chair next to Charles and give him a beer.

Grandpa used to tell me this was the most important part of Festival.

Charles was off to the side now, sitting between a couple of families I couldn't recognize.

The last few men walked around the perimeter, looking for the last grudges they could remember.

Eventually, we all left the field together, turning away from each other. Some of the tables were now decorated like someone was preparing for a birthday party in the park. Balloons and streamers hung from standing canopies.

Back at our camp, Mom had plates of sandwiches and laid out bags of chips on the table. Two identical, small coolers were also on the table. I reached into a cooler, mostly for some ice, but Dad told me to go change first.

"You'll feel better once you do," he said. ☺

# MAINSTREAMING COLONIAL MENTALITIES

by

*Madison Davis*

Gil Scott-Heron, one of the musical greats of the past century, left a lasting impression not only on the music industry, but on the Black community at large. At the height of the Black Power movement, his music provided a backdrop of solidarity for revolutionaries, activists, and average citizens living through a tumultuous time. Scott-Heron specialized in weaving together poetry and music to make poignant statements about the Civil Rights movement and the Black experience in America. Though he died in 2011, his music continues to ring vibrantly in the ears of thinkers and artists, old and young alike, and it still evokes the same beauty it once did. While he produced wonderful work throughout his entire career, the defining piece of Scott-Heron's career is his spoken word classic "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised."

In "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," Scott-Heron lambastes the inability of White-controlled media to serve the revolutionary interests of Black America. It also sharply criticizes those who find themselves wanting to "plug in, turn off, and cop out" of their responsibilities to the revolution in lieu of poisoning themselves with "skag," Scott-Heron's sobriquet for television, which he compares to opiates for the masses who consume it.

This piece was obviously directed at Black Americans of the Civil Rights era. However, due to the fact that the fight for civil rights and liberties continues to this day, the question for our generation is whether or not

Scott-Heron's societal critique applies to us. In the current mass media world we live in, will the revolution be televised? Is that question still relevant? Regardless of how the question is approached, the variable on which it hinges remains the same: the media.

American culture is, in the loosest terms, a mass media culture. Our cultural icons are often derived from our obsession with social media, film, television, radio, podcasts, and other media. In theory, this vast media apparatus exists to serve the public by disseminating information and providing entertainment for mass consumption. But, like most things, it is a business and often does what the market demands. Historically and contemporaneously, the media market and those who constitute its body have been dominated by White Americans because of their controlling share of the nation since its existence.

One of the primary issues facing Black Americans today is a media landscape that is built on assumptions and apparatuses which work to disenfranchise the race from both the media landscape and society at large. Because of the deep history of racism in the U.S., Black Americans account for a minute portion of pop culture icons. In fact, until relatively recently, it was next to impossible for Black people to get the same types of positions in the media that would allow them to become icons of the popular, mass culture.

While not immediately apparent to those unaffected by it, the lack of diverse Black faces in film and television is one of the many factors that contribute to the dehumanization of Black people. Our stories are not told in any legitimate, nuanced fashion. Instead, we are constantly portrayed as gangsters and people in subservient positions, or we are appropriated and tokenized as props in the backgrounds of White stories. Consumers of these regurgitated tropes of Blackness fall into a cycle of believing that these are accurate representations of all Black people. For this reason, people will more readily assume that Black victims of murder, discrimination, and economic poverty had a hand in creating their low socio-economic status either by past innocuous actions or by not “pulling [themselves] up by their bootstraps,” a common trope of “Americanness” which, in any legitimate sense, did not even pertain to Black Americans for the majority of the nation’s history. Victim blaming and character assassination, which has been seen countless times recently in light of the increased publicity of police brutality towards Black Americans, work to enforce the belief that Black victims “deserve” their lot, much in the same way rape victims are blamed because they were “asking for it.”

With this in mind, it becomes clear that the media has failed in its goal to serve the interest of the public, as it has neglected and continues to neglect its obligation to the Black community.

In regards to mainstream news media outlets, such as CNN and Fox News, the double standards present in their language of reportage are blatant and insulting. White rioters lashing out after a sports loss are described as “rowdy,” with the same kind of “boys will be boys” attitude that perpetuates toxic masculinity and violence against women. Black protesters, who lawfully state their grievances, become homogenized with a handful of looting individuals as “thugs” in an attempt to dismiss their movement and disregard their experience.

Several videos have surfaced on YouTube demonstrating the news outlets’ apathy towards telling the stories of suffering people. These videos, while superficially amusing, often include protest-

ers and casual pedestrians interrupting reporters as they sell a biased version of the movements on which they’re reporting and neighborhoods in which they take place. This bias stems from mainstream news reporters’ routine ignorance of the conditions of poverty, unemployment, and discrimination afflicting those neighborhoods. Their Orwellian double-speak contributes to the misunderstanding of Black socio-political issues and only serves to hinder any meaningful discussion on the topic. Further, news outlets consistently tie issues involving the Black community and law enforcement agencies with the high prevalence of “Black-on-Black” crime, resulting in specious debate about “respectability,” which subsequently allows the horrors of respectability politics to rear their ugly heads and dominate the discussion.



*Falling Petals - Aahed Abdullah*

But the myth of Black-on-Black crime as a talking point only organically appears in conversation within the context of police brutality towards

the Black community, proving this dismissive discourse, or rather its relevance in the contemporary context, is only used as a tool to silence those discussing their oppression. Additionally, since violent crimes are most often committed by close family members or friends of victims, most crimes regardless of location or socio-economic status involve people of the same race. But it is never framed this way for “White-on-White” crime, further proving that such lexicons only serve to derail meaningful conversation.



*Incidental Lines - Aahed Abdullah*

The double standards perpetuated by the news media do not only apply to Black Americans. Words such as “terrorist” and “extremist” are almost exclusively reserved for Muslims abroad and Muslim Americans, despite the actions of members of more privileged social groups committing acts of terror as well (i.e. the Aurora, Colorado theater shooting and the Sandy Hook Elementary school

shooting, both of which were committed by cisgender White males) without having the same terms applied to them. While this dichotomy is a blatant exercise of White privilege, it also speaks to the delusional reality created by the media, featuring nuanced White individuals who “may have a history of mental illness” and the violent, homogenized Others. In this way, the media functions as a tool of oppression and colonialism, propagating the notion of “civilized” White people and the “uncivilized” Other.

Yet, disregard for a Black individual’s nuance, while oppressive and dismissive, has not had entirely negative effects, as it has served as the catalyst for the creation of Black media, like *Ebony Magazine* and BET, that celebrate the nuance of Black Americans.

Historically, Black media outlets have formed to combat negative images and assumptions of Black people by presenting more diverse representations of Black people. In the contemporary context, trends like #Blackout and shows like BET’s “Black Girls Rock” exist for the same purposes because Black Americans still face a constant bombardment of negative media directed at them and at people who look like them. Yet, these trends are not the final solution to the problem of misrepresentation, nor are they without their flaws.

In addition to the lack of diverse Black representation in media, there also persists a healthy culture of colorism in the media and pop culture. Colorism refers to the preferential treatment of people of lighter skin-tones within a single race. Black Americans with a skin tone closer to that of the majority White population often find themselves afforded more opportunities than their darker skinned brethren. For this reason, biographic films and television series about historically dark skinned people are retold with lighter skinned actors. Recently, Zoe Saldana, a prominent light-skinned actress known for her characters Neytiri from the film Avatar and Uhura in the Star Trek film series, was cast for the biopic “Nina,” which tells the story of Nina Simone, a dark-skinned jazz artist whose political activism cost the musician her career, according to critics. While this exam-

ple is by no means a critique of Saldana's acting prowess, the fact remains that there are several equally talented dark-skinned actresses who more closely resemble Miss Simone, such as Viola Davis and many others. Therefore, it is fair to believe that colorism played some role in the casting decision, reflecting the widespread bias that colorist mentalities have created.

The issue of colorism didn't develop recently. Historical examples can be found in the Civil Rights era. Rosa Parks, while now viewed as the poster child of the Southern bus boycotts of the '50s, was not the first activist to stage such an event. In fact, her protest was somewhat inorganic, as the NAACP staged the event using her because they thought her lighter skin (relative to the other activists, such as Baynard Rustin, protesting in similar ways) would make White Americans sympathize more readily with her and the desegregation movement. Another example is the infamous 1966 *Ebony Magazine* cover displaying only light-skinned, nearly White-passing Black girls with straightened hair. The magazine posed this question to its readers: "Are Negro Girls getting prettier?" While even in its time the article received its fair share of flack, the cultural implications of such an inquiry are staggering. If the portrayals of Black people from non-Black-controlled media sources are not sufficiently representative of the community at large, the "color line" within the community's own representations of itself results in equally insufficient and exclusionary media.

While colorism mainly persists as an issue within the Black community, American culture has historically worked to perpetuate this condition by affording more opportunities for lighter-skinned Blacks. One example is the divide between the "house and field negroes," the former being reserved mostly for light-skinned slaves (despite Samuel L. Jackson's amazing performance of the loyal house slave in *Django Unchained*), and the latter applying to dark-skinned slaves. Another example is lighter skinned women experiencing mitigated effects of misogynoir, the dual oppression of Black women due to their womanhood and their Blackness, because they more closely fit Eurocentric beauty standards. However, the phenomenon of

colorism is not just "skin deep." It has intense social and psychological repercussions. One such repercussion is the demonization of Black hair.

Hair itself is a political statement. Up until the late '60s, it was extremely commonplace for Black men to straighten their hair in a process called "conking." Conking involved using harmful chemicals like lye to straighten hair in order to more accurately fit America's Eurocentric aesthetic. While this may seem a little asinine to those who have never felt the pressure to alter their natural hair state, Black people, Black women in particular, have always felt pressured to change their hair in order to be afforded more opportunities. For this reason, along with other systemic issues, you rarely see Black women on national television without straight hair. The alternative is far too political for mass, White American consumption due to the fallout of the revolutionary Black Power movement, which prized natural Black hair.

Recently, however, the "natural hair" movement has arisen to combat this issue, urging both women and men to allow their hair to grow naturally - coils, kinks, and all. The movement also encourages Black people to avoid relaxers and perms which aim to straighten and flatten one's natural hair. Movements like this are vibrantly celebrated on social media spheres. Popular blogs such as "Afropunk" post "Afro of the Day" photos. Other web sites that educate people on how to take care of their hair have become popular, as many Black people do not know how to care for their hair in its natural state due to how ingrained the norm of straight hair is in American culture. But the unabashed celebrations of Black culture on blogs and social media aren't able to spread their message at the same scale that the mainstream media apparatus is able to broadcast the plethora of outlets celebrating and normalizing Whiteness.

However, social media phenomena, particularly Twitter's use of the hashtag, have equipped disenfranchised Americans, Black Americans especially, with their own tools to broadcast their oppression and tell their stories on their own terms. At this juncture in time, very few have escaped the "controversy" of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

As many have pointed out prior to this article, the fact that saying “Black lives matter” is controversial speaks volumes about the state of racism in our nation.

Opponents of the #BlackLivesMatter movement believe it to be exclusionary. This couldn’t be further from the truth. One of the main reasons the #BlackLivesMatter movement began is because Black voices are not heard or are misrepresented by an oversaturated public media sphere generally disinterested in their stories. Consequently, Black people, in particular Black youth, are now using social media to carve out a space for themselves. They accomplish this in a variety of ways, including the aforementioned blogs and websites for things as simple as hair tips and styles, but also through work as critical and thorough as actress and activist Amandla Stenberg’s analysis of cultural appropriation in America. While hashtags featuring the names of victims of police brutality (#MichaelBrown, #SandraBland, #AiyanaStanleyJones) unfortunately dominate the landscape of Black social media, the space is also utilized for things aimed at uplifting and uniting the community in the face of adverse and malevolent representations by the mainstream media. #Blackout and #GrowingUp-Black are two examples of this. Unsurprisingly, given the history of non-Black American appropriation and co-optation of Black American language, dance, and social movements, both of the aforementioned hashtags were immediately imitated by other racial-ethnic groups. While these responses range from innocuous to blatantly racist, the goal of each was the same: to participate in a colonial system designed to position oppressors in positions of ignorance while they trample upon oppressed people.

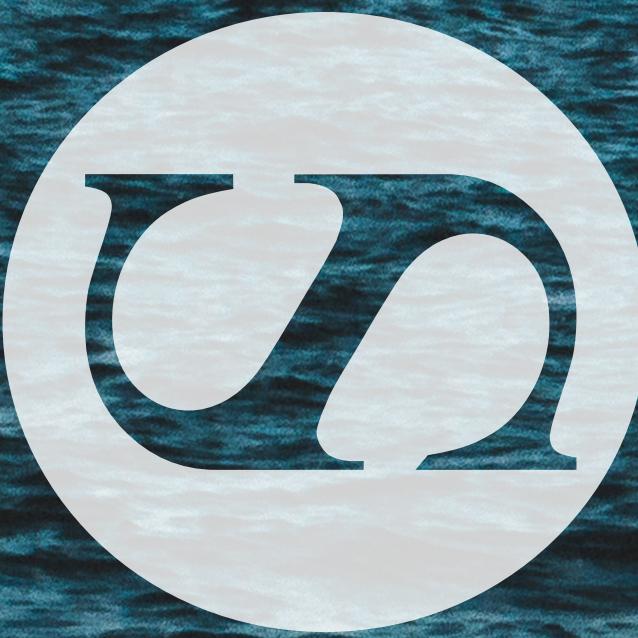
As demonstrated by the lack of real, visceral, human representations of Black Americans in film, television, music, and beyond, the media does not exist to serve the interests, socio-cultural or political, of the Black community at large. In fact, the argument can be made that the mainstream media does not even serve the general population, instead defaulting to the values of corporate sponsors and benefactors from the same industry, which are often synonymous with the interests of the rich and

powerful. However, as it relates to Black politics and culture, the current media environment acts as an exclusionary apparatus utilized to perpetuate colonial mentalities, which, in turn, work to serve only the most privileged individuals within a society that has a history of colonialism.

Therefore, because the current media landscape cannot support the social obligation it bears, it is necessary for either its evolution as an inclusive entity, or its destruction and replacement with a more egalitarian system of news and entertainment. ☩

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