
Special Section: Anarres Project for Alternative Futures Collection

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with a forward by Taine Duncan**

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ABSTRACT: This article contains four essays from the Anarres Project, a forum for conversations, ideas, and initiatives that promote a future free of domination, exploitation, oppression, war, and empire. In the spirit of philosophy in the contemporary world, the selection includes recent work on the pandemic and related struggles for justice in the past year. An introduction to the project is included.

Forward

THE REFLECTIONS IN THIS SECTION raise urgent and timely questions, while also demonstrating that the longstanding ethical dilemmas of racism, sexism, and classism are only amplified by global crises. In 2020 and 2021, the conditions of the precariat were illuminated for all to see: disparities in healthcare and social safety nets; purposeful political silencing through election policies and laws which cause voter suppression; and police, ICE, and state-sanctioned violence. Those living in these conditions, whose experience, advocacy, and activism had engaged the issues of the precariat for years, were speaking-up, speaking-out, and calling-in loudly (Campanello). However, many of these issues continue to be under-theorized, under-recognized, and underrepresented in philosophical published work. What is the role of the academy in silencing or marginalizing the precariat? How are we not only complicit in the larger political and social systems, but also actively and explicitly reproducing marginalization by using the tools of gatekeeping in the academy as a means for silencing the experiences and insight of public thinkers and activists?

These questions struck my co-editor, Geoff Pfeifer, and myself. We wondered how a journal called *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* could engage more directly with the immediate problems of our world, particularly in the conditions of a pandemic. In her forward to *The Center Must Not Hold*, Sandra Harding asks academic philosophy as a discipline a series of poignant questions: “Should epistemological issues be prioritized over ethical and political ones? How are philosophy’s typical forms of addressing readers complicitous with racist assumptions?” (xi). Though Harding focuses directly on the urgency of racism here, we might ask ourselves similar questions about

the marginalization of other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, other People of Color) voices, LGBTQ+ voices, working-class voices, and the voices of others marginalized within the traditions of the academy. As Baffoe, Asimeng-Boahene and Ogbuagu explain in their research, intersectional issues of white supremacy, Eurocentrism and Americancentrism, and insularization of the academy have continued to reproduce work which represents a particular worldview (20). If 2020 and 2021 have taught us anything, it is that the status quo is unsustainable intellectually, culturally, politically, and ecologically. The dual pandemics in the United States of COVID-19 and “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” require inclusivity, creativity, critical theory, and a shift in the academy (hooks, 7).

We recognized that this journal not only offers a platform for inclusion of other voices, but also that it was disingenuous to pretend that formal academic work was untouched by pandemic conditions, as well. Many academics were teaching, researching, and balancing home-life in new ways this past year. The exigencies of life outside the ivory tower illustrated the illusory nature of such a tower to many folks. Relatedly, and somewhat suddenly, after years of decrying the humanities as reliquaries, the academic philosophers who have long worked on care ethics, vulnerability, and precarity were thrust to center-stage in public discussions. Judith Butler, for example, began 2020 giving talks for her most recent book, but by middle of May 2020, *The Nation* interviewed her on “the need for global solidarity in a pandemic world” (Wade). Joan Tronto, whose book *Moral Boundaries* was published in 1993, was invited to give interviews with healthcare experts on applying care ethics to the treatment practices and procedures of the pandemic (Kohlen, McCarthy, and Tronto). The growth of philosophy beyond the artificial boundaries of the academy in a time of crisis also proved that philosophy as a discipline is applicable, necessary, and potentially transformational.

The three thinkers featured in this special section illustrate the complexity and importance of doing public philosophy in the contemporary world. These three pieces were first made publicly available in some form on the Anarres Project for Alternative Futures website. The Anarres Project has always included voices from a variety of experiences, traditions, and backgrounds in the publication of their

website, the production of their video and voice series, and in community fora that they host at Oregon State University. We reached out to co-founder of the project, Jose-Antonio Orosco, to help us solicit the best representation of the considerations of the early pandemic year. What follows are three short-writings collected here because of their connection to these themes of transformational voices and representation of the precarious in the pandemic. The first selection is from Jose-Antonio Orosco himself. In this piece he reflects on the ways in which the murder of George Floyd, and the subsequent widespread public recognition of the Black Lives Matter Movement in searching for justice, relates to a long-history of oppressed communities challenging police violence and brutality. Addressing the history of police brutality against Chicax movements, Orosco connects past and present to help us envision liberatory alternative futures led by antiviolence movements in marginalized communities. The second selection from Lark Sontag serves as a challenge to those who should be in solidarity with the precariat. Recognizing that public transit was a potential vector for COVID-19 when “essential workers” were called back to reopen businesses in the height of the pandemic, Sontag challenges the lack of solidarity among feminists who should be fighting for the care, safety, and health of the community over a symbolic transit movement. And, finally, Zara Stevens has offered us a reflection on the experiences of bartenders and other service-industry workers experiencing economic precarity in lockdown. Stevens reflects on the complexity of that position, offering solidarity and challenging hope for recovery.¹

We hope that the inclusion of this article also inspires other folks to submit work that may be reviewed for our journal, and for public scholars who might want to consider becoming reviewers for the journal to contact us. If you are interested, please email the editors at jpcweditors@gmail.com.

¹ We have included reprinted materials from Zara Stevens previously published online, and made available through the Anarres Project.

Lessons on Police Brutality from the Chicana Experience

Jose-Antonio Orosco

The past week has seen an explosion of urban uprising that has not been experienced in the US in decades. Almost five thousand people have been arrested nationwide in protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis. What is unique about this moment is that a majority of Americans support the protests, in part, because they have seen the violent response of police forces all across the country. Even mainstream media outlets are calling the police response disproportionate, and many more people are starting to consider the alternative of police abolition as a serious option.

The history of Mexican American people in the US is one that emphasizes that police violence is not a recent problem created by the militarization of police forces, or of white supremacist infiltration. In the mid 1800s, police forces were created specifically for controlling Mexicans and Mexican American citizens. The Texas Rangers were created during the Republic of Texas era (1836-1846) specifically to do border patrol duty with Mexico. Later they became a regular unit when Texas was absorbed into the United States. The story of the Rangers is a bloody one of lynchings, massacres, and disappearances. From 1915-1919, in a period named La Hora de Sangre (The Hour of Blood), Rangers abducted and murdered hundreds of Mexican Americans with impunity.

In the 20th century, several cases are notable, not only for their brutality but also because of what they teach us about responding to police violence today.

Sleepy Lagoon and the Zoot Suit Riots

The first is the 1942 case of the Sleepy Lagoon murder in Los Angeles that was popularized in the play and film by Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit*. Dozens of Mexican American youth were arrested for killing another

Mexican American under very unclear circumstances. By this point in time, the LAPD was notorious for police brutality and especially for being effective at creating a blue wall of silence to protect their own. But what was significant about this episode was the treatment of the pachuco youth by the whole criminal justice system—police, prosecutors, social workers, and judges. During the trial, the Mexican American men were denied access to their lawyers, they were not allowed to wear clean clothes to hearings, and were subjected to testimony by state experts who informed the jury about the “savagery” of the Mexican people and their propensity to use knives to cut and maim that went back to Aztec times. The girlfriends of the young men refused to testify against them in trial and were then taken away from their families and put into state custody at reform school for months and years.

What this points out is that thinking about police state violence will require more than reforming police forces with better training or body cams and so forth. Sleepy Lagoon revealed that there are many sites of power within the criminal justice system that can coerce and harm individuals. Moreover, this case also reveals how institutional reform may not matter much without confronting the way white supremacy structures culture and everyday life. The state dehumanized those young men and women and played off the stereotypes of violent Mexican gangs to secure their imprisonment and family separation. Those stereotypes would just simply explode a year later when police and military forces persecuted Mexican American youth in the Zoot Suit riots of 1943. In other words, police state violence would not have been possible if many white citizens weren’t willing to tolerate it in order to keep Black and Mexican American youth subjugated.

The Bloody Christmas Episode

LAPD police brutality against Mexican American youth continued and crested in 1951 with the Bloody Christmas episode. A group of young Mexican American men were confronted in a bar by police and fought back against the officers that were harassing them. They were arrested and brought back to the city jail. During a drunken Christmas Eve party, dozens of LAPD officers formed a secret gauntlet in the basement of the jail and forced the defendants to run through it while they beat them with clubs. The torture went on for an hour and half and several

defendants had broken bones and ruptured internal organs. They were then forced to pose in photos with the officers they had resisted.

The LAPD expected this case to be covered up just like countless of other cases had been. However, the families of the defendants joined together and became part of a grassroots group called the Community Services Organization. The CSO had been organizing with Mexican American communities in Southern California for several years. When the families brought the CSO network to bear on their case, the city and FBI insisted on a review of the Bloody Christmas incident. In the end, a handful of LAPD officers were convicted of crimes and many were reassigned. It was one of the first times that the blue wall of silence was broken.

It should be noted how CSO accomplished this victory. For some years, CSO had been conducting meetings in the homes of Mexican American families to inform them about issues and the power of collective community action. These meetings inspired thousands to see themselves as agents of change and not just passive subjects of state control. It had created a very successful voter registration drive that empowered thousands of Mexican American voters. CSO also encouraged multicultural alliances with other groups, namely Jewish cultural organizations and Black and Asian labor groups. This kind of solidarity enabled them to help to elect Ed Roybal to the LA City Council in 1949--one of the first Mexican American political officials in the city since the Mexican American War of 1848. Roybal was instrumental in getting pressure on the LAPD during the Bloody Christmas incident.

The organizer that helped to create this Mexican American political bloc was a man by the name of Fred Ross, Sr. He had gained a reputation about Mexican American communities because of helping them to mount a legal case in Southern California to desegregate public schools that went on to be a template for *Brown v. Board of Education*. After the victory of the Bloody Christmas, Ross went to San Jose to help form CSO chapters. It was there he met a young man by the name of Cesar Chavez, who later went on to become the national organizer for CSO for almost a decade before he helped to form the United Farm Workers with Dolores Huerta (who was also another CSO organizer).

Chicano Moratorium Against the Vietnam War

The last episode has eerie resonance with today's uprisings. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Chicano Moratorium March against the Vietnam War. The Chicano Moratorium was a nationwide group that came together in repose to the disproportionate numbers of Chicano youth that were dying as casualties of the South Asian conflict. For months, the Chicano Moratorium group planned a huge march and rally in Los Angeles for August of 1970. When the day came, almost thirty thousand people came for the demonstration, making it one of the largest anti-Vietnam war protests in history. The march ended in a park, where there were speeches and performances. In a nearby neighborhood, there was a break in of a local business and police were called. County and city officers responded by the dozens and they came with riot gear. Without warning or provocation, they rushed into the protest crowd, shooting tear gas, and indiscriminately beating people with clubs. There were several casualties, including the Chicano journalist Ruben Salazar, who was shot in the head with a tear gas projectile that was launched into a nearby bar.

The casual nature of the police violence in this case and the easy manner in which police were able to deploy weapons in a deadly way demonstrated to many Chicanos that mainstream America would not tolerate even nonviolent dissent from people of color.

When we see the responses from police in today's headlines we have to wonder whether anything has really changed in the last 50 years. The magnitude of the uprisings is certainly different even if the state responses are not. The big question is how will the work on the street translate into the kind of institutional and cultural changes necessary to confront and end police violence.

Chicano leader Corky Gonzales presented an outline of reforms in his "El Plan del Barrio" 1968 as part of his contribution to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign. He included a program of economic reforms that included housing, jobs, and wealth redistribution that surely merits revisiting today.

A further lesson from the Chicano experience is the importance of organized communities, like those with CSO, that can support families who find themselves victims of police violence. Sleepy Lagoon, however, demonstrates the need for more sustained work because police violence is just the tip of the iceberg of state coercion toward

communities of color. The Sleepy Lagoon trial reveals the need to ways to think about reforms in the training of lawyers in law schools, and election of prosecutors and local district attorneys and judges. We need also think about the education of social workers, and others charged with public health and child protective services, to make sure they understand the various forms of aggression, macro and micro, directed at young children and their families from society and the state. This would also involve looking at how juvenile justice programs are operating. Much of this is on the agenda of prison abolition projects around the country already, but that then also raises the topic of the corporate intervention in the prison industrial complex that profits off the dehumanization of youth of color and the politicians that benefit from those business entities. Finally, it also means that ordinary white folks need to seriously contend with lingering white supremacy in their families and communities, and everyone, include Chicax/Latinx people, need to acknowledge and grapple with anti-Black racism that is a cornerstone of the white supremacy that harms us all. Educators will have to craft explicitly anti racist curriculums and discussions will need to happen in homes, workplaces, and especially, communities of faith.

The experience of Chicax communities shows us that police violence is not isolated or even recent; it is also not something that can be solved easily by focusing on entirely on the prosecution of a few “bad apples”, or on police force reform. I hope that this history does not make it seem like dealing with this problem is an overwhelming and impossible task. Rather, I hope that we can see that there are many places to get involved, many different sites of struggle, for our energies. But it will indeed be hard.

Where Are the Feminists in COVID-19?

Lark Sontag

More women take public transit than men, and Black people are more likely to be in carFREE households than people in other racial groups. Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American households are more likely to

be in a carFREE household than white people. So it has always troubled me that upper-middle and middle-class white men have continued to dominate the conversation on getting from point a to point b. This conversation should be intersectional. Open streets, human transit movements are politically feminist. It should be Feminist with a capital F, but no, and it is far from that. The women in the human-centric transportation field seem to prefer being viewed as the “cool girls” than the people who stand up for women and children. On Twitter, FB, in the media, I keep reading praises for carFREE BUSINESS initiatives to reopen prematurely. Initiatives that put people at risk and the people at risk are predominantly women who are Black, Latinx, and Indigenous. Their lives are being gambled and negotiated away, so that mostly white business owners can make money. And I see women with children co-signing on it, because of the dog-pack mentality of movements that are male-dominated, like the human transit movement.

If you care about women and children, you need to speak up about the irresponsibility and selfishness of opening up businesses now — even if a bicycle is pasted on to it.

You need to say something about the vile new practice by the urban planning/alt transit/big development funded media who keep trying to find the silver linings on opening nonessential businesses, just because the streets are blocked off from cars. The workers that have to serve the upper-middle class and the public employees that bring them to work don't live on the open street and often have to come on the train, the bus from far away owing to redlining and racism so that others can have fun.

There is no bright side to Florida (with horrible public transit) opening up because the streets with businesses happen to be blocked off from cars.

The servers don't live in the businesses, does that entire concept escape those who advocate for this selfishness? If you are Black, Latinx or white working class, you've probably experienced a two-hour commute for a piece of shit job, if you're white, metropolitan, and middle class, understand this: that is how the rest of us get to to work to serve you a coffee.

People are going to die because of this shortsightedness. Do people understand that people do not live at their workplaces, that they have to travel, and all kinds of things can happen between home in East NY and serving a coffee on the Lower Eastside of Manhattan?

Men —fine, I can see how middle-class white men don't see this (or do not want to admit to seeing it), but women in the carFREE movement—Black and Latina women are trying to eat, so I get why they are quiet, but white women — I'm not getting your silence on this madness? Being a feminist means sometimes being unpopular with guys.

This is a picture of a bus in Maryland of essential retail workers getting to work, so maybe you can think about this before you co-sign on to some dude's awesome idea of opening things back up:



(Photo provided by the author, Lark Sontag, 2020)

3/15/20

Zara Stevens

I'm a bartender. I lost the totality of my income tonight when my state shut all bars and restaurants down in the face of this global pandemic. I am without work now. Not because I was fired for incompetence. Neither was I fired for negligence. My business wasn't closed down for inept management. Like so many of us, I'm unemployed for no reason other than the fact that the arena of my line of work is potentially unsafe for society at the moment.

I'm fearful. I'm sad. I'm worried not only for my own immediate economic future, but for that of those with whom I work, and for those with whom I share a line of work. Mine is not the only state to have made this decision – and it will not be the last. All night, and for the past few days, I've been fielding conversations from my fellow service industry folks, from all over the country, as our industry takes the frontline economic hit of this crisis. I can report to you that we are sharing love and encouragement amongst ourselves. And that it extends to you, our patrons. We are pledging support to one another, with our limited and rapidly dwindling means. We are proud to have served as long as we could. Our chins are up. We are scraping a silver lining from the bottom of this barrel. We love you, our patrons, regardless of how hard a line we may have had to draw with y'all during business as usual. We want you healthy. We want you safe. We want you dancing and happy in our establishments, enjoying good food, good company, and good drinks.

This is going to end. We will be serving you again soon, and we very much look forward to that day. Until then, let it be said that this is not a political issue for us. For us, this is a matter of food on our tables. This is a matter of our bills going unpaid for an indefinite number of weeks or months. This is a matter of our personal debts increasing, and our nights growing evermore sleepless. Many of us have dependents. Many of us do not have the modern luxury of a partner with an income that is (for now) guaranteed. Some of us work for small family businesses and we worry about our beloved employers' ability to weather this economic storm. Others amongst us work for larger businesses, and we worry about their loyalty to us as both

workers and human beings. We are the canaries in this collapsing economic coal mine, and we are not comforted by facile political debate. Our fears are not allayed by conspiracy theories. We are not lulled to sleep by misinformation, nor are we distracted by platitudes. We are actively focused on the very real needs of the most vulnerable within our communities, because we are living amongst them in the indefinite economic insecurity of this moment -- and, truthfully, many of us live our entire lives balanced, at the best of times, precariously on that dividing line.

We hope against hope that you do not join us in this place anytime soon.

We are not asking for pity. We are not begging sympathy or financial support. We do, however, respond with gratitude to solidarity and compassion. We bow deeply to skill-sharing and the pooling of excess resources. We appreciate, immensely, your non-partisan acceptance of our very frightening personal experience in these unprecedented days. We recognize that illness knows no political party, no class boundary, no religious affiliation, no racial division, no sexual orientation or gender identity, no age or professional distinction. When we speak aloud about our experiences in this weird new reality, however temporary it may be, we do so in the spirit of solidarity and transparency. We remain largely positive as we metabolize our grief and anxiety.

Though our businesses may be temporarily shuttered, our memories are long. We have sat with you during your most difficult moments. We have toasted your triumphs. We have fed you, watered you, laughed and cried with you. We've called you cabs. We've helped you avert shitty dates. We've cleaned up after your most embarrassing moments. We've danced with you, sung with you, talked you off the ledge. We know better than most that a horrifying moment passes, and this current one will, too. We are going to be so happy to pour you another drink, serve you another steak, and, fuck yes, to bring you more ranch dressing, once all of this clears. Until then, from the relative comfort of our homes, we send you our love, our joy, our understanding, and our continued solidarity. We implore you to shed the lens of politics in this challenging time, because we know from recent firsthand experience that we are all concerned about the same

things -- the continued viability of our home lives, the continued health of our loved ones, and the continued fervent hope for this pandemic to dissipate.

We wish you health. We wish you happiness. We wish you easy passage through this unique moment in recent history. We've watched you overcome so much, and we know you'll make it through this, too. We'll see you on the other side!

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