

MODELS OF RESISTANCE FOR A DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS

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INTRODUCTION

A GOLDEN THREAD OF A HISTORY TOWARD HOPE
AND CHANGE

WILLIAM A. CALVO-QUIRÓS

I remember where I was when I heard (and saw) the live news about the events of January 6, 2021, at the U.S. Capitol during the certification of the 2020 electoral votes. The images of the attack, the rhetoric of violence, the mockery of the law, and the sight of lawmakers hiding in fear for their lives were overwhelming. I was overcome by a sense of sadness, despair, disillusionment, and fear for democracy. This was not just a riot of unhappy people. It felt like an assault on the core values of our nation.

I was just entering a video conference meeting with a group of international researchers, and they asked me about the events happening in Washington. I found myself unable to speak as I was overwhelmed by the flood of emotions.

Recognizing my struggle, one of them reassured me, saying, “Don’t worry. The United States is the strongest and oldest democracy in the world. It has checks and balances to protect it.” Despite his kind words, I felt such a profound sense of loss that they seemed empty and clichéd. I had the impression they had not grasped the larger implications of the events, particularly for many marginalized communities. Furthermore, their insistence on moving forward while overlooking our pain and the crucial element of accountability came across as superficial and careless. Was I overreacting?

It was a strange, defining moment. On one hand, I have been somewhat skeptical and cynical about some of our institutions for most of my life, as they have historically failed to defend and protect those who are more vulnerable and in need. However, despite my awareness of the historical class, gender, and racial disenfranchisement in our nation, I found myself deeply invested in the ‘sanctity’ of the elections and the safeguarding of our democratic

electoral process. Both realities coexisted and collided at the same time, almost ambiguously.

Just as it had happened before during other acts of violence, such as September 11 or the attack on the Pulse gay bar in Florida, I sensed that the world had changed once again that day, and I was not fully prepared for the mourning that was required. But how do we engage in a process of mourning that is not solely focused on grief from the past, but also envisions the creation of a better future from the burdens imposed on us?

The essays collected here represent a brave intellectual intervention by scholars deeply committed to social change. Each essay explores different terrains where hope for a better future has been enacted, envisioned, or recognized. In some cases, as demonstrated by Megan Flattley, hope is evident and closely tied to discussions of aesthetic resilience and art resistance. In other instances, Geoff Eley's piece shows that hope emerges from recognizing patterns of violence as a means of fostering an emancipatory

consciousness, aimed at preventing history from repeating itself. Similarly, Jamon Jordan's essay highlights the value of grassroots organizing and public protest as essential practices for social transformation and evolution. Hope weaves all of these essays together, as they collectively and individually assert that the world we are living in today is not the one we are destined to experience.

The essays in this volume are written in language that is easy to understand, avoiding the academic jargon that can sometimes alienate certain audiences. In this case, they represent a smart attempt by academics to bring their voices into the public domain. The authors intentionally adopt a colloquial tone to emphasize that it is about people talking to people. In doing so, they not only risk their own safety by sharing what we are called to do for society and illuminating our shared commitment to humanity, but they also express a desire to make sense of a dynamic world that is constantly changing. More importantly, each essay unveils what we can define as a golden thread that links history, cultural productions, and practices. Here,

human relational history is never fully predictable, manageable, or even a ‘rational’ set of events; rather, it is part of a larger genealogy of humanity’s struggles, a journey, to unveil our calling to care for each other.

More importantly, these essays do not reflect a naive desire to return to an idealized past, such as the so-called ‘great times,’ nor do they suggest a longing for the period before January 6, 2021. The authors recognize that our past was, at best, inherently insufficient and dysfunctional in many ways. This is particularly evident in Jamon Jordan’s article, where he guides us through the long trajectory of violence and rejection by African Americans in a nation built on the premise of inequality and exploitation. His work highlights the ongoing struggles and resilience of this community. Overall, the authors call for the creation of a different world based on our mutual recognition as humans, always interacting with the environment around us. The central questions percolating through all the essays are: How do we envision a different world, moving beyond our misguided longing for the past and the fears of the

present, and instead focusing on our hopes for what the world can be? How can we liberate our consciousness to foster mutual care?

The intervention by Geoff Eley appears first in the anthology, emerging almost as an ominous essay about how things can quickly go deeply wrong. He highlights the fragility (and even complicity) of democracy when unresolved issues surrounding race, class, and religion are not confronted, discussed, and healed. One of his crucial contributions is his analysis of what he calls the “dual crisis” of a system incapable of reproducing and securing itself under the current broken political ecosystem. His notion of the “non-intelligibility of power” defines today’s political apathy and reluctance to engage with and confront governance as people tend to believe that “power is exercised in a distant place behind closed doors and opaque glass by conspiracies of corrupt elites who are beholden to no one and who simply do not care.”

Moreover, under this premise, academics are dangerously perceived as part of an intellectual

elite, distanced and disenfranchised from the realities of people's lives.

As he explains, the current crisis of governance must be analyzed within the “structural circumstances” that have contributed to its emergence in the first place. These conditions have developed over time. As we can infer, these dynamic constellations of historical and cultural changes encompass fractures at the core of the Cold War order and the repositioning of the United States within the global marketplace. They also respond to cultural aspirations and the deceptions surrounding its claimed exceptionality, and the dismantling of collective modes of state welfare. In this context, against what Eley describes as the systematic institutionalization of “non-accountable immunity,” solidarity emerges as a solid point of departure and collective engagement for change. Here, the politics of hope is embraced broadly as an ecosystem that includes grassroots activists, educators, politicians, unions, religious groups, and the exchange of ideas in all public forms.

This leads us to Jamon Jordan's essay, in which he masterfully outlines the many intersecting mechanisms, cultural expressions, and epistemic maneuvers that define the legacies of resistance among African Americans. He traces these legacies back to the fight against enslavement and the forced confinement of Africans at the beginning of slavery. He describes a consistent process of reclaiming humanness and wholeness beyond the maneuvers of greed, consumption, trade, and exploitation that have shaped their history and relationship with the United States. Jordan's essay is as much about the unstoppable force that has driven a community to craft different presents and futures, aiming for social, economic, and cultural change. He links the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Art Movement, and many other legal and extralegal struggles and victories (along with marches, boycotts, and protests, including the modern Black Lives Matter movement) into a continuous constellation of defiance and self-valorization that stretches from the period of slavery to the present and into the future.

As he explains, the worlds of the secular, the religious, and the legal, along with education, housing and healthcare access, and the right to aesthetic sovereignty, are all interconnected and codependent, forming part of a larger project of emancipation and self-determination. As he writes, “there is no separation between what our foremothers and forefathers did and what we’re doing today.” This is not a revisionist historical maneuver. Rather, it illustrates that the struggles of African Americans are not new. Furthermore, it affirms that the community has always been prepared and is continually preparing for the current times and the challenges of tomorrow. This dissolution stems from the belief that we have arrived, and everything is done. Emancipation occurs as a collective project.

The following essay by Megan Flattley navigates a similar structure, but now through the lens of history and art. Almost akin to a guided museum visit with its many wings, Flattley invites readers into an open museum without walls, one that exists across the Americas, from Argentina

to the United States, as an interconnected set of artistic expressions defined by justice and hope. As she explains, “Art has the unique ability to visualize alternatives to the present.” Moreover, “in order to build better worlds, we must first be able to imagine them.” Art provides a venue for communities facing struggle, invisibility, and disenfranchisement to envision emancipation on their own terms, beyond what may seem possible or even fixable in the current moment.

For Flattley, art has guided humanity through some of its most politically repressive periods in history, including the traumas of “military dictatorships and [state-sanctioned] violence.” It illuminates and guides people, even employing sarcasm and humor, to highlight the dark ironies that life can bring. Furthermore, art and artists serve as both archives and archivists, capable of documenting the histories of struggles, victories, and joys of people and communities. As Flattley explains, “art is at the core of what makes us human,” especially during “times of dehumanizing rhetoric and policies.” In many ways, we can say that art, as a loyal companion,

walks with humanity through our most tumultuous and joyous moments.

I argue that these essays should not be interpreted as recipes or manuals for merely understanding the present or predicting our future. Instead, they demonstrate that the United States is not a completed project, but one that is continually evolving and transforming. These essays speak to a humanity that believes not only in the possibility of a better world but also in the capacity to move forward, even when it feels as though we are moving backward. This collection of essays represents an act of hope and defiance against the notion that the future is predetermined and cannot be changed. On the contrary, these scholars call us to action, advocating for a radical sense of empathy and the enactment of a counter-narrative for the future. Because collective social action for change keeps one eye on the past, it is anchored in the present and always moves toward the future.

This was particularly highlighted in a recent lecture I attended by associate researcher Mara C. Ostfeld, the current director of the

Center for Racial Justice at the Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. In discussing the precariousness of our current times, she stated, “Remember, the backlash is never the final chapter ... be prepared for the aftermath and the questions that will be asked, as well as the alternatives that will be required.” Here, she emphasizes that resistance to change is part of history and that epochs of deep social transformation tend to be followed by revisionist periods of pain, suffering, and realignment, which may feel like a step backward. However, the book of human history is long and enduring. It transcends any individual, culture, or even the most significant wars and pandemics. Therefore, it is imperative to develop a refined eye to see beyond immediate circumstances, even amidst the dust storm. The world moves forward despite hate, fear, and dissolution. We must (re)focus our attention to recognize the light that exists, even during times of darkness. As she noted during these challenging times, we must emphasize the “creation of systems of support, care, and joy.”

These authors provide us with tools beyond those of the dominant narrative to envision and build lasting alternatives for when the dust settles, as we cannot compromise what makes us human.

William Calvo-Quirós is the Director of the Latina/o Studies Program and an Associate Professor of American Culture at the University of Michigan. His research focuses on the connections and intersections among the multidisciplinary fields of Religion, Latino Studies, Aesthetics, and both virtual and physical spaces. Key questions guiding his work include: How do faith and religion manifest and evolve? What role do empathy and care play in motivating and inspiring people to imagine and enact the promotion of a different world?

His early work focused on car subcultures and how cars manifest American values and histories, particularly examining car customizations and their use of color and design methodologies. His award-winning book, *Undocumented Saints: The Politics of Migrating Devotions* (Oxford Press), follows the migration of popular saints from Mexico into the U.S. and the evolution of their meaning.

MODELS OF RESISTANCE IN RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF FASCISM IN WEIMAR AND TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY

GEOFF ELEY

I compose this essay as a German historian who's written about Nazism and an earlier, transnationally generalized crisis of democracy. During the first Trump presidency, I published an essay called "Is Trump a Fascist" laying out the detailed case for how I think we should proceed with an informed and careful historical comparison. I wrote, "We can look at earlier situations—in this case the kinds of crises that produced fascist politics in the past—in order to measure them against the severity and form of the crisis we're facing in the present."

So why begin by looking at the early 20th century? Well, until we understand what we're up against, we won't properly grasp how to oppose it.

Fascism is more than simply an extreme rightist politics. It denotes a far more specific agenda. It breaks aggressively with what came before. Rather than arguing with its opponents, it wants to suppress and even kill them. It prefers an authoritarian state over democracy. It pits an aggressively exclusionary idea of the nation against the pluralism that values and prioritizes difference.

What makes fascism different? Fascism embraces political violence, the need for authoritarianism, the dismantling of constitutional democracy, and the virtues of a violently non-inclusive patriotism. It pursues an adversarial politics of refusal driven by an angry, disappointed, and disbelieving alienation from the long-accepted rules of the polity. It polarizes popular hopes around fantasies of national renewal (MAGA) and “extra-systemic solutions” [solutions beyond the accepted political frameworks]. Hardwiring those hopes are multiple anxieties about the wholeness of the nation and the boundaries of its endangered integrity.

Trump’s personal views aren’t really the point, it seems to me. By affinities, affiliations, and

self-stylizing, it's clear by now where he stands. His rhetoric mirrors fascist and neo-Nazi tropes and ideas. When he tweets this or that slogan, when he rails against the beltway and the Washington elite-establishment and the rottenness of the party system, when he talks about “draining the swamp,” he speaks language directly recalling those early 20th century times. And in 2025, this is far worse than 2017.

But beyond Trump himself, we need a different order of questions. What kind of crisis explains this new politics and its arrival? What makes it seem so appealing? How does it become such a desirable “extra-systemic solution” as an alternative to the pluralism, negotiation, and coalition-building of democratic constitutionalism? What kind of crisis brings Trump's politics onto the agenda?

The answer, in my view, is the severity of a dual crisis, a doubled emergency in which two systemic breakdowns happen together. Moreover, the crisis had been building long before Trump descended that infamous escalator. It grew from processes dating at least from the early 2000s and,

in some ways, going back even further to the mid-1990s. First, the existing political processes and arrangements can no longer sustain stable governance. Second, government malfunctions so badly that it forfeits consent from the people. *That's* the kind of dual crisis we're in. The polity is broken. On the one hand, we have the withering of democratic practices in the state, whether inside the legislature or the relations of Presidency, Congress, and Supreme Court; or in the attack on voting rights and the conduct of elections; or in the curtailment of civil liberties and the scale of the carceral state. Equally disastrously, on the other hand, distressingly large parts of the citizenry share a kind of default belief that government means only burdensomeness, corruption, incompetence, and arrogant non-accountability. There's a still-widening popular presumption about what I'd call the *non-intelligibility of power*: the belief that power is exercised in a distant place behind closed doors and opaque glass by conspiracies of corrupt elites who are beholden to no one and who simply *do not care*.

When those two crises happen together—crisis of representation, crisis of consent; government paralysis, democratic impasse—we're in deep trouble. And that's where I begin. Not with Trump personally, but with the structural circumstances of this particularly severe doubled crisis.

So what follows, in terms of effective opposition? What can earlier histories tell us in that regard? For me, certain features of the crisis of Weimar in 1930-33 Germany resonate strongly with what we're experiencing now. I'll pick out five elements that have particular resonance for ourselves.

First, there's the directly constitutional aspect: paralysis of governance and the post-1930 democratic impasse, plus the non-accountable independence of executive power. The suspension of parliamentary process and oversight in March 1930 and the beginning of government by executive decree look very similar to what we've been experiencing now.

Next comes the non-accountable immunity of the key economic decision-making

including the power of financial institutions and the untouchable authority of the accompanying economic expertise. In response to the Great Depression after 1929-30, national governance (whether in Germany or country by country elsewhere) was massively constrained by the power of the big banks, which itself reached back through the 1920s. Certain ironclad rules of economic policy-making laid down over many years, regarding the necessary priorities and permissible reach of how government could act in the economy, were normatively accepted across nearly all of the party spectrum. Those rules unbudgeably restricted the possible options for managing the economy and its prospects. In the early 1930s, no less than now, those ironclad assumptions unrelentingly required drastic cuts in any and all public spending. Then, as now, fiscal dogmas and financial instruments essentially called the shots. Whether structurally or in the generalized common sense of the economy, *their* authority and the associated expertise have not been open to question. For the bulk of conservative and liberal opinion in that earlier setting, anything

smacking of *redistributive* social and economic policy was absolutely beyond the pale. In our present moment, in unexpected places, certain cracks have appeared in that orthodoxy (e.g. in current Republican disregard for balanced budgets, indebtedness, and soaring deficits), but the underlying immunities of non-accountable financial institutions and their decision-making (“Wall Street” in common parlance) have stayed immovably intact. That has immense implications for how politics can be conducted.

A third similarity is the accelerating turn after 1930 to economic protectionism and tariffs.

Fourth, the escalating political anxieties in the Germany of 1930-32 were fueled not only by job loss, hunger, destitution, and lack of relief, but also by a generalized social fear and its effects. Rising Nazi support came less from *direct* personal suffering from unemployment, household collapse, business failure, or bankruptcy (horrendous realities though these were), than from intensifying social worries about such things. German electoral behavior was driven by worsening political anxieties, bordering for many

on panic, and by widening perceptions of a societal crisis with no apparent way out. For that burgeoning Nazi electorate, *authoritarian* remedies (rather than any strengthening of democracy) seemed increasingly the only choice. But by 1932 in Germany, the political nation and its organized voices were very evenly polarized. After November 1932 elections, which saw the Nazis *lose* 2 million votes, many in the left-based Social Democratic Party (SPD) were *calling* for a stand. Instead, the leadership of the Reichsbanner, that pro-democracy party's paramilitary wing, started burning their membership lists to protect its veterans from persecution. Those were the stakes in 1932 in Germany.

Finally, Germany's January 1933 outcome—the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor—was not actually a fascist seizure of power but a new coalition government, a regime of stabilization charged with restoring order by authoritarian means as essential for economic recovery. Only two ministries were held by Nazis themselves in that first government. Government was continuous with earlier cabinets of experts,

especially for the economy, finance, justice, foreign affairs, and defense. In the cause of restabilizing society, in other words, power elites showed themselves ready to ally with the fascists.

Where Can Resistance Occur?

In this present moment of danger, if we see equivalent dimensions of crisis, how can democracy be upheld? What political choices do we have?

With the current assaults on democracy, Trump, no less than Hitler, is following through on clearly stated commitments, namely—and this is a quote about Hitler—“to reshape the political conditions within which the economy could function.”

Since January 2025, we’ve passed very abruptly, I think, to our own 1933. And again, this is not entirely or exactly the same. Crises don’t map or mirror exactly. If democracies often fall into crisis, each does so in its own historically specific way. But structurally, I think we *can* speak of similarities, resonances and

equivalences. In his concept of the “dual state,” Ernst Frankl, an early 20th century political scientist who emigrated to the U.S. from Germany, contrasted the *normative state*, which operates by set rules and regulations, and the *prerogative state*, “which exercises unlimited arbitrariness [e.g. unaccountable executive orders] and violence unchecked by any legal guarantees.” Here and now, in the United States, in real time, the one is being aggressively imposed over the other.

But the seizure of power in 1933 happened with spectacular, devastating speed. The term used to describe that process was *Gleichschaltung*. It means putting into the same gear; getting onto the same page; coordinating; synchronizing; centralizing; silencing sources of critique and impedance. That was brutally sudden in 1933. Heedlessly violent. And devastatingly successful.

But there remain some important distinctions. I’ll mention five areas where we can still find some pause. At the same time, however, they pinpoint the spaces where bad things have certainly been happening.

1. The Nazi centerpiece was the Enabling Act of March 23, 1933, which freed the state from existing checks and accountability; empowered its executive action; brought the banning and self-disbanding of parties; and closed down parliamentary arenas. Within three months, by May 1933, the entire infrastructure of constitutional democracy, collective associational action, and civil society was in shreds.

With that kind of speed, synchronized penetration, and heedless use of state-authorized repressive violence, *Gleichschaltung* hasn't happened now. Shocking changes tumble one after another, helter-skelter, on a daily basis, to be sure: the chaotic despotism of Trump's behavior in the White House per se; closure or dismantling of government programs and entire departments; slashing of federal services and employment; expansion of capacities for Homeland Security, ICE, all levels of policing, and militarized security; cultural militarization; criminalizing of dissent; normalizing of detention and enhancement of carceral powers; the enabling impetus of a rightwing Supreme Court majority. If still

hectically all over the place and provisionally impeded, these initiatives are definitely a test—of the procedural resilience of constitutional democracy (those proverbial “guard rails”); of the practical meanings of the rule of law; of citizens’ authoritarian receptiveness; of just how far (and how quickly) it’s possible for Trump to go. Attacks on federal bureaucracy certainly mirror the Nazis’ 1933 Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which enforced loyalty tests and “non-political” conformity, while initiating a political and racial purge. Trump’s executive orders may not be an Enabling Act, but they most definitely announce the prerogative state.

2. Hitler’s Enabling Act had its violent correlate in the Reichstag Fire Act of February 28, 1933 (exploiting the opportunity provided by an anarchist’s arson of the parliamentary building), which declared a state of emergency, suspended civil liberties, and banned the extremely large and popular Communist Party. It unleashed the violence of the SA (the Nazis’ armed paramilitary wing) and state police against opponents in a

surge of killing, beatings, ransacking, and carceral roundups, creating countless torture sites and the first concentration camps. During the rest of 1933, this wave of viciously violent repression continued building through the despicable anti-Jewish violence, banning of books and ideas, sweeps of “a-socials,” the socially despised, and the unhomed, and the detention of probably 200,000 opponents by close of the year.

That hasn’t happened either. Members of Congress and other elected representatives, public servants who’ve run afoul of the current President, along with sundry “enemies of the state” (stigmatized as “the insane radical left”), may have been arrested or charged under bogus pretexts. But they’ve not yet been taken to torture sites, stripped and whipped into unconsciousness, and dumped into rivers. At the same time, we don’t need mass roundups, heedless paramilitary rampage, ransacking of neighborhoods, or full-scale concentration camps to find helpful analogies. “Alligator Alcatraz” is distressingly reminiscent of Nazi thinking, sometimes right down to the phraseologies used. Those

dangers profoundly threaten extremely large, disregarded, demonized, and otherwise marginalized or vulnerable populations. Nor is it hard to imagine our own “Reichstag Fire Moment”: a new 9/11 perhaps; a new Black Lives Matter (BLM) explosion; a particular mass shooting; an assassination. We can easily imagine a crisis of that magnitude. The assassination of Charlie Kirk triggered the kind of political language, especially the generalized demonizing of political enemies, that sounds distressingly like Germany in early-1933, often in exactly the same words. As troops cover the streets of LA, DC, Memphis, and Portland, our own “Reichstag Fire Moment” comes distressingly ever closer. *Then*, we’re in a genuine state of emergency. For “resistance” purposes, that means preparedness, strategic anticipation, attentiveness to provocations, and so forth.

3. Third, immediately after January 30, 1933, the German courts were Nazified. Two days before the Enabling Act, special courts were created for political crimes. Incredibly rapidly,

judicial independence was gone. That's still a clear difference from the present so far. But the reckless attacks on judicial process and judiciary; hate campaigns against particular liberal or progressive judges and their rulings; clogging of political process by cynical use of the courts; shameless politicizing of Justice Department and FBI; even arrests of especially courageous judges—all these are equally clear indications of where things are going. It remains to be seen how far the courts and legal recourse can remain effective grounds of impedance. The most recent steps in the politicizing of the Justice Department and FBI—which are so egregiously bare-faced and cynically heedless—don't leave many grounds for confidence.

4. In Germany in 1933, universities, scholarly institutes, scientific research, and critical knowledge production were instantly reduced to conformity and quiescence. That certainly occurred by directly enforced control. But no less effective were intimidation, blackmail, ideological interventions, and critics' exclusion

and denunciation. Incomparably more complex, variegated, and dispersed, U.S. higher education can't be swung as easily into the generalized conformity the Nazis so brutally imposed. But leading institutions have fallen into line with unseemly speed, craven abjection, and worrying completeness. Similar can be said of print and televisual media, of the professions, and of many parts of organized civil society. How far, in any of these areas, critical independence will manage to persist also remains to be seen. At the literal time of writing (late-September 2025), the Trump administration's ambitions have been dangerously ramped up, and the apparent misfire of the Jimmy Kimmel persecution may well prove a temporary respite.

5. Finally, federalism remains vitally important, whether as constitutional infrastructure, protected governance, or continuing political space. Dismantling federalism was a key part of the pre-Nazi authoritarian creep in Germany during 1930-33. By April 1933, Nazis had replaced federal states with centrally appointed officials.

That hasn't yet been happening (although DC is less an anomalous opening than a calculated pilot operation). But from the major bastions of Texas and Florida to the wider chorus of smaller Republican-ruled states, state-level policy-makers have long been blazing the way, whether as camp followers, stalking horses, or vanguards. In face of this authoritarian, insistently anti-democratic devolution, Blue-State independence becomes an ever-more crucial resource.

How to Resist Today

During the final crisis of Weimar in 1932-33, the fascist momentum I've described was incredibly fast. What could people have done to make a difference? How do you uphold democratic accountability under that kind of severity of crisis?

What about constructive resistance in our own present moment? There's no shortage of exhortations, guidance, and lists. In March 2025, Jigna Desai, a professor in the Department of Feminist Studies at UC, Santa Barbara, posted "20 Actions to Defend Higher Education" on

Facebook.¹ On April 1, in *YES! Magazine*, Arun Gupta published “10 Organizing Principles for Defeating Trumpism 2.0.” There are many more examples.

To conclude, I have six general propositions:

Despite all attacks and erosions, we still have two enormous assets: education and the public sphere. That means education and schooling as a whole, not just higher education. Likewise, “public sphere” means public communication and activism of thought in contemporary electronic forms, and not just traditional or legacy media, such as print newspapers.

Second, resistance begins from the ground. It’s personal; it’s existentialist (involving a moral choice, under pressure of current events); it’s local (coming from our immediate circumstances). It reaches from the big-city rallies, through the street-corner placarding, to the chat-groups in rural Nebraska townships. Via transmission, resonance, and deliberate diffusion, demonstration effects

can aggregate to solidarity. When more widely circulated and further transmitted, as knowledge of them ripples outwards, and if they're deliberately diffused in organized ways, the demonstration effects can build into impressively larger-scale solidarity.

Effective resistance builds from the citizenry.

Opposition needs not only leaders setting a lead but citizens roiling the streets. Legislators need to speak to listeners outside. They need to use parliamentary platforms to challenge the given rules of the politically possible. They should be bridging creatively from the committee room to the street. The one rarely works without the other. That's the third point.

Fourth, under the dual crisis I've outlined, the broadest democratic defense is essential. And that means the greatest breadth of coalitioning across the bewildering array of multifarious progressive agencies currently seeking our attention: progressive caucuses of left-of-center parties, movements and general organizations;

news sites, web-based platforms, left magazines and newspapers, and lobbying groups; countless vote-defending initiatives and single-issue campaigns, including feminist, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+, poverty-related, anti-racist, migrant-defending, trade-union, environmentalist, public health, civil liberties, human rights, anti-hate, and other drives. It means building an urgent conversation across these usually discrete activities. Only then might the party establishments be moved more decisively in needed directions. It's astonishing to observe the endless proliferation of new campaigns and organizations. We need coalitioning and economies of scale. An example is the 50501 movement ("50 protests, 50 states, 1 movement") that's been coordinating demonstrations since February 5, 2025, by partnering with Bernie Sanders' *Political Revolution*, *We (the People) Dissent*, and *Women's March*.

Resistance needs spectacle: imaginatively conceived, attention-grabbing public intervention. Cory Booker's April 2025 25-hour marathon speech protesting the constitutional

crisis of Donald Trump's presidency and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency is one thing. Direct action is even better. New versions of Mario Savio's 1964 "bodies upon the gears" speech are urgently needed. What if, synchronized for the same moment, teams of legislators, activists, and citizens chained themselves to symbolic buildings across all 50 states? That would be resistance spectacle. What if the assembled past and present Democrat grandees held a common press conference to denounce Trump and read a common-good manifesto? Why hasn't that happened? Astonishing, really, given all the anxieties repeatedly being expressed.

Finally, resistance is fundamentally a battle of ideas. Talismanically invoking the Constitution or "Our Democracy," let alone the incanting of "Joy," no longer does the trick. These people no longer believe in democracy, the Constitution, or the proverbial rule of law. So, in response, we need determined, unapologetic, eloquent, and compelling advocacy of precisely the values and purposes that they're currently placing under

ban: human decency and respect; public goods; socio-cultural diversity; equality of treatment; and democratic inclusion.

Conclusion

These forms and grounds of resistance owe little directly to the anti-Nazi precedent. Whether in detailed circumstances, institutional resources, or available democratic capacities, that earlier political conjuncture (1930s Germany and Europe) is so markedly different from our own today. To be blunt: before 1933 in Germany (and before 1922 in Italy) could be found the strongest socialist and Communist parties under capitalism. But in 2025 in the USA, there is ... what?

So, the purpose of these thoughts is less to find particular models or examples of resistance that might be directly applied in the present. Rather, it's to identify helpful grounds of comparison for the kind of challenges we're now facing. As I've argued in the earlier part of this essay, it's the convergent conditions of a general

political emergency—in a crisis of representation and a crisis of consent; government paralysis and democratic impasse—that provide the best place to begin. With respect to 1933, the most important place of equivalence—the one that helps us most in thinking about the present—is the character of that dual crisis, its similar coordinates, and its distinctive extremes of severity.

NOTES

1. Jigna Desai, “*20 Actions to Defend Higher Education.*” Google Doc, March 2025. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ga6xWJyRfeU5ltpla5yEat0aMDY3ffGo/view>

Geoff Eley is a British-born historian of Germany. In 1979, he began teaching at the University of Michigan in the Department of History and, in 1997, within the Department of German Studies. He served as the Karl Pohrt Distinguished University Professor of Contemporary History at Michigan.

Eley's early work focused on radical nationalism in Imperial Germany and fascism but grew to include theoretical and methodological reflections on the history of the political left in Europe. He has just finished the first two volumes of a three-volume history of Europe in the 20th Century, while completing *Genealogies of Nazism: Conservatives, Radical Nationalists, and Fascists in Germany, 1860-1945*.

His work on the history of Germany and the authoritarian regimes of the interwar period; the role of class, gender, and race in current debates within the field of historiography; and the inextricable trajectories of European democracy and the European left gives him an insightful

understanding of today's political momentum. In particular, his contributions in the field of history have transformed the way we deal with the origins and the nature of autocratic politics, the history of the non-Stalinist left, and the liaisons between history and politics.

REBELLIONS WORK

PROTEST AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE

JAMON JORDAN

We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.

At the time this piece was first published on August 26, 2020, there had been close to 70 days of ongoing national and global protests against police killings and anti-Black racism since the police killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

Yet, even with protesters in the streets daily, police killings of unarmed Black people have continued.

Some folks have asked, “What does protest ever get us?” Many have said, “Rioting never solves anything.” And still others have declared,

“Marching and protesting are outdated and don’t work, if they ever did.”

But they do.

Protest as an act of resistance to oppression is a staple of American culture. The very founding of the United States is connected to protest, which exists in myriad demonstrations.

Here are the receipts.

The Beginning

In 1767, the British government passed the Townshend Acts, which placed high tariffs on many British imported goods. Almost immediately, in the British North American colony of Massachusetts, there were violent protests against the acts. Numerous riots broke out.

From 1768-1770, there were constant protests and street battles between the American colonists and British soldiers culminating on March 5, 1770, when British soldiers fired on a crowd of 300, hitting 11 protesters and killing

five, including a Black man named Crispus Attucks. What came to be known as the Boston Massacre, and the later protest—the Boston Tea Party—are often cited as the beginnings of the movement for the American Revolution, which brought about the independence of the 13 colonies from Great Britain, and the establishment of the United States of America. But it did not lead to independence or freedom for Black people.

However, before Crispus Attucks joined the protest at the Custom House on King Street in 1770, Black people had been protesting and resisting oppression by British, French, Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish citizens who were the perpetrators of the Transatlantic Slave Trade—the largest forced migration in history.

Beginning in the mid-1400s, the capturing, trading, warehousing, and enslaving of Africans by Europeans as well as the transporting, selling, and buying of these enslaved people were aggressively protested by African people. Many know of the Amistad

mutiny and the Nat Turner rebellion against slavery, but the resistance to slavery did not begin on the plantations or the slave ships.

It began on the continent of Africa.

Much discussion has centered the role Africans, particularly African rulers, played in the slave trade, yet there has been less discussion about the fight West Africans waged against slavery. Villagers and townspeople built fortifications and set up warning systems to prevent slave raids by both Europeans and slave traders from enemy ethnic groups.

King Mvemba, also known as King Afonso I, of the Kingdom of Kongo, in the 1500s, began writing letters to the Portuguese condemning the slave trade in his kingdom. These anti-slavery writings of an African ruler are the prototype for the anti-slavery newspapers of the 1800s in the United States.

In the 1600s, after failed negotiations and treaties with the Portuguese, Queen Nzinga Mbande of the African kingdoms of Ndongo and Matamba (present-day Angola), went to war

with Portugal, largely over slave trading in her kingdom.

She not only led her soldiers in battle but also fought a guerrilla war using trenches and hidden caves, and accumulated supplies to prepare the people for a long war. She decreed her kingdom a safe haven for people escaping enslavement by the European colonists. Queen Nzinga is just one example of the fact that Black women have always been at the forefront of the struggle against oppression.

Even after being captured and forced onto slave ships for the Middle Passage, enslaved Africans resisted by organizing hunger strikes and rebellions. Many committed suicide by jumping overboard. About one-tenth of all slave ship voyages had major slave revolts. Many more experienced other forms of resistance.

Slave ship rebellions were so costly for European slave traders that many began to avoid certain regions known for revolts, such as Upper Guinea. Subsequently, there would be fewer enslaved Africans from this region.

When Africans were brought into the “New World”—the Caribbean, Brazil, Central America, and what would become the United States and Canada, they resisted on every level. They broke the tools, burned the crops, refused to work, worked slowly on purpose, made fun of the slaveowners, poisoned the food, and organized slave rebellions.

In the 1700s, New York had a large population of enslaved Africans. In 1712, there was a slave revolt, and in 1741 there was a plan for an even larger uprising. In the 1730s and 1740s, Manhattan had the largest population of enslaved Africans in Britain’s 13 colonies, except for one other city—Charleston, South Carolina.

In 1739, the Stono rebellion, the largest revolt against enslavement in the 13 colonies, took place in South Carolina. Forty Africans and 20 White colonists were killed in the uprising.

There were hundreds of rebellions during the period of slavery—some small, some major.

Rebellions worked.

Today's protests are no different. They're modern-day uprisings, or rebellions, and part of every era of U.S. history.

Cultural Resistance as Protest

“National liberation is necessarily an act of culture.” —Amilcar Cabral

In the recent Black Lives Matter protests, we see musicians, poets, singers, visual artists, dancers, and others using various arts and cultural presentations to support the movement. The reality is, these cultural presentations are themselves protests against anti-Black racism that draw upon a long history of cultural resistance that spans from the African continent to the slave plantations to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s to the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and '70s to the conscious hip hop movement of the 1980s and '90s to the present-day movement for Black lives.

And even those movements drew from the practice of Africans speaking in their native languages in order to resist the forced imposition of the slaveowners' language. They used their African names among each other, rather than the names given to them by enslavers. Many held on to their traditional African religions or Islam rather than convert to Christianity—the slaveowners' religion. When Africans did practice Christianity, they largely interpreted it through their own cultural lens and saw God as a liberator on the side of the enslaved. They performed rituals, art, and drum and dance to hold on to their African traditions. These forms of cultural resistance helped to retain African culture, which became the foundation for African American culture. These African cultural retentions are easily seen in the variety of Black music, dance, language, clothing styles, worship styles, and family organization.

If slaveowners had been successful in totally removing all vestiges of African culture from enslaved Africans, there would be no African cultural retentions such as call-and-response at

Black churches, parties, and concerts, no pouring of libations for honored ancestors, and no Ebonics or African American Vernacular English, no Jamaican Patois, and no Haitian Kreyol. There would be no African spiritual systems like Haitian Vodou, Louisiana Voodoo, Cuban Santería, Brazilian Candomblé, and no distinct Black Church in America.

Legal Resistance as Protest

From the writing and adoption of the Constitution to the 13th Amendment, the enslavement of African people was still legal in the United States. However, another area of resistance to slavery would strike directly at the underpinning of the peculiar institution—the law.

We all know, or should know, the Dred Scott case. *Dred Scott v. Sandford* was a U.S. Supreme Court case in which Dred Scott, an enslaved Black man, sued for his freedom, as well as the freedom of his wife and children, based on the fact that they had lived with their slave-

owner in Illinois and Wisconsin, a state and territory, respectively, where slavery was prohibited.

The Supreme Court ruled 7-2 against Dred Scott, in a decision that proclaimed that Black people were not citizens and had “no rights which the White man was bound to respect.”

However, before the Dred Scott case, which gave momentum to the abolitionist movement, and was a catalyst for the Civil War, there were hundreds of lawsuits for freedom. In 1781, the case *Brom and Bett v. Ashley* made it to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, which ruled in favor of Elizabeth Freeman, known as Mum Bett, and granted her freedom. This case provided the legal foundation for ending slavery in Massachusetts.

When we think of legal challenges to racial discrimination, we most often reflect on the NAACP’s courtroom battles to end segregation, most famously in schools, culminating in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the 1954 case in which the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that segregated schools are unconstitutional.

Legal challenges have been consistently used in concert with other forms of protest, such as freedom rides, sit-ins, marches, and boycotts.

Boycotts

Boycotts, like so much of Black protest traditions, trace back to the abolitionist movement.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) churches organized a major boycott of goods produced by those enslaved in 1830. The churches played a major role in organizing both the Colored Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania, an all-Black male organization, and the Colored Female Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania, created and led by Black women.

The boycott targeted sugar and cotton produced on Southern and Caribbean plantations. They not only boycotted goods produced by the enslaved, but they presented alternatives for sugar and cotton produced by free

men and women, as well as their own distribution networks and retail stores.

The AME church continued its activism beyond the fight against slavery. In 1930, the Detroit Housewives League was formed by members of Bethel AME Church in Detroit. They organized boycotts of businesses that refused to hire Black people or treated Black customers disrespectfully. They were successful in getting African Americans employed at White-owned businesses that previously refused to hire Black workers, while at the same time offering Black-owned alternatives to these discriminatory establishments and promoting Black entrepreneurship as a response to racism in White stores. In 1933, the women instituted a national organization known as the National Housewives League of America.

One of the most famous, largest, and longest boycotts in U.S. history is the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. The extent of what most know about the boycott is that it began when Rosa Parks didn't give up her seat to a White man. What is not well known is that, before

the boycott, Jo Ann Robinson, the leader of the Women's Political Council, sent a letter to Mayor William A. Gayle, threatening a Black women-led boycott of the Montgomery buses if some serious changes were not made. Before and after Robinson's threat, there were repeated instances of Black women being harassed, mistreated, and arrested on the bus for violating the segregation ordinances.

Following the strategic Parks demonstration, the boycott was organized by the Montgomery Improvement Association and worked alongside a civil rights lawsuit, *Browder v. Gayle*, in which four Black women—Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Susie McDonald, and Mary Louise Smith—sued the mayor of Montgomery, the chief of police, and various other local and state representatives on the grounds that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional.

The boycott lasted 13 months and ended in 1956 after the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling in favor of Browder.

Marches

One of the most notable protest marches is the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. To commemorate this historical moment, and in protest against police killings and anti-Black racism, organizers planned a march in the nation's capital for August 28, 2020. It was at the 1963 March on Washington that Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous “I Have A Dream” speech, and where he addressed the racial injustices in America that were later protested all over the nation during the Black Lives Matter movement.

Since the March on Washington, there have been many more Black-led marches in Washington, D.C., including the Million Man March in 1995, led by Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, and featuring many speakers from the Black political, religious, and civil rights communities, including Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X, and civil rights legend Rosa Parks.

As we know, marching is not new.

On July 28, 1917, 15,000 Black men, women, and children silently marched, in record heat, down Fifth Avenue in New York City to protest the murders of more than 40 Black people in the 1917 race riot in East St. Louis, and the long history of lynchings, specifically the then-recent lynchings of Black men in Memphis, Tennessee and Waco, Texas. They carried signs with anti-lynching messages, as well as messages proclaiming Black humanity and dignity.

The march was organized by the NAACP, then led by James Weldon Johnson, as well as two prominent Black Harlem churches—St. Philip’s Episcopal Church and the Fourth Moravian Church.

Five years later, on June 14, 1922, there was a similar march of 5,000 Black people on Washington D.C. This was the first civil rights march on Washington, D.C. in the 20th century. The march was meant to push federal legislation against lynching. However, the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was filibustered by Southern

segregationist congressmen and died on the House floor in December of the same year.

In 1940, on the eve of the United States' entry into World War II, the Armed Forces were still segregated. African Americans who served in the military were treated as second-class soldiers, and when they returned, they were treated as second-class citizens. A. Philip Randolph, leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Walter White, leader of the NAACP, and Thomas Arnold Hill of the National Urban League met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and demanded an immediate end to segregation in all of the armed forces.

When the White House rebuffed the Black leaders' demands, Randolph planned a March on Washington as a mass protest against the President and segregation in the armed forces. The March was scheduled for July of 1941.

The march, to be funded entirely by Black people, was expected to draw 100,000 Black people. Black newspapers, especially the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Amsterdam News*

were instrumental in getting the word out about the protest.

Roosevelt was unsuccessful in getting Randolph to call off the march and later compromised. A week before the march was to take place, Roosevelt announced the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), which would prohibit discrimination in federal training programs. But that wasn't enough, nor was it what the Black leaders demanded, and four days before the march, although he still didn't end segregation in the armed forces, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which officially established the FEPC and prohibited discrimination in the defense industry and in companies with defense contracts.

Randolph then canceled the march, but for the next six years, he continued to use a potential march as a pressure tool to get the federal government to move forward against anti-Black discrimination. In 1948, President Harry Truman outlawed segregation in the armed forces.

Self-Determination as Protest

Another aspect of resistance to racism has been the tradition of African Americans building their own institutions. Discriminated against in White churches, they founded their own churches and denominations—and did the same for schools, banks, etc.

When two free Black men—Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, both Methodist ministers, protested discrimination at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, their demands for change were denied. In 1787, Allen and Jones left and founded the Free African Society, a Black institution devoted to providing assistance to those escaping from slavery as well as other Black people who needed assistance in Philadelphia. Out of that institution, two others would be formed—the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, the oldest Black Episcopal congregation in the United States, and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the oldest independent Protestant denomination founded by Black people.

The land and building of the Free African Society became the site for Mother Bethel AME Church and is the oldest piece of land continuously owned by Black people in the United States.

This process happened over and over.

In Detroit, First Baptist Church, a White-led church with a significant number of Black members, not only segregated the seating in the church, but had other rules for its Black members.

Black members could not become ushers, deacons, or ministers.

Black members had to pay their tithes on time or be kicked out of the church.

Black members had to be to church on time and could not be absent, or they would be kicked out of the church.

The Black members left First Baptist and founded Second Baptist Church in Detroit. Second Baptist, the oldest Black congregation in Michigan, became the center of the abolitionist movement and served as a major station on the Underground Railroad, as well as the first school for Black people in Detroit.

There were numerous business districts developed by African Americans throughout the United States. In Detroit, this business district was known as Paradise Valley, and included 350 Black-owned businesses, including clubs, restaurants, hotels, bars, shops, law offices, mortuary services, real estate developers, and so much more.

The most famous of these Black business districts was the Greenwood section of Tulsa, Oklahoma, which became known as Black Wall Street. Whereas Paradise Valley in Detroit was destroyed when the land was seized by eminent domain in the 1950s in order to build a freeway, Black Wall Street was destroyed in a bitter race riot in 1921 when White violence—backed by the city—resulted in the deaths of up to 300 people and the destruction of millions of dollars' worth of property.

The Abolitionist Movement Paves the Way for Other Movements

When it comes to protesting against racism, and using the tactics of rebellion, cultural

resistance, legal challenges, boycotts, marches, and building Black-led institutions, the model comes not from the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, but the abolitionist movement.

Although many of us have been taught that the abolitionist movement was an anti-slavery movement composed mostly of Quaker Whites, we need to remove the idea of a “White savior” movement and adjust our lenses if we want to clearly see what the abolitionist movement really was—a movement largely organized and led by free Black men and women with important White allies who worked with and sometimes under the leadership of these Black men and women.

Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth are not exceptions—that’s the way the abolitionist movement, including the Underground Railroad, actually worked.

Abolitionists published anti-slavery newspapers, lobbied local and state governments to end slavery in the states where it existed, and prevented slave catchers from capturing freedom seekers to return them to slavery. They wrote and

published thousands of slave narratives—the most famous being those of Frederick Douglass (who wrote three: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*; *My Bondage and My Freedom*; and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*), Harriet Jacobs (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*), and Olaudah Equiano (*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*).

Black abolitionists were orators who gave public speeches to both educate the mostly Northern White public and motivate them to support the abolitionist cause. The most well-known of these speakers was, of course, Frederick Douglass, but Sojourner Truth, Charles Lenox Remond, and his sister, Sarah Parker Remond, were also very well known as powerful speakers against slavery. Charles and Sarah Remond are among the first Black abolitionist public orators and were highly influential in their anti-slavery speeches. Frederick Douglass named one of his sons, Charles Remond Douglass, after Charles Lenox Remond.

The Underground Railroad, which could only exist with the diligence of free Black men and women, was, besides slave rebellions, the most radical component of the abolitionist movement. Neither “underground” nor a “railroad,” the Underground Railroad used railroad terminology to refer to the people, places, and routes that helped enslaved Black people—known as “cargo” or “passengers”—escape from slavery. The safe houses, which included homes, attics, closets, basements, hidden wall areas, barns, churches, and other areas, were known as “stations” or “depots.” The property owner or manager of the safe house was known as a “stationmaster.” Abolitionists that told enslaved Black people about the railroad were known as “agents” or “shepherds.” Those who raised and provided funds and other resources to the Underground Railroad were known as “stockholders.”

Anyone who helped guide or transport freedom seekers from one site to another was known as a “conductor.” Harriet Tubman is the most famous Underground Railroad conductor.

The abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad also had vigilance committees that helped to organize the Underground Railroad as well as respond to slave catchers who were attempting to capture freedom seekers and return them to slavery. The most well-known was the Vigilant Committee (also Association) of Philadelphia. In Detroit, there existed two interconnected vigilance committees—the Colored Vigilant Committee of Detroit and the more secret group, the African-American Mysteries known as The Order of the Men of Oppression founded by prominent Black Detroit businessmen George DeBaptiste and William Lambert.

With its strategies of cultural resistance, sabotage, work stoppage, escape, emigration, armed rebellion, speech-making, moral persuasion, and legal challenges, the abolitionist movement provided the bulk of the activist tools for subsequent movements, like the Civil Rights Movement and the women's suffrage movement.

The women's suffrage movement is a direct descendant of the abolitionist movement.

Most of the leading suffragists were former abolitionists—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and others. And we cannot forget that Black women were also pioneering women suffragists—Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells-Barnett being two of the most well-known.

Even before slavery ended, Black leaders and activists had been organizing for both Black voting rights and women's suffrage. The right to vote, which had been a goal of Black activists since slavery, became a staple of the Civil Rights Movement.

By the time we get to the sit-ins of 1960, the Freedom Rides of 1961, the Birmingham Campaign and the March on Washington of 1963, the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, the Selma Voting Rights Campaign of 1965, the Chicago Movement of 1966, the Detroit 1967 Rebellion, and the Poor People's Campaign of 1968, we should all know the names of these organizations and their functions in the Civil Rights Movement:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, uses lobbying and litigation as its main strategies.

National Urban League (NUL), founded in 1910, focuses on social work, job training, housing, and education for African Americans.

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), founded in 1942, used nonviolent direct action, mainly freedom rides and voter registration as its main strategies.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded in 1957, used nonviolent direct action, especially boycotts, marches, and speeches as its main strategies.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), founded in 1960, used nonviolent direct action, especially sit-ins, voter registration, and grassroots organizing.

From these groups, in the 1950s and 1960s, we learn the names of leaders and activists

like Roy Wilkins, Medgar Evers, Thurgood Marshall, Whitney Young, Fred Shuttlesworth, Wyatt Tee Walker, C.T. Vivian, Andrew Young, James Bevel, Diane Nash, John Lewis, Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson, James Farmer, James Forman, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and so many others.

Although each of these organizations originally adopted nonviolence as a form of protest, by 1965, both CORE and SNCC were no longer fully wedded to the idea of nonviolence. By 1966, both groups would support self-defense and proclaim themselves as seeking Black Power.

The Black Power Movement, with the creation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense—which, by the way, instituted health care programs, community schools, and the first free breakfast program on which our modern-day school meal programs are based—became another facet of the Black liberation movement that combined the civil rights aspirations of the nonviolent organizations with the Malcolm X-inspired ideas of self-defense and various degrees of support for Black nationalism.

Just as the Black Power Movement came out of the Civil Rights Movement, so did the anti-Vietnam War Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement. In both cases, much of the leadership and many of the activists of the main anti-war and women's liberation groups had earlier been involved in civil rights. There is no Students for a Democratic Society without SNCC.

When we look at all of the progressive ideas that are still being advocated for in the age of Black Lives Matter, we need to first look back at the abolitionist movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and other eras and forms of Black protest to see the long continuum against many of the same issues:

Police violence.

Mass incarceration.

Voter disenfranchisement.

Segregated schools.

Redlining.

Health disparities.

Fighting for Health Equity

“Of all the inequalities that exist, the injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhuman.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Chicago, Illinois, March, 1966

Speaking of health disparities, single-payer universal health care was on Jesse Jackson’s 1984 and 1988 platforms long before Bernie Sanders’ 2016 or 2020 platforms.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began shutting down schools, businesses, and other institutions in March 2020, there was an acute recognition of health disparities between African Americans and White Americans. Although this has been known since before the Affordable Care Act, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010, many of today’s thinkers and activists have not looked at how Black leaders and activists addressed health care inequality in the past.

The push for national health care was initiated by Black doctors in the early 1900s.

Prohibited from joining the American Medical Association, which was founded in 1847, Black doctors—12 of them—formed the National Medical Association (NMA) in 1895. They, mostly, lobbied and spoke out in favor of health care as a right. Those doctors knew that the majority of African Americans were blocked from attaining wealth, from high-paying jobs, and from careers that supplied health insurance—only those patients who had wealth, or high incomes, or good insurance could afford to get adequate medical care. Therefore, the only way to ensure equity in health care was to have national health care.

By fighting for this, Black doctors were also fighting for medical care for poor and low-income Whites. White doctors wanted to be able to continue to use their medical practice as a road to wealth. When President Harry Truman announced a national health care plan in 1945, the White-dominated AMA spent millions of dollars on newspaper ads and billboards against national health care and banded together with Southern segregationists. W. Montague Cobb, a

leading Black physician who would become president of the NMA in 1963, was a vocal supporter of Truman's plan, and came out against the AMA.

The national health care plan, which Truman attempted to get passed a number of times between 1945 and 1950, was largely supported by the NMA, although some were against it.

The plan was ultimately blocked, but Truman's successor Dwight D. Eisenhower passed a law that provided health care to families of soldiers. Nobody wanted to fight that in public. This was the first Medicare program.

In 1957, Dr. T.R.M. Howard, a Black medical doctor from Mississippi who was a tutor to Medgar Evers and Fannie Lou Hamer, as well as a civil rights activist who led a community investigation of the murder of Emmett Till, became the head of the NMA and founded the Imhotep National Conference on Hospital Integration.

The group fought to end the practice of blocking Black patients from being admitted to

White hospitals, and they fought to end blocking Black doctors from having full medical privileges to practice at White hospitals.

In 1963, Dr. George Simkins sued the White hospital in Greensboro, N.C. on behalf of his patient who was refused admittance.

After Simkins won in the federal court of appeals, Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation in public places and institutions that received federal funding—including hospitals.

Johnson would then go on to expand Medicare to cover all Americans aged 65 and older. Also, LBJ would sign Medicaid, which covered poor and low-income Americans, into law.

Because these two government insurance programs pushed millions of dollars into hospitals all over the country, those hospitals, their lobbies, their waiting rooms, and their exam rooms, became integrated immediately.

Black patients were being seen at most hospitals in the country, and Black doctors were able to practice at most hospitals in the country.

Disparities still exist, and still Black doctors, activists, and allies continue to fight for universal health care. But there would be no Obamacare, otherwise known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, without the century-long battle for national health care that was championed early on by African American doctors of the National Medical Association.

Standing on the Shoulders of Those Who Came Before Us

Black protest has borrowed from the long activism of the abolitionist movement, the organizing of Black people during Reconstruction, the anti-lynching campaigns of the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Great Migration from the South to the North and West, the fight for integration in sports—most notably baseball—the fight for an integrated armed forces, and many other battles that we may take for granted today.

These campaigns, all of them, included not only pencil-pushing and sign-carrying by the

protesters, but bloodshed and death of protesters and non-protesters alike.

Police brutality and police killings of Black people have been the main spark for uprisings today, and for decades. The 1960s rebellions in Watts, Newark, and Detroit, as well as many others were all sparked by police brutality and killings of Black people. During the Civil Rights Movement, especially the Birmingham Campaign of 1963 and the Selma Campaign of 1965, the White segregationist police brutality of Birmingham Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor and Sheriff Jim Clark, which was televised nationally, helped to publicize the civil rights protests and morally sway people to support the efforts of the movement.

One difference we see now, especially with the Black women-organized movements of Black Lives Matter and ‘me too,’ is a strong realization that Black women have always been at the forefront of any movement for Black progress. Whether it’s the abolitionist movement, the suffragist movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the labor movement,

the Black Arts Movement—or founding churches, starting businesses, building Black institutions, or reforming schools—wherever the battlefield is, Black women are and have been on the field. BLM cofounders Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi stand on the shoulders of those women who came before them, as does ‘me too’ founder Tarana Burke.

As anti-racist allies, Whites will have to look at this history too. Otherwise, they will find themselves perpetuating the harms that existed between White allies and Black activists for centuries and may not be able to move beyond it.

They must understand that White supremacy exists within the Left too. When William Lloyd Garrison, a radical White abolitionist, wanted Frederick Douglass to continue giving lectures, Douglass decided to write not only his autobiographies, but also started his own abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*. Garrison and Douglass ended their partnership over this and other issues. But the idea that White progressives can tell Black activists what to do is still a problem in the protest movement.

White progressive activists, when it comes to protesting against racism, must accept and respect Black leadership. If Black Lives Matter, then Black leadership matters. And both African Americans and White activists must have a high respect for the movements of generations that came before them.

Most progressive policies—including guaranteed basic income, free college tuition, and universal health care—were initiatives fought for by Black people before White progressives supported them. Yesterday and today.

We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.

There is no separation between what our foremothers and forefathers did and what we're doing today. Signs like, "I am not my ancestors, I'll f—k you up!" are counterproductive, and those carrying them are either historically naive at best, or intellectually dishonest about the long movement for Black liberation, at worst.

Protesters today ain't doing nothing new:
They are standing on the shoulders of those who
came before them.

Check the receipts.

This essay is reprinted, with permission from the author, from the August 26, 2020 edition of *Yes! Magazine*.

* * * * *

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ART AS RESISTANCE

ART ACTIONS DEFINED BY JUSTICE AND HOPE

MEGAN FLATTLEY

Art has the unique ability to visualize alternatives to the present. In order to build better worlds, we must first be able to imagine them. Artistic work cannot always produce the same results as activism or political organizing, but it can complement them and ultimately shift the horizon of what is possible by cultivating our collective imagination to help citizens dream of (and subsequently demand) more just futures. As the author and theorist bell hooks noted, “the function of art is to do more than tell it like it is—it’s to imagine what is possible.”¹ Further, writer and activist adrienne maree brown argues that all political organizing is in fact science fiction.² We work towards building a better world, but we can’t know what those

results will look like. In this respect, the speculative nature of visual art is a way to practice the future in our minds.

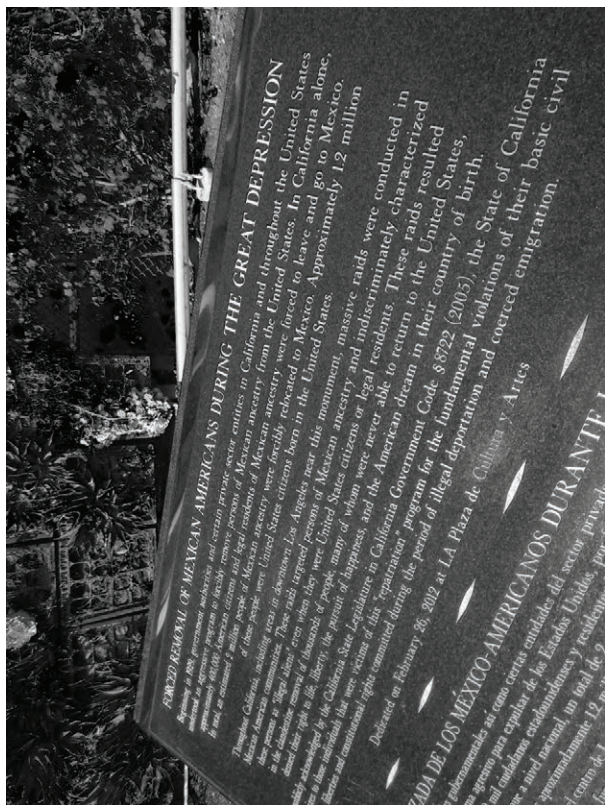
We don't have to travel across the Atlantic to see evidence of fascism in the 1930s or examples of artistic and creative resistance to authoritarian governments. During the Great Depression, the United States government embarked on a campaign of deportation and forced repatriation of Mexicans and U.S. citizens of Mexican heritage. Scholars speculate that anywhere from one to two million people were deported and that more than half of them may have been U.S. citizens.³ In the watercolor, *The Repatriated in Torreón* (1931), the Mexican artist Diego Rivera visually references the 138,000 Mexicans deported the year prior to his and Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's arrival to Detroit. This work, like the other projects in this essay, serves as an example of art's critical capacities as a site of resistance.

In 1932, businessman Edsel Ford, son of automaker Henry Ford, commissioned Rivera to paint a series of murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts. In painting the 27 fresco panels, Rivera took

the opportunity to visualize the critical role that immigrant and racialized labor made to the automotive industry in Detroit, *and* to paint visions of a more equitable workplace.

The predominance of immigrant labor meant that men working on the line might not speak the same language. Rivera testified to the importance of art as having “the advantage of speaking a language that can easily be understood by workers and peasants of all lands.”⁴ This universal language was deployed when the labor movement used the murals to organize workers. United Auto Workers delegate Ruben Alvarez recalled that, “when we organized the UAW at Ford, we used to bring delegations down to see the murals. Those who lacked words brought people down here to sign them on. They were ... inspirational.”⁵

On the North Wall of the Rivera Court, the artist imagined political alternatives by visualizing a future wherein the Ford Motor Company was racially integrated. In 1932, the River Rouge plant was heavily segregated, and Black workers were given



A memorial in downtown Los Angeles commemorates the mass expulsion of Mexican-Americans during the Great Depression. Photo: Adrian Florido/NPR.



Mexicans returning home by train; Central Station, operated by Union Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads, and located at 5th Street and Central Avenue, Downtown, Los Angeles, CA. March 8, 1932. Herald Examiner Collection, HE box 681; HE-000-282 4x5



Diego Rivera, *Repatriados en Torreón* (*The Repatriated in Torreón*), 1931, watercolor.



Diego Rivera, *North Wall. Motor Assembly*, 1933, Fresco, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.



Diego Rivera, Detail: *North Wall. Motor Assembly*, 1933, Fresco, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

the most dangerous work, typically in the foundry. Rivera's painted inclusion of workers of color on the assembly line challenges this exclusion. Further, Rivera depicted workers wearing safety equipment that was not yet part of any guaranteed workplace protections—providing another imagined future around which workers could organize for a safer workplace.

Finally, on the West Wall in the panel titled *The Interdependence of North and South*, Rivera visualized the contribution of racialized workers beyond the United States to the might of Detroit industry. Here, the artist places laborers tapping rubber trees at the Fordlandia plantation in the Amazon rainforest opposite the Detroit port and skyline. The panel's title reveals Rivera's determination to show that the industrialization and modernity of the so-called "North" depend on the resources and labor of the "South" at a time when people who arrived from Latin America were being targeted for deportation.

Artistic Work Created Under Conditions of Intense Political Repression

The second half of the 20th century in Latin America saw a devastating wave of civil and military dictatorships and state violence. The subsequent artistic expression of resistance varied in relaying overt or occluded meaning, depending on the degree of censorship and repression that artists endured in each country.

By the late 1960s, in Brazil, all standard means of communication were strictly monitored and controlled by the military regime. Thus, the artist Cildo Meireles set himself the task of “inventing alternative methods of communication ... [by] taking advantage of some of the alternate systems of circulation that already existed.”⁶ In 1969, he began the project *Insertions into Ideological Circuits*, wherein he silk-screened messages in vitrified white ink on to empty Coca-Cola bottles, which he then returned to the store for deposit and disinfection, hence inserting them into the circular economy of refillable glass containers. Meireles’ messages

only became visible when refilled and put back into circulation, now inscribed with statements such as “Yankees Go Home,” in reference to U.S. support for the military regime, or the formula for a Molotov cocktail, encouraging armed resistance.

Between 1970 and 1975, Meireles used banknotes to similar ends. After stamping the words “Who Killed Herzog?” on Brazilian currency, he spent the bills to put them back in circulation. Vladimir Herzog was a journalist who had been tortured to death by police, who then staged his death as a suicide. Meireles’ anonymous intervention employed a type of parasitical resourcefulness, subversively using existing circulation systems to challenge state narratives.

This appropriation of systems and mass messaging to expose layers of meaning, the use of humor to communicate corruption and monstrosity, and the wide circulation of artworks outside of galleries have precedent in anti-fascist photomontage. During the 1930s, John Heartfield cut and pasted photographs from newspapers—media associated with facts—to satirize Hitler and the Nazi Party by visually expressing what



Cildo Meireles, *Inserções em Circuitos Ideológicos: Projeto Coca-Cola* (Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project), 1970.



Cildo Meireles, *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos: Projeto Cédula*
(*Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Banknote Project*), 1975



Cildo Meireles, *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos: Projeto Cédula* (*Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Banknote Project*), 1975, Rubber stamp on banknote. Photo: Pedro Oswaldo Cruz.

would have been banned by censors. Heartfield's photomontages portrayed Hitler as a weak, ineffectual military leader and the German public as duped by Nazi rhetoric.

During the first year of the second Trump presidency, we saw digital tools being likewise deployed to criticize kingmakers, capitalism, and the unsanctioned use of government data. Reminiscent of Heartfield's strategies, the AI-generated video of Trump kissing the feet of Elon Musk, captioned with the words "LONG LIVE THE REAL KING," landed on the screens of employees at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Trump's installation of Musk, an unelected billionaire with no experience in government or inclination towards the public good, to head the unapproved-by-Congress "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE) led to mass layoffs of federal employees, including 4000 HUD employees, in the midst of a U.S. housing crisis. Upon the release of the video, one HUD employee commented, "Staff have viewed this as a sign of resistance that has brought a lot of joy."⁷

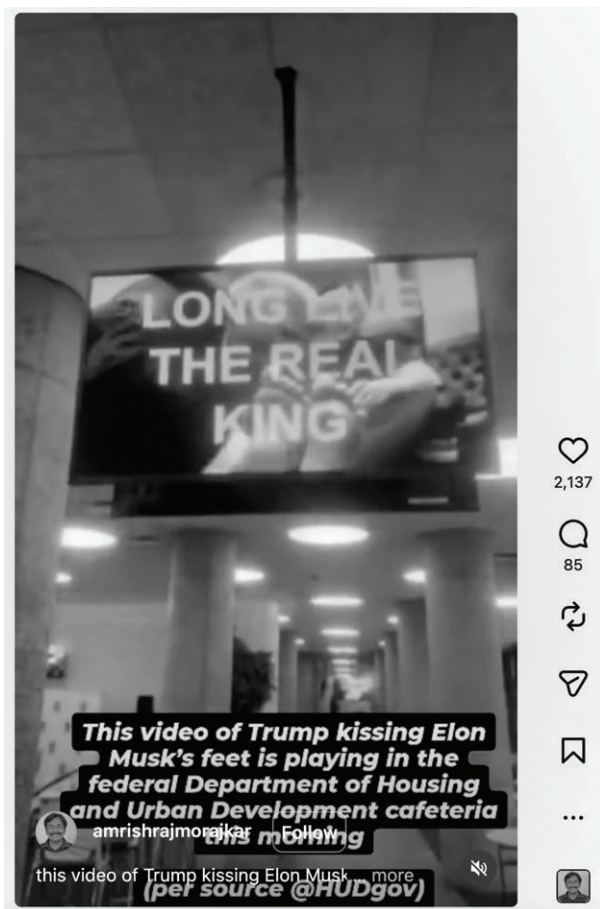
Königsaufnahme von JOHN HEARTFIELD



ADOLF, DER ÜBERMENSCH: Schluckt Gold und redet Blech

875

John Heartfield, *Adolph the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk* from the Magazine *AIZ*, 1932, rotogravure. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

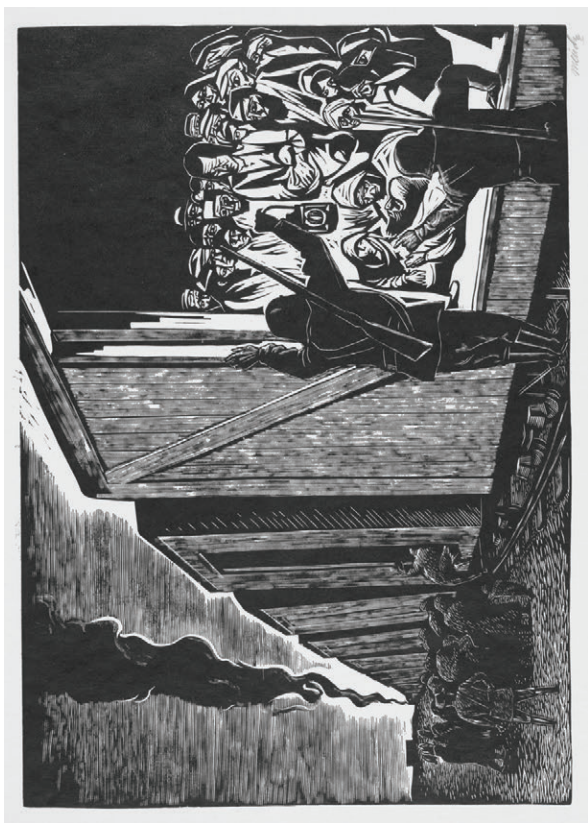


Long Live the Real King, February 24, 2025. Looping video shown on internal TV monitors at HUD headquarters. Photo Credit: Amrish Raj Morajkar (Instagram: @amrishrajmorajkar).

Art as a Means of Documentation

In times of state violence and repression, art can bear witness to traumatic experiences. The very first image referring to the Nazi concentration camps was created by a Mexican printmaker named Leopoldo Méndez in 1942. The title of the print *Deportation to Death* evokes the illegal deportation of Mexican Americans—linking fascism in Europe to the racial fascism of the United States—while the image shows families being shepherded into a train that will take them to their execution.

Associated with this project of documentation is art's ability to serve as a vehicle for the maintenance of collective memory. Peruvian artist Akito Bertran memorializes the victims of the armed conflict in Peru that occurred at the end of the 20th century. The title of this work, *15,000/70,000*, refers to the 15,000 disappeared and 70,000 killed during the conflict, the majority of whom were from Indigenous Quechua communities. The project is a quilt that uses safety pins to hold together approximately



Leopoldo Méndez. *Deportación a la Muerte (Deportation into Death)*, linocut on paper, 1942

5,000 pieces of fabric with the names and images of missing individuals. 10,000 blank squares inscribed with the word “disappeared” represent unidentified persons. Importantly, this piece is unfinished. When exhibited, Bertran invites participants to add the names and pictures of their loved ones to the long list of the disappeared. Thus, for families, this is not simply an artistic object, but a site for communal worship and reverence, and a sacred repository of the memory of their lost loved ones.⁸

In cases of the repression of political speech, art and culture can offer protection or cover for more explicitly political work. This is the case with the project *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán is Burning*), developed by a collective of artists in Argentina in 1968. The goal of the project was to raise awareness of the extreme conditions of poverty that resulted from the concentration of land ownership by a few powerful landlords in the sugar industry province of Tucumán. The artists interviewed residents and gathered information about local living and working conditions, which they documented in photographs and



Grupo de Artistas Argentinos de Vanguardia (Avant-Garde Argentinian Visual Artists Group), *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán is Burning*), 1968, performance, Rosario, Argentina.



Grupo de Artistas Argentinos de Vanguardia (Avant-Garde Argentinian Visual Artists Group), *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán is Burning*), 1968, publicity campaign, Rosario, Argentina.

short films. The police warned the public not to cooperate with the artists, but the group took advantage of the artistic aspects of their activities, such as hosting public talks with area journalists within the local Museum of Fine Arts, in order to cloak their more explicit political activities in a cultural veneer.⁹

Ultimately, the collective held two exhibitions (“*muestras denuncias*”) denouncing the Tucumán situation, bringing all the information they had gathered about the oppression to wider audiences in Rosario and the capital Buenos Aires. Throughout, they used cultural language to market the events, such as describing it as the first “biennale” of the avant-garde and deployed a campaign of aesthetic counter-information—montages of audio-visual media, oral histories, mural photographs, and so on—to make the realities of Tucumán more visceral for viewers.¹⁰ One member of the collective, Leon Ferrari, wrote that, “*Tucumán Arde* used art in order to make politics,” differentiating it from contemporary “political art” that “uses politics as a theme to

make art.”¹¹ This distinction is really prescient for us to keep in mind, especially as we consider so-called political art popular during the first Trump administration that took politics as its subject matter rather than seeking to practice politics.

Art in Public Spaces

As *Tucumán Arde* shows, Latin American artists have long recognized that, to be a site of resistance, art must often vacate the prestigious spaces of the art world and make a creative intervention into public spaces. This notion was taken up further by the Grupo de Arte Callejero (GAC) or Street Art Group collective, which created several interventions in public space in Argentina in the early 2000s.

Despite the end of the civil-military dictatorship in 1983, December 2001 was a time of severe repression by the armed forces in Argentina, with significant public protest in response. During this time, GAC released 10,000 toy soldiers with parachutes from a helicopter. The plastic military invasion floated down over the



Grupo de Arte Callejero (Street Art Group), 2001. Urban Intervention, 10,000 toy soldiers attached to pink parachutes, Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Grupo de Arte Callejero (Street Art Group), *Caricels de la memoria (Posters of Memory)*, 1999-2010, urban intervention, 53 road signs.

capitol of Buenos Aires while the artists stenciled military symbols on common goods in circulation, such as Marlboro cigarette packs.¹² These visual gestures critiqued a continuity of violence with the civil military dictatorship that had ostensibly ended in 1983.

Between 2001 and 2006, GAC created and placed “memory maps” around Buenos Aires. These maps indicated the locations of the more than 500 illegal centers of detention that operated during the dictatorship, as well as the residences of its collaborators. Like Meireles, GAC appropriated official symbols—in this case, street signs—to communicate statistics about the violence of the dictatorship and to maintain a public memory of the over-30,000 disappeared persons.¹³

We also see art used to struggle with memory in public space at sites of national monuments. In September 2021, the *Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan* (Roundabout of the Women Who Fight) was founded in Mexico City when a group of activists took over a dismantled Christopher Columbus monument and created a



Glorieta de las mujeres que luchan (Roundabout of the Women Who Fight), 2021, Mexico City. Photo: Mario Marlo

new “anti-monument” devoted to memorializing femicide and gender-based violence in Mexico.

First, the activists placed a wooden figure of a woman with a raised fist atop the empty plinth of the monument and graffitied the names of hundreds of murdered and disappeared women on the protective walls surrounding it. The intervention expanded in March 2022 when activists added the *Jardín Somos Memoria* (*We Are Memory-Garden*), a series of information panels throughout the same public square that informed viewers about the realities of femicide and gender-based violence.¹⁴

Artistic interventions in public space can also become forums for multi-voiced expression. Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla placed 12 five-foot columns of chalk in public squares in Lima, Paris, and New York City. The artists then invited passers-by to write chalk messages, to draw, or to express themselves in any manner on the pavement. Consequently, in Lima, the chalk was placed in political spaces, such as in front of government offices, which led to a proliferation of writings critical of the Peruvian state. When



Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla, *Tiza (Chalk)*, 1998-2002, 12 pieces of chalk, Plaza de los Caudillos.

this artistic activity drew people to the square and evolved into an impromptu peaceful protest, military officers confiscated the chalk and washed away the political speech. In this, the project revealed the threat that free speech poses to authoritarianism.

In another piece involving volunteers, called *When Faith Moves Mountains*, Belgian artist Francis Alÿs recruited 500 locals from the outskirts of Lima, Peru, and students from the University of Lima to literally and metaphorically move a mountain. The volunteers climbed a 1,600-foot sand dune near a *barriada*, or informal settlement. Digging in unison until they reached the other side of the dune, they collectively displaced the sand by nearly four inches. Some participated because they were curious about how this could constitute art, but others commented that they wanted to participate in a collective project. The project functioned as a symbol for the monumental task of affecting political change in Peru and also exemplified the collective power of the citizenry.

Involving Participants in the Construction of Social Practice Art

Bread and Puppet Theater, founded by Peter Schumann to protest the Vietnam War, came to life in New York's Lower East Side in 1963 and moved to Vermont in 1970. For over 50 years, the theater company has produced larger-than-life-sized papier-mâché puppets to comment on the shortcomings of news media in reporting on issues such as gun violence, democracy, structural racism, populism, and autocracy; to ridicule corrupt landlords, war machinery, Uncle Sam, and the Supreme Court; and to celebrate Mother Earth. Whether performed in the grass amphitheater in Vermont or on the traveling national bus tour, the shows are free and open to all who show up. Despite the fun and exuberance of the puppets and the tradition of feeding audiences homemade bread, Schumann says that the spectacle is “not for the fun of it,” but as a “service that needs to be rendered to the public.”¹⁵

Political engagement and communal work are also at the heart of Mexican artist Pedro Reyes'



Francis Aliys, *When Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002, Peru.



Francis Ali's, *When Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002, Peru.



Bread and Puppet Theater, August 24, 2011, performance, Statehouse lawn, Montpelier, Vermont. Photo: Toby Talbot/AP

work. In 2008, the government of the state of Culiacán enlisted Reyes to create an artistic intervention in a local park. Responding to the high rate of gun violence in the state, he invited citizens to voluntarily exchange guns, no questions asked, for coupons that could be redeemed for other items. During the month that Reyes ran TV advertisements for *Palas por Pistolas* (*Guns for Shovels*), 1,527 weapons were collected, taken to a military zone, crushed by a steamroller, and melted in a foundry. The metal was used to produce 1,527 shovels. Reyes distributed the tools to art institutions and public schools that enlisted participants to plant 1,527 trees. The project was not simply an aesthetic gesture of turning guns into shovels for display, but a practical, impactful action to remove primarily U.S.-manufactured weapons from the streets and replace them with trees that clean the air, absorb carbon dioxide, and support life-giving habitats.

Social practice is also a helpful framework to contextualize the work of Mexican artist Minerva Cuevas. In addition to her more traditional artistic practice that alters commercial branding



Pedro Reyes, *Palas por Pistolas (Guns for Shovels)*, 2008, Collected guns melted into steel to fabricate shovels.



Pedro Reyes, *Palas por Pistolas (Guns for Shovels)*, 2008, Collected guns melted into steel to fabricate shovels, tree planting.

imagery to comment on the role of multinational corporations in perpetuating systemic violence in Latin America, Cuevas has a nonprofit called *Mejor Vida Corp* (*Better Life Corporation*). As life becomes more difficult for those who are economically disenfranchised, Cuevas' work intervenes to provide access. Rather than just making grand political statements, the non-profit offers participants student IDs that grant them entry into any museum in Mexico, tear gas for personal protection, and barcodes to be placed on fruit and vegetables to reduce the cost of fresh produce.

My final example of social groups practicing the art of resistance is *La Raza Art and Media Collective, 1975-Today*, an exhibition at the University of Michigan Museum of Art celebrating the 50th anniversary of the named collective, which was formed by a group of Latinx students attending the University of Michigan in 1975. The Raza Art and Media Collective (RAM) organized exhibitions, cultural gatherings and events, and ran and published a multimedia journal that expressed the concerns, experiences,



La Raza Art and Media Collective, 1975-Today, exhibition at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, July 2025. Curated by Dave Choberka and Félix Zamora Gómez. *Photo: Emily Pinsuwan.*

and dreams of Latinx students and community members.

Art helps us to develop the muscle of ideation, of collective imagining that can generate visions of better futures. In the 1970s, RAM dreamt together; art was the language through which they envisioned a more just university and a more just art history. Today, the university has a Latina/o Studies Program that grew out of the legacy of their student activism. Their collective imagining demonstrates the power and perspective of student organizing.

The Art of Hope

German artist Gerhard Richter said that “Art is the highest form of hope,” and hope is something we desperately need to cultivate.¹⁶ Art is at the core of what makes us human. At times of dehumanizing rhetoric and policies, experiences that loudly and vehemently assert our shared humanity are precious. Art of resistance feels good for the soul and exists in many forms beyond what we conventionally label “art” made by “artists.”

In the years ahead, remember the words of queer activist and author Dan Savage,

During the darkest days of the AIDS crisis, we buried our friends in the morning, we protested in the afternoon, and we danced all night. The dance kept us in the fight because it was the dance we were fighting for. It didn't look like we were going to win then and we did. It doesn't feel like we're going to win now but we could. Keep fighting, keep dancing.¹⁷

NOTES

1. bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (Routledge, 1994), 281.
2. adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (LaVergne: AK Press, 2019), 10.
3. Francisco E. Balderrama, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (University of New Mexico Press, 1995).
4. Diego Rivera, "The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art," *Modern Monthly* 7, no.3 (1932): 52-53.
5. Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 235.
6. Jacqueline Barnitz and Patrick Frank, *Twentieth Century Art of Latin America* (University of Texas Press, 2015), 299.
7. David Ingram and Laura Strickler, "Fake video of Trump kissing Musk's feet displayed at HUD office in Washington," *NBC News*, February 24, 2025.
8. Olga González, "Silence and Absence Made Visible: Arts and Memorials for the Disappeared of Peru," *Anthropology Now* 5, no.3 (2013): 74-91.
9. Eve Kalyva, "The Rhetoric of Disobedience: Art and Power in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 51, no.2 (2016): 46-66.

10. Sensory gestures included: the lights being switched off at an interval to convey the infant mortality rate in Tucumán, the entrance to the building was filled with sacks of spilled sugar, while bitter coffee was served inside. Kalyva, "The Rhetoric of Disobedience," 49-50.
11. *Ibid.*, 45.
12. Eve Kalyva, "Making Sense and Claiming a Presence: The Social Semiotics of Visual Activism," in *Visual Activism in the 21st Century: Art, Protest, and Resistance in an Uncertain World*, eds. Stephanie Hartle and Darcy White (Bloomsbury, 2022), 35.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Manuela Badilla and Alexander Ulrich Thygesen, "Feminist and Dissident Counter-Monumental Interventions: Urban Memory Struggles Between Santiago de Chile and Mexico City," *Art & the Public Sphere* 12 (special issue: "Latin American Performance, Activism, and Public Space") (2023): 19-32.
15. Amy Goodman, "Bread and Puppet Theater Founder Peter Schumann on 50 Years of Art and Resistance," *Democracy Now*, December 26, 2013.
16. Gerard Richter, "Catalogue text," in *documenta 7* (Kassel, 1982).
17. Dan Savage, "SAVAGE LOVE: Trump and Dump," *Portland Mercury*, Jan. 21, 2025.

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Megan Flattley is a historian of art and visual culture whose work examines artists and movements that challenge the distinction between art and politics and that envision liberatory futures. She is currently working on her first book project, a reexamination of the art and politics of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. The project analyzes how Rivera's pictorial and architectural space related to pre-Columbian, Cubist, and industrial contexts.

Dr. Flattley holds a PhD in Art History and Latin American Studies from Tulane University with certification in Community-Engaged Scholarship. She attended the University of Michigan with the support of a Pell Grant and received her Bachelor's degree in the History of Art.

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The UM/AA-AAUP, under the guidance of its president Dr. Julie Boland, and the Faculty Senate Office, led by Director Luke McCarthy, rose to the moment to collectively

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Disobedience
Press