

Open Letter To Judd Arnett & Lou Gordon

The *Fifth Estate* Staff Death Penalty for Newspaper Columnists

Fifth Estate Collective

1976

To: Judd Arnett, *The Detroit Free Press*

Lou Gordon, *The Detroit News*

Lift up a rock in Detroit these days—more correctly, in one of its outlying suburbs—and out will crawl a newspaper columnist.

Regarding your respective columns of August 25 in the *Free Press* and the *News* on the subject of street gang violence in the city: In general, when we have been forced to think about you at all, we've been inclined to think of you as just two more transparent apologists for the status quo. We've always felt it symptomatic of your distorted self-perceptions that you should think your banal and witless observations deserving of the least attention, and symptomatic of this sick society that it should pay you to make them public. We have thought of you, in other words, as fit only to be ignored.

But your recent poisonous distortions of past and present reality in the above cited columns have left us no choice but to confront you for the willfully ignorant charlatans that you are.

You, Judd, we wanted to address first because in your humble, populist posturing, you brilliantly distill not just your own deliberately distorted perceptions but also those of more than two hundred years of white racist paternalism. Not wanting to pussyfoot around the issue of race you boldly leap right in by informing us that "It is said there are blacks who welcome the flight of whites to the suburbs and beyond because this means they are 'inheriting' Detroit and all its assets. Fair enough—if you are satisfied with the short view." This is also fair enough if you are satisfied with the most thoroughly contemptible inversion both of history and observable reality! When a white society which has grown fat off the exploited labor of racial minorities then abandons its worn-out central cities to the only people who are deprived of the "upward mobility" to flee the urban decay, this is called "inheriting the city and all its assets." What assets, Judd? What city?! How many inner-city blacks are inheriting the Renaissance Center or the Medical Center, those disgusting and flagrant symbols of white corporate largesse? You're right, Judd, none. What they are inheriting, if they are inheriting anything at all, is exactly what they've always inherited from this society: the cast-offs and the dregs, squalor and permanent impoverishment. If your fabrications didn't enjoy such currency in this world, Judd they would be little more than laughable.

But there's more. As if being a newspaper columnist didn't provide you with sufficient opportunity to pontificate, you are also both pop sociologist and cracker-barrel philosopher:

"The pressures of migration on education, housing, employment, recreation—the gamut of the good life—have been tremendous, adding emphasis to what John Kennedy once said: 'Life is unfair.' " How profound. And how curious that such pearls should always issue from the mouths of those who, like you and your appropriately dead forebear, have suffered the least at the hands of life's unfairness and have the most to lose from any effort to redress it.

Despite the implications of your words of wisdom, Judd, human life is not a process external to human beings which contains for all its dose of unfairness; human life is socially constructed, and the fact that it is presently con-

structed in the image of the John Kennedys and Judd Arnetts of this world necessarily implies the possibility of that life—that parody of life—being destroyed by other human beings and reconstructed in a form more compatible with the goal of a truly human existence.

And it's this possibility which really frightens you Judd, as your next sentence makes so abundantly clear: "But unfairness is rarely changed to fairness by violence, particularly when it affronts the accepted order of a humane society."

A humane society?! We know you know this, Judd, but we'll remind you anyway: this "human society" of yours has generated two world wars; it has ravaged the earth and turned it into a network of competing markets each armed to the teeth in "defense" of its own interests; it kills thousands daily, engages in genocide and has seen to it that a greater portion of the human race suffers permanent and irreparable under-nourishment than at any other time in its previous history. And, Judd, Violence is the only thing which will change this "unfairness" to "fairness"—not the mindless violence of dehumanized gang members but the revolutionary violence of a world of people determined to wrest their humanity from the clutches of this insufferable "order" which only dolts like you could find acceptable. And this violence will not simply affront that order; it will destroy it.

Now that we think about it Judd, we take it back. You're not contemptible; you're beneath contempt. If it's any consolation though, beneath even you is Lou Gordon.

You, Lou, have been for too long a voice crying out in the wilderness:

"After the terrible 1967 riot I told members of New Detroit that they were insane to sit down and bargain with militant blacks who were making demands and telling them what they would do to the city if they weren't given certain 'rights.'

"I was shocked when they imported Frank Ditto from Chicago to work with gangs and told them permissiveness would get them nowhere."

We share your horror, Lou, but you err in your assessment of the situation in '67: the mistake was on the part of black people in allowing self-appointed "militants" to "negotiate" for them with the collective corporate scum of this city—they should have burned Detroit to the ground and dealt with every "leader" and honky ideologist like you accordingly.

Where do you think this crime comes from Lou? Do you think inner city blacks are genetically criminal? No, of course not, you're too hip for that. Then is it social? Could it be this violence is the inevitable product of a system that makes loud-mouthed white reactionaries like you and Arnett wealthy simply for airing your self-serving opinions, while it turns black kids who know their lives are from the outset exercises in futility into nihilistic monsters? Is this possible, Lou?

Well, you know, Lou, as you, and Arnett, and all the other self-important benefactors of this stinking social order are constantly reminding us, you don't get something for nothing in this life, and the price you and the rest of the swine are going to pay for the free lunch you've been enjoying in your "suburban sanctuary" has not even begun to be exacted.

The same vile system that made you comfortable as the well-paid mouthpiece for its defense has created these monsters who strike such terror into your heart, and now you're weeping and moaning all over the pages of your despicable advertising circular about how the politicians let you down and your bought blacks betrayed you. And you're right, they did let you down. You pay them and all the rest of the state's parasitic minions handsomely to keep the seamy underbelly of this squalid society out of your face while you "go about your business," and they let you down. You moved out to the suburbs so you wouldn't have to be around it and even had them build you expressways so you wouldn't have to see the city's residential decay as you blithely "commuted" in and out of your business district. But still they let you down, they let that violence from those wasted, meaningless lives spill out into your sacrosanct territory, and now you want something done about it.

And you know just what you want done about it too, don't you Lou? Crack a few heads. Reinstate STRESS. Make curfews permanent. (Do you know anything about your Constitution Lou?) Re-arm Raymond "Mad Dog" Peterson and declare open season once again on blacks, make it nice like it used to be when blacks knew their place and kept it.

And, now, you tell us, for the first time in your life, you are “prepared to accept capital punishment for convictions of wanton first-degree murder.” We’re sure you are, Lou. But are you prepared to accept the absolute destruction of everything that allows you to mouth your villainous pieties as if your wealth had nothing to do with the generations of misery and impoverishment which have produced these rapists and murderers? We think not.

Capital Punishment! You pompous wretch. We spit on you and your capital punishment and the moribund subhuman society in defense of which you invoke it. It’s for you, and the dog Arnett, and for the culture which, in spawning your verminous presence, has despoiled the world and its people, that we invoke the death penalty.

And rest assured: You will go down in flames.

“Punitive and brutal,” you say? Fuck, yes, Lou, and we can’t wait to see you go.



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Fifth Estate #276, September 1976

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