

Letters

Various Authors

2019

Send letters to fe — AT — fifthestate — DOT — org or
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Letters may be edited for length.

TAKING A RISK

As always, thank you for everything your team does. I've been working my way through the Winter 2019 issue of Fifth Estate after my shifts at Starbucks, and it really grounds me and makes me feel sane after working for capitalist madness.

Yesterday, I read "The Mystification of Voting: An Anarchist Critique" by Clara Mystif [FE #402, Winter, 2019]. Their reminder of the Situationist slogan, "All Power to the Imagination," got me through the day.

Curiously, at the end of my shift, a co-worker asked what I was reading, and I took the risk to tell her. Another co-worker overheard and clarified that I said, "anarchist literature," and just laughed knowingly. She chuckled and said, "What millennial isn't reading anarchist writing right now?"

Josefine Parker
Liberty, Tenn.

IN THE DARK

The FE editors were a bit in the dark, I think, when they published the puff-piece interview with AK Press, last issue [FE #402, Winter, 2019]. What went missing is the deeply ideological nature of the "anarchist" AK project.

They never carried *Green Anarchy* magazine during its eight years of existence, have refused to carry the primal anarchy/anarcho-primitivist *Black and Green Review*, and carry virtually none of my books.

As far as I know, no explanation is ever given except for the obvious one: they don't tolerate perspectives that challenge the reigning civilizational death trip we are on. They are deeply committed to the Left, that monumentally failed and dying ode to domestication, civilization, technological society.

Thus, they offer no more than the rest of the dominant order as to the Why of mass shootings, rising suicide rates, declining life expectancy, the lonely emptiness of our supposedly connected life-world, the nature of this civilization, which is failing like every one of them before, etc.

It is clueless and suicidal to cling to the Left as AK does.
John Zerzan
Eugene, Ore.

FE Note: John's 2018 title, *Time and Time Again*, is available from AK Press. *Black and Green Review* is available from BAGR, PO Box 402, Salem MO 65560.

AUTHOR NOT HAPPY

I received my copy of the Winter 2019 issue of *Fifth Estate* and was unpleasantly surprised by Mike Wold's review of my recently published *Resisting Illegitimate Authority*. [See "Fuck Authority & How to do it Successfully," FE #402, Winter, 2019.]

While I certainly expect some reviewers to disagree or even dislike some or all of what I say, it is annoying when a reviewer misrepresents what I've said.

It is especially annoying when a review that misleads readers about what I've said is published in a magazine for readers who I especially care about.

Let me give you just one of several misrepresenting/misleading assertions that Wold makes about my book.

Wold writes: "The chapter on Native American societies as anti-authoritarian could be an opportunity to explore what cultural elements foster anti-authoritarianism, but his blanket characterization of all the tribes north of Mexico as being essentially similar in this regard is ethnocentric and inaccurate."

Did I actually make a "blanket characterization" that is "inaccurate" which is "ethnocentric?"

In the beginning of this chapter ("Genocide of an Anti-Authoritarian People: Native Americans"), I say: "At the time Europeans began to colonize North America, Native American societies were highly diverse with many different political systems and various religious beliefs." So, I begin with the opposite of a blanket characterization.

I then say that "Native societies in what now constitutes the United States did not have the hierarchical and authoritarian organization of the Aztec and Inca societies south of them."

I then discuss how Native societies in what now constitutes the U.S. were in stark contrast to European hierarchical/authoritarian societies. This is what Wold calls a "blanket characterization," but Wold does not give even one example of an authoritarian Native society in what now constitutes the U.S.

Even if Wold (unlike the historians I reference or Native people who I consulted) can produce such an example, it would still be "FOX-like" to insult me with "ethnocentric," but this is moot since he doesn't even back up his claim of inaccuracy.

With respect to Wold's remarks about my neglecting to "explore what cultural elements foster anti-authoritarianism," I actually do discuss some cultural elements, including child-rearing.

Annoyingly, Wold ignores the main thrust of this chapter (included in the section, "The Assault on U.S. Anti-Authoritarians"), which is to make clear, as I say in the beginning: "The assault against Native Americans constitutes racism, genocide, and land theft on a massive scale.

It is also an attempt to eliminate a cultural tradition that—with its relative absence of coercion and greater freedoms—undermines U.S. authoritarians."

In this chapter, I provide Native anti-authoritarian cultural examples and, using the United Nations definition of five varieties of genocide, I lay out how the U.S. committed all five.

This is not the only instance in Wold's review which misrepresents what I said or did not say. Wold misrepresents me as not giving "substantive attention to what is legitimate vs. illegitimate authority and how to know the difference." I can give you many examples from the book to show that this also is false.

Wold's unfair depiction of the book doesn't end here. Like any reviewer, Wold is certainly entitled to dislike or disagree with what I've said, but he is not entitled to misrepresent what I've said. This kind of reviewing is not only bad for my reputation and for AK Press, but also bad for *Fifth Estate*.

Bruce Levine
Cincinnati, Ohio

Mike Wold replies: I want to note that my review contained positive comments as well as criticisms of Bruce Levine's book and I did not "dislike" it.

To get to his specific complaints: As far as the difference between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" authority, I was not looking for examples. I was looking for analysis of what makes the difference.

I would apologize for poor sentence construction that made it sound as if Levine did not talk about anti-authoritarian Native American cultural practices at all. He devoted all of a page and a half to this subject. I would have liked to see more.

Like Levine, I feel passionately angry about the genocide against the original inhabitants of this continent. I'm no expert, but I've read and studied about many Native American cultures and greatly respect them. They were destroyed regardless of how authoritarian they were; the genocide happened because they were in the way of White settlers.

It's a pervasive and long-standing myth that Native Americans in North America did not create any civilization comparable to those in Mesoamerica (including the Aztecs) or Peru (including the Incas). The myth's progressive variant is that all Native Americans north of Mexico lived in small groups and were non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical.

The North American parallel to the other civilizations is in the numerous tribes in the Mississippian culture, which thrived for centuries in most of what's now the Midwest and Southeast U.S. The largest ceremonial center, Cahokia (a UNESCO World Heritage site, in case the author still thinks I'm making this up), was home to over ten thousand people.

The paramount chief lived on a 100 foot high mound, still standing, built up from a flat plain by manual labor, using stone tools.

The Mississippians (as archaeologists call them) had chiefs who were considered semi-divine, had elites that lived off the surplus of the common people, and practiced human sacrifice. The civilization had largely collapsed by 1500 CE, but there were surviving tribes documented by the Spanish and French explorers when they reached Florida and the Gulf Coast.

Another very different hierarchical culture was in my area, stretching from Puget Sound to Southeast Alaska. These tribes had a well-developed class structure, including a semi-hereditary slave class. Leadership was almost always drawn from the similarly semi-hereditary upper class.

Many other groups had hierarchies, including slavery. Their practice of slavery was usually not as brutal as that of the European settlers in the U.S., and the condition of slavery generally less permanent, but it can hardly be called "anti-authoritarian."

For somebody growing up in American culture, being ethnocentric is almost inescapable. I didn't use it as an insult.

It's ethnocentrism to project political ideals we'd like to see in our society onto a culture (in this case, innumerable cultures) that is not ours, rather than honoring its reality.

Surviving Native cultures are not really helped by idealizing their pasts. We can learn a lot from them, but we need to understand their weaknesses, as well as their good points.

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/403-spring-2019/letters>
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