

Letters

Various Authors

2020

Send letters to **fe AT fifthestate DOT org** or Fifth Estate, P.O. Box 201016, Ferndale, MI 48220.
All formats accepted including typescript & handwritten.
Letters may be edited for length.

Naming people

Rob Blurton's article, "Anarchy in the Midwest," [FE #406, Spring 2020] uses the term Native American to describe the people living in the lands invaded by Europeans.

None of the English language options referring to indigenous people and nations are perfect, but Native American is especially problematic.

Colonialism entails the conquest of language as well as territory. England came to dominate what is now called North America.

Thus, English triumphed over Native People's, Spanish, French, Arabic, Dutch, Portuguese and several African languages—all of which were and, in many cases still are, in play.

As a consequence, English gets to decide what to call things. Native American is an oxymoron insofar as American is chronologically and otherwise superimposed on people who were already here when the likes of Christopher Columbus and Francis Drake showed up.

The word Indian obviously has similar problems.

First Peoples, First Nations, and Native Peoples have some advantages. Perhaps the most important thing, especially for white people, is to be humble and understanding about the difficulties of any term that isn't specifically the language of any indigenous Nation, Peoples, Tribe, or Pueblo.

While I found Blurton's article informative and well intentioned in many ways, I think it also suffers from another common white gaze difficulty.

In projecting anarchism onto Native Peoples, Blurton is failing to understand their way of life on its own terms. That impedes our ability to accept and learn from those not defined by the Euro-American or what I call the white way of thinking.

And, wow, do Native Peoples have a lot to teach us.

Frank Joyce

Detroit

FE Note: Frank Joyce is a long time contributor to this magazine and an anti-racist activist. He was News Editor of the Fifth Estate when such titles prevailed.

Rob Blurton replies: I basically agree with Frank Joyce's critique. I only used the term Native American as a sop to assumed expectations.

If you read the article closely, you'll see that I prefer calling the protagonists "Indians" or "natives" or "tribesman," also all flawed words, but yes, I did consciously invoke Native American a few times as well.

Since I was well aware of its problems and holding my nose while using it, my sin was craven conformity to PC phrasing rather than participating in a "common white gaze." I'm not sure which is more venal.

Fifth Estate comments: Names for conquered, enslaved, or oppressed people devised by those responsible for the crimes can never be satisfactory, even if accepted by those who suffer them.

People who inhabit what is now called Italy aren't referred to as Native Italians, for instance. Calling people from the African Diaspora, blacks or African Americans has replaced colored, Negro, or worse, but still ignores they came from lands with names. And, none of them were Africa.

The descendants of the conquered people of our continent who survived ethnic cleansing and land theft had names as well. Where Detroit sits, the people there belonged to the Waawiiyaatanong, the Three Fires Confederacy. The people around that city were Anishinaabe—Odawa, Saulteaux, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Oji-Cree, and Algonquin.

That's who they are/were. Not any of the names assigned to them by the invaders then or now.

Calling people with a distinct heritage and history by improved settler names does them no service, but rather affirms why we only give passing recognition that we live on stolen land.

Still Printing

I found your advertisement in the back of the *Earth First! Journal* and I'd like to subscribe to y'all as well. Enclosed is \$25 cash. I know the subscription price is \$15 but it's just so refreshing to find organizations still printing issues in paper form.

You lose the magic reading it online. I could have subscribed online, but since you list a post office box, it felt appropriate to write in.

ZB

Central Square, N.Y.

FE Replies: A curious phenomenon is that 95 percent of our subscriptions come through PayPal online, but half of renewals are by postal mail. It could be due to the fact that renewal notices are sent through the post office.

Please note that if you are a subscriber, your expiration issue number is on your address label. The issue number is on the masthead on Page three.

Time For A Change?

During the George Floyd protests we again saw the demonization of anarchists.

Is there an idea that our movement will eventually be able to recover the term anarchism as something with positive resonance? If so, I think we're suffering from a chronic delusion, one which is continually marginalizing and counterproductive.

Anarchism is negative in its essence... "against"... rulers or authority or government, etc.

Do we really want to relate to people and effectuate social change? Let's shift our discourse toward positive concepts like communitarianism, bioregionalism, or "the greening of society."

Steve Welzer

East Windsor, N.J.

FE replies: Steve Welzer is a longtime friend and supporter of this magazine as well as an environmental campaigner.

The querulous editor of *The Match*, Fred Woodworth, agrees that what he defines as the good name of anarchism has been defiled by what he sees in the media of black bloc and antifa actions, so he dropped the term from his magazine.

In George Orwell's 1984, Big Brother enforced the truncated language of Newspeak upon Oceania's population with the idea that if you limited words, you could eliminate the concepts they represented.

For that reason, and for the political tradition from which we descend, we will stay with defining our vision as one based squarely in anarchism.

Don't Vote

As much as I respect Peter Werbe's work with *Fifth Estate*, it does get tiresome to see him trotting out the same old argument every four years during Presidential campaigns to advocate for whichever scumbag the Democratic Party happens to have nominated that time around. Bill Clinton, John Kerry, Obama, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden: it's always some slight variation of the Lesser Evil creed. [See "The 2020 Election: What to do while waiting for the Revolution," FE #406, Spring 2020.]

Anarchists are supposed to believe that a Democratic administration would somehow be at least slightly more inclined than the Republicans to throw some crumbs from the Master's table to the working class, ethnic minorities, women, environmental activists, anti-militarist activists, or whatever.

Leaving aside any concern for anarchist principles (as one would have to do, even to contemplate voting), it doesn't take a genius, or even an anarchist, to understand that both the Democratic and Republican parties follow the same neoliberal agenda, and only get more brazen about it with every succeeding election cycle.

If anarchists really want to do something worthwhile during the election cycle, they should be making very loud and public arguments against voting for anybody, handing out anti-voter registration cards, and so forth. Sure, it might not make much difference in the short term, but at least we would be getting the message out there, which is more than voting could accomplish. The perceived legitimacy of any political system in the world today depends to a large extent on the ritual of voting, regardless of what choice one makes in the voting booth.

Derek Davis

Chicago

Peter Werbe replies: Thanks for keeping this discussion going, Derek, as to what constitutes effective anarchist practice. And, glad to know I only tire you once every four years.

You might want to go through the Fifth Estate archives on our web site rather than rely on your memory for what I wrote in these pages. You won't find an editorial endorsement of Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Barack Obama, or Hillary Clinton by me. And, certainly not of Joe Biden in the article upon which you are commenting.

In fact, it was I who was usually tasked with advising abstention from what we designated as the quadrennial political farce each election cycle. In 2004, following a year and a half of intense anti-war organizing including marches that involved millions, the U.S. military machine was slaughtering Iraqis uninterrupted.

Direct action hadn't worked. My call for the defeat of the war criminal George Bush came out of pure desperation, a rage and heartache at what he was directing against the people of Iraq, and the faint hope that John Kerry would end it.

All of my writing about elections, including the article you are criticizing, emphasizes that each party administers capitalism and the empire when they are in power.

Rather than take up space enumerating the Trump attacks on at-risk populations, his mobilization of a mass based proto-fascist movement, and an assault on the environment, let me just ask, do you really think all of what we've seen over the last four years would have happened under a Clinton administration?

I also wrote, "There are so few anarchists in America, whether we all vote or none of us vote, little or no difference in outcome will occur."

The best argument against voting is that it erodes the traditional anarchist critique of the state if one participates in its processes." So, hand out anti-voting tracts.

We often quote a comrade who says they think a higher percentage of anarchists vote than does the general population. Are those that do morally or politically sullied? If you think that, don't vote.

Do you think a quick, passive act done in privacy will in any way impede the development of a revolutionary movement? I don't.

In the article, I wrote about the dangers of advocating voting for liberal or left candidates and winding up with the opposite of what you want. I said that Obama/Clinton had ramped up Cold War II.

The article ended by stating, “The most we can do is what the anarchist movement has done throughout our long history: organize for revolution.” Sorry, I can’t do any better than that.

Whinnying Liberals

Corporate news outlets and social media alike are now inundating us with moral exhortations to self-quarantine. “It’s your obligation,” they claim, “to stay at home so that you do not carry the virus to the poor, old, and immunocompromised.”

The narrative goes on to assert that it is ethically wrong to further burden the health care system, which is already overtaxed. This line of thinking is a clear reflection of the white savior complex at the heart of bourgeois liberalism, and therefore should be totally repudiated.

The white-liberal-as-savior complex is a pernicious ideology that effaces the agency of those it purports to serve. This precise point was made by Black Power advocates during the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s.

If people of color were going to empower themselves, the Black Panthers argued, then they had to do it on their own without the help of bleeding-heart liberals.

Likewise, moral exhortations to self-quarantine for the sake of others is not simply a form of virtue signaling, but a means of normalizing the disempowerment of others.

Whinnying liberals should worry less about infecting their “social inferiors,” and focus on their role in the power structure of a far greater sickness—the technopathocracy.

This is not proposing a Corona Virus Liberation Front. Self-quarantine is sound advice, certainly. The point of this is to disentangle the virus from its spectacular recuperation by do-gooder glorps.

The social conditions of late-stage capitalism have been disrupted by the pandemic; we have everything to gain. Power to the People.

For the wild,

JC

Stuck In A Box

Wow! Your Spring edition, “The Call for Justice” is powerful. If more people could learn the foundational beginnings of this land and how corrupt the capitalist corporations really are, they also would begin to envision a more unified, environmentally healthy, and clean society. I can’t wait to be released so I can get involved with the change we as a people need.

Right now, I’m stuck in an 8 by 10 foot box.

Tim Hardin

Hodge Unit

Rusk, Texas

FE Note: This is why we give free subscriptions to the incarcerated through our Prisoner/GI Free Subscription Fund.

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