RESISTANCE & HOPE

ESSAYS by DISABLED PEOPLE

CRIP WISDOM FOR the PEOPLE

Edited by Alice Wong, Disability Visibility Project

Resistance and Hope
Essays by Disabled People

Crip Wisdom for the People

Alice Wong

Copyright © 2018 Alice Wong
All rights reserved.

Distributed by Smashwords

All rights reserved. Each story is owned by the original author and has been included in this anthology with their express permission. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the original author and the editor.

Alice Wong, Editor and Publisher

Robin M. Eames, Editorial Assistant and Herder of Cats

Book cover by Micah Bazant

Ebook formatting by www.ebooklaunch.com

Praise for *Resistance and Hope*

"Get this book right now! *Resistance and Hope* is the disability justice Bible you've been waiting for. If you want to read a book chock full of disabled Black, brown, queer, trans genius, real talk and vision, if you want to understand that six million dollar question 'What is disability justice?,' if you're a sick or disabled or Mad or neurodivergent or Deaf person figuring out how to survive fascism and create the world we want and deserve (or an abled or neurotypical person trying to catch up with us), this book will give you comrades reassurances that we are brilliant revolutionaries and a plethora of tools and visions for how we make the road by limping, crutching, rolling, signing and stimming. I am so grateful for Alice Wong for doing the cultural work of putting this together and for every single writer in this book."

— Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha, performer, community organizer, and author of *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Arsenal Pulp Press, October 1, 2018)

• • •

"Until our movements are fully intersectional, we will not make the progress necessary to build the equitable society we all deserve. *Resistance and Hope* is a necessary manual for all of us as we learn how to build movements that are as inclusive as the world we hope to see."

— Brittany Packnett, activist, educator, writer, Co-Founder of Campaign Zero and Co-Host of Pod Save the People

• • •

"There have been many conversations about which stories deserve to be told and which do not. However, the essays in *Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People* not only deserve to be told but heard and seen by people who want to see themselves and people who want a stronger and more important view of the world and the fight ahead of us."

— Keah Brown, journalist and author of *The Pretty One* (Atria Books, Spring 2019)

• • •

“*Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People* is a timely and must-read collection of essays by some of the most cutting edge leaders in the Disability Rights Movement. If you are interested in learning more about disability rights and justice, activism, and current times we are living in today take the time to read and may these pieces evoke discussions in your communities as we fight for justice and equity.”

— Judy Heumann, Disability Activist

• • •

“It is so necessary for people who have been historically marginalized to tell their own stories. I am proud to know Alice Wong, who is someone dedicated to telling these stories with authenticity and integrity.”

— Blair Imani, Author of Modern HERstory and Founder of Equality for HER

• • •

“A rare and powerful collection that demonstrates hopeful resistance. If you want to know how to fight and survive when Trump cuts try to destroy people you love, then read this book. These 17 authors outline strategies for successful resistance that emerge from communities committed to race, age, language, queer and disability diversity, equality and justice. As Anita Cameron writes, ‘To resist, one must have hope. Without it, we are lost.’ This book is a much-needed guide for resistance in these despairing times.”

— Corbett OToole, Co-Founder and Publisher of Reclamation Press and author of *Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History*

• • •

“We cannot talk about true democracy and true diversity in America if the voices and ideas and work of disabled people are not given space at the welcome table. Alice Wong, long a tireless leader and visionary advocate for the disabled community, has assembled a powerful new anthology, *Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People*, featuring 17 brilliant and bold disabled activists and artists. In the age of Trump this collection is a revelation, bringing from the margins fresh new ways to look at America, and fresh new ways to look at ourselves."

— Kevin Powell, author of *The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood*

• • •

"In *Resistance and Hope*, activist, advocate, and scholar Alice Wong brings together new voices and perspectives on living with disabilities that come from an inclusive array of multiply marginalized disabled people. In the spirit of nothing about us without us, *Resistance and Hope* offers us an urgent and needed collection of "crip wisdom" on belonging, community, and self-care that goes far toward showing us how to build the kind of just world we want to live in together."

— Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, disability bioethicist and educator at Emory University and UCLA and author of *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*

• • •

"An instructive and empowering anthology on the lived struggles of persons with disabilities. You will finish this book hopeful, optimistic, and ready to rebuild our nation for all to shine."

— Arjun Singh Sethi, activist and author of *American Hate: Survivors Speak Out* (The New Press, August 7, 2018)

Table of Contents

Introduction

As the results of the Presidential election rolled in the evening of Election Day 2016, my heart raced. I felt unsafe and a sense of urgency to do something. In my moments of fear and panic towards what I knew would happen, I was strangely comforted by the fact that disabled people have been surviving and resisting for millennia.

Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People is a powerful collection of essays by disabled writers, artists, activists, and dreamers. What is the relationship between resistance and hope? What can disabled people share with the world during this time of uncertainty and unrest? You will learn from a wide range of perspectives from multiply marginalized disabled people on where we are right now, where we've been, and where we're going. Share this anthology with everyone everywhere—on social media, in the classroom, at the kitchen table, with your friends and neighbors.

The idea for the *Resistance and Hope* anthology developed that evening in November as I wondered what could I do to fight back and create something of value for all of us. I reflected on Sins Invalid's show in October 2016, "Birthing, Dying, Becoming Crip Wisdom," and realized we weren't entering into a new moment; every moment is cyclical and tied to living, resisting, dying, and rebirth. We are all linked to one another for survival. On a related note, thank you to artist Micah Bazant for the beautiful book cover. Mushrooms are my symbol of resilience and interdependence for this publication.

It is my intention for you, dear reader, to soak up crip wisdom from these writers and our ancestors. Think about your privilege, get angry, and become involved in your various communities.

With gratitude and solidarity,
Alice Wong, Editor and Publisher
Founder and Director, Disability Visibility Project

Rebel - Don’t Be Palatable: Resisting Co-optation and Fighting for the World We Want

Lydia X. Z. Brown

Content notes: abuse in activist communities, activist praxis, accountability, intracommunity harm, compliance culture, conflicting access needs, cure rhetoric, respectability politics, multimodality

As a writer, thinker, educator, and organizer, I cannot stop thinking about the innumerable ways the world we live in is so violent, and how I desperately long for a better world, what that world might look like, and how we might get there. That is the work of social justice, or what could be described as laboring for liberation.

In the past few months, I have witnessed and felt a shift in the spaces I live and work in—heightened fear, rage, and loss, much of it tied directly or indirectly to the shift in the U.S.’s political landscape. That shift is real and valid, but for me, the election of Donald Trump wasn’t surprising. It angered and upset me, for sure, but there was nothing shocking about the United States choosing (what is ultimately) white supremacy. This nation was founded on stolen land, genocide, and myths of white (abled, male) supremacy that led to laws and “traditions” based on the supposed inferiority and undesirability of anyone who didn’t fit that mold, whether because they were Black, Indigenous, women, or disabled (among other things).

It’s clear to me that movements for liberation, justice, and healing are fighting wars on two fronts —against external enemies and internal dangers alike. Trump (and his administration), the alt-right, and systems of structural oppression (like transmisogyny, ableism, or settler-colonialism) are all external threats. On the other hand, patterns of gatekeeping, abuse, horizontal or intra-community oppression, and silo-ing (single-issue politics) represent some of the internal dangers we struggle to address. Frequently, we lose track of the distinctions between the two, instead of recognizing both how they are related and how and why they are distinct, and therefore require different types of strategies and tactics. I don’t claim to have or know all of the answers to these problems (at either the interpersonal or structural levels), but I do perceive some strategies and principles we need to keep in mind.

The first and most important thing is emphasizing the importance of sticking to values and principles, instead of rigid or overly ideological thinking (the kind that leads to unnecessary political litmus tests, lack of nuance, and no space for people new to movement work). Values and principles help underscore what kind of world we want to live in - things like *valuing interdependence*, *anti-violence*, and *accountability with compassion*. There could be many other possible values and principles too. When we operate from a set of shared values and principles, we can both set a framework for the core conditions necessary for doing movement work and building the world we want, *and* allow for multiple possible and valid interpretations of how those principles should work and be applied in different contexts.

Effective resistance requires challenging harm and violence both within and outside movement/community. I learned disavowal—one of the most insidious oppression tactics—most explicitly when I first connected with the autistic activist community. Some of the first messages I got said that society needs to accept autistic people because autism is a valid difference and not a psychiatric or intellectual disability. Those messages actually say that our humanity is contingent on somebody else's inhumanity (not to mention how they erase autistic people with psychiatric and/or intellectual disabilities). Disavowal tells us that we only get to move ahead or get more rights or be more included or get an opportunity if we do so at somebody else's expense. It reinforces capitalist scarcity politics by saying that only so many people can be included or have rights, and that in order to include or give rights to some people, somebody else must still be excluded and denied rights by definition.

Many of us know that to be marginalized or targeted means a lifetime of abuse and violence, including the violence of compliance and indistinguishability philosophy.[1] Like all other forms of violence, compliance and indistinguishability target us both from outside and from within. I want and need to talk about what it means to create a compliance culture within movements. For me, activism was inevitable. Meeting other autistic people was life-changing and incredibly empowering. It brought so many things to my life that I will forever be grateful for, but it has also nearly destroyed me. I’ve found myself in communities that constantly replicated the very same hierarchies and forms of violence that we fought against, wrote about, and discussed in late night conversations, anywhere where we might be able to sum up the collective privilege of resources to be somewhere together. We’ve replicated the same things that we talk about as violent and horrible and wrong. And one of those is a compliance culture specific to activism.

Here’s an example of that: In autistic activism land, it is not permissible for an autistic person to say, “I think I would like to be cured.” The idea of autism as undesirable defect is so widespread in society, but if somebody says that, they will be yelled at for being self-hating. That’s not to say that talk about cure is not retraumatizing and deeply triggering for many of us. But for some autistic people, especially those who haven’t ever learned about general opposition to the idea of cure, that medical model might make sense. Even someone who is deeply familiar with neurodiversity literature might still desire to be “cured” by some or another definition.[2] The point is, that it can be simultaneously valid for many of us to be triggered by and unable to engage with conversation about cure, while others find discussion of cure to be deeply validating.

Activism has its own overcoming myth. You enter some activist space, Tumblr, a campus group, your neighborhood cultural center. You’re expected to make mistakes, but to eventually never mess up anyone’s pronoun, ever, to never accidentally use the wrong vocabulary, regardless of how educated you are, self-educated or formally. You’re expected to be on this linear progression of no longer making mistakes once you are politically conscious, radical, or involved enough. And if you do make a mistake (and things that are actually toxic or oppressive end up being conflated very easily with valid disagreements), it’s evidence there’s something deeply wrong with your character regardless of how you handle it, whether you try to be accountable, or whether you work to not repeat that harm again.

I don’t mean that to say in communities where we’ve all been traumatized that we should excuse harm. We should never say that being traumatized or marginalized absolves us of responsibility when we harm others. But we’ve quite undeniably built up a mythology that there’s a linear progression in activism. And in reality, that myth is itself ableist, classist, racist, and capitalist because it implies that we’re all on an upward progression - the same language that white supremacy uses to say colonialism needs to civilize Brown people.

Compliance training in the community also means the social immunity of those with platform and influence from criticism - unless the criticism is a vitriolic attack tearing down everything the person has ever said or done throughout a lifetime.[3] Compliance in movement space means that although we often reject hierarchies and power structures as inherently abusive, we nevertheless create and perpetuate them quite frequently.

The movement calls for a lot more complexity and nuance than that. The movement has to acknowledge that none of us are perfect or infallible. This is why disability justice is critical to organizing. It recognizes and values that our needs, knowledges, capacities, and abilities to engage are fluid. It’s hard work to navigate that line between not giving ourselves a pass because we recognize that we will fail at some point, and insisting constantly that we work to do and be better. Disability justice allows us to embrace these imperfections, recognize our vulnerabilities and to recognize that most situations and most relationships are complicated and often intensely fucked up.

When we have communities that are based on shared experiences of trauma, we need to talk about how to navigate multiple conflicting traumas. We’re not going to get it right every time. It’s impossible to somehow extricate some set of rules that will perfectly apply to any situation, end abuse, and eliminate possibilities for and propensities to abuse, all across multiple forms of oppression. But we can think about what principles and values we seek to honor and what many of the possible multimodalities for engaging with those principles might be. We could seek to put those values and principles into practice, not as rigid rules, but as flexible guidelines based on a movement - and therefore the people in that movement.

What is the kind of world that we want to live in? If the purpose of much of our thinking and activism is to address wrongs and violence in the world, then what does it mean to also address wrongs and violence in our own communities? I have witnessed it. I have been part of it. I have been targeted by it. And I want and need us to question what keeps us beholden to the idea of palatability—why do we permit so much debate, so much calling out, so much speaking of truth, but draw lines at our own movements, lest we go too far? We can't let our movements be co-opted by neoliberal, exploitative, and unaccountable individuals and organizations that push respectability politics or hackneyed and watered-down versions of the principles we fight for.

What does it mean to do the hard work of holding someone accountable and seeking justice, but without violence? What does it mean to center survivors if most nearly everyone in the space is a survivor? How can we handle, for example, conflicting and mutually contradictory abuse accusations, or ambiguous and shifting definitions of concepts that should have a plain meaning but are instead twisted totally beyond recognition? How can we believe survivors and hold space for both of these people if they are in our community, in our neighborhood, in our organizing group, in our friends circle and not excuse abuse? What does it mean to do reparations on the individual level? What does it actually mean to hold yourself and others accountable? What does it mean to do accountability when the word accountability and literally every concept created in activism, advocacy, organizing, or social justice has at some point or another been twisted to abuse and harm?

Who can't be here? Thinking about what disability justice means in doing accountability requires asking what it means to hold myself accountable for my privilege. Struggling with disability justice means asking at every point: Who has access and who does not? When do I allow myself to be valid and when do I not? What does it mean to support other people and also not to expend all my emotional labor at other people's whim? What does it mean to build community if community itself is traumatizing?

I don't think that any of these questions come with easy answers. But I do think these are the questions we don't ask often enough and that our movement does not address as often as it ought to. We spend a lot of time talking about disability justice and what it means externally from the movement - when talking about the prison industrial complex, historical forms of oppression, treating people like objects, medical experimentation, chattel slavery, war, reproductive access and justice, colonialism, economics. We don't talk as much about what disability justice means in a movement. Sometimes we scratch the surface.

We talk about how we can make events more accessible, and we absolutely need to be having that conversation more frequently and seriously than we already do. But aside from events, what does it mean to make your organization, Facebook group, or house accessible? What does that mean for those of us who are on a fixed income or have no income, or if you're houseless or people you know are houseless? What does accessibility mean if I have access to something that someone else doesn't? Some of the ways I have attempted to practice that are of course remaining in conversation and collaboration with those who have the time and the emotional energy to speak with me and to work with me at least sometimes, to think about: If you are impacted by something that I'm not, where am I failing?

Reflecting on the privilege that I have, I'm neither going to solve it or erase it, but I do have an obligation to hold myself accountable for the privilege that I benefit from and for my capacity to harm—whether derived directly out of my privilege, or simply aided by it. And I also have to hold compassion for myself and for movement, to build a movement based on disability justice means to embrace interdependence and how we need one another in this process.

We can't go it alone. It means to embrace multimodality as a way of doing movement. There is no one way to do activism right. There is no one way to communicate the ideas that we have bursting within ourselves that we want to share. All contributions, all types of labor, all of us are valid and valuable. And the sooner we recognize that, we'll be in a better place to be able to grapple with these difficult questions and rebel against the respectability politics mandate and the activist compliance culture alike. Struggling *with* disability justice has to be an imperative for liberation because it requires us to do the hard work of engaging with each other as human beings in the full complexity of our bodyminds and all the weight that we carry.

© 2018 Lydia X. Z. Brown

About

[Image description: giving a short talk at the Disability Intersectionality Summit in Boston, Massachusetts, 5 November 2016. Image shows a young east asian person gesturing with both hands — their t-shirt says "The Whole Damn System Is Guilty As Hell" with the logo of the power fist (and comes from the Organization For Black Struggle based in St. Louis, Missouri); they are also wearing a nametag that says Lydia X.Z. Brown they/them, and a color communication badge showing green. Photo credit Kelsey Kent.]

Lydia X. Z. Brown is an advocate, organizer, and activist whose work has focused on violence against multiply-marginalized disabled people, especially institutionalization, incarceration, and policing. They have worked to advance transformative change through organizing, conducting workshops, giving testimony, and disrupting institutional complacency. Lydia recently completed a term as the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council chairperson. Along with E. Ashkenazy and Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, they are a lead editor of All the Weight of Our Dreams, the first-ever anthology by autistic people of color. Recently, they taught a course on disability and social movements at Tufts University. Their writing is featured in numerous scholarly and community publications, and they have received many honors, most recently from Davis-Putter Scholarship Fund, National Association for Law Placement/Public Service Jobs

Directory, Society for Disability Studies, and American Association of People with Disabilities. Their blog is Autistic Hoya.

Twitter: @autistichoya

To Resist, One Must Have Hope!

Anita Cameron

Content notes: struggle and solidarity, infrastructural violence, suicidal ideation

In the dark times since the election, a one-word mantra has arisen. That word, that mantra, is *Resist*!

Many have lost hope. I too lost hope at first. I was very, very angry. I became depressed to the point of seriously considering suicide. Thankfully, that feeling only lasted a few minutes! Still, I was left with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. After all, I am almost everything this administration hates in the body of one person: Black, a woman, a lesbian, disabled, poor.

I saw how this administration did not wait to begin before hiring unqualified staff who hated people like me and other marginalized peoples. Though some, including the President, have been accused of (or caught in) acts of wrongdoing, they continue with impunity because they are surrounded by like-minded people. With all that corruption and complacency, what is an ordinary person to do? How could I resist?

I thought about fleeing the country, but realized that even with all of my skills, I would never be allowed to enter another country because of my disabilities.

I became numb in order to be able to deal with these feelings, but had to cast off that numbness in order to let hope seep in. As an activist, one must have some measure of hope. Otherwise, why bother?

What is it that we must resist? Fear, hatred, racism, misogyny, ableism, xenophobia, and general disrespect. We must resist the efforts of this administration to take away our healthcare; to deport people based on their religion; to rewrite history; to disrespect women; to strip away protections for trans folks; to criminalize people based on their race, skin color, or low socioeconomic status; to erase and eradicate the disability community; and to silence anyone who resists.

It’s easy to say that we must “resist,” but what is resistance? What does it mean to resist?

To resist means to exert oneself so as to counteract or defeat opposition. Another way of putting it is refusing to go along with the status quo. To resist is to fight. It means not allowing yourself, your family, your friends, or anyone to be pushed around by people or entities who would rather you cease to exist. Resisting can be hard but it must be done.

How does one resist? What can you or I do to combat what is going on?

Organizing is a form of resistance. The phrase "Don't mourn, organize" is being bandied about now more than ever. To many, it feels hollow because it seems like nothing can stop this administration’s transgressions; they've already gotten away with so many different kinds of misconduct.

Still, organizing against their policies sends a message that not everyone agrees with the evil bullying of this administration.

How does one organize? How many people does it take to organize? What can people organize?

Organizing can be simple or complex. One person can organize a specific action, such as drawing up a petition or holding a one-person vigil, while many people can come together to organize a specific event, such as a march, rally, or town hall meeting.

For those who can’t or don’t want to organize, participating in events and specific actions is also a form of resistance. For those who are homebound or bed borne, you, too can resist. You can sign an online petition. You can call or email your legislators. You can organize from your bed. You can use social media to resist by sharing an article or petition on Facebook, or by tweeting at a legislator.

There are other ways to resist if you don’t want to go as far as doing “political” things. You may feel unsafe because of your job, or because of where you live or who you live with. Speaking out against hatred, racism, ableism, disrespect, and discrimination is another form of resistance. Uplift marginalized peoples. Validate our experiences. Center us. Defend us.

Remember that unless you are part of the 1% or less, you have a chance of being negatively affected by what is happening in our country, even if right now you feel that you are “on top” because you are a White, cis, straight, Christian, nondisabled male, because of your status as middle or upper middle class, because of your education level, or because of any other reason that you feel that you aren't "one of them." It is important that you try to understand things from our perspective and resist alongside us, because if things continue as they are, you may get a rude awakening one day and find yourself among our ranks.

To resist, one must have hope. Hope is essential. Without it, we are lost.

What is hope? Hope is the act of wanting something to happen or to be true. Hope means that we are not giving up on our country or ourselves.

We must have hope in the face of all that is going on, because without it, we will die. We will watch and do nothing while healthcare goes away, while education becomes utterly substandard, while families are ripped apart through deportation and bans, and while safety nets are snatched from the disabled and poor. We will watch and do nothing while this administration commits more and more outrageous injustices and leads us to war and annihilation.

Hope gives us the strength to resist, to take action. With hope, we believe - we know - that we can stop or change things. Hope leads those of us who can, to act.

Hope and resistance has borne fruit. The President's ban on Muslims from certain countries has been stopped, at least for now, after hundreds of people protested at airports. The American Health Care Act (AHCA), which would have led to the death or institutionalization of millions of Americans, was stopped not only because of disagreements among right wing Republicans, but through the actions of so many of us who wrote, called, tweeted, emailed, and visited our legislators, as well as those who held town hall meetings, and who protested and were arrested in order to stop it, at least temporarily.

Victories like this, even temporary victories, keep hope alive in those of us who resist. We can dream of a better and brighter day, just as those before us dreamt that someday we would all be free and equal. While that dream has not yet truly come, it is closer than ever.

In this age of hate, when everyone is desperate and all seems hopeless, it is extremely important that those of us who resist remain steadfast in our hope. We cannot allow these temporary victories to lull us into a false sense of security. In response to every victory, our opponents, those who want us dead or gone, craft new and clever ways to oppress us.

Just as the powers that be are creative in their methods of oppression, we resisters must be equally and more creative in our resistance. After all, at some point, our methods of resistance will become predictable and easily thwarted. It is well known that certain legislators no longer attend their own town hall meetings. Some legislators will no longer accept petitions, postcards, or letters. Call-ins to politicians are stopped in their tracks because staff close the phone lines. Protesters are often stopped before they reach their target, or arrested within minutes of arrival.

Hope allows us resisters to devise better and more efficient strategies to continue our fight. It keeps us on the path of nonviolence and justice. Violence is hopelessness; it is an act of one who has given up and who sees no other choice. It is hope turned to desperation. I'm not being judgmental. I know what it is to feel desperation. I understand the emptiness and hopelessness that leads to violence. It is hope based in love of self, of neighbors, and of country that leads to creative resistance that will bring back what we have lost and what we still might lose.

Hope gives courage, which leads to more hope. It is what makes us hold on when all seems lost. It is what propels us to do things we thought we could never do: call that senator or member of congress to oppose unjust legislation; carry a picket sign during a vigil; get arrested for shutting down a building, a street, or the Capitol as a form of civil disobedience. Hope gives you the strength to tell your right-wing uncle that Black lives matter, poor people aren't leeches, disabled people deserve to live and have rights, immigrants aren't bad people, and stop misgendering your trans cousin!

To resist, one must have hope. The work cannot be done in a vacuum. Hope sustains resistance. Resistance sustains hope. "Resistance" without hope is merely an empty word. Shouting "Resist," posting a meme on social media, making some artwork… that's easy, and meaningless. To give it meaning, to make it useful, to make it actual, you need a fuel, a driving force: hope. Without hope and all it entails, there can be no resistance.

© 2018 Anita Cameron

About

[Image description of Anita Cameron, a Black woman with very long dreadlocks, wearing thick glasses, a tan hat and dressed in various shades of grey, sitting with one hand handcuffed to the fence of the White House during an ADAPT protest. A copper colored cane is in her lap and she is staring seriously, almost scowling into the camera.]

Disability rights activist **Anita Cameron** has been involved in social change activism and community organizing for 37 years. As a teenager, the 52-year old Chicago native joined peace and justice organizations and participated in nonviolent civil disobedience. In 1986, Anita joined ADAPT, a national, grassroots disability rights organization, and has been a member for 32 years, serving as a national organizer, strategist, and police negotiator. Anita is very proud of the fact that she has been arrested 134 times with ADAPT doing nonviolent civil disobedience after the style of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi.

Anita is an accomplished writer and blogger who has served as a guest columnist for newspapers, magazines, and blogs, writing mainly about issues affecting people with disabilities, including issues of discrimination, voting rights, transportation, opposition to physician assisted suicide, and emergency preparedness. She has written for Yahoo! Voices, The Mobility Resource, and The Huffington Post, and has been published in “Voices of A

People’s History of the United States”, by the late award winning historian Howard Zinn. The book has recently undergone a tenth anniversary reissue, which includes Anita’s original article, “And the Steps Came Tumbling Down: ADAPT’s Battle with the American Homebuilders’ Association”. Anita now blogs at Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies, as well as at her own blog, Angry Black Womyn.

Anita is Director of Minority Outreach at Not Dead Yet. She lives in Rochester, NY, with her wife Lisa.

Twitter @adaptanita

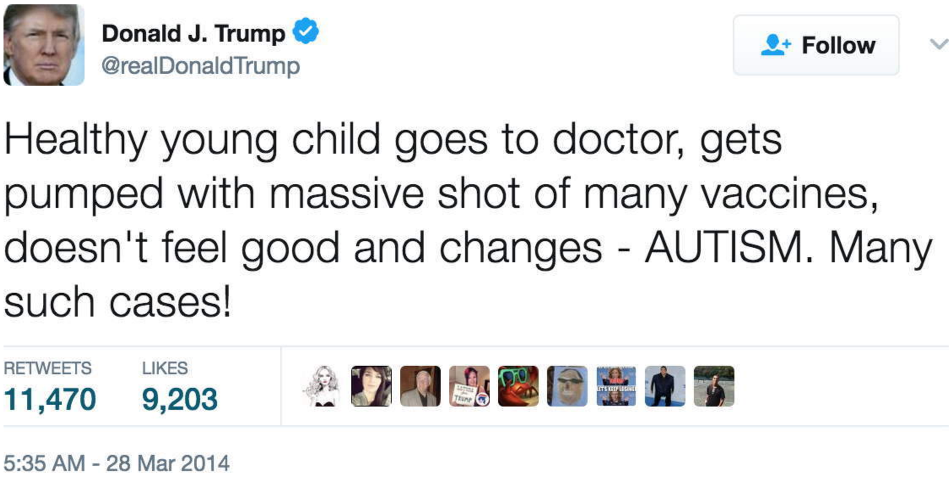
Barron Trump's (Alleged) Autistic Childhood

Cyree Jarelle Johnson

Content notes: eugenics, child abuse, suicide

President Donald Trump has a contentious relationship with disability communities. His attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and derision of Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Serge Kovaleski have rightfully put him at odds with our movement. His approach towards disability issues is troubling, yet in the context of plausible rumors that Barron Trump is autistic, this misbehaviour could amount to child abuse. Public humiliation and cure rhetoric are common forms of emotional abuse leveled at autistic children. The treatment of the youngest Trump is potentially a proxy for the abuse that will continue to be the norm in Donald Trump's America.

Donald Trump met with school leaders this Valentine's Day, and spent a great deal of their time together talking about autism, a non-sequitur to their scheduled conversation about early childhood education. Principal Jane Quenneville noted what she believed to be a rise in students with autism spectrum disorders. Trump slammed what he called a "tremendous increase" noting that he found it "a horrible thing to watch." The voices of autistic students were noticeably absent from the room.



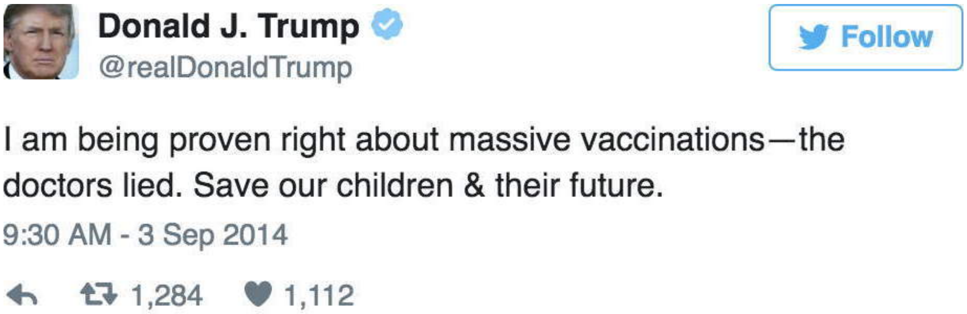
Healthy young child goes to doctor, gets pumped with massive shot of many vaccines, doesn't feel good and changes - AUTISM. Many such cases!

5:35 AM - 28 Mar 2014

[Screenshot from a Tweet by Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump on September 24, 2014, 5:35 AM: "Healthy young child goes to doctor, gets pumped with massive shot of many vaccines, doesn't feel good and changes - AUTISM. Many such cases!]

The Centers for Disease Control have noted no such increase. About 1 in 66 to 1 in 68 people are autistic, a small fraction of the human population. While these numbers may be greater or fewer in some states, overall there is no “autism epidemic.” There is, however, a regime of misinformation about people with autism spectrum disorders.

When President Trump was still Candidate Trump, he issued at least two tweets baselessly linking early childhood vaccinations to autism spectrum disorders. On March 28th, 2014, he tweeted “Healthy young child goes to doctor, gets pumped with massive shot of many vaccines, doesn’t feel good and changes - AUTISM. Many such cases!” This conspiracy theory, most common among conservative Christian Darwinists on the far right and ableist body purists on the left, casts autism as an avoidable horror. To them, autism is far worse than the deadly diseases vaccines are designed to prevent. This line of thinking promotes a “survival of the fittest” mentality, at once eugenicist and ignorant to the fact that healthy, non-disabled people die each year of preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, and influenza. These are the lies that create stigma. These are the myths that “warrior” parents use to excuse the abuse of autistic children.



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

I am being proven right about massive vaccinations—the doctors lied. Save our children & their future.

9:30 AM - 3 Sep 2014

1,284 1,112

[Screenshot from a Tweet by Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump on September 3, 2014, 9:30 AM: “I am being proven right about massive vaccinations—the doctors lied. Save our children & their future.]

Trump’s claims linking autism to vaccines are based on a fraudulent study that has since been thoroughly debunked; however the influence of the study has unfortunately been very persistent. There is a great deal of evidence that his line of thinking excuses and even promotes the murder of autistic children. Trump’s proposed cuts to healthcare will surely leave parents of autistic children with fewer options for safe childcare, and less money at the end of the month. It is common for a lack of social and medical support for parents to be cited as a contributing factor to the murder of children with disabilities. If autism is being presented as a curable or preventable negative trait, something to “[s]ave our children & their future[s]” from, then what incentive do non-autistic people have to respect their autistic children as human beings?

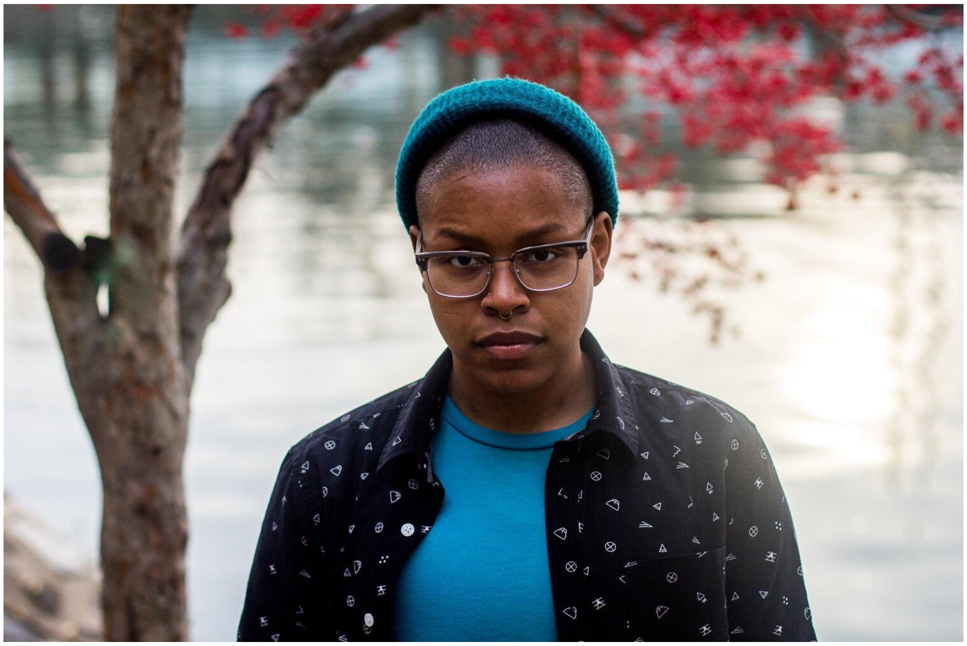
Enter Rosie O'Donnell. In late November 2016, O’Donnell posted a video to her website asserting that Barron Trump had an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Her proof lay in Barron Trump’s supposed inability to clap in a way that seems allistic, and some fidgeting in his seat. On November 28th, 2016, she tweeted “Barron Trump Autistic? if so - what an amazing opportunity to bring attention to the AUTISM epidemic”. O’Donnell has an autistic child. Instances in which the parents of children with autism use their supposed knowledge of ASDs to harm autistic people as a whole are myriad. Many have asserted that the youngest Trump should be “off limits” to scrutiny and speculation. Donald Trump’s war on the autistic community necessitates inquiry into what this means for the autistic people around him.

If Barron Trump is indeed Autistic, he is very likely subject to humiliating taunts and behavioral “therapies” designed to make him more like allistic children. He is the president’s youngest son: hypervisible, incredibly privileged, yet vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. This is not a rallying cry in defense of Barron Trump; yet if rich, white, autistic boys are harshly scrutinized for benign behavioral irregularities, other autistics will continue to bear the brunt of the fallout.

When autism is positioned as inherently negative, autistic people are seen as disposable. Why is having difficulty clapping considered troublesome enough to prompt a saccharine video about the sad fate of autistic kids? Now is the time for autistic youth and adults to highlight and respond to the intense scrutiny that autistic people of all ages face, and its consequences. People with autism die eighteen years sooner than non-autistic people, and are much more likely than allistics to commit suicide. Some of those suicidal impulses stem from the bullying that folks on the spectrum incur from people who agree with Donald Trump and Rosie O’Donnell’s fatalist view of autism.

© 2018 Cyree Jarelle Johnson

About



[Image description: a black non-binary person with very low cut hair and glasses looks directly into the camera. Behind them is a tree with low hanging branches bearing red berries, and a body of water.]

Cyree Jarelle Johnson is an essayist and poet from Piscataway, New Jersey. They are a Poetry Editor at The Deaf Poets Society, a journal of D/deaf and Disabled literature and art, and a proud member of the Harriet Tubman Collective. They are currently a candidate for an MFA in Creative Writing - Poetry from Columbia University.

Twitter: @blackTiresias

Hip Hop & Disability Liberation: Finding Resistance, Hope & Wholeness

DJ Kuttin Kandi and Leroy Moore

Content notes: Hip Hop hxstory and potential futures

For many of us Black and Brown people and people of color, music and art is more than just music and art just as Hip Hop is more than just Hip Hop music and art. Hip Hop is a culture that awakens our spirits and finds home through spoken word truths. Hip Hop is about surviving and thriving in an unjust world. It's about healing, embracing, and holding space for one another. It's a movement that flows with rhythm and rhyme through pain and joy. It pushes back against all that seeks to erase us as we leave our writings on the walls. Through the call and response, we shatter glass ceilings and beat juggle our way into existence, especially when we are unloved. Hip Hop is everything we are told not to be and everything we aspire to become. Hip Hop is the toprock and sixstep reach to our whole selves; and the verse and the hook of resistance along with the swag of a squad full of hope.

Founded by Black and Brown working class youth in the Bronx, Hip Hop culture has always been a form of resistance as it has always been a space of hope and love. Through resistance work, one can and will find community who bring hope by their perseverance and dedication for justice amidst oppression. While resistance work can be hard and full of struggle, it is also amongst the people we serve where we find upliftment and hope. Hip Hop, a hxstorical resistance movement of marginalized communities of color that fought against an oppressive system in the early 70's in the Bronx, continues to find *hope* through the Hip Hop elements of Breakin', MCin', DJin', Graffiti, and Knowledge. It is also through that same hope of "cuttin' it up" on vinyl, windmills on cardboard boxes, and spittin bars in a cypher where Hip Hop proceeds its journey into resistance as it continues to "look for the perfect beat."

In reality, we know that there is no such thing as perfect. Yet, sometimes to our own demise, we tend to strive for perfection. And in Hip Hop, it's almost always about “authenticity.” More on authenticity later. Regardless, there is work to be done if Hip Hop is to move past this idea of perfection and continue onto the path of resistance. In order for Hip Hop to truly evolve and expand in its understanding of resistance and hope, the Hip Hop community must move beyond just the 5 elements of Hip Hop and approach Hip Hop with an intersectionality practice—a practice that integrates a Disability Justice framework. Therefore, as we continue to celebrate what Hip Hop means for us, it is also important that we be critical of the work that Hip Hop has done thus far. Despite Hip Hop being a large platform that shares stories of resistance and hope, there are still many stories and people that have not been centered and given the platform. Specifically, disabled Hip Hop artists have been left out of the conversation or rather, they have been forgotten, ignored, and/or othered.

Hip Hop has touched people with disabilities world-wide; however, people with disabilities are still oppressed in and out of the Hip Hop world-wide industry. Today, Hip Hop has grown into a world-wide movement and a multi-billion dollar industry. Hip Hop artists Jay Z, Duffy, Dr Dre, and Birdman and Slim Williams are reaching the 2017 Forbes Five list with multi-million to billion dollar deals and money making contracts with companies such as Tidal, Apple, Ciroc Vodka, and Armand de Brignac. Yet many of us do not know the full stories of graffiti writer Kase2 also known as King Kase2 (born Jeff Brown) with an amputation, Ronald “Bee-Stinger” Savage with Tourette Syndrome, Darryl “DMC” McDaniels who released a memoir on depression and suicide in January 2017, and more early stories of artists with disabilities in Hip-Hop. Why is there still a stigma of depression and suicide, and why is it hardly discussed such as the death by suicide of Hip Hop music mogul Chris Lighty in 2012? Why aren’t queer and trans disabled Black, Brown, Indigenous, womxn of color centered and given not just the feature but the headline of every performance bill? Why are there many celebrity artists whose disabilities are often erased or sometimes silenced if they speak about their disabilities in public? How does this global billion dollar movement touch people with disabilities but leave them out of the picture? These are just some of the questions we need to reflect upon and address, especially if we intend to further our resistance work as a Hip Hop community.

Hip Hop's journey of resistance began long before the two turntables ever existed, as Hip Hop has its roots in slave ships where The Dozens were born, in disabled slaves who battled each other by telling stories, in field songs that had messages that were passed down from slave to slave, and in the Blues like Blind Willie Johnson who sung a haunting song on the steps of a New Orleans courtroom and was arrested while singing for tips outside of a Custom House. These real stories of resistance through music by Black and Brown disabled artists are only the tip of the iceberg, but very few make the connection of race, art, disability, and resistance. Musicians with disabilities have always been here; however, there has been a lack of cultural activism especially in Hip Hop with disability justice, to not only advocate but to continue to display the talents of musicians with disabilities.

Today, organizing groups such as Krip-Hop Nation bring in the cultural activism and disability justice perspective as they honor the history of Black and Brown disability resistance through the arts. Krip-Hop Nation is an international network of Hip-Hop and other musicians with disabilities with a few chapters around the world called Mcees With Disabilities (MWD) in Germany, UK, and Africa. Krip-Hop is a community as well as style of music, an artistic space where people with disabilities can speak out and speak back to the social structures that exclude people based on disability, race, sexuality, and a host of other marginalized identities. Krip-Hop Nation's byline *"Krip-Hop is more than music"* is reinforced through their ever-growing movement-building politics, which is a process that builds from identity politics, to self-empowerment, to cultural artistic expressions of speaking, singing/rapping, and writing with a political activist and intersectional lens.

During this Trumpism era it will be necessary that we work in solidarity with organizations like Krip-Hop Nation who are doing the work of centering Black and Brown people and people of color with disabilities. The Trump administration, along with Mick Mulvaney, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, recently previewed the 2018 budget which vows to cut $72 billion from Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income in the next ten years. The Trump administration's proposed cuts encompass $1.74 trillion on social welfare reductions. This is just a preview of the challenges people with disabilities will be facing in the next four years. Thus, international organizing networks and artistic collectives such as Krip-Hop Nation will continue to be vital as they create and hold space for artistry, education, and community building. More than ever, it will be crucial that we give love to our disabled ancestors and organizations/projects that uphold disability justice, artistic avenues, and display our stories such as The Disability Visibility Project, Sins Invalid, The Harriet Tubman Collective, National Black Disability Coalition, Hip-Hop Bruha, ThisAbility Newspaper of South Africa, and so much more. We will need to protect and preserve these spaces, and create newer resistance and hope spaces for the art arena and our international community. Our Hip Hop community will need to move through, with, and beyond just conversations of access and inclusivity, and into a dialogue exchange of how disability, social justice, and Hip Hop culture can and do intersect.

As Hip Hop community organizers, our work needs to support the work of organizing networks like Krip-Hop Nation who are grounded in an intersectionality framework, connected with community, and centering people of color with disabilities. We need to be committed to disrupting and addressing how society views people with disabilities as we work on dismantling white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalist ableist systems. We must also recognize our disabled ancestors and founders from Blues to Hip-Hop because we are building on what they have built. We will need to celebrate this history and intersectional cultures by politically educating ourselves and our local to global communities. Simultaneously, we need to be critical thinkers and challenge this very foundation along with questioning why disabled peoples have been left out and/or oppressed.

Disability Justice organizers Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Leroy Moore, Sebastian Margaret, Eli Clare, and Stacey Milbern (along with the inspiration of many Disability Justice movement organizers around the world) created the Disability Justice (DJ) framework and practice which lays out ten principles for movement organizers to work from such as *Commitment to Cross Disability Solidarity, Collective Access*, *and Collective Liberation*. The DJ framework in company with the *Hip Hop Intersectionality Framework* (HHIF) created by DJ Kuttin Kandi and Krip-Hop Nation's Hip Hop for Disability Justice Campaign are just some of the resources that provide a basis which can be put into not just our Hip Hop artistry but into our daily practice.

With the intention of Hip Hop developing a praxis that widens and deepens its knowledge and work on social justice, it is paramount that Hip Hop aims to apply these frameworks as well as connect and collectively *move* with the people. Just as Hip Hop has always been about the movement, we will need to be movement-building with Disability Justice at the forefront. We will need to continue to challenge an industry created by corporate greed that tries to tear our spirits by strengthening Hip Hop's anti-capitalist lens. Hence, it will be imperative that Hip Hop continues to shift away from an industry that often others and shames people with disabilities, and into a place of centering wholeness through a Hip Hop movement that demands Disability Justice.

Hip Hop has always been a space for Black, Brown, Indigenous peoples, and people of color who have been excluded, marginalized, and othered. But Hip Hop has also been a space where Black and Brown people and people of color who are queer, trans, gender non-conforming, and/or disabled have been excluded, oppressed, and othered. Some examples of Hip Hop ableist actions have been through the Hyphy Movement using ableist words such as "retarded", Drake's appropriated "Wheelchair Jimmy" dance as he acted as a wheelchair user, and 50 Cent who has consistently bullied autistic people. Be that as it may, Hip Hop did not create ableism as ableism itself has always been intertwined with white supremacy and heteropatriarchy way before Hip Hop was created. Actually, Hip Hop was created as a response to white supremacy. As follows, this is all the more reason why Hip Hop needs to, as Disability Justice organizer Mia Mingus eloquently stated in their 2011 Femmes of Color Symposium keynote speech, "move towards the ugly." We will need to move towards the hidden, the shamed, the displaced, the othered, and the undesirable, as Hip Hop has always been the kind of resistance space that sought hope from the often othered and ugly. Hip Hop's original roots relied on the voice of the struggle and the marginalized to create its authentic aesthetic. Consequently, this is the type of resistance work that will find not just hope but the kind of liberation and wholeness Hip Hop has been seeking and needing.

As more Hip Hop artists come forward speaking openly about their disabilities and/or support for people with disabilities, the more we can collectively gather, share, and organize. The more that we center disabled queer, bi, trans, gender non-conforming, womxn of color; the closer we get to liberation. If we, as a Hip Hop community can face our own internalized ableism as we confront institutionalized ableist systems, we can find truth in our futile search for Hip Hop "authenticity." It will be then that we will realize that authenticity is not simply just found in some nostalgic Hip Hop "purist" sound but in the static of the dirty skratch on even the shiniest most crunk vinyl. It's deep in the cut, stacked under a crate full of records. It's lost amongst the grooves. And it's bent, cracked, and warped. But it's a sound worth playing as the "purity" is found in the screech of the kick and the snare, and the authenticity between the rarity and the most common of the funk. This is where hope lives and where we are free. It is silent and yet it hollers out truth from *droppin' it on the one*. It's tragic as it is liberating. It's comforting and excruciating. Still, it plays on, because perhaps this is still about that journey for the "perfect beat", after all—the perfect beat created by the imperfect, othered, and forgotten disabled Hip Hop head who brings authenticity through every whole note played and every resistance song chanted.

© 2018 Leroy Moore and DJ Kuttin Kandi

About

[Image description: a smiling Brown Asian, Fiipinx, womxn with long dark brown hair wearing a camouflaged jacket and elephant-printed hat tilted to the side.]

DJ Kuttin Kandi also known as the "People's Hip Hop DJ Scholar" was born and raised in Queens, NY. She is widely regarded as one of the most legendary and accomplished womxn DJs in the world. Kandi is a disabled PilipinX/PinXy-American Queer, Writer, Poet, Theater Performer, Educator, Hip Hop Feminist, and Community Organizer . She is a member of DJ team champions 5th Platoon; Co-Founder and DJ for the Hip Hop group Anomolies; Co-Founder of the famed NY monthly open mic “Guerrilla Words,” Co-Founder of the coalition R.E.A.C.Hip-Hop (Representing Education, Activism & Community through Hip Hop), Co-Founder and Board Member of the new DJ Coalition - Freedom Sound DJ's, and the Founder and Editor of the blog Hip Hop Bruha. DJing for over 20 years, Kandi competed in over 30 DJ competitions such as ITF Championships and Vibe Magazine DJ Championships. She is the 1998 NY Source Magazine DJ Champion and for 18 years she held the title as the only womxn DJ to be in the DMC USA FINALs. Kuttin Kandi has been interviewed and featured in numerous magazines and newspapers such as

Source, Vibe, Vogue, YM, Rolling Stones, XXL, The New York Times, The Daily News, and the Vibe Hip-Hop Diva's book. Kandi has performed all around the world with artists such as Bob James, Kool Herc, Jay-Z, Gangstar, LL Cool J, Mya, MC Lyte, the Roots, Young Gunz, Dead Prez, Immortal Technique, Black Eyed Peas, Common, Jean Grae, BlackStar, and punk Riot Grrrl group LeTigre, just to name a few. Kandi has been honored and performed at venues such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Lincoln Center, and Madison Square Garden for WNBA's NY Liberty. She is a known Pop-Culture Political Essayist and has written for several anthologies and blogs. Kandi is also the Co-Editor of the book "Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipino/a America" and is currently working on new writing projects. When Kandi is not performing she is organizing on the ground with various grassroots community organizations, speaking, writing or lecturing. Kandi worked at UC San Diego's Women's Center for seven years specializing in social justice & diversity programming and within Student Life at Diablo Valley College in the Bay Area. Kandi is a member and organizes with Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, Asian Solidarity Collective, Asians For Black Lives San Diego and the Intersectional Feminist Collective. DJ Kuttin Kandi continues to do community organizing work and provides various lectures on diversity, gender & sexuality, race, body politics, disability justice and etc.

Website: https://www.djkuttinkandi.com/

[Image description: a photo of Leroy Moore, a Black man with a shaved head looking left from the camera. He is wearing a black tuxedo with white shirt and magenta bow tie. Behind him is a glass-paned window.]

Leroy F. Moore Jr. is a Black writer, poet, hip-hop/music lover, community activist and feminist with a physical disability. He has been sharing his perspective on identity, race & disability for the last thirteen years or so. His work began in London, England where he discovered a Black Disabled Movement which help lead to the creation of his lecture series; 'On the Outskirts: Race & Disability.' Leroy is Co-founder of the Sins Invalid performance project and its Community Relations Director. Leroy is also a contributing writer and performer for many Sins Invalid shows. He is also the creator of Krip-Hop Nation (Hip-Hop artists with disabilities and other disabled musicians from around the world) and produced Krip-Hop Mixtape Series. Leroy formed one of the first organizations for people of color with disabilities in the San Francisco Bay area that lasted five years. He is founding member and current Chair of the Black Disability Studies Working Group with the National Black Disability Coalition. Leroy was Co Host of a radio show in San Francisco at KPOO 89.5 FM, Berkeley at KPFA 94.1 FM. He has studied, worked and lectured in the field of race and disability concerning blues, hip-hop, and social justice issues in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and South Africa. Leroy is one of the leading voices around police brutality and wrongful incarceration of people with disabilities and was the assistant producer on a 2015 documentary, Where Is Hope, on police brutality against people with disabilities. He is a longtime columnist, one of the first columns on race & disability that started in the early 90's at Poor Magazine in San Francisco, www.poormagazine.org, Illin-N-Chillin. In 2014, San Francisco Bayview Newspaper named Leroy Champion of Disabled People in the Media on Black Media Appreciation Night.

Leroy is the author of a new children's book, Black Disabled Art History 101, Krip-Hop book and his poetry/lyrics book, The Black Kripple Delivers Poetry & Lyrics has been published by Poetic Matrix Press in the Winter of 2015. Leroy has won many awards for his advocacy from the San Francisco Mayor's Disability Council under Willie L. Brown to the Local Hero Award in 2002 from Public Television Station, KQED in San Francisco.

Leroy has interviewed hip-hop/soul/blues/jazz artists with disabilities; the Blind Boys of Alabama, Jazz elder Jimmy Scott, Hip-Hop star, Wonder Mike of the Sugar Hill Gang, DJ Quad of LA, Paraplegic MC of Chicago, Rob DA Noize Temple of New York to name a few. Leroy has a poetry CD, entitled Black Disabled Man with a Big Mouth & A High I.Q. and has put out his poetry CDs entitled The Black Kripple Delivers Krip Love Mixtape (2014) & Krip-Blues Stories (2017).

Email: kriphopnation@gmail.com, blackkrip@gmail.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/KRIPHOPWORLDWIDE/
Address: 1370 University Ave., #316, Berkeley, CA. 94702
Twitter: @kriphopnation

They Had Names

Mari Kurisato

Content notes: Sagamihara, mass murder, eugenics, colonial violence, slur mention

"The disabled can only create misery…It is better that the disabled disappear."

These are the words of Satoshi Uematsu, a former caretaker for disabled residents, who murdered 19 innocent people with disabilities and injured 27 more in July 2016 before turning himself in. Unfortunately it seems Japan has, thus far, capitulated to his suggested ideal. The media, along with the families of the victims, have kept the names of the murdered secret. Hidden. As if their deaths were a crime they committed. In a generation, will people even remember the Sagamihara 19?

"He was doing a standard retard, waving his arms and sounding stupid," wrote Ann Coulter addressing President Trump's mockery of Serge Kovaleski, a New York Times reporter with a congenitally disabled right arm.

If you type in the words "should disabled," Google's autocomplete function suggests "should disabled babies be aborted?"

Another search suggestion is "should disabled people have children?"

The trend here is the eugenics-laden sentiment that the disabled should cease to exist, if only to end our suffering.

We should not exist. We should disappear.

As a disabled woman, my instinct is to say, "Screw that!"

I will resist disappearing.

How do I resist? How do I find hope?

Connecting. Ceremony. Being visible! Shouting "NO!" Self-care. Creating.

First, a bit of backstory.

Besides being a woman with cerebral palsy, spinal stenosis, PTSD, dyscalculia, social anxiety disorders, and "other cognitive learning disabilities,” I’m also a member of the Cote First Nation of Ojibwe people. These two things don’t seem connected at first, but when it comes to resisting disappearing, the Indigenous people of North America have a good track record.

So I draw inspiration and strength from my Elders, Ancestors, and my Tribal Nation.

For us Indigenous people, resistance is existence. Given that Natives have lost much of our pre-contact population, our autonomy, and even in some cases our cultural identity, we have become experts in resisting extinction over the last 525 years. The methods of our resistance vary widely, but in my case, it's a matter of focusing on a single question:

Who do you fight for?

Survival requires a reason, and at their core, my reasons are my child, my spouse, my mom, my relatives on the reservation and off, and my people. My family.

Resistance is about shoring up relationships. Strengthening connections, to community and to its resources, and tightening bonds between friends and family. The Ojibwe formed alliances with the Odawa and the Potawatomi Nations, creating the Council of Three Fires, a ceremonial bond that stands to this day.

Natives have a history of this; resistance as ritual, as ceremony. We find hope in our family, our friends, the grand entry pow wow lines where thousands of years of history both oral and physical culminate in a sacred moment that is worshipful prayer and sage defiance.

My resistance comes from who I am as a Native and as an LGBTQIA woman. Instinctively, the first step is reaching out and making connections across social media and MMO [massively multiplayer online] games, the only places where my social anxiety lets me interact with people on any meaningful level.

Part of my ceremonial ritual is established for me by my connections to the tribe. Part of it is what I create. Art is a form of resistance. Writing, poetry, drawing, painting. Telling the stories about how disabled people are people with disabilities, and their disability no more defines them than their eye color. Recording my path as a Nakawē Ojibwe Native, as an LGBTQIA woman, and as a disabled mother.

Because maybe there is a young person out there from a Northern Tribe, with the same disabilities as mine, and maybe they need to hear a voice that says “Not only can you do this, but you *can* resist the evils of this world, you *can* make good things.”

And part of that is just being a visible person with disabilities. Putting a name and face, such as they are, to society’s collective concept of disabled people. To resist the trend that made the Sagamihara 19 massacre possible. To not disappear. To not let Trump’s mocking of a disabled reporter go unanswered. To refuse to be silent.

Sometimes it’s screaming at the top of my lungs. Some days it’s just fighting the urge to give up. To force myself to get out of bed, if only to take a self-care day. Self-care can mean just focusing on cleaning out my brain, resting, and not engaging with the world. Exercising if I can, cooking if I have the energy. Taking my meds on time. Focusing on ‘me time’ without feeling guilty. To check in with friends on Twitter, to make sure they’re okay. To reconnect, and listen to those who need an ear or a shoulder to cry on. To not give up living, to respect my body’s limits, not as something I should be ashamed of, but as a fact that my body wants to live too, and is trying its best.

Getting over my internalized ableism is an ongoing process, and forgiving myself my failures is part of resistance. Understanding that weakness is a state of my body, not a chosen character flaw, is perhaps the largest obstacle I face day to day. Weakness and limitations are not my body’s fault, and telling myself that my body means well, and that I shouldn’t resent its failures, has eased up some of my Body Dysmorphic Disorder, but it’s an ongoing struggle.

One of the most soul-restoring ways to resist is to create. I draw, I write poems, I paint, I write novels. Making things eases the weird tangle of fear and shame in my brain, even when I just doodle, or write nonsensical poems. And writing fiction? That’s like breathing. It doesn’t really matter if I get published or not. I have to write as long as these ideas are roaming around in my head like a buffalo herd in the Louvre.

But the goal is to find a reason to resist. To have help via friends and family connections. To find my strength in Native ceremony and healing. To be visible as a person with disabilities. To scream “NO!” at the world when the world asserts disabled people don’t matter, but also to take care of myself. To give myself space to live and create. All of this is resistance, so that if one day I, and others like me, are gone, people will say, “They resisted. We remember them. They had names.”

© 2018 Mari Kurisato

About

[Image description: Mari's picture is her online avatar, a punked-up version of Disney's Pocahontas, (a not so subtle satirical dig at a corporate cultural misappropriation) She is adorned with glasses, Pride Flag rainbow colored hair, traditional face and neck tattoos that read Pocahontas' real name "Matoaka," "John Smith Lied!" and "Tashunka Witko is My Hero" and is wearing a black shirt with red lettering that reads "Saulteaux Cote First Nation."]

Mari Kurisato is the pen name for a disabled, LgbtQia, tribally enrolled Cote First Nations Ojibwe woman who lives in Denver Colorado with her wife and son. She has written two self-published books, and her short fiction has appeared in *LOVE BEYOND SPACE AND TIME*, the *THINGS WE ARE NOT* anthology, and *ABSOLUTE POWER, TALES OF QUEER VILLAINY* by Northwest Press. She is currently hard at work on her next novel, seeking an agent, and spending too much time on Twitter and in MMO's. Find her at www.polychromantium.com.

Twitter: @polychromantium

the birth of resistance: courageous dreams, powerful nobodies & revolutionary madness

Talila A. Lewis

Content notes: violence, including incarceration and gun violence

The year is 2050.
There are no prisons.
What does justice look like?

For the past several years, I have invited my students to submit their final compositions in response to this brief yet colossal prompt.

They are free to step outside of themselves and into another time and space—to dream about a world that they have never seen, to create justice that they have never felt, to design a future realm that honors and protects the next seven generations. Throughout the semester, we make space for one another's dreams and work to develop and build on each other's imagined worlds.

Some write about sharing stories with their grandchildren of a time when poverty, disability, and race were criminalized, and modern-day unarmed peace officers were formidably armed police officers. Some share about former prisons having been renovated and developed into schools, libraries, and community living spaces. Others share about the deep sorrow felt by children whose visits to prison museums could not help them comprehend the normalized horrors their ancestors visited upon their fellow human beings. In their worlds, neurodiverse people are seen as an invaluable part of society, and formerly institutionalized people—who are now aging and passing away—are revered for having survived the age of mass incarceration.

Their dreams are beyond this world, but completely possible.

Ki'tay D. Davidson, a renowned dreamer and purveyor of dreams, insisted on the critical importance of dream work with his clarion call: "Dream! You were meant to be courageous."

Indeed, dreaming is among the most difficult and brave kinds of advocacy work. Its value cannot be overstated. When we create space for ourselves and others to dream, we embody recurring hope, active love, critical resistance, and radical change. We are reminded that those who came before us dreamed of that which no one thought could exist—that their dreams are the reasons that we now are living the "impossible."

All of this said, the two greatest threats to this immensely important dream work are, first, our own unexamined trust in and overreliance on current institutions, and second, erasure and devaluation of the path-breaking work of "nobodies."

Institutions and institutional actors depend on us depending on them. Trans activist-educators Tourmaline and Dean Spade's recent calls for "a movement of nobodies" resonate deeply with many. Many are struggling to breathe life into this call to action.

Simply put, addressing harm and preventing violence in our communities requires mutual accountability that does not rely upon or perpetuate state, intra-community, or interpersonal violence. Innovative, intersectional, restorative, and transformative practices that center healing, anti-violence, and community-based strategies will save us. In my life and in my advocacy, for example, I have found the existence of laws, law enforcement, and uncritical legal professionals to be among the greatest barriers to individual and collective accountability and healing.

In January 2007, I was caught in a hail of stray bullets that were the result of a drive-by shooting. Bullet holes peppered my car door and the facade of the apartment building immediately next to me. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Police officers arrested one young man at the scene and a prosecutor brought charges against this young man "to the fullest extent of the law." This episode still haunts me, but not for the reasons that most might assume.

Apart from how decidedly awfully police officers treated me in the immediate aftermath of this traumatic event, I also discovered that my voice and my needs for healing were of no consequence to the state—particularly because my desires were not sufficiently punitive. On the morning after the shooting, the prosecutor called me to gather details. After sharing as much information as I could, I expressed my sincere desire to have a face-to-face conversation with the young person who had been arrested.

As a student working three jobs and attending school full-time, who had just begun an internship at the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, I thought a conversation might make the world of difference in this person’s life and provide closure and healing for me. Upon hearing my request, the prosecutor gruffly stated that “the state would handle it from here,” and hung up.

The government never contacted me again, never provided further information about this individual or the outcome of this case, and I have no idea what happened to this young person.

Was he even the right person (there was some indication that the police may have arrested the wrong person)? Is he being harmed in a federal prison somewhere? Was he released? If he was released, did he continue a cycle of violence or is he now working to support and mentor other societally marginalized youth? Should I have pressed further to have a conversation? Could that have saved others from being victimized if this young person did in fact continue down a path of violence? Would a conversation have benefited either of us anyway? These are questions that I likely will never be able to answer.

Harsh retribution—which seemingly satisfied the state—actually damaged me, this young man, our families, and every marginalized community to which we belong. Furthermore, some ten years later, I still do not have closure and probably never will. Our criminal legal system claims to seek justice for victims and survivors of violence, but our voices are not centered unless we are acceptably violent enough to justify the state’s pre-ordained violent action; or white, wealthy, or abled enough for our dissent to actually matter.

Proximity, privilege, and profit determine individual, social, and political perspective and discourse surrounding which institutions are “of value.” Those who swear by the criminal legal system, for instance, often have the least experience with and are least affected by this system. Supportive individuals also tend to have the most to gain by and through this system's vitality.

For a government that claims to seek to reduce and prevent violence, transformative and holistic measures like community conversations and community accountability should be at least a part of the solution. The opposite is true, however. Despite evidence of these approaches having positive and lasting effects, and despite the fact that we know that the law in its conception, application, and consequence is now and always has been racist, classist, and ableist, the state continues to circumvent healing in exchange for its own unique brand of violence. After a decade of all-volunteer advocacy, I have come to view every incarceration as a missed opportunity to love and transform; as a loss of time, life, and dreams of our community; and as state violence. Some of our greatest assets and resources in this struggle are exiled from our communities and languishing in this nation's labyrinth of violent institutions.

Large nonprofits—yet another institution that we have become particularly reliant upon—will not save us either. Many of the largest nonprofits in this nation have sufficiently bought into the myth of incrementalism and positive outcomes by and through existing institutions. Often these nonprofits receive funding from the government and other entities that lead to them supporting the perpetuation of harmful "solutions" or "reforms" in the wake of interpersonal, intra-community and state violence. Instead of finding ways to address the root causes of violence, these organizations impulsively resort to relying upon the legal system, or "partnering" with harmful state actors in response to systemic and pervasive state violence. Then, people will celebrate a non-profit's "successful" lawsuit (which usually helps the government discover new ways to avoid being caught and held accountable in the future and requires taxpayer payouts without any real accountability or change ever occurring) more than they do volunteer community organizing and collective resistance.

As someone whose work has been continually erased by some of the largest and most powerful nonprofits in the nation, I would be remiss not to include the harms that stem from the capitalist credos of most of these institutions. Erasure of the free[dom] grind of authentic advocates, community builders, and affected persons who sacrifice their lives for justice is a particularly grievous form of violence. This form of erasure disempowers our communities. Erasure keeps our communities beholden to the nonprofit or the state—wholly unaware of their own history of resistance and power to change, heal, and transform *without* organizations, *without* foundations, *without* institutions or the state.

Access to our courts is the privilege of privileges. The fact that abled white cisgender straight generationally well-off men comprise the *vast* majority of those who are deemed “qualified” to prosecute and practice in courts across this stolen land should be indicia enough of the problems inherent in our legal system. Attorneys, judges and others who hold power in the legal system rely on people believing that the legal system is the path to “justice.” But neither history nor present has borne this out. On the contrary, despite some important cabined victories, the legal system continues to perpetuate inequity, privilege, capitalism, classism, ableism, racism, and countless other other harmful systems of oppression.

What if we flipped the legal system on its head, so the folks most affected are discussing, addressing, and in charge of their own healing and transformation?

The more invested our communities become in the government as the solution to violence, the less connected we become to each other, and the less we look to our own communities as sources of safety, healing, prevention, and transformation. The more invested our communities are in institutions, the less we dream of what could and should exist in their place. Resources are siphoned away from our communities and funneled into institutions that rely on creating and perpetuating violence to survive and thrive.

We will never create justice by perpetuating violence by and through the state; and nonprofits, law(yers), and litigation will never equate to liberation.

Disability and deaf communities must interrogate and work to dismantle systemic ableism, racism, and classism within our own communities and within all institutions. We must also be honest with community members about police and prosecutorial power, privilege, discretion, and abuse. These weigh heavily on laws invoked, arrests made, and charges levied and upheld in our communities. If disability and deaf communities and organizations were prioritizing racial justice, economic justice, and disability justice, we would be centering the stories and leadership of the most marginalized, and challenging our communities to reimagine and redefine "justice."

Resistance is dreaming about the end of law enforcement, courts and prisons as we know them. Hope flows from knowing that we are not bound by the rigid and relative confines of legislatures, courtrooms, or oval offices—that outer limits exist only if we accept them as real.

Love is our relentless pursuit of real-life dreams.

Freedom first takes root in our visions for a radically just space-time continuum; and triumph is earned when others slip into our envisioned realm of justice and stay awhile—at least until time, space, or both catch up.

Liberation is conceived by our imagination, carried in our hearts, and birthed through our revolutionary madness.

© 2018 Talila A. Lewis

About

[Image of a young genderfluid black person of African descent (TL) wearing a bright blue collared shirt while seated at a desk in a hallway with their hands folded under their chin and elbows leaning against the tabletop. There are windows & doors in the background.]

Recognized as a White House Champion of Change and one of Pacific Standard Magazine's Top 30 Thinkers Under 30, **Talila A. Lewis** is a Community Lawyer who has been engaged in innovative and intersectional anti-violence, decarceration & prison abolition work for over a decade. Talila's work highlights and addresses the nexus between race, class, disability and structural inequity—focusing in particular, on people with multiply marginalized identities. Talila co-founded & serves as the volunteer director of Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of Deaf Communities (HEARD), a volunteer-dependent nonprofit organization which created and maintains the only national database of Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled and Hard of Hearing imprisoned people. Talila also serves as a consultant on radical education and workplace inclusion; an expert on cases involving disabled people; and previously served as the Givelber Public Interest Lecturer at Northeastern University School of Law and a visiting professor at Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf. Talila is a founding member of the Harriet Tubman

Collective and co-creator of the Disability Solidarity praxis. A recent graduate of American University Washington College of Law, Talila has received awards from numerous universities, the American Bar Association, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, the American Association for People with Disabilities, National Black Deaf Advocates, and the Nation Institute, among others. Talila is the recipient of the 2018 Roddenberry Fellowship and the 2018 Atlantic Fellowship for Racial Equity.

Twitter: @talilalewis

Renewal of Faith and Hope

Noemi Martinez

Content notes: survival, belonging, intracommunity and lateral marginalization

If we don’t have renewal of faith and hope, constant and continuous resistance cannot be sustained or endured.

How do we do this? Renewal of faith and hope look different for different parts of my communities, as does survival. Survival takes on a different meaning depending on the context of the community where it’s coming from.

Survival in my immediate family means: am I working, am I feeding my family, am I doing everything I can in order to not live in poverty? There is often no thought to what that means for crip bodies, or what that looks like after five to ten years of continuous harm working long hours or being exposed to harmful chemicals, noises, or environments that poison my body and psyche. Survival in this mode means: am I getting and providing the most basic of needs to myself and my children?

Survival in the immigrant, migrant, and latinx communities I am part of means something similar and in the same vein often comes at a cost of losing cultural connections and pathways to sacred memories of my ancestors. There is an idea that assimilation is needed to be fully integrated as belonging to a country where my parents were forced to travel to work because of the colonization of our motherlands.

I often relate the story of how, when I was younger, my father didn’t want me to say I was Chicana because he thought I would appear unappreciative of living in this country. He was also afraid that the government would somehow find out, and that it could be grounds for removal. I fully understand this frame of mind. Yet now, twenty years later, my dad is not shy about criticizing the policies of the United States, the country that used him as a bracero when he was at his best, and then tried to expel him from the country after he had worked the land and formed ties to people and communities. Never mind the fact that braceros, like many of the immigrants and migrants from Mexico and other countries, come to the US for better opportunities.

Survival, in this case, often doesn’t mean understanding the ways our bodies are harmed by continued exposure to long term and generational poverty, to structural, institutional, medical and environmental racism, and to the ableism that exists in this society. Survival, in this case, doesn’t look at the ways that our parents and grandparents worked their bodies year after year in harmful and stressful situations. Survival, in this case, doesn’t account for the ways our bodies are not made for this land and the constrained and homophobic set of beliefs found in this society. My queer and genderqueer body is not made for this land.

Survival in my crip communities looks different too, if it’s coming from a radical people of color centered crip community, or if it’s coming from the disabled community that society assumes is the default, which is usually white and white people centered. This is the default that is perceived by society, and it’s also the group that often doesn’t understand the complex identities of brown crips and crips of color and our varied identities. What this means is that when someone mentions someone with a disability, people in society will usually take that to mean a white disabled person. It’s the way our society is constructed.

So when referring to my body and mind, survival is coded differently to (white) crip communities and to crip of color communities. Here’s where it gets tricky. I can be part of all these communities and circles, and yet still receive fragmented ideas of what survival means. That’s why hope and the fight for existence is so tiring. Every community demands a certain amount of sweat so I can be worthy of belonging, of being “in”. There is only one of me. I live in a sick, crip, and chronically ill body. I am neurodiverse and have a learning disability. My core self is further fragmented because I must pour myself into these communities to feel part of these communities, and often I don’t have the energy to this.

When I want hope, I have to rely on the same fragmented ill/sick self to sustain myself, because I haven't put enough “sweat” into these communities to feel like I can receive methods or resources to remain hopeful, and nourishment to continue resisting in this society.

How do we go beyond resistance, survival, and defending our right to exist, when within these communities we must defend our right to exist as the fragmented selves that we are?

If my communities were to take me holistically, as a person that has varied and different identities than them, and if my communities were to embrace my brown, queer, crip femme body, the pull of trying to appease the different communities and circles I am in wouldn't feel like so much *work*. In order for people like me, who live in these varied identities, to be able to feel that we can approach these communities for nourishment and hope, I must be embraced as I am.

Not all communities are behind me and my varied identities, but I defend, fight, and work for the rights of the members of all my communities.

We are often called divisive when we bring up other parts of our identities that the majority of that circle doesn't share, or realize. Mental illness and depression are still seen as laziness by many in my latinx community. We can't talk about depression or suicidal ideation, because that means we are taking for granted the opportunities we have here in the United States. When I bring up race and culture or medical racism in a community of mostly white disabled people/crips, I am blamed for causing rifts and am met with animosity. When I bring up access issues that prevent my or my medically complex family's participation in events, marches, or gatherings in my local community, I am literally ignored. The constant and continuous fight within these communities means we face fatigue in the same way we face fatigue when confronted by ableist and racist microaggressions daily.

There is a connection between resistance and hope, but first my communities must accept and work with me, as I defend my right to exist in their communities.

© 2018 Noemi Martinez

About

[Image description: photo of Noemi, a brown person of color, with black-red curly hair, looking off center at the camera, not smiling, wearing dark lipstick. They are wearing a black shirt that reads “decolonize: body love”.]

Noemi Martinez is a queer crip chronically ill magical poet-curandera mixed media artist, writer, historian and cultural worker with Mexican and Caribbean roots. A first generation American, her father came to the US as a bracero and her mother was forced to come to the US as a child because of colonialism. Martinez has spent the last 20 years being a nontraditional teacher and involved in the alt publishing community. Some of her poems, essays, artwork and words can be found in *Revolutionary Motherhood: Love on the Frontlines*, *Pimento: Journal of All Things Disability*, **82*, *Make/shift*, *Alyss*, *Rest for Resistance*, *Hip Mama*, *Don’t Leave Your Friends Behind: Concrete Ways to Support Families in Social Justice Movements*, *The Geeky Gimp* and *Xicana Chronicles*.

Twitter: @hermanaresist

Reflections as Congress Debates our Futures

Stacey Milbern

Content notes: caregiving, Medicaid cuts, suicide

This essay was written in the summer of 2017.

Found this photo tonight of Shu and I on graduation day. The photo evokes mixed feelings in me: appreciation for her and deep sadness that the Medicaid funded services that made this joy possible are under attack.

[Centered is Stacey, a mixed race Asian American person wearing a black graduation gown and cap. She is holding a yellow graduation stole. Shu, an Asian American woman with long hair, is to the right of Stacey. She is carefully adjusting Stacey's graduation cap. Stacey is looking forward smiling.]

Today my Facebook feed is full of disabled people saying that they will die if this legislation passes. It is not an exaggeration. My Medicaid funded attendants come every day to assist me to get out of bed, bathe, eat, and manage my impairment. For many of us, our lives depend on these attendant services. Medicaid is the only payer for them, and the services are already classified as optional for states. By capping/cutting federal

Medicaid dollars, the new legislation pressures states to cut services, and the ones they can most easily cut are the optional services.

I read today that 88% of those receiving “optional” services are seniors and people with disabilities. More than half of the funding for this “optional” classification is for home and community based services, like the ones that make my life (and this day pictured) possible. It’s all as totally fucked as it sounds.

Last weekend a video producer followed me around to tell the story of these Medicaid cuts. Part of the reason my story is included is because the video producer thought it was compelling that Medicaid funded attendant services were what made it possible to come out as gay/queer. Before I had Medicaid funded services, my family provided all my support. My family is evangelical Christian and have a hard time with queerness. I love my family and miss them tremendously, and also needed space and attendant support to live my life as me, obviously.

The video producer and I went back-and-forth about how much footage to show. I want to maintain privacy around my personal care routine (emphasis on the word personal!). At the same time part of the problem is that these supports, whether provided by paid attendants or unpaid loved ones, are invisibilized. There are many reasons for this… I have heard Beltway friends imply that if unpaid caregivers tallied up their labor, organized, and started demanding government to pay for the supports disabled people and their families deserve, the system would not be able to continue as it is now. I also know personally that a function of ableism is that it forces disabled people to navigate systems in isolation, so most people do not actually have a clue about what our lives are like.

I want the video producer to be successful in his storytelling so we have another tool against these cuts. At the same time, it is hard to show any vulnerability in a society that discards people who it considers to be weak. I ultimately decided to show some footage that did not feel intimate and am trusting the videographer with my story and body.

I feel a little bitter that most non-disabled people do not have this dilemma of whether they will exchange their privacy to be seen as human. I am also aware that I am not alone in this experience, and that many marginalized people are put in the position of having to prove their humanity every day.

I have heard many disabled people say that they would rather experience death by suicide than be forced back into an institution. People with disabilities have a long history of institutionalization. We only really moved into the community a few decades or so ago. Republicans say that if they cut federal funding, other supports will appear. Many people I know are thinking about how might they get their needs met without Medicaid. I have tried having my access needs met in a caregiving collective where disabled queer friends of color and our allies tried to provide mutual aid to each other, out of a spirit of creating a system outside of the state, and in order to practice what we thought disability justice meant. The reality is that I need at least fifteen hours of attendant support a day, and my level of access needs is too high for unpaid people to provide consistently and reliably. The difference in vulnerability and power also can create an environment where abuse can happen very easily. I think the caregiving collective model is something to keep experimenting with and working on. And I also know my life depends on Medicaid funded attendant services and that a caregiving collective will never be enough to keep me out of a nursing home. Maybe I should also add that I'd rather die than be in a caregiving collective… just kidding. Sort of.

Suicide is not new in my life. I have experienced suicidal ideation, it was actually greatest during the years after I left the caregiving collective and was alone. I lost a lot of relationships, either by burning them to keep the collective happy, or after I split and had to start building community for myself because all of my previous relationships had filtered through the collective. During that time I was also working as a nursing home transition coordinator in allyship with disabled people trying to leave institutions. I saw viscerally how much people hate us, and that amplified the loneliness and frustration I had with my body, finding autonomy, managing disability, family, and social location differences. My boss and I organized a remembrance event for a family who committed filicide and suicide at the height of my ideation. Funny how the universe draws us to work on the issues we are challenged with internally.

At least once a month, someone close to me considers suicide. Suicide is not an inherent part of being disabled or being queer or trans or a person of color, but I think is indicative of the society we live in and how we are supported or not supported. Each time I learn a little more about how to just sit with people, and with myself, until it passes. Sometimes it doesn't pass.

Watching this healthcare debate (or non-debate) is painful. Disabled people deserve so much more. I deserve so much more. Some of my disabled friends are organizing vigils for disabled community members of color recently murdered by the police. Other disabled friends are organizing fundraisers for disabled community members of color who have experienced vigilante violence. One disabled friend is teaching self-defense classes at the lake to anyone who wants to feel a little more prepared. Another disabled friend is teaching businesses how to resist calling cops or working with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. There is so much work to do in my community and so many attacks. Medicaid is just one.

I haven't been able to write since leaving the collective. I am not sure what propelled me to write tonight, except drinking coffee too late in the day, and this photo. I love my community and want us all to be okay. My community and our strength is my resiliency. Holding folks tight today.

© 2018 Stacey Milbern

About

[Image description: centered is Stacey, a mixed race Asian American person with short hair and wearing a short-sleeved gray t-shirt.]

Stacey Milbern is a disability justice thought leader with twelve years of experience incubating leadership programs, managing services programs, and providing technical assistance to organizations wanting to increase their capacity around disability and diversity. She is a queer, mixed race, disabled woman of color and is passionate about advancing the leadership of disabled people of color. She has trained many community organizations and served as an appointed advisor to the Obama administration for two years. She currently works within the HR field supporting employees with disabilities in pursuing accommodations, and has a MBA from Mills College. In her free time, she serves on the WITH Foundation board of directors, provides organizational support to Sins Invalid, a disability justice performance project, and enjoys exploring the SF Bay Area.

Twitter: @cripchick

Building Back Belonging, Hope and Possibility

Mia Mingus

Content notes: transformative justice, abuse

> *"I had to use the intensity of fury, frustration and fear I was feeling to create something that could help alter the reasons for what I felt."*
> -*Audre Lorde*

For more than a decade now, I have been involved in what I refer to as "building alternatives" work. It is work to build the world we want, long for, and ache for, and it is work that has sustained me and continues to sustain me during these turbulent and scary times.

Resistance is only as powerful as what it is in service of. Resistance by itself—resistance just to resist—is not meaningful and will lead to burnout very fast. It's when resistance is in service of something larger than itself that the true power of resistance is unleashed. These are the moments we often think of when we think of resistance: the moments that moved us deeply, not necessarily because of what people were resisting, but because of what that resistance was in service of.

I think about how powerful it was for me when I saw the thousands and thousands of people protesting at airports across the country once the Muslim Ban went into effect at the end of January 2017, soon after the new administration took office. Looking at those pictures and hearing the stories coming out of the protests made my heart swell and my eyes tear up. It wasn't just the resistance, it was what we were fighting *for* that moved me. It was the love and the heart-anger expressed through people's signs, tweets, posts, videos, actions, and services that still move me when I think about it. It was the care shown through the volunteer lawyers, the people who brought food, and the web of networks that lit up around the country to get people out to airports and help signal boost the resistance. You could feel the passion and the pain. The "NO" to the new administration, Islamophobia and hate was just as strong as the "YES" to all those being unlawfully detained and Muslim communities at large.

Those acts of resistance gave me hope in the face of fear, in the face of the unknown.

I am part of a collective to build transformative justice responses to violence, harm, and abuse in our communities. I work to create the kinds of conditions that would allow and support us in responding to violence—all kinds of violence—in our communities. Part of this work is not relying on the state (e.g. police, prisons, the criminal legal system), because so many people do not have the option to; and part of this work is actively cultivating the things we know will prevent future incidence of violence, such as accountability, healing, trust and safety for all.

We envision a day when all communities are able to intervene and respond to violence within their communities such as domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, child abuse, or bullying, in ways that are transformative and generative, rather than destructive.

I think of this work as disability justice work because disabled children and adults are targeted by violence and abuse at astronomical rates. Because of ableism, much of the violence we face is hidden, and when it is visible, it is viewed as justifiable. Disabled communities are made vulnerable by society, and we often aren't able to "call for help" because so many services are inaccessible to us, or because we are severely isolated by our abusers, many of whom are often our family members, caretakers, and/or attendants.

I think of the work I am involved in as a way to build communities where we can all belong: where survivors don't have to flee their communities to be safe and heal; where elders don't have to get displaced into abusive nursing homes; where disabled people can be connected and loved; or where offenders can transparently take accountability for the harm they have done. I work to build back belonging for all of us who have had belonging stolen from us by violence and abuse.

As a disabled queer woman of color, I am constantly thinking about what it would take for disabled children and adults to be safe in our communities. This is the vision I am always guided by. What would need to change for our communities to be able to not harm, but instead truly care for and value disabled children and adults? It is not enough to only work against and resist disabled people being institutionalized, when our communities are just as unsafe and rife with violence and abuse of disabled people. We must also work to build the alternatives that we will need as we get disabled folks out of abusive group homes and prisons. In short, simply resisting against the world we don't want is not enough; we must also work to build the world we *do want*. It is not enough to only be able to articulate what you're against; you also need to know what you are *for*.

Hope and possibility should beget resistance, and resistance should beget hope and possibility, over and over again.

There is a discipline of possibility that you must build in order to engage in building alternatives. Hope is not some magical thing that only "special" people have; it can be cultivated and practiced just like anything else. Possibility is at the crux of transformative justice, because we are saying that there is another way; that we don't have to do what we've always done. We are saying that something else beyond criminalization, disposability, punishment, and revenge is possible. I have watched many people come and go in this work who could not—and sometimes did not—want to build the discipline of possibility and hope in themselves. And I fully understand and don't judge them for it because hope and possibility have the uncanny ability to not just lead us to joy, but to also release grief. For many of us, hope and possibility remind us of what we never had—of what we wished we had had. I know for myself, this is definitely true. Part of the discipline of possibility is the work you must engage in to face and feel your grief, sadness, sorrow and pain. For many of us organizing for transformative justice, we do this work out of our own longing for what we never had in the face of violence and abuse.

This work has changed my life. It has given me energy and nourishment that I had never had before in other political work. It embodies the essence of Audre Lorde's quote at the beginning of this essay. Resistance must work to transform the conditions that created the need for that resistance in the first place. It must not only be *for* something, but it must also function to create broader change. Sometimes the resistance in and of itself is enough to create new conditions. For example, communities visibly and actively resisting abuse can help set into motion a culture where people think twice before they abuse others. However, more often than not, prolonged, sustained resistance is needed, and alternatives are also needed. What to do with the incidents of abuse that created the need for that resistance? What to do with the survivors from them? With the offenders? And inevitably, how was this able to happen in our community, and what can we do to ensure it doesn’t happen again? *Transforming broader conditions.*

I understand my work to be in concert with folks doing more traditional resistance work, and I have the deepest gratitude and respect for my comrades who are resisting every day in amazing ways. They make my work more possible, and the work of others who are building alternatives more possible. The example I always use is prison abolition. We can shut down all the prisons and detention centers, but we will still need a way to address violence, harm, and abuse. We will still need a way to deal with trauma. Both are essential: resistance and building alternatives.

Working every day on something that requires possibility is not easy, but it has transformed my life. It has helped ground me during some of the most heartbreaking moments in our country and world. Engaging in work that is actively building our dreams and hopes doesn’t mean that I am always hopeful or that this work is always enjoyable. I am not, I am human, and it is not, it is some of the hardest work I have ever been a part of.

It is no small task to hope for belonging. To believe that belonging is possible for all of us and not just some of us, is a kind of possibility work that many would call naïve or impossible. That is what the discipline of possibility does to you: it breaks down the limits of your revolutionary imagination and lets it soar. I have been lucky enough to witness improbable moments again and again, whether it is people who have done violence or abuse taking accountability for their violence or abuse; survivors holding compassion and love for those who have violated them as they also hold their own pain and rage; or bystanders who are willing to take accountability for the ways they did not protect survivors or intervene in abuse they knew was happening. I have seen what many would call “impossible,” over and over again and I have only been able to witness these moments because of the discipline of possibility; and I will continue to build back belonging and practice a discipline of possibility until we are all free.

© 2018 Mia Mingus

About

[Image description: black and white photo of Mia Mingus from the chest up, smiling and looking down.]

Mia Mingus is a writer, public speaker, and community organizer working for disability justice and transformative justice responses to child sexual abuse. She is a queer physically disabled Korean woman, a transracial and transnational adoptee, born in Korea, raised in the Caribbean, nurtured in the U.S. South, and now living in Northern California. She works for community, interdependency, and home for all of us, not just some of us, and longs for a world where disabled children can live free of violence, with dignity and love. As her work for liberation evolves and deepens, her roots remain firmly planted in ending sexual violence. Currently, Mia is a 2016 Just Beginnings Collaborative fellow funded for The Living Bridges Project, an anonymous story-collecting project documenting collective responses to child sexual abuse. Mia is a core-member of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC), a local collective working to build and support transformative justice responses to child sexual abuse that do not rely on the state (i.e. police, prisons, and the criminal legal system). Her writings can be found on her blog, Leaving Evidence.

Twitter: @miamingus

Beyond Hope

Lev Mirov

Content notes: death, grief, infrastructural violence

I've nearly died so many times I've actually begun to lose count. The first time, a car accident, lit a determination in me to finish my bachelor's research, a relentlessness that had its own problems. “It's not enough,” I thought, over and over again, “if I die and this isn't finished it won't be enough.” After my brush with death, I found myself making major life changes on the premise that I wanted to die "as myself," whatever that meant. It’s taken years to understand what I meant.

Now I have a different problem with time: the problem of degenerative chronic illness. My lifespan is dramatically truncated from the expectations of the 22-year-old who frantically pored through medieval chronicles muttering about how much more they wanted. I am almost thirty and have passed my expected midlife. Any number of small errors with my medication or treatment plan and my lifespan might shorten even further—

Or my life might simply stop, a pocket-watch broken mid-tick.

As a poor disabled person of color, the healthcare situation in the United States is precarious; at any moment the rug could be ripped out from underneath me, the medications I need to live on might dry up, and with them, my life. Every talking head blabbing about the opioid epidemic and how we need to control pain medication puts another barrier between me and survival. What hope do I have? My condition never gets better. It only gets worse. Medications help but they only prolong the inevitable. No amount of borrowed time will ever be enough for everything I’ve dreamed of doing. I've grieved the lives I will never have, and raged through the anger stage of mourning, trying to accept what can’t be changed.

To some degree my health is hopeless anyway. A feeling of optimism is nothing but painful wishful thinking. No hope for my miraculous recovery; we all die eventually, and I'm living at twice the speed of my friends who don't have degenerative conditions. Dare I put my hope in potential developments in medicine that might stop my symptoms? Not on Medicaid I can't.

If the future is going to be worse than the present, how do we proceed into the darkness? Is there a point in proceeding? As I grappled with the mathematics of disability and poverty, wondering if I can afford my medications and which ones I can survive without if push comes to shove, I came to the guiding principle of my life: life is worth living even if I am completely without hope for myself and my future.

Hope presupposes the future will be better. I don't know if I believe that but I believe we must try to make it better. That I must try to make the world better than it was when I found it, and join the efforts of people who share my vision of what *better* is. I believe in the act of reaching out, with gestures large and small (so many of my gestures feel so very small).

Shining a light on the darkness into which I am proceeding gives other people light to see by, even if we are stumbling down the same dark path of uncertainty, knowing that the road for us ends when for so many others it goes on, and on, and on. Deciding to keep on without a sense of hope for myself can mean the short-term fight doesn't rest of the shoulders of one or two people alone, but offers the whole community a place to name the long-term dangers that we must either hide from alone or face together.

Do I hope my brother's infant will have a life better than mine? I desperately want that to be so. But that won't happen on its own; it won't happen without work, without witness, without saying where we are right now and imagining where we could be — even if I will never see the could-be visions of the future, and those dreams will never be mine to fulfill. I'm not sure this is hope. I think my actions can make life better for someone, even if that someone isn't me, but I don't always feel it.

Between now and eternity stretches an unknowable number of years and challenges. I don't have much hope tomorrow will be better. Tomorrow will probably be a lot like today; insomnia and bad weather and my cats howling while I'm trying to take a nap to avoid the news. (I do hope my fire alarm doesn't start going off at 4 AM, though.) Tomorrow will also have friends checking in on me; my spouse pausing a documentary to muse over the ethics of historical figures; cats curling cozily around my painful hips and a book I am enjoying reading.

Tomorrow might be worse — more pain, less sleep, a sudden shock, a disappointment, a blow to the guts from political news or fresh heartbreak from the wars that seem unending — but my husband, however grumpy, will still smile at me. We'll try to cheer each other up — with inane jokes, by playing a silly game together, reading the Torah portion sitting in bed with breakfast as we do most Saturdays. My friends will reach out; we'll commiserate over the news or cheer each other up with GIFs or pep talks. And I will write: about the view from my bedroom, on a box that shows me the world, and try to use my words to make that world better, even if I don't feel like my words amount to much.

Is this hope? I've always thought of hope as a feeling of positivity about the future, which I don't have. What am I hoping for? I have to have the strength to get up tomorrow, because my cats need breakfast, and I, too, need breakfast. I'm not finished yet, no matter what emotional state I'm in. Today wasn’t enough. I can’t even begin to imagine enough: unable to plan even a year ahead of the now, I can only live moment to moment as if another one will come after this one. I have to act as if what I do matters, even if I'll never see the outcome of my work.

Is that hope? I don't know how to manufacture feelings of positivity. But I do know how to keep moving into the darkness and the unknown, waving my flashlight for the other lost and lonely, until my path ends. If hope is a choice we make to act like someone will have a future if we give them one, maybe the work isn't hopeless after all.

© 2018 Lev Mirov

About

[Image description: a light-skinned man in his late twenties with messy dark hair and heavily lidded eyes looks down at the camera through his glasses with a neutral expression. He wears a large blue evil eye charm and a Hebrew lettered ring on a necklace.]

Lev Mirov is a queer disabled mixed race Filipino-American poet, writer, and activist. His poetry has appeared in various venues and his short work has been featured in anthologies. He is a Masters of Fine Arts candidate at Goddard College, where he explores disability activism, dance, music, and writing diverse speculative fiction and poetry that represents a more inclusive vision of humanity's past, future, and imagination. He is also a scholar of medieval religion and history.

Twitter: @thelionmachine

Back into the Fires that Forged Us

Shain M. Neumeier

Content notes: Sexual assault, police brutality, institutionalization

The political situation America finds itself in now wouldn't be possible without a certain undercurrent of cruelty, or at least a callous tolerance of it, in our culture. It shows itself through people ranging from internet trolls to journalists to university presidents showing contempt for the access needs of young adults with trauma histories and psychosocial disabilities. It shows itself through people being indifferent to police executions of black, disabled, and Deaf people, and simultaneously threatening to mow down demonstrators who block roads in protest of these actions. It shows itself through North Dakota's proposed law allowing people to run over protesters without consequences. And it shows itself through how Donald Trump, an admitted sexual predator who called on his followers to violently remove protesters from his rallies and who said that a former prisoner of war was no hero on account of having been captured, nonetheless won the 2016 presidential election.

There are a number of interrelated underlying beliefs allowing for Trump and his supporters' conduct. For one, many Americans have an authoritarian streak, or at least concede that even extremely harmful forms of authoritarianism are legitimate or necessary, either out of genuine belief or for political gain. This includes many of the very people who use the rhetoric of freedom and independence, at least where it concerns guns or the right to emotionally abuse others. At the same time, American culture fetishizes (a certain type of) resilience and the idea of "pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps" for those of us who don't have the power or the resources to impose our will on others even if we wanted to. This translates into an expectation that we keep pushing and changing ourselves to survive, no matter the cost, instead of questioning the artificial and wholly changeable systemic conditions that put our survival at stake in the first place. Finally, when bad things continue to happen to good people who follow these rules, people fall back onto the just world fallacy out of denial:

if it was that bad it couldn't have happened, and if it happened it couldn't have actually been that bad.

In the culture of abuse that this creates, morality is turned on its head. Many people spit out the word "victim" like it's a slur, loading it with connotations of irresponsibility and manipulation. They view people who challenge the way things are, and particularly in ways that they see as going too far, as at best naïve and in some cases deserving of punishment for even minor shows of defiance. Most often, they dismiss advocates as oversensitive enforcers of "political correctness" who have only flipped oppression to work against the oppressors. Meanwhile, the same people forgive and insist on forgiveness or at least lenience for people and institutions who abuse their positions of relative power or privilege - whether it be in the context of interpersonal violence or that of entire systems - while too many others shrug with discomfort but say the harm was necessary or inevitable. This is hardly a new phenomenon, but the election and its aftermath have highlighted it and encouraged more obvious manifestations of it, both amongst the public and within the government.

This framework is extremely harmful to the disability community, most obviously in the context of the attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Even while Republicans in Congress exempt themselves from the effects of a repeal, they downplay or ignore how it could literally kill many of people with disabilities, ranging from people with chronic suicidal depression who will no longer be able to afford our medication to disabled people who would lose essential services that they receive through the Medicaid expansion. Worse, they blame us for having the disabilities that would functionally prevent us from accessing care, only backpedaling enough to concede that there are some people who don't bring their conditions upon themselves and thus pitting "good" sick and disabled people against "bad ones." Similarly, others blame disabled people for not finding or doing the largely nonexistent or inaccessible type or amount of work that would allow us to pay for medical expenses out of pocket.

This also plays out in contexts that don't directly target but still disproportionately affect members of our community. Not only has the government and society in general refused to adopt a Housing First policy despite there being more than enough available housing to allow for it, for instance, but we're heading in a direction that makes it harder for people to survive while homeless. Many homeless people have psychosocial and other disabilities, whether innate or caused by trauma. Nonetheless, local governments, even those in allegedly more progressive parts of the country, are purposefully preventing people from finding or creating shelter in public spaces and criminalizing feeding homeless people, mostly to improve the aesthetics of their cities. Both politicians and members of the public support (re)segregating homeless people, most often but not exclusively in psychiatric institutions. At the same time, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson recently advocated for making homeless shelters purposefully unpleasant to discourage people from relying on them long-term. This follows the general pattern of prioritizing the sensibilities and biases of the (relatively) privileged over the most basic well-being of marginalized people, and justifying it by blaming them for both their own and broader societal problems.

These views, practices, and laws aren't just callous; they represent a resurgence of social Darwinism. This nineteenth century bastardization of the theory of evolution frames (what it defines as) weakness and dependency, and not the oppressive use of power and privilege masquerading as strength, as being the source of social problems. It goes hand in hand with the ableist, racist, classist, misogynist, and scientifically unfounded theory of eugenics, which has also reemerged with new language on both sides of the political spectrum - whether it's Trump pointing to his allegedly superior genes as the reason for his success, or liberals blaming the growth of far-right views on "stupid people breeding," as they often phrase it. Because they're harmful as well as baseless, we need to re-consign these ideologies to the past.

To do this, and more generally to make this world more hospitable to marginalized communities, we should keep on protesting - in person or remotely - or start doing so if we haven't already. We should continue pushing for laws and policies that reflect a belief in the worth and dignity of all people on the basis of our humanity by meeting everyone's needs and protecting all of us from preventable harm. But we also need to address cultural narratives of strength and power, of their purpose and their responsible use, that new laws and politicians can't fully address on their own.

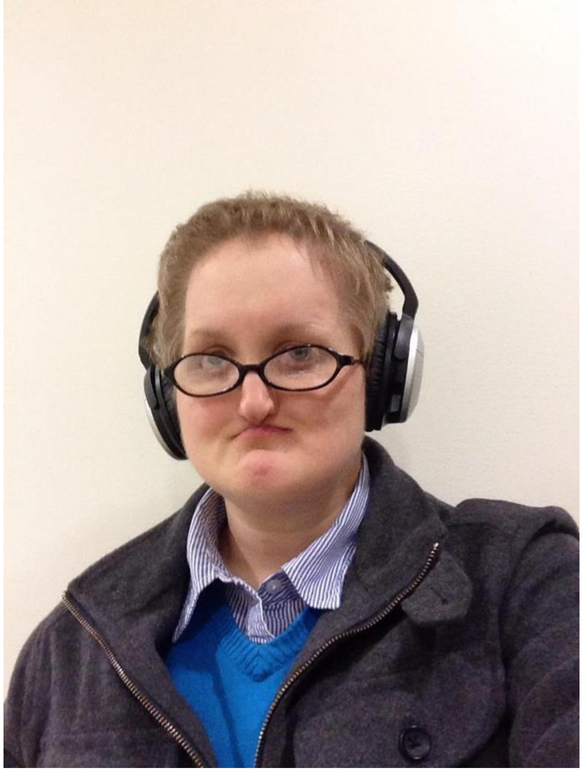
More than most, disabled people haven't had the luxury of safety - physical, social, financial, or otherwise. Having some degree of trauma is more common than not for us. Those of us who've chosen a life of advocacy and activism aren't hiding from the world in a bubble as the alt-right and many others accuse us of doing. Anything but. Instead we've chosen to go back into the fires that forged us, again and again, to pull the rest of us out, and to eventually put the fires out altogether. We have very little, generally speaking, in the way of institutional power, much less influence. Instead, we're running on what we've managed to scrape together for ourselves, but mostly on the memories of our worst individual and collective experiences; the knowledge of where we could've been but for relative luck; the urgency of current conditions; and the love for and camaraderie of our community. This might not be power in a traditional or tangible sense, but it is strength.

Our work must be to replace the current model of strength (using power for one's own gain at the expense of others, or surviving by becoming hardened and accepting oppression as inevitable and even necessary) with one of coming through the very worst with our compassion and the courage to act on it intact. And in the meantime, our work must be to impart this strength to others, one by one, by showing them that the justice it can bring about is possible - for them and for others - and that it's always worth fighting for. This can be as simple as including image descriptions and trigger warnings on social media posts even in the face of trolling or criticism, to as dangerous as putting one's own body in front of an abuser to protect their victim.

This isn't a four-year project against a specific politician, public figure, or faction. It's a lifetime of demonstrating our strength on small and large scales, and of beating back ideologies, laws, and practices that would throw us back into the most enduring forms of oppression. But in doing so, we'll be fulfilling our commitment to leaving the world better than we found it in a lasting and meaningful way.

© 2018 Shain M. Neumeier

About



[Portrait-style photograph of a smiling white person with short blond hair, glasses, and a pair of noise-cancelling headphones. They are wearing a grey jacket over a button-down shirt and blue sweater.]

Shain M. Neumeier is a multiply disabled queer attorney who has been actively involved in disability and other social justice activism for the past nine years. They have focused on issues of bodily autonomy for disabled, young, queer and other marginalized people, particularly in the context of medical treatment and institutional settings, in both legal and policy advocacy. They have also spoken about these and other disability justice topics at conferences and universities across the country. Shain has received the Association of University Centers on Disabilities' 2015 Leadership in Advocacy Award and the Self Advocacy Association of New York State’s 2017 Self Advocate of the Year Award in recognition of their work. Shain currently runs a solo law practice in Springfield, Massachusetts, focusing on defending people with disabilities against institutionalization, guardianship, and forced medication.

Twitter: @smneumeier, @disjusticelaw

Self-Care When Things Shatter

Naomi Ortiz

Content notes: love, silence, honesty, self-care, activism, hope

Some days,
I don't want to be here.
In this place, in this time.

In the past, I felt like there was a semblance of a container, like a large glass vase, connecting activists in the United States. Different people were working on different areas, and it wasn't that we all understood the ways we had privilege or how we hurt/helped each other, but somehow, we were held together by a common fight for justice. Now, I feel like this vase has been hurled against the wall, shattering us into urgent action. We are all flying like sharp fragments—with force and in many different directions. Our connections with each other and even within ourselves have been disrupted.

I don't find these times interesting or inspiring,
there is no grand feeling of togetherness,
no feeling of coming alive.

I've been battling my own feelings of despair. Asking myself, "How do I attend to the old causes when the new fights are so urgent? How do I share my despair without just contributing to the negativity that now seems to be everywhere? How do I show up when it feels so hard to be there for others' pain, for their truth?"

Instead, I feel squashed down,
cradled in a crevice of hard packed dirt.
Here in this dry and dusty bowl, it is too small for my body.
I am sore from shifting, never can quite get comfortable,
never can quite render my body speechless.

Tension from the constant shifting of my heart and spirit occupies my body. Newspaper headlines weave into my jaw, which tightens to brace for impact. The call from *mi amor* about how activism failed, their sadness fills my *panza*, up into my chest, leaving little room for breath.

Still, I write letters. I call. I protest. I stay informed, motivating myself by my desire to push this pain somewhere else outside of my body. I commit to this activism, deep down believing I can do it all without listening to my body, my heart. I hurt all the time. Trying to push the pain outwards without listening to myself, what I need, mostly feels like the pain rebounds right back at me.

Finally, I am exhausted. My body speaks. My body's words are tethered to truth. Truth is so precious these days. I want to listen.

Care of the self requires honesty. Am I honest with myself about my limits and my gifts? Am I respecting both?

Listening becomes my first commitment to myself. I make space and time for silence. Space for boredom, space to unclench from my constant grasping towards control. Then there is space to listen.

In the silence, I realize that weaving each horror and each failure into my body means there is little room left for anything else to exist. If I'm full of everything I cannot control, then I am full of doubt. If I'm full of doubt, then it is hard to have any room for love towards myself, let alone others.

In the silence, I begin to understand that if I cultivate a feeling of spaciousness in my body (not to be filled, but to remain open and relaxed) I have a place for love. Sometimes, especially on the extremely scary days filled with things I can't do much about, it feels like love may be the only thing I have to offer to the world. How then do I break this tension that fills my body?

In the silence, when I listen,
I hear voices far away calling out into the sky.

And I can feel the vibration in my chest of song.
I am still one who cannot remain silent.

Driving home from a meeting, I have a few minutes alone in the car. I can't contain this tension any longer. Opening my mouth, I exhale one long note. Softly at first, humming a sound. Then louder. And louder. Then I am humming my note so loud the vibration in my chest shakes my body awake. Like wind which rattles everything loose. I sing more. And more. I pry my doubt lose.

Making room for love and kindness becomes my daily task. I listen. I look for things which make me feel hopeful because hope inspires love.

I wonder about hope. Of course, I feel hope when I see protesters occupying buildings, putting their bodies on the line to protect something like healthcare and interdependence. I'm inspired and I feel so grateful. But that hope often lives and dies with the outcome—did they win (make a change) or lose (again)?

I can feel fed by the hope of others resisting, fighting for change and recognition, but where does hope live inside of me? Where do I grow my own hope? Often, I am afraid. Afraid to keep showing up, talking to others, asking for change. I am afraid hope will tear me apart.

Hope exposes the soft spots inside, the same soft spots I am doing everything I can to shield. Hope is a contradiction in my body—asking for a way to come in as I try to hold anything unpredictable out. Hope makes me feel vulnerable to harm. Hope is also what I need to feed my ability to love and survive. And survival is essential.

I listen. I hear my breath fill my body and leave.
  Inhale. Exhale.
Breath is the ultimate way I receive and give.
Breathing is taking a chance every time—
  to inhale that which will permeate every inch of my body
  and to exhale that which permeates the world.

I realize that the hope I want—is a hope for my survival. To grow that kind of hope means I must pay attention to what I need. To grow that hope means paying attention to how I care for myself as I share what I have to offer with the world.

When the world is shattering, we are the shards cutting to shape something new. In this time of sharp edges, self-care can feel so subtle, light, small. Yet, self-care is the magic ingredient to help us be flexible and adaptable. Self-care is the sunshine which helps hope grow.

Self-care, however, isn't the same as safety. Self-care is holding ourselves accountable. It is downright uncomfortable when I take time to reflect and challenge myself to understand my fears. How much energy am I using to beat myself up? How much energy am I using to be kind and gentle with myself?

Truth is, being kind to myself does help me be in a more spacious loving place with the world. When I’m in that spacious, loving place, it’s so much easier to figure out what to focus my energy on. To know where and how I can be effective. Self-care helps me to grow my own hope as I try and create change from this place of love.

© 2018 Naomi Ortiz

About

[Image description: light skinned Mestiza with blue bandana, silver hoop earrings and purple shirt smiles looking to the side of the camera. A tattoo of the word Voice is over her heart. The Sonoran desert is in the background with multicolored dirt, palo verde trees and small leafy plants.]

Naomi Ortiz is a writer, poet, visual artist, and facilitator who cracks apart common beliefs and spills out beauty. Naomi is a nationally known writer, speaker and trainer on self-care for activists, disability justice, and living in multiple worlds (intersectionality). She is a Disabled, Mestiza (Latina/Indigenous/White), raised in Latinx culture, living in the U.S./Mexico borderlands.

Naomi's book, *Sustaining Spirit: Self Care for Social Justice* invites readers to delve into what self-care means in their lives by exploring the relationships between body, mind, spirit, heart, and place to integrate self-care to survive and thrive. *Sustaining Spirit: Self Care for Social Justice* will be released May 2018 from Reclamation Press.

Connect with Naomi's writing, art and learn more about Sustaining Spirit at:

www.naomiortiz.com.

Twitter: @thinkfreestyle

Who Gets to Be the Activist?

Victoria Rodríguez-Roldán

Content notes: intracommunity hierarchies, respectability politics

Sometime last year, I was pounding the hallways of the House office buildings in Capitol Hill, lobbying against what was popularly called the Murphy Bill. The Murphy Bill would have stripped many of the legal protections of people with psychiatric disabilities, including their HIPAA privacy rights. During the course of the protest, I had the chance to meet with many congressional staffers as well as members who supported the bill.

In one of those congressional offices, a legislative assistant for a congressman (both of whom shall remain unnamed) who co-sponsored the bill explained to me that “you need to understand, this is just the *serious* mental illnesses we’re talking about. Like bipolar and schizophrenia.” When I mentioned to her that both myself and my partner have bipolar disorder, she was very embarrassed and quickly tried to backpedal. Her response was along the lines of “well, uh, if it’s properly treated or medicated”. She never quite finished her sentence (admittedly, she was trying to crawl out of an inescapable black hole of awkwardness), but the underlying sentiment was essentially: I’m not talking about *you*, you’re one of the good ones.

Who gets to be one of the “good ones?” What’s the criteria for membership into that club? Is it having an impressive résumé? Or having degree letters after my name? Is it being “mature” (whatever that means), or dressing more or less professionally, or whichever other arbitrary metric of respectability we want to apply?

Or maybe a combination of all of the above, all of which boil down to *being perceived as harmless.*

Society often reduces disabled people into one of two stereotypes. In the case of many physical disabilities and some developmental disabilities, you’re the object of pity, to be prayed for. Your life is perceived as such a miserable and horrible endeavor that people assume you'd rather be dead (or, worse yet, tell you "I'd rather be dead than disabled like you"). As such, society enacts legislation encouraging you to commit suicide; assumes your right to privacy is nonexistent; and any "achievement" you make (regardless of whether it's a Nobel Prize or baking cookies) will be used as inspiration porn. We will value your labor less, and funnel you into "sheltered" workshops where you'll be paid less than a dollar an hour, supposedly for your own protection, because we think your capabilities are limited to menial work like basket-weaving. You're also a tragic burden on society, and we feel bad for your parents because your existence presumably destroyed their lives. In cases of filicide, instead of calling it murder, we call it a "mercy killing," and give suspended sentences to murderers who would be sent to death row had they killed an abled person.

The second great stereotype applies mainly to psychiatric disabilities (and some developmental ones). You do not inspire pity, but rather the opposite: you're seen as scary and a threat to society, on the assumption that you're inherently violent or otherwise dangerous. Society legislates for institutionalization without due process, and chips away at the civil rights gains of activists in the past (name it: voting rights, ability to own a firearm, right to have children and raise them, and so on).

However, amidst all this, there are still some disabled people who are allowed to be in society. They go to school, are permitted to become professionals, and end up becoming the "activists" who make it into the door of the congressional offices and who are invited to the White House. They're the ones who get to be the "good" disabled folks. They're the ones who get to be in the media depicting someone with a disability. They're the token hires of companies who then brag about their "diverse" workforce. Invariably, we're talking about the physically disabled person who passes as stereotypically photogenic, or the person with a psychiatric disability who passes as "quirky." 10% bonus points if they're white, straight, and cis. If we take white feminism and "I don't really think of you as black" racism, mix them together in a shaker and pour them out into a cocktail garnished with an accessible parking placard, the end result is essentially the respectability politics narrative of the "good" type of disabled person that is tolerated by society.

It’s our duty to ask, when we talk about disability inclusion and “nothing about us without us,” who are the disabled people who are being included?

Where are the ones who stutter?

Where are the ones who need personal attendants?

Where are the “ugly” ones?

Where are the ones who’ve experienced psychosis?

Where are the ones who’ve been in the psych ward?

Where are the ones locked up in “homes”?

Where are the ones diagnosed with schizophrenia?

Where are the ones who are non-oral?

Where are the disabled folks of color?

Where are the disabled immigrants?

Where are the queer disabled people?

Where are the ones who can’t work and rely on disability and Medicaid?

Where are the ones who couldn’t go to school?

I can go on.

Until we challenge the world and ensure that further-marginalized intracommunity groups are also leading our movements, we will not have lived up to the challenge of “nothing about us without us.”

© 2018 Victoria Rodríguez-Roldán

About

[Image description: black and white headshot of a Latina woman in her mid to late 20s. She is smiling, has eyeglasses, and is wearing a white shirt with a black blazer. On her lapel there is a pin with the logo of the National LGBTQ Task Force, and a brooch in the shape of an owl.]

Victoria Rodríguez-Roldán is the Trans/Gender Non-Conforming Justice Project Director at the National LGBTQ Task Force. Particular areas of expertise and focus are the intersections of issues affecting transgender people with disabilities and mental illness, anti-trans workplace discrimination, and gun violence prevention from a social justice lens. She has been in trans advocacy the entirety of her adult life, including advocacy in Puerto Rico and in Maine. She is the author of *Valuing Transgender Applicants and Employees*, a gold-standard best practices guide for employers, and frequently speaks on discrimination issues impacting the trans community. She was named the Autistic Self Advocacy Network's 2016 Ally of the Year Award, and has been profiled in NBC News and Latina Magazine, among other outlets. Prior to joining the Task Force, she worked as an Equal Opportunity Specialist for the U.S. Department of Labor's Civil Rights Center. Victoria holds a B.A. in Psychology with Honors from the University of Puerto Rico, and a J.D. from the University of Maine School of Law.

Twitter: @yovimi

The Audacity of Hope In the Make America Great Again Era

Vilissa K. Thompson

Content notes: advocacy and activist praxis, multiple marginalization

Is it ambitious to still hold onto hope while living in the Make America Great Again (MAGA) society?

That is what I have been wondering since November 9th, 2016, when I woke up to news of Donald Trump becoming the 45th president of the United States. It was right then that I realized the facade we have allowed to exist was snatched from under us.

What was that facade? Portraying America as being a progressive, "post-every offense that could be thrust upon marginalized people" country.

Did I believe in the facade? No; my identities as a Black disabled woman did not allow for such delusion to take root in my consciousness. I knew how I was defined by the visible identities I possess that caused strangers to prejudge me without knowing my name or my story.

In my advocacy work, I constantly state how I know the world engages and views me: Black first, woman second, and disabled last. Nothing that I achieve (education, career, economic status) will shield me from experiencing discrimination and bigotry. No matter how well I "play by the rules," I am at a constant risk of being misunderstood and disregarded by the stereotypes that have been thrust upon my identities. It is these truths that prevented me from believing in the facade that was burst wide open in November.

As someone who is a triple minority, I understand fully how important it is to speak up and speak out on the injustices that plague the safety and inclusion of the groups I hold membership in. Now more than ever, speaking out has to transpire. Every day, I watch the groups I have membership in (and those I do not) fear being harmed and in a state of unrest. To reside in a country where you have to walk/roll/limp on eggshells simply because you exist, living in a constant state of panic and stress, has affected so many of us emotionally and mentally. I have witnessed how anxiety and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness have manifested for some of the disabled advocates I know, and even within myself. I truly believe that we live in the type of times we read about in school; to live it day to day is exhausting.

Who Will Be the Champions?

With my life experiences and advocacy work, I worry about certain issues not gaining the political attention or support as they once did previously. I am concerned about police brutality cases and hate crimes not being heavily investigated on the federal level to warrant justice. Who will protect the rights of racial minorities, particularly those of color and disabled, when our elected officials have histories of exhibiting blatant racist ideologies? Who will ensure that the laws are enforced when discrimination occurs, students' rights are violated, and we are forced to be institutionalized and not live independently? Who will lead the charge to find our missing girls of color that vanish right under our noses? Who will proclaim that women should have access to pertinent healthcare services? Many of those connected to this Administration, and in Congress, have damning views about quality of life and the deservingness of individuals who are not members of the majority; who will fight hard for those of us who are multi-marginalized? Who can we trust to stand against the status quo and not waver under pressure? Every day, I ponder who will champion for us and fail to see many answer the call.

Continuing to Ramp My Voice In the MAGA Era

This year, I have brainstormed how I can be that champion. Why wait for someone to care about my issues when I can raise consciousness myself? Using social media has been an incredibly powerful tool for my work. I have gravitated towards many platforms, particularly Twitter where I interact with fellow disability advocates, as well as other prominent social justice and civil rights leaders and grassroots campaigns. Creating threads about topics that concern me and/or the identities I have has been an effective tool. Spotlighting the diverse disabled experience has been a method that allows different perspectives to be read and known. Social media has been that medium where our voices can be amplified significantly and reach stakeholders that are outside of our state and national borders.

Educating others is a key part of what I do, and giving space for individuals to tell their stories to the world is an instrumental part of that. I have been fortunate to educate outside of my platform through interviews conducted by like-minded activists on their podcasts and blogs. Sharing with their readers, listeners, and supporters about the challenges of living in an ableist society, and the injustices enacted on disabled people, is important so that better understanding of what we endure as an oppressed group will extinguish the myths about who we actually are.

Lastly, developing materials that foster self-education is the crux of my work. The creation of my Black Disabled Woman Syllabus and offering workshops are just examples of my efforts to foster appropriate knowledge about our way of life. Education, whether informal or formal, is a huge means to ridding society of its inaccurate views on certain identities. I believe that using these approaches will continue to be relevant in eliminating ignorance about the diverse human experience.

Now Is The Time To Unite & Become a Powerful Force

As a collective entity, there are many actions we can take that will strengthen our ability to be heard and respected as a group and be a powerful political force. As the largest minority group, it is a travesty that our issues are ignored politically. Now is the precise time for us to enlarge our political muscle. There are many great advocates who write on political and policy issues; amplifying their work and perspectives is one tactic to get our specific views at the forefront. In championing individuals who are addressing the issues that affect the community, be mindful to ensure that those views are also intersectional. Our community has a huge issue and long history with racism, sexism/misogynoir, classism, and heterosexism. What is taking place in our country will impact us differently based on the identities we have OUTSIDE of being disabled. Understanding what intersectionality is and giving space for diverse disabled voices to share how this Administration will affect their livelihood and safety is instrumental for broader society to view disability from all dynamics.

There are two more things I believe we should do as a community: the first being to prioritize reading reputable sources to keep abreast on the continuous attacks on our civil and human rights, and the devastation that could occur for us. Being informed is not an optional stance to take; it is a requirement. The amount of ignorance some Americans have about certain policies has been unveiled since November. Equipping oneself with facts regarding how the government works, and how public programs operate and who benefits (particularly since many of us depend on them to survive), is crucial. The second action to take would be to become politically active: get involved with your local state parties, run for office, volunteer for campaigns, become a pollster during election season. These small actions can help push the disabled agenda forward, and we will feel less detached from the whole process. When elected officials see us, they can no longer dismiss our existence.

Self-Care Is Mandatory for Survival - Practice It Relentlessly

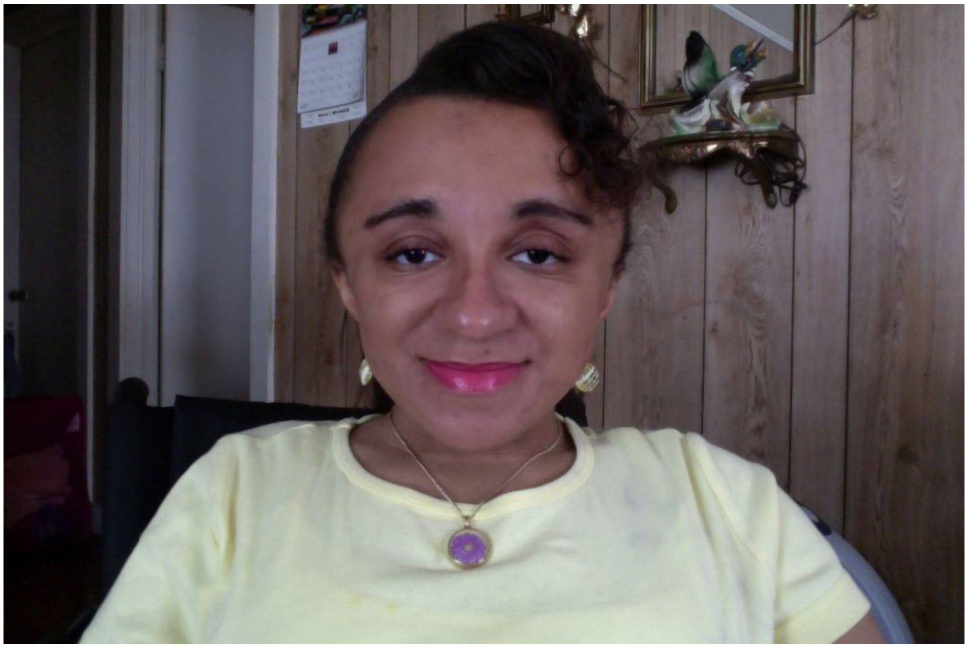
Though I regard becoming more visible and active players an urgent call to answer, I also want us to be mindful of our self-care. It is so easy to get engulfed in the rapid-changing news headlines and feel overwhelmed in trying to stay updated each day. It is perfectly fine to unplug and take breaks from the news and do self-inventories about your emotions. Self-inventory means gauging if you are experiencing more stress than usual or feeling as if you are off-balanced. As I like to remind myself, you cannot be much use to anyone if you are not taking care of yourself—running on empty is not sustainable. I know that I try to check in with those in my circles and give space for them to vent/discuss what they may be struggling with. Checking in on people is crucial, especially when certain human experiences are under attack. Checking in allows people to know that they are not alone, and they have a support system to lean on during uncertain times. Supporting each other has to be a part of what we do during the next four years—we will not progress if we leave some of us behind.

Is It Foolish to Keep the Hope Alive?

As a Black disabled woman, there is no space place or space for me to go—if I want safety and empowerment, I have to create it myself. I hope that through my efforts, I can be one step closer to achieving liberation and safety for myself and those in our community. As disabled people, one way to be audacious in the Make America Great Again era is to hold onto hope as we establish safe spaces and fervently demand that our freedoms and rights are respected and protected. As the great Martin Luther King, Jr. stated: “Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

© 2018 Vilissa K. Thompson

About



[Image description: photo of a young Black woman with her hair parted to the side and curled. She is smiling at the camera and wearing a yellow t-shirt. Behind her is room with wood panelling and a calendar and bird figurine on the wall.]

Vilissa K. Thompson is a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) from Winnsboro, SC. Vilissa is the Founder & CEO of Ramp Your Voice!, an organization focused on promoting self-advocacy and strengthening empowerment among people with disabilities. Being a Disability Rights Consultant, Writer, and Advocate affords Vilissa the opportunity to become a prominent leader and expert in addressing and educating the public and political figures about the plight of people with disabilities, especially women of color with disabilities. Being a disabled woman of color herself, sharing her life experiences, and tales from the women she has encountered during her advocacy work, has empowered her immensely because it validated the struggles and successes she endured in her young life.

Twitter: @VilissaThompson, @RampYourVoice

Jewish and Disabled: Finding Kavanah and Tikkun Olam in Activism

Aleksei Valentín

Content notes: chronic pain, struggle and solidarity, Jewish history and community

One of the strangest parallels in my life is that I have been both Jewish and disabled from birth, unknowing, and only later came to realise both identities. Both were hidden in my genes: my Jewishness from my father (a descendent of a long line of Sephardic Jews forced into hiding by the Inquisition); my Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome from my mother. Both became evident in my teen years, as I discovered my Jewish heritage and embraced Judaism, and as my dislocating joints and constant pain became undeniable.

As my disability has increased in impact and severity, my Jewish practice and identity has given me a way to navigate the resulting pain and limitations. My disability and my Jewishness are inseparable, and my Jewish ethos shapes my activism from the very root. Jewish ideals of justice and our responsibility to bring it about are central to my life and work.

Kavanah is a Jewish concept that loosely translates to "intention." Where Christian theology believes that religious actions arise from an emotional feeling of belief, Jews approach things differently. (This comes with the caveat that with three Jews come four opinions. I come from liberal Reform Judaism, and knew a queer rabbi in my younger years who embraced all kinds of Jews at all levels of observance, so I am shaped by that interpretation. Caveat over.) It is possible to carry out religious actions, like giving charity and observing holidays, without a strong kavanah; that doesn't take away from the meaning of the actions. Often, repeated practice can *inspire* kavanah and help the individual find meaning in what they're doing, a spiritual awakening, a connection to God and the people Israel. As my rabbi taught me, it's better to do what we're commanded to do even if it seems pointless and trust that inspiration will come, rather than waiting for a bolt from the blue that will get us on our feet and transform us into perfect Jews.

My understanding of kavanah has shaped my activism from the beginning. Disabled voices are so often unheard, unnoticed, or deliberately ignored. To insist on our dignity, our needs, and our humanity feels like shouting into the void. It's easy to lose heart and momentum, and to feel like nothing we do matters. We lose our kavanah, our intention, our sincere feeling, our hope and belief in what can be achieved. But lacking kavanah doesn't excuse a Jew from observing rituals and social obligations, so even when we don't feel like we're changing anything we don't give up. We take care of ourselves, we prepare to get back into the fray, and we trust that our kavanah will return as we work for our liberation and resist the ableism that makes us second-class citizens.

Tikkun olam is the other guiding Jewish principle of my disability activism. This translates loosely as "repairing the world." For Jews, this means that as long as pain, injustice, and suffering exist in the world, it is our obligation to fix things, however we can. But this is an action that must be taken as a community. No single person can solve all the world's problems. Our sages had a response to the overwhelming size of this holy task: "It is not upon you to finish the work, but you are not free to ignore it." (*Mishna, Ethics*, 2:21.) In other words, you can't do everything, but you must do your part. There is no other option. Living a good life isn't enough. You have to actively work to make life better for others, work for justice, work for peace. You must speak words of truth to the oppressor, even when those words are dangerous. You must resist helpless inaction. You have to keep working, even when it seems hopeless - perhaps especially then.

Tikkun olam and kavanah work together to keep me moving forward, committed to Jewish values of social justice and the included value of asserting the rights and dignities of disabled people. It is a massive job. Sometimes it's easy to lose heart, to feel overwhelmed. But that is no excuse to just throw in the towel.

Inspiration doesn't come first. Even hope doesn't come first. *Action comes first.* As we act, as we speak, as we resist, we find our inspiration, our hope, that which helps us inspire others and keep moving forward, no matter the setbacks and no matter the defeats. Persistence is a Jewish value, too.

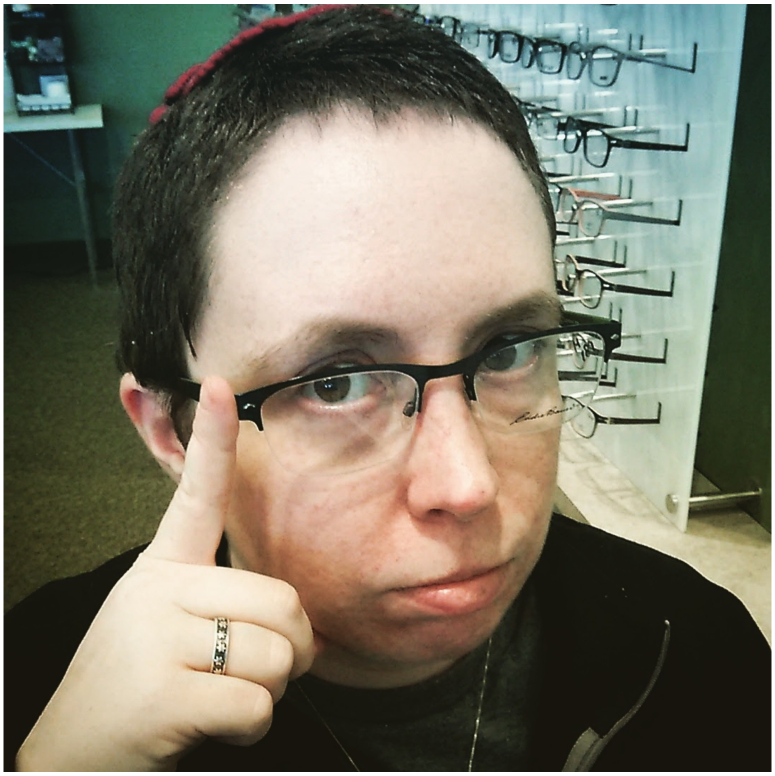
I write this as we look towards Pesach and our liberation as a people from the slavery of Egypt. It's a time for reflection and joy, but also for recognition of those who died so that we could be free. This multi-layered consciousness helps me remember that we’ve come so far, and we have so far to go, but if we gave up when things were hard, we would still be slaves in Egypt.

Every struggle is a burden. As disabled people, we carry so much on our already weighted shoulders. But if we recognise in each other the bonds of community, the bonds of intention, justice, dignity, and love, the weight of tikkun olam becomes dispersed and easier to carry. Hope, inspiration, and intention will come. Success will come. But we can’t wait for them to arrive first in order to work for our liberation.

The work comes first. And as we work, we will cross out of our Egypt and into a better world that we helped create. Work in the face of overwhelming odds is hope we make for ourselves by our actions. The rest will follow.

© 2018 Aleksei Valentín

About



[Image description: light olive skinned Latino man in his early 30s with short brown hair wears a red kippah and stares up at the camera with a serious expression, one finger on his glasses]

Aleksei Valentín is a queer, trans disabled Luso-American Jewish activist working at the intersections of race, religion, and disability, and is pursuing an MFA in interdisciplinary art. With his husband Lev Mirov, he is a speculative writer, poet, and artist. He can be found rolling through other worlds or the local library in his trusty wheelchair named after Merry's pony in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Twitter: @ai_valentin

Don’t Bring Cotton Candy to a Nuclear War

Maysoon Zayid

Content notes: Trump, supremacism, activist praxis

On November 8th, 2016, the American disability community’s worst nightmare was elected president of the United States. Donald Trump’s reign is not my first tango with supremacism. I was born and raised in the great state of New Jersey but spent my summers growing up in Jerusalem instead of on the Jersey shore. When anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic rhetoric became a thing during the 2016 Presidential Campaign, I heard those dog whistles loud and clear.

Religious supremacists were nothing new to me but I wasn’t prepared for the anti-disability rights posse occupying the White House. Supremacists have a history of targeting my community. In 1939, Hitler ordered the mass murder of disabled people. The Nazi program was called AKTION T4. I have been reprimanded for comparing Trump to Hitler and his supporters to Nazis. To this I say if it quacks like a Nazi, goose steps like a Nazi, and hates like a Nazi, we probably shouldn’t ignore these “very fine people.”

Hollywood stars, cable news commentators, and perturbed parents were horrified when The Donald mocked New York Times reporter Serge Kovaleski’s disability. Many declared it was the worst thing Don had ever done. I wish it was. He has documentably done far worse in the past and the worst is yet to come. Trump and his cabinet of billionaire bigots are not fans of disability. Chucky Doll in-Chief has a pretty impressive history of violating the Americans with Disabilities Act. Trump has been sued no less than eight times for ADA violations. He settled with New Jersey and the Department of Justice for his grotesque violations of the law at his failed Trump Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City. Yet Trump believes that there is no biglier champion of the ADA than he. He also claims to have “given more money to ADA than anyone else.” The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed under Republican president George H.W. Bush in 1990, is a federal law. It is not a charity you donate to by buying a yuge, disturbing self-portrait of yourself at an auction. Trump also shared this with his friends at Fox: “I spent millions of dollars making buildings good for people that are disabled.” He seems to want a Cheeto for complying with federal law, even when it takes being repeatedly sued for him to adhere.

Trump is determined to decimate the ADA, and his patsies, the GOP, are more than happy to join the fray. His endless attacks on the Affordable Care Act, that ADAPT threw their bodies in front of to stop, have left the disability community living in limbo. Medicaid is also on the chopping block, even though the Liar-in-Chief promised that he would never grope it. Trump is not alone in his quest to sweep the community’s leg. Allow me to introduce you to his unholy trinity of anti-disability rights appointees. Let us begin with with Jeff Sessions. Trump’s recused Attorney General, who lied during his confirmation hearing about rendezvousing with Russia, doesn’t dig disability either. He once opined that IDEA “may be the single most irritating problem for teachers across America today.” The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act protects the right of disabled students to a free, accessible, public education in America. Sessions, who is now in charge of protecting Americans’ civil rights, thinks that we are an irritating waste of space. When I was a student, a teacher repeatedly scolded me for being fidgety and having “ants in my pants.” She demanded I sit still even though that was physically impossible to do due to my cerebral palsy. I also got in trouble for not putting my head on my desk when told to do so. The fact that my body didn’t bend that way did not save me from the wrath of Mrs. Gross, who made me stand in the corner on one leg because I failed to comply. Although I can walk, run in heels, and dance, I cannot stand, so this was far more torturous than a desk nap. I was a straight-A student, but by Mrs. Gross and Mr. Sessions’s standards, I am uncivilized. In an effort to tame us, the Department of Justice rescinded ten texts on disability rights and they are just getting warmed up.

Next up we have Betsy DeVos. Cruella DeVos crushed Sessions like a cookie when it came to stripping the rights of Americans with disabilities. She scrubbed 72 memos that explain how schools are obligated to protect the rights of disabled students. Jeff Sessions has a lot of catching up to do, but I have faith in his dastardliness. DeVos’s motivation for rescinding these rights was that she found them confusing, which is not a surprise because during her confirmation hearing, DeVos displayed an utter lack of understanding of IDEA. As the future Secretary of Education tap danced through her hearing, she hinted that she would not guarantee a disabled American child's right to a mainstream education. If the law hadn't been on my side when I enrolled in Cliffside Park Public School #6's kindergarten class, I promise you I would not be writing this. My access to mainstream education is absolutely responsible for my ability to succeed as an adult with a disability in America. If not for IDEA, I would not be here.

Rounding out the team, we have Neil Gorsuch, who slid into Antonin Scalia's vacated seat on the Supreme Court of the United States. Gorsuch has a history of ruling against people with disabilities. If any more of the sitting Supreme Court Justices were to unexpectedly exit the bench as Scalia did with his death in 2016, Donald Trump would have the power to appoint another Neil-like Justice. This would further tip the scales against civil rights, which include disability rights.

It's time for me to give my disabled peers some advice they do not want to hear. We got too comfortable when the Obamas were in power. It wasn't perfect; we still had to jump through hoops for benefits. A broken wheelchair replacement could take over a year. We still battled criminally disparate wages and unemployment rates far higher than our non-disabled peers. We still faced inconceivable amounts of violence from our caregivers and from police enforcement. The difference was that we had someone fighting for us instead of against us. We focused less on survival and more on battling against ableist language and for the right to run out of spoons.

The party is officially over. To paraphrase Whoopi Goldberg in Ghost, "Disability community, you in danger." It's time to fight for our rights by any nonviolent means necessary before we no longer have any rights. One my favorite forms of resistance for those of us who cannot march is social media. Too often, however, we are preaching to the disabled choir. We need to broaden our audience. I highly recommend tweeting about things other than disability in addition to your advocacy. A good place to start is by amplifying other equality movements. Also, if you like sports or pop culture, then tweet about that. It will connect you to people who may not be familiar with the current disability struggle.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the mainstream media is absolutely oblivious to the fact that many in the disabled community consider shots at the Predator-in-Chief's mental health offensive. Here is a smattering of words that many consider ableist: insane, delusional, crazy, psychotic, mental, madman, moron, idiot, and stupid. I know what you're thinking; there's nothing left to call him. I promise you, there is. Try ignorant, evil, bigoted, and a disgrace. Mental health advocates argue that armchair diagnoses unfairly vilify those with psychiatric disabilities by blaming Trump's hatred of minorities and love of Nazis on a medical condition. We the people do not know the status of Trump's mental health and we do not need to. He is unfit for the job, not because he might have an invisible disability, but because he hangs out with white supremacists and knows absolutely nothing about global politics. He's unfit because he's an admitted sexual predator and a serial ADA violator.

Once you have tweeted and snapped, call or write your representatives. In their minds, every year is an election year. Give what you can to organizations and candidates who champion disability rights. If we've learned anything from 2016, it is that money wins races. If you can't donate money, donate your time, even if it's online. It's time to #CripTheVote and permanently disable Donald Trump's ability to harm our Ohana.

© 2018 Maysoon Zayid

About

[Image description: Maysoon is smiling. She’s wearing green eyeshadow and her dark hair is in a bun. She is wearing a purple dress with white cross-stitched butterflies and is carrying a Scottish fold calico cat named Beyoncé.]

Maysoon Zayid is an actress, comedian, writer, and disability advocate. She is a graduate of and a Guest Comedian in Residence at Arizona State University. Maysoon is the co-founder/co-executive producer of the New York Arab American Comedy Festival and The Muslim Funny Fest. She was a full-time On Air Contributor to Countdown with Keith Olbermann and a columnist for The Daily Beast. She has most recently appeared on Oprah Winfrey Networks In Deep Shift, 60 Minutes, and ABC News. Maysoon had the number one TED Talk of 2014 and was named 1 of 100 Women of 2015 by BBC.

As a professional comedian, Maysoon has performed in top New York clubs and has toured extensively at home and abroad. She was a headliner on the Arabs Gone Wild Comedy Tour and The Muslims Are Coming Tour. Maysoon appeared alongside Adam Sandler in You Don’t Mess with the the Zohan and has written for VICE. She walked in New York Fashion Week and is proud to be an ambassador for the Cerebral Palsy Foundation.

Maysoon is currently developing a comedy series with Hazy Mills Productions called If I Cancan.

Website: www.Maysoon.com

Twitter: @maysoonzayid

About the Team

[Image description: photo of a white trans person with short brown hair, in profile. They are wearing a black "Black Lives Matter" shirt.]

Micah Bazant, Book Cover

Micah Bazant is a trans visual artist who works with social justice movements to reimagine the world. They create art inspired by struggles to decolonize ourselves from white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, and the gender binary. Micah is an anti-zionist jew and identifies as trans, nonbinary, and timtum (one of six traditional jewish gender categories). They make art as a practice of love and solidarity with trans liberation and racial justice movements to build power. The ongoing process of developing ethical models for collaboration with grassroots community organizations is a large part of their work.

Micah has worked with hundreds of social justice groups across the US, and their work has been shared millions of times on social media and in the streets, as well as in galleries, museums and publications. They co-founded the Trans Life + Liberation Art Series and the Trans Day of Resilience art project, to help support and celebrate trans people of color while they are alive. In March 2017, Micah joined the staff of the national organization Forward Together as Artist in Residence. They are also an advisory board member of Sins Invalid, and a member of the Jewish Voice for Peace Artist Council.

Micah's art has been exhibited internationally at places like the Brooklyn Museum, Galeria de La Raza, The Luggage Store, and Interference Archive, and in hundreds of actions in the streets. Their work has been featured in many publications, from online platforms such as Rewire and Them, to books such as Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility and Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color, to national trans prisoner newsletters like Stiletto.

They illustrated the animated short film The Personal Things, directed by Reina Gossett and featuring the wisdom of Black trans elder and legendary activist Miss Major Griffin-Gracy. Their art has also been included in the documentaries Major! and Free CeCe.

Micah lives in the Bay Area and enjoys learning the secret histories of plants, fostering monarch babies, and admiring sparkly things.

Website: https://www.micahbazant.com/about/

Twitter: @MicahBazant

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/MicahBazantArt/

Instagram: @MicahBazant

[Image description: Robin, a white nonbinary wheelchair user with rainbow hair and tattoos, reading into a microphone.]

Robin M. Eames, Editorial Assistant and Herder of Cats

Robin M. Eames is a queer crip punk poet who is only mostly dead. Their work has been published in *Cordite*, *Voiceworks*, *Red Room*, *Strange Horizons*, *Archer*, and *Junkee*, and is upcoming in *Breath & Shadow* and *Uncanny Magazine's* Disabled People Destroy Science Fiction. Robin is one of the University of Sydney's 2018 Disabilities Officers, and one of the Publications Directors for the centenary edition of *ARNA*, one of USyd's annual literary journals. They have exhibited art at Newtown Festival, Verge Gallery, the M2 Gallery, the Red Rattler Theatre, and the Burdekin Hotel. Their recent panels include QUEERCRIP REBELLIONS at the Romantica Social Centre's Rad Queer Fest, CRIPPING THE LITERARY at the Unspoken Words poetry festival, and SEX ON WHEELS at the University of Sydney's Rad Sex and Consent Week 2017. Robin is just about to finish their Honours thesis in transgender history and historiographical ethics. They live on Gadigal land. You can find them online at robinmeames.org.

Twitter: @robinmarceline

[Image description: Asian American woman in a wheelchair wearing a black jacket and a multicolored scarf around her neck. She is in front of a colorful mural and wearing a mask over her nose attached to a gray tube for her Bi-Pap machine.]

Alice Wong, Editor and Publisher

Alice Wong is a disability activist, media maker, and consultant. She is the Founder and Director of the Disability Visibility Project (DVP), a community partnership with StoryCorps and an online community dedicated to recording, amplifying, and sharing disability stories and culture created in 2014. Alice is also a co-partner in two projects: DisabledWriters.com, a resource to help editors connect with disabled writers and journalists, and #CripTheVote, a nonpartisan online movement encouraging the political participation of disabled people.

Alice's areas of interest are popular culture, media, politics, disability issues, Medicaid policies and programs, storytelling, social media, and activism. She has been published in Bitch Media, Teen Vogue, New York Times, Transom and Rooted in Rights. Her activism and work has been featured in CNN's original series, United Shades of America (Season 3, Episode 4), WAMU radio, Roll Call, WBUR radio, Al Jazeera, Teen Vogue, Bitch Media, Rewire, Vice, Esquire, CNET, Wired and Buzzfeed.

From 2013-2015 Alice served as a member of the National Council on Disability, an appointment by President Barack Obama. She has a Masters in medical sociology and worked at the University of California, San Francisco as a Staff Research Associate for 15 years. During that time she worked on various qualitative research projects and co-authored online curricula for the Community Living Policy Center, a Rehabilitation Research and Training Center funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research.

Alice launched the Disability Visibility podcast in September 2017 and currently works as an independent research consultant as part of her side hustle.

Twitter: @SFdirewolf @DisVisibility

About the Disability Visibility Project

Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People is a publication by the Disability Visibility Project, a community partnership with StoryCorps and an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture.

For more about the Disability Visibility Project: https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/about/

Support the work of the DVP via PayPal or Patreon:

https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/donate/

Listen to our podcast: https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/podcast-2/

Buy some awesome swag at our online store: https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/sweet-swag-shop/

Find us on Twitter: @DisVisibility

Find us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/356870067786565/

Email: DisabilityVisibilityProject@gmail.com

Endnotes

[1] The autistic community has long referred to the "philosophy of indistinguishability" as the idea that the only acceptable, praiseworthy, and desirable goal for disabled people's therapy/treatment/supports is for the disabled person to seem as nondisabled as possible (as close to neurotypical, sane, abled, hearing, sighted, etc.) so they are "indistinguishable from their peers."

That language comes from Ole Ivar Lovaas's original work on behaviorism as applied to young autistic children - he is the father of all applied behavior analysis (ABA), which is widely touted as the "most evidence-based treatment for autism," but which is a cause of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD) in almost every autistic adult who has experienced it. See work on this topic by Sparrow Michael Maxfield Rose, Kassiane Asasumasu (in a series on indistinguishability from peers and its cost), Amy Sequenzia, Julia Bascom, and a Reddit discussion thread where many autistic adults shared their experience, as well as testimonials from former ABA therapists.

Lovaas's work on ABA is also deeply tied to his earlier work on the Feminine Boys Project funded by the National Institutes on Health, which sought to subject children assigned male at birth who were perceived as effeminate to painful and punitive behavioral modification to "prevent them from developing homosexuality." That work also laid the foundation for not only the entire field of ABA as we know it, but also all contemporary conversion or reparative therapy for queer and trans people, and the abuses of the Judge Rotenberg Center, which are well documented particularly by autistic attorney-activist Shain M. Neumeier and by autistic musician and YouTuber Jennifer Msumba, a survivor who was previously institutionalized at the JRC.

[2] I love what Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha has said about cure - that it's possible to be both intensely anti-ableist (disabled and proud!), and also want to have a body that's "less hurty and achey." My friend Nai Damato, who has multiple disabilities and chronic illnesses, has also discussed in detail the nuances of being proud of and identifying with some disabilities, and wishing for cure to eliminate others; their colleague Tasha

Raella Chemel offers a contrasting perspective - she describes herself as a transabled blind person (she is in fact blind but identifies as internally sighted), who envisions that “cure” could mean simply bringing the bodymind into a desired state, and that both “ability” and “disability” can be desired states although in an intensely ableist society, only “ability” is considered desirable. (Chemel also recognizes the deeply exploitative and objectifying use of the concept of “trans-ability” almost exclusively by able-bodied people fetishizing disabled people’s bodies without actually struggling against ableism. Hers is the only perspective I am aware of writing from the opposite perspective.) Eli Clare similarly has a new book out on the topic of cures and treatment, called Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure.

[3] Jason Porath (creator of Rejected Princesses) calls this the game of Perfect or Hitler, wherein people doing social justice work (whether overall more privileged/resourced/powerful or more marginalized/targeted/un-resourced) are either held up on pedestals as perfect/infallible, or demonized as evil and monstrous (for wrongs ranging from extremely mild to the worst kind of harm). This phenomenon has been documented for at least decades if not longer, going back to feminist lawyer/political scientist/activist Jo Freeman, writing as Joreen, discussing it in a 1976 article on trashing, and more recently by video game designer/new media artist Porpentine Charity Heartscape in a 2015 essay on social death and mobbing. Counselor, publisher, and editor Michón Neal, and poet Nik Angel Moreno have specifically also discussed wide-ranging impact of abuse culture targeting Black and Brown people, who are especially likely to be painted as monsters.