

# PLAIN WORDS

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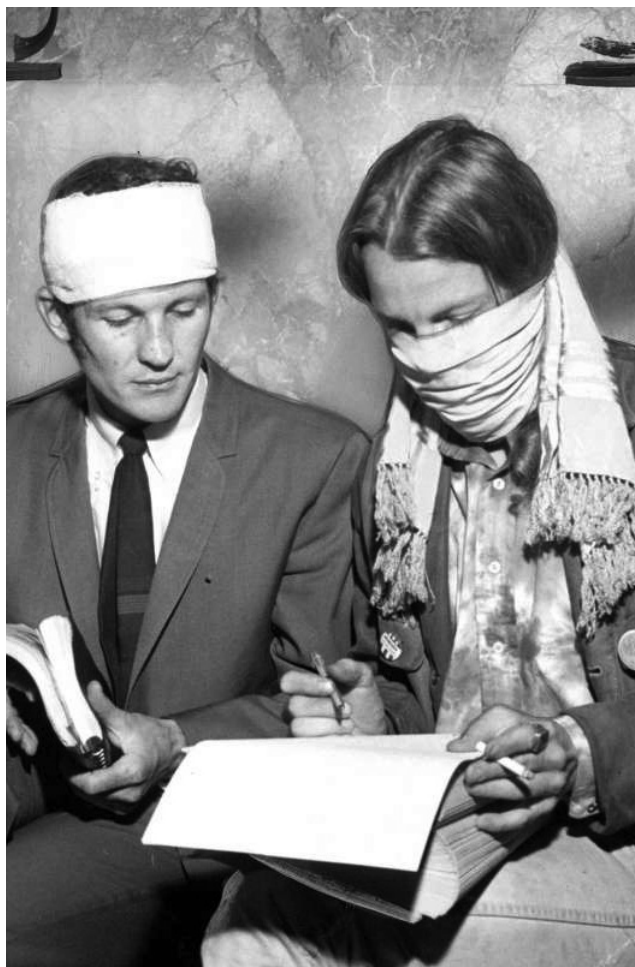


## INSIDE:

ONE YEAR OF PLAIN WORDS  
BLOOMINGTON IS GETTING WORSE  
COPING WITH THE END OF THE WORLD  
EVANSVILLE RESPONDS TO POLICE VIOLENCE

ART & ANARCHY  
THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN INDIANA  
MYSTERIOUS SAMARITAN VS. THE COPS  
THE LENCO BEARCAT & THE LIBERAL TRAP

# PLAIN WORDS



**Plain Words** is a website and publication that focuses on spreading news and developing analyses of struggles in and around Bloomington, Indiana. As anarchists, we approach these struggles from an anti-state, anti-capitalist perspective. However, we aren't interested in developing a specific party line – even an anarchist one – and instead value the diverse forms resistance can take. Our anarchism is vibrant, undogmatic, and finds common cause with all others who fight for a world without the state, capital, and all structures of domination.

All texts and images in *Plain Words* are taken from the internet or submitted to us by others. **We are not an organization or specific group**, but simply a vehicle for spreading words and actions of resistance in Bloomington.

As such, **we actively seek collaboration**. If you have news, images, reportbacks of actions and demonstrations, communiques, event information, publications, analyses of local trends and situations, updates on projects and campaigns, or anything else coming from an anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist perspective, please get in touch.

If you have comments on or critiques of anything we've printed that you'd like us to publish, feel free to send them our way.

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Everything in *Plain Words* that is not explicitly attributed to its editors is either taken from the internet or anonymously submitted to us online. All content is presented for educational purposes only. The editors of this project have no connection to anonymous content beyond transmitting it for others to read.

# ONE YEAR OF PLAIN WORDS

## SOME REFLECTIONS



This issue of *Plain Words* marks the one-year anniversary of the project, and I want to open space for reflection on the challenges, successes, failures, and complications we've had in the past year. These words are only my own — the thoughts of one person involved in writing, designing, printing, and distributing this publication — and don't necessarily reflect the multifaceted and diverse ideas of others involved. With that said, let's begin...

### Political rackets & ideology

As a project, we have chosen to operate with the understanding that there is no need for large political organizations, formal groupings, or leadership — forms of organization which separate us from our ability to think through the problems of our lives and act in unmediated ways. This includes an indictment of the slimy language of politics which often hides behind seemingly “anti-capitalist” or “autonomous” or “anarchist” groups. We want to expose, ridicule, and sabotage every attempt by political managers to control revolt and reroute it toward their own ends. We seek to attack any effort to pull human beings into political rackets and want to belittle the petty mafioso who operate these groups. We favor free association rather

than coercive structures; informal groupings based in friendship rather than formal membership organizations; individual initiative rather than bureaucracy; trust of one's own desires rather than morality; honesty rather than hiding intentions in hopes of gaining adherents; open conversation rather than political manipulation.

Despite criticisms from some quarters accusing *Plain Words* of being “ideological” for calling itself anarchist, we have always refused to abide by any party line or book-thump for any orthodoxy. We call our publication *anarchist* because anarchy continues to be a point of reference for us and a guiding compass for our lives: nothing more, nothing less. It is not “ideological” or “subcultural” to refuse to disguise the fact that we will fight for a world free of domination and submission. We have, from the very beginning, refused to play games of obfuscation, misrepresentation, and dishonesty, preferring unpopular intransigence to the fake smile of the politician.

### Propaganda vs. Communication

Despite success in avoiding political dogma, one major criticism I have of the initial focus of this project is its propensity for viewing itself as propa-

ganda. If we truly wish to refuse the dead words of politics, we should think critically about how we engage with the media we create. Should an anarchist publication see its task as “spreading anarchist ideas” to the world in the hope of creating more anarchists? I think not, unless we seek to be missionaries of a secular cult. This is where the insistence on “propaganda” by many anarchists opens itself up for the worst forms of political manipulation.

What I want from this project is to communicate, to express my ideas (in visuals, words, deeds) and to put them in conversation with the ideas and actions of others with whom I may have affinity. If I make definitive statements against authority, I would also like to open up questions about that authority and its possible destruction. Without reducing everything to the stupidity of democratic dialogue, I want to argue, contest, debate, and discuss with others my thoughts and dreams. I will leave propaganda to militaries, advertising executives, television news stations, and electoral campaigns. I wish to speak like a human being, not a bullhorn.

### Learning Curves

If we are to believe the internet, there are many new people coming to a point of conflict with state authority and capitalist dominion. While we laugh with every

person setting themselves at odds with this society, we worry that the skills and tools of rebellion are not being shared properly by those of us who have smiled at the sound of breaking glass for the past decades. This includes an array of things: preserving anonymity, computer security, dealing with interpersonal conflict, carrying out clandestine actions, forms of sabotage, recognizing and disrupting political management, prisoner support, informal and egalitarian organization, graphic design, organizing events, confronting and overcoming authoritarian behavior, and a million other practical and interpersonal tools of love and war.

We have tried to spread knowledge of some of these topics and plan on continuing to do so. Our ATTACK poster series documents various actions in Bloomington (claimed anonymously online) throughout the years against police, capitalist enterprises, and state infrastructure. We continue to share news of any local (and sometimes international) actions, to show what is possible when we cease to be passive observers of life. We have also published instructional texts on some basic skills.

I worry that these actions and How Tos will be taken as blueprints for revolt or a political line. They are not meant to be a list of anarchist-approved tactics, but only a selection of things we have found inspiring. Dropping banners, wheat-pasting posters, sabotaging businesses, writing graffiti, forming affinity groups to carry out nighttime actions...these are some choices available. What matters is not that these specific practices spread, but that individuals or small groups of friends decide to break with social peace and act in ways that make sense to them. We want only to share some of our skills and ideas with others, and to have others share theirs with us.

## Against the techno-nightmare

**M**uch of the content in *Plain Words* has furthered a critique of technological alienation and the mutilation of human life by digital technology. I try, as much as possible, to put this into practice in my life and in this project. Yes, we use computers to design each issue and maintain our website. But despite some initial desire to be a hub of “counter-information” on the internet, we have focused most of our energy on creating a widely-distributed print publication. While we post a

digital copy of every issue on our website, what matters most to me is that one cannot walk around downtown Bloomington without passing numerous places offering free copies of the latest issue. In a time where more and more writing is migrating to a purely-digital sphere (and is subsequently deadened by the medium and the information sickness it creates), we have chosen to prioritize the quiet reflection made possible by reading a material publication. It is this I am most proud of. However, there are challenges...

## IS ANYONE READING?

**O**ne of the difficulties in publishing an anonymous periodical is that we rarely know what anyone feels about what we write; what disagreement, outrage, or inspiration our little paper stirs in others. Aside from knowing that people take copies from the places we leave them, or limited commentary on its contents from friends, we don't even know how widely *Plain Words* is being read. We try to encourage response and contribution, but few take us up on this offer. I hope this isn't because the act of writing — not social media outbursts or inane meme production, but actual reflection — has become passé, but I fear the worst.

I would like this publication to be a mosaic of voices exploring together what a world without coercion, work, alienation,

and authority could look like — and how to get there. I am happy to do the work of carefully designing, prolifically printing, and methodically distributing this paper, but hope for others to join in creating what truly matters: dialogue between and expression by human beings, without political fetters or commercial logic, free in every way.

So please consider writing an essay, sending a communicate about your spree of vandalism, sharing your inspired poetry, or responding to something we wrote.

We will continue, with modest but active hearts and hands, to put this rag into the world, with the belief that the urge to create is also a destructive urge.

For human community  
& wild exuberance,  
margot v.



*The well-paid staff of Plain Words hard at work*



# ANARCHY

# ART AND

*The following is a critique we received of the article "Good TV as a Roadblock to Becoming Ungovernable, or Anything Else Really" in the Winter 2018 edition of Plain Words. It is followed by a response from the author of the original article.*

**D**ear Plain Words, Nice magazine. These photographs are beautiful and the layout is excellent. The articles are insightful. In Issue #4 I liked the kaleidoscope one and the "good TV" one. I read them and talked about them with friends. I'm not into the indiscriminate violence of your namesake, but I appreciate their tenacity.

I've got a couple things to say about the "good TV" article. I liked how it talked about the trap of seeing your subculture or identity represented in the media. Having your interests sold back to you like that. And it was a good reminder to get off the couch and go talk to people.

But there's a couple important things I think it's missing about what it means to be human.

With some exceptions, anarchists these days don't do a very good job of dealing with art and beauty. These are huge and important parts of human life, but we don't have much to say about them. What we do have to say is usually about how these things are enslaving us and alienating us and "stymying revolt." Like we'd all be smashing out Starbucks windows and killing our bosses if it weren't for TV.

Of course it's true. Of course TV pacifies us and of course it isolates us. It fits conveniently into a life of alienation under late capitalism. For sure. I'm not arguing for or against "good TV."

But it could be that people are watching some of these "good TV" shows because they are beautiful. Because, in the best cases, they are feats of human creativity and artistic expression that deserve attention. The studies of light and color, of film and of storytelling, of beauty and sensuality, of power and aggression and suffering. You write that when watching TV "we are set in receiving mode while being flooded

with images, archetypes, and stories." But setting yourself in "receiving mode" to watch intricately-crafted images, full of archetypes that speak to core elements of our humanity is a tradition with roots far deeper than late capitalism. If you're gonna "raze" that "to the ground" it makes me worry what other core elements of human culture you've got on the chopping block.

The images Michelangelo painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel were commissioned by Pope Julius II. From one perspective, these are images depicting a creation myth of the most oppressive religion humans have ever created, funded by an authoritarian colonial leader of that religion as a monument to its hegemony. Perhaps it, too, should be razed to the ground?

Anarchist analysis must expand. If we can't find ways of speaking and relating to the way the eroticism and sensuality of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel catch your breath and, like all great art and literature "make us go out of control" as Leslie

Fiedler<sup>1</sup> put it, then we are going to continue to speak only to ourselves. Anyone not already thoroughly indoctrinated by our ideology can see that we're missing something big here.

On a different note, there seems to be an assumption floating around in the background of this article (and in much anarchist discourse) that TV and the system that created it are the source of all of our problems. We are presented with an image (literally and figuratively) of a solitary person, miserable and alone in front of the television.

Our analysis of the ways capitalism and the state encourage the worst parts of ourselves and exponentially increase their impact are apt and inserting them is strategic, but it's naïve the way we anarchists seem to often be saying that dissatisfaction, isolation, anxiety, cruelty and anti-social violence, despair and misery are created by capitalism. Try telling that to someone living a few hundred years ago, before the enclosure of our precious commons. We've got some good ideas about how things could be better and how we could build a world that promotes the best parts of ourselves and discourages our yuckiest parts, but let's be more honest about which problems we can and can't solve. It isn't the TV that's making us miserable. While aspects of capitalism and the state are definitely making our lives worse, the various forms of human misery listed above are part of the human condition.

When we embrace this reality, we place ourselves on the receiving end of a rich tradition stretching back tens of thousands of years of humans struggling with our place in the universe. I bet we'd have some cool things to contribute to that conversation. And when we ground ourselves there, we build a solid foundation on which to express and attempt to realize our visions of a better world.

Thanks for creating and curating this forum and for putting your ideas out there. Can't wait to see what comes next.

## A response by the author

**T**hanks for your thoughtful and non-dogmatic response to the article I wrote. I appreciate the critical thought apparent throughout the letter, it is unfortunately a rare commodity these days,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-DoGLBBC0BQ>

even among anarchists. I found some of the critiques you made useful, and disagreed with others.

First, I want to clarify what I was getting at with the "Good TV" essay. As you point out, I wrote, "TV is both bad in its own right, and in how it stymies revolt and keeps people from taking action against the nightmare world around them," to which you responded, "like we'd all be smashing out Starbucks windows and killing our bosses if it weren't for TV." Fair enough, I regret the choice of words I used, it wasn't an accurate description of what I was thinking when writing the piece.

What I think TV and similar commercial passive entertainment stymies isn't revolt, but rather creativity and the urge to experiment. I was more on point when I wrote earlier in the essay that "capitalism and the technology developed through it have created conditions that hinder the creation of long-term life habits outside those of passivity and consumption." Because these technologies are so seductive for reasons explained in my essay, people are more likely to spend their free time isolated, entertaining themselves with an endless stream of shows and content. When that option is always present, people are less likely to go out, interact with others, and in their boredom, come up with something interesting. It seems like the institutions and value systems of this society are dying, but I don't see experiments in communalism or new ideas or interesting social phenomenon popping up. While I don't mean to blame tech toys for ALL the world's issues, I can't help but see them as contributing to these specific problems.

You say, "of course TV pacifies us and of course it isolates us," but I don't think that should be taken for granted. When I was younger, I heard the phrase "idiot box," but I never hear sentiments like that now. I have no way of knowing this, but I'm going to guess that most people nowadays don't think of TV as an object which they can have an opinion about, let alone come to conclusions that it is isolating or pacifying. I have two experiences that come to mind.

I used to spend time on Tumblr, and it seemed like the general opinion in the "radical" and social justice circles there was that some TV shows were a socially positive force, aka "woke," while others that didn't portray race, gender, and sexuality in the ways fashionable to their circles at the time were "problematic." They would spend time

"debating" whether *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was feminist, or mourning *Game of Thrones* because of a racist scene at the end of its second season. The content of TV was a constant source of comment, but never the medium itself.

In college, I was in a class where we were discussing advertising to children in commercials. I explained how disgusting it is the way advertisers exploit children, and it seemed like most of the class agreed. But then one student spoke up, and said if there were no children's advertisements, they wouldn't have commercials during children's shows, and therefore we need advertisements for children. I was shocked, but the class seemed to totally agree with his sentiment. They couldn't imagine TV itself being something bad, or something that could be judged in its own right.

I'm not going to deny that there are TV shows that are "feats of human creativity and artistic expression." I agree with you there. But I don't think that's why people watch TV. TV watching is a habit, formed because it is the easiest alternative to basically every other activity available to us. I wrote more about that in the original essay, so I won't re-explain it here. I think people watch TV, and occasionally one of the shows they watch contains some kind of special meaning or beauty. That's been my experience at least. Sure I watched *The Wire*, but when it was over I queued up the newest season of *Archer*. Like phones and computers, it occupies the time in between work and other necessary social roles.

I'm having a hard time understanding your use of the ideas "our humanity" and "the human condition." I did a little research into the latter, and it seems to be an idea produced in the 20th century in the first-world. I am skeptical that someone in this society could have anything close to a meaningful and conclusive understanding of what it would mean to be human. Knowledge about abstract things should always been read as being situated in the time and place they come from. So instead of "the human condition," I read it as "the 20th/21st century first-world condition!"

I like what you say about "a rich tradition stretching back tens of thousands of years of humans struggling with our place in the universe." If we're going to talk about ideas like "our humanity," I think it fits there, as a thing to aspire to contribute to. So I disagree when you say that TV is "full of archetypes that speak to core elements of our humanity." I just don't know

how anyone can know about “core elements of our humanity,” and I tend to read these kind of claims as ideology, which always camouflages human-constructed ideas as nature.

The closest I’ve seen a TV show speaking to any kind of deep meaning, situated in the time and place it came from, is *The Sopranos*, but only because at every turn the characters failed to grasp any understanding of themselves, each other, and the world around them. A striking example of the 20th/21st century first-world condition if you ask me!

Does great art and literature really make you go out of control? I’m jealous if so. When reading most literature, my mind quickly wanders after reading a few pages, and I end up flipping to the end of the chapter to see how much I have left before I can put the book down. I blame this attention deficiency on the hours I spent every day as a kid playing video games and watching TV. When I think of great art, I remember viewing Tumblr or Instagram on my phone. No matter how beautiful some image was, I’d scroll down to the next one within a second. If anything, I’d say that if you really value great art and literature then you should be especially hostile to all these

tech toys, which reduce beauty in preference to amusement.

That all said, I do have a critique of art, one shared by many artists such as the surrealists, Dadaists, Situationists, and others throughout the last century. Creativity can and should exist in all aspects of life, not just frozen in a product, or “work of art.” Should only a painting or a sculpture, but not a relationship between caring friends who come to deep understandings of each other, be considered art? What about a life lived with dignity and through one’s own desires, in constant combat with a society always trying to stifle both? That sounds, and would feel, pretty beautiful to me. Nonetheless, I still like works of beauty, like paintings and music. Critiques aren’t always meant to be demolishing, they are often meant to be expansive, to rip open the walls of definition.

I agree with you that dissatisfaction, isolation, anxiety, cruelty, despair, and misery were not created by capitalism, but I suspect that many of these feelings/inflctions have been exacerbated by it. Or, at least, some people at certain contexts within the past 300 years of capitalism experience those feelings more than others in different contexts. For example, precarity

in late-stage capitalism contributes to anxiety, as does debt. Again, neither created by capitalism, but both heightened for certain people at specific eras. I agree with your sentiment that we shouldn’t expect a hypothetical future anarchist society to solve every human existential crisis, as Christians view heaven. But capitalism, especially with assistance with information technology, has deeply infiltrated minute aspects of our daily lives. That these intrusive systems of control and mediations, which serve the purposes of varied inhuman institutions and abstract forces like capital, wouldn’t contribute to our dissatisfaction, isolation, anxiety, despair, and misery seems unlikely to me. Either that, or us humans are incredibly flexible in what we desire and will tolerate. Given how unhappy everyone is, how terrible of a shape the world is in, and how neurotic and awful we are to ourselves and each other, I doubt this is true.

I want for us to contribute something to the rich tradition of finding our place in the universe. But I think people come to insight by learning from and through each other, hence artist/literary scenes, scientific journals, etc. If TV is keeping us isolated, then it’s a direct obstacle to us coming to any of those ideas.



## UPDATES ON J20 TRUMP INAUGURATION ARRESTEES

**O**n Inauguration Day in 2017 over 200 people were kettled and arrested for alleged involvement in an anti-capitalist, anti-fascist march in Washington D.C. Almost everyone was initially charged with felony rioting, before later being reindicted with eight felonies punishable by up to 75 years in prison. The state was — and still is — attempting to use conspiracy charges to hold everyone who was arrested

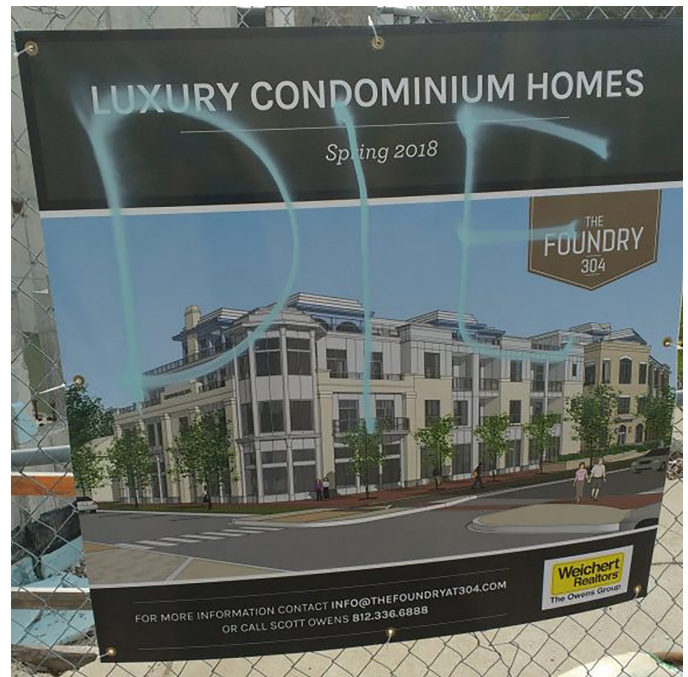
responsible for the property destruction that happened on Inauguration Day. With only a handful of people accepting plea deals, most defendants held out for collective defense and solidarity. The first six defendants, including a few street medics, went to trial in November of last year. After a few days of deliberation all were acquitted on all charges. In the face of their acquittal, about a year after the initial arrests, and following a Day of Solidarity with J20 Resistance, the prosecution dropped all charges against 129 people, leaving 59 still facing charges. (It’s important to note, too, that the charges were dropped “without prejudice” leaving the door open for charges to be refiled in the future). Among those whose charges were dropped are all three former

defendants currently residing in Indiana. So with some of the local pressure off, we must throw our full support behind the remaining defendants. The next trial is set to begin on April 17, 2018, with subsequent trials ongoing continuously throughout the year. We’ve got a lot of work in front of us to keep up the pressure and the support for everyone going to trial from now until November.

Keep an eye on [DefendJ20Resistance.org](https://DefendJ20Resistance.org) and [ItsGoingDown.org](https://ItsGoingDown.org) for trial updates.

And don’t forget we also have one defendant from Bloomington’s local inauguration day march last year. Look out for calls for solidarity as the case continues.

# COPS, CAMERAS & CONDOS BLOOMINGTON IS GETTING WORSE



**B**loomington is increasingly becoming a place meant for rich and middle class people. In order for that to happen, the city government is cracking down on the presence of poor people downtown, while real estate developers are building luxury and market-rate housing developments that drive up rent across the city. Cops, cameras, and condominiums complement each other in guiding the city towards becoming a place inhospitable to poor or uncontrollable people.

The Bloomington Police Department expanded its downtown presence last year and finally removed the homeless population from People's Park. This came after Mayor John Hamilton unveiled his Safe & Civil Cities initiative in August 2016, which aims to make downtown safer for middle-class and rich people, including privileged students and their visiting parents.

To accomplish this, the BPD is installing and monitoring four or five surveillance cameras downtown, an addition to the six added in 2016 located along the B-Line, in People's Park, and in Seminary Square. Regarding this technology, Steve Kallams with the Bloomington Police Department said: "The criminal out there sees the cameras — we are hoping they take their criminal offense someplace else."

By spitefully wishing "criminal offense" on anywhere that's not downtown Bloomington, Steve's logic complements gentrification, the ongoing process where

wealthier people replace poor people in a city, often via rising rent. When this happens, there's a tendency for business owners, city government officials, and Good Citizens to heighten focus on crime associated with people living in poverty in the inner-city. Rather than address the social problems that both cause and result from poverty, police crack down on poor people, luxury housing is built, wealthy people who now feel safe invade the area, and rent goes up. This causes an inner-city's poor to be replaced with rich people. So Steve's criminal offenses and the misery accompanying poverty still exist, they are just pushed "someplace else."

This is not only happening in Bloomington. Developers are building luxury condos while housing is becoming more expensive in cities around the world. Urban living is becoming more culturally seductive to upper and middle-class people everywhere, whose parents or grandparents fled the cities in the 1950s and '60s. These processes are contributing to gentrification, which means more condos, more cops, and more cameras. Except maybe when they're on a mission trip to Africa to collect potential default facebook pictures, rich people don't like interacting with poverty. They would rather move somewhere where they don't have to. This adds motivation for city governments to remove homeless and other poor people to attract capital and rich residents. To accomplish this, more cops

and cameras are needed.

There are a number of new housing developments for rich people that have been built or are currently in construction. I will briefly point out and describe some of them to contribute to awareness of how gentrification is happening in Bloomington.

## The Foundry

**A** luxury condo complex called The Foundry is being put up on the B-Line and 6th Street. It's probably most famous around town for having a sign that's been tagged at least twice.

There are 26 units in this complex, and they are going for \$249,900 – \$869,000, so if you live nearby, prepare for an influx of rich people into your neighborhood later this year when the project is complete.







## Luxury Apartments across from People's Park

Shortly after the Bloomington cops chased homeless folks out of People's Park this past summer, construction on apartment complex across from the park was completed, and it is now renting out studio apartments for \$1,299 – \$1,399/month. The correlation appears again: as more yuppies move downtown, the city government has more excuse for social cleansing. In this case, the yuppies would have felt uncomfortable at the presence of homeless people so close to them, who might even have asked them for money when they walked by. Homeless people asking you for money?! Move over ninth circle of hell!

## Urban Stations



It's been there for a bit now, but Urban Station Apartments on Walnut Street near Sahara Mart is renting out one-bedroom apartments for \$1,269, and two-bedrooms for \$1,920 at minimum. Who can afford that? Probably the kind of people who feel safe when they see cops.

The same developer, H.M. Mac, is trying to get another abomination off the ground, cleverly titled "Urban Station Phase II." It'll be built where Rhino's Youth Center is currently located, so they're offering them a free spot on the ground level. This is a distraction from the fact that, unlike in Urban Station I, "the proposed development does not include a commitment from

the developer to make any of the units priced as workforce housing."

Workforce housing, a somewhat nebulous term, seems to imply that for a tenant to qualify, they must make near the median annual income of the area. This means they must be employed, and presumably full-time in order to make that much money. So real estate developers can add a couple of "workforce housing" units to their developments as a bone to throw at liberal city governments, which lets them off the hook so the rest of the units can charge much higher rent. In the case of Urban Station II, they don't even have to do that, because they are letting Rhino's stay there for free (for now).

## Evolve Bloomington



Near the IU Stadium a 400-bedroom housing complex will be finished sometime this year, uncreepily called "Evolve Bloomington." According to the website, this unfinished housing development is present-tense "CHANGING THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT STUDENT LIVING," and plans to "REDEFINE EXTRAORDINARY." That hardly seems necessary since the definition for the word "extraordinary" was updated on Merriam-Webster's website as recently as January 13, 2018. They don't list any prices on the website, so it's safe to assume it'll be rented out to rich east-coast undergrad students and Kelley MBA's who want to be able to drunkenly stagger to and from the stadium.

## Tapp Road development

There is a 111-unit housing complex going up at 2182 W. Tapp Road that will be 10% workforce housing. So that means 90% of the units will be for rich people, while the cost for 10% will be "set at a fixed rate related to the minimum wage." How can there be a single, fixed rate related

to the minimum wage when minimum wage earners often don't work full-time? There can't, so one can assume they mean the fixed rate will be "related," whatever that means, to the wages of someone working full-time hours. In that case, those 10% of tenants are allowed to live there, but only if they work enough to be too tired to have any kind of meaningful or interesting life.

## Echo Park Apartments

Echo Park Apartments on 2780 South Walnut St Pike is charging \$899/month at minimum for a one-bedroom unit. This one-star review has been posted to their facebook page: "Ridiculously overpriced and bland rentals that are neither urban nor forested as they claim. They cut down 10 acres of woods to build this monstrosity and then added balconies that overlook the backyards of neighboring houses. Bonus points for false advertising a dog park and walking trails, neither of which exist, and for promising to plant an evergreen buffer between the apartments and neighboring houses (spoiler alert: they never did and its been well over a year). Know that if you move in here your neighbors already hate you. Gentrification at its finest." Well put.

## Conclusion

Bloomington is not an unaffordable, tightly-packed, constantly-surveilled dystopia yet. There are more condos, cameras, and cops now than in the recent past, and there will be even more of all three in the future. This piece is not meant to produce a feeling of hopelessness, but rather point out to those who are threatened by these new developments how the situation here is changing, so we can adapt. The forces of order are still not omnipotent, not even close.

**Barney Szyalak**

*For citations, visit  
plainwordsbloomington.org*



# COPING WITH THE END OF THE WORLD

**T**he day after Trump was elected President, news reports circulated images of young people at college campuses gathering to cry and mourn together. At these “cry-ins” or “self-care events,” students reportedly colored in coloring books, played with play-doh, met with therapy dogs, drank hot chocolate, and of course, cried together. These stories were met with ridicule, supposedly showcasing the oversensitive millennial generation as a bunch of snowflakes who can’t handle the world. But just like how, to Baudrillard, the existence of the uber-commercialized and artificial Disneyland gives cover to the rest of society pretending not to be both already, these spectacular stories of human coping hide the fact that society is already coping all the time.

To cope means to deal with something with some degree of success. When faced with a situation that is unalterable, it is a workaround or sidestep. Since you cannot change it, you try to figure out a way to handle it. In the 20th century, revolutionaries faced the miserable world with hope to transform it into something better, which guided their actions and ways of living. But in present day, a revolution seems less possible, and hopelessness is spreading.

Every day is a new disaster: environmental catastrophe, war and the threat of nuclear winter, daily random mass shootings, Nazis killing people and trying to gain power, and the arrival of an Orwellian techno-future. These horrors compound ongoing miseries of daily life under capitalism: hunger, boredom, humiliation, exploitation, isolation, violence, oppression, alienation, etc. Since it seems like we can’t change these realities, we try to cope with them.

## Coping with our minds

**M**indfulness is a Buddhist practice that has recently become popular within the field of psychology. It involves adopting a quasi-meditative mindset throughout daily life to non-judgmentally notice toxic thoughts. Seeing these thoughts for what they are supposedly lessens their ability to exacerbate neurosis and anxiety. This practice contrasts with psychoanalysis and other schools of psychology in discarding the role of the therapist as an expert of the mind, who tries to “fix” the patient by uncovering latent secrets buried within their psyche. Mindfulness never aims to “cure”, but rather offers an ongoing strategy for dealing with anxiety and toxic thoughts. In

other words, it is a coping strategy that’s become popular due to an increasingly anxiety-producing world. It’s not the only one.

Psychiatry, a sister discipline to psychology that includes its practitioners prescribing anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications, adopts the same approach. It never tries to cure someone of depression or anxiety, but instead aims to assist the patient in getting through daily life. Like mindfulness, it is a coping mechanism that can be useful to people. Both are in prominence right now because they level people out enough to enable them to be productive members of society. Someone who cannot get out of bed in the morning won’t be able to produce value at work or through whatever role they are assigned in capitalist society.

## Coping through drugs

**T**he number of people addicted to opioids have increased drastically in the last decade, including over double the amount of heroin users in the US from 2002 to 2016. The Opioid Crisis is largely a result of over-prescription of painkillers for severe and chronic pain. These painkillers are addictive, and 21 to 29 per-

cent of patients prescribed them admit to misusing them. When the prescription runs out, or when a tolerance is built-up to the drug's effects, many begin using heroin or other illegal opioids. Chronic means "continuing or occurring again and again for a long time," implying that it probably won't be going away permanently. Taking painkillers then is a way of coping, of constantly battling a condition that isn't being fixed for whatever reason.

The most common reported type of chronic pain is low back pain, which has a number of different causes. But it's likely that the prevalence of this kind of pain has actually increased over time. A study done in North Carolina shows that the proportion of people suffering from long-term, low back pain has more than doubled between the early '90s and 2009. Clearly something about this society and form of life is causing people to feel more chronic pain, which they then cope with by taking painkillers.

Habitual use of any drug can be read as a coping mechanism. 55 million people in the US used weed within the last year, and 35 million do on a monthly basis. 52% who used marijuana come from the millennial generation. Weed lowers your standards, it makes boring things fun. A stupid show on Netflix becomes entertaining,

the toxic parts of a relationship are de-emphasized over the presence of a warm body to cuddle with, and emotions are dulled to the point of being manageable or ignorable. While drug use can provide interesting experiences, habitual use is clearly a way of coping with a boring and stressful world as well as putting off dealing with ongoing problems in life. Since under late capitalism the world cannot be acclimated to the needs of the body, with weed the body adjusts itself to acclimate to the world: a boring, despair-inducing, and stressful one at best.

## Radical self-care

The idea of "radical self-care" has become popular through Tumblr and online social justice circles in recent years. Rejecting notions of mandatory productivity and its related shame, radical self-care rhetoric preaches that people should do whatever they need to do to get through the day. The examples given usually seem to be indulgent forms of consumption: eat a whole pizza, binge-watch a mindless series, stay in bed all day if you need to. That radical self-care often translates into indulging in consuming commodities is a stellar example of capitalism preying on people's vulnerabilities.

The rhetoric around radical self-care goes something like: "whatever you need to do to cope, do it. Don't ever let anyone make you feel bad for how you cope with the world." What's striking about this is how identical it is to a popular sentiment in prison: Whatever you have to do to do your time, do it. A thoughtful and multifaceted analysis of radical self-care has already been made, but what's apparent here is that it is a synonym for coping.

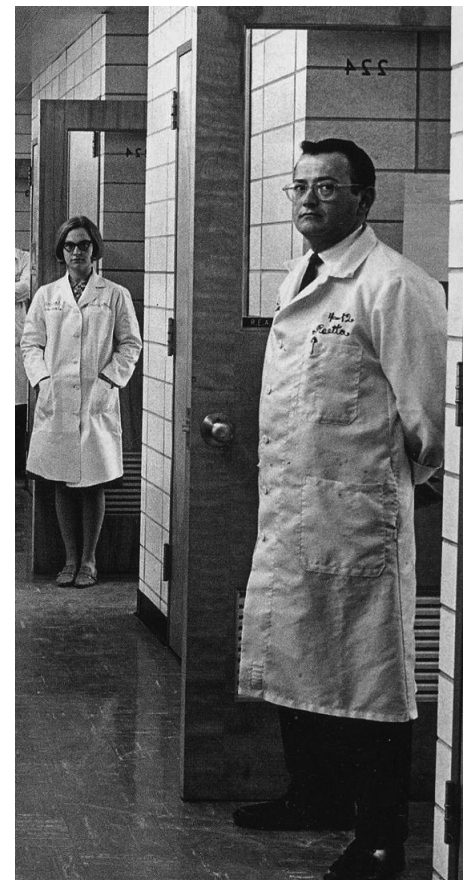
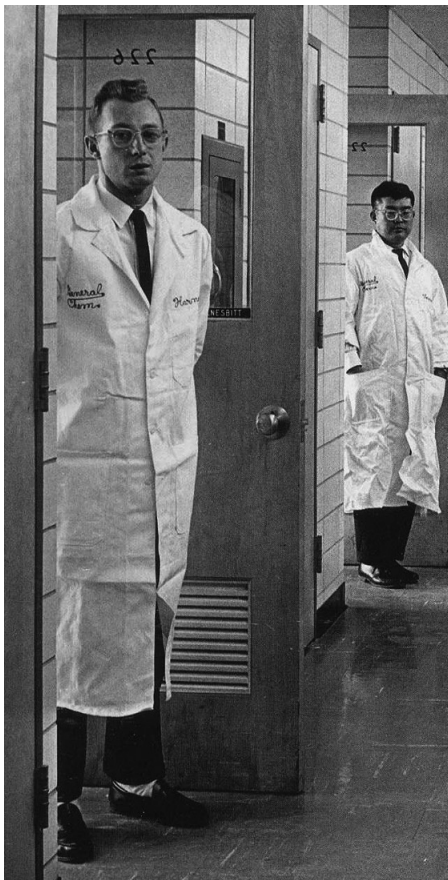
## Sadvertising & sentimentality in advertising and culture

Marketing and PR executives are tasked with creating propaganda content for their brands, products, and organizations, which requires them to study social trends and know the pulse of the public. In the last few years there was a trend in advertising dubbed "sadvertising," where ads consisted of sentimental and emotionally moving stories, often unrelated to the products being marketed. William Gelner, former chief creative officer of the marketing agency 180LA, attributes this trend to the fact that: "...we live such dig-

itally switched-on, always-plugged-in lives, and yet we still also somehow feel disconnected from people. As human beings, we're looking for human connection, and I think that emotional storytelling can help bridge that gap." But at the end of 2016, after both Brexit and Trump's election, the mood of holiday advertising quickly changed. An article published by a website for Association Executives:

*Last year's tear jerking sentimental ads have been replaced with trampolining animals, courtesy of John Lewis, and a shift from sentimental wallowing – 'sadvertising' – to a healthy injection of light relief and laughter. Maybe the prospect of Brexit and Trump was simply more than most of us could deal with! When it comes to communications it's definitely crucial to have an accurate appreciation of the predominant mood of the audience.*

A trend that exploits people's unfulfilled desires to have meaningful connections was replaced by a trend that tip-toes lightheartedly around people's fears of a disastrous future. While the cope-baiting is most obvious in the latter, in both cases the target of the advertisements is someone trying to deal with the miserable life they're stuck in.



## Failure to cope

To cope implies a degree of successfully persevering through the situation. What about when you cannot, when you lack the ability to both change a situation and deal with it in your life? Hopelessness is “significantly related to eventual suicide” by psychiatrists, and suicide rates have been on the rise across demographics of age and gender. It is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. If suicide is related to coping, is it linked to a failure to cope, or is it actually a rejection of coping as a way of living? Random mass

shootings are also on the rise. These seemingly arbitrary acts are hard to understand, but the absence of empathy points to a lack of connection with people, and the suicidal intentions behind them demonstrates a feeling of hopelessness.

## Conclusion

It would be stupid, insensitive, and unhelpful to suggest that people “stop coping,” as if that were possible or even desirable. Instead, I seek to uncover a trend in the hope of allowing us to better understand this oft-changing and complex society

we have been forced into. If you know what your enemy has been up to, wouldn't that help you plot against them?

*For notes & citations, visit [plainwordsbloomington.org](http://plainwordsbloomington.org)*

# SOLIDARITY WITH ERIC KING

Eric King is an anarchist serving 10 years in federal prison for an attempted attack on a Kansas City, Missouri government official's office.

In September 2014, Eric threw a hammer and two lit Molotov cocktails through the window of Missouri congressman Emanuel Cleaver's (unoccupied) office. Both incendiary devices failed to ignite. Eric was arrested after being identified as a suspect due to previously coming under suspicion for anti-government and anti-police graffiti.

On March 3, 2016, Eric accepted a non-cooperating plea agreement for one count of using “explosive materials to commit arson of property used in or affecting interstate commerce.” Eric was sentenced to ten years, the statutory minimum and maximum for the charge. His release date is June 2, 2023.

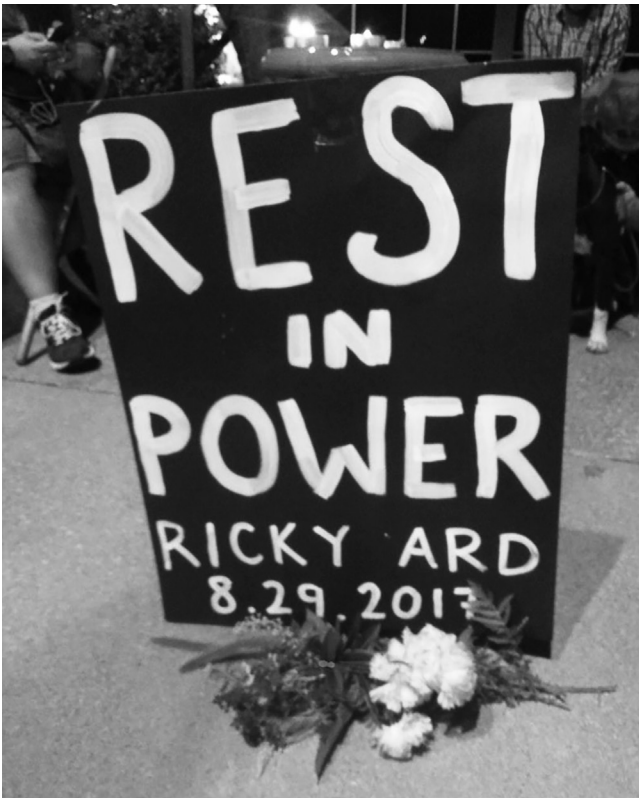
During his sentencing, Eric faced his captors with integrity, making clear that his action was done in solidarity with the rebellion against police in Ferguson, Missouri. Of his action, he stated: “I'm happy I did it. The government in this country is disgusting. The way they treat poor people, the way they treat brown people, the way they treat

everyone that's not in the class of white and male is disgusting, patriarchal, filthy racist...I'm not sorry for what I did. I'm sorry that I got caught before I could do more things. I would have loved to attack more government buildings and make sure that bubble of safety that prosecutors and FBI agents and judges feel got shattered so that they stay in their safe pockets knowing they can't touch me even though there are consequences to my actions.”

Throughout his subsequent years of imprisonment, Eric has been subject to isolation and harassment by prison guards. He has repeatedly been thrown in segregation and has had to fight for vegan meals. Ever defiant, Eric remains active, writing poetry, teaching yoga, and contributing to anarchist publications and projects.

To find out more about Eric, check out [SUPPORTERICKING.ORG](http://SUPPORTERICKING.ORG)





# RESPONDING TO THE POLICE MURDER OF RICKY ARD

## AN INTERVIEW WITH EVANSVILLE COMRADES

**I**n August of 2017 Evansville, Indiana resident Ricky Ard was gunned down by an EPD officer and a federal security guard outside of the federal courthouse in downtown Evansville. We spoke with three people involved in the response to Ricky's death.

### Why did you join the gathering at the Federal Building?

**Respondent 2:** Some friends and I gathered at my house on the evening of Ricky's murder to try to figure out how to respond. One other person and I were trying to say that we should wait until the next day to hold some kind of demonstration in hopes of doing more planning and having a bigger turnout. Another friend showed up who perhaps tends more toward action and made it clear that she was going to be down at the federal building that night and that we could choose to join her or not. In retrospect, I am really appreciative of that person's tenacity, as the vigil that night ended up being really inspiring for me and attracted a fair amount of others who were upset about what the cops had done and wanted or needed to be around others who felt the same way. For me, my choice to go down to the federal building came from at least two places within me. First, it came from an ideological or strategic place that seeks out

certain moments of conflict because I believe them to be opportunities to push ideas about how I'd like the world to be. Second, it came from a more emotional place that wanted to mark in time the death of a mentally ill old man at the hands of a pig with too much power. I had gone down to the federal building earlier that day, shortly after Ricky was murdered and the clean up crew had already hosed his blood off the cement. All that was left was a wet spot to indicate his murder and a broken window that a security guard was casually leaning through, joking with a co-worker. It really is true that some people are considered disposable by society and that makes me feel like shit. I don't want to live in despair, nor do I want to feel isolated in my suffering. So getting together with others, yelling at some shitty exploitative reporter, taking neighbor kids down there and talking to them about what happened gave me a way to move through it and hopefully honor Ricky's death.

**Since Ferguson, cops in many places get very nervous about a response to police murders, sometimes resulting in very heavy handed policing, and others with very intricate soft-policing. How did the Evansville PD respond to those who had gathered?**

**Respondent 3:** Within 10 minutes police

were driving back and forth in front of the building, slowing down, scanning us, and parking across from the building and on all sides. They made no contact with us at the vigil. At a small rally the next day, a Federal Officer verbally reinforced where the property lines of the building were and instructed that any trespass would end in arrest. When a protester asked about the public sidewalk the officer rushed into his face and physically flexed up, telling the protester not to challenge him. When cameras were brought out he backed down and shielded his face.

**Respondent 2:** In general, our collective response to Ricky Ard's murder was not powerful enough to elicit much of a repressive response. On the night of his murder, we held a candlelight vigil and the next day we gathered on a public sidewalk outside of the federal building where the police and press outnumbered us by a significant margin. This is not to say that these moments were not powerful for those involved and for the Ard family viewing them from afar, nor that they weren't a powerful gesture in a place where so little seems to be possible. But it does seem important to point out that it is too soon to make accurate calculations about how repressive forces like cops and the criminal justice system would respond to a powerful counter-force.

Nonetheless, as indicated above, the federal agents who confronted us on the sidewalk the day following Ricky's murder responded aggressively to the smallest challenge, indicating that if the conflict were to have advanced, they would have quickly escalated to heavy-handed measures rather than more diplomatic de-escalation.

**Has there been any sustained organizing in the months following Ricky's murder?**

**Respondent 3:** Where the River Frowns covered the story live and with an immediate critical nature against the police procedure and response. We gathered the next morning and all of our posters, messages, and candles had been removed. So we replaced them. Some of us spoke with the news media who wanted more answers from concerned outspoken citizens than from the police who killed Ricky. Where the River Frowns maintained communication with the family who reached out to them after the coverage was shared via Facebook, and they diligently kept the tact and message from the family the top priority. There is effort to revisit this event and our actions, as well as continue to examine the police's response afterwards in a zine. WTRF took the participating neighbors' and attendees' perspectives and intel objectively and allowed me to critique and add my thoughts without me having a personal podium to otherwise do so.

**Respondent 2:** After our attempt at a demonstration in front of the federal building on the day following Ricky's murder was so sparsely attended, the response quickly lost momentum. On the night of the vigil some people who attended indicated that they were going to show up the next day with significant numbers of people in tow, but those people did not manifest. There were some efforts among the group of friends who planned the vigil to continue to act, but ultimately we could not maintain the momentum, nor could we transform it into longer-lasting projects. The reasons for this are many, but some of them are our own inexperience in working together and, for most of us, our inexperience in responding to these kinds of situations. Additionally, we are trying to make things possible in a really inhospitable environment, with very little recent precedent for rebellion and very little participation in the social movements of the last few years (the local resistance to

the construction of I-69 being a notable exception). In general, we are still trying to figure out what a response to a police murder (for example) looks like here and how we could work together to make that happen. Ricky Ard's murder was the first recent catalyst for us attempting to work out some answers to those questions and I think it did leave us a little closer to doing so.



**What seems to have changed in Evansville since then? How has it affected neighborhoods and groups of people within Evansville?**

**Respondent 3:** No direct correlation has been made, but one group, MASK (Mothers Against Senseless Killings), formed recently whose mission is to be directly involved in neighborhood patrols and police intervention. They proclaim to be taking their city back and giving their community more options than calling the police. I believe this is due to a culmination of the last few years being policed heavily and wanting to collectively acknowledge how they are being singled out and falling into systemic carceral trappings/pipelines.

**What reflections do yall have on the aftermath of Ricky's murder?**

**Respondent 1:** I'm glad that we held the vigil on the day of Ricky's murder. I think it allowed people who watch the news to see opposition to police brutality, and it created a space for some people to come to talk about what had happened. I think it was meaningful to Ricky's family as well. A lot of us were really worn out though by the time the body camera footage was released two days later. We had been at the vigil, creating media, writing and printing a statement to hand out at a rally, contacting the family, etc., so we ran out of energy around the same time that the surveillance

and body camera footage was released. I'm afraid that sent a message that we were satisfied with the police narrative of "appropriate" force; I wish would would have continued to visibly oppose what had happened in some way.

**One of the most heartbreaking aspects of police murders is seeing the families of the victims on what has to be one of the worst days of their lives. How did yall approach the family and navigate building those relationships?**

**Respondent 2:** Our interactions with the family were pretty minimal. At the vigil on the night of the murder, a woman who attended said she was in touch with the family and I approached her and asked if she would pass on my number. A couple days later I got a text from Shannon, Ricky Ard's niece, and we arranged to talk. It was hard to balance my desire for her and her family to take certain positions — such as condemning police violence or calling for protests — with the obvious need to put her grieving process first. It took an effort to put our shared humanity before my ideology. I made myself available for more connection, invited her to collaborate on an interview to be published on Where the River Frowns and asked about the possibility of more public protests. She seemed uninterested in these things, but was kind and thanked us for the vigil. She said that she appreciated how "diverse" the vigil had been — highlighting the number of both Black and white people in attendance. That was the only real contact we had with her until she sent us and the mainstream media the same statement a couple days later. I wish that more relationship building had been possible, but it didn't seem to be in this case.

**A statement from Ricky's niece, Shannon, talks about Ricky's history of mental illness. Here in Bloomington, data from the BPD shows that most situations in which officers drew weapons were Wellness Checks, indicating that those struggling with mental health are some of the most at-risk for police abuse and violence. Can yall talk about how you see mental illness factoring in to the danger that police pose? How has that thread been woven into the local response?**

**Respondent 3:** I see mental illness used by



authorities to override all autonomy or cognitive reductive capacity from their suspect and then to self-impose their own protocol or desired interaction without context. The police department is quoted as saying the officer that killed Ricky Ard acted within acceptable defensive procedure and that the video footage and response could be used in future trainings. The re-elected Sheriff's new jail being marketed as a mental health facility proposal is the city's response.

**Respondent 2:** In September 2016, police executed a homeless man named Daniel Wooters after he jumped in an unattended a police cruiser and drove off. Previous arrest records indicate that he probably suffered from severe mental illness. In October 2016, Evansville police brutally beat a handcuffed homeless drug addict, Mark Healy, after a cop stuck himself on a syringe in Healy's pocket. The issue evoked controversy after body camera footage proved the cops had concocted a bullshit story together for the police report. In August, Ricky Ard was murdered despite obviously needing mental health intervention and when de-escalation strategies could have easily been employed. The homeless, the addicted, the mentally ill. It's obvious that Evansville police, like police elsewhere, respond with violence in situations when people most need help. Unfortunately, the brevity of our response did not allow us to put a strong focus on this aspect of Ricky's murder, despite requests by his family that we do so.

**There have also been a number of police murders in Indianapolis including**

**Andre Green, Mack Long, and Christopher Goodlow in 2015; Aaron Bailey in June 2017. Bradley King, who, according to his family, had schizophrenia, was killed by a Hendricks County Sheriff deputy in 2016. Rarely are there any consequences for the officers or departments responsible. How could we be working together across the state for a stronger response?**

**Respondent 3:** Stringing these deaths and misconducts together as evidence of a systemic failure would greatly bring light to each as a social crisis rather than bad apples. Sharing each other's newsletters, speaking about local crimes statewide, drawing out the ties between law enforcement and mass incarceration, getting involved in prison abolition, collectively sharing the responsibilities to get word out about these events, and encouraging and supporting each other could be steps toward higher consequences for police who kill people.

**Respondent 2:** I would like to see greater contact and collaboration between people in this region in hopes of establishing more complex networks that could, among other things, be relied upon to facilitate a rapid response to a police murder. In these moments, it's useful if we can act fast and respond in large numbers. If those who were interested in pushing back against police violence were in touch with each other throughout the region, we could go to each other's towns and create a significant disturbance in these moments. I think the only way we are ever going to stop police

violence is if we make it clear that our towns and cities aren't going to function if the cops keep killing people. Creating major disturbances that shut down freeways, close businesses, cause damage to state and corporate property and otherwise make sure we can't all just go about our day, takes large numbers of people. If we help each other we increase our chances of achieving that. In the moments when there isn't a heightened conflict, we can use these networks to build, share resources, and attempt to improve our lives and the lives of those around us.

**The calls for officers to be fired or have criminal charges brought against them almost always end in cruel disappointment. With so many strategies failing to hold police accountable, what thoughts do you have about novel ways to address police violence?**

**Respondent 3:** Not shielding their actions as a police officers from their daily lives — their neighbors, pastors, families, etc. — might be effective. The security guard's name still hasn't been released. He clocks in and kills someone, clocks out and no one knows who this person is.

**Respondent 2:** I addressed this question in my answer above, but I'd like to add that if we can get together with those around us and build up the strength of our neighborhoods and communities so that more and more we are turning to each other to solve problems and mediate conflict, the police and other powerful actors in society will

have less and less of an impact on our lives. Obviously, we're a long way from that, but I think it's useful to hold this as a direction in which we can point in our efforts. Any time someone on our block calls a neighbor or friend instead of the police, we reduce the chances of somebody ending up dead or in jail. Also, a lot of crime, anti-social violence and moments of police intervention are linked to people not having their needs met in some way. The more we are getting ourselves together to feed, clothe and house each other, support each other through domestic disputes and other conflicts, respond to each other's medical problems as well as we can, meet each other's social and emotional needs, get together to defend ourselves and each other both with and without weapons, the more we can avoid bringing cops and other destructive forces into our lives and the less we'll have to worry about whether the cops are reforming themselves, wearing body cameras or whatever nonsense they come up with. Obviously the cops would still be in our lives, but if we were better organized to meet our own needs we'd be better situated to powerfully respond to their intrusions.

**For people who have no faith in police reform, what hopes might they have for participating in protests of police violence? Is there a hope for a more generalized and uncontrollable revolt like we saw in Ferguson or Baltimore? If so, how might one intervene to that end? If not, what else motivates or guides one's participation?**

**Respondent 3:** The more we pay attention, take on serious engagement and educate ourselves, the more we can replace the need for these institutions in our daily lives. We only have spirit and numbers on our side.

**Respondent 2:** In a context like Evansville, it seems unlikely that we can expect a response that resembles even a scaled-back version of what happened in Ferguson or Baltimore. Therefore, it's necessary to think about what is possible in our context and not try to replicate those events in a context where they don't apply. Small disturbances do seem possible in Evansville and the more of a ruckus we can create, the more effective we will be. That being said, even small gestures such as the vigil we held have a huge impact on the way we consider what is and is not possible in a place and can build our capacity in ways we can't fully predict. I think for a lot of people seeing a diverse crowd of people acknowledging that someone was murdered and standing up to his murderers even in small ways was very meaningful. We can build from there. In my opinion, change is slow and even explosive moments of concentrated progress like we saw in Ferguson are the result of consistent and unpredictable contributions of innumerable forces over time. We can't go out in the streets expecting Ferguson, but we can act knowing that we are carrying on the legacy of those who acted in Ferguson and creating another tiny, interstitial moment that, in combination with other moments like it, has the potential to build to something bigger. There is no certainty

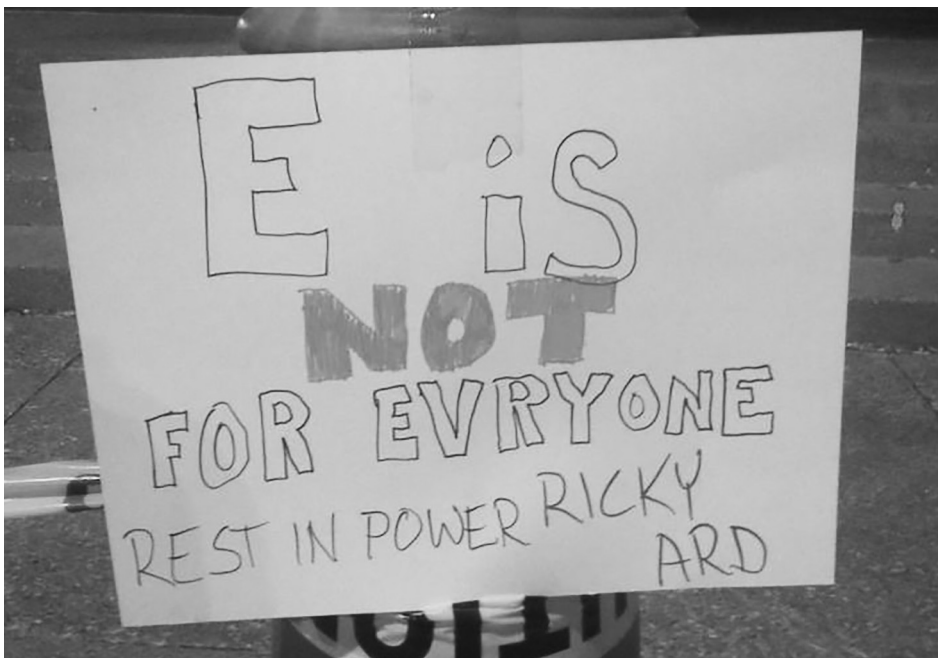
that our efforts will lead to any particular outcome and proceeding anyway requires patience and humility. Fortunately, cultivating those qualities also make one's life better in the meantime.

**Anything else you'd like to share?**

**Respondent 1:** On February 23, 2018, EPD officer Samuel SeDoris shot and killed 59-year-old Evansville resident Douglas Kemp during a traffic stop. Kemp was the 182nd person killed by police in 2018, and the second person killed by the EPD in less than six months. A month before, on January 18, 2018, EPD officer Jackie Smith fired two shots at Vincent Bufkin while responding to a "refusal to leave" call; Bufkin survived a gunshot wound to his shoulder. Last year, officers Nick Henderson, Mark DeCamps and Marcus Craig attacked a handcuffed Mark Healy and fabricated an alternative story about it, which Sergeant Kyle Kassel approved. Two years ago, officers Jason Thomas, Zach Elfreich and Dexter Wolf shot Daniel Wooters who was thirty feet away from them, "armed" with a knife and not making any advances. These nine officers, like officer Kenny Dutschke and the unnamed security guard who killed Ricky Ard, ultimately faced no charges, disciplinary actions, or other obvious consequences. Unfortunately, Ricky Ard's murder is not an isolated incident, and clearly police are not holding themselves accountable for their violence.

**Respondent 2:** On the night of Ricky's murder, many of us who went down to the federal building sent texts out to most of our friends in town asking them to come. One of the most inspiring responses came from a friend who was running a Dungeons and Dragons campaign that night who convinced his whole group to cancel whatever kind of dragon slaying they were up to and come down to the vigil.

*We thank these respondents for sharing their thoughts and experience with us, appreciate everyone who showed up in the wake of Ricky's murder, and send our best to Ricky's family and friends. Check out Where the River Frowns for more on this story and many others: [wheretheriverfrowns.com](http://wheretheriverfrowns.com)*







# BLAST FROM THE PAST

## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN MADISON, INDIANA

In many of the river communities, underground work was carried out almost entirely by African Americans. One of the most effective networks of all was based in the port of Madison, Indiana, about eighty miles downriver from Cincinnati. With a few exceptions, it is difficult to form a sharp picture of the men who formed this cell. None of them left memoirs or diaries. Their activities remain visible at all only as they have been refracted through the anecdotes of white abolitionists, often long after the fact, and in a handful of nineteenth-century newspaper articles that omit more than they reveal. It is clear that the man at the cell's center in the early 1840s was the freeborn Virginian George DeBaptiste, whose picaresque career suggests that he had much more than the average share of charm and nerve. A natural mole, he would not have been out of place in the shadowy world of twentieth-century espionage. Born in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1814, he was trained as a barber, and by the age of eighteen became the body servant of a professional gambler, with whom he traveled widely around the country, including the Deep South. In 1838 DeBaptiste had settled in Madison, and his barbershop at the corner of Second and Walnut soon became the underground's local headquarters.

As late as 1940, Madison was the second largest city in the state, with almost ten thousand inhabitants, two hundred of

them African American. Madison owed its prosperity to the confluence of the Ohio River with the staple commodity of the mid-century western diet: pork. More than a dozen firms dealt in pork-related products: lard, bristle, hides, barrels, as well as meat. Their brick warehouses lined the mile-and-a-half-long waterfront, where flatboats, keelboats, steamboats, and fishing boats jostled for space along the wharfs amid floating clouds of flimsy skiffs. Little more than a couple of plants hammered crudely together, these had so little value that they were left lying everywhere along the river's shores, where they were pressed into service as many a fugitive's express to freedom. Poised here in a political no man's land between slavery and freedom, the lives of Madison's blacks – sailors, stevedores, waiters, and casual laborers, for the most part – were intertwined with those of proslavery and antislavery whites in an unstable equilibrium that both favored the clandestine work of the underground and accentuated its danger.

DeBaptiste and most of this collaborators were part of Madison's tiny black middle class, self-employed businessmen or artisans who possessed economic independence, freedom of action, and the kind of organizational sense that was essential to make the mechanisms of the Underground Railroad work. They were well-known to everyone in town, and thus always exposed

to the scrutiny of whites, few of whom they could trust with their secret. In essence, they hid their underground work in plain sight. Less than a block from DeBaptiste's barbershop, where he trimmed the hair of abolitionists and slave owners alike, stood the businesses of his fellow African Americans: John Carter's stall in the public farmers' market, Stepney Stafford's laundry, and Elijah Anderson's blacksmith shop, at Third and Walnut. Slaves who brought produce in from Kentucky farms passed on to Carter information about fugitives who were waiting to cross the river. Stafford's employees served as the cell's eyes and ears as they made their daily rounds to homes that included those of proslavery families, who might let slip information about the movements of local slave catchers. Anderson, one of several conductors, personally took fugitives as far north as [Quaker abolitionist] Levi Coffin's home in Newport. At least two white men were also part of DeBaptiste's circle: John Todd, who lived just west of Madison, and his brother who lived in Kentucky, who would beat on an old brass pot and then wave lanterns when it was safe for a fugitive to cross the river. For blacks, who were vulnerable in ways that whites were not, secrecy was potentially a matter of life and death. Although he was widely suspected of helping to run off slaves, DeBaptiste succeeded for years in brushing off suspicion with disarming innocence.

He always declared, with what one imagines must have been a carefully calibrated chuckle and a servile smile, that he only wished that he was “smart enough to steal the niggers, and he would steal all there was in Old Kentucky.”

DeBaptiste estimated that in the course of eight years in Madison, he personally assisted 108 fugitives to freedom, and several times that number indirectly. He sometimes crossed into Kentucky himself to make arrangements for their escape. [After receiving coded messages about the arrival of fugitives], DeBaptiste and one or two friends would go down to an agreed-upon point on the river after dark and lie at the water’s edge, sometimes for half the night, listening for the sound of muffled oars. Most often, DeBaptiste, Anderson, or one of the others took fugitives to Lancaster, twelve miles north of Madison, a town inhabited by fiercely abolitionist immigrants from Vermont and Maine, who in 1839 had formed the first antislavery society in southern Indiana.

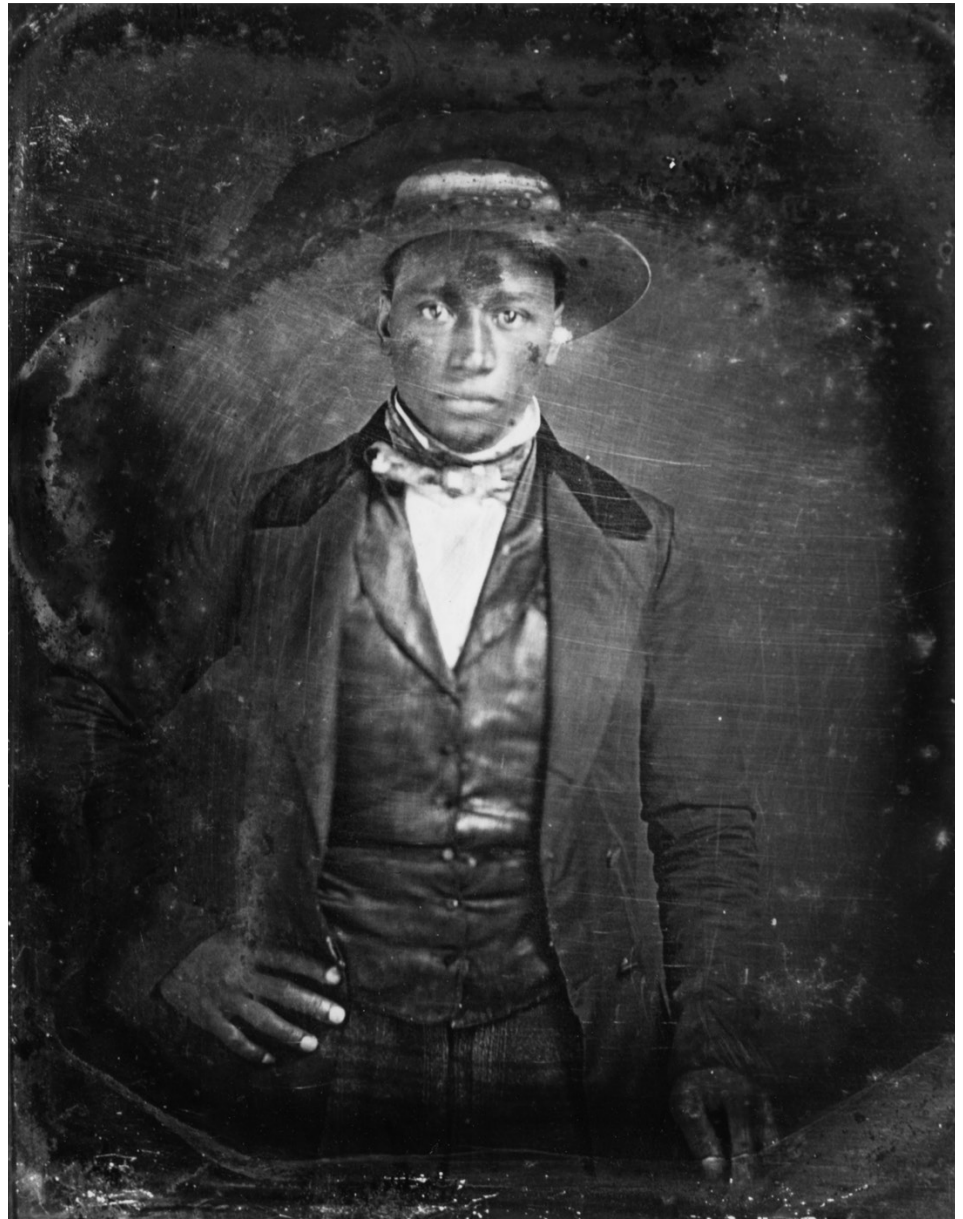
In 1846 Kentucky slave owners and their local allies launched an effort to destroy the underground in Madison. White mobs invaded the homes of blacks and nearly beat to death those who dared to resist. One of DeBaptiste’s conductors, Griffin Booth, was almost drowned by proslavery men in the Ohio River. Elijah Anderson abruptly moved upriver to Lawrenceburg before something similar happened to him. DeBaptiste himself fled to Detroit, fearing exposure and arrest. Outside Madison, gangs of proslavery hoodlums terrorized white abolitionists. The stress on underground families was extreme. The son of John Carr, a white farmer, remembered how he had slept on a trundle bed in his parents’ room and was frequently wakened in the night by his mother sobbing and his father stealthily slipping out of the room: “My curiosity, then awakened, was not wholly satisfied for a year of more, during which time the, to me, mysterious events recurred. My parents were devout Baptists, members of the church nearby, and I attended regularly the meetings and Sunday school. I heard much of wicked men, thieves, robbers, and murderers, and began to fear that my father must be engaged in some such wicked work, and I used to cry to myself when I heard poor mother crying and because, I thought, she was grieving over my father’s wickedness.” Finally, one morning, after a year of this, the boy discovered that his father was hiding fugitives in the hayloft,

where he found three men, a woman, and a baby hidden concealed in the hay. “Father then explained the whole history, cautioning secrecy. Thus warning that some of the pro-slavery men might kill him, or burn his barn and other outbuildings.”

The system that DeBaptiste and his collaborators built continued to flourish, despite attacks by white vigilantes and the flight of several key leaders. New men continued to step forward to fill the breach. The kind of repression that a generation earlier would have been sufficient to destroy the underground had little lasting effect. If anything, it stiffened resistance to intimidation. The Yankee farmers in Lancaster made it known to all that if they were attacked by proslavery forces they would fight back, even on Sunday. Remembrance Williams,

a member of the Baptist congregation to which nearly all of them belonged, recalled, “Firearms were carried into church, revolvers sometimes falling from the coat pockets as Deacons rose from prayer.”

From *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* by Fergus M. Bordewich



*George DeBaptiste*



# THE LENCO BEAR CAT

## & THE LIBERAL TRAP

### Campaign against BPD's Armored Vehicle

In early February, the City announced that in the spring of 2018 Bloomington Police Department will be purchasing a Lenco BearCat for the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), which also includes officers from IUPD and the Monroe County Sheriff's Department. The name BearCat stands for ballistic engineered armored response counter attack truck. By February 15th some activists with Black Lives Matter Bloomington kicked off resistance to the purchase of the armored vehicle by calling for others to join them at Mayor Hamilton's State of the City address at the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre.

It was a scene unfamiliar to Bloomington in the last few years. Within minutes of starting his speech, Hamilton mentioned the purchase of the BearCat, seemingly in an attempt to preempt any disruption, as he knew activists were planning to show up. The attempt, however, failed; activists, led by BLM organizers Vauhxx and Jada, soon began to question Hamilton from the audience. A good portion of the audience joined in, with 50 to 60 people

cheering on the disruption. It continued for several minutes, with various City Council members, and even one man who "marched with King" (a trope that would play out repeatedly in response to BearCat protests), trying to placate the crowd before Vauhxx pulled out a megaphone and a 15-minute recess was called. During the recess, many tried to shame protesters into "civility" and letting the mayor continue. As soon he did, however, a crowd had gathered next to the stage and the shouting and disruption continued. A few minutes later Hamilton gave up and left the building. One notable element of the night's events was the failure of the city administration's often-successful counter-insurgency tactics of preempting and limiting dissent by calls for dialogue and civility. But whoever was in charge of refreshments was nice enough to still put out two large cakes which protesters and others enjoyed while continuing to mingle and make sure everyone was getting out safe.

In the following days the mayor gave his speech in private while setting up three "listening" sessions offered as the proper channels through which to bring grievances. A "CIRT Vehicle Discussion" hosted by BPD two days prior to the State

of the City address was an attempt to pacify dissent before it had really begun. However, it turned out just to be cops trying to tell everyone how important it was for them to have an armored vehicle, and failed to achieve its goal. So the city had to change its tactic from talking to listening. Three town hall style events were held in the week following in which member were able to speak for three minutes about their position on purchase of the BearCat.

Criticism of the decision to purchase the BearCat primarily comes from two places: transparency and police militarization, though some are also noting that the \$225,000 could probably be better spent in many ways. The argument for transparency is essentially one of process, as explained in Councilmember Steve Volan's open letter to mayor. Tall Steve is notorious for attempting to engage with activists since at least 2011 during Occupy Bloomington, to little success, and for being caught on video saying that everyone who comes to public comment at city council meetings is "insane." While he was seen trying to talk down protesters at mayor's speech, by the following Tuesday, he released a letter complaining about how the mayor had not consulted him and the rest of the council on the

decision and that public documents were not accessible enough. The only difference between an armored vehicle approved by Mayor Hamilton and Chief Diekhoff alone versus one approved by the full council is the illusion of legitimacy via a democratic process. We mustn't let a small tweaking in the process shift the perception of the BearCat purchase and militarization of the police from illegitimate to legitimate.

The refusal to allow the BPD to militarize without a fight is a solid position. However, the distinction between a military vehicle and a different vehicle — say, a re-purposed Brinks truck — used for the same purposes, seems to be largely symbolic, though that symbolism is not entirely unimportant. As Vauhxx points out in an interview with WFHB's "Bring It On," there is data to suggest that police departments obtaining and using armored vehicles like the Lenco BearCat make both police officers and local residents less safe. It's been suggested that a military vehicle can change the orientation of a police force to act more explicitly as an occupying force. And we've seen in places like Ferguson and Standing Rock what militarized police forces can do. Apparently the Bloomington City Council has taken a position against police militarization at least in its most obvious forms, barring BPD from purchasing equipment from the Military Surplus program that sells military-style weapons and vehicles to local police departments across the country. The main difference between a BearCat and some other armored vehicle seems to be the ease with which it could transform from just armored to armed: the BearCat is set up for installments of weapons, although the BPD has not included any in its current order. One concern is what the vehicle could become in the future, what it will be used for when it's readily available. Data shows that while most departments request these vehicles for such things as hostage situations and active shooters, they mostly end up using them for drug busts and executions of search warrants. And we all know how racist drug laws and enforcement are. There is a real concern about what the acquisition of this vehicle would mean for those living in Bloomington, particularly people of color, poor people, and those with mental illnesses. This is even more concerning given the new study that shows that Bloomington, along with several other cities in Indiana, has higher racial disparities in arrests even than Ferguson, Missouri[1]. But surely, whichever vehicle BPD decides

on will experience mission creep and can be used similarly against the most vulnerable populations.

The energy of the initial protest and contentious town-halls were followed up with a film screening of "Do Not Resist" and a call-in campaign to correspond with the City's public comment period, continuing through March, as well as a resurgence of organizing under the Black Lives Matter moniker. According to a press release from the Office of the Mayor, "The City Administration will take all the public input into consideration, will review options, and will announce the planned direction forward before the end of March." It remains to be seen if the City will back down in the face of the so much public outcry or how many will be placated by the endless meetings, gestures towards hearing the voices of all Bloomington residents, and a less-militarized armored vehicle.

## Notes

[1] See "Study: Blacks Arrested Disproportionately in Johnson County, Carmel" at [IndyStar.com](http://IndyStar.com)



## The Liberal Trap

**M**aybe we should have this thing painted pink," local business owner Jeanne Smith suggested, adding the paint color could help offset feelings of aggression and warfare the truck evokes for some.

"That's actually a really good idea. Having it be something friendly," Monroe County Commissioner Amanda Barge agreed. "Let's make it Bloomington. Let's make it weird. Let's make it punky. I'm serious."

These quotes — published in the Herald-Times during the public debate over the police department's decision to purchase an armored vehicle — are representative of the liberal project in Bloomington. There's an almost impenetrable facade of liberalism that covers the everyday violence of gentrification, policing, racism, etc. — the institutionalized systems of oppression that characterize modern capitalism exist just as much in Bloomington as anywhere else. Maybe it's a bit more hidden and easy for some people — particularly the liberal class

— to ignore, but it's there. Moreover, as development accelerates — it is increasing.

The debate around the Lenco Bearcat illuminates the poverty of Bloomington's progressive identity. Bloomington — like every city — relies on a police force that uses violence to enforce a specific set of relations. The police uphold interlocking systems of white supremacy and property relations that criminalize and target specific sections of the population. Policing exists to enforce these relations and control populations. Armored vehicle or not, the police will always act in this capacity.

The progressive/liberal conception of politics offers no opportunity for meaningfully engaging. The entire debate around the Lenco Bearcat shows the limits of politics and civil discourse. While the City might not be enthusiastic about the Mayor's speech being disrupted, it is relatively easy for them to absorb it and use it to bolster Bloomington's liberal identity. It gives the illusion of a kind of chaotic democracy in which even extreme dissenters have a "voice". However, this absorption is an act of control. Modern democracies exert control by giving us the illusion that we have a "voice" or a place in the process. The "conversation" is always prioritized to the point where we get lost in an endless deluge of commentary. The City of Bloomington is more than happy to "debate" and "listen" in response to the Bearcat controversy and no doubt hopes that most critics will be satisfied that their voice was heard and that our enlightened representatives can then continue on with both the purchase and maintaining the city's liberal facade.

Similarly, the question of "transparency" — so often invoked in the Bearcat debate — is another liberal diversion. It allows the politicians an easy path out of the controversy. They can feign outrage and whine about how they were excluded from the decision. They perform this role in the media, bolstering both their own liberal bona fides and that of Bloomington as a whole. Somehow we are supposed to believe that had a handful of Bloomington politicians been included, this would have somehow been a "just" decision. But that's just a smokescreen and hides the fact that these politicians work with the police every day and are working together to build a city that will always be — and in fact cannot be anything other than — unjust.

Liberal identity serves as a distraction — and like all forms of control — must be destroyed, post haste.



# NEWS OF THE WORLD

## No Mas Muertes

**N**o Mas Muertes/No More Deaths was founded in 2004 to provide food, water, and medical aid to people crossing the U.S.-Mexican border. In response to dozens of migrants dying while trying to cross the desert every year, volunteers with the organization leave food, water, blankets, and other supplies on commonly used routes. Throughout its entire existence, the group has faced harassment and repression from Border Patrol, whose agents are regularly documented destroying the supplies and water left for migrants. In the past year, Border Patrol's disruption of No Mas Muertes has escalated.

Last summer, Border Patrol raided a No Mas Muertes medical aid station, guns drawn, to apprehend four people receiving medical care. On January 17, a report co-authored by No More Deaths was released demonstrating the significant role Border Patrol plays in destroying humanitarian supplies. A few hours later, Border Patrol arrested a humanitarian-aid provider from No More Deaths and two people receiving aid from the group, and the former is being charged with a felony involving alien smuggling. Since then, seven other activists with No More Deaths have been charged with various misdemeanors for activities related to their work with the group.

## Iranian Uprising

**I**n the face of neoliberal deterioration of living standards, malcontent people have taken to the streets of Iran starting December 28, 2017. Healthcare, workplace security, and employment have declined in recent years, forcing people into short-term contracted jobs or unemployment. After the state did not provide funding to repair damages from an earthquake in November and the cost of living was continuing to rise, demonstrations started in Masshad and quickly spread to over 100 cities in days.

People flooded the streets, clashed with police, attacked government buildings, went on strike, and set fires. Women in highly publicized images removed their hijabs, which the government forces them to wear. Cop cars were overturned, chants calling for "Death to the Revolutionary Guards" and "Death to Khameni" were popular. The motivations of demonstrators seemed varied, in addition to opposition to neoliberalism, there were both supporters of jailed opposition leaders and reactionaries present in the streets. After a few weeks the demonstrations were largely over, with over 3,700 people arrested and dozens killed, though it seems there are still occasional protests or mass actions being taken.

## Scripta Manent

**I**n Italy, the state continues its attacks on anarchist projects and individuals as part of Operation Scripta Manent. The repression began in September 2016 with raids on 30 houses and the arrest of five individuals. The state is attempting to hold seven individuals (the five arrested, plus two others already in prison for shooting a nuclear executive in the kneecaps) responsible for over a decade of direct attacks claimed by the Informal Anarchist Federation (FAI). The FAI is a decentralized tendency, not a formal organization; a name that has been attached to bombings, incendiary attacks, and other actions worldwide. Part of the state's strategy has been to try to divide the Italian anarchist movement along ideological lines, attempting to distinguish between the "good," "peaceful" social anarchism and the "violent," "anti-social" insurrectionary anarchism. Additionally, the state has targeted those offering solidarity to the Scripta Manent prisoners, including the anarchist counter-information websites RadioAzione and Anarhija.info and the Croce Nera Anarchica (Anarchist Black Cross). Despite the state's attempts to isolate them by restricting communications, the comrades remain intransigent and dignified. For more information, visit [anarhija.info](http://anarhija.info).

# CHRONOLOGY

## & UPCOMING EVENTS



### December 6, 2017

*Hunger strike victory for political prisoner Shaka Shakur*

After 12 days of refusing meals, Shakur's demands to be moved to a different area of the prison, to have the majority of his property returned, and have in-person (though still through glass) visitation restored were finally met by the administration. Shaka's strike was bolstered by support on the outside including call-ins and banner drops in four Indiana cities. However, Shaka's battle is a long one and still continues. Find out more at [IDOCWatch.org](http://IDOCWatch.org)

### December 31, 2017

*NYE Jail Demo at Monroe County Jail*

In the bitter cold, about two dozen people marched to the jail to bang pots and pans and chant messages of solidarity to those inside, as part of the tradition of New Year's Eve demonstrations outside of jails and prisons across the globe.

### January 1, 2018

*DIY all-ages show space closes after two years*

The Void was home to many benefit shows, movie challenges, and other events and a favorite stop for touring bands. It closed as the its former building is set to be demolished by the city to create the new Switchyard Park in Bloomington's south side.

### January 7, 2018

*Bloomington icon Boxcar Books and Community Center closes its storefront after 16 years. See more at [BoxcarBooks.org](http://BoxcarBooks.org)*

### February 4, 2018

*Inaugurate the Revolution 2017-2018*

Organizations from last year's ITR as well as new groups and collectives shared updates on projects they've been working on in the last year and what they have planned for the future.

### February 15, 2018

*Racial Profiling by IUPD*

Bloomington residents Ameshia and Elijah, who have been working with Bloomington Solidarity Network, were targeted for completely unfounded "suspicious activity" outside of the School of Music, resulting in police harassment and a ban from campus, where Ameshia studies law and her son practices music. Ameshia has said, "That's Really Sad. This Is Racism & Ive Had Enough! This Is Discrimination At It's Finest! I'm Livid! I'm disappointed!"

Follow Bloomington Solidarity Network on Facebook for ways to support the family.

### February 16, 2018

*Mysterious samaritan throws mysterious objects at a Bloomington police vehicle, striking the driver's side rear door. The attacker remains at large at the time of publication.*

### February 17, 2018

*BPD Uses School Shooting Panic to Harass and Arrest Black Residents*

After two boys, 11 and 12 years old, allegedly posed with what were soon determined to be BB guns on social media, police arrested them both. Two adults and a 17-year-old were also arrested, potentially in response to some attempting to assert their rights in the face of the police raid. The three minors remain in custody.

### March 2, 2018

*Walk-Out at Elliott Abrams talk at IU*

Students, faculties, and others walked out of Abrams's talk with pictures of victims of the Guatemalan genocide he facilitated, and gathering outside in the hall to speak to experiences of racism at IU. Abrams, who was invited by the same Tocqueville institute that hosted Charles Murray last year, was protested for his decades of involvement in neoliberal violence and genocide across the globe in the name of "democracy," most notably the Iran-Contra affair, the Guatemalan genocide of 1981-83, and the Iraq war.

**March 2, 2018**

*Building Stronger Community, Stronger Resistance*

A panel featuring Victoria Law, Andrea Ritchie, and Andrea Sterling spoke on the intersections of incarceration, race, and gender; against carceral feminism, and about building resilient and regenerative movements.

**March 5, 2018**

*Banner drop in solidarity with striking West Virginia teachers.*

“This past week, we’ve felt stronger, inspired that teachers in West Virginia are struggling collectively, with dignity and without bowing to the union bureaucrats or cops, for their future and the future of the children they teach. The teachers are fighting for all of us, demonstrating the power of solidarity to push back against the relentless cuts to living standards threatening us all. Now it’s up to the rest of us to make sure they don’t fight alone by spreading the struggle. We hung this banner during rush hour as a small contribution to that process.”

**March 12, 2018**

*From Democracy to Freedom*

Anarchist collective Crimethinc hosted a presentation and discussion on the J20 case, what we mean when we talk about democracy, and how a critique of democracy relates to our responses to state repression.

## Upcoming Events

**April 15-16, 2018**

*Mutual Aid Disaster Relief Two-part Workshop*

April 15//6-9 pm

@ Girls, Inc. Monroe County

“Protectors vs Profiteers: Communities in Resistance to Disaster Capitalism”

April 16//3-8 pm

@ Girls, Inc. Monroe County

“Giving Our Best, Ready for the Worst: Community Organizing as Disaster Preparedness”

Free admission, but \$20-30 donation for trainers and venue appreciated.

**April 21, 2018**

**3-6pm**

**Georgia Room @ the IMU**

*Prisoner Art Show*

IDOC Watch will be hosting an art show featuring pieces and performances from people currently in jail or prison in Indiana, those formerly incarcerated, and anyone who has been affected by the prison system.

**First Thursday of every month**

*Rock Against Racism benefit shows*

A themed dance party the first Thursday of every month at The Back Door. Each month benefits a different community group or project.

**Indiana Recovery Alliance**

IRA frequently has trainings on harm reduction, opioid overdose reversal, and naloxone kit building, and other related topics. Visit the IRA’s website for more info: [indianarecoveryalliance.org](http://indianarecoveryalliance.org)

# CRITICS ARE GOING WILD FOR PLAIN WORDS



**“I LIKE IT.  
I LIKE IT  
A LOT.”**

Jeremy “J-Ho” Hogan  
*photographer, The Herald Times*



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