



# 'COUNTERCULTURE 2.0: GROTESQUES OF TRANSGRESSION AFTER TRUMP'



Dr. Guy Stevenson

“WE ARE IN A CULTURE WAR. IF THE REPUBLICANS DON’T TOUGHEN UP AND GET SMART AND GET STRONG AND PROTECT OUR HERITAGE AND PROTECT OUR COUNTRY, I THINK THEY’RE GOING TO HAVE A VERY TOUGH ELECTION”

Donald Trump, Interview with *Real Clear Politics* 2020

“POLITICS IS DOWNSTREAM FROM CULTURE”

Andrew Breitbart (mantra + mission statement for his news website Breitbart, adopted by Steve Bannon when he took over as owner, before organising Donald Trump’s 2016 election campaign)

“THE CONQUEST OF CULTURAL POWER COMES BEFORE POLITICAL POWER”

Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 1926 (Marxist response to Fascist Control)

# MY AIMS

- Learn about the transition from hard fought battles for Civil Rights to the assimilation of their tenets into the mainstream; and the backlash against them in 2016.
- Learn about the Right's presentation of itself as **FREE SPEECH COUNTERCULTURE**.
- Learn about confusion, anger, disagreement over politics of identity by going back to the decade when they took centre stage in Western politics.



## MILO YIANNPOLOUS

- 2017 "Free Speech Week", University of California, Berkeley
- Response to "No Platforming" of Trump supporting conservative speakers





## OPEN LETTER TO HARPERS' BAZAAR JULY 7 2020

'resistance must not be allowed to harden into its own brand of dogma or coercion'

(signed by Noam Chomsky, J.K. Rowling, Cornel West, Margaret Atwood)

# TRANS ACTIVISTS VS. "TRANS EXCLUSIONARY RADICAL FEMINISTS"







FUENTES

McINNES

YE



# MY QUESTIONS

- How have we got here? How have we ended up in a place where rancour around race, gender and sexuality permeates everything?
- How have we gone from Trump's populist nationalist revolt against 'wokeness' to ugly battles between feminists and Trans activists?
- To a black, liberal rapper joining forces with a racist crypto-fascist?

# CIVIL RIGHTS → BLACK POWER → BLACK LIVES MATTER





# 3 STAGES OF REVOLUTION

## 1. 1950s Bohemian Personalism

– liberating self through the artistic expression of the ‘unspeakable’

## 2. 1960s Counterculture & Civil Rights

– liberating self through spiritual existence

– liberating self by refusing segregation

## 3. 1970s Women’s Liberation

– shift in countercultural logic, from emancipatory alone, to emancipatory and openly proscriptive.

– freedom of self based on fixed political tenets, and involving analysis and condemnation of other views

# STRUCTURE

1. SPIRITUAL ELITISM
2. WORDS AS VIOLENCE
3. EXPANDING BIGOTRY
4. COMPASSIONATE DOUBLE STANDARD

# 1. SPIRITUAL ELITISM (THE COUNTERCULTURE)

# RACE





# GENDER



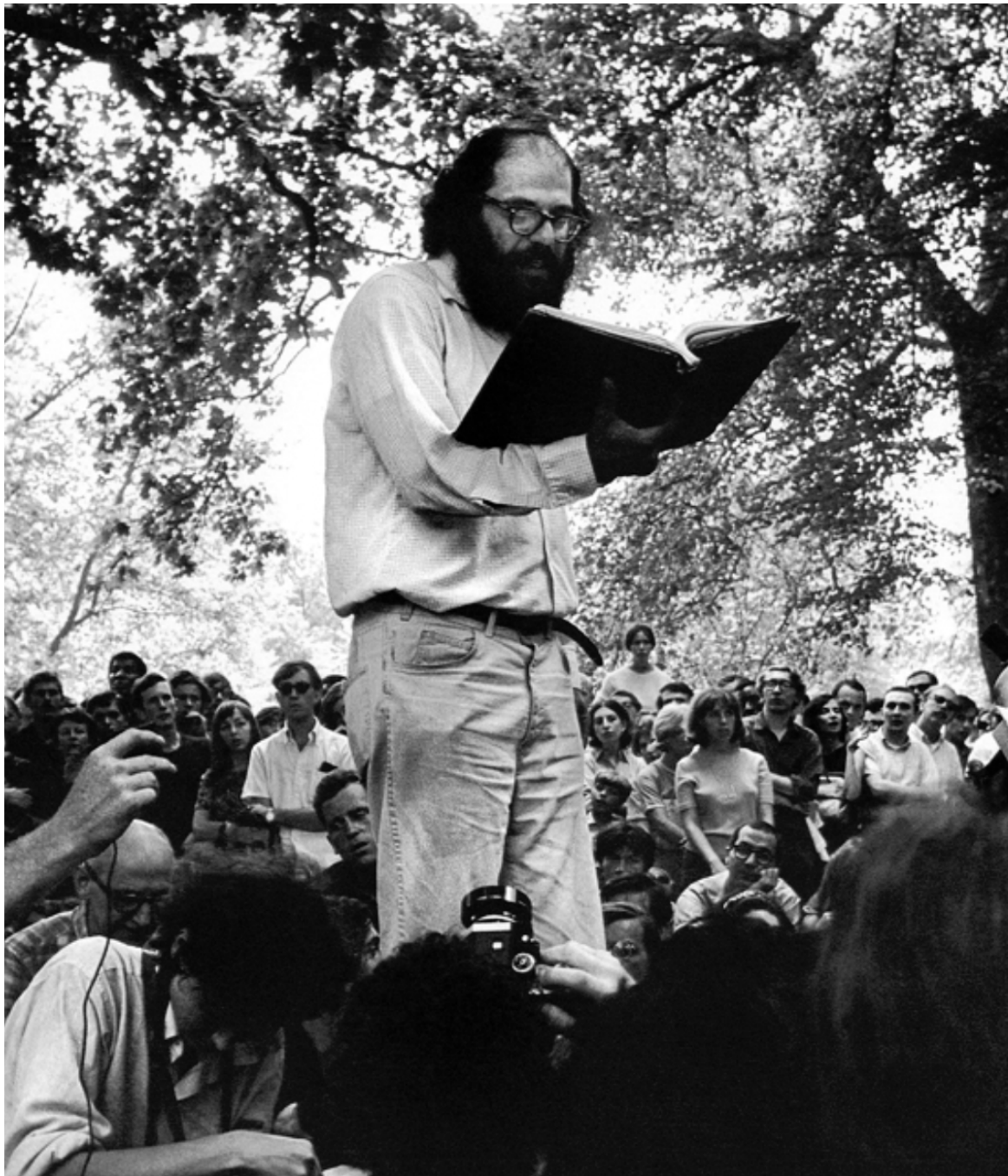
# WAR + IMPERIALISM





LYNDON B JOHNSON SIGNING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT 1964 (ending segregation) ; FOLLOWED BY THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT 1965 (ending race-related impediments to voting)

- But they also saw the birth of a new kind of elitism.
- To do with who was authentic and who wasn't.
- Who was awake to their true selves, and able to break free of the system that oppressed them, and who remained asleep.
- Existentialist inspired – trend for Soren Kierkegaard.
- Jung-inspired – trend for psychoanalysis.
- Nietzsche inspired.



## IN LITERATURE

- The influential, Romantic vision of ‘The Beat Generation’.
- Allen Ginsberg (left), Jack Kerouac.
- Yearning for a purer America, free from industrialization, from puritanical, bourgeois values.
- A vision that divided the country into: **the saintly few**, beaten down and beatific enough to see clearly and the square, **9 to 5 majority**, spiritually impoverished by conformity.

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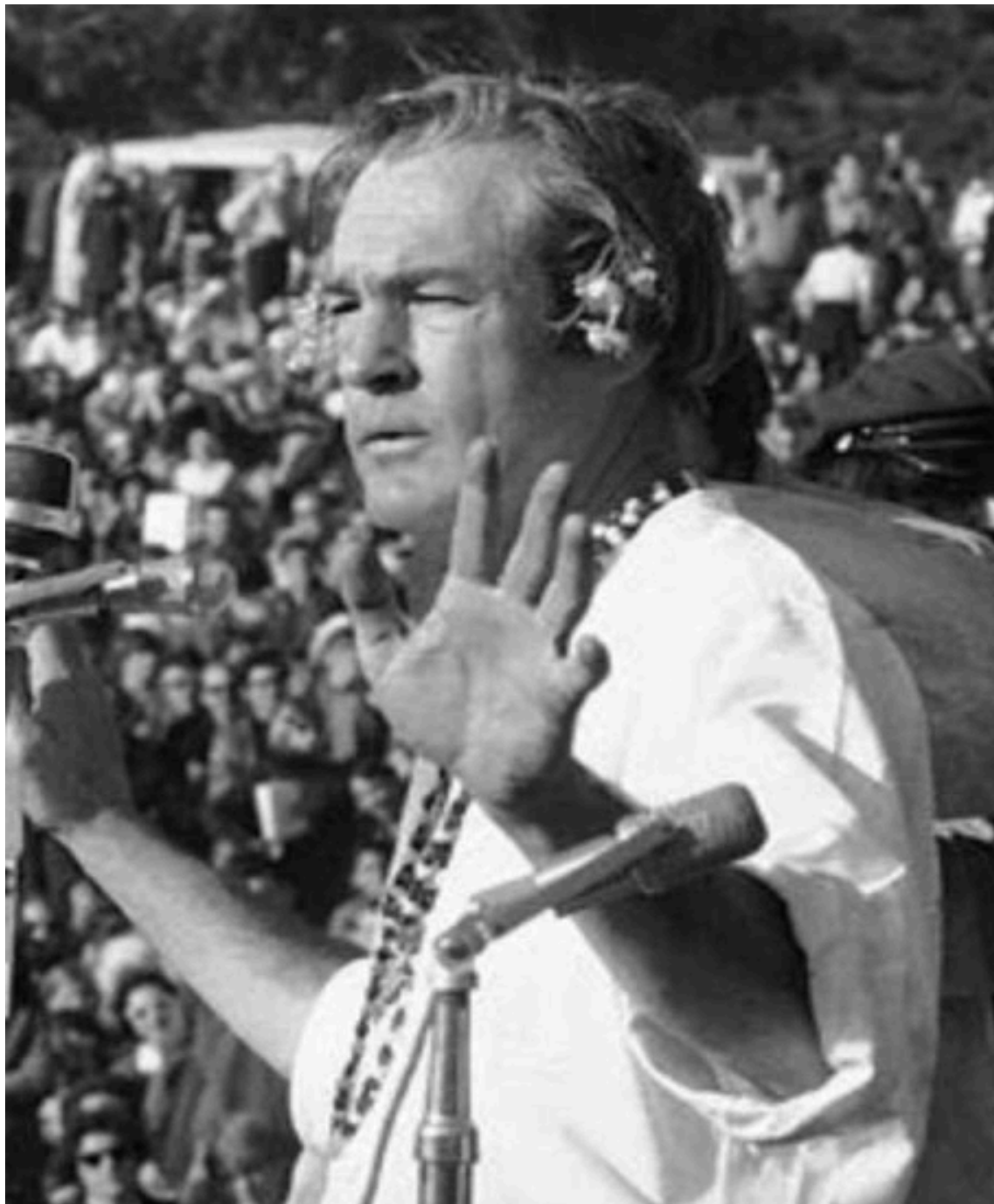
## IN MUSIC

– Politically conscious (Beat influenced) folk music of Bob Dylan.

– Celebrated as political voice of his generation aged only 19.

– Set a precedent for leftist politics as a game old 'squares' couldn't understand.

“I know more about you just by looking than you ever know about me ... I could tell you, but you wouldn't really understand” (Dylan to *Time Magazine*, left)



## IN LIFESTYLE

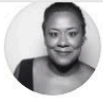
- Timothy Leary (High Priest of LSD): 'Turn on, tune in, drop out'.
- Struck-off Harvard scientist on a religious mission to wake the next generation up through acid.
- Big influence on the mass migration of young bohemians out of conventional society, onto communes (100,000).
- **The LSD awoken few vs. the sleeping masses, trapped in the nightmare of 'old men's politicking'**.

States of mind inherited from:

1. Small politically engaged bohemian art movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (DADAISTS, FUTURISTS, VORTICISTS)

2. Radical Politics (MARXIST ATTEMPT TO RAISE THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MASSES)





Johanna Fuentes 

@jfuentes



Shut it down. Today's best sign (via [@womensmarch](#)).









- For the 1<sup>st</sup> time, Left wing struggle was presented less in terms of class and more in terms of youth.
- Less working men's union.
- More student union.



- Encapsulated by the Marxist sociologist C. Wright Mills counselling a shift in focus from 'Victorian Marxism' to 'the cultural apparatus'.

- The emphasis on youth brought change and captured the media's attention.
- But it alienated exactly the demographic leftist politics had evolved to protect.
- Working class men and women who were put off progressive political ideas in the 1960s by their association with Woodstock, the Summer of Love, and rebellious Rock Music.
- With Free Love and Communal living rather than Material Class Conditions.

- It also gave impetus to Conservatism
- To Nixon in 1970s, to Reagan in 1980s
- And to Trump in 2016
- Trump's populist right movement.

**“Look at the liberals! They claim to care about ordinary working people, but all they really care about is keeping up with fashion and looking virtuous”.**



- Alt Right Red Pilling, Socratic Method, Kanye West
- All part of the right's rebranding as transgressive, rebellious, provocative not safe

ALL SIDES TRAPPED IN A MANIA TO PROVE THAT THEY'RE ENLIGHTENED + THE REST ARE DUPED

## 2. WORDS AS VIOLENCE (FEMINISM)



1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening
3. Try never get drunk outside yr own house
4. Be in love with yr life
5. Something that you feel will find its own form
6. Be crazy dumb saint of the mind
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow
8. Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
9. The unspeakable visions of the individual
10. No time for poetry but exactly what is
11. Visionary tics shivering in the chest
12. In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
13. Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
14. Like Proust be an old teahead of time

THE  
PERSONAL  
IS  
POLITICAL

OVER!  
NASTY  
WOMEN  
SAVE  
THE  
PLANET



# CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING



- Women gathered to share their experience of everything from ‘sexual harassment in the workplace [to] body image, menstruation and pregnancy’, as the sociologist Nancy Whittier wrote, and to purge themselves of a ‘toxicity’ ingested from the patriarchy.
- The goal, in the words of the journalist and early participant Susan Brownmiller, was to **use individual pain to ‘uncover ... collective truths’**
- **Baptist religious imagery + Marxist idea = New Politics of language**

# CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING



# COUNTERCULTURAL SHIFT

- In their philosophy of speaking a personal truth and raising consciousness, they unwittingly effected a shift in countercultural thought.
- One that made freedom depend **not only on the expression of your own honest and messy self, but on prohibiting that mess in others.**
- The moment when the counterculture starts owning *but also policing* its hypocrisies about gender.

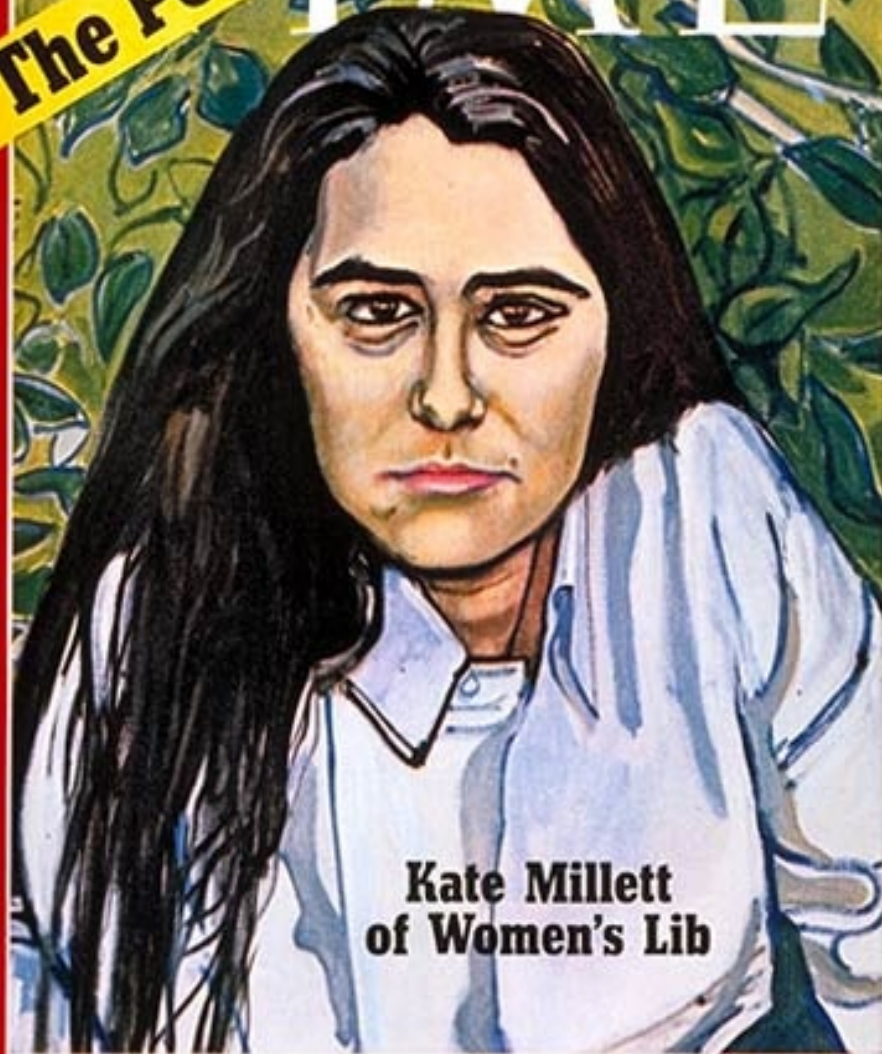


1970 (1970)

AUGUST 24, 1970

**The Politics of Sex**

TIME



**Kate Millett  
of Women's Lib**



### 3. EXPANDING BIGOTRY (CIVIL RIGHTS/BLACK POWER)

**CIVIL RIGHTS → BLACK POWER → BLACK LIVES MATTER**

**Baptist → Marxist/Existentialist → Social-Media Marxist**

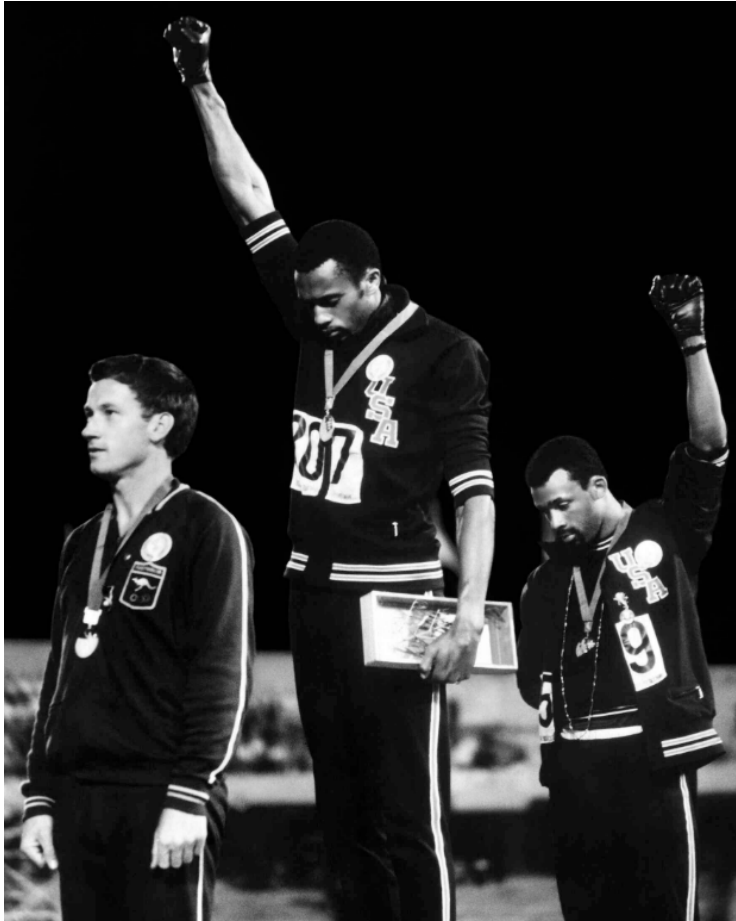
CIVIL RIGHTS



BLACK POWER



# BLACK POWER → #BLM



- BLACK LIVES MATTER. HASHTAG + A COLLECTION OF “CHAPTERS”
- Going viral, capturing the imagination of many, that symbolism looks good but lacks a concrete story.
- Disconnected from tangible demands (whether radical or practical).
- Demands that can be wrestled with, understood, responded to.



# RACISM REDEFINED

- Shift in both the meaning of racism and methods for detecting it.
- From racism defined as the individual belief in the superiority of one race over another, to a belief perpetuated by a whole system.
- From violence manifested through action, to violence manifested through:
  - discriminatory **words and images**.
  - subtler unconscious harm through **insensitive language**, **underrepresentation** in film, TV, adverts, books and newspapers.

## 4. COMPASSIONATE DOUBLE STANDARD

**TROPIC OF CANCER**  
BY HENRY MILLER  
FOURTH PRINTING

A VERY REMARKABLE BOOK, WITH PASSAGES OF  
WRITING IN IT AS GOOD AS ANY I HAVE SEEN  
FOR A LONG TIME . . . . . T. S. ELIOT  
AT LAST AN UNPRINTABLE BOOK THAT IS FIT  
TO READ . . . . . EZRA POUND

**LADY  
CHATTERLEY'S  
LOVER**



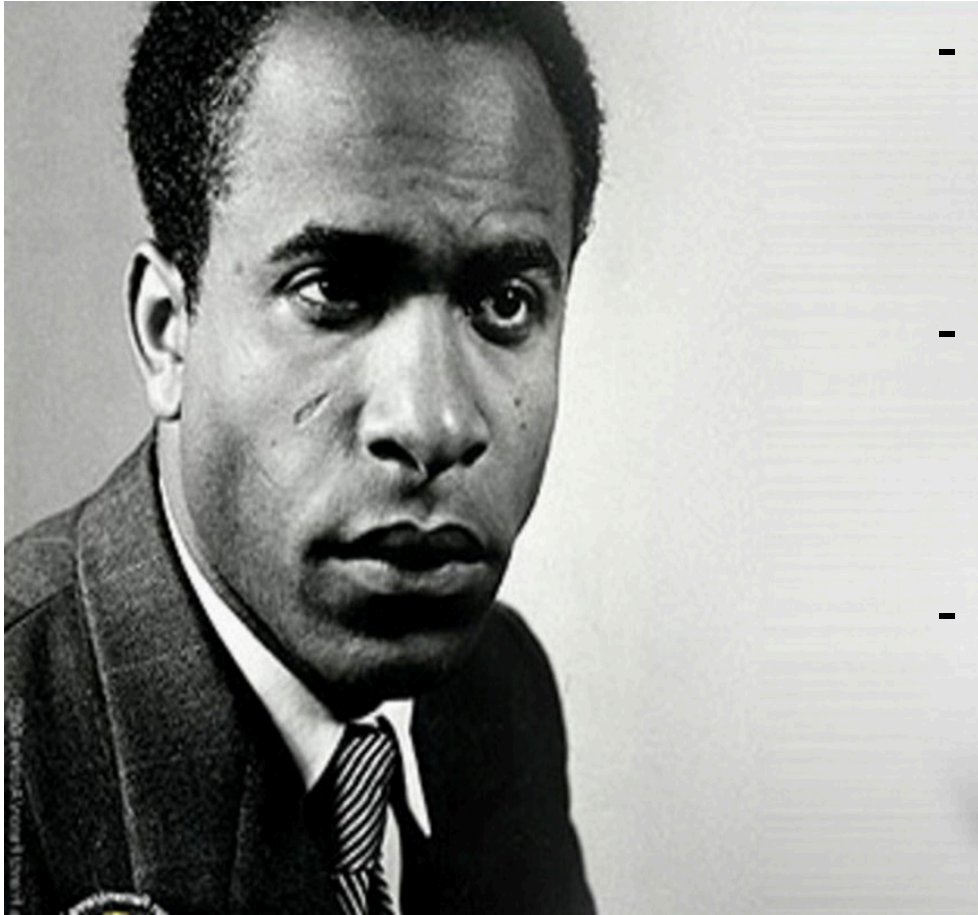
**D. H.  
LAWRENCE**



# NEW RULES

- Minority art is permitted its mess, its self-contradiction, its right to be received as experimental expression only.
- Whereas art made by people from majority groups is taken to signify the maker's historical privilege, checked for its damaging politics, and required to tread carefully.
- **Black hip-hop** is celebrated for its raw artistic honesty even if it breaks moral codes that would lead white artists to be cancelled.
- **Women** are allowed to tell jokes against men that would get men into serious trouble if the roles were reversed.
- **Trans performers** – who exaggerate some of the most toxic stereotypes about women for entertainment – are given a free pass on the basis of their marginality.

# FRANTZ FANON



- MARXIST WEST INDIAN PSYCHIATRIST, POST-COLONIAL PIONEER.
- DIAGNOSED PATHOLOGY IN COLONIAL RELATIONS (WHITE GUILT)
- USED EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHERS TO UNPICK WHITE IDEAS OF BLACK “PRIMITIVISM”
- BIG INFLUENCE ON “BLACK POWER”

# TRANS VS. FEMINISTS

'Gender is culturally formed but it's also a domain of agency or freedom. It's most important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms, especially against those who are gender different, who are non-conforming in their gender presentation'

Judith Butler



**J.K. Rowling** 

@jk\_rowling



If sex isn't real, there's no same-sex attraction. If sex isn't real, the lived reality of women globally is erased. I know and love trans people, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives. It isn't hate to speak the truth.

11:02 PM · Jun 6, 2020



 218.2K

 42K

 Copy link to Tweet

# TO RECAP ...

## 1. SPIRITUAL ELITISM

- “Us and Them” inherited from 60s.
- Enlightened/Benighted; Woke/Napping.

## 2. WORDS AS VIOLENCE

- Inherited from 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave Feminism.
- The moment the Counterculture started policing itself.

## 3. EXPANDING BIGOTRY

- Racism redefined, expanded to include discriminatory words, unconscious harm, representation.

## 4. COMPASSIONATE DOUBLE STANDARD

- Minority art is permitted its mess, its self-contradiction, its right to be received as experimental expression only.

# The Personal Is Political

by CAROL HANISCH

For this paper I want to stick pretty close to an aspect of the Left debate commonly talked about—namely “therapy” vs. “therapy and politics.” Another name for it is “personal” vs. “political” and it has other names, I suspect, as it has developed across the country. I haven’t gotten over to visit the New Orleans group yet, but I have been participating in groups in New York and Gainesville for more than a year. Both of these groups have been called “therapy” and “personal” groups by women who consider themselves “more political.” So I must speak about so-called therapy groups from my own experience.

The very word “therapy” is obviously a misnomer if carried to its logical conclusion. Therapy means that someone is sick and that there is a solution, e.g., a personal solution. I am greatly offended if or any other woman is thought to need therapy in the first place. Women are messed over, messed up! We need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them. Therapy is adjusting to a bad personal alternative.

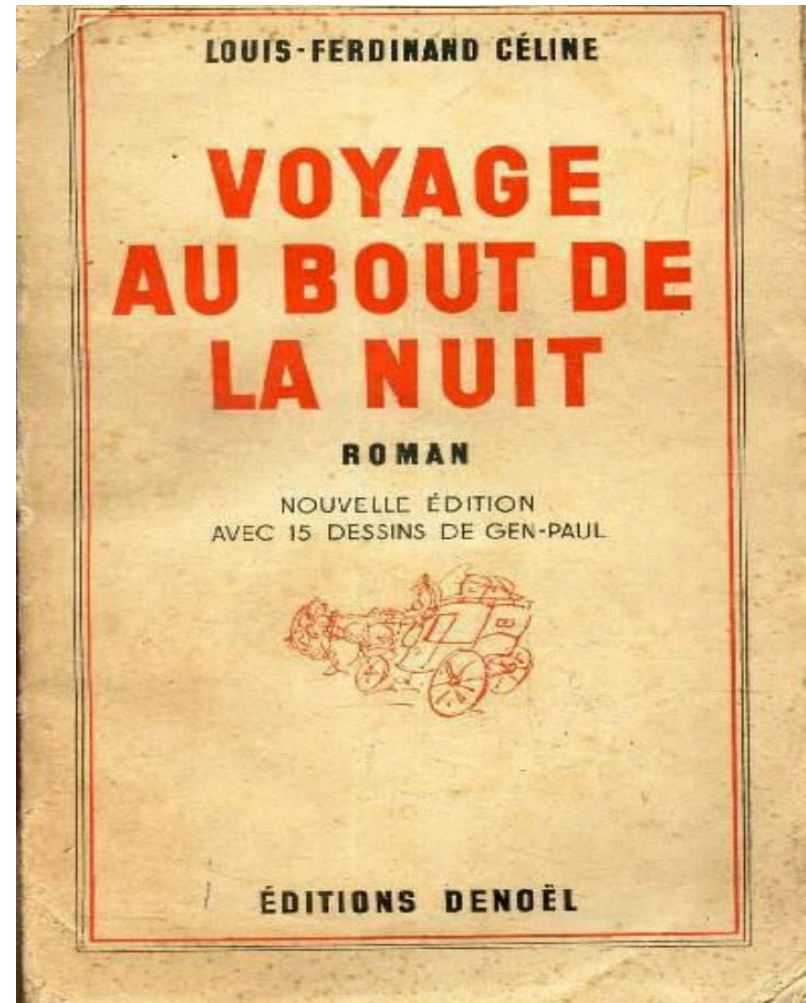
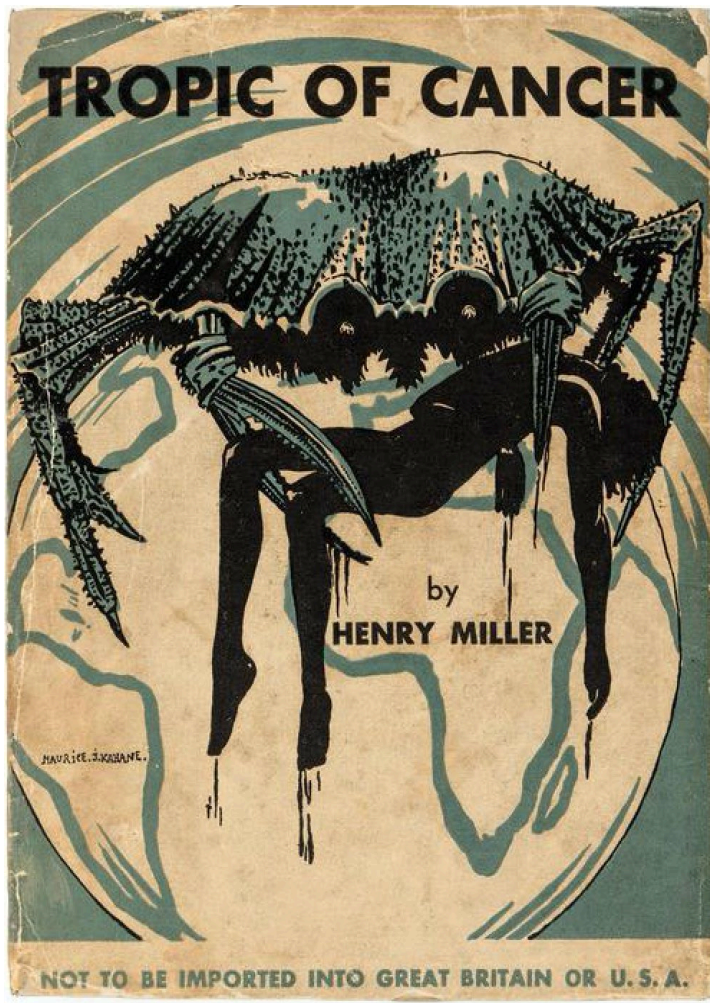
We have not done much trying to solve important personal problems of women in the group. Mostly picked topics by two methods: In a round-robin it is possible for us to take turns bringing up issues to the meeting (like, Which do/did you have a girl or a boy baby or no children, and how much more money than you? Less than you?). Or we go around the room answering the questions about our personal experiences. Everybody shares. At the end of the meeting we try to generalize from what’s been said and discussed.

strong, selfless, other-oriented, sacrificing, and I am not in general pretty much in control of my own life. I don’t admit to the problems in my life is to be deemed weak. So I want to be a strong woman, in more political terms, and not admit I have any real problems that I can’t find a personal solution to (except those directly related to the capitalist system). In fact, at this point a political action to tell it like it is, I would say what I really believe about my life instead of what I’ve always been told to say.

So the reason I participate in these meetings is not to solve any personal problem. One of the things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution. I went, and I continue to go to these meetings because I have gotten a political understanding which all my reading, all my “political discussions,” all my “political action,” all my four-odd years in the movement never gave me. I’ve been forced to take off the rose-colored glasses and face the awful truth about how grim my life really is as a woman. I am getting a gut understanding of everything as opposed to the esoteric intellectual understandings and *noblesse oblige* feelings I had in “other people’s” struggles.

This is not to deny that these sessions have at least two aspects that are therapeutic. I prefer to call even this aspect “political therapy” as opposed to personal therapy. The most important is getting rid of self-blame. Can you imagine what would happen if women...

- The Women's Liberation Movement emerged in the early 1960s in line with the 60s Sexual Revolution
- But it developed in the late 60s into an attack on its icons
- A purging of misogyny in the Hippie bid for freedom.



- A demonstration that FOR WOMEN PROMISCUITY WASN'T NECESSARILY THE LIBERATION FROM PATRIARCHAL HIERARCHIES IT SEEMED.
- Old hierarchies, different forms.
- Corrupted by male violence + 'sexual neuroses' (Millett), newly acceptable sex out of wedlock led again to women being **resented, mistreated, cast aside.**



There is no way out of such a dilemma but to rebel and be broken, stigmatized, and cured. Until the radical spirit revives to free us, we remain imprisoned in the vast gray stockades of the sexual reaction. Our subject is now some of those who helped to build these structures—writers, who, after the usual manner of cultural agents, both reflected and actually shaped attitudes. So we proceed to the counterrevolutionary sexual politicians themselves—Lawrence, Miller, and Mailer.



- In Millett's new countercultural thinking, writers who had been celebrated as heroes of the Sexual Revolution were black-listed for their sexism, for being **part of the problem.**
- Writers like Henry Miller, D.H. Lawrence and Norman Mailer, whose no-holds-barred approach to sex
- Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) represents **the moment the Counterculture started to police itself**
- **THE MOMENT FREEDOM OF IDENTITY + EXPRESSION BECAME DEPENDENT ON RESTRICTIONS ON LANGUAGE**

# WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS?

1. OVERDUE PROGRESS
2. THE BEGINNING OF A NEW SIGNIFICANCE AFFORDED TO WORDS
2. A PRECEDENT FOR OUR “CANCEL CULTURE” TODAY?

# JUDITH BUTLER + QUEER THEORY

- The intellectual ground for Trans Rights lay in a New Radicalism: Queer Theory.
- 1980s + 90s.
- Queer Theorists like Judith Butler challenged 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave Feminism.
- Rejected feminist definitions of womanhood as biological (female reproductive organs) and even as sociological (experience of male oppression).

**\*\*Gender as Socially and Culturally Constructed.  
Indeterminate, Fluid \*\***

- Kate Millett's embargo on Art that had recently stood for freedom suggests a new emphasis on enforcing orthodoxy in American "countercultural" thought.
- A move in 1969 from a spiritual-sexual revolution based on total freedom of expression, to one that **monitored expression for offence to the vulnerable**.
- That compassionate mission has been expanding ever since.
- But so too has the friction it created between a 60s permission to "speak your truth", and new rules about which truths were say-able.

**LITERATURE: REJECTION OF MESS IN FAVOUR OF MESSAGE**  
(Joseph Conrad, Henry Miller, Flannery O'Connor)

**IN SOCIAL DISCOURSE: MORE POWER TO RACIST WORDS?**

# 3. A DOUBLE STANDARD (GENET VS. MILLER)

**MILLETT ON HENRY (STRAIGHT) MILLER:** ‘A compendium of American sexual neuroses [whose] value lies not in freeing us from such afflictions, but in having had the honesty to express and dramatize them’

**MILLET ON (GAY) JEAN GENET:** ‘Granted that their caricature is grotesque, and Genet himself is fully aware of the morbidity of of his pastiche, his homosexuals ... have ... penetrated to the essence of what heterosexual society imagines to be the character of “masculine” and “feminine”’



- Genet was a similar writer to Henry Miller.
- Literature about living hand to mouth on the streets; about graphic sexual encounters, about **lust, violence, + bodily fluids**.
- **SAME AIM OF SAYING THE UNSAYABLE ABOUT THE BRUTALITY IN SEX**
- But Genet survived the cull by 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave Feminists, whereas Miller did not.
- **HE WAS ALLOWED TO EXPRESS MISOGYNY BECAUSE WRITING FROM A POSITION OF OPPRESSION**



- WITH 2<sup>ND</sup> WAVE FEMINISM A WELL INTENTIONED, AND WELL REASONED DOUBLE STANDARD ENTERED WESTERN THINKING ON IDENTITY.
- OPPRESSED MINORITIES WERE PERMITTED THE MESS FORBIDDEN TO THE MAJORITY.
- THIS IS AT THE HEART OF ANTI-'WOKE' THINKING TODAY:
  - **Black hip-hop** is celebrated for its raw artistic honesty even if it breaks moral codes that would lead white artists to be cancelled.
  - **Women** are allowed to tell jokes against men that would get men into serious trouble if the roles were reversed.
  - **Trans performers** – who exaggerate some of the most toxic stereotypes about women for entertainment – are given a free pass on the basis of their marginality.