

Chicago 7

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- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written December 12, 2001

How the Police Riot at the 1968 Democratic Convention Facilitated the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion

Years before *Drummer*, the 1960s alerted us to resist fascism and its police enforcers by using the newspapers and magazines to promote art, freedom of expression and sexual rights which all add up to our inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness decreed in the Declaration of Independence. Having freedom of speech at rallies, freedom of the press in gay publications, and freedom to assemble peaceably in gay bars and baths are freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution. As a professor in a university culture made volcanic by anti-Vietnam activism and a gay culture revolutionized by Stonewall, I wrote this "Chicago Seven" essay in February 1970 and it was published in March 1970 as an installment of my on-going media column for the monthly newspaper, *Dateline: Colorado*, Colorado Springs, edited by Reverend James Kane who was also the leather-priest Jim Kane who was several times featured in photographs in *Drummer*.

During that time of social revolution, one might observe, that editor Kane's publishing of my columns on art, media, and politics was a subversive contribution to the traditional Catholic press made by me, a seminarian, who was once almost a priest, and him, a priest who was on the verge of leaving the priesthood. As it was, Jim Kane and I were vacationing together and sleeping together having sex in an affair that lasted from 1968-1973, and in a friendship that crumbled but did not dissolve until 1989 when he was afflicted with senior dementia.

This article proposes taxing churches to fund art, and mentions gay bashing. As a longtime activist for social justice, civil rights, and peace, I need to explain that the Catholic press was once quite progressive before it was corrupted by the fundamentalism sweeping the planet in the 21st century. The same is true of the gay press which was progressive in its first years in the 1970s before being hijacked by politically correct fundamentalist conservatives in the 1980s.

For my “Chicago Seven” article, my original typed manuscript exists with edit marks made in red ink by Jim Kane who returned the original to me with copies of the published column which also exists. [Editor’s note: See other columns on “media” written by Jack Fritscher and published in *Dateline Colorado*, edited by Jim Kane, at www.JackFritscher.com.]

The Chicago Seven were put on trial (September 24, 1969) for inciting a riot at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Four of the “Chicago Seven” were Abbie Hoffman, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, and Jerry Rubin, with the side-wise participation of Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Timothy Leary, Phil Ochs, and Judy Collins. The riot had, in fact, been caused by the police who opened the hostilities by moving in against guru Ginsberg and his gay followers in Lincoln Park, 11 PM, Sunday, August 25, the eve of the Convention. A year before Stonewall in New York, the fags in Chicago fought back. Both cop-riot and hippie-resistance spread out of Lincoln Park as captured in Haskell Wexler’s dramatic film shot as *cinema verite* during the confrontations, *Medium Cool* (1969). The iron-fisted conservative fascist Mayor Richard Daley, confronted by the hippie Yippie gay protest, detailed nearly 25,000 police, soldiers, and National Guard who overshot their mark and began clubbing and gassing the rather bourgeois Convention crowd—live, on television, to the chant of “The Whole World Is Watching.” Inside the Convention, at the same time, August 28, 1968, CBS News correspondent Dan Rather was slugged in the stomach on the Convention floor shouting, “Get your hands off me,” causing CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite to say live on TV: “It looks like you have some thugs down there, Dan.” Proving thirty-five years later in 2005 that “1984” goes on forever, similar thugs saw to Dan Rather’s firing from CBS News because of—it was “reported”—his anti-Bush “reporting” during the 2004 presidential election.

In his *Palimpsest*, Gore Vidal explained that eventually the Chicago courts, rejecting that the 1968 bloodbath was a hippie riot, called this a “police riot”—that is, a riot caused by the police who beat and bloodied hippies and convention delegates and news reporters and anyone—male or female, young or old, black or white, gay or straight—opposed to the war. “The police,” Vidal wrote, “were unselective in their porcine fury, and so, for once, they got a moderately bad press.” (Page 211) Vidal’s use

of the word *porcine* is a polite way of writing that the police were loudly called *pigs* in Chicago.

Because the international press turned on the cops, because of the new awareness of live media coverage, and because of the chant to the media cameras “The Whole World Is Watching,” this 1968 people’s rebellion against the police was the activist model for the Stonewall rebellion ten months later in New York.

Without anti-war defiance of the cops in Chicago in August 1968, Stonewall might not have happened in Greenwich Village in June 1969.

In the zero degrees of separation and participation, I was living during this time of social trauma in and around Chicago. I wrote this article during the media frenzy of the “Chicago Seven” trial which ended February 20, 1970, eight days before this article was published after a last-minute edit update.

In such a climate of big-government fascism, I witnessed gay liberation rise up as an avatar of personal freedom.

If freedom to do what you want with your body is the ultimate political act, then *Drummer* was a sexual declaration of independence.

My social activism in Chicago, where I earned my doctorate at Loyola University (1968), began in 1961 when I lived on the South Side at 63rd and Cottage Grove working with the Woodlawn Organization at Holy Cross Parish, organized by the Reverend Martin Farrell, guided by Saul Alinsky and the NAACP, and marching—on one unforgettable occasion—with Martin Luther King, Jr. to a sit-in at Mayor Daley’s office where each of us was literally carried out bodily by the Chicago police. See the articles, “Bringing Christ to Woodlawn” by Frank E. Fortkamp (*The Josephinum Review*, October 23, 1963) and “The Church Mid-Decade and the Negro” by Jack Fritscher (*The Torch*, Volume 58, February 1965, New York).

Some years later, another contributor to the gay press, John Preston, revealed he too had been working in the civil rights of race relations before he entered gay publishing. That, of course, was logical, because so many who became part of the GLBT civil rights movement were graduates of the struggle for Black civil rights.

II. The feature essay as published in *Dateline: Colorado*, March 1970, James Kane (Jim Kane), Editor



**Art, Politics, and Revolution:
You are in the midst of the 2nd American Revolution**

Chicago 7

Dateline Colorado Editor's Note [Jim Kane]: Dr. Fritscher writes in a serious vein this month about the interaction of art with our new rough-and-tumble American society. He here gives candid opinions on the secularizing, revolutionary world parents can expect for their children.

No matter what your opinion of the "Chicago Seven" trial, one fact is unmistakably clear. The arts, especially film, are of immense import to our revolutionary times. This came personally clear to me on New Year's afternoon, 1970.

It was a cold and gray day, a bad way to begin the new decade in Chicago. The political climate was even more depressing than the weather. Constantin Costa-Gavras' film *Z* had opened a few days earlier. Word-of-mouth said *Z* was good. I called some friends and took off.

I'll not soon forget that beginning of this year sitting next to Abbie Hoffman watching him watching *Z*. I had the sick feeling the film was about Abbie, and I wanted to ask Anita, his wife, if she felt that, too. Seven weeks later, another of the "Chicago Seven," Tom Hayden, husband of actress-activist Jane Fonda, stood in a Middle-America courtroom saying on his day of sentencing that he felt as if he were a character in *Z*. It was no accident that at the same time as the trial, a film was in town to comment on the difference between politics and justice.

Now *Z* has five Academy Award nominations and five of the "Chicago Seven" have maximum prison sentences. [With nominations for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Editing, and Best Foreign Film, the anti-fascist *Z* went on to win the 1970 Oscar for Best Foreign Film, and remains remarkably relevant to the American politics of George W. Bush. —JF]

CHICAGO: THAT BOGGLIN' TOWN

Chicago at best is a strange, artless place. Southern Blacks moving North don't move to Chicago. They move to 63rd and Cottage Grove in Chicago. Displaced Southern Whites locate around Belmont or Argyle in Chicago and prey nights on the homosexuals cruising solitary in middle Lincoln Park. "The Patch," an Irish gang that grows out of the Catholic basketball courts up around Loyola Avenue, is neither as feisty nor as infamous as the militant Afro-American "Blackstone Rangers," but the Patch spawns more police vocations than any other gang in Chicago.

The "People's Park" at Halsted and Armitage is rocks since its neighborhood sponsor was murdered late last summer. He and his wife were killed while a friend of mine [the 2007 MacArthur Fellowship "Genius Award" writer, Stuart Dybek] sat studying late and deep next door. The next morning the detectives wondered why he had heard nothing; and he looked out on the play-yard swings of the children with the dead parents and said again, no, he had heard nothing.

The Spanish-American "Young Lords" gang continues making into a daycare center the local Protestant church emptied by the changing neighborhood. The Coven, a diabolical rock music group, can be reached c/o Dunwich, 25 East Chestnut, Chicago.

WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) has its main national headquarters for the Women's Liberation Front in Chicago. And the blue-and-white cop cars are everywhere, sudden and tough, keeping all these parts and pieces in tight control.

ENTERTAINMENT'S PLACE IN A BURNING SOCIETY

No matter what the fine line between police protection and police state, the Chicago fact is clear that the city's population is divided. Some support the police as protection against the lawless; others say the police themselves are the lawless. Fear and over-reaction are the tunes they're fiddling in the city that has once already burned.

One side or the other over-reacted outside the Hilton Hotel during the 1968 Democratic Convention as the riot and the police beating of innocent conventioners was televised live to the hippie chant "The Whole World Is Watching." Since then, more and more dissatisfied ordinary people have been dropping out. Haskell Wexler's beautiful *Medium Cool*—a film about how art might explain a riotous society—could not find an audience in Chicago where Wexler famously filmed it in Lincoln Park during the police riot at the Democratic Convention.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* liberal film critic, Roger Ebert, gave Wexler's film four reviews trying to hype it as a must-see. As a socially responsible critic, Ebert knows how art can clarify a confusing social situation.

But he knows the double frustration of the artist in Chicago even better. “Reviewing a frothy piece of entertainment,” Ebert said, “is a futile enterprise on the day when William Kunstler was sent to jail for four years and seven days.”

Art in Chicago has hardly fared well. The movies are censored by the Chicago Film Board, a group of ladies whose Kabuki-like credentials are (no kidding) that they are widows of machine-politicians. The Aardvark Cinematheque, an experimental film emporium in Chicago’s hip Old Town, was severely obstructed in its inception by Film Board censorship objections which interestingly were always over-ruled, after weeks of tension and fighting, by a higher appeals board of psychologists, professors, and artists who seemed to speak for more liberal Chicagoans.

If the Broadway musical *Hair* [which in each major city had a new edition] is representative of commercial theater now playing in Chicago, then “Chicago *Hair*” — unlike “New York *Hair*” or “LA *Hair* — is stripped of social-comment dialogue, because local satirical references that might be incendiary or revolutionary or sexual have been forbidden.

“Chicago *Hair*” sings pre-censored set lyrics and ad-libs little satire. Only the poster “DIAL-A-BEATING: PO-5-1515” — sneaked into a mob scene — makes any reference to the Chicago police by giving the fuzz’ phone number. Art is obviously having a hard time in the city the kids call “Prague West.”

TAX ART; EXEMPT CHURCHES

Chicago’s head like Chicago’s location is central Mid-America, without the extremities of either Coast. So it’s no wonder art can barely survive in this U.S. “Central America.” Acting out of 300 years of repressive Founding-Father Calvinism, the United States Government continues to tax art and exempt churches.

This tax inequity ignores the radical connection between art and religion: that both once performed the same function. They both mean to sort out man’s relationship with other men and all men’s relationship to their universe.

Something new is afoot. Even politically Catholic Chicago is paring back its piety. So much property tax revenue has been lost to the city that legislation was passed so that religious orders are now restricted from buying any more old non-taxable mansions on North Sheridan Road, two and three blocks south of Loyola university on Lake Michigan.

The city prefers — instead of ten tax-exempt Jesuits living in gilded-age splendor — that plush residential high rises (highly taxable) replace

the razed manses so that 3,000 taxpayers can stack up 26-stories on a lot formerly occupied by a family of seven.

NIXON AND THE ARTS

Chicago is typical of the tax ground that institutional religion is losing just this side of professional atheist Madelyn Murray O'Hare. This past year, in fact, as Chicago took frown at its multiple religious exemptions, the "Chicago International Film Festival" was declared, at long last, tax-exempt to insure its artful survival.

While a move in the right direction, this art-exemption is roughly equivalent to President Nixon appropriating \$35 million this year to promote culture. This entire annual cost—\$35 million—is spent every ten hours by the United States in Vietnam.

Up to this year, the most the U.S. spent annually on the arts was \$20 million. This is a global scandal when nearly every other government makes provision to sustain cultural activities through the arts and humanities. Not through militarism and violence, but through the arts does a nation preserve and promote its heritage of civilization.

PARENTS, KIDS, AND REVOLUTION

Despite the fact it's fashionable to knock Chicago, this appraisal is only accidentally fashionable.

The "Chicago Seven," free on bond during their trial, are preparing a film of their exploits. They'll act it themselves in the streets where-it-happened-with-the-original-cast. They will film their own *Z* in a city so uptight it's surprising the Film Censor Board let *Z* and its political message ever be screened.

I suspect the board didn't realize the underlying implications of *Z*, a French film made in Algeria about Greece—and about the Chicago-like society that spreads the fascist control of censorship across America. The point is the Seven, like *Z*'s director, Constantin Costa-Gavras, are turning to art to make the score they couldn't make in the Mid-American streets and Mid-American courts.

Maybe art can make sense out of disordered human reality. If so, then America's social reality is certainly disordered enough to give art a try. The possibility, at least, is enough that our short shrift of the popular arts ought to make us nationally embarrassed.

Half the kids in our primary schools won't finish high school. One-third of the kids who make it to high school won't graduate. If so few Americans finish even lower-level education, then the informal education

provided through the open-minded arts seems a likely avenue into their unfilled minds.

Everyone sees some TV, some movies, some magazines and newspapers. The point here is: the popular arts of our popular culture can be more meaningful than frothy fluff and nonsense.

A PERSONAL NOTE

Maybe this week's column is too defensive, but if more parents with their children would look somewhere for some social answers about what it is to be human in our crazy society, then maybe I won't be tear-gassed again as I was last Wednesday while lecturing before 200 teachers at a "Teachers of English" convocation at Western Michigan University. The students blamed the police and the police the students, and all we teachers stood arm-in-arm outside at the entrances to the building to keep the two sides apart. [The campus riot that day was the largest and most violent in Western's history.]

When society squares off against itself, and the peace of art loses out to the violence of politics, I blame education and cities that fall short in encouraging *art* communication. That's a short-circuit which society can't afford. Tear gas is frightening in a crowd where twelve-thousand dollars' worth of damage is done. And we can all expect more of this from people and police alike before the Second American Revolution is over.

I'm still looking for an alternative to the coming violence.

[Editor's note: Fritscher's intuitive conclusion was prophetic. On May 4, 1970, approximately seventy days after this article was published, the National Guard fired their army rifles on a peace demonstration at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine.]

III. Eyewitness Illustrations



Detail from a page of "Impeach Nixon" stamps, early 1970s.



Top: "Police Riot, Lincoln Park, Chicago, 1968." Two photographs shot in color of a redheaded protester, August 28, 1968, in the crowd surging through Lincoln Park during the Democratic National Convention. The Police Riot at the Democratic Convention caused citizens to fight back in the streets, and this, in turn, emboldened homosexuals ten months later to fight back against the NYPD at the Stonewall Rebellion, June 1969. Bottom: The Reverend Jim Kane photographed in Colorado Springs for his 1970 Christmas card at a time when exchanging personally made gay Christmas greetings was the custom not yet undone by political correctness. Photographs by Jack Fritscher. ©Jack Fritscher



