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Public Intellectuals, Scholars, Journalists, & Activism: Wearing Different Hats and Juggling Different Ethical Mandates

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Abstract

In democratic civil society a public intellectual can spark deep conversations about disparities of privilege and power. This brings with it the need to be intentional about ethics. The author reviews different roles in which he has been cast where he has played the role of a "public intellectual". The different hats he has worn include scholar, journalist, paralegal investigator, and leftwing movement activist. In each case, there were normative or at least expected ethical boundaries which usually varied by project and sometimes conflicted with other roles. After exploring the different roles and related ethical issues, there is a discussion from a progressive perspective of basic ethical mandates and tools for building human rights. An extensive set of references is provided to assist researchers.

Keywords: ethics, activism, subject research, professional standards, principles of unity

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Intelectuales Públicos, Académicos, Periodistas y Activismo: Llevar Diferentes Sombreros y Manejando Diferentes Mandatos Éticos

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Resumen

En una sociedad civil democrática un público intelectual puede generar conversaciones sobre las disparidades de privilegios y poder. Esto conlleva la necesidad de ser intencionales en cuanto a la ética. El autor revisa diferentes roles que ha desempeñado en los que ha jugado el rol de "intelectual público". Los diferentes roles que ha jugado incluyen al académico, al investigador jurídico, y al activista de izquierdas. En cada caso, había normativa, o al menos unas fronteras éticas esperadas, que usualmente variaban según el proyecto y a veces chocaban con otros roles. Después de explorar los diferentes roles y los aspectos éticos relacionados, se discute desde una perspectiva progresiva de los básicos mandatos éticos y herramientas para construir los derechos humanos. Se proporcionan un conjunto extenso de referencias para asistir a los investigadores.

Palabras clave: ética, activismo, sujeto de investigación, estándares profesionales, principios de unidad

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I am not a sociologist but I play one on TV. I hold no academic degrees, but for the past 20 years I have been writing scholarly essays (Berlet, 2013a). As a result, I have been quoted in and appeared on corporate and alternative media, speaking on subjects such as right-wing social movements, political repression, prejudice, apocalypticism, terrorism, and other matters that involve sociological research. Before my metamorphosis into a scholar I spent decades as a progressive activist and investigative journalist. Trodding those paths I gained a reputation as someone who thought about ethics and wrote about occurrences of principled and unprincipled behavior by political, business, and religious leaders. This in turn led to many conversations with others across the political spectrum. I listened, learned, took notes, and wrote essays. I moved from premature curmudgeon to "expert" simply by getting older. Direct all credit to my allies and all criticisms to me.

As a form of self-disclosure, I identify myself as a radical Christian and democratic socialist working as part of a progressive global human rights movement. In my work I employ a form of sociological cultural Marxism, engage in "Power Structure Research" (Berlet, 2013e); and use an analytical lens that sees race, gender, and class as "omnipresent in the background of all forms of collective action" (Buechler, 2000). I strive to be a "bad subject" in the Althusserian sense by exposing and challenging ideologies, systems, institutions, and structures of oppression and repression that buttress unfair hierarchies of power and privilege (Althusser & Brewster, 1971/2001; Gray, 2005; Macherey & Bundy, 2013).

Public intellectuals can play a key role in building democracy and civil society and extending human rights. I take that seriously as a responsibility. In this essay I will outline the differences and conflicts in the ethical standards involved in the work I do; which varies based on what social role I am playing at any given moment. Since this essay began as a presentation at a panel discussion, I will alert readers to my penchant for theatrical aspects of public speaking –including my frequent use of various props and stage magic- described here in bracketed comments. In my work over the years I find myself wearing different hats. [At this point I pointed to the baseball hat I was wearing, advertising the "Social Movement Study Network" (2013),

which is a website I curate to help link academics and their students to reliable movement group research and resources].

How did I get picked to be on a panel addressing sociologists as public intellectuals? Some background will set the stage. My participation in social movements began in the 1960s, which were a tumultuous and fluid time. In 1964 I was passing out flyers for the Presidential campaign of the arch-conservative Republican Party candidate Barry Goldwater. A few years later I was marching in the streets with the Civil Rights movement. When I entered college in 1968 I became active in the movement against the war in Vietnam. So I moved from Right to Left. While ostensibly studying sociology and mass media at the University of Denver I began working on the campus student newspaper, eventually becoming editor. After a moving antiwar speech by my professor and mentor John Rice (former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's father) –I dropped out of college to join the antiwar movement (Berlet, 2004).Gravitating toward the alternative press, I eventually was named to the governing board of the Underground Press Syndicate.

Over the next 20 years I worked with civil rights, antiwar, community, labor, civil liberties, and anti-racist groups on local and then national levels. In the mid 1970s my wife Karen Moyer, and I moved into a predominantly White working class neighborhood in Chicago where racial tensions spilled over into violence against Black families integrating the area. We worked with a multi-racial progressive community group the Southwest Community Congress. In 1981 I was employed part-time at what became the progressive fight-the-right research center Political Research Associates (2013) founded by Professor Jean Hardisty. In the late 1980s, after we moved PRA to the Boston area, I was abducted by radical sociologists who asked me to write scholarly conference papers and later journal articles and book chapters about right-wing social movements.

Public Intellectuals

Now I am identified as a publi –or at least publicize- intellectual who uses sociological insights in my work. I am honored to be asked to write about what I have learned, especially since there are so many activists and scholars

who have been my teachers, including those on the panel with me: Kathleen Blee, Francis Fox Piven, and Amy Stone. There are also many others who have blended progressive political activism with scholarship. Among them are Gary Delgado, Sara Diamond, Marshal Ganz, William A. Gamson, Jean Hardisty, Douglass Kellner, and Charlotte Ryan. Ganz even has an online training course for organizers (2013).

Being a public intellectual who is part of the progressive movement for social change in the United States can complicate my ethical considerations. I first became a nationally-known expert on right-wing groups in June of 1983 when reporters contacted me about the militant right-wing anti-regime movement known as the "*Posse Comitatus*", which was a predecessor movement of the armed citizens militias. There had been a shootout between one of the *Posse Comitatus* leaders, Gordon Kahl, and law enforcement, which left several people dead and wounded. Kahl escaped, went underground, and was killed in a gun battle with authorities (Corcoran, 1990; Lamy, 1996). In Patriot movement jargon the name "*Posse Comitatus*" takes a standard legal concept in Latin about state power derived from the people. This is turned into a bogus theory claiming the improper and repressive use of federal authority.

I was working in Chicago at a small progressive think tank, Midwest Research, founded by Professor Hardisty who had left academia to study right-wing movements. Several reporters found a reference to me and my knowledge of the *Posse Comitatus* in a pre-Internet news database. The NBC television network morning news program, the *Today Show*, invited me to New York to discuss the *Posse Comitatus* in a live interview. Jean Hardisty and I discussed our obligations as movement activists to highlight the collapsed economy of the farm belt. We were working with progressive farm organizers such as Merle Hansen of the North American Farm Alliance who were competing with the *Posse Comitatus* for recruits among beleaguered farm families struggling with harsh economic realities and structural "adjustments".

We decided that I would agree to the interview only if I could bring a farmer. It was as if I was asking to bring a talking onion. [At this point I placed a large yellow onion on the podium]. The *Today Show* producers were flabbergasted. I held out. The producers relented. The farmer who

appeared was terrific. Here I tip my hat to the Power Devaluation theory of Rory McVeigh (2009) which explains why right-wing movements can grow in both boom and bust cycles.

The next year, in 1984, when civil rights activist Jesse Jackson toured the farm belt for his Presidential campaign, some of the people who organized on his behalf were affiliated with the *Posse Comitatus* and similar anti-regime right-wing groups. Those of us on the Left knew who they were, and they knew who we werewe all kept our mouths shut. This was not ethical in terms of journalism. But it was ethical in terms of the movement idea of principles of unity for tactical rather than strategic coalitions (Berlet, 2013d).

My high point for visibility as a public intellectual was when I was retained by the Cable News Network (CNN) as their expert on right-wing violence in the days following the bombing of the Oklahoma Federal Building in 1995. I hasten to explain that I was way down the list of customary national experts, but many well-known talking heads at the top of the list were journalistically guillotined after they wrongly blamed Muslims for the terrorist act. For example, Steven Emerson declared "This was done with the attempt to inflict as many casualties as possible….that is a Middle Eastern trait" (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, 2008).The terror bombing was actually carried out by domestic right-wing terrorists (Dyer. J., 1998; Hamm, 1997; Stern, 1996). Later, this high-visibility role as a public intellectual for CNN led to me being subpoenaed as an expert in the resulting murder trial –alas by the defense team for the now convicted and incarcerated bombing accomplice Terry Nichols. Life sometimes gets very complicated.

Different Hats

What follows are brief descriptions and examples of other ethical issues or questions of core principles I have encountered while wearing different hats.

Independent Scholar

Since the late 1980s I have written conference papers, book chapters, and journal articles; some of which survived the ordeal of peer review (Berlet, 2013a). When working on scholarly projects I try to abide by the ethical mandates of the academy in general and the American Sociological Association in particular. I am acutely aware of this when I am engaged in subject research. But I nevertheless incorporate into my research and writing some material collected by others not bound by these ethical considerations. I try not to use material I gathered while wearing a different hat unless the information has been published by someone other than just me. Is that sufficient? I hope so. It's thin ice. I worry about it.

Sometimes I engage in "site visits" that involve a pretext in which I do not reveal my identity as a scholar or journalist. This is clearly outside the bounds of ethical disclosure for sociologists at academic institutions and for members of the American Sociological Association. Sociologists including Kathleen Blee (2002), Jerome Himmelstein (1998), and Betty Dobratz and Stephenie Shanks-Miele (1997) are among the scholars who have written about the fine line they dance on when studying right-wing groups that are racist, antisemitic, sexist, or homophobic. One Himmelstein ASA conference paper was titled "All But Sleeping with the Enemy" (1998).

At a discussion hosted by Burt Klandermans and Kathleen Blee at the 1998 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, several sociologists wondered if there was an ethical problem of interviewing neonazis but not revealing oneself as Jewish or gay or a leftist. Another topic was the difficulty of gathering accurate information from far right groups that routinely misrepresent their views and activities unless the researcher uses some pretense.

Terminology itself raises questions regarding principles and ethics for both scholars and movement intellectuals. Language is loaded with social and political baggage, and an ethical scholar should consider this when writing or speaking. Himmelstein, for example, argues the term "extremism" is at best a characterization that "tells us nothing substantive about the people it labels", and at worst the term "paints a false picture" (Himmelstein, 1998, p. 7). Lyons and I have been critical of the term "extremism" because

we argue it implicitly valorizes the political center which defends the status quo in US society while oppressive systems based on race, gender, and class are allowed to function with little attention (Berlet & Lyons, 1998). A term clearly contentious among both scholars and activists is "hate crime" (Altschiller, 1999; Berlet, 2004; Dyer, CC., 2001; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Jacobs & Potter, 1998; Jakobsen, 1999; Jenness & Broad, 1997; Jenness, Ferber, Grattet, & Short, 1999; Levin & McDevitt, 1996; Whitlock, 2012).

Paralegal Investigator

A paralegal investigator works under the direct supervision of an attorney, while a licensed private investigator can work for an attorney or directly with a client. I was trained as a paralegal investigator by Eda Gordon and Sheila O'Donnell (a licensed private investigator) of the original Public Eye Network; and attorney Matthew J. Piers, for whom I worked on a lawsuit against illegal government spying in Chicago. In the 1980s I worked on several other lawsuits against government surveillance abuses, or in defense of movement activists enmeshed in legal troubles or harassment (Berlet, 2013b, 2013c).

Working for Piers I did document analysis and deposition preparation on cases against the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Military Intelligence, and the Chicago Police "Red Squad" intelligence unit. In this role there are strict legal ethics. For example I had to sign a legal document swearing under oath I would not divulge to the public the contents of any government documents covered by court protective orders. And I didn't. Yet having read over 100,000 pages of these documents, my writing on government repression is based on solid information that cannot be revealed, but nevertheless shapes and supports my reporting. I believe I walk this ethical tightrope successfully.

Legal ethics can conflict with movement ethics. In 1988 I was asked to review the evidence in a court case filed by the Christic Institute against alleged U.S. government misconduct involving the Contra rebels seeking to overthrow the leftist government of Nicaragua. The plaintiffs were two American journalists involved with progressive movements. My supervisor at Christic was a licensed private investigator. We both agreed there were

serious and substantial deficiencies in both the evidence and legal work in the case. Our first impulse was to go directly to the plaintiffs. Being unsure of the ethics, we contacted an attorney to advise us. He told us that the only ethical conduct would be for us to inform the lead attorneys in the case, and if they chose to do nothing, we had to remain silent. So we did not alert the plaintiffs or the movement groups funneling tens of thousands of dollars to support the case. We agonized over the outcome, which was that the case collapsed when it reached court (Berlet, 1990/1994).

Investigative Journalist

Wearing this hat I specialize in writing about government repression and right-wing movements that defend systems of oppression based on race, gender, and class. Journalism schools teach ethics, as do several non-academic centers and groups, including Investigative Reporters and Editors, to which I belong. Even within journalism there are debates about the ethical boundaries of investigative reporting especially concerning the appropriateness of using fictitious identities. Over the years I have had discussions with other investigative reporters about the stress and ethical boundary issues involved in pretext identity or "undercover" site visits. We even have a term: "Judas Syndrome", about feeling bad because we are aware that we eventually are going to betray the trust of the people we are not just observing, but sitting down with over burgers and a beer.

Another disagreement involves surreptitious audio or video taping – which some states allow with limits and some ban altogether. Is it acceptable for a journalist to arrange a meeting across a nearby state line to be inside a state that allows surreptitious audio or video taping? Do some reporters illegally tape record conversations just in case they feel they need proof and would rather face a judge for illegal taping than have their credibility undermined? All of this is done all the time by reporters, but it is controversial. I confess I have done both.

When reporting on intelligence agencies or using information supplied "not for attribution" or "on background" a journalist needs to assess whether or not they are being used for a nefarious purpose. "Big Stories, Spooky Sources", was an article I wrote for the *Columbia Journalism Review* (1993)

after I saw several colleagues watch their careers implode by being insufficiently skeptical of sources. The ethics here involve the Two Source rule; now often ignored even in corporate or "mainstream" journalism (Power Structure Research, 2014). The growth of the Internet as an information source and the shrinkage of the news cycle from days to minutes have exacerbated this problem. I acknowledge the irony of being a former denizen of the underground press now teaching journalistic ethics to progressive reporters.

Movement Activist

Over many years I have participated in numerous conversations about strategy and ethics with progressive movement activists. Within social movements there are specific roles, each with a set of ethical standards that vary by group and sometimes the political weather.

Alternative Journalist

Left movement journalistic ethics should be based on the quote by Amilcar Cabral: "Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories" (Cabral, 1970).

Journalists working as part of a social or political movement are often expected to adjust or abandon some of the customary ethical standards of corporate journalism. There are sets of standards for being an "alternative journalist" *covering* Left movements, and there are often a different set of expectations for alternative journalists *working inside* Left movements. There was a panel of alternative journalists discussing these issues at the 2012 Left Forum conference in New York City (Gupta, 2012).

In 1994 radical journalists Michael Albert and Lydia Sargent cofounders of Z Magazine and South End Press, established the Z Media Institute (ZMI) "to teach radical politics, media, and organizing skills; the principles and practice of creating non-hierarchical institutions and projects; and a special

emphasis on vision and strategy for social change" Hundreds of progressive media activists have attended ZMI and learned not only the tools of movement activism, but also responsibilities and ethics. Holly Sklar developed a media curriculum to teach young alternative journalists the basics of journalism as a craft, including the norms and ethics. Sklar brought me in to team teach, and after several years I taught the class with sociologist and journalist Abby Scher (Sklar, Berlet, & Scher, 2013). Sociologist Charlotte Ryan also taught media classes, as did alternative radio guru David Barsamian. Other ZMI instructors have included Michael Bronski, Leslie Cagan, Noam Chomsky, Rosa Clemente, Ron Daniels, Barbara Ehrenreich, Amy Goodman, bell hooks, and Danny Schecter.

Movement journalists are sometimes asked to do things that are clearly unethical in terms of corporate journalism. In 1991 then federal judge Clarence Thomas, a Black man with intensely conservative views, was facing nomination hearings for appointment as a Supreme Court Justice. Some left-leaning Black leaders wanted to know if Thomas while in college had spied on campus civil rights or antiwar activists. A member of the Congressional Black Caucus contacted me with this rumor and a request. Senator Teddy Kennedy was willing to ask the FBI to produce any evidence in their possession, but only if an article discussing the possibility appeared in print. I struggled with the ethics of this request, but eventually wrote a short article for the radical *Guardian* newspaper in New York City. I suggested the possibility without revealing the role of the Black activists in generating the article. Senator Kennedy requested and received the FBI information. There was no evidence that Thomas had ever spied on activists for the government. After tumultuous hearings, Thomas took his seat on the Supreme Court. I was castigated publically for having written a shabby article.

When Jean Hardisty hired me she said one investigative journalism practice she wanted me to stop was surreptitious "dumpster diving". This collection of garbage for research purposes is known us practitioners as "Garbology" (Barricade Journalism, 2013).

I pointed out the US Supreme Court had ruled it legal to collect garbage discarded on public property such as the curbside. Hardisty replied that although she was a progressive lesbian-feminist activist she was also a

trained political scientist and there were certain standards. There was one time I went through garbage while at PRA, but only after securing permission from the group moving their offices (Berlet, 1989). The ultra-conservative John Birch Society staff assumed I was a supporter. Was that OK ethically? For journalism it was.

Movement Media and Publicist

Publicity and media relations are polite terms for "propaganda". This term we used in progressive movements in the 1970s in the way suggested by Bernays: as a form of persuasion (1928). Now, with a wink at sociologists, we sometimes call it "applied framing". Movement media and publicity involves helping develop outreach strategies including the development of frames, slogans, and narratives. Sociologists William Gamson and Charlotte Ryan host the Media Research and Action Project (MRAP) seminar at Boston College where human rights activists bring their media strategies for analysis in front of a panel that includes graduate students (Media Research and Action Project, 2014). Ryan authored the guide *Prime Time Activism* (1991); and with Gamson wrote "Thinking about Elephants: Toward a Dialogue with George Lakoff" (2005).

In 1974 as part of a small single-event collective I helped coordinate publicity for a week-long series of demonstrations by Vietnam Veterans against the War (VVAW) targeting inadequate veterans' benefits and related issues. The plan included staging an escalating series of provocative actions such as sit-ins and posting protest placards on federal buildings. One small group of handicapped veterans in wheelchairs volunteered to chain themselves to the doors of the Veterans Administration building. Our propaganda collective started laying the groundwork and training veterans as spokespeople over a month before the demonstrations. Our goal was to get coverage on the major television network nightly news programs on the last day of the protests. We succeeded. Much of the coverage was sympathetic. Ethics? Well, we were assigned to manipulate the mass media and we chose to break laws; but we pledged not to ever lie or even exaggerate. The vets spoke truth to power (Social Movement Study Network, 2013a).

I took over as chair of the publicity committee for of the Pressman's union in Washington, DC defending the 15 members indicted and put on trial after they trashed the *Washington Post* pressroom while walking out strike (Social Movement Study Network, 2013b). Our task on the publicity committee was to manipulate the mass media by creating news with press releases and staged events. All of this was to shift public opinion and create a less hostile perception, especially among potential jurors. I practiced no balanced point of view, certainly no objectivity – whatever that means – but clearly I did not explore both sides of the conflict in the press releases I wrote or the slogans I helped frame and then field tested for response. I was biased, and by ASA standards, probably unethical. That's the task, however, of propagandists engaged in "applied framing".

Tactical Opposition Research

This is seeking to research, expose, and blunt the opposition's short-term plans. The ethics here can be dicey, especially when the researcher is expected to allow the data to be exaggerated or hyped by movement leaders. Just say no is good advice, but alas, it is often ignored by leadership looking for headlines.

I did tactical opposition research for the SCC in Chicago. My assignment was studying how neonazis and organized white supremacists interacted with and influenced local organizations and individuals who tolerated or promoted a "Whites-Only" neighborhood concept, and other forces that impeded racial justice –including the local police (Berlet, 2001). I used journalistic ethics for most of the research and movement ethics for strategy discussions with the leadership of SCC and its allies. Here I give a tip of my hat to Doug McAdam whose book on political opportunity structures and political processes was so useful that after reading it I helped refocus our strategies and tactics within SCC (McAdam, 1982).

While important and useful for social movements, tactical opposition research tends to be used by political parties and candidates to generate donations rather than build social movement organizations for actual social change. To me that poses an ethical dilemma for people raising funds to

"Fight the Right" in the United States who then funnel that money into appendages of the Democratic Party. The organized Right in the United States invested in a large and diverse set of social movement organizations to pull the Republican Party in their direction rather than serve as an outreach arm of the political party.

Strategic Movement Research

This involves serious long-term research into trends in opposition institutions and organizations. It can be overt or covert. Primarily this involves doing "deep reading" of the materials produced by opposition groups looking for patterns and trends that reveal what may turn into a project tactic or strategy. The purpose of this is to assist movement leaders in developing effective counter-strategies as early as possible.

An example of this is the important strategic research of Surina Khan while she was at Political Research Associates (PRA) in the 1990s. Khan was reading deeply into the work of groups that opposed gay rights, and detected a shift in rhetoric. It took her weeks of further research to figure out how a new frame was being tested by anti-gay forces. The result was the report *Calculated Compassion* (Khan, 1998). It was very useful to groups organizing for gay rights, allowing them to anticipate the changing frame of the antigay movement and develop countermeasures.

In 1994 a number of us were studying the growth of the right-wing anti-regime "armed citizens militia" movement (Berlet & Lyons, 2000; Ward, 1996, 1997, 1998; Zeskind, 2009). We suspected their anger would generate violence. A national meeting of researchers in the Pacific Northwest resulted in a warning that likely targets included government buildings, reproductive rights centers, gay rights groups, and people organizing for immigrant rights. Ken Stern of the American Jewish Committee, (who attended the meeting) wrote a memo warning the federal government (Stern, 1996). The rest of us sent out warnings to our constituencies. In December 1994 John Salvi, a militia devotee, attacked reproductive rights centers in Boston (Berlet & Lyons, 2000, p. 297-299). In April 1995 Timothy McVeigh, a neonazi and Terry Nichols, a militia movement participant, blew up the Oklahoma City

Federal Building, killing 168 and injuring many more (Berlet & Lyons, 2000; Levitas, 2002; Stern, 1996; Zeskind, 2009).

Undercover Work

Strategic research extends as far as doing undercover work to evaluate and thus help confront attempts to derail progressive dissent. This work is secretive during the investigative phase. The targets of inspection can include government agencies or non-government organizations. I did this type of work originally with the Public Eye Network in the 1970s, which was studying and challenging government surveillance and repression (Public Eye Network, 2012).

Sometimes in both tactical and strategic research work I find myself far distant from the ethical mandates of the American Sociological Association on subject research. For instance I did not notify my subjects of study when I was posing as a potential recruit attending meetings of neonazis, Holocaust deniers, the neofascist LaRouchite cult, and white supremacists in the 1970s and 1980s.

Another example of ethical juggling is when the environmental group Greenpeace sent me undercover to a meeting of the American Society of Industrial Security. I went posing as a facility security specialist complete with phony business cards. My task was to ask various security firms what they thought of Greenpeace. "Harmless but annoying" some said. Others leaned over and quietly warned me that Greenpeace was funded by Moscow and a den of potential terrorists (Berlet, 1990).

To track organizing against reproductive rights and gay rights, I attended a meeting of the right-wing patriotic group the John Birch Society. We were watching a movie about the communist menace when the aged 16mm film projector snapped the brittle film. Now, you should know that in the mid-1960s I was that guy in high school who was in the audio-visual club – pushing 16mm movie projectors and audio tape players from classroom to classroom in the days before laptops and cell phones. At the Birch Society meeting I struggled with an ethical dilemma: leave the film broken and mess up the meeting or go over to the projector and fix the problem. I decided to

splice the film and spent the rest of the meeting feeling conflicted –but nonetheless watching the vividly anti-communist film I had always wanted to see.

Logistics for Demonstrations

I coordinated garbage collection for one of the big Washington, DC antiwar marches in the early 1970s while the Vietnam War still was raging. We all have to start someplace. Later I was promoted to producing mimeographed flyers. It was amusing to watch rally organizers try to balance the number of Leninists and Trotskyists on the podium.

Eventually I helped stage demonstrations in DC at the Capitol building (In support of increasing college student financial aid), the Kennedy Center (for the Washington Post Pressman's union picketing the opening of the film "All the Presidents Men"); the Justice Department and Veterans Administration (VVAW); and various events for the Yippies (Youth International Party) and Zippies (a radical anarchist grouplet that split with the Yippies). I worked as volunteer staff for scores of other demonstrations. Logistics (even in movement groups) is all about checklists. Yet in most cases we took the time to consider matters of principle and ethics.

Movement Security

This can be as simple as making sure a meeting room, stage, or performance venue is safe and secure. Wearing this hat I worked with teams for field security (for marches and rallies with stages), first aid volunteers, and legal observers. In each role we had conversations about what was appropriate and ethical behavior for the specific event; and the ethical boundaries were fluid, and determined in part by the ideological range of the group coalition.

A movement's opponents sometimes are disruptive or even violent. While coordinating the security for the first US concert by Cuban trumpeter Arturo Sandoval the building was hit by rocks and bottles thrown by anti-Castro demonstrators. Here ethical discussions take place as to when (if

ever) to call the police if a situation gets out of hand. Movement security also involves training activists in what Public Eye Network founder Sheila O'Donnell calls "Common Sense Security", in which basic steps are taken that do not waste time, energy, or funds on elaborate (macho) fetishized security mania (O'Donnell, 1978/2012).

Ethical Movement Building

Develop Principles of Unity

Being sensitive to ethical considerations in Left movement work requires attention to several levels of interaction: internal behavior, external relationships, and coalition work. Groups articulate basic principles in a variety of forms: Principles of Unity, Vision Statements, Goals, Mission Statement, History, etc. These types of statements are a guide to normative behavior in a movement group and often shape the frames and narratives developed for use by the group (Berlet, 2013d).

The organization INCITE! describes itself as a "nation-wide network of radical feminists of color working to end violence against women, gender non-conforming, and trans people of color, and our communities. We support each other through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing" (2013a). This serves as the group's basic principles of unity. INCITE! Also has a page describing its more detailed principles of unity (2013b). An excellent online collection of statements is from Southerners on New Ground (2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

Be Agile and Responsive

Sometimes matters of principle intervene in the projected workplan of a movement group. Jean Hardisty was asked to prepare a research study on the development of organized homophobia for the legal team challenging the homophobic Initiative Amendment Two in Colorado. PRA dropped everything for a month of intensive research. Then Hardisty and I flew out to

Colorado to assist the legal team, with Hardisty testifying before the Colorado Supreme Court. Her study was later published as "Constructing Homophobia" and then incorporated into her book, *Mobilizing Resentment* (Hardisty, 1999).

Don't Stab Your Existing or Potential Allies in the Back

Seriously? Why does this even need to be stated? Because time after time progressive groups have developed and implemented plans that have had harmful or even devastating effects on potential allies.

In Oregon an anti-gay conservative Christian organization placed a homophobic initiative, Measure Nine, on the ballot. The first plan to mobilize voters to block the initiative focused on urging urban voters in two large cities, Portland and Eugene, to reject Measure Nine. But this original framing developed by national "strategists" pitted urban dwellers against rural dwellers in a snarky way. It implied that sophisticated urbanites knew better than to be bigoted against gay people.

The proposed advertising plan would have undermined the work of rural organizers in Oregon and put gay people outside the cities at greater risk. Experienced grassroots leaders in the statewide LGBTQ community blocked the original plan, arguing that it would be better to stand up against Measure Nine in a principled way that built a broader progressive movement in Oregon. And they explained in private strategy meetings that they took this stand as a matter of ethics even if that meant Measure Nine stood a greater chance of passage. In fact, this long-term strategic approach not only stopped Measure Nine, but also helped build future alliances across Oregon (Pharr, 1988, 1996; Stein, 2001).

Practice Participatory Democracy

Some progressive social movement organizations (SMOs) take the idea of democracy as an internal practice very seriously (Polletta, 2002; Reagon, 1983; Sitrin, 2012; Sitrin & Azzellini, 2013). For too many progressive (SMOs), especially on the national level, this is a claim made to boards and

funders but not a reality in practice. Progressive SMOs regularly burn out their staff. Appeals by directors for staff sacrifices for the "movement" are just another way to increase workload and keep salaries low. There is even a guide for resisting this titled "White Supremacy Culture" (Okun, 2000/2001). The Western States Center has an entire collection of tools and resources for building participatory democracy (2013). I helped start staff unions at the National Student Association and the National Lawyers Guild, and tried to build one at Political Research Associates. This should not be necessary.

There is an especially wide gap in ethics between groups that actually practice collaborative mass democratic engagement versus cadre organizations operating under Leninist principles. How can secretive Leninist cadre organizations have members participate in mass democratic movements and organizations in an ethical manner if the leadership bind their cadre to promote a predetermined Leninist "Party Line" before any mass group discussion? They can't. I base this on the theories of Hannah Arendt in *Totalitarianism* (1951) and extensive personal observations working in mass-based groups alongside members of various Leninist, Stalinist, and Maoist groups.

To engage in truly democratic activity the cadre organization must always release all cadre members from any aspects of "democratic centralism" so they can participate freely in the mass movement discussions and make up their own minds. Perhaps my most controversial essay on movement ethics was the article "Abstaining from Bad Sects" (1999) (in English the title is a pun). Published in the Left movement *Resist* newsletter, my essay received an unusually high number of responses pro and con –and a few denunciations and cancellations.

Work Across Boundaries

In the 1990s Suzanne Pharr, Loretta Ross and I convened several national strategy meetings for challenging right-wing backlash movements. We called our informal strategy network the Blue Mountain Working Group and at our first meeting in 1994 we issued "A Call To Defend Democracy And Pluralism" (Blue Mountain Working Group, 1994). These meetings were

attempts to draft broad "principles of unity" for ethical work by researchers, strategists, and activists.

We were alarmed at the way some activists challenging homophobia in the 1990s had created frames and narratives for publicity purposes that insulted and put at risk people based on their multiple and complex racial, gender, and class identities. Progressive movements and groups need to take the time to investigate whether or not their proposed frames, narratives, and actions will do more harm than good in the short term or long term.

The broad issue here is the need for all human rights activists to build bridges across boundaries that divide us; and create coalitions that are truly diverse and democratic (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Lorde, 1983; Nakagawa et al., 1996; Reagon-Johnson, 1983).

Leverage Privilege & Celebrity

As a Straight, White, American, Christian, Male (SWACM) with abundant privilege, I have learned to use my status to elevate other voices in my writing to increase diversity of ideas in the public sphere. This concept was taught to me by activists such as Jean Hardisty, Peggy McIntosh, Scott Nakagawa, Suzanne Pharr, Loretta Ross, Urvashi Vaid, and Nikhil Aziz. Their work is chronicled at the Building Human Rights website (2013).

Because my media celebrity after the Oklahoma City bombing briefly gave me high public visibility –I was asked in 1995 by others in the Blue Mountain Working Group to set aside work with Matthew N. Lyons on our book *Right-Wing Populism in America* (2000). Instead, I was asked to pull together and publish an edited volume on challenging right-wing movements that highlighted overlooked voices in the progressive community. I agreed and the result was the edited volume *Eyes Right: Challenging the Right-Wing Backlash* (Berlet, 1995).

The point is to help challenge traditional hierarchies of power and privilege built around race, gender, and class while also leveling organizational hierarchies to achieve more democratic decision-making (Aziz, 1995; McIntosh, 1989; Ross, 2009; Vaid, 1995, 2012). Not a bad principle of unity for the human rights movement (Building Human Rights, 2013).

Conclusions

There are many discussions and disagreement about ethics and their boundaries in social movements Left and Right, and this is a fruitful area for more social science research. Scholars and social movement activists exist in a symbiotic relationship. I attend meetings of the American Sociological Association in part to bring back new ideas and research discoveries to progressive movement leaders so we can be more effective. On a national level there are dozens of us who engage in progressive movement tactical and strategic research who benefit from social science research. We are scattered across the country as individuals and as staff working at groups such as Political Research Associates, Data Center, Project South, Center for New Community, Applied Research Center, Highlander Center, and many more. All of these groups are underfunded. Several similar groups have shut their doors due to lack of funding over the past 20 years. When members of the group Incite! point out that the "Revolution Will Not Be Funded" (2007) they are making a salient point about all forms of nonviolent radical social change that seeks to rip up the roots of inequality, oppression, and greed (Berlet, 2005).

Every few years I sit down and reread Hanna Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) to remind myself of the obligations of a human rights activist participating in building a truly democratic civil society. According to William H. Hastie, the first Black federal judge in the United States, "Democracy is a process, not a static condition. It is becoming rather than being. It can easily be lost, but never is fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle" (Hastie n.d., as cited in Facing History and Ourselves, 2011). Democracy, therefore, is not a specific set of institutions that can be exported to different nations –and certainly not when delivered by drones. Democracy is an ongoing process rooted in the unique culture of a society, and which involves several components, all of which are necessary, but none of which is sufficient. This is how it works in my view:

The majority of people,
Over time,

> Given access to enough accurate information,
> And the ability to participate in a free and open debate,
> Reach decisions that will benefit the whole of society, and also:
>> Preserve liberty,
>> Protect freedom,
>> Extend equality, and
>> Defend democracy.

With scholar and progressive activist and strategist Frances Fox-Piven on the panel I would like to end with a tip of the hat to her for putting up with all the abuse, red-baiting, and general defamation from right-wing demagogues over the past few years. They wave a red flag to get attention. [I begin to wave a red handkerchief in the air] but we all know that this rightist rhetoric is a red herring to divert attention from the unfair power and privilege of wealthy elites. [Here the red handkerchief magically turns into a wealthy elitist's four-foot-long walking stick].

Acknowledgment

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