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Though some people may think the job involves more shushing than rallying, many librarians consider "making America read again" to be a radical political proposition.

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Arianna Rebolini
FEB 20 2017, 12:23PM

Photo by B. Harvey via Stocksy

When Audrey Lorberfeld woke up in her Brooklyn apartment on Saturday, January 28, she was, like much of the country, angry. In the first week of his presidency, Donald Trump had already signed executive orders reinstating an expanded global gag rule, calling for the construction of a border wall between the United States and Mexico, reopening the possibility of the Dakota Access pipeline, and, on Friday, January 27, barring any travelers into the US from seven Muslim-majority countries.

Within hours of the order's signing, two Iraqis who'd flown into JFK—53-year-old Hameed Khalid Darweesh, arriving from Iraq, and 33-year-old Haider Sameer Abdulkhaleq Alshawi, arriving from Sweden—were detained. Overnight, while lawyers representing the two refugees worked to file a suit for their release, news of their detention spread, and by 11 AM on Saturday, organizations like the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) had put out a call for protesters outside JFK's Terminal 4.

At 9 AM that same morning, Lorberfeld didn't know this mobilization was in the works, and she decided to get a protest going on her own. She gathered up all of the information so far available regarding the executive order—what it actually comprised, what had happened since the signing, which countries were (and weren't) being targeted, who the detainees were, and what their lawyers had been able to do until then—organized it into an easy-to-digest list with links to sources, and published it, albeit nervously, as the first post in a public Facebook event she created calling for a shutdown of JFK. When concerned strangers, many of whom were seasoned activists, pointed her in the direction of the NYIC, Lorberfeld updated the event—which was already spreading further and more quickly than she could have anticipated—and turned it into a **supportive action** for the protest already underway.

By 2 PM she was onsite with roughly 200 people, a crowd which, by the end of the night, would **grow** to more than two thousand.

The page she'd created that morning grew with the actual protest, becoming a space for people to share time-stamped news updates (and then fact-check those updates), seek ride shares, post live video feeds, coordinate deliveries of handwarmers and refreshments, and declare support from around the country and globe. It was a real-time, digital forum. Lorberfeld, who stayed at the protest until 6 PM but continued to post updates from home until ten, was relieved, humbled, and energized. She hadn't led the protest, but she'd supported it by finding and disseminating accurate information, providing a space for the open exchange of ideas, and engaging with the community—just as any librarian would do.

> **Librarians decide what gets preserved and how information is classified, which inherently affects how people find that information and who is likely to find it.**

An impromptu protest at an airport without legal or organizational support could have gone very, very poorly. It is a move Lorberfeld, who currently splits her time between grad school and her job as digital technical specialist at the

"Once I started getting emails from people I was like, 'Oh my God, what did I get myself into?'" she told me about a week after the protest. "I was super lucky that [the NYIC] protest that started before mine was planned to start. I want to be adamant that nothing I did on Saturday would've been able to happen without that."

Still, looking at the numbers on Lorberfeld's event page—which, at the time of this writing, shows 4,700 people invited, 3,200 interested, and 928 attending—one could assume Lorberfeld's supplementary organizing brought news of the ban and the protest to the attention of many, and perhaps encouraged some of that audience to show up. She helped sustain a protest that lasted nearly 12 hours, and in doing so, continued in a tradition of librarians using their professional skills to support civilian resistance.

That many librarians consider their role to be inherently political, and in some cases radical, might surprise a public whose perception of the job usually involves more shushing than rallying. But in recent history especially, librarians have played key roles in progressive movements. In 1960, **the *Library Journal*** condemned segregation in Southern libraries; in 1974 the American Library Association (ALA) **endorsed the Equal Rights Amendment**. In 1990, the ALA created the **Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force** to disseminate information about poverty, and in 2003, Carla Diane Hayden—ALA president at the time, currently the first black and first female Librarian of Congress—fought for patron privacy in the face of the Patriot Act. "We are fighters for freedom, and we cause trouble!" she said in **a 2003 profile in *Ms.* magazine**. "We are not sitting quietly anymore."

Carla Hayden, current librarian of Congress. Screengrab via YouTube

Certainly not. This year, librarians showed up in droves to marches across the country, promising with their signs that they would "make America read again." But their professional expertise—whether in information literacy, privacy protection, coding, or research—gives them a unique ability to drive our culture and educate the electorate. Take New York–based librarian Alexandra Lederman and archivist Katie Martinez, who created a zine about data privacy and handed it out at the Women's March. Or Linden How and J. Turner Masland, in Portland, Oregon, who linked up to create **a comprehensive reading list** offering historical and theoretical contexts for US labor relations, environmentalism, civil rights, women's rights, and queer liberation movements.

Indeed, librarians' embrace of freely shared knowledge puts them at an advantage when it comes to organizing—especially online. **Radical Reference** launched in 2006 as an online support site connecting radical librarians with each other and with those who might need their services; now chapters across the country host meetups where librarians and archivists discuss ways they can use their free time and skills to fight for social justice and equality. (Lorberfeld, Lederman, and Martinez are all members of the New York collective.)

shortly after the inauguration to offer resources and support. In Storytime Underground, a Facebook group for youth services librarians, members have been sharing ideas for books about refugees, ways to celebrate World Hijab day, and protest signs for displays.

> **In a political climate where truth is dismissed, it can be difficult to figure out where politics end and moral, or even professional, imperatives begin.**

But not all librarians can resist so openly. Ana, 31, has been a public librarian in a "very rich, very red" county in Florida for the past two years, but she's originally from Puerto Rico. (She has requested we omit her last name.) She and her coworkers know being anti-Trump puts them in the minority where they live; over the phone, she recounted to me how, after the election, they huddled, cried, and comforted each other. This is a key difference between working for public and private libraries, and it gets to the core of a debate that has rattled the industry for decades: Should a library be politically neutral?

For Ana, who serves and is answerable to a community largely happy with the election results, resistance manifests creatively. When her library was celebrating its 15th anniversary, just about a month after the election, she suggested they throw a *quinceañera*. The community, and the library funders, were thrilled.

"I got a band to play Latin music," she told me over the phone. "We held bilingual programs all throughout the month. The city is relatively diverse, but the leadership is not, so I did it to showcase and highlight Latino culture, to celebrate that diversity."

It was a way of fighting for an issue she cares about—Latino visibility and empowerment—without being partisan. But in a political climate where truth is dismissed, diversity is disdained, and free access to resources is a radical notion, it can be difficult to figure out where politics end and moral, or even professional, imperatives begin.

"There are things that librarians and libraries absolutely cannot remain neutral on, including defending intellectual privacy and intellectual freedom," said Linden How—which is to say that sometimes, the very act of a librarian doing her job can resemble activism.

"Librarians decide what gets preserved and how information is classified, which inherently affects how people find that information and who is likely to find it," said Lorberfeld. It's the *who*—the almost sacred relationship between librarian and patron—that inspires these librarians to resist a status quo that aims to further disenfranchise the people they serve.

Chantez Neymoss of Charlotte, North Carolina, echoed the sentiment, describing librarians as "radical protectors of information and their communities." It's not hard to see how political protest can feel like an extension of the job. When hateful rhetoric encourages hate crimes, the preservation of safe spaces and cultural exchange is even more vital. When "alternative" facts are legitimized, information literacy must be emphasized. When the future of public education is under threat, continued access to free and unlimited information is paramount. And when a travel ban promises to keep out immigrants and refugees, those who serve immigrant and refugee communities are impelled to fight it.

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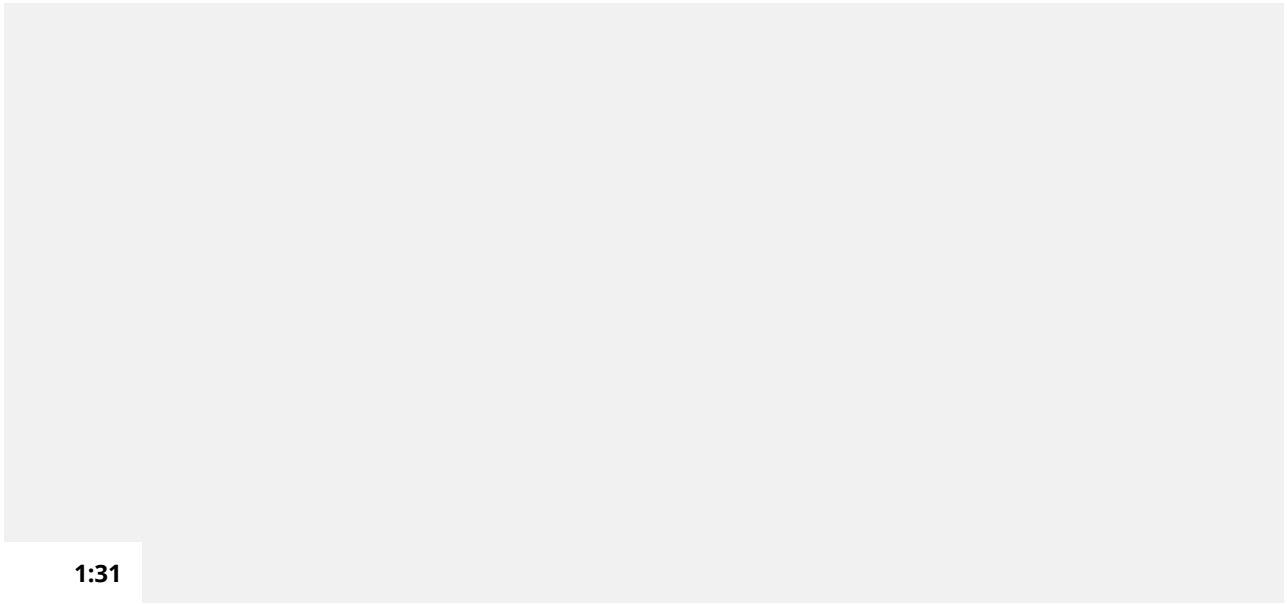

Faces of Resistance: Blair Imani

Sex, drugs, culture, politics, witchcraft.

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HISTORY OF

What Our Obsession with Tragic, Beautiful, Mentally Ill Women Says About Us

Bethy Squires
OCT 20 2017, 12:27PM

Since the Victorian days—where "hysterics" confined in institutions were forced to dress and act like Ophelia—mental illness in women has wrongly been framed as something beautiful and unknowable.

Photo of a patient with 'sleeping hysteria' and a still from 'The Virgin Suicides'

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surprisingly consistent: messy hair, disjointed speech, glassy eyes, inappropriate nudity. For centuries, men have reframed mental illness as something romantic, even sexy. Based in the antiquated diagnosis of "hysteria," men's representation of women's mental illness has overshadowed the stories of their (often non-consenting) muses.

It's not a coincidence that *Hamlet*'s **Ophelia** cleaves perfectly to this stereotype. Her characterization heavily influenced the first psychologists. "Every mental physician of moderately extensive experience must have seen many Ophelias," wrote Dr. John Charles Bucknill, the president of the UK's Medico-Psychological Association, in 1859. Dr. **Hugh Diamond**, the superintendent of the Surrey County Asylum women's ward, even dressed his patients as Ophelia for photographs; the most famous of these images depicts an inmate in his asylum wrapped in a cloak with a garland of laurel **he has placed on her head**. Dr. Diamond used portraits of his patients in therapy—it was believed that photographs could "shock" the patient into wellness, the theory going that being confronted with their own face would bring them back to reality. Actresses who were portraying Ophelia on stage were also invited to visit asylums to observe "Ophelias" in their domains, presumably for artistic inspiration.

One place where actresses, medical students, artists, socialites, and other slack-jaws gawpers could observe hysterical women was at the **Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital** in Paris. At the time, hysteria was defined as a disease of the reproductive organs. Excessive desire—for sex and/or childbirth—was considered the likely root of the disease. Deception, mood swings, and emotional outbursts were **widely recognized symptoms**. Suggested cures included **horseback riding and childbirth**. Physician Jean Martin Charcot, director of the Salpêtrière and **father of neurology**, was one of the first doctors to advocate that the cause of hysteria was in the brain and not the loins. Still, his work on the disease was still highly sexualized.

Charcot demonstrating a patient with hysteria. Photo via Wikipedia Commons

Every Tuesday, Charcot would show off his patients like a lion tamer at a circus. Patients with twitches were given caps with long feathers that would jerk wildly with every tremor. Patients with hysteria were put through "experiments" that more closely resembled stage hypnotism than anything with medial merit. Charcot played hysterical patients like someone playing the ***Jurassic Park* theme on melodica**, inducing hysterical fits on command. If the patient didn't act hysterical in the way expected of her, she risked being thrown into the general population of so-called insane women where the cure rate was **less than 10 percent**.

One "skit" deemed a big hit by interns at the hospital and recounted by Asti Hustvedt in her book **Medical Muses** was called the "*mariage a trois*." In it, a hysterical patient was hypnotized and "told that each side of her body, her left side and her right, had its own husband and was reminded that it was her duty to be faithful to both of them," Hustvedt writes. The two husbands would then fondle their respective half, which the patient received with "marked pleasure," according to one of the gropers. "But if one dared encroach on the side of the other, watch out! When I ventured too far, I received a whopping slap." Any physical or mental discomfort the women of the Salpêtrière suffered took a backseat to the spectacle of the Tuesday lectures and the titillation their suggestibility provided.

Charcot also partnered with artist Paul Richer to document the **poses a hysteric goes through** during attacks in a series of etchings. These artists renderings were cribbed not only from Charcot's observations, but from representations of religious ecstasy in early medieval art. In the preface to his and Richer's book of hysteric poses, Charcot draws a line St. Catherine of Sienna to his era's hysterics, trying to create a so-called "universal" theory of hysteria. Many of these poses were, of course, captured in states

Photos of patients with "hysteria." Photo via Wikipedia Commons

The hysteria diagnosis **fell out of favor in the 20th century**, in part due to the activism of feminists and mental health advocates, but the romantic mythology of the mentally ill woman remained very much intact. Film became the site of a ubiquitous stock figure figure—the tragic, beautiful, woman struggling with some highly gendered form of mental illness, which I'll refer to as the Sexy Doomed Sad Girl.

Postwar Hollywood **liberally used** the Sexy Doomed Sad Girl in films like *Vertigo* and *Lilith,* where a woman's allure was equal to her grim predestined fate. "The twist is, she's beautiful," explains **Bechdelcast** co-host Jamie Loftus when asked about this archetype. "She's so sad, but she's beautiful. Any time a mentally ill character is not attractive, when is that character saved? When is that character given the correct amount of attention in the plot, or by anyone in the movie?" These films are more about the men who love a Sad Girl, and less about real mental illness. At the beginning of *Vertigo,* for instance, James Stewart's character is told that his blonde ice queen has been possessed by the spirit of her suicidal grandmother. Stewart isn't deterred by this frankly bonkers pronouncement. Rather, he becomes so enamored of his doomed heroine that he molds his next girlfriend into her suicidal image.

movies would rather look at women than analyze them — except when the lady in question is (at least apparently) a little screwy," writes Terrence Rafferty in his **review** of *A Dangerous Method.* Rafferty argues that that film, as a medium, tends to concern itself with the inner thoughts of a beautiful woman only if she's insane, and to only care about the insane if they are beautiful women. Examples he cites include Olivia de Havilland in *The Snake Pit*, Jessica Lange in *Frances,* Naomi Watts in *Mulholland Drive*, and Natalie Portman in *Black Swan.*

"Some of the movies' disturbed women get the proper treatment — psychiatric and cinematic — and many do not," he argues, "but even when the analysis fails, the looking remains." Loftus agrees with his characterization, citing the dreamy aesthetic of *The Virgin Suicides* as a notable example. "Film is visual medium, and it's got to look like something," she says. "But it's always going to look too nice. *The Virgin Suicides* looks too nice. It's very gauzy... there's a lot of millennial pink in there, slow motion, an indie soundtrack. Mental illness shouldn't be scored with The Shins."

> **"Any time a mentally ill character is not attractive, when is that character saved? When is that character given the correct amount of attention in the plot, or by anyone in the movie?"**

Our tendency to focus on "the looking" has continued to the modern day, and proliferated into other forms of media: The Netflix original series *13 Reasons Why*, which came out earlier this year, specifically frames a girl's sexual assault (and ensuing PTSD and suicide) as a scavenger hunt for the male protagonist. "Instead of showcasing the tragic ending to a life, we witness a school become captivated by the drama of suicide," writes Alexa Curtis in ***Rolling Stone***.

There are, of course, portrayals of women's mental illness that do not fall into stereotypes that should have died with the hysteria diagnosis. And when women who struggle with mental illness tell their own stories, they can bring unprecedented nuance to the subject. In the second half of the 20th century, many mentally ill women took control of their own stories through memoir. Sylvia Plath's semi-fictional *The Bell Jar*, the poems of Anne Sexton, and works like *Prozac Nation* by Elizabeth Wurtzel and *The Center Cannot Hold* by Elyn Saks chronicled the experience firsthand;

The resulting works finally give women authorship over their own experiences: In Susanna Kaysen's memoir *Girl, Interrupted,* for instance, she fights back against her borderline personality disorder diagnosis and hospitalization. While admitting that she needed help and was, in her own words, "insane," she doesn't let her doctors off the hook for taking away her agency. A chapter called "Do You Believe Him Or Me" is devoted to proving her doctor was lying when he said he spoke to her for three hours before recommending institutionalization. Works like this force the reader to confront mental illness and all its messy complications. As more women write and produce their own shows, the representation of their experiences will also improve. "*Lady Dynamite* gets it as right as I've seen it," says Loftus, referring to Maria Bamford's semi-autobiographical Netflix comedy. "Even though it's represented in a silly, manic way, at least it's represented as a process and not a phase."

Mental illness isn't a phase. It can be silly, painful, gross—any number of descriptors. ("Sexy" isn't a good one.) It's a deeply complex topic; anyone rearing *Girl, Interrupted* understands that Kaysen's life isn't all flower garlands and staring off into the middle distance. Hysteria sufferers at the Salpêtrière didn't get to tell their stories, and were instead relegated to actors playing themselves in someone else's account of their purported "madness." When women are in control of their own story, the truth comes through in all its unsexy, messy glory. That is a different kind of beauty.

MENTAL ILLNESS HISTORY HYSTERIA

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ASTRO GUIDE

Daily Horoscope: October 20, 2017

The Moon is in Scorpio today.

By **Annabel Gat**; illustrated by **Robin Eisenberg**
OCT 20 2017, 12:00AM

The Moon in Scorpio meets Mercury at 7:23 AM, helping us articulate our many complicated emotions this morning. A dreamy vibe will descend once the Moon mingles with Neptune at 8:15 PM.

All Times EST.

Libra

The Moon is in Scorpio today, lighting up the sector of your chart that rules money, bringing you news on the financial front and helping you come up with a creative solution to a problem this evening.

Scorpio

evening.

Sagittarius

Be gentle with yourself today, Sagittarius: The Moon is in sensitive Scorpio, and it's activating a highly psychic and private sector of your chart. Spend some time alone, listening to your inner voice.

Capricorn

It's a wonderful day to connect with friends— early on, some helpful conversations will arrive, and a creative energy will flow this evening.

Aquarius

The Moon is in Scorpio today, illuminating the sector of your chart that rules worldly success. It's a brilliantly creative day!

Pisces

The Moon is in fellow Water sign Scorpio today, encouraging you to look at the big picture, instead of getting lost (you're always lost, Pisces) in the details.

The Moon is in intense, emotional Scorpio today, Aries, lighting up the sector of your chart that rules intimacy. Get clear on what you need from your partners.

Taurus

Your focus is on relationships today, thanks to the Moon spending time in Scorpio, your opposite sign. A partner has something important to tell you this morning.

Gemini

You're focused on getting work done today, Gemini. It's a wonderful morning to get organized, and a creatively inspired evening.

Cancer

The Moon is in fellow Water sign Scorpio, lighting up the sector of your chart that rules romance and creativity—expect magic on these fronts today.

Leo

Your focus is on your home and family today, thanks to the Moon in private, emotional Water sign Scorpio. Reflect on your boundaries today.

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The Moon is in Scorpio today, encouraging you to clearly communicate your emotions, even though doing so may make you feel vulnerable.

What's in the stars for you in October? Read your monthly horoscope here.

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The History of the Vibrator

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