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THE NEVER BEFORE TOLD STORY OF THE MAN IN THE INFAMOUS 'FUCK THE DRAFT' POSTERS

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Of the many stories of official government suppression that came out of the Vietnam War era protest movements, one of the most compelling is the saga of Kiyoshi Kuromiya's indelible "Fuck the Draft" poster. Kuromiya procured—how is unclear—a photo of a hippie burning his draft card, looking almost religiously captivated by the flame, and set his slogan in the plainest possible type. It was a hit, but his mail order sales gave feds seeking to suppress its message a strong angle of attack—using the mails to send obscene materials over state lines. The designer spent three years fighting those obscenity charges, and my *Dangerous Minds* colleague Jason Schafer crafted [a fascinating deep-dive of that story](#) about two and a half years ago. I unconditionally recommend reading it before proceeding here.

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A crucial part of that story has gone untold until now—the perspective of Bill Greenshields, the man in the photograph. He’s only ever been publicly identified as the face of “Fuck the Draft” once before, practically in passing in a 1968 issue of an underground magazine. He’s agreed to tell his story for the first time to Dangerous Minds, to mark the 50th anniversary of his immortal rebellious action—the photo was taken on October 21, 1967, at the notorious war protest at the Pentagon, the one during which Abbie Hoffman famously attempted to levitate the building.

From our partners at 

Dangerous Minds was put in contact with Greenshields by longtime Detroit art/punk provocateur Tim Caldwell ([we’ve told you about him before.](#)) Caldwell has known Greenshields for decades, but only just found out about his friend’s connection to the poster. It’s a story best told in Caldwell’s words:

Tim Caldwell: I was at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit for this exhibit called “[Sonic Rebellion](#),” for the 50th anniversary of the [Detroit riots in July of 1967](#). There are all these artifacts, like magazines, protest posters, books, and photographs, and people’s interpretations of all that in their artwork. And also there’s this idea of music as a force of expressive resistance. And there was this poster of my friend Bill. It was really weird, because he’d always told me he’d had a very different life before we met, and I didn’t really know what he looked like as a teenager—he’s almost 70 and I met him about 30 years ago, doing films and things like that. But so I saw this poster, in a case, and I was like “WOW, that’s him!” He looks kind of goofy and crazed in it, because that’s just the moment they caught him, he wasn’t posing or anything. I hadn’t seen him in about five or seven years, so I called a mutual friend who’s a musician who he knew Bill from film societies going back to the ‘80s. And he confirmed that it was Bill in the poster, and I asked if he was OK with talking about it, since he’d never mentioned it. So finally I called Bill and, yeah, it’s him! And every time we talked after that he’d have more and more crazy stories about stuff he did in the protest era that I’d never heard about before, he had this whole secret life before I met him—I started to wonder how well I’d really known him for those 30 years!



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Bill Greenshields reliving a key moment from his past

Greenshields broke his decades-long silence on his experience in a phone conversation last weekend.

DM: So let's start at the beginning—the protest itself. What were the circumstances, and do you know who shot the picture?

Bill Greenshield: I have no idea who took the picture or how I was selected to be on a poster. There were some people around with cameras, some of whom I thought were probably government spooks.

DM: Some of them probably were!

BG: There were friendlies too, with cameras, though. This occurred at the Pentagon on October 21, 1967, and it was part of the march on the Pentagon.

DM: This was the day that Yippies tried to levitate the Pentagon?

BG: Yeah, that occurred at the same time, you might say, around sundown. The march started at the Lincoln Memorial. People were bussed in from all over the country, and it was kind of a virgin thing, the first really big national march. If you've been to the Lincoln Memorial, you know there's a giant long reflecting pool between that and the Washington Monument obelisk. At that particular time, I was part of a group of draft resisters in the Detroit area, and one of us had made a mock-up of a sign, a really large draft card. The name on it was "Loony Bird Johnson," since LBJ was president at the time. Another fellow and I took off our shoes and sock and walked into the reflecting pool, which was slippery as hell. So we're slipping and sliding, trying to be really careful, taking this gigantic draft card out into the middle of it, and suddenly everyone looked a lot smaller, except Lincoln, who was still very imposing. We got out a butane lighter and tried to light it, and it took a while, because there was a breeze and it was poster board. But we got it lit and immolated the whole thing. Then slid all the way back and put our shoes on to go hear all the speeches.

Then there was a march across the Potomac to the Pentagon. I don't know how many miles it was, but it was slow going. I don't know how many people were there but it was a long line of them, and the first people there went to where the public entrance was, that large staircase, and they went up there and got stuck up there, surrounded by Federal Marshals, who were not very nice [laughs], with billy clubs and whatnot, and Federal troops, who were our age, and were very nice. They were armed, but you could talk with them. It was starting to get dark, and like I said, they were stuck up there. Then some of the Yippies were doing like an invocation to levitate the Pentagon...



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Direct Expose

DM: So did it go up?

BG: Well, *WE* levitated! [laughs] Anyway, what happened was someone threw a rope up to the next level, because the stairs were blocked, and nobody was grabbing it to climb it, and I thought "what the hell," and I started to go up. And as I'm going up I'm thinking various things, like "I hope someone up there keeps holding the other end of this," and "A sniper could pick me off pretty good right now." And when I got all the way up some people saw me and helped me over the ledge. People were pretty crammed together, and about 50 of them had put their draft cards in a soldier's helmet and burned them all, and I had just missed it. So I took mine out and lit it up individually, and it lit a lot better than the big cardboard one. That was when someone took my picture. And that picture somehow got to Kiyoshi Kuromiya who made the poster.

I had no knowledge of the poster until an article in May of 1968, in *The Fifth Estate*, an underground paper that still exists, by the way, Harvey Ovshinsky was the editor. I was a childhood friend of his, all the way through junior high school, and he recognized me on the poster right away, and even named me in the article.



[click to spawn a more readable enlargement](#)

DM: The look on your face in that poster is a little demented, like you're some kind of twisted fire-worshipper.

BG: Yeah, like there's this GLEE of some kind! That's probably why it was selected, but you gotta remember, I had just climbed this rope after walking from the Lincoln Monument to the Pentagon, and so I probably WAS really enjoying burning that card at the time. [laughs]

DM: So after the poster came out, the Federal obscenity charges came up against Kuromiya. Did the feds try finding you, too?

BG: Yes, they did. Here's what happened: under the U.S. Code title 18 section 1461, postal code, it was considered an obscene, indecent and crime-inciting poster. The ACLU defended Kuromiya, who was arrested on April 11, 1968. He was handcuffed at both his hands and his waist, and forced to walk seven blocks down Martin St. in Philadelphia to the Federal Building where bail was set at \$500. And if I remember my facts correctly, the case was overturned in 1971. The ACLU used a precedent: some guy had "FUCK THE DRAFT" hand written on his jacket, and was arrested and indicted for obscenity. The defense was that the statement is Constitutionally protected and cannot be used to convict because no-one could possibly believe that the defendant was suggesting sexual intercourse with the Selective Service System.

DM: [laughing] So the context of the "fuck" was non-sexual and so not obscene? Is that basically what it came down to?

BG: Yes. That was the basis of the whole argument, suggesting sexual intercourse—which of course is impossible—with the Selective Service System! It's not something you could literally do.

DM: I'll bet some people got high enough to try.

BG: I'm *sure* they did.

DM: So wait, now, you said the article in *The Fifth Estate* appeared in May of 1968, but the poster artist got arrested in April of 1968? Was the obscenity case the topic of the article in which they named you as the subject of the photo? That seems jurisprudentially ill-advised.

BG: Right! Like I said, as soon as they had knowledge of the poster and the arrests, May 1st was when the paper came out and April 11 was when the artist was arrested. Now I saw, in early May, the article. It had a picture of the poster, which I hadn't seen before, and they printed it backwards so the "FUCK" wouldn't be obscene, it would say "KCUF." My parents, friends of mine, my employers, places I frequented, were all approached by the FBI. But where I was living, that was pretty ambiguous, or they probably would have come straight to me. So I said well, discretion is the better part of valor here, so I decided to get out of Detroit, hitchhike out west and keep moving around. A moving target was less likely to be hit. I just didn't want to deal with these



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History 101

guys after what they were doing to Kuromiya.

So I wandered around Indian reservations, like the Navajo nation, Zuni Pueblo, later a Lakota reservation, then became a migrant worker with a lot of Mexicans, who were mostly Yaqui Indians who didn't speak Spanish. I wandered all up and down the West Coast, up to Washington, down to Los Angeles, of course spent time in the Bay Area, and I finally wanted to make my way back to see what was going on, and I got news—two couples who'd visited New York had come to see me, and they told me they saw me in New York. I go, no I haven't been to New York, you didn't see me. But they said oh, no, you were IN New York! They smile and tell me there was this area where they were building these huge buildings, and there's a baffling fence around all these blocks so you can't get into the construction site, and the poster with me on it was all the way around it for blocks and blocks. You couldn't miss it. Those buildings were the World Trade Center Twin Towers.

There were other incidents where I came across the poster, of course. I never had a copy because I never felt I needed one, I was in it. Anonymity of the subject was kind of what the poster went for, and Kuromiya said in an interview that he thought the person in the poster was from Detroit, but that he was either in jail or dead, neither of which happened, thank God! You can only imagine putting yourself in my place, this thing you had nothing to do with—and of course I did what I did willingly and I'd back it up today, and if someone had asked me to voluntarily be photographed burning my draft card for a poster I would have said "sure"—but nobody asked me, it was just done, so it was a surprise, and I've kept it under my hat for many years. It's nothing to brag about, really, I was just committed to the cause, and it took years after that for the war to finally be over. So many people died, I had friends who went, some all gung-ho and some against it, some didn't make it back, so I felt it was worthwhile doing what I did in opposing it.



BONUS! Here's some pretty amazing footage recently posted to YouTube by the [MC5's Wayne Kramer](#). It depicts the band performing at the 1968 Chicago DNC protests, and a "Fuck the Draft" poster is clearly seen at about 2:59. It's a selection of highlights from about a half hour of footage, which one can hope Kramer (or someone) will see fit to put out in its entirety.

Long Lost MC5 Footage! Democratic National ...



Deepest gratitude to Tex Newman for setting this post in motion.

Previously on *Dangerous Minds*:

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A.T. Murray • 2 years ago

This is the coolest thing I've read on the Internet all year (2017) long. **Hacker News** sent me here. A year after the depicted glorious event, I was drafted out of U Cal Berkeley graduate school into the U.S. Army, but not before I marched in a "GI's for Peace" protest march



[see more](#)

4  |  • Reply • Share ›



Em An → A.T. Murray • 2 years ago

They drafted folks out of grad school? What did you do? Make maps-n-shit?

1  |  • Reply • Share ›



A.T. Murray → Em An • 2 years ago

No, I worked with nuclear weapons. Now at **UW Daily/Bulletin Board/Announcements** I am organizing a spy ring to overthrow the illegitimate, incompetent, evil Chinese government.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Em An → A.T. Murray · 2 years ago

Good luck with that. You some kinda schizophrenic?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jimson · 2 years ago · edited

I think they should bring back the draft, or basically "everybody has to do two years community service", and no outs either-- if you dont want to serve in the military then you serve in the Peace Corps or build homes for the homeless, etc., and wealthy families can't buy their way out of it, either Richie Rich Jr. goes to Iraq or he goes to Ethiopia or Appalachia.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Charles Robinson → jimson · a year ago

You could do that, but if you're going to draft people into national service, draft money and corporations too. No one should be obligated to provide free labor for someone else's profit making enterprise. Remove the opportunities for extraction of economic rents out of maintaining the military and see how quickly foreign policy becomes less aggressive.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Masterskrain · 2 years ago

"Fuck the Draft"

Just declare that you have "Bone Spurs" or some other MADE-UP excuse...

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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Em An · 2 years ago

DAMMIT.

I was all set and ready to declare that picture an early photo of Thomas Pynchon (ie, 'hiding in plain sight') but you had to go ruin it with the rest of the article.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



BillClitone · 2 years ago

a story about nobody, who did nothing, to effect no one.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Em An → BillClitone · 2 years ago

...that everyone enjoyed reading nonetheless. including you...

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



mickrussom · 2 years ago

People like this should be in prison. Or spent time in a chain gang. These degenerated created a nation half full of traitors who lick the boots of Islam and love marx.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Lacombe57 · [→ mickrussom](#) · 2 years ago · [edited](#)

Yeah indeed! Heel spurs really! Can't enlist but can still pay golf. Off with their heads!

10 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Em An · [→ mickrussom](#) · 2 years ago

And did you notice something? WE LOST THE VIETNAM WAR, and Vietnam and China never attacked the US or tried to export Marxism across the pacific ocean.

You really are a silly fascist dipshit, aren't you?

7 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Cowicide · [→ mickrussom](#) · 2 years ago

2/10 troll

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



jrobertclark · [→ mickrussom](#) · 2 years ago · [edited](#)

Oh, gawd. Trump trolls are even spewing their ridiculousness on a serious, thinking-person's site like Dangerous Minds. Is nothing sacred?

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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