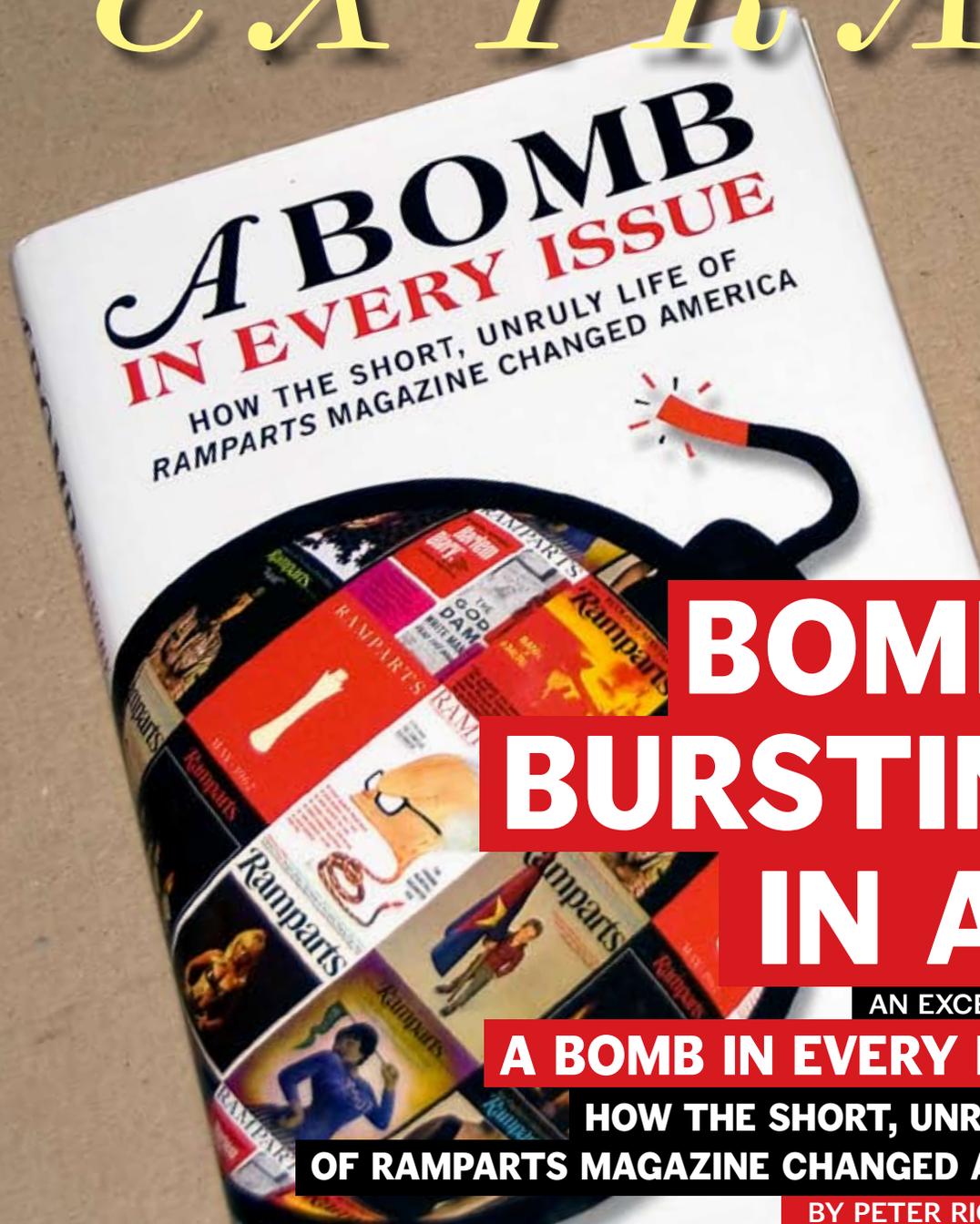


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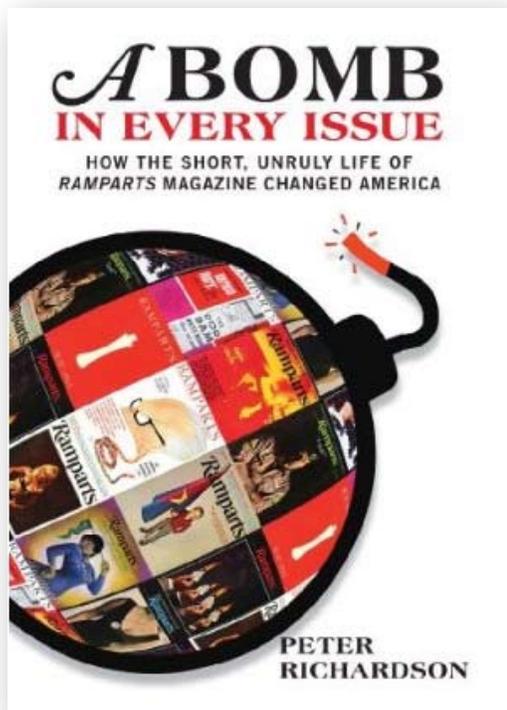
**BOMBS  
BURSTING  
IN AIR**

AN EXCERPT FROM

**A BOMB IN EVERY ISSUE:**

**HOW THE SHORT, UNRULY LIFE  
OF RAMPARTS MAGAZINE CHANGED AMERICA**

**BY PETER RICHARDSON**



## THE AUTHOR

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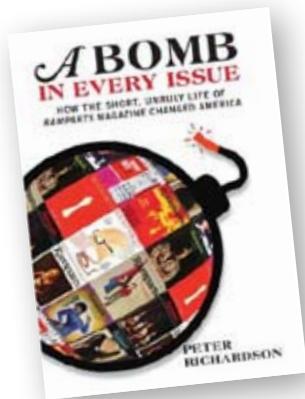
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# BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR: RAMPARTS MAGAZINE AND THE CRISIS OF 1968

AN EXCERPT FROM

**A BOMB IN EVERY ISSUE: HOW THE SHORT, UNRULY  
LIFE OF RAMPARTS MAGAZINE CHANGED AMERICA**

BY PETER RICHARDSON



Founded in 1962 as a Catholic literary quarterly, *Ramparts* magazine quickly morphed into America’s first “radical slick.” Under publisher Edward Keating and executive editor Warren Hinckle, the San Francisco muckraker took on both civil rights issues and the hidebound aspects of the Catholic Church. But when art director Dugald Stermer and Berkeley radical Robert Scheer joined the magazine, its combination of effective showmanship, radical politics, and visual flair vaulted it into national prominence. In 1967, it won the prestigious George Polk Memorial Award for excellence in magazine reporting, primarily for its investigative reporting on the CIA’s covert activities in Vietnam. Although it folded in 1975, the magazine loosened the breath of American journalism and created room for new magazines, including *Mother Jones* and *I*, both of which were launched by *Ramparts* veterans. This essay, adapted from a chapter of Peter Richardson’s *A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America*, details the magazine’s activities in 1968, one of the most fractious years in a tumultuous decade.



If 1968 was the year America had a nervous breakdown, *Ramparts* was its most reliable fever chart. The national crisis had complex and interlocking causes, including policy failures, mounting frustrations, social ruptures, and political violence. Most of these developments were reflected – and in some cases, aggravated – by *Ramparts* and its coverage that year. As the nation plunged into crisis, so did the magazine. *Ramparts* began 1968 in the coils of conspiracy theories, became embroiled in the nation's most controversial and violent domestic conflicts, and finished the year in fractious, chaotic collapse.

The political crisis had been brewing for years. Emotionally, the country was still recovering from the shock of the Kennedy assassination, which for many Americans had never been explained satisfactorily. In its aftermath, President Johnson signed sweeping civil rights and Great Society legislation, but he also escalated the conflict in Vietnam and thereby made violence a staple in the na-

“**Emotionally, the country was still recovering from the shock of the Kennedy assassination, which for many Americans had never been explained satisfactorily**

tional media diet. As American soldiers decimated Vietnam and perished by the thousands, the major parties mulishly refused to acknowledge what administration insiders already knew – that military victory was impossible. Opinion polls showed that more and more Americans opposed the war, but even in liberal San Francisco, most still supported the effort despite mounting evidence that the Johnson administration hadn't been truthful about the war's origins or prospects.

*Ramparts* had exposed the official mendacity as forcefully as any media outlet. But the New Left had made little significant progress on its primary issue, and it blamed Johnson and mainstream liberals for that failure. After several years of organizing and protest, some movement leaders concluded that they had exhausted the opportunities provided by conventional politics. Radical leftists, who had never held out hope for electoral politics, redoubled their efforts to promote direct action. *Ramparts* fell somewhere between these two positions.

## BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR

Scheer's 1966 campaign had targeted major flaws in America's liberal consensus, but by 1968, the magazine had recoded those flaws as crimes, and liberalism itself became a key target. Postwar America provided opportunity and prosperity to many, but it also withheld them from those who needed them most. Moreover, its leaders lied about the true aims of the nation's foreign policy, and many young people were paying the ultimate price for that deception.

From *Ramparts'* perspective, liberals looked even worse than conservatives. "Cold War liberalism," a December 1967 editorial argued, "lost even the pretense of vitality in the pursuit of truth and change, and instead came to acquire the stench of decay." Grassroots liberals had become "reluctant revolutionaries," and a younger generation raised on the principles of liberalism was "outraged by the crimes committed ostensibly in their name."

In the February 1968 issue, Carl Oglesby extended the argument:

We who are radicals have a task much different than the salvation of liberalism – to champion the values which made us radicals to begin with ... This is no time for taking cover on behalf of somebody else's disagreeable vision for the good-enough society.

Instead, Oglesby argued, it was time to "transform every attack upon ourselves into a still happier and more piercing attack upon those whose crimes created us." This was both a call to arms and an origin myth for young radicals. Oglesby stopped short of the more sensational pronouncements advanced by his peers. "Number One on the Yippie program," Jerry Rubin famously told one student group, "is kill your parents." But Ogles-



**After years of cobbling together an unstable coalition of blue-collar workers, ethnic minorities, intellectuals, and conservative southern Democrats, many liberals had learned that throwing bombs was easier than catching them**

by's analysis assumed a backdrop of intergenerational conflict.

What to do now? On this point, *Ramparts* joined an emerging New Left consensus: turn up the militancy. That consensus moved young radicals even further away from liberals, many of whom had misgivings about the New Left's penchant for protest and distrust of power. Old-school liberals like Clark Kerr and Pat Brown came of age during the New Deal, when the federal government was an engine for progressive change. For them, power wasn't something that you only spoke the truth to; it was something you accrued and deployed to build new institutions and enact progressive reforms. Although Johnson and others had abused that power, liberals were uneager to hand it over to Republicans like Ronald Reagan or Richard Nixon, who had launched their political careers by attacking or persecuting leftists. And after years of cobbling together an unstable coalition of blue-collar workers, ethnic minorities, intellectuals, and conservative southern Democrats, many liberals had learned that throwing bombs was easier than catching them.

But with body counts rising and millions of young men facing conscription in a dubious war, frustration among antiwar activists reached a boiling point. When students returned to Berkeley in fall 1967, they were ready to act. Bay Area radicals organized a street action to blockade the Oakland Induction Center for draftees. A nonviolent sit-in on Monday would be followed by more militant action the following days. The actions were announced in a telegram to Governor Reagan asking him to shut down the induction center. "If you don't, we will," the telegram read. In a later article for *Ramparts*, Reese Erlich and Terence Cannon described their

telegram's tone as "good New Left arrogance." As the event's organizers finalized their plans, they learned that Che Guevara, the revolutionary icon, had been captured and executed in Bolivia.

The first day of Stop the Draft Week came off as planned. The sit-in resulted in the arrest of 124 protestors, including Joan Baez, all of whom walked peacefully into the paddy wagons. The second day, known afterward as Bloody Tuesday, featured a clash between 2,500 protestors and club-swinging cops, and street confrontations continued throughout the week. The action managed to delay busloads of inductees only by a few hours, but organizer Frank Bardacke counted it a success: "We blocked traffic and changed the streets from thoroughfares of business into a place for people to walk, talk, argue, and even dance. We felt liberated and we called our barricaded streets liberated territory." Such was the shift from protest to resistance.

In January 1968, the Alameda County authorities indicted some protest leaders, who became known as the Oakland 7. In retrospect, the charges against them sound largely symbolic: conspiracy to trespass, to commit a public nuisance, and to resist, delay, and obstruct police officers. The defendants included Erlich, who began working for *Ramparts* after his suspension from Cal. The Oakland 7 were eventually acquitted, but the protests were just getting started.

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*Ramparts* began 1968 in typical fashion; the January issue featured a story on the Kennedy assassination, a piece by Maurice Zeitlin on the Israeli left, and passages from Che's memoir. But letters to the editor indicated that some readers felt



**The *Ramparts* office, he wrote later, "soon became a library, research center, information retrieval system, office, and all-night hot dog stand for free-lance assassination buffs."**

the magazine had crossed a line or two. One complained about the magazine's position on Israel, and two objected to the magazine's language, which, in the aftermath of the Lenny Bruce obscenity trial in San Francisco, had become increasingly earthy. One reader claimed that a recent issue contained "one 'motherfucker' too many."

Long before 1968, the JFK assassination had become a favorite subject for Hinckle. Regarding the Warren Report as a soporific, he plunged the magazine into a dense thicket of conspiracy theories. The *Ramparts* office, he wrote later, "soon became a library, research center, information retrieval system, office, and all-night hot dog stand for free-lance assassination buffs." One intrepid investigator made an especially strong impression on him.

One of the most horrific experiences of my life was when a dogged female sleuth trapped me in the men's room, where I was sitting in the morning after a long evening of drinking. She lounged against the urinal, lecturing me for half an hour through the stall door about the conspiratorial significance of Oswald's having shaved off all his pubic hair.

Scheer eventually banished the conspiracy theorists from the building, but Hinckle's appetite for sensation meant the stories would continue.

Led by Bill Turner, a team of *Ramparts* writers and researchers sorted through dozens of fantastical scenarios. In November 1966, the third anniversary of the assassination, *Ramparts* featured the work of small-town Texas editor Penn Jones. Hinckle described Jones as "a wash-and-wear version of Burgess Meredith," but he accepted John Howard

## BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR

Griffin's assessment of Jones as scrappy and reliable. Jones's work called attention to a string of mysterious deaths of Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby associates, but few other outlets credited his conclusions.

For the cover of that issue, Stermer asked a local manufacturer to make a jigsaw puzzle out of Kennedy's photograph. Stermer removed some of the pieces, photographed the puzzle, and ran the image on what would become one of the magazine's most memorable covers. Keating suggested that they pluck out the pieces where the bullets had actually entered Kennedy's head, but Stermer refused.

That issue's contents further distinguished *Ramparts* from other national outlets. The book review section included a notice on a four-volume opus called *Time of Assassins* by Ulov G.K. LeBoeuf. According to the reviewers, *New Yorker* writer Jacob Brackman and co-author Faye Levine, only LeBoeuf "had the courage not only to fly aggressively in the face of official arguments, but also to offer a recognizably new theory of his own." With that compliment paid, Brackman and Levine offered some cavils.

Where he falls short (as in the thinly veiled suggestion that Aldous Huxley, also dying on November 22, was in fact poisoned by a female FBI agent working as a servant in the Huxley household as part of a scheduled psychedelic purge), one has the feeling that he has not had time to amass sufficient evidence and has decided, perhaps unwisely, to commit himself in print on the basis of intuition — as yet unproven, but not irrevocably so!

From there, Brackman and Levine went on to list a string of increasingly



**The day after the magazine appeared on the newsstands, orders for the nonexistent book began flowing in to retailers, and over 300 readers sent checks to *Ramparts* in the vain hope of acquiring the four-volume set**

nonsensical bits of evidence purportedly catalogued in the book. ("Exhibit 226, III: 581: a James Beard cookbook from the pantry of Peggy Goldwater with a recipe for cinnamon rolls circled in red.")

The day after the magazine appeared on the newsstands, orders for the nonexistent book began flowing in to retailers, and over 300 readers sent checks to *Ramparts* in the vain hope of acquiring the four-volume set. Some fellow writers fell for the hoax, too; Gene Marine received an urgent call from one reporter asking for LeBoeuf's contact information, and references to the work began to appear in other media accounts and bibliographies, including one published by the *Boston Globe*.

In January 1967, David Welsh and David Lifton's "The Case for Three Assassins," added to the burgeoning assassination literature, and in two consecutive issues that spring, Bill Turner profiled New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison and advanced his argument that Lee Harvey Oswald was a CIA agent and fall guy. Returning to Garrison and his team in January 1968, Turner concluded that there was "no question that they have uncovered a conspiracy," though the nature of that conspiracy remained unclear. Turner's reconstruction was as shaggy as Castro's beard and begging for an application of Occam's Razor. But the assassination story resisted any efforts to tame it, and thanks in part to *Ramparts*, it had taken on a self-propelled media life of its own. Just as the New Left had helped take down liberalism without replacing it with anything stronger, *Ramparts* undermined the Warren Report without establishing a broadly acceptable counter-narrative.

Hinkle was an ideal audience for Garrison, whom he described as "cool, sharp,

informed, confident, convincing.” His last contact with Garrison was a telephone call in November 1968. Directing Hinckle to take the call from the mailroom telephone, which was less likely to be tapped, Garrison explained that three aerospace firms had put up the money to assassinate Kennedy. Hinckle dutifully pulled out his pencil and wrote down the three culprits – Lockheed, Boeing, and General Dynamics – as well as the employees who set up the murder.

After hanging up, Hinckle went through his top-secret routine.

I typed up a brief memorandum of the facts as Garrison had relayed them and burned my notes in an oversized ashtray I used for such purposes. I Xeroxed one copy of the memo, which I mailed to myself in care of a post office box in the name of Walter Snelling, a friendly, non-political bartender in the far-removed country town of Cotati, California, where I routinely sent copies of all supersecret Ramparts documents. That night I hand delivered the original to Bill Turner, the former FBI agent in charge of the magazine’s investigation of the Warren Commission. Turner had drilled me in a little G-Man security lingo. According to our code, I called him at home and said something about a new vacuum cleaner. He replied that he’d be right over, and said he would meet me at the bar at Trader Vic’s, which meant that I was to actually meet him at Blanco’s, a dimly lit Filipino bar on the fringe of Chinatown, where we often held secret meetings.

“That was the way we did things in those days,” Hinckle recalled.

★★★



**When she met Cleaver in person, she thought he was intimidating. “He filled up the doorframe and had no expression on his face,” she recalled. “He had only been out of prison for three months, and he hadn’t thawed out yet”**

As Hinckle indulged his appetite for conspiracies, McGraw-Hill was preparing to publish Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* for Ramparts Books, its new imprint. The volume was a collection of prison writings, most of which had appeared in the magazine. Cleaver thanked Keating, whom he described as the first professional to pay any attention to his writing; Maxwell Geismar, who contributed the book’s introduction; and *Ramparts* staffer David Welsh for his editorial assistance. But he dedicated the book to Beverly Axelrod, with whom he had become romantically involved, and he included some of their emotionally charged correspondence in the book. Cleaver’s dedication read, “To Beverly, with whom I share the ultimate of love.”

Cleaver’s romance with Axelrod was short-lived. In spring 1967, just as *Soul on Ice* appeared, Cleaver met Kathleen Neal at a conference in Nashville sponsored by SNCC. Kathleen, a Barnard student who had moved to Atlanta to work for SNCC, knew about Cleaver from his writings in *Ramparts*, which her boyfriend’s roommate had brought to her attention. When she met Cleaver in person, she thought he was intimidating. “He filled up the doorframe and had no expression on his face,” she recalled. “He had only been out of prison for three months, and he hadn’t thawed out yet.”

But Cleaver was smitten and decided to stay on after the conference. He was writing a story on Stokely Carmichael, who was scheduled to speak at Vanderbilt University the following week, but he also wanted to spend more time with Kathleen and offered to drive her and her colleagues back to Atlanta. When it was time to leave, Kathleen saw Cleaver strolling across the campus lawn with a white woman in a sundress and sandals.

## BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR

It was Axelrod, who seemed annoyed when Cleaver introduced her as his lawyer; in fact, they were engaged.

After Cleaver returned to San Francisco, he and Kathleen began to exchange letters. Axelrod discovered some of their correspondence when Sacramento authorities returned Cleaver's briefcase to her after his arrest. His parole restricted Cleaver's travel, but Kathleen caught a ride to Los Angeles and flew to San Francisco on a \$12 ticket. She stayed at Cleaver's apartment, a walk-up studio at 42 Castro Street that he had recently leased. (When first released from prison, he was officially living with Axelrod's brother; unofficially, he was living at Beverly's house in San Francisco.) On the first or second night of Kathleen's visit, she and Cleaver heard a ruckus outside; someone was trying to break in to his apartment. It turned out to be an irate Beverly. More than once, Cleaver pointed out Axelrod's Volvo parked outside his studio; apparently she was keeping an eye on them. Nevertheless, Cleaver proposed to Kathleen during her first visit to San Francisco, and they married later that year.

As that courtship unfolded, *Soul on Ice* drew reviews from *The New Republic* ("painful, aggressive, and undaunted"), the *New York Times Book Review* ("brilliant and revealing"), and other high-profile outlets. Most reviewers praised its originality and power. Some hedged their compliments; the *Saturday Review*, for example, claimed that Cleaver "can be a mature, perhaps even a great writer," implying that he was not yet either. Other reviews were overgenerous, a response that Geismar's introduction invited. He applauded Cleaver's essay on the Beatles, for example, which included this muddle of a paragraph:

Before we toss the Beatles a ho-



**In Panther David Hilliard's pithier formulation, white radicals wanted to "get a nigger to pull the trigger"**

mosexual kiss – saying, "If a man be ass enough to reach for the bitch in them, that man will kiss a man, and if a woman reaches for the stud in them, that woman will kiss a woman" – let us marvel at the genius of their image, which comforts the owls and ostriches in the one spot where Elvis Presley bummed their kick: Elvis, with his unfunky (yet mechanical, alienated) bumpgrinding, was still too much Body (too soon) for the strained collapsing psyches of the Omnipotent Administrators and Ultrafeminines; whereas the Beatles, affecting the caucasoid crown of femininity and ignoring the Body on the visual plane (while their music on the contrary being full of Body), assuaged the doubts of the owls and ostriches by presenting an incorporeal, cerebral image.

A blurb from *The Nation* review ("beautifully written") was consistent with Geismar's hyperbolic assessment that Cleaver was "simply one of the best cultural critics writing today."

Taken together, the accolades supported Ishmael Reed's retrospective claim that the "New York Old Left and its branches in Northern California and Los Angeles" had "given up on the worker . . . and in his place substituted the black prisoner as a proxy in their fight against capitalism." But even more than their precursors, the New Left radicals regarded black prisoners as the vanguard of the revolution. In Panther David Hilliard's pithier formulation, white radicals wanted to "get a nigger to pull the trigger." A pungent whiff of danger accompanied *Soul on Ice* and its promotion, and Cleaver's attack on Baldwin was considered newsworthy. For all these reasons and others, *Soul on Ice* became an international publishing event.

Cleaver had little time to relish his status as a celebrity author. Less than a month after the book went on sale, Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis. Although the Black Panthers had mocked King's nonviolent tactics, they were outraged by his murder. Two days later, Cleaver sat in his *Ramparts* office and dictated his response to King's assassination.

It is hard to put words on this tape because words are no longer relevant. Action is all that counts now. Any maybe America will understand that. I doubt it. I think that America is incapable of understanding *anything* relevant to human rights. I think that America has already committed suicide, and we who now thrash within its dead body are also dead and part and parcel of the corpse. America is truly a disgusting burden upon the planet. A burden upon all humanity. And if we here in America ...

A telephone call interrupted Cleaver's dictation; when he hung up, he left the office for Oakland.

That night, Cleaver organized four carloads of Panthers for an outing in Oakland. Cleaver would later claim, perhaps jocularly, that they were preparing for a picnic, but their ostensible goal was to attack the Oakland police. When they encountered officers on a routine patrol, gunfire broke out. Two officers were wounded, and Cleaver and seventeen-year-old Bobby Hutton fled to the basement of a nearby house on 28<sup>th</sup> Street. Police surrounded the house, and a gun battle ensued. Cleaver was wounded in the foot by a ricocheting bullet and hit in the shoulder with a tear gas canister. He shouted to the police that he was coming out of the house. To ensure that his



**Accounts of what happened next vary; arresting officers claimed that Hutton tried to run after stumbling. Beyond dispute is the fact that the police shot and killed him**

surrender was unambiguous, the prison-seasoned Cleaver emerged from the house naked with his hands in the air. A clothed Hutton also emerged and was apprehended. Accounts of what happened next vary; arresting officers claimed that Hutton tried to run after stumbling. Beyond dispute is the fact that the police shot and killed him.

After the shootout, Cleaver was taken to Highland Hospital, where Scheer and Marine tried to visit him. They were denied access but watched as Cleaver – surrounded by police, his eyes still swollen from the tear gas, and handcuffed to his gurney – was loaded into another ambulance for a transfer. “I thought they would kill him,” Scheer said later. Officials booked Cleaver in Alameda County, revoked his parole, and sent him to the San Quentin prison hospital in nearby San Rafael. Later, he was transferred to the prison hospital in Vacaville, a short drive from Sacramento.

James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, and other prominent writers and intellectuals signed a letter decrying the violence against the Black Panthers. “We find little fundamental difference between the assassin's bullet which killed Dr. King on April 4, and the police barrage which killed Bobby James Hutton two days later,” it read. A more modulated letter in *The New York Review of Books* the following month condemned the Oakland police response as “acts of violent white racism.”

In the May issue of *Ramparts*, Gene Marine covered the shootout in an article titled “Getting Eldridge Cleaver.” He also published a *Ramparts* book, *The Black Panthers*, the following year. Supported by Bob Avakian's research, that book described Oakland's city government as “not only racist but Mesozoic.” Yet Ma-

## BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR

rine denied allegations that he was an apologist for the Black Panther Party. “I am frightened by them, and I am fascinated by them,” he wrote. “I find myself stirred to admiration and stricken with apprehension ... In short, I am white and not particularly revolutionary ... I am, indeed, afraid of the Black Panther Party. I hope you are, too.” The book’s back cover copy appealed directly to that emotion. “Uniformed, Armed Black Men in America! Black Men Who Talk Back – and Shoot Back!”

From Vacaville, Cleaver smuggled out an article that ran in *Ramparts* with a brief introduction by David Welsh, who wrote that Cleaver “was imprisoned for the political crime of organizing black people for their own liberation.” Cleaver’s article, “A Letter from Jail,” recounted his first encounters with the party’s leaders and positioned Newton as the “ideological descendant, heir and successor of Malcolm X.” Cleaver wrote that Newton “lifted the golden lid off the pot and blindly, trusting Malcolm, stuck his hand inside and grasped the tool.”

When he withdrew his hand and looked to see what he held, he saw the gun, cold in its metal and implacable in its message ... Huey P. Newton picked up the gun and pulled the trigger, freeing the genie of black revolutionary violence in Babylon.

Cleaver settled in for a lengthy prison spell, but a Superior Court judge unexpectedly released him on \$50,000 bail the following month. Back on the streets, Cleaver began an extraordinary campaign.

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Cleaver’s disgust for America after the



**“If Che could be killed,” Gitlin wrote later, “then ‘the revolution’ was more vulnerable than the Left wanted to think”**

King assassination had a corollary in the antiwar movement. As the New Left turned from protest to resistance, its disdain for politics as usual – and for American culture more generally – began to grow. “Little by little,” Todd Gitlin wrote later, “alienation from American life – contempt, even, for the conventions of flag, home, religion, suburbs, shopping, plain homely Norman Rockwell order – had become a rock-bottom prerequisite for membership in the movement core.” As their disaffection deepened, some of these core members began to look abroad for their heroes, who came to include Mao, Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and Ho Chi Minh. If America had betrayed the young militants, perhaps their international comrades would not.

Chief among the revolutionary heroes was Che Guevara. After playing a pivotal role in the Cuban revolution, Che served in Castro’s government, tried unsuccessfully to incite a revolution in the Congo, and eventually landed in Bolivia, where he ran a small training camp for Communist insurgents. Bolivian Special Forces led by a CIA operative captured and executed him there in October 1967. *Ramparts* ran several stories on his execution, which rattled the confidence of his American admirers. “If Che could be killed,” Gitlin wrote later, “then ‘the revolution’ was more vulnerable than the Left wanted to think.”

The Bolivian generals began selling Che’s personal effects to the highest bidders, and Che’s Bolivian diary immediately became a hot publishing property. Although *Ramparts* had a fledgling book division, it had no plans to bid on the English-language rights to Che’s diaries. But Scheer had established a personal connection that other American publishers lacked. In early 1968, he traveled to Cuba

with the understanding that he would be allowed to interview Castro. Scheer cooled his heels at the Havana Libre for a month, waiting for the still unscheduled appointment. Finally, he told the Cubans he needed to return to the United States to run his magazine. The night before his departure, armed men arrived at his room and took him through a series of houses and buildings. After midnight, Scheer said he needed to relieve himself. While he was in the men's room, Castro walked in. He had been playing basketball. Castro was willing to conduct the interview right then, but only on background. Scheer protested, but Castro assured him that their exchange would be better than an on-the-record interview. They talked until daybreak.

Although Scheer couldn't use that material for a story, his Castro connection allowed *Ramparts* to enter the publishers' sweepstakes. When Scheer returned from another trip to Cuba in April 1968, he told Hinckle that Castro had a copy of Che's diary, that he wanted *Ramparts* to publish an English translation, and that he would write the introduction. Scheer and Hinckle agreed to maintain strict silence about the matter. In general, the *Ramparts* staff "leaked like a bad kidney," Hinckle wrote later, but this time they weren't taking any chances.

As the months rolled by without any sign of the manuscript, Hinckle and Scheer grew uneasy. During that time, they were in touch with the editor-in-chief of McGraw-Hill's trade book division, with which *Ramparts* had an arrangement. "This is extremely confidential," the editor told Hinckle, "but we're getting the Che Diary ... It's the publishing coup of the year, and I think I may be able to work it so you can print some excerpts." Hinckle held his tongue.



**When Scheer returned from another trip to Cuba in April 1968, he told Hinckle that Castro had a copy of Che's diary, that he wanted *Ramparts* to publish an English translation, and that he would write the introduction**

When Hinckle finally received the manuscript in a cloak-and-dagger operation in New York, he discovered that Castro had arranged for the publication of a Spanish-language edition in a matter of days. (Castro had also lined up French, Italian, and German editions.) Hinckle concluded that the best option was to sell the rights. With the help of Cleaver's literary agent, he arranged a deal with Bantam, which was already in negotiations with McGraw-Hill for the paperback rights. Copyright issues clouded the deal, but those dissolved when Hinckle learned that Che's widow had granted rights to the Cuban state publishing house, which in turn authorized the *Ramparts* English-language edition.

In the meantime, *Ramparts* built the buzz. The March issue included an article by French journalist Michele Ray, who had traveled to Bolivia to obtain the diaries. *Time* helped the publicity effort by impugning Ray in its March 15 issue. It described her as "a comely French journaliste" who "views the world as a vast fairy tale. There are cruel oppressors, who are mainly American. And there are the cruelly oppressed, who range from the Viet Cong to Castro's Cubans to Bolivian peasants." Referring to Ray's conclusion that two CIA operatives supervised Che's murder, the article closed by repeating the fairy-tale trope.

[Ray's article] makes gripping reading, but it was apparently too much of a fairy tale for New York Times Correspondent Juan de Onis, who claimed there was no evidence linking the CIA to Che's death. It was a fact, reported De Onis, that Che talked freely to a CIA agent shortly before he died. But when Che was finally gunned down by a Bolivian sergeant, the CIA man had gone.

## BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR

It was a curious dismissal of Ray's conclusion. Evidently, the CIA couldn't have supervised Che's killing because one of its agents wasn't present at his execution. But whatever it lacked in logic, the *Time* story fit the pattern the magazine had developed for covering its left-wing dop-pelganger. *Ramparts'* tales were the misbegotten issue of a dubious ideological agenda, while *Time* was the levelheaded supplier of empirical fact.

When the English translation of Che's diary appeared, *Time* weighed in again. Its July 12 issue described the book as a "propaganda coup" for Castro and questioned the integrity of the text, which one writer who tried to acquire the rights described as "hasty, doctored and bowdlerized." Designed to downplay the story, the *Time* article closed by characterizing Che's efforts as a "sad crusade."

Two weeks later, *Ramparts* devoted an entire issue to excerpts from Che's diaries and included Castro's introduction. Castro described Che as a man of deep conviction, selfless courage, iron will, stoicism, and an irreproachable fighting spirit. His critics and adversaries were stupid, ridiculous, cowardly, reactionary chauvinists. Americans, Castro noted in passing, were "increasingly subjected to the moral barbarism of an irrational, alienating, dehumanized, and brutal system." They suffered from that system's "wars of aggression, its political crimes, its racial aberrations, the miserable hierarchy it has created among human beings, its repugnant waste of economic, scientific, and human resources on its enormous, reactionary, and repressive military apparatus – in the midst of a world where three-quarters of humanity lives in underdevelopment and hunger."

Che's legend didn't require *Ramparts* for its growth and dissemination, but the



**Scheer called the FBI office in San Francisco, which downplayed the threat. He replied that if anything happened to him, *Ramparts* would release whatever information it had on the FBI's connections to right-wing groups**

magazine's role in the diary saga reflected its rising position in American journalism. Five years earlier, *Ramparts* had failed to deliver its latest bombshell, a colloquy on Jesuit higher education. Now it was the one American outlet to which Fidel Castro entrusted Che's personal writings.

The book reportedly sold 500,000 copies, but it also produced security concerns for Scheer. He learned that Alpha 66, an anti-Castro paramilitary group, had placed him on its death list and would execute him by a certain time that week. Such threats couldn't be ignored; in July 1968, a different right-wing Cuban group launched a grenade through the window of Grove Press's New York office to protest *Evergreen Review's* celebration of Che.

Scheer called the FBI office in San Francisco, which downplayed the threat. He replied that if anything happened to him, *Ramparts* would release whatever information it had on the FBI's connections to right-wing groups. Later that day, Scheer received a call from the FBI instructing him to look out the window. When he did, he noticed an agent in front of the building. Still uncertain about his safety, Scheer visited the home of San Francisco private investigator Hal Lipset, a *Ramparts* contributing editor who later served as a technical consultant for Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974). Lipset and Scheer broke out the vodka, and Scheer later reported that he "slept through the appointed hour of my death."

As the drama surrounding what Michele Ray called "the relics of St. Che" unfolded, a different back story was making its way though the *Ramparts* office. According to David Horowitz, "the office was abuzz about an affair Scheer had while in Cuba with Michelle (sic)

Ray, the journalist who secured the Guevara diaries for publication.” When Scheer called a meeting to discuss the February 1968 “Women Power” issue, he reportedly snapped at Anne Weills, who was featured in the lead article. “What I didn’t realize,” Horowitz recalled, “was that Scheer’s anger was provoked by his discovery that Anne was having a retaliatory affair with [Tom] Hayden. She had even trumped him politically: While his tryst with Michelle Ray had taken place in Cuba, hers had been consummated on a trip to Hanoi.”

It’s difficult to reconcile Horowitz’s timeline with the one Hayden lays out in his memoir, but even if Horowitz’s chronology is faulty, he was right that the bunking arrangements in the *Ramparts* community had become complicated. When Scheer returned from his Cuba trip, he learned that Weills wanted a separation. By that time, they had a son, Christopher. Soon after that, Hayden moved to Oakland, perhaps to be closer to Weills, but according to Hayden, she was unwilling to “enter a stable relationship so close to her own separation.” Their romance was a prime example of what *Ramparts* writer Michael Lerner dubbed “armed snuggle.”

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That summer, *Ramparts* once again revised its publishing schedule. Now subscribers would receive twenty-four issues each year for \$15 instead of \$8.50 for twelve issues. Hinckle announced the plan in the June 15 issue and took the occasion to discuss the magazine’s methods.

There is no secret about what *Ramparts* has done. It has used the same tools as, say, *Time* – color, profession-



**Hinckle departed to start Scanlan’s, where he helped launch Gonzo journalism by matching Hunter S. Thompson and illustrator Ralph Steadman for the first time**

alism, slickness, large distribution – to achieve essentially the opposite results, challenging rather than reinforcing stereotyped ideas, promoting dissent rather than putting it down.

Hinckle’s point was valid, but the new schedule masked a grim financial picture. *Ramparts* was teetering on the brink of collapse.

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In January 1969, *Ramparts* filed for bankruptcy. Hinckle departed to start Scanlan’s, where he helped launch Gonzo journalism by matching Hunter S. Thompson and illustrator Ralph Steadman for the first time. But that magazine went down in flames after eight issues.

Reorganizing under Chapter 11, *Ramparts* resumed publishing in April 1969 under the leadership of Robert Scheer. By the end of that year, editors David Horowitz and Peter Collier engineered his ouster. When art director Dugald Stermer resigned in protest, Horowitz and Collier organized a collective to run the magazine but made most of the major decisions themselves.

Horowitz and Scheer continued to identify and publish major writers, but with the departures of Hinckle, Scheer, and Stermer, *Ramparts* lost a great deal of its flair and fundraising ability. Moreover, the left was experiencing what Collier later called “elemental cell division,” making it more difficult than ever to articulate a compelling leftist analysis. Finally, the media ecology was changing swiftly. *Ramparts* was forced to compete with many new magazines, some created at least partly in its image. Under Horowitz and Collier, *Ramparts* cut costs

## BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR

dramatically and pursued a more revolutionary editorial line, but circulation declined steadily after 1969, and the magazine closed its door for good in 1975.

*Ramparts'* impact outlived its lifespan. By demonstrating that a radical slick had broad appeal, the magazine cleared the way for new publications. By hiring Cleaver, covering the Black Panthers, and sponsoring their work, *Ramparts* helped establish the Panthers as internationally recognized revolutionaries. Finally, *Ramparts* opened a new chapter in the history of the CIA. By exposing the agency's covert activities, which came to include unlawful spying on *Ramparts'* staff and



**In retrospect, *Ramparts* resembles the journalistic equivalent of a rock band. Its sheer incandescence blew minds, launched solo careers, and spawned imitators.**

investors, the magazine and its coverage helped set the stage for the first congressional oversight committees. Chaired by Frank Church, a friend of Keating's during their undergraduate days at Stanford University, the Senate version was particularly adept at exposing CIA and FBI malfeasance.

In retrospect, *Ramparts* resembles the journalistic equivalent of a rock band. Its sheer incandescence blew minds, launched solo careers, and spawned imitators. Although its legacy remains controversial, one fact is indisputable; 1968 was a key turning point in its brief, turbulent life.

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