Anger, No Rage, Is An Entirely Appropriate Response Right Now

The Times' button-down-iest columnist calls for "a comprehensive civic nation uprising"

April 18, 2025 By Mike Barr

My husband is about to leave me.

"Why are you so angry?"

"You really have to control your anger."

"Yesterday you looked like a crazy person."

He tells, warns and scolds me.

Yesterday and today (and okay, last October and November) I started to worry too about my anger. Should I check my blood pressure? Is it something I'm taking. Or not taking?

Why am I so angry??

But this morning, it dawned on me. Anger is the ENTIRELY APPROPRIATE emotion right now.

(And, a long ago equities analyst, I went all-cash in January. One might also invoke T Rosta's clever quip: "Ray Charles..." So it has nothing to do with the Nasdaq's slide.)

No, wait. Anger is too tame, too quotidian, too frequently present in the spectrum of normal human emotions. What I am really feeling, what is eating away at me at every waking-thinking moment (or even at 3 a.m.) is not anger; it's rage.

I can't focus on work. My businesses are suffering. I seem to spend the entire morning reading 4 or 5 newspapers online. At 2pm or 3pm, I tune into the latest from The Bulwark or Lawrence O'Donnell or Andrew Weissmann-George Conway or Rachel or David Frum or hell, even Bill Kristol. Times Radio and I've Had It have lifted my spirits from time to time. This afternoon it was this. And this. (And then, Easter Sunday, Anne Applebaum, with Tim Miller (America Turning Into Russia), took my breath away.

I know I should resume my news fast, but isn't that putting one's head in the sand?

How can people go about their business in an ordinary way? Don’t you realize the entire course of history has been changed?

I can’t remember whether it was Jennifer or Angie (I think Jen), but when a week or so ago she said that an out, gay or trans person in a red state “had to be the bravest person in the world,” I think I cried.

I can hear Ron Goldberg’s narration in my head this morning. (Admittedly, I am only 1/2 way or so through his FANTASTIC history of our days— and am so happy I chose the audio format because not only is he a terrific narrator (slash studied thespian), but you can tell he’s re-living it with you, just as you are re-living it with him!)

And even though I can’t quite (yet) pin down the exact context, or even the original speaker, I hear it: "How can they just go about their daily business? Don’t they know that we are in the middle of a crisis?—that this is a national, no worldwide, emergency??"

(Found it. It was from The Times Of Harvey Milk, Sally Miller Gearhart (1931-2021) on daily life in SF the day Harvey and George Moscone were shot dead. (See her at 57:00 of same link) God, we’ve lived through/seen/fought so much.)

People go about their business though.

Passover and Easter celebrations are being planned. Women cart their (mostly atrociously behaved— but blame the parents) children in strollers with face paint or bunny ears or vintage plastic sunglasses. Giggle and laughs. Life is beautiful.

EXCEPT THAT IT’S NOT!!

The final “clarifying” moment, as if we needed one, came today when I woke to an Op-Ed from the nebbish-iest of nebbishes, a bookworm’s bookworm intellectual if ever there were (was? even at 60, I at times struggle with the subjunctive) one, David Brooks (bless his heart), for Christ’s sake, calling for... did you see it too?— RIOTS IN THE STREETS!

Okay, maybe not riots. And please people, be careful & look out for one another, as (again, painstakingly documented/recounted in Ron’s bravura first-person history of ACT UP/New York) we were trained to do in the late 1980’s and the better part of the 1990’s.

“A comprehensive civic nation uprising,” was Mr. Brooks’ exact phrase.

I was arguing with a friend, 20 years my junior, whom I had met in acupuncture school, in Los

Angeles yesterday on the phone. “But isn’t it great to see Bernie and AOC out there drawing such crowds?” he posited. Immediately the blood rushed to my face. Surely there was steam streaming out my ears. Yeh sure, fantastic. But they’re just Woodstock-sized circle jerks. “They’re not CHANGING anything!” I retorted.

I love AOC’s origin story. But I have come to see her as toxic. At least in today’s United States. I quietly thank her. And just as quietly hope she’ll go away.

Cory Booker, so clumsily transparent and overwrought, mostly reeks of ambition (in the Shakespearean sense) and inauthenticity and opportunism.

It was 100% appropriate (and even a little brave) for Chris Van Hollen to visit CECOT. And I see that 4 more senators flew there on Sunday. It’s great to keep this story at the top of the new cycle, but can we PLEASE ALSO INCLUDE the 200 or so others who were illegally imprisoned?? When and who will meet with Andry and Jerci and Neri and Francisco and Arturo and Wuilliam? Frizgeralth and Hennry and Alirio and Lainerke? Who will call their wives and mothers and brothers and sisters? Who will report to them that there are MILLIONS OF US who have not forgetten them and who are fighting and marching every day for their release?

Yes, it’s crucial to keep this abomination of justice in the headlines, but can Reps. Frost and Garcia and Ansari and Dexter PLEASE let the other 158 detainees that we are thinking of— and fighting for— them too?

Bernie should have been our candidate in 2016. We would have very likely been spared this decade-long gold-plated shit show. But Bernie in 2025, with that same strained, hoarse voice that reminds one of late Biden. The self-righteous anger that, again, conjures up Warsaw 03/36/22 (“For god’s sake, this man cannot remain in power!”), just doesn’t work today the way it might have in 2016— or even 2020.

The cojones-less relativist that is G Newsom serves only as a potent emetic. “It’s a tough case. Do we really want to be defending MS-13?” This is no time for Clinton-style strategic triangulation. Or outright callousness. His carefully choreographed presidential campaign promises to go nowhere.

Brooks, ever the writer & thinker, put it much better than I could yesterday: feel-good as they may be, the Sanders-AOC rallies “are an ineffective way to respond to [this moment.] (Like Whoopie, I try no to print or utter his name.) ”They make this seem like a normal contest between Democrats and Republicans. But there is nothing normal about this."

On the way home this morning, thinking about this a bit more, I heard Vito. And I thought of Ron— or Ron's voice, reading Ron's book, of our history.

Were we (ACT UP/New York) really that special?

Can/can't everyday Americans do what we did when our lives and our values were so threatened— now that their values, their communities, heck, their/our institutions, are similarly at risk?

When I watched those protests a few weeks back— celebratory, unserious, disjointed, not a single sign for, nor any sign of outrage for, any of the prisoners in CECOT— I was certain the answer was no.

When I look around— and this is NYC folks! this is even Brooklyn, for Christ's sake!!— and I see everyone going about their business as if it were just another gorgeous spring day.

Yes, even in Park Slope.

(And it is gorgeous here. So please, take in the beauty, the majesty of nature in large, slow daily boluses in order to balance, even flush out, if only for a few minutes, the everywhere-else ugliness and horror and cruelty.)

I'm pretty sure the answer is no.

And what will become of us?

Future generations will ask (and study) how we responded to this moment. Did we flee? Did we cower? Or did we stand up & fight?

Vito at Albany echoed in my head, paraphrasing only slightly:

> "This moment is really a test of us, as a people. When future generations ask what we did in this crisis, we're going to have to tell them that we were out here today.
>
> Someday this will be over. And those who are left will hear the story that once there was a terrible disease in this country, and all over the world. And that a brave group of people stood up and fought and, in some cases gave their lives, so that others might live and be free."

And in this uncanny convergence between Vito Russo at our Albany, NY demo in May 1988 and friggin' David Brooks in the New York Times today, they both ended with this:

Vito... “Strategize and plan for the next wave, and the next day, and the next month, and the next week, and the next year.”

David’s version fleshes this out a bit, adding specifics germane to the current crisis & challenge:

“A civic uprising has to have a both short-term vision and a long-term vision. (He cites Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan and their book, ”Why Civil Resistance Works")

Short-term:

- Stop him.
- Foil his efforts. (echoing in ways Ezra Klein’s early, sort of “reality check resistance” advice back in early February, "Don’t Believe Him" YT link: “he can really only get away with these things if we let him”)
- Pile on the lawsuits
- Turn some of his followers against him (latest polling shows him down 10% (from 90/8 to 85/12, approve/disapprove) among even his most loyal followers over the past week)

(Long-term: Create a fairer society that offers a positive vision)

I would argue that the Biden-Pelosi team were actually doing this. It’s just that Biden came ten or twenty years too late. And this kind of change takes years and years and years. Much of the damage was actually done by Clinton, even if one might blame some of that on Gingrich et cie’s Blood Sport on steroids. (Obama’s frequent condescension didn’t help matters. But I digress.)

> Scholars of dictatorship and authoritarianism will tell you that, when it comes to resistance, it is never just one thing that works; it is everything together.

“I’m really not a movement guy,” to state the obvious, Brooks concludes, “but this is what America needs right now. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

Thank you, Mr. Brooks. Thaaaank you, Ron. Thank you (miss you), Vito.

Now call 3 or 4 friends and/or family members. And GET OUT INTO THE STREETS!!

Postscript: After working on this today, I tuned in for my virtual daily dose of either despondency

or outrage or encouragement, and I am happy to report that today it was the latter. Both J Harvie Wilkinson's majestic written opinion yesterday (read/presented by Sarah Longwell & George Conway) and RM's recap of community protests, church groups, and others organizing across the country this past week (actually, these seemed to have all occurred on just one day, Wednesday!)— in Colchester, VT, in St. Albans, VT (in support of Mohsen Mahdawi), in Grand Rapids, MI (protesting planned opening of immigration prison), in St. Paul, MN (outside the Salvadoran consulate there), in Santa Rosa, CA (local clergy), in Denver, CO (local clergy), in New Orleans (protests at ICE headquarters), in Cobb County, GA (protesting at MTG town hall in Acworth Community Center), in Newark, DE (at University of Delaware), in Millcreek, UT (a community rallying for 3 Haitian and Venezuelan neighbors with Temporary Protected Status who received "It's time to leave the U.S." letters last week, giving them 3 days to self-deport), in Raleigh, NC (Apostles Church, also defending their immigrant neighbors), at Harvard— is making me wonder if maybe, just maybe, the answer is not No but Yes. We can stop him/them/this!!

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Mike Barr, a longtime Poz Contributing Editor and founding member of and scribe for the Treatment Action Group (TAG), is a functional medicine practitioner and herbalist in NYC. Reach out to him here. Or sign up for his curated (and wildly discounted: 30% off first order; 25% off all auto-refills) professional grade supplement dispensary here.

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