

States of **Rage**

Emotional
Eruption,
Violence,
and
Social
Change

Edited by

Renée R. Curry and Terry L. Allison

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INTRODUCTION

Invitation to Rage

TERRY L. ALLISON and RENÉE R. CURRY

Being a black woman means frequent spells of impotent, self-consuming rage. —*The Black Woman's Gumbo Ya-Ya*

WHY TALK ABOUT RAGE?

In our daily consumption of media, “rage,” “outrage,” “enraged” increasingly appear in print or are splashed at us from our televisions and radios. Rage appears to define the daily existence of some groups in the United States;¹ further, our own experience suggests that few individuals in our media-dominated culture fail to encounter en-, out-, or just plain rage each day. Contemporary society appears suddenly willing to employ the term more often to describe our own or others’ mental states or actions. Rage seems to have gained a currency in the past decade which it previously did not possess.

The rise of rage in discourse begs many questions. Has the experience of individuals in our society shifted so significantly that vastly more people experience rage? Or, have we simply hyperbolized such a term as “anger” in an ever more sensationalized multimedia market? Could the rising discourse about rage reflect an ever less reticent public, now willing to discuss their rage along with the whole range of their other previously private and family emotions? Or, are we suddenly hearing the expressions of rage that have been speaking to us all along? In some respects these questions also ask whether or not we believe in rage as a present and/or ongoing cultural phenomenon or whether we consider rage primarily a catchword, manufactured or inflated for our consumption, even for our entertainment. Will the term, au courant, fade into obscurity, or will rage continue to describe in some more profound sense our daily experience in contemporary society?

In preparing this collection of essays, we claim that rage as a personal and social construct deserves more than our passing interest. The term *rage* succinctly describes an ongoing emotional state for many residents and citizens of the United States and elsewhere, not only for those whom we usually name as outrageous or outraged. While we do not wish to claim that everyone continuously stalks our landscape in rage, this anthology aims to suggest why this emotional state has increasingly intruded into our social, artistic, and academic existences.

WHY DEVELOP AN ANTHOLOGY ABOUT RAGE?

States of Rage seeks to gather for the first time a critical mass of writing about rage in various disciplines. In first planning a national conference, “Rage! Across the Disciplines,” we began with the assumption, stated above, that we could no longer avoid rage, that it has intruded, welcome or unwelcome, into our emotional, social, cultural, and academic lives. Rage has become both an increasingly legitimated method of expression and a feared outcome of interchange in several areas of our lives. The expression of rage at the very least has challenged an agreeable, centrist consensus that we must remain polite when discussing our differing views. At its greatest force, the unleashing of rage has translated into dead bodies on our campus and city streets, in our public buildings and our homes.

Some of the essays collected here and on our list of readings at the end of this introduction illustrate that our social interactions have long manufactured rage and our cultural productions historically have both reflected and produced their own degrees of rage. Until only quite recently, however, does it appear that our safer realms of academia have fully experienced both the social and cultural arenas of rage. Certainly rage appeared in academic settings in the 1960s with the outburst of civil rights and anti-war protests. However, now we legitimate rage when discussing previously “non-political” arenas such as what gets taught and by whom.

At base, rage is an emotion that, when expressed, either individually or collectively, manifests itself in multiple and unforeseen ways usually perceived to be violent. Manifestations of rage come in many forms including volatile and violent actions, artistic productions, discourse and political activism. This collection addresses a range of such manifesta-

tions: killings by postal workers; killings of feminists; killings of husbands, wives, and lovers; arguments regarding political correctness; depictions of deaths by AIDS; filmic and fictional representations of racism; riots against injustice; queer militant acts; and representative sites of rage.

Yet, few writers have asked the basic questions about rage: Who defines rage? How do they define it? Does rage merit serious analysis? What sorts of analyses of rage would prove most fruitful? What can we learn by looking at rage across disciplines rather than strictly within disciplinary boundaries?

This anthology, a first interdisciplinary gathering of writing about rage, does not seek definitive answers to these questions, but does seek to begin a structured conversation about them. By gathering these essays, we seek to enable readers to discern rage in terms of its psychological and social origins, its relationship to the self, its connection to culture, and its possible predictors. The essays do not, however, announce with any surety the exact people(s) among whom, the exact moments at which, nor the exact forms in which rage will occur.

In compiling this collection, we sought out connections from a wide variety of contemporary writing, looking for patterns of rage to emerge. An initial chord was struck when we realized that for some people *mere discussion of rage* produced rage. For some of the critics of our conference, for example, to discuss various people's rage immediately qualified one for Allan Bloom's "culture of complaint" or Harold Bloom's "school of resentment." To some cultural critics, rage implies invasion by an intruder, a loss of self, thus a lack of responsibility that threatens the concept of a powerful, moral, autonomous self. The fear of bringing rage into more conscious discourse preserves the illusion either that rage does not exist or that to address rage necessarily incites further rage. In editing this anthology we wanted, among other purposes, to legitimize the discussion of rage, to propose rage not as unadulterated complaint or resentment, but as a constant, perhaps increasing, provocation in our daily lives.

We seek first to focus attention on recent work about rage, work that considers basic questions:

How do various theorists multiply define rage, and do their definitions work across disciplines?

How have writers constructed rage in terms of its supposed opposites: Reason: sanity, stoicism, normality, order and politeness?

Can we ritualize rage, or is it always spontaneous?

What is the relationship between rage and power(lessness)?

Is rage a response to loss? Loss of what?

How does rage relate to personal or social injustice?

What provokes rage and what is provocative about it?

The essays in this anthology begin to provide definitions, context, and shape to the multiple meanings of rage.

A problem implicitly raised by defining rage, yet infrequently addressed by this collection, remains that of whether or how to curtail the often violent results of unleashed rage. This collection does not purport a prevention mode. The authors represented here provide insight and commentary into the operations of rage as they see it apparent primarily in contemporary U.S. culture. In some cases they make judgments; in other instances they analyze and interpret. Some of the authors infrequently mention the word, “rage,” and yet the intense emotion they describe resonates with the more explicitly defined moments of rage that the authors here discuss.

SOCIAL, ARTISTIC, AND ACADEMIC ARENAS OF RAGE

We have gathered the essays here into broad categories of disciplines that employ similar methodologies, styles, and vocabularies to address rage. Naturally, some of the essays reach across the disciplinary boundaries that we have imposed on them. Nevertheless, within the broad groupings provided, the essays reflect on each other’s vocabulary, the-
matics, production, and interpretation of the meaning of rage.

Social Constructions of Rage

Both Julie Brickman (“Female Lives, Feminist Deaths”) and Dianne R. Layden (“Violence, the Emotionally Enraged Employee, and the Work-

place”) focus on men’s rage that explodes into violence. Brickman draws more of a continuum between outbreaks of killing rage and what she perceives as more “normal” or common male behaviors of rape and incest, while Layden describes rage as a manifestation of various levels of pathology. Still, for Layden as well as for Brickman, men’s murderous rage can reveal itself among those who display a whole range of mental illness to those who are “generally not deranged.” Layden reports that these outbreaks of rage into murder at the workplace are small in number, but growing. Brickman’s focus on the continuum of male violent behaviors means that she is not so concerned with charting the growth of the outbreaks of murderous rage, but with tackling the whole range of men’s socialization into violent, outrageous behaviors.

Though both Brickman and Layden describe similar outbursts of male rage, Layden sees more practical steps to counter rage that eventually may break out into violence. However, reading Layden’s essay closely will reveal that she, like Brickman, believes that only broad social changes will diminish the production of male rage. For both Brickman and Layden, rage is a likely outcome of social pressures. There may be warning signs, but responding to these signals from isolated individuals alone will not stem all of male rage.

Vanessa Friedman examines the rarer case of female murderous rage. Women’s rage, for Friedman, is a reaction to patriarchal abuse and a means of stating a woman’s very existence. Yet, Friedman shares with both Brickman and Layden the reaction that our social structure itself unfailingly will produce rage. Friedman asks: “What happens when the [social] structure which serves to contain anxieties becomes the source of anxiety itself?” For Friedman, female rage counters the essential denial of female language and voice within the patriarchy. Murderous rage becomes one of the few means that women possess to turn themselves into speaking subjects. While acknowledging the damage of rage, “the ultimate unacceptability” of murderous rage, Friedman still finds it “honest and genuine.”

By directly confronting his own rage, Ian Barnard speaks in a different voice than the three previous authors. Barnard takes the highly threatening and damaging act of “gay bashing” and turns the phrase into a figurative bashing of those gays and lesbians who “collude” with the same power structures that Brickman, Layden, and Friedman criticize to varying degrees. Barnard, who aligns his rage with that of the fag

bashing queer 'zines, specifically names the social structures that would need to change to alleviate his rage: "reductively binary models of identity, oppositionality, and political activism." Barnard's work suggests the complicated nature of undoing social structures that manufacture rage. Beyond simple homo/hetero issues lie a whole matrix of class, race, and gender issues that will likely produce and reproduce rage.

Artistic and Cultural Representations of Rage

In his essay "Whatup in the 'Hood," William Brigham discusses the artistic practice of black filmmakers as one that closely reflects their social experience of rage, thus providing an effective transition between considering rage in its social and its artistic manifestations. Brigham demonstrates that when African-Americans depict themselves independently of the white-owned and dominated film industry, the portraits of African-Americans shift from accommodating and assimilationist to enraged. However, Brigham argues, African-American directors also in part have used their recent films to demonstrate the misdirection of this rage towards other blacks. Several of the recent films produced by African-Americans suggest that turning this rage towards white institutions would provide the most effective means of resolving the characters' rage.

D. S. Lawson ("Rage and Remembrance") also sees rage as a central, structuring emotion for a group of texts, plays about AIDS, that spring directly from a known social condition. Similar to Brigham's argument, Lawson's analysis finds that the dominant society's dismissal of the crisis (black poverty or AIDS, respectively) produces as much rage as the crisis itself. Lawson agrees with Brigham as well that artists from minority or oppressed groups may often direct their rage at the "inner group"; the seeming hopelessness of the group working together to accomplish change may unleash the artist's rage against the insiders as well as the outsiders.

Claire Kahane ("The Aesthetic Politics of Rage") defines varying types of rage produced in nineteenth-century, upper-middle-class women: repressed rage, displaced rage, and outrage. As opposed to the earlier essays collected here, Kahane finds that "the experience of rage is powerful, but not political." Kahane separately defines "outrage" as a political act. Thus, while both Brigham and Lawson see filmmakers and play-

wrights expressing rage directly in artistic form, Kahane sees this direct expression of rage as outrage, manifested in essay writing and feminist action. Kahane defines rage in literary expression as an act of displacement, describing this displacement in more explicitly Freudian, psychological terminology than the previous authors in this section.

Our essay (“All Anger and Understanding”) finds rage more literally expressed in film and literature than Kahane suggests. The essay describes how narrative in the cinema and in fiction represents what we describe as an ultimately uncontainable concept, rage. We argue, as does Lawson, that complex, experimental narrative structures more effectively allow for rage to emerge from the text. Through examining the work of several writers and filmmakers, notably Hanif Kureishi, we interrogate rage in fictional texts for its content, its structural challenges, and its cultural significance.

The next two essays in the collection discuss how artistic works can work to conceal or to deflect (abort) rage. Moshe Davidowitz’s essay (“The Psychohistory of Jewish Rage and Redemption”) defines rage as a probable psychological reaction to persecution and hatred. Davidowitz alone among the authors here discusses pictorial art as a symbolic means of expressing a rage that could not be expressed directly in words or action, nor even figuratively through drama; if medieval European Jews expressed their rage, they could be killed. Using psychological theory similar to Kahane, Davidowitz describes rage as an emotion that must be directed *somewhere*. Pictorial art, then, can serve as a safe, symbolic outlet of rage for a particular group that dares not express it directly.

Alan Clarke Shepard also discusses repressed rage, but in this case, the artistic work both expresses and deflects the rage. In our contemporary society, certainly, expressions of rage by oppressed groups are more tolerated than in the society that Davidowitz discusses. Still, female playwright Beth Henley, Shepard argues, nearly always hesitates to express or aborts the rage so evidently mounting within her work. Shepard’s essay echoes both Friedman’s analysis of female reluctance to assume the male prerogative of rageful revenge and Kahane’s demonstration that female rage often turns inward onto the female self. Even in our so-called age of feminism, female rage may never develop into the acts of violence it threatens. Though Henley’s heroines “relish murderous and suicidal fantasies, they repudiate them.”

As in the first section, “Social Constructions of Rage,” we end our

group of essays on artistic and cultural representations of rage with a work that mixes a personal experience of rage with a broader theoretical engagement with it. Susan Stryker (“My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix”) furthers some of Barnard’s ideas regarding the unfixed self as a particularly productive site of rage. Stryker offers the transsexual body as a metaphoric site of cultural rage. Transsexuality and the rage it screams “represents the prospect of destabilizing the foundational presuppositions of fixed genders upon which a politics of personal identity depends.” Stryker radicalizes the idea of an artistically constructed self transformed into a symbol of rage.

Rage in the Academy

Our last section of essays demonstrates how the previously polite discourse common to higher education in the United States increasingly breaks down in the face of rage. As we began the anthology with the bloody, murderous intrusion into a Canadian university of a male outraged against feminism, so we end by showing how feminist, working-class, and multicultural intrusions into academia have outraged all parties on any side of the debates. Each of the essays in this grouping reflects the personal focus of Barnard or Stryker while raising larger issues about rage in the academy as an institution.

Sharon O’Dair discusses her outrage as a university professor, forced to separate herself from her working class roots, but constantly humiliated by middle- or upper-class professors who recognize her performance, both in trying to retain working-class roots and in trying to pass as an intellectual, therefore, not a person of the working class. Academics who claim working-class solidarity while denying their privilege as elites fuel O’Dair’s outrage. O’Dair does not finally propose a means to resolve the rage that a professor of working-class origins faces. However, she states that the academy has only begun to acknowledge this issue and must continue to confront it.

In the essay, “Second-Rate or Second Rank: The Human Pyramid of Academe,” Sheng-mei Ma provides a connection between ethnicity and rage in the academy. Ma writes to unveil the outrageous attempt on the part of U.S. academic institutions to keep hidden the facts of hierarchy prevalent throughout. Ma argues that “by retrieving into scholarly debates such terms as second-rate, as harsh as they may sound, we import

to our profession some degree of honesty” and make possible “the revolution of turning the communication channel upside down.” He suggests a revolution of honesty that would afford academic institutions opportunities for change.

In “The Rage of Innocents: On Casting the First Stone in a Sea of Cultural Pain,” Don Keefer also asserts that a “cold civil war” exists in academia and that it has everything to do with the political correctness movement. He cautions against the execution of a politically correct agenda: “A consequence of the politically correct depth-psychological search and destroy mission to eradicate prejudice is a style of intolerance not tolerable within the academic community.” Here too issues of academic freedom and justice infiltrate the rage debate.

The essays we collect here do not represent all theoretical stances on rage, nor do they attempt to survey rage to a great extent beyond the borders of the United States (with one significant extension into Canada and a foray into nineteenth- and twentieth-century England.) This anthology serves to expand and to complicate an understanding of rage, its relationship to social, artistic, and academic life. It provides an introduction, a beginning, an invitation to rage.

FURTHER READING

During the course of our research, we found rage a surprisingly under-theorized term. Though we read and heard the word often in our daily experience, rage had received few significant theoretical analyses. We recommend the following works for their analysis of rage, for their central representation of it, or for the fears they express about rage. This list by no means represents a definitive bibliography of rage, but it should provide some key directions for those readers who want to pursue the topic further:

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- Wright, Robin B. *Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.

NOTES

1. This collection of essays contains only one essay about Canada, another which divides its attentions between England and the United States. All the other essays focus on rage as it develops and manifests itself within the United States. We intended all along to center our attention on U.S. experience, but added the other two essays which closely parallel situations in the United States as they have occurred in other Western societies. In no way do we want to claim that people across different cultures experience, feel, or manifest their rage in similar ways.

PART I

**Social Constructions
of Rage**

CHAPTER 1

Female Lives, Feminist Deaths

The Relationship of the Montreal Massacre to Dissociation, Incest, and Violence against Women

JULIE BRICKMAN

On Wednesday, December 6, 1989 a young man, 25 years old, product of a violent home, failed military candidate and lover of war films, entered the University of Montreal's School of Engineering building. He was not a student, although he had once studied for admission to the school. He was carrying a .223 calibre semi-automatic rifle.¹ It was a little after 5:00 p.m.

Walking into a classroom, he shouted "I want the women" (Kuitenbrouwer, Scott, Lamey & Heinrich, 1989). He separated the men from the women, ordered the men to leave the classroom, and lined the women up along one wall. "You are all feminists!" he yelled and began shooting to kill (Kuitenbrouwer et al., 1989). According to the professor, all nine women in his class were either killed or wounded (Shepherd, 1989). There were approximately 48 men in the classroom (Came, Burke, Ferzoco, O'Farrell & Wallace, 1989; "The gunman's trail," 1989).

The young man continued his hunt, stalking his victims without obstruction. He had already murdered one woman near the copying room prior to entering that first classroom. He killed six more in the classroom, left, walked through the corridors firing randomly, entered the cafeteria, killed three more women, then went into a second classroom, where he murdered four more women and killed himself. By the end of

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his spree, he had murdered fourteen women and injured thirteen others: nine women and four men.

According to Elliott Leyton, anthropologist and author of *Hunting Humans: The Rise of the Modern Multiple Murderer* (1986), this pattern is characteristic of multiple killers. Their murders are their social statements, and their social statements embody central themes and tensions of the civilization in which they live. Typically, they are men who view themselves as failures and blame their lack of success and status on a target group.

Marc Lépine targeted women: successful women and feminist women. For him, the two categories were the same. His explanatory letter contained a tirade against women as well as a list of nineteen prominent women, whom he particularly despised.

What, then, was Lépine's social statement? How does it embody tensions central to our age? There seemed to be at least three implied statements concerning women:

1. Women are responsible for the failures of men;
2. Any woman who stands in the way of a man's success deserves to be punished;
3. Successful women have abdicated their right to protection by individual men (through heroic actions) or collective mankind (through theory, social policy and law).

Feminism, a label earned by scholarship, political action and/or particular theoretical understandings of the world, should not be denigrated by allowing it to be applied willy-nilly by those with the least comprehension of what it signifies. To examine these murders as actions against successful (and therefore feminist) women would be to define women from the stand-point of Marc Lépine and to endorse traditional sexist theories about women, which collapse unrelated characteristics of women such as successful, feminist and anti-male into a single dimension or constellation. During their lives most, if not all, of the murdered women did not define themselves as feminist, and one of the basic tenets of most feminist thought is the right of women, individually and collectively, to define themselves.

If they did not live as feminists, they certainly died as them. The nature and circumstances of their deaths has reshaped the meaning of