



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

The Great American Freak Out

Americans are not only terrified of everything; it turns out they are also subject to sudden and inexplicable tolerance breaks. Last week's viral incident at the Jet Blue counter in Miami serves up more evidence of an epidemic of adult con-niption fits, even as nobody seems to know why the Adult Freak Out singularity is sweeping through the country like a disease.

We can't even fairly hang this on Trump — though Bloomberg et. al. keep trying to convince their readers this is the worst period in the history of the world — because the Freak Out phenomenon predates Trump by several presidents.

Alistair Cooke, who was as fine an observer of Americans as anyone, suggested that, "To watch an American...tells you something about one aspect of the American character: the capacity to withstand a great deal of outside interference...a willing

acceptance of frenzy which, though it's never self-conscious, amounts to a willingness to let other people have and assert their own lively, and even offensive, character."

It's possible that was actually true of our character, once, though it would be hard to count Cooke's observations as a legacy we are handing down to our grandchildren.

At least not in Oregon, which hosts a political culture that is increasingly intolerant, even aggressive, toward anyone who resists socialist dreams of absolute control over everyone, and everything. Oregon has decided to toss freedoms of all kinds, and is now on the cusp of turning hundreds of thousands of its best and most law-abiding citizens into felons, overnight, with the most nakedly Bolshevik gun laws outside of the Soviet Republics — and cautionary tales — of California and New York.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote: "It is part of the American character to consider nothing as desperate." But something has changed dramatically from that rosy view, so much so that a few hundred years later the poet Archibald McLeish would write: "The American mood, perhaps even the American character, has changed. There are few manifestations of the old American self-assurance, which so irritated Dickens. Instead, there is a sense of frustration so perceptible that even our politicians have attempted to

exploit it."

Of course they have. Domesticating the American character, which has devolved from a suspicious-of-government, can-do, entrepreneurial, and mission-oriented problem-solver into a sour, intellectually and sexually repressed, oversensitive bundle of nerves, always serves the interests of politicians because the success of their scheme is predicated on utter dependence.

Your dependence. On them and their largesse. Which is why tossing even a single freedom overboard is so very, very, dangerous.

But why are Americans, with such alarming frequency, falling back on the Full Freak Out? What in our culture is creating this abundance of tantrums?

If you Google "Woman Freaks Out" you will be rewarded with a long list of fantastic, and occasionally quite dangerous, tolerance breaks. Women have recently freaked out at Starbucks, on airplanes, at Planet Fitness, over a PDA, on trains, over service dogs, in Gamestop, on the subway, at the McDonald's drive-thru, over a close encounter with whales, on ferris wheels, in hundreds of restaurants, and most recently at the aforementioned Jet Blue counter in Miami, where a woman's rage for not being allowed on an airplane was, naturally, caught on dozens of cell phones as she screamed — and it was actual screaming — that the perplexed gate-agent was a

rapist.

If you Google "Man Freaks Out," the list is equally rewarding. Men have freaked out over stray cats, in Gamestop (again), on planes, in vape shops, in WalMart, over bagels, in Taco Bell, McDonalds, Burger King, and Chick-fil-A. They have lost it over head-lice, Christmas decorations, plastic straws, bagels (again), and at least one classic freak out was triggered when an employee called a customer "Sir." Which, given the transgender person's overwhelmingly male characteristics, was certainly a forgivable offense.

One of the funnier threads running through these viral episodes of hysterics is the number of times the Freaker-Outer browbeats their victim with the most desperate playground move imaginable, which is the exasperated threat to "Call Corporate."

Lions, and Tigers, and Bears. And Corporate. Oh My!

These are adults doing this. Faced with an inability to control their circumstances, not to mention themselves, they just detonate on anyone, or anything, around them. Which is why we now have thousands of videos of American adults destroying inanimate objects — from mailboxes to laser printers, from cell phones to traffic signals — in astonishing fits of unleashed rage.

If the now ubiquitous American Freak Out is evidence of anything, perhaps it is a symptom of our lives on the new frontier. Maybe

it's happening because we are culturally marooned, neither here nor there just yet, but rather groaning through the death agonies of the old myths that once sustained us, while fighting savagely over the invention and control of the new myths we will eventually live by.

Only one thing seems certain: if you lose it, and go Full Freak Out, you won't do it alone. That's because almost everyone around you has been turned into a mobile television van, complete with live-streaming, on-location, Breaking News capability. So if you are going to freak, do us all a favor and at least make it interesting, because it's a competitive environment, and if you do it well enough you have a legitimate shot at becoming famous.

If only for a minute.

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