

Why we document you: Recording the city's oversight failure

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It seems like a million years ago, but there was a time when the testament to a fine performance or thrilling speech was a standing ovation. Even further back, for a moment in adolescence, we lifted our matches in a darkened stadium to share a twinkling recognition of the ascendancy of rock. More recently, during Occupy, we all learned to twinkle our fingers in agreement and hiss in displeasure.

Today our matches no longer light the sky. Instead, we hold our cell phone cameras aloft, aimed directly at authority, secrecy and control. There's plenty of each. You can find the evidence on our website.

Over the years, the website of the Mental Health Association of Portland has collected thousands of articles, reports, photos and videos chronicling the history of mental illness and addiction in Oregon. We built this rich archive because no one else bothers to collect *our* history – the story of how people with mental illness and addiction have been treated in Oregon.

Our online archive documents our genocide, generation after generation, at the hands of the state and citizens of Oregon.

We document the warehousing, isolation, beating, poisoning, torture, drowning, exile, medical experimentation and unmarked mass graves. We document the hatred, the contemptuous laughter, the poverty, sickness and death. Our bullet-ridden bodies tell a terrible story that few acknowledge and fewer mourn. We document an ongoing horror, through the years and as it happens.

Much of this happened out of society's view, and society was just fine with that. Moreover, the decisions and policies that shaped our lives happened without us. Today we have a new tool to bring authority out of the darkness and into brilliant sunshine.

Cell phone cameras are now flooding city and county chambers, public meetings and committee hearings across the nation. And

in Portland advocates are closely monitoring police accountability discussions, making recordings and carefully posting them online.

Why are we interested in the police? Because our police are well known for their routine harm to people with mental illness.

Most of these cell phone cameras are held by people who have experienced mental illness and addiction, violence or threat of violence by our police – or are entirely sympathetic to the welfare of those who have.

Why such scrutiny?

Many of these meetings are also recorded and carefully posted online by the organization hosting the meeting. Why bother to make a second, often inferior, recording?

Further, the makers of the secondary recordings have been jerks, harrasing volunteer committee members, giving running commentary over the proceedings, intending the camera as a forceful spotlight, pointing it like a weapon. They are intentionally rude and should cease. But those hosting public meetings need to smarten up and recognize when they're being pranked.

We support the right of community members to make recordings of public meetings and post them online – and record any part of the making of the public's business – because our lives depend on that business being fair, legal and beneficial. Public scrutiny acts as a shield.

Most persons elected to office or

appointed to committees do not depend on public services. Sure, they may be cashing a public salary to pay bills, but they have options. People with disabilities, people recovering from mental illness and addictions, often do not have options and are entirely dependent on the public welfare system. Our medical care, our housing, our food, our protection from both the law and perpetrators, come from this public

business. As we are not represented at the table, we need to learn, follow and understand every iota of public business that affects us.

But why the second version? Why not be satisfied with the high-quality recording made by the committee?

Three important reasons we document you.

One: Those high-quality recordings are routinely deleted from government servers. When Sam Adams succeeded Tom Potter dozens of recordings of meetings about routine police harm to people with mental illness were wiped away. When the Portland Tribune and Willamette Week recently updated their websites thousands of articles and photos vanished. Local TV and radio empty content from their sites every news cycle.

Who cares? News by definition is ephemeral. Piles just lying around are unnavigable and unhelpful. We need to move on into the future. Set aside grievances and focus on now.

We care. These documents – whether we agree with them or not – are our history. Articles, photos, recordings, tell the story of what happened to us. They are often clumsy, not created in the way we would like to tell the story, but they are what we have for now. At some point in the future a careful

and thoughtful historian will arrive and make sense of these days. So for now, we collect in preparation for that effort. Now your history is ours.

Second: Our local media stopped covering government business over a decade ago. Both the mainstream media and the so-called alternative media are almost exclusively interested in scandal, conflict and scoops. They don't provide unbiased analysis as advertised; they never did and never will. The future of journalism is flotsam in the swarm, picked over by aggregators and curators, led by Snowden and hackers and public records requestors. The cell phone takes back the power, just a little bit, in a jiggly hostile gesture, but it is ours and not theirs.

Finally: The way the pocket camera or cell phone is held is a new gesture which says something substantial about this generation. Held out at arms length it could be intended as some sort of collective shield charm by the internet swarm to ward off evil, as a crucifix or garlic may have done in other story lines. Held out at arms length in the midst of confrontation during a conversation about police brutality it becomes also a weapon, symbolizing a gun, to slay an opponent. The irony of mental illness advocates pointing cameras at police is fierce. Note: when advocates point cameras at advocates, the police sit back and chuckle.

The decorum of the police oversight meetings in Portland collapsed because the structure was designed and built with the goal of containment and control. It was built without the full and equal participation of people directly harmed by the city – those due an apology and reform. That apology has not occurred. That reform has not occurred.

In response to challenging words the city has produced yet more barriers to reform, more lawyers and rules.

To expect decorum now is ridiculous. No justice no peace, nothing about us without us.



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