

The Last American Idealist

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Christopher Dorner's brutal killings of multiple people vaguely associated with the Los Angeles police have caused debates over both the department's deployment of manhunt drones and the disastrous trigger-happiness that had them showering bullets on any hapless civilian with the misfortune to drive a truck resembling Dorner's. But what deserves close attention is the extended statement Dorner released on his motivations, which in its non-menacing parts is unsettlingly eloquent, and which stands as a testament to the destructive consequences of American mythology.

Following the press's standard line, the *Christian Science Monitor* summarizes Dorner's writings as "alternately horrific and pathetic," full of "vengeful bitterness over perceived slights and injustices ranging from racial slurs in grade school to his firing as a Los Angeles police officer"; standard homicidal maniac material. But an actual close reading of the statement shows otherwise. "Horrific" it certainly is, in detailing Dorner's intention to use the police's own tactics and weaponry in a bloody war against them. But the "perceived slights" are in fact a quite substantial history of LAPD racism and unaccountability, including the case of an officer who "found it very funny and entertaining to draw blood from suspects" and "even intentionally ripped the flesh off the arm of a woman we had arrested." Dorner says officers routinely shrug off wrongful criminal accusations by saying "I guess [the accused] should have stayed at home that day." The "grade school" incidents referred to by the *Monitor* are similarly misrepresented: they are in fact Dorner's account of the humiliations of being called "nigger" growing up in an all-white school, which he offers in response to the anticipated accusation that he has a history of violence and bullying.

The first point to note about this unusual document is that Dorner appears to be right about the circumstances of his firing. Dorner was dismissed from his position for making false statements after he filed a complaint against an officer for kicking a Christopher Gettler, a mentally ill man, multiple times in the face and torso. But video evidence confirms Dorner's account: both Gettler and his father recount the kicks. In the evidentiary fog that generally surrounds police brutality claims, it's very rare to find proof this clear. Given that, along with the detail of Dorner's accounts and his outright begging of journalists to investigate his claims, some credence therefore appears due to Dorner's claims of an LAPD rife with blind-eye turning and "blue line" protection of corrupt officers, one that "has not changed from the Daryl Gates and Mark Fuhrman days."

But the second striking fact is that despite his allegations of massive departmental racism, Dorner writes as a perfect political moderate rather than a racial firebrand. He speaks of being inspired to a military career by Colin Powell, of having pride in his badge. The last passage pays tribute to Bill Cosby, saying Cosby's criticism of black society is dead-on: "Blacks must strive for more in life than bling, hoes, and cars. The current culture is an epidemic." Dorner places himself squarely within the bootstraps school of American political thinking. And though he wishes pain on George Zimmerman, he has harsh words for black officers who carry the "intent of getting retribution toward subordinate caucasians officers for the pain and hostile work environment their elders inflicted on you as probationers," since they "breed a new generation of bigoted caucasian officer when you belittle them and treat them unfairly."

"I'm not an aspiring rapper, I'm not a gang member, I'm not a dope dealer, I don't have multiple babies momma's. I am an American by choice, I am a son, I am a brother, I am a military service member... I didn't need the US Navy to instill Honor, Courage, and Commitment in me but I thank them for re-enforcing it."

Dorner fully bought the bullshit they fed him about the rewards of Working Hard and Being Honest, and the disjunction between these deeply internalized myths and the reality of an irredeemably racist LAPD culture appears to have driven him mad. Despite his disgust with the LAPD, he *still* ludicrously believes the country's tales about itself. There are passages full of a sweetly naive optimism that would make a junior high civics-class A-student blush:

"America, you will realize today and tomorrow that this world is made up of all human beings who have the same general needs and wants in life for themselves, their kin, community, and state. That is the freedom to LIVE and LOVE. They may eat different foods, enjoy different music, have different dialects, or speak a second language, but in essence are no different from you and I. This is America. We are not a perfect sovereign country as we have our own flaws but we are the closest that will ever exist."

Dorner comes across as having a childlike faith in the redemptive possibilities of the country's institutions. He commends Ellen Degeneres because she "changed the perception of your gay community and how we as Americans view the LGBT community." He wants to see Jeffrey Toobin on the Supreme Court, because he would bring "some damn common sense and reasoning instead of partisan bickering" (although "in true Toobin fashion, we all know he would not accept the nomination"). And even witness his hopeful comments on Hollywood:

"It's kind of sad I won't be around to view and enjoy *The Hangover III*. What an awesome trilogy. Todd Phillips, don't make anymore Hangovers after the third, takes away the originality of its foundation."

Dorner *actually believes* the question of whether or not there will be a *Hangover IV* is affected by something other than the box-office receipts of *The Hangover III*. He thinks government can exercise integrity, he likes both Barack Obama and George H.W. Bush but not Wayne LaPierre or the Westboro Baptist Church. Except where he is threatening policemen's families, Dorner consistently writes as an optimistic Everyman Moderate, perhaps the last person to believe so totally in the country's myth, and as a result the person most wholly destroyed by its contradictions.

The Dorner note is somewhat reminiscent of the one issued in 2010 by Joseph Stack, the Texas man who flew his plane into an IRS office. Stack, too, had believed what he was taught, but had come to the despairing conclusion that the capitalist creed was "from each according to his gullibility, to each according to his greed," and didn't know how to proceed except with irrational violence. Analyzing Stack's note, Noam Chomsky wrote that "[a]n acute sense of betrayal comes readily to people who believed they had fulfilled their duty to society in a moral compact with business and government, only to discover they had been only instruments of profit and power." Chomsky said that the Stacks of the world need to find hope before they "destroy themselves, and maybe the world." Like Stack, Christopher Dorner chose the monstrously wrong path of destroying himself and multiple perfectly harmless people.

But like his madness, the turn to violence was also a logical consequence of the limitations of Dorner's ideology, in this case his lifelong immersion in police and military culture. In the most disturbing and bloodthirsty parts of his writing, Dorner lapses into a chilling series of martial acronyms as he detachedly describes his battle plans. He says he "will utilize every tool within INT collections that I learned from NMITC in Dam Neck" and that he "will utilize OSINT to discover your residences, spouses workplaces, and children's schools [and] IMINT to coordinate and plan attacks on your fixed locations." Dorner was too much of a military man and a police officer to see how futile

violence is as a tactic. He thinks if you just kill enough people, deploy enough shock and awe, you can make your point. (It's ironic, of course, that the same rush to violence caused the LAPD to open fire on multiple civilians in their blind quest to destroy Dorner.)

Christopher Dorner might have proven a great asset in the movement for police accountability. But lacking a radical analytical framework to explain the tension between the story he believed and the reality he saw, he went insane. Like the everyman-maniac protagonist in the dreadful film *Falling Down*, he sees a broken world and reacts with the hideous non-sequitur of killing everyone instead of creating a better one.

Such is the consequence of believing in just institutions. Dorner had taken his case to the courts and been rejected, yet he says he refuses to accept that "sometimes bad things happen to good people"; that impossible tension can't be resolved but by forcing it to resolve. Lacking a grounding in popular struggle and organized resistance, he used the only tool he knew: the sickening bloodshed of the police and military.

The Dorner case shows the tragic consequences of the American political religion meeting the American political reality, and a need for the kind of robust radical program that offers understanding and hope to future Christopher Dorners.

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