



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for March 8<sup>th</sup>

### **18 Feb - Charges dropped against man accused of bringing ‘explosives’ near rally**

*Three charges were dropped against an Oldsmar man who deputies said brought a “destructive device” to a political rally outside a county courthouse on Jan. 6, 2022.*

#### **MORE:**

by Dylan Abad (WFLA)

According to a previous report, Garrett James Smith, 22, was seen running away from an “active political lawful assembly” that gathered in a Pinellas County Courthouse parking lot. At the time, the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office said Smith was wearing all black, with a black face covering and a black backpack.

When deputies stopped Smith and searched his backpack, they found a black helmet and a list of items referred to as a “direct action list” or “DACK,” according to the sheriff’s office.

The list included directions on the type of clothing Smith should wear, as well as what pieces of armor and gear — including a gas mask and air filters — he should carry.

Deputies also found what appeared to be a “pipe-style explosive device,” the report added.

Smith was charged with three counts of making, possessing, and/or discharging a destructive device, and one count of loitering and prowling.

On Tuesday, a filing revealed three of Smith’s charges will be dropped after an investigation by the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives) found the pipe-style device “not to be [a] destructive device.”

The filing said, “the items were legal ‘novelty devices’ that emit smoke but do not explode if ignited.”

Smith will still be prosecuted for the crime of loitering and prowling.

### **22 Feb - New Writing by Eric King**

*We’ve been really lucky over the last couple of months and are again happy to share new work by Eric King, who is gearing up for trial.*

#### **MORE:**

##### Just Yesterday

I study our photographs  
Remember how soft you felt  
Those moments to find my life  
Kept me sturdy in Rocky waves  
How the fuck did you get so good  
At the card games you’d learned  
Just yesterday...  
It doesn’t make any damn sense  
I swear  
I taught you cribbage on Saturday  
You skunked me all day Sunday  
We’ve existed through distance

##### They say I’m no good

They say I’m no good  
and the whole town would be safer  
If I was buried deep or shot with a taser  
They talk a lot of shit  
is it a terrorist or arsonist?  
Can’t let me out of here I’m a fire breather  
I’m too violent  
cops put me in a box with 20 doors and no windows  
sunlight’s prohibited “it’ll make you grow”  
those that will judge have never gotten  
to know me but my look is rotten  
If only they’d talk to you first

And connect through fingertips  
Card tables and plexiglass  
Living in 15 minute intervals  
Praying nothing fucked the weekend off  
Praying they just leave us alone  
Dying to feel my arms around you  
Pinching you when the camera flicks  
Will you have a new hairdo?  
Will they trip on you?  
Leave you locked in again?  
Like you belonged here also?  
When was the last time we spoke?  
Without an extra pair of ears?  
I know when doors fade  
Our new reality gets to grow  
My arms will need to be pried off you

they would learn a secret by you from me  
& maybe they'd agree  
that I'm harmless

\*poem\*

When life gets heavy  
I lay on my bunk  
put my sheet over my head  
pretend to be a turtle in my shell  
retreat to my safe space  
eat my lettuce and carrots  
pretend I'm out in a garden  
escape the noises and pollution  
build my fantasy reality  
safe + sound  
blocking out the hate and noise  
living in my shell  
until it is safe to come out

### **23 Feb - Certain Days calendar collective on a few podcasts**

*Our friends at Certain Days were on a few podcasts this month. Check it out.*

#### **MORE:**

Kite Line Radio, February 4, 2022; Listen at [wfhb.org/news/february-4-2022-certain-days](https://wfhb.org/news/february-4-2022-certain-days)

We share a conversation between Daniel McGowan and Brian Whitener about the Certain Days calendar. The Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners Calendar is a joint fundraising and educational project coordinated between outside and inside organizers in the US and Canada. Its founding members Herman Bell, Robert Seth Hayes and David Gilbert were welcomed home from prison in 2018 and 2021. Today, McGowan talks about the history of the project, his own experiences with prisoner support, how the calendar supports folks on the inside, and some of the challenges to long-term organizing. McGowan reflects on his time inside following his arrest for Earth Liberation Front actions and emphasizes the importance of supporting grassroots movement organizations.

Millennials are Killing Capitalism, February 18, 2022; Listen at [tiny.cc/CDonMAKC](https://tiny.cc/CDonMAKC)

This one I did with my fellow Certain Days collective member Josh. We talked to Jay Beware for over an hour about the past and future of our calendar, political prisoners, the 2022 calendar and more.

Daniel and Josh talk about the nuts and bolts of putting the calendar together, working with political prisoners on the project, and supporting prisoners against state repression. Along the way they both talk about tensions they feel in political prisoner support in the present moment. Both embracing prison abolition, understanding the inherently political nature of all imprisonment, and holding firm on the critical importance of movement defense to the creation of a better future.

Daniel also shares many insights from his own time as a political prisoner on the vicious and arbitrary nature of carceral power and the role that political prisoners try to play teaching and sharing radical knowledge but also seeking to legally combat the most repressive facets of the prison system both inside and out.

Josh and Daniel reference a ton of great projects and ways people can get involved, we will include all of them in the show notes so make sure to check them all out and get involved. One in particular we want to draw folks attention to [uprisingsupport.org](https://uprisingsupport.org) which was created to support people facing political repression

for their involvement in the uprisings in response to the executions of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others in 2020.

MAKC has a patreon you can support at [tiny.cc/MAKC\\_Donate](https://tiny.cc/MAKC_Donate)

## **24 Feb - Whistleblowers say they're bullied for exposing prison abuse**

*As the federal Bureau of Prisons faces increased scrutiny over its latest scandal — allegations staff and even a warden sexually abused inmates at a women's prison known as the "rape club" — people striving to hold it accountable say they're being attacked for speaking up.*

### **MORE:**

by Michael Balsamo and Michael R. Sisak (*Associated Press*)

Whistleblower employees say high-ranking prison officials are bullying them for exposing wrongdoing and threatening to close the women's lockup if workers keep reporting abuse, and members of Congress say they're being stonewalled as they seek to bring greater oversight to the beleaguered bureau.

The Bureau of Prisons' proclivity for silence and secrecy has endured, workers and lawmakers say, even after an *Associated Press* investigation revealed years of sexual misconduct at the women's prison — the federal correctional institution in Dublin, California — and detailed a toxic culture that enabled it to continue for years.

After that reporting, which included accounts of inmates being sent to solitary confinement or transferred to other prisons to silence them, workers and union leaders at the Bay Area lockup and other federal prisons say they're also being threatened for raising alarms about misconduct.

At Dublin, union president Ed Canales says the acting warden, Bureau of Prisons Deputy Regional Director T. Ray Hinkle, shared Canales' confidential emails and home address with the staff after Canales complained to bureau leaders about abuse, corruption and safety issues.

At a federal prison in Mendota, California, union president Aaron McGlothin says agency officials retaliated by reviving a frivolous disciplinary investigation after he complained about busloads of COVID-19-positive inmates being transferred to his institution. The investigation, he said, stemmed from an erroneous complaint that he was AWOL from work when he'd actually been cleared to spend time on union matters.

At the federal prison complex in Victorville, California, workers said one official has warned them to stay away from whistleblowers or risk being jammed up with disciplinary investigations. Such threats are effective because even the lowest-level disciplinary matter can hinder a worker's move up the ranks, union officials said.

John Kostelnik, the Western region vice president for the correctional workers union, said what's happening to whistleblowers at Dublin, Mendota and Victorville is endemic of a coverup culture deeply ingrained in Bureau of Prisons leadership — aimed more at preserving what's left of the bureau's tattered reputation than sweeping away any employee's transgressions.

"We're responsible for keeping inmates behind the walls, but this agency has created a concept of keeping everything behind the walls. And that's not appropriate," Kostelnik said in an interview.

Four men who've worked at Dublin have been charged with sexually abusing inmates there, including ex-Warden Ray J. Garcia, who's pleaded not guilty. Several others are under investigation.

Federal law protects whistleblower employees from retaliation, but Kostelnik said such protections don't really exist in the cloistered Bureau of Prisons, where wardens control staff discipline and people who

speaking up are essentially blacklisted. Bosses routinely ask would-be whistleblowers to write memos detailing problems, effectively forcing them to put down their names and compromise anonymity, Kostelnik said.

Without an anonymous, third-party reporting system like other law enforcement agencies have, federal prison whistleblowers "face a full-frontal attack when you report anything of wrongdoing in the facilities, especially if you're reporting management officials," Kostelnik said.

The *AP* contacted the Justice Department and the Bureau of Prisons with detailed questions about the allegations. The Bureau of Prisons responded with a one-sentence statement, saying it "takes seriously allegations of staff misconduct, including allegations of retaliation by staff, and consistent with our national policy, those allegations are required to be reported, and when warranted, investigations are opened." Hinkle didn't respond to a text message seeking comment.

The Bureau of Prisons has been plagued by crises in recent years, many of them exposed by *AP* reporting, including criminal activity by employees, critically low staffing levels hampering responses to emergencies, the rapid spread of COVID-19, a failed response to the pandemic and dozens of escapes.

Last week, after *AP*'s reporting on Dublin, the Senate launched a bipartisan working group to scrutinize conditions within the Bureau of Prisons, and Wednesday the leaders of the Senate Judiciary Committee wrote to Attorney General Merrick Garland demanding he take immediate action to reform the bureau.

The bureau's treatment of whistleblowers and its resistance to transparency, as documented by workers and lawmakers, has only invited more scrutiny.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., who visited Dublin last week after reading *AP*'s investigation, says she's taking a larger congressional contingent to inspect the prison after Hinkle prevented her from speaking one-on-one with inmates and staff.

"When I read the article, I was both astonished and disgusted," Speier said in an interview. "I wanted to go and visit to determine for myself what the circumstances were. I would categorize the visit as woefully inadequate and unsatisfactory."

Speier said she won't stop until the Bureau of Prisons faces significant oversight and will "go to the highest levels of the Justice Department and the White House if necessary, to make sure we have the access we want."

During her visit, Speier said, Hinkle tried to block her from speaking with several inmates who reported abuse and instead sent her to speak with others he'd picked. She said he dismissively called sexual abuse committed by employees "an embarrassment."

Speier said she told him: "This isn't an embarrassment. This is a toxic work environment. It is a reprehensible set of circumstances."

Afterward, in an email to Dublin staff obtained by the *AP*, Hinkle alleged Speier "mistreated" prison workers and treated one employee "as though she had committed a crime."

"I can only assume the Congresswoman was referring to a recent *AP* article that painted our institution in broad strokes," Hinkle wrote in the email. "Although I recognize her right to believe what she believes, I do not recognize her right to blindly categorize all the hard working staff at FCI Dublin who choose to be law-abiding public servants every single day they report to duty."

Hinkle said Speier had surprised him and other officials by asking to speak privately with inmates — an assertion the congresswoman disputes — and said they blocked her from doing so because having those conversations could "compromise an active investigation or case."

In another recent all-staff email, the acting warden floated the possibility of replacing or renovating the Dublin prison, citing infrastructure and safety concerns.

In a recent closed-door meeting, however, union leaders said officials threatened to shut down Dublin if workers didn't stop speaking up about misconduct.

"They were very clear that us reporting is what's going to close it down, that our actions are what's going to close it down," Kostelnik said.

He said prison officials raised Dublin's maintenance costs, some of the highest of any federal prison, as a pretext for a possible closure. The facility, 21 miles (34 kilometers) east of Oakland, opened in 1974. It has about 760 inmates and more than 200 employees.

"Now all of a sudden they want to bring that up, that it's costing us all this money," Kostelnik said. "But it was all related to 'Well, if you guys keep doing this,' basically saying, 'We have the reason to shut it down because it's costly, but because you guys are exposing this, we're just gonna shut it down.'"

## **26 Feb - Supporters Seek Clemency for Native American Activist Convicted in Killings**

*Leonard Peltier, sentenced to two life terms 45 years ago in the shooting of two F.B.I. agents, is now 77 and in poor health.*

### **MORE:**

by Mark Walker (*New York Times*)

Now his backers, including members of Congress, are making what they consider a last-ditch effort to win clemency for Mr. Peltier, who is 77 and suffering from diabetes, hypertension, partial blindness from a stroke, and an aortic aneurysm. Mr. Peltier, whom many Native American activists consider a political prisoner, also recently tested positive for the coronavirus.

Efforts to overturn his conviction over the years have failed, as have campaigns for a pardon or commutation of his sentence. Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama both left office without acting on pleas to grant him clemency, Mr. Clinton after hundreds of former and current F.B.I. agents angrily marched to the White House to protest his considering such a move and the bureau's director at the time made his opposition clear.

Representative Raúl M. Grijalva, Democrat of Arizona, has sent letters to the White House on Mr. Peltier's behalf, including one last month after he tested positive for Covid-19. That letter was signed by eight other members of Congress. Mr. Peltier's lawyer is also pursuing the issue through the regular clemency process at the Justice Department. It is not clear whether President Biden would consider the clemency request. The White House did not respond to a request for comment. The F.B.I. declined to comment on whether it would now oppose commuting Mr. Peltier's sentences.

Mr. Peltier's fight for freedom has long drawn support from global activists and celebrities, including Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and the actors Robert Redford and Danny Glover.

Alli McCracken Jarrar, a human rights campaigner with Amnesty International, said the organization had campaigned for Mr. Peltier's release for years, hoping to undo what the organization considered an abuse of the criminal justice system.

"For the last 44 years, prominent individuals and prominent organizations have called on president after president to grant him clemency," she said. "It is long past due for him to be given clemency, so he can live the remaining years of his life with his community."

Mr. Peltier grew up on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota; members of the tribe say they will take care of him if he is released. The deadly confrontation that put Mr. Peltier in prison took place at a ranch on the Pine Ridge reservation, about 10 miles from Wounded Knee, where U.S. soldiers had massacred hundreds of unarmed Lakota nearly a century earlier.

Native American activists returned to occupy the village during a drawn-out protest in 1973, in hopes of forcing the federal government to investigate what they said was corruption in the leadership of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, treaty violations and problems with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Two F.B.I. agents, Jack Coler and Ronald Williams, died in the shootout. One of the activists was also killed, but his death was never investigated.

Mr. Peltier belonged to the American Indian Movement, which sought to draw attention to federal violations of Native American treaty rights; he was found guilty of the killings in 1977 and has since been in federal prison, currently in Florida.

He has admitted to participating in the shootout in self-defense, but says he did not kill the agents. He and his supporters also say that F.B.I. agents coerced witnesses, and that prosecutors withheld exculpatory evidence while extraditing Mr. Peltier from Canada and trying him in North Dakota.

Mr. Peltier's arrest came at a time of intense unrest on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

On Feb. 27, 1973, Oglala Lakota activists and members of the American Indian Movement seized control of Wounded Knee to draw attention to the federal government's violations of the treaty rights and a tribal president accused of corruption and aligning with the federal government. The resulting 71-day armed conflict between Native Americans and federal law enforcement at Wounded Knee left two activists dead, and a federal agent shot and paralyzed.

Even after the siege, conflict on the Pine Ridge Reservation continued. Murders were frequent, and the federal and tribal police forces on the reservation behaved like a paramilitary force. Then came the shootout on the Pine Ridge reservation in 1975, where the two F.B.I. agents and a Native American activist were killed, resulting eventually in the charges against Mr. Peltier and two others implicated in the deaths of the agents.

Mr. Peltier's co-defendants were found not guilty of murdering the agents after they argued self-defense. They were tried in Iowa, while Mr. Peltier was tried in North Dakota, where the judge blocked some evidence that was allowed in the Iowa case.

Years of appeals have poked holes in the government's case against him, Mr. Peltier's supporters say.

His conviction rests solely on the fact that he was present at the shootout with a weapon that day — not that he fired a fatal shot or had any hand in killing anyone, said James Reynolds, a former U.S. attorney in Iowa whose predecessor, Evan Hultman, handled the original prosecution of Mr. Peltier.

Mr. Reynolds is among those who have lobbied for Mr. Peltier's release, writing letters to both the Obama and Trump administrations. He said that, while the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit found Mr. Peltier had a fair trial, he no longer believed that to be the case.

"How much stuff does he need to have on his side before you say enough is enough," Mr. Reynolds said. "They've been fighting this thing for more than 40 years & it's unfortunate this is the government position."

Kevin Sharp, Mr. Peltier's lawyer, said granting him clemency could be a major step toward healing the rift between Native Americans and the federal government.

"The important thing is breaking from the past," Mr. Sharp said. "The F.B.I. will say they are no longer the J. Edgar Hoover F.B.I. I believe them when they say that. But if you really want to break from the J. Edgar Hoover F.B.I., they need to release this prisoner."

Ruth Anna Buffalo, a citizen of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, and a state representative in North Dakota, was among two dozen Native American state legislators who signed a letter to Mr. Biden in October requesting clemency of Mr. Peltier.

She said the president had yet to include Native Americans in his administration's efforts to overhaul aspects of the federal justice system. Granting clemency to Mr. Peltier would be a step in the right direction, she said.

"We are not asking for special treatment," Ms. Buffalo said. "We are asking to be treated as human beings. None of us are free until Leonard is free."

### **26 Feb - Victory in DAPL legal battle!**

*On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it would not hear an appeal to overturn a court-ordered environmental review of the Dakota Access Pipeline.*

#### **MORE:**

That means Kelcy Warren and Energy Transfer Partners have exhausted all legal options available to them and concludes the final legal victory for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe against the DAPL!

"The litigation concerning the pipeline is over, but the fight continues," said EarthJustice attorney Jan Hasselman representing the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe since 2016. "We call on the administration to close the pipeline until a full safety and environmental review is complete. DAPL never should have been authorized in the first place, and this administration is failing to address the persistent illegality of this pipeline."

As calls mount on Joe Biden after the Supreme Court decision to not hear the case to cancel the Dakota Access Pipeline, we must not forget about the NoDAPL struggle's last political prisoner, Jessica Reznicek.

Jessica, like thousands of others, took nonviolent action before DAPL was operational where the system and courts were failing. The highest courts in the US have now ruled against DAPL, siding with the view of water protectors that the regulatory process was inadequate.

Yet, Jessica remains in federal prison serving an 8 year sentence labeled a terrorist for acting to deliver the same justice federal courts are now upholding. Not only is this hypocrisy angering as our friend enters her 6<sup>th</sup> month in prison, but it has dangerous consequences for human rights. What happens to Jessica can happen to all of us.

That's why Jessica and many others from the historical NoDAPL movement are fighting back. Saying loud and clear, that we are water protectors not terrorists. That climate action is not terrorism.

Nine organizations have filed amicus briefs to support the removal of Jessica's terrorism enhancement. Already over 13,000 people have signed the petition and over 100 organizations have signed on in support of Jessica's case.

Now is the time to use this victory against DAPL to reach the White House loud and clear.

DAPL is illegal and operating without a permit, it's time to shut it down and free its last political prisoner!

### **28 Feb - Support Doug Wright after release from political imprisonment**

*Political prisoner Doug Wright, the last of the Cleveland 4 to be released, will be entering a halfway house this month. Donate at [tinyurl.com/doug-wright](https://tinyurl.com/doug-wright)*

#### **MORE:**

Doug was arrested on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012 after being entrapped by an FBI informant with a plot to allegedly damage a bridge. Prior to his arrest, Doug had been a traveler and then a participant in anti-capitalism activism through Occupy Cleveland. Doug deserves support getting back on his feet with basic necessities after undue harsh treatment as a political prisoner inside. Please help by contributing funds to cover his needs and share with your networks.

As a reminder, the Cleveland 4 case stemmed from a plot concocted by a paid FBI informant. It was one of several cases around anti-capitalist mass mobilizations, all based on the efforts of FBI informants to manufacture conspiracies not representative of anarchist organizing at the time. And in all of these cases, the defendants have been described as anarchists in the legal paperwork filed against them, setting precedents for criminalizing anarchism. Doug unfortunately got entrapped in the government crack-down on anarchist and anti-capitalist ideas. It's important we have his back after a decade in prison.

### **28 Feb - Portrait: Harry and Harriette Moore by Marius Mason**

*While we can't share the image, we can share link & text that accompanies a new painting by Marius.*

#### **MORE:**

**[supportmariusmason.org/2022/02/28/portrait-harry-and-harriette-moore](https://supportmariusmason.org/2022/02/28/portrait-harry-and-harriette-moore)**

Painting done with coffee – chalk rubbing for background. "...Harry and Harriette Moore were early civil rights workers, and sadly, were bombed and killed because of their work. NPR did a feature story on them and on the case implicating 4 KKK members in a conspiracy to target them – but modern day activists believe there was a larger group involved too." [zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/moore-home-bombed](https://zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/moore-home-bombed) | [npr.org/2022/02/01/1076141993/black-history-harry-harriette-moore](https://npr.org/2022/02/01/1076141993/black-history-harry-harriette-moore) | [saytheirnamesmemorials.com/harriette-moore](https://saytheirnamesmemorials.com/harriette-moore)

### **1 Mar - The Vegan Greenwashing of NYC Mayor Adams is Worth Another Look**

*Recently, Sarahjane Blum and Ryan Fletcher published an article exploring concerns about how people in the vegan movement champion New York City mayor Eric Adams as a symbol of progress for the vegan, plant-based, and food justice movements, despite his harmful, anti-progressive agenda. They are back with more...CHECK IT OUT.*

#### **MORE:**

by Sarahjane Blum and Ryan Fletcher (*Medium*)

One intent of the piece was to examine what message haloing Adams sends to other social movements and those most impacted by injustice that many vegans purport to be allied with.

We made a point to grant that we believed Adams' commitment to veganism was sincere. In the days after it was published, a minor controversy that came to be known as FishGate broke out. Politico and many other outlets reported that Adams regularly orders and eats fish at the swanky establishments he frequents, and we began to reflect on why we so easily believed that Adams was representing his dietary practices honestly. After all, this is a man who generally does not behave like someone who holds himself accountable to his words. His ability to stretch the truth led many during his mayoral campaign to question if he is truly a New York City resident. Sometimes it seems like the only thing consistent about him is inconsistency.

In short, we were misled by the same greenwashing tactics that we were writing to warn against. To greenwash is to convey a false impression about a product, company, or brand's commitment to positive impact through performative gestures or misleading labeling. Often greenwashing is not just about encouraging positive sentiment among consumers, but also distracting from business practices or scandals that could draw negative attention. In the case of Eric Adams, the aggressive promotion of his veganism has been used to pull focus from his long and not always pretty history in New York City politics, and his administration's dangerous policy agenda.

The sudden and haphazard rollout of his Vegan Fridays policy turned media attention away from ongoing concerns about his harmful approach to homelessness, policing, and racial injustice. The policy plans that have emerged in his first weeks in office are more likely to exacerbate those problems than better them. While activists like Patrisse Cullors challenge his authoritarian approaches to policing he doubles down on his outdated "war on crime" approach. He attempts to make his position seem like that of a caring and conscious person by reminding people at every turn how he meditates regularly and has a personal commitment to veganism.

In general, Adams spends an inordinate amount of time and energy getting the media to talk about his relationship with food and health and his evangelical interest in increasing access to healthy plant-based foods in communities across the city despite his pursuit of unhealthy social policy in other realms. One obvious way for him to consistently pursue his stated commitment to public health beyond food would be for his administration to recognize that criminalizing mental illness and homelessness directly hurts human health and to turn away from addressing human suffering as a challenge to be solved with ever-more policing. But as is abundantly clear, consistency is not high on Adams' agenda.

### **FishGate & Food Police**

When he was questioned about his choice to promote himself as vegan despite overwhelming evidence that he regularly eats fish, he responded by calling those who question his diet "the food police." Now, it would take too much time and too many words to unpack the implications inherent in a former cop who runs his administration on highly authoritarian principles using the word police as an insult, but it's noteworthy nonetheless. The term food police rests on a shared unstated awareness people have that largely, the act of policing is not that of protecting public safety in the interest of the common good — it's invasive oversight, control, and persistent abuse in the interest of maintaining social power or taking it away from others. Mostly, users aren't consciously evoking that understanding, but acknowledge and reify it all the same.

Which returns us to Eric Adams, the fish-eating "vegan" who seems to believe "all food-cops are bastards", even if some people think he is a food-cop himself. Much like the word police, the word vegan is inherently political. It was coined by the animal rights activist Donald Watson in the 1940s specifically to differentiate those who attempt in an ongoing fashion to strictly abstain from eating animals from the many other strains of vegetarianism which existed and make the practice visible. For as long as vegan has been a word, the diet has been critiqued for being impractical and too extreme. For most of this period, those who have practiced it have been ridiculed and written off, as a way for the dominant paradigm to avoid having to face the truths in the critique veganism offers.

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a preponderance of evidence has come to light about the brutal exploitation of animals and workers in industrial farming, the deleterious effect to human health of animal centric diets, and the catastrophic impact animal agriculture has on the environment, it has become less easy to write off the moral and ethical imperative that drives veganism.

Because the arguments in favor of veganism are harder to dismiss than ever, the word has begun to be depoliticized in new ways — through attempts to strip it of its original and deeper meaning and intentions. Over the past 20 years, we have seen the term vegan begin to be used to label more general efforts at reducing the amount of animal products one consumes. There have also been parallel attempts to erase the word and replace it with the term plant based.

These have been intentional choices on part of some vegan activists, animal advocates, alternative protein investors and marketers, and a broader spectrum of food activists attempting to broaden the appeal of and lower barriers to entry for adopting more conscious eating practices. A recent article by Alicia Kennedy, “On ‘Plant-Based’: It would be a useful phrase, if everyone could agree on what it means”, illuminates the problem:

*“It seems that the more “plant-based” has become ubiquitous as a marketing term, the less clarity one can have on what it refers to precisely. “Plant-based” could be the new “natural,” meaning whatever the person selling a product wants the consumer to believe it means.”*

Her words could also be applied to the term vegan (although so far, it’s still less frequently used as a catch all than plant-based). One of the more prominent movers of this change in understanding is Mark Bittman. Bittman and writers like Michael Pollan and Jonathan Safran Foer have been especially influential in moderating the degree to which advocates ask people to consider changing their diets — suggesting that advocating for veganism is too much, too extreme, and not likely to appeal to the masses. Increasingly, this argument is made citing limited and cherry-picked data. Bittman’s championing of part-time veganism in his long-running *New York Times* column and diet book *Vegan Before 6* was a significant vector of introducing the word to a broader public and as a result has further muddied the waters of what it means for someone to call themselves vegan.

Among people who decidedly or even proudly include being vegan as part of their identity, though, the definition has generally remained clear. It’s one thing to use the term with a qualifier, like Bittman did with *Vegan Before 6* and another entirely to use it how Adams has. There’s remained an understood difference in how the word is used when Arnold Schwarzenegger describes being vegan 80% of the time and when Eric Adams pushes to be described as New York City’s first vegan mayor. This nuance is important to maintaining the integrity and utility of the term vegan.

The problem with Adams’ behavior is not that he succumbs to the social pressure to order non-vegan meals at restaurants. This social pressure is real. We have no doubt that attempting to navigate old boys club dinners with political power brokers or bottle service nights at private clubs with people who believe they are entitled to anything they want at any time is hard. But rather than acknowledge that it’s difficult to maintain such a practice in the face of social pressure, Adams approaches questions about the inconsistencies in his diet the same way he approaches other questions he doesn’t like about his failure to be reasonably consistent with his previous statements — by bullying the person asking and pretending that he never said what he is being questioned about, or that it didn’t mean what the person asking thought.

### **Vegan Fridays**

Adams’ approach to his own veganism is a significant tell about his broader approach, and it should give people pause about how far his leadership can advance issues of food justice. FishGate occurred in the context of the Adams administration rolling out “Vegan Fridays” in NYC public schools — a rushed program, modeled after Meatless Mondays but on a different day of the week with a different name. The menu wasn’t limited to vegan food. Dairy products were abundant in the offerings. Whether this is because there wasn’t proper planning to prepare for the launch, or there wasn’t proper education on what providing vegan meals entails, is unclear. Federal laws that require schools provide “fluid milk” may be part of the challenge, as has been the case with other school food initiatives. But so far, the program shows Adams to care more about adding greenwashed stories to the news cycle than to make sure his Vegan Fridays are actually feeding kids vegan food.

It’s clear that to create the framework to make true Vegan Fridays possible much more work needs to be done. The Adams administration will need to engage in a good-faith effort to educate the public to influence real transformation. That means bringing people along, not just declaring a policy and haphazardly imposing it from above. After all, the core tenants of veganism stand in opposition to domination. As we mentioned previously, some even responded to the initiative feeling like Adams was forcing “vegan” food on children. Adams would do well to introduce policy in a way that builds consensus for it, or else he himself risks continuing to be seen as the dreaded food police.

The Vegan Fridays debacle was an example of Adams' signature swagger of style over substance. He overstated his ability to create change, redirected public attention from his dangerous policies on policing and housing, and hammered home his personal brand as "the vegan mayor". With FishGate his over-reliance on his morally superior stance as a vegan gave journalists an opening to try and probe the true relationship at play between the mayor's image and his actions.

### **Why Consistency Matters**

When Adams finally did acknowledge that the people who reported seeing him eat fish regularly were telling the truth, he maintained he was "perfectly imperfect," and played into the common status quo assertion that being vegan is near to impossible. Since the news has broken, he still presents himself as a figure who should be taken seriously as a leader in the vegan movement. We disagree.

We recognize how complex maintaining veganism is in the dominant culture — there indeed is a spectrum of understanding and of practice. We understand why it's tempting to let a looser definition of the word come to be the dominant one, but as a movement — we must resist this — because consistency matters. No vegan is perfect. Although some people do approach veganism as a magic bullet cure for societal ills, no such thing exists. Perfection is not the point. Veganism is one among many approaches people take within a broad spectrum of conscious eating — a spectrum that includes everyone from reducetarians to pescatarians as well as strict high-welfare meat eaters and eaters of many other persuasions. In our opinion, vegans should be welcoming allies to everyone on that spectrum — because we can't improve public health, fight factory farming, free animals, and save the Earth alone — but changing and drastically loosening what it means to be vegan is not progress, it's a step backwards.

A person can eat and even champion vegan food and eat fish, but once the definition of "being vegan" is broadened to where it is acceptable for Adams to claim it even if he still regularly and intentionally eats fish, food movements lose power and meaning. Only the status quo of profit driven animal agribusiness benefits from that. At the same time vegans who strive to practice this discipline with consistency and humility (especially when they fall short of embodying their own ideals) become seen as the ones who are doing it wrong.

The accusation that vegans are engaging in an out-of-touch, idealistic pursuit of purity is just one of the myths that is weaponized against veganism to make it seem moralistic, impractical, and beneath consideration. There are vegans who land all sorts of places in good-faith debates about eating honey, wearing second-hand clothes made of leather, or the ethics of dumpster diving food with animal products in them. There are vegans who will eat something at a restaurant that comes out made incorrectly and has cheese on it, and ones who will not. There are even vegans who might occasionally eat something served to them at a party or while traveling without knowing 100% what's in the dish. What binds the people in these nuanced examples together is that they are grappling with the ethics of their choices as they make them with humility and intention in a way that, say, someone who regularly orders and eats fish at restaurants and aggressively dismisses concern from constituents about it does not appear to be.

It stunts and confuses societal progress for conscious and ethical eating when someone who doesn't understand or respect the core values of food movements takes center stage in public understanding of what it means to be a part of them. Adams may try to eat vegan much of the time, and that's a good thing — but he does far too much else that makes the rest of us work overtime to set people straight on the nuance of what it means to be vegan. Again, Eric Adams doesn't lend credibility to true food justice, and our movements shouldn't work to lend credibility to him.