

GOOD AND MAD

THE REVOLUTIONARY POWER OF
WOMEN'S ANGER

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ALSO BY REBECCA TRAISTER

All the Single Ladies:

Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation

Big Girls Don't Cry:

The Election That Changed Everything for American Women

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PART II

MEDUSAS

My mother, when she was about to deliver me in El Paso, Texas, needed a cesarean section and they wouldn't admit her because she was black. It was a Catholic hospital. My grandmother, who was half Irish—because my great-grandmother, who was a domestic worker, had been raped by her white employer—looked white, so she had to convince the people in the admitting office that my mother was her daughter. They finally let her in and they left my mother on a gurney in the hall, unattended, and she was delirious. She *needed* a C-section. Finally a doctor noticed her, drove her into the operating room, and it was too late for a C-section. She almost died; they had to pull me out using forceps and I barely made it. She almost didn't live and I almost didn't get here. So you think I'm not mad? Please. I don't like talking about this stuff a lot. But I guess anger has been just a part of my life since the day I was born. It's part of what's motivated me to deal with racism, sexism, lack of access to health care for women—for my whole life—*that's* why I fight.

—Congresswoman Barbara Lee

CHAPTER ONE

HOLD YOUR TEMPER/ HOLD YOUR TONGUE

one could have predicted." In other words, in a very dark year, the vote to repeal the AUMF had been a singular example of functional democracy; when it passed the Appropriations Committee with overwhelming support, other lawmakers in the chamber had actually applauded.²

And then, three weeks later, Paul Ryan stripped Lee's amendment from the defense bill before it could come to a full House vote. The repeal was removed in the middle of the night, with no vote and no explanation.

"It evaporated," Lee said to me a few weeks after her repeal had been vaporized. "It's like they whited it out and rewrote something in. This is sleazy. This is sleaze all the way."

A shocked Lee appeared before the Rules Committee, where she calmly described her objections to the process by which the repeal had been stripped to the committee chairman, Texas Republican Pete Sessions, who responded to her politely stated points with cheerful condescension. "I was so mad at Pete Sessions," Lee recalled. "But I tried to control my anger."

Lee recalls her inner calibrations, during the back-and-forth with Sessions: "I've got to not let them think that I'm not responsible, and that I don't know what I'm talking about. I've got to be logical and coherent, I can't let my emotions come out because otherwise they'll say '*There is this angry black woman again. She's always angry about something; here she goes again.*'"

Lee remained measured. She repeatedly expressed her disbelief and dismay at how and why the amendment had been removed at the discretion of a couple of individual lawmakers, despite its having passed the Appropriations Committee with broad support from both parties. She remained stone-faced as Sessions, a white man from Texas who's served in the House for about the same amount of time that she has, explained to her that this was just how things worked.

At the very end of the interaction, Lee finally allowed some of her frustrations to show, telling Sessions, "I am very shocked at this process and how this went down, and I hope that in the future . . . in the spirit of bipartisanship and regular order and our democratic processes that this not be done very often, because this is really *raw*." She quoted him numbers, noting that it had only happened two other times in the past year; he put his head in his hands, in a show of exhaustion. Lee pressed on: "I just hope

Congresswoman Barbara Lee was mad.

It was the summer of 2017, and the very liberal Democrat representing Oakland, California, had recently produced one of the only true—and surprising—bipartisan victories of the long, miserable congressional term, one she'd been working toward for over a decade.

Lee, the *only* member of Congress to have voted against the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) in 2001, three days after the September 11 terrorist attacks, had been campaigning practically ever since to have that authorization—which had granted the president the ability to go to war without congressional approval and had been used to justify at least thirty-seven military interventions in fourteen nations—repealed. Lee had, in June, finally rallied Republican support for the AUMF repeal, with a window of eight months to revise and replace it. Over the objections of House Speaker Paul Ryan, Lee's amendment to a Defense Department spending bill had passed by a voice vote out of the Appropriations Committee with support from both Democrats and Republicans.¹ *Politico* had called the Appropriations vote "the rarest of congressional spectacles: an earnest debate in which minds were changed, followed by a vote no

people understand that democracy is very important and the Democratic process is important and members should not be undermined by three or four or five individuals if they have worked together, and put something together and gotten it in a bill, bipartisan, and then it's ripped out . . . It is perplexing that this could happen in the middle of the night."³

Her colleagues watching from her California district, she said, had cheered at the insistence with which she'd kept pointing out the injustice that had just been enacted. "They said, 'You kept coming back at him, wearing him down.' So it may have worked, because if I had gone off like he expected me to go off, then I may not have been able to wear him down." Lee's appearance was, indeed, a study in strategic containment, just as she knew it must be. While she was confronting a male colleague—and describing other male colleagues, who had tricked, attempted to deceive, and were now condescending to her—she was, above all, courteous.

Those in her own party noticed, and, as she would tell me later, congratulated her for it. "Everyone told me how gracious I was, and how they could tell I was really getting ready to go off on him, but I was restrained. They could see my anger, but they were so proud of me because I handled it right," she said.

Their response, Lee said, enraged her even more than the committee's dirty play had.

"They expected me to be the angry black woman, okay? They were applauding me for not being the angry black woman, and I wanted to cuss them out. Because that was the implication: *you were so cool, you were so restrained, you handled it so well, and toward the end you were a little emotional but you were great*. And I'm [thinking] 'Doggonit, you guys don't even know what you are saying!'"

What they were saying was that it hadn't even occurred to them how limited Lee—an esteemed colleague who had every reason to be livid that the amendment she'd been trying to pass for fifteen years had been improperly removed by her political opponents—had been in her ability to fight against those who wronged her professionally. They were suggesting to her, by congratulating her on not having shown her anger, that anger would have been the improper recourse, when in fact it would have been a wholly reasonable response to improper professional behavior by her

colleagues. They were telegraphing to her that they had never considered the kinds of racial and gendered pressures put on women, and especially on black women, to bottle up their resentments and their frustrations, no matter how justified they might be.

The fact that Lee had understood that she *couldn't* get openly mad, that she had known that an expression of wholly valid, justified, rational rage would have worked to weaken her position, is a symptom of the same kinds of skewed power dynamics that permit white men to hold so much sway in government—to be the chairmen and the speakers in numbers so much greater than any other demographic.

The result of the hosannas for not having expressed her anger, Lee said, was that she just got angrier—at her colleagues, her opponents, and because the AUMF *still* wasn't repealed. "I was totally hurt and, yes, livid." But, Lee said, she will try again. "And again and again and again until it is done. I am not going to let anyone stop me."

Barbara Lee was born in Texas, to a mother who was always upfront about her anger. "She didn't take any prisoners. She was really upfront about inappropriate speech and behavior. She didn't mince her words; she wouldn't take any mess," said Lee. Lee recalled a story her mother had relayed about how as a college student, she and a friend had wanted to join Alpha Kappa Alpha, the nation's first black sorority. Back then, AKA admitted only light-skinned women; that wasn't a problem for Lee's mother, the granddaughter of a domestic worker who'd been raped and had children by her Irish employer. "So my grandmother looked like she was white, and my mother was very fair with green eyes," said Lee. But the sorority turned down her mother's best friend Juanita, whose skin was darker. "My mother got furious," said Lee. "She said 'To hell with this; I'm not joining,'" and called on the civil rights activist and educator Mary McLeod Bethune to come down to Texas Southern University and help students organize in protest. "That's how my mother was," Lee said. "She was constantly pushing."

When Lee herself was a high school student in San Fernando, California, she wanted to be a cheerleader, but the school had never had a black cheerleader, in part because of the way the selection process was conducted, privately. "I was mad," recalled Lee of her teenage self, "because I knew all these white girls had had the opportunity to be cheerleaders, and

I knew I couldn't. So I went to the NAACP out of anger and asked them if they could help me and they said yeah." Lee and her classmates staged protests to change the rules, ensuring that girls could try out in front of the student body. Lee became the first black cheerleader at San Fernando High, and was soon joined on the squad by an Asian American student. "That was anger," she said. "I was *really* angry. I voiced my anger. But I was strategic, and I got what I wanted, not just for me but for everybody else, for all these girls of color who wanted to be cheerleaders."

In her early twenties, Lee was a student at Mills College in California; she was by then a single mother of two sons, on welfare and Medicaid. "I was angry at the system of oppression and racism because I saw it, I lived it every day, and who wouldn't be angry? I was being dissed by social workers and jerked around by guys and all that stuff." She became the head of the campus Black Student Union, and started doing community work with the Black Panther Party. "I wanted to make whatever intervention I could to make things better for other people." But her interventions did not include electoral politics; she had no interest of working within the American political system. "I mean, I was saying it was rigged back then," Lee said of electoral politics. Lee's lack of belief in the system was imperiling her grades; as a government major, she was required to do field work for a campaign, but she was not even registered to vote in early 1972.

That's when Shirley Chisholm came to speak at Mills College. Chisholm, in the midst of her presidential campaign, spoke to students in fluent Spanish; she talked about health care, poverty, women's rights, racial justice, and immigrants' rights. Lee couldn't believe it. She approached Chisholm afterward and suggested that she'd like to work on her campaign in the California primary, confessing that she'd previously not had anything to do with electoral politics. Chisholm, Lee recalled, "Shook her finger at me. 'Little girl!'—I was twenty-five! I had two little kids, they were probably with me!—But anyway, she said 'Little girl! If you really believe in what you stand for, then you'll register to vote, get involved with politics, and try to make change. Because we need you.'"

Lee wound up organizing Chisholm's Northern California campaign with other Bay Area college students, attending the Democratic National Convention in Miami as a Chisholm delegate. After Chisholm's campaign,

and a stint working for Black Panther cofounder Bobby Seal's 1973 mayoral race, Lee worked for a decade for Congressman Ron Dellums, who had been one of Chisholm's supporters in the Congressional Black Caucus; she was then elected to the California State Assembly and the California State Senate. Lee would eventually win Dellums's seat after his retirement from Congress. She has served Oakland as a congresswoman for twenty years.

And in that capacity, she told me, "I've learned how to . . . I won't even say *finesse* it, but how to handle life without going ballistic every time I feel like I'm treated unjustly, or other people are treated unjustly."

For women in public life, especially those engaged in a fight for more equal opportunities for more kinds of people, the message has long been clear: their anger and desire to challenge the system—ironically, perhaps the thing that motivated their engagement in social change and political life to begin with—will be used against them.

BRING IN THE BRANK

The furious female is, we are told to this day, in innumerable ways, both subtle and stark, a perversion of both nature and our social norms. She is ugly, emotional, out of control, sick, unhappy, unpleasant to be around, unpersuasive, irrational, crazy, infantile. Above all, she must not be heard.

The brank—also known as a scold's bridle, or a witch's bridle—was a sixteenth-century torture device used to muzzle a defiant or cranky woman, her head and jaw clamped into a metal cage. Some of the bridles, which were made of iron, included tongue depressors that would be inserted into the woman's mouth; some of those had spikes on the bottom to pierce the tongues of the insubordinate. The Tower of London features an internally spiked metal neck collar dating from 1588, labeled a "collar for torture," but described in guidebooks as a device to be "put around the necks of scolding or wayward wives."⁴

We may not be literally collared anymore, but the men who tell us to smile on the street so we'll be prettier (reminding us simultaneously to stifle negative thoughts *and* that our purpose is to decorate their world) are

echoed around us on national stages. During the 2016 primaries, MSNBC host Joe Scarborough chided Hillary Clinton, after a winning night, "Smile. You just had a big night."⁵ In 2018, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said during a CNN appearance, about Nancy Pelosi's grim visage during Donald Trump's first State of the Union address, "I think she should smile a lot more often; I think the country would be better for it. She seems to embody . . . bitterness."⁶

The notion of bitterness, a word and descriptor that suggests cramped, upright sourness—something that no one wants to express—crops up all the time around angry women. But bitterness tends to be an aspersion cast only at those with most to be bitter about, something that James Baldwin described decades ago with regard to black anger. "People finally say to you, in an attempt to dismiss the social reality, 'But you're so bitter.' Well, I may or may not be bitter, but if I were, I would have good reasons for it, chief among them that American blindness, or cowardice, which allows us to pretend that life presents no reasons for . . . being bitter."

The old view of disruptive women as Medusa—who was punished by Minerva after having been raped in Minerva's temple, cursed with a head full of snakes and the ability to turn men into stone just by looking at them, and who was finally effectively disarmed, via beheading, by Perseus—was not lost on Susan B. Anthony, who observed in 1893 to the *Chicago Tribune* that women were asked to echo the sentiments of the men who ran the major newspapers, "and if they do not do that, their heads are cut off." In the same period, one preacher described the figure of the woman reformer, jostling into male spaces with her arguments for enfranchisement and temperance, as "a monstrosity of nature, a subverter of society . . . the head of Medusa, a bird of ill omen, a hideous specter, a travesty of all that is sacred and divine."⁸ As the British historian Mary Beard has chronicled, critics have often used the same frame for Hillary Clinton, producing endless memes of snakes emerging from her scalp⁹; one Breitbart writer claimed that statues of the candidate hadn't been erected since "anyone who saw them would turn instantly to stone."¹⁰

But the labeling of the powerful political woman as monstrous doesn't stop at Medusa; it's in the endless barrage of Republican campaign mailers featuring Pelosi as cackling witch or ghoulish villain. As the journalist

Peter Beinart reported in 2018, "within days of Pelosi's ascension to House minority leader, in 2003 . . . the Republican Party featured her visage—garish and twisted; in the words of a magazine article at the time—in an ad against a Democrat running for Congress in Louisiana." Pelosi is always shown with her mouth open, unrestrained by any brank or bridle. The impulse to depict the most powerful woman in Congress as threatening or unstable, and to direct her ideological foes to do what they can to shut her mouth, almost certainly can be traced directly to fear of her efficacy. She has been one of the most successful legislative strategists of the modern era, shepherding her often fractious caucus through the passage of health-care reform and stimulus spending during the Obama administration. All this in contrast to the Republican men who've occupied the same spot and exhibited only the most flaccid leadership abilities: from Paul Ryan to John Boehner to Dennis Hastert.

Powerful women—especially those whose talents are inarguably more impressive than that of their male peers—are often perceived as monstrous or perverse, unwell or unwholesome in their challenge to male authority. "Madness," a term used to designate mental illness, is also a description of anger, and for women, the two seem to be understood as related.

THE MADWOMAN IN THE STATE HOUSE

The aspersion that a woman who is angry is also *unstable* is cast every day in popular political discourse, so often we probably don't understand how completely we absorb the connection. In 2017, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand aggressively questioned Marine Corps Commandant Robert Neller about a failure of the military to address a pervasive pattern of sexual harassment in its ranks. That night, Fox News anchor Tucker Carlson went on national television and announced, "Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York came positively unglued," describing her as "barking" at the commandant.

When Maxine Waters refused to yield in her questioning of Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, announcing that she was "reclaiming [her] time," the website RealClearPolitics described it as a "meltdown"¹¹; at right-wing sites TheBlaze and Breitbart, Waters is regularly described as

“unhinged.”¹² Trump-supporting black pastor Darrell Scott has referred to Waters as a “crazy aunt . . . rambling and babbling incessantly over every little thing.”¹³

The idea that women’s anger is fundamentally illegitimate, because they have nothing *real*, no big things to be rationally angry about, is part of what undergirds the claim that furious women are mentally ill. But it can also cause women to *feel* crazy. “Our anger gets dismissed and devalued and gaslighted,” Black Lives Matter cofounder Alicia Garza told me, speaking specifically about black women. “We are angry because people are telling us what is happening to us right in front of our faces is not in fact happening, and that is crazy to me.”

Whether angry women are driven crazy, or whether their anger is confused for mental illness, the claim about them in a society that treats mental illness as a delegitimizing aberration becomes the same: they are received as emotionally precarious, irrational, untrustworthy, marginal, and unattractive.

Do a Google image search on any of the powerful women in politics or public life, especially those who threaten white male power—by pressing for reforms in the military, the criminal justice system, the banking industry, or by running to beat powerful men—and you’ll turn up scores of photos of Waters and Pelosi and Senators Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren with their mouths open, unrestrained: mid-yell, spittle-flecked, the very act of making a loud noise a sign of their ugly and unnatural personalities. The best way to discredit these women, to make them look unattractive, is to capture an image of them screaming; the act of a woman opening her mouth with volume and assured force, often in complaint, is coded in our minds as ugly.

“I struggle to think of women who lost their tempers in public and didn’t face ridicule, temporary ruin, or both,” wrote the feminist essayist Lindy West in 2017, citing public outcry against and condemnation of singers Sinead O’Connor, the Dixie Chicks, and Solange Knowles, as well as Juli Briskman, a government contractor who was fired after she was photographed giving Trump’s presidential motorcade the finger.¹⁴ When Caitlin Marriott, a twenty-one-year-old congressional intern, shouted, “Mr. President . . . fuck you!” at Donald Trump as he entered the Capitol in

the summer of 2018, she was suspended for a week and had her credentials removed, though notably her boss, New Hampshire senator Maggie Hassan, told the press that Marriott’s behavior “shouldn’t be equated with the president’s destructive and divisive actions, like ripping health care away from people . . . like separating children from their parents. . . . And this young woman immediately accepted responsibility for her actions and is facing consequences for them. The president is doing neither.”¹⁵

Perhaps the negativity around the yelling woman goes back to the disproportionate labor they perform as caretakers of the young, women’s raised voices an unhappy reminder of reprimands, tones that make men feel like children again, under the punitive thumbs of their mothers, grandmothers, older sisters, nannies, and teachers who nurtured and educated them. “We’re raised by women,” said Gloria Steinem, “so we experience female power when we’re younger. And men, especially, when they see a powerful woman as an adult, feel regressed to childhood and strike out at her.”¹⁶

But the way in which adult female censure may return us to a youthful, domestic sphere—the only one in which women have been granted a kind of unchallenged power—speaks to the thing that women’s full-throated challenge does: it turns things upside down, reminds us of a time and place where women had authority, but when it’s happening in politics, or in workplaces, or in activism, or elsewhere in the public sphere, it’s an aberration, contextually inappropriate. In this way, women’s angry voices, raised in challenge to power structures, vibrate with the threat of insurgency.

When Senator Kamala Harris, a former prosecutor, aggressively questioned Attorney General Jeff Sessions in 2017, Harris was instructed to stop interrupting Sessions by his friend, Arizona Senator John McCain. During that exchange, Sessions said aloud that Senator Harris’s interrogation was making him “nervous.” After the contentious exchange, former Trump advisor Jason Miller described the Attorney General as having had “vinegar and fire in his belly”; by contrast, in his view, Harris displayed “hysteria” in her interrogation of Sessions.

This coding doesn’t just come from men: an angry woman can make other *women* very nervous too. After one furious postelection rant from Elizabeth Warren, MSNBC anchor Mika Brzezinski warned viewers,

“there’s an anger there that was shrill . . . unmeasured and almost unhinged.” Even in the *New York Times*, Warren—whose great gift is her ability to tell clear stories about the American economy that convey the frustrations and resentments of Americans who’ve been cheated or left behind as financial institutions have gotten more powerful—has been labeled a “scold,” a word that seems well paired with another descriptor the paper has applied to her: “imperious.”

What these women seem to represent is a kind of disarray. And here there is a deep historical reverberation: In early twentieth-century propaganda film strips about suffragists, women demanding enfranchisement are shown leaving their babies at home with their incapable husbands.¹⁷ Nature has been thrown awry; the women’s fury at their exclusion from civic participation has provoked disorder in the home. Women’s ire in any political context remains coded as chaotic, while men’s is comprehensible, understood as rational and often admirable.

This is probably why, as I was reporting for this book, nearly every woman I spoke to—especially in the months immediately following the inauguration of Donald Trump—described her anger as a thing of the past. “I was angry,” an interviewee would say, “but I’m not angry anymore; I’ve taken my anger and turned it into action.” Anger had to have been felt in the past tense in order to be something that many women I spoke to could describe to me with authority or confidence, let alone enthusiasm. About ten minutes into every interview I did in which a woman had assured me that she’d cast off her anger, I’d find her cursing and raising her voice, yelling about how livid she was: at Donald Trump, or her father, or her friends, or more broadly, at the nation and its injustices. These women were angry; *of course* they were angry. But they were conditioned to deny it from the start.

RECOGNIZING FURY

Gloria Steinem described to me the lifelong process of learning to feel, recognize, acknowledge, and express anger in real time. Steinem was raised in Toledo, Ohio, in a family in which her mother had given up a career as

a journalist to raise children, and then suffered a mental illness that left her daughters as her caretakers. But Steinem was resistant to anger. “Coming from the Midwest, we have to be on LSD to know when we’re angry,” she said. For a while, she said, she “transplanted [her] anger, which is not uncommon for women to do, into other things.” She could be angry at anyone who treated an animal badly, or another person, but not angry on her own behalf.

When she was in her thirties and a working journalist herself, established as a glamorous denizen of the early 1970s New York media scene, Steinem made waves by posing as a Bunny at the New York Playboy Club and then writing about the experience; she’d also covered the antiwar and black power movements, and she’d been sent to cover a hearing on abortion. As Steinem recalled, “I’m sure that [anger is] what I felt at the first abortion hearing, the moment when I suddenly realized that *yes*, I had had an abortion, and so had one in three other women [but that it was illegal]. I’m sure what I felt was anger: *How is this okay? This is completely irrational!* I was fueled by anger.” That fuel propelled her into the women’s movement. Still, she said, for many years, “I could finally tell people on a Thursday that I’d been angry on Monday. I couldn’t tell them in real time.” Still, she said, with half a century as a feminist organizer and women’s leader under her belt, as a woman who understands that “anger is great fuel for political activism; it’s wonderful and I value it, I treasure it”—still, she said, to this day, she can express anger in real time “only occasionally.”

If it is so difficult for Gloria Fucking Steinem to confidently let loose with fury, is it any wonder that in many places when I speak to students, young women ask me how *they* might express their own ire? They are scared, they tell me—in high schools, and on college campuses—to be publicly open about their rage, because they are afraid it will be alienating to their friends, to their peers, to men. They fear it will make them sound deranged or aggressive. They’re not deranged and they’re not aggressive; they’re just angry. But how can they say that they’re mad without drawing condemnation and raised eyebrows? How can they be confident and unapologetic in their rage? Won’t they scare people off? They ask me what my secret is: How did I figure out how to get up on the stages at their schools and speak angrily?

What can I tell them? That when I was thirty-two and visiting a beach community with a friend, I told a glamorous older woman to whom I'd been introduced that I wrote about feminism, and that she looked me up and down and asked coolly, "How do men feel about your work?" as if this were the most crucial question about its consequence. When I told her that the man I was dating seemed interested in it, she raised an eyebrow and, disconcertingly, ran a finger along my leg, perhaps checking to see if it was hairless. "We'll see how that lasts." I don't want to recall to them that when I first started to write about politics and culture from a feminist perspective—and nearly always with careful humor and lightness intended to obscure my fury—about half of the responses I received were from readers anxious to tell me how furious I sounded, as if the assertion that I was angry was its own self-contained insult. Others suggested that the rage they presumed I must be feeling originated with the fact that I was ugly and that no man wanted me, while others were sure that if I could only land a man, he might be able to help me. Perhaps I should not mention to them that I was once told that a male friend—a good friend, a man I trust and care about—had said privately to another man, who had in turn told me, "Rebecca is so warm and so funny, you'd never connect the person she is with the angry stuff she writes."

But! I long to say to that friend, though he has no idea that his remarks were reported to me: the warm and funny me is the *same* as the writer who's furious about inequality; the woman who has been both happily single and happily partnered, who is in love with a man who loves her, who has fun and feels joy and cares about her work and her friends and who vacations and drinks and eats and cooks and has kids she adores: she's also very angry.

But perhaps the belief that anger is somehow at odds with the otherwise affable feminine personality has to do with the fact that women have been so well conditioned to tamp down the rage, to disguise it or compartmentalize it, that the revelation that it's bubbling underneath feels surprising and discomfounding—even worrying—to others.

IT'S BAD FOR YOU

There is a persistent conviction that to be angry is *bad* for women. In early 2018, my dentist estimated to me that three-quarters of the women who'd come to see him since Trump's election were livid, information I quickly understood as a hopeful sign. But he shook his head sadly. "It's bad for them," he said. "They grind their teeth."

My dentist was not alone in his concern; plenty of activist, feminist women have shared his worries about rage's detrimental health effects. In the same days of 2018 that flood waters were covering Houston and Donald Trump was once again threatening to repeal DACA and had pardoned racist sheriff Joe Arpaio and rolled back Obama administration provisions that forced companies to turn over their pay statistics, I received in my inbox a newsletter from goop, Gwyneth Paltrow's health and wellness brand, advising me on how to manage my anger. Though the newsletter assured me that according to psychotherapists, anger is "essential to our development" and acts as "a fuel that propels you through different life stages," the Q and A with the experts told a different story, warning goop's overwhelmingly female readership that feeling anger was an easy way out in personal relationships ("We'd rather get angry than admit our deep feelings of vulnerability") and also admonished that in politics, "So many politicians . . . are blinded by their own rage, leading to more mistakes. The mark of a true leader is that they can . . . make a mistake or people can disagree with them and they aren't taken over by anger. They may feel angry, but they don't act it out."¹⁸

So stigmatized is anger—viewed as somehow unclean, unhealthy—that even women whose politics have in part been driven by rage at injustice often renounce it and warn against its ill effects. The civil rights activist Septima Poinsette Clark, daughter of a formerly enslaved man, who grew up with reduced educational and economic opportunity and became a prolific educator and the founder of "citizenship schools" to increase black adult literacy and provide African Americans with tools they needed—and were often denied—to increase their chances at civic participation, famously said, "I never felt that getting angry would do

you any good other than hurt your own digestion, keep you from eating, which I liked to do.”

But women tamp it all down so effectively that I didn't realize until recently—as the rage began to overflow—how many other women, speaking about feminism around the country, get the same kinds of questions asked of them by young women as I do. The writer Roxane Gay has described how “at many events where I am speaking about feminism, young women ask how they can comport themselves so they aren't perceived as angry while they practice their feminism. They ask this question as if anger is an unreasonable emotion when considering the inequalities, challenges, violence, and oppression women the world over face.”

Women yearn for permission, and simultaneously hunger for someone to express any curiosity at all about what they might be feeling.

“We get told all the time that our anger is disruptive, that it is a distraction, that it is not helpful, and that in fact it is divisive and moving us backwards,” said Alicia Garza. “Yet nobody ever seems to question: *why are you so fucking mad?*”

“You are the first person who's ever asked me explicitly about anger,” said Aditi Juneja, a twenty-seven-year-old lawyer and activist who co-created an activism guide called *The Resistance Manual* in the wake of the 2016 election. “People ask me about self-care, about inclusion; no one ever asks me if I'm pissed off.” But Juneja said she knows why. “If you ask women if they're angry, everyone will say no.”

Juneja said she'd been thinking a lot about “who's even allowed to be pissed off and how they're allowed to express it” since the election. She said that she stopped watching Trump speeches or news about him almost a month before he was elected, because the experience of watching him, yet not seeing any of the rage he inspired in her reflected in the news media's coverage of him, was leaving her crippled by vertiginous self-doubt. “I felt like I was hearing him say things that didn't make sense or that contradicted what he'd just said, but no one else was hearing this.” The political media was covering him and the things he said as legitimate. “And I was questioning myself.”

At some point in 2017, Juneja mentioned to her father that she'd stopped watching coverage of Trump because it had made her feel so

confused and her father replied, “Well, I wasn't confused; I knew exactly who he was.” Juneja said that she looked at her father with perplexity before realizing: “Oh, congratulations, no one has socialized you to wonder if maybe *you're* the one who's wrong. No one ever told you that the way you feel about the world is not valid.”

There's perhaps no neater example of how rage is an emotion that is permitted and encouraged in (some) men—and can be used to their advantage—while for women it is forbidden, invalidated, and treated as a path to self-defeat, than the 2016 presidential election.