

Op-ed || Views expressed by parties interviewed or by the author of this article are not representative of everyone involved.

“Growing up I was attacked on the street for being gay. I was a pacifist for a long time until I realized that pacifism without the threat of great violence is really just playing the victim.... The day I decided I wasn’t gonna take that shit anymore was the day they stopped attacking me.” – Fred, LSD Collective

But Queer people, as well as other oppressed people, have a dubious right to self defense in the United States. While George Zimmerman walks free after executing Trayvon Martins for walking while black, women, even victims of trafficking such as Pieper Lewis or Cyntoia Brown do time in Prison for killing their rapists. Consider Hakiym, a black wildland firefighter currently serving a prison sentence in Oregon’s Snake River Correctional Facility for defending himself from a racist drug fueled hate crime. Consider Jaia Cruz or Cece McDonald, both trans women verbally and physically attacked with racist and transphobic slurs and both sentenced for acting in clear cases of *self defense*.

But let’s put a pin in that since this isn’t the Jailbreak Column.

Corporate pride is dead. Mainstream Pride organizers struggle to find their footing as corporate sponsors, the fair weather “allies” that they are, largely withdrew and fell silent this Pride. Meanwhile, the police, always a contentious presence at Pride parades, have made it clear that they stand exactly where they have always stood: against Queer people and marginalized groups. With gay bars being raided in Seattle and Pittsburgh, Seattle Police again attacked a queer counter protest to a right wing Christian hate group in Cal Anderson

Park. Meanwhile, this pattern remains unsurprisingly consistent at the highest levels, as the Department of Homeland Security removes protections from targeted surveillance based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The message is clear, if not beaten to a pulp; get back in the closet, visibility makes you a target. The mirage of gay rights is fading into a sea of anti trans bills, hate crimes, and political and legal disenfranchisement.

The diminished influence of corporate and government interests on Pride, presents unique opportunities though, if one is open to finding them. *They* no longer care to define, package, and sell our queer identities back to us. We as a community can define who we are, and what we stand for. What are *our* values? *Where do we go from here? And how will a besieged queer community redefine itself?*

"I used to view queerness as something effeminate, not strong in the machismo way... I learned early that being tough isn't about how you present superficially. It's how you show up emotionally and physically in relation to yourself... showing up authentically, with my messy existence, my queerness, my imperfections, and trusting my process- that's plenty tough in my estimation.... If I can help a few along that sometimes nasty journey with some tools for self-preservation and calm courage then I'm truly grateful." – Shachar Efrati, LGBTQ Self Defense

It was this question and more I sought to answer as I set out on a journey into the movement of combative queers, uncovering an entire world itching just beneath the surface. Even in a relatively small town like Eugene, Oregon, there were a plethora of public facing queer led self defense groups which were only vaguely aware of each other. LSD Collective, which stands for Lane Self Defense Collective, was one of the handful of queer self defense groups I was able to discover here in Eugene. I met Fred, who specializes in Panantuken,

Dumog and Balintawak (Filipino dirty boxing, grappling, and stick fighting respectively). Other groups I contacted include The Collective, which describes itself as “a queer anarchist collective whose primary mission is to provide free firearms classes to the local trans community”; a Queer Jui Jitsu group led by ‘Judy Jitsu’ out of the Lavender Network; and LGBTQ Self Defense which specializes in Wing Chun, Tai Chi, Jigong, and Jui Jitsu in various capacities. All of the groups I spoke to share several things in common, despite their isolation from each other. They’re all free, they all strive for decentralization to some degree or another, and they’re all raging faggots.

Similar groups exist in towns and cities all through the Emerald Valley, though many are not public facing and did not wish to be included in this article to avoid the public eye.

Judy Jitsu says she grew up scrapping with her brothers and sisters. “I’m native Hawaiian, we’re a pretty fight oriented people, we love to scrap, she stated. This passion turned into a life long practice of Wrestling and Jui Jitsu.

“The second I started transitioning,” says Judy. “There were instances of people being transphobic, homophobic... Once I started doing estrogen I was learning about my body in a new way, becoming a new person... I wanted to carve out my own space, to have the luxury of training with the people I resonate with.” The space, Judy emphasizes, uses a ‘trauma informed approach’, and differs from the teaching style of traditional schools. “A lot of gyms I’ve been to the instructor will nitpick everything you do because there’s a “correct” way to do it. I think that’s a very puritanical ideal of any martial art and it’s toxic to the growth of any athlete.” To rectify this, Judy says she “set’s up a scenario and invites people to engage on their level.” Queer self defense doesn’t only mean gay people kicking butt, but also *verb.* queering self defense. Fred of LSD collective and Shachar from LGBTQ Self Defense talked a similar game of

breaking down the machismo and hierarchies of traditional martial arts, and using trauma informed approaches. Breaking down borders, reshaping, redefining, and forging a new path forward, not only for their disciplines, but for the queer community they serve.

Take The Collective for instance, sometimes referred to as the "Trans Gun Club". Specific names won't be used to protect the safety of their membership, but they say, "All of The Collective's members are trans people who have felt the need to become armed for the express purpose of being capable to defend themselves with firearms." They're part of a larger movement of Queer people, and leftists in general reconsidering their stances regarding firearms. This has led to groups like The Collective forming all across the country, as laid out in the article "Carrying For Each Other" from The Pickup. The Collective sticks out fiercely in the world of American gun culture, as do the other unarmed self defense groups as well. These sports are stereotypically white, cishet, dominated by the NRA, law enforcement, and far right groups such as Active Clubs. Yet, despite this hegemony, bands of trans and queer people *are* pulling- *have* pulled together to create something outrageously opposed to this 'regime of the normal', to quote Mary Nardini King. The Collective, for their part stated, "We believe the need and desire for self defense is self evident in all oppressed communities."

"What is self defense actually? It's not martial arts. It's not practicing Katas, it's not putting on a uniform, it's not how do you tie the knot on your belt... there isn't a right or a wrong in self defense. It's whatever keeps you out of a bad situation. There's no boxes or methodologies. It's how you move when somebody grabs you, talking about real world situations.... As an Anarchist I want it to be non-hierachical. Being an instructor people are gonna look to me to lead, but I have to keep in mind that it's not about me, it's about love for the community and how we're going to defend

ourselves from the threats we face.” – Fred, LSD Collective.

Which brings us back to those many cases of oppressed people being demonized, villainized, condemned, and attacked for exercising their right to self defense. Whether it be anti-colonial struggles from Palestine to Fred’s practices of Panantuken and other Filipino self defense forms which developed in the context of the Philippines centuries long anti colonial struggles. Or people of color and queer people right here in the United States who are systematically besieged and whose members sit in prisons for exercising their right to self defense. This may stir up a question- whether or not defending oneself is worth it. I raise it because it’s one worth grappling with, pun intended. The choice is not a personal one, it’s an instinctive one. Ask yourself; what will you do when the chips are down? If they attack your community? If they attack your friends? If they attack *you*? Will you stand up? Will you fight back? Or will you lie down and hope to appeal to the conscience of those who wish you dead? Training self defense puts the power, in more ways than one, in the palm of your hand.

Happy Pride.

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Judyjitsuxoxo@gmail.com

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shacharmax@gmail.com

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