

Opinion

The hypocrisy of Burning Man

By **SYDNEY FERRICK**
Contributing Writer

Art, music, fashion and fire — it sounds like a bohemian paradise, but can a city made of sand hold true to its bohemian values? From Aug. 30 to Sept. 7, while Quinnipiac University students were adjusting to a new semester, tens of thousands of people gathered in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada to celebrate Burning Man.

Burning Man is a large art festival that has been taking place in the Black Rock Desert for over 35 years. Attendees form their own Black Rock City on the sandy terrain, which they call “the Playa.” They participate in what many attendees consider a religious experience where they can “burn the past and start again” once a year. Kimbal Musk, a former Burning Man board member (and current billionaire), explained the process in the 2026 HBO Max documentary about the festival. It is done by literally burning a wooden statue of The Man, along with additional, less relevant burnings of wooden structures.

In archive footage, Larry Harvey, the founder of Burning Man, has said, “We live in a consumer society and we’re completely insulated from the realities of nature in our own inner needs.” Because of this observation, the founders of the festival strove for it

to be a protest against capitalist society. To achieve this, there’s a rule that nothing is for sale on the Playa. Instead, Burners (Burning Man attendees) participate in gift-giving and trading, which fosters more connection than the usual capitalist world does.

This is what bothers me about Burning Man today. It doesn’t accomplish the goal that so many people praise it for. I like the idea of a festival that celebrates art and brings people together. Burning Man reminds me of a modern-day Woodstock, if it weren’t solely a music festival. It holds hippie-like values, but even hippies weren’t always successful in protesting systems that they claimed to dislike.

Burning Man is not a free event like it used to be. A ticket costs between \$550 to \$3,000. On top of that, Burners have to get there somehow, and vehicle passes cost \$165 on top of the gas costs for the numerous hours it takes to get in and out of the event. Cheaper tickets are available through a ticket aid program, which is based on income and requires an application with financial documents, but this cannot cover the numerous other costs of the festival.

The Playa is a windy and dusty desert. Dust flies everywhere, which cannot be healthy to breathe in for a week, but I digress. Consequently, Burners must pur-

chase protective gear, like goggles and masks, when they travel around Black Rock City. Many people travel the make-shift streets by bike, which they also have to purchase if they do not already own one. Most importantly, they need somewhere to sleep, like a tent or an RV, which can cost hundreds of dollars to rent per night and still needs to be made dust-proof. This can be done by taping openings shut, but it isn’t always effective.

The revenue from tickets goes towards operational costs and funding the artists who contribute to the festival. I agree that it is important to fund art and workers, but paying huge sums of money to get into a place where money supposedly holds no value rubs me the wrong way. It just feels hypocritical.

The event is also known to attract business owners, influencers and millionaires (or billionaires in the case of Kimbal Musk and others). At the festival, they strive to promote their companies by throwing parties featuring branded swag and attracting crowds with extravagant artistic vehicles that can cost over \$1 million to create.

The Playa has been an important place of expression and belonging for thousands of people. It is a crucial event for their creativity and spirituality. If people are willing to spend the hundreds or thousands of dollars required to attend Burning Man, no one should stop them, but I don’t think that the festival can still be considered a protest against capitalism with the high cost it has today, and it should not be praised as such after the changes it has endured.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILLIANA MIRABELLA

Hindsight doesn't stop a knife

Blaming officers doesn't change reality

By **MICHAEL MCGRAIL**
Contributing Writer

Aug. 31, two people were stabbed in the middle of Times Square by Pamela Cisneros, a 49-year-old Queens resident. Whilst her first victim was rushed to a nearby hospital with a minor wound to his side, her second was not nearly as fortunate. The 32-year-old Bank of America Executive Erin Piacenti was fatally stabbed in her stomach a mere 20 seconds after Cisneros’ initial attack. Cisneros was then surrounded by police officers and shot dead in the street.

Cisneros reportedly suffered from a long history of mental health struggles, with the NYPD having a documented history of her psychological issues dating back to 2018 and 2019.

Her own father went on record to make the claim that his daughter’s mental struggles became increasingly apparent after the birth of one of her children, leading him to believe she was suffering from postpartum depression.

Cisneros approaching multiple officers seconds before being shot, waving two large knives in the air erratically.

Anyone claiming that lethal force was unnecessary in this situation is, quite frankly, out of touch with reality. Despite the condition she was in, Cisneros was very much an active threat to everyone in the area. Multiple videos have popped up showing four officers attempting to neutralize her non-lethally through the use of tasers, all of which failed to incapacitate her because of the suspects weight and the obstruction caused by her purse.

The fact of the matter is, it’s infinitely

easier to point at a dangerous situation after the fact and preach what should have been done to handle it without ever having to face down the pointy end of a kitchen knife. Whilst I do agree with the notion that lethal force should only be employed when all else fails, in this situation, all else had already failed. The NYPD had tased her four times, and yet Cisneros had continued her approach.

Despite multiple attempts being made in the form of tasers and verbal commands to non-lethally de-escalate the situation, many still claim that the NYPD should have attempted to physically restrain Cisneros rather than shoot her outright. The most notable of these protesters is Cisneros’ own mother, who asked in an interview with FOX5NY, “There were so many police... why didn’t they grab her by the arm?”

What people don’t seem to understand is the risk analysis that goes into situations like this. While there is a chance that, had the officers on the scene opted to physically restrain the active lethal threat rather than shoot her, Cisneros would be alive in custody right now.

An equally likely scenario, however, is that an officer attempts to restrain Cisneros and is stabbed, heavily injured and potentially killed.

There seems to be a popular sentiment nowadays that a police officer should be willing to lay down their life at the drop of a hat, a sentiment I entirely agree with. Becoming a member of a police force should mean that you are willing and ready

to sacrifice yourself for any civilian should the situation call for it.

What some people seem to be missing is that this situation did not call for it.

Cisneros was an active threat. A murderer who had proved, mere minutes before being surrounded, that she was willing to and capable of brutally stabbing a fellow human being. No history of mental illness, tragic as it may be, can erase the fact that she would have taken more lives in that moment had she been presented the opportunity to do so. Lethal force was necessary.

Cisneros attempted to kill herself by jumping in front of a subway train in 2019. Her own family knew little to nothing about what mental illnesses she was diagnosed with, save for the fact that she was receiving weekly injections in an attempt to treat them. Despite her heinous actions, the fact stands that Cisneros led a deeply tragic life. Her death was not realistically avoidable in the moment, yes, but that does not mean that it should be trivialized nor celebrated.

Rather than solely scrutinizing those responsible for killing her when she was already an active threat, I believe we as a collective society should focus on treating those experiencing severe psychological illness before they can suffer a potential mental break. If we put our utmost efforts into identifying and treating mental health issues within people who have nowhere to turn, we will be taking the first step in ensuring nothing akin to the tragic events of that day can ever happen again.

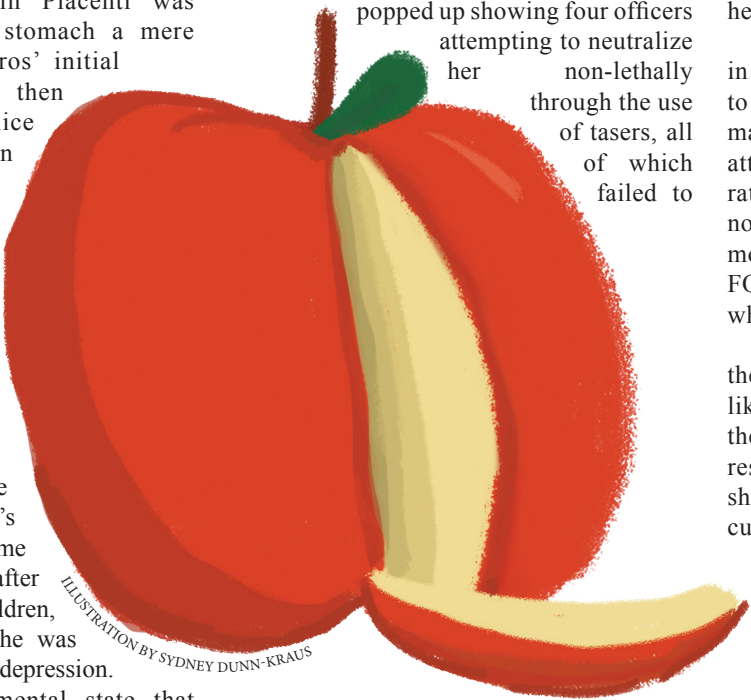


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