

| **NEWS** |

The Bloodstained Men – America's Premiere "Intactivist" Protesters – Are Coming to Dallas

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In October 2012, seven men in white jumpsuits -- immaculate save for an unsettling crimson stain spreading from their crotches -- gathered outside the convention center in New Orleans as the American Academy of Pediatrics was having its annual meeting. The body had just **issued a policy statement endorsing newborn male circumcision**, a decision that had inflamed the anti-circumcision activists and left some of its veterans, among them a bearded Californian named Brother K, grasping for a way to convey the horror of a practice they consider genital mutilation. The stained coveralls confronted convention-goers with what **Brother K would describe as a "profound bloody spectacle."**

"In the past 30 or 40 years in American cultural life, I myself cannot think ... of any symbol that so represents what's going on in America -- the tragedy, the disaster, the catastrophe of it -- and captures it in one bloody spot, on the crotch of men."

Brother K has been speaking out against infant circumcision on and off for more than three decades, ever since concluding in early adulthood that the removal of

his foreskin as a baby, done in the guise of a religious rite, had left him physically, emotionally and sexually scarred. It was "the mark of an angry, ancient god on my penis." He decided to "renounce the birth name that was associated with Him (Kenneth Hopkins, according to an old Associated Press story) and so i changed my name to Brother K." The summer of 1979 he spent at the University of California, Santa Barbara, independently researching the practice and producing a manuscript, "The Circumcision Instinct," that represents "my best attempt to understand the broad aspects of circumcision."

In 1980, he and his girlfriend at the time began protesting in earnest, calling their two-person group Citizens Against Ritual Violence. They spent several weeks picketing a Eureka, California, hospital holding signs ("Purpose of Circumcision is to Break the Man's Spirit Forever"; "Circumcision is a Psychopathic Mutilation") and wearing masks; his was red, to represent his rage. Hers was yellow, for compassion. Later, they protested outside the state capitol in Sacramento.

But as eye-catching as Brother K had found the masks three decades before, the bloody jumpsuits were impossible to ignore. "The bloodstained symbol cuts through all the clutter and rhetoric that surround this issue, and gets to the heart of circumcision. It's a bloody wound that men reject when given a choice," he **told Intact America last year.** After the demonstration in New Orleans, he and other anti-circumcision activists (aka "intactivists") established Bloodstained Men and have been traveling around the country in their white jumpsuits protesting circumcision ever since. They arrive at Dallas' Klyde Warren Park, the first of their five-stop Texas tour, at 10 a.m. Tuesday.

Intactivists like Brother K view male circumcision as a matter of human rights. Their rationale goes something like this: circumcision -- i.e. strapping a baby down so a doctor can snip off part of his genitals -- is basically torture; it serves no medical purpose (intactivists **downplay or dismiss** the notion that it reduces the risk of contracting HIV, which is the **CDC's primary rationale for backing the procedure**); and while adults are presumably free to chop off whatever body parts they choose, newborns have been thrust into the world without the capacity for informed consent.

It's not just dudes who are rethinking circumcision. Brother K was en route from California to DFW Airport for the protest when we called Bloodstained Men, but we talked to the group's press secretary, Cassie Waldeck, a mother of two from Pennsylvania. When she was having her daughter five years ago, she became immersed in the **natural parenting movement**, which has a philosophical affinity with the intactivist movement. She did a lot of reading about circumcision and watched some of the horrifying videos that abound online of screaming babies having their foreskins lopped off. When her son was born three years later, circumcision was off the table. She left him intact.

Waldeck, like many intactivists, thinks the modern prevalence of male circumcision in America is due neither to religion nor medicine. Rather, it was an outgrowth of Victorian prudishness, popularized as a way to control masturbation, a claim that's also been made in various **peer-reviewed studies**. Not that it has any direct relevance to the ethical debate over circumcision, but she also highlighted some of the disturbing shit people do with foreskins, **like putting them in cosmetic face cream**. She also alerted us to the existence of **circumfetishists**, i.e. people who get off on the act of circumcision.

"I kid you not there are men who get off on cutting babies, and there are men they will arrange for a man to be circumcised in a room while they all masturbate around him," Waldeck says.

Most parents, perhaps conditioned by tradition, perhaps figuring that the kid will get over it, don't share Waldeck and Brother K's alarm. More than half (just north of 55 percent) of male newborns in the U.S. are circumcised, but that **number has fallen considerably** since Brother K began his crusade in 1980. Back then, nearly two-thirds of male babies underwent the procedure.

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