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Circumcision protest on Manhasset streets

BY KARINA KOVAC

At the busy intersection of Northern Blvd and Port Washington Boulevard, a protest by the California-based non-profit group Bloodstained Men caused a commotion Sunday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Motorists passing by honked, shouted and exchanged both support and opposition with the protesters, who were wearing white outfits featuring a vibrant red spot over the crotch area. The purpose of the protest was to raise awareness about circumcision and advocate for the preservation of the foreskin.

The Bloodstained Men group, formed in 2012, is currently touring New York and chose Manhasset's bustling intersection for its visibility and impact. Their signs carried messages like "blood rituals are not medicine" and "I want my foreskin back." They've been traveling across America in Chicago, Boston and other major cities.

Manhasset motorists honked at the protesters with some in favor and others against the movement. One driver shouted "die" at the group while another produced an enthusiastic "yes."

David Atkinson, the president and CEO of Bloodstained Men, was among the protesters who took to the streets with the intention of increasing awareness among "intactivists." These are individuals who believe in the right of a person to not be subjected to involuntary, non-herapeutic modification of their genitals. Atkinson, who started participating in the group in 2014, said their aim is to prevent future generations from undergoing non-consensual genital cutting.

In an interview with the Manhasset Times, Atkinson said, "The foreskin is a normal, healthy, valuable part of the human penis, and the European medical community has condemned American doctors for tampering with the genitals of perfectly healthy baby boys. So, we're here to encourage American parents to educate themselves about the functions of the foreskin so that they have the resources and the confidence to protect their children from anyone who would try to cut off part of their children's penises."

Atkinson said the two main problems related to circumcision are ignorance about the value and function of the foreskin and denial of injury resulting from circumcision. He claims

that ignorance exists even within the medical profession itself, attributing it to the tradition of American doctors not having the foreskin.

Drawing an analogy to female genital mutilation, Atkinson argued that such practices are illegal in the United States and should be, as no one should tamper with the genitals of a healthy infant.

The Bloodstained Men group also referenced other intactivist organizations such as Attorneys for the Rights of the Child and Doctors Opposing Circumcision, all of which share the same advocacy for protecting children from non-consensual circumcision.

The genesis of the Bloodstained Men's distinctive outfit and creation dates back to 2012 when intactivist leader Jonathon Conte protested at the American Academy of Pediatrics Convention in New Orleans. That year the AAP updated their statements and asserted that the benefits of circumcision outweighed the risks.

"Specific benefits identified included prevention of urinary tract infections, penile cancer, and transmission of some sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has endorsed this statement," the AAP said in its 2012 statement.

In response to the AAP's statement, Atkinson asserted, "They were immediately condemned by the European medical community in the pediatrics journal and the AAP's own journal a few months later." He said that one committee member published an article in 2016 claiming the AAP's statements were primarily based on cultural and religious factors rather than medical considerations.

In recent years, the debate surrounding circumcision has gained traction in public discourse. In 2020, presidential candidate Andrew Yang expressed his opposition to the practice, and if he'd been elected, it would have been a part of public policy.

David Wilson, an intactivist for over 35 years, said he still feels incomplete due to his circumcision nearly 70 years ago. He started protesting in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1992, the same year he founded the Stop Infant Circumcision Society, and continued to protest with the Bloodstained Men group.

"I knew something was missing that I needed or wanted," said Wilson, "and the best way I thought I could do it is to be vocal."



PHOTO BY KARINA KOVAC

The Bloodstained Men group protested at a busy Manhasset intersection on Sunday during their foreskin awareness tour around the state.