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Build a Bridge Out of Her

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Build a Bridge Out of Her

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Build a bridge out of her.
As I survey the shellacked November landscape, I say let us all build a bridge out of her.

What sort of bridge?

Suspended between war-----and the promise of peace.

A Golden Gate
from “Mission Accomplished”3
to the audacity of hope.4

Guantanamo
remains open, but so do I.
I Still Hope.

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1 The most updated version of this piece appears in the book *In Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism Beyond Gay and Straight* (Routledge 2015). Earlier versions of “Build a Bridge Out of Her” were presented at the 2010 National Communication Association meetings and published in *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* (Tillmann 2011; used with permission, Sage Publications: http://csc.sagepub.com/content/11/5/516.abstract).

2 After Republicans gained control of the U.S. House of Representatives in November 2010, President Obama referred to the election results as a “shellacking.”

3 President Bush spoke in front of an infamous banner reading “Mission Accomplished” in 2003. Though he announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq, the U.S. occupation would continue until the end of 2011.

4 *The Audacity of Hope* is the title of President Obama’s second book.
A Golden Gate
suspending 83,000 tons of east coast steel.\(^5\)
SOLID, substantial------------------yet flexible, agile,
undulating with the wind, swaying nearly 28 feet,\(^6\)
before again finding
her center.

Yes, we can.

Yes, build a bridge out of her.
But not a Bridge to No where.
No, not a bridge to the 50 residents of Gravina Island, Alaska who just want to be left the fuck alone. \textit{That’s why they live there}.
No, not a 398-million-dollar bridge,\(^7\) enough to build
26 schools, serving more than 16,000 students\(^8\)
each year.

Build a bridge out of her.
Oh, but not the Minneapolis I-35.
No, not the truss arches that
crum
ble
d
to their knees
during rush hour,
August the first, 2007.
No, not the bridge that
tum
ble
d
100 vehicles
and 18 construction workers
toward the rushing river
below.
Thirteen people rushing
with or to their families
would rush
no
more.\(^9\)

\(^5\) See Golden (n.d.).
\(^6\) See Creager (June 7, 2010).
\(^7\) The proposed "Bridge to Nowhere," eventually scrapped, became a symbol of wasteful spending during the George W. Bush administration; see Schlanger (August 8, 2013).
\(^8\) According to the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, the average construction cost in 2010 of an elementary school serving 600 students was $14.8 million; see Data (June 5, 2014).
\(^9\) See Highway (n.d.).
Build a bridge out of her.
But no, not the I-35. Not any of our country’s 150,000 structurally-deficient or functionally-obsolete bridges.¹⁰
Our “representatives” pay for warplanes before commuter trains, for AIG before levees.
And so our bridges
falling
down,
fall
ing
do
wn,
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a
l
i
n
g
d
o
w
n.

Build a bridge out of her.
Maybe the Hudson River Bridge.
She carried working men and their families through the Great Depression.

Seventy years later, on that September Tuesday, this Hudson Bridge, re-christened the George Washington Bridge, held working men and women as they wept for their burning city, their cremated comrades. Yes, maybe the George Washington Bridge.

¹⁰ See Structurally (n.d.).
Oh, but no.
No, not the George Washington Bridge.
No, because on the 22nd of September, 2010,
the bridge out of her would have said to Tyler Clementi,11
“No way. No way no Rutgers Scarlet Knights cheering,
no Phi Delta Theta fraternizing, no violin impresario playing,
no not-yet-out gay boy fretting
leaps from MY arms!”

The bridge out of her
would have said: “My sweet Tyler,
I just kicked the ass of your dumbass roommate
and lobbied Congress for you and your future soul mate.
No way you leap
from these trusses, boy.”

Build a bridge out of her.
Oh, but not that bridge in Baghdad.
Nearly one thousand pilgrims drowned, trampled, suffocated
on that bridge, on that August day
in 2005.12

Nearly 1000 pilgrims.
Over 300 more than perished in the South Tower.13
The same number of flag-veiled coffins arrived in Dover
in the first eight years of the Afghan theater.14
Nearly 1000 pilgrims on one bridge
in one city
on one August day.

Build a bridge out of her.
Perhaps a bridge over troubled water.15
That’s sounding right. I will lay me down.
Yes, I will lay me down.

---

11 Tyler Clementi’s college roommate surreptitiously took video of an intimate encounter between Tyler and another young man. After his roommate broadcast the encounter on the Internet, Tyler leapt to his death from the George Washington Bridge.
12 See Farrell (November 11, 2008).
13 See Lipton (July 22, 2004).
14 See Operation (n.d.).
15 A nod, of course, to folk singers Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel.
But the bridge out of her cannot stay down. No, I must put this bridge called my back\textsuperscript{16} between facts---------------------------------and Fox. Between citizens---------------------------------and Citizens United.\textsuperscript{17} Between reality---------------------------------and the Tea Party. Between people---------------------------------and poverty. Between sisters---------------------------------and slavery. Between brothers---------------------------------and bombs, fathers and tombs. Mother Earth and the plunderers, poetry and soul murderers.

So yes, \textbf{up!} build a bridge out of her. \textbf{rise} But see her. Do you see her now through the fog? \textbf{will} This is a drawbridge, baby, and when she draws, \textbf{she}

\textit{Works Cited}


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http://www.asce.org/People-and-Projects/Projects/Monuments-of-the-Millennium/Golden-Gate-Bridge-California/.

\textsuperscript{16} A nod to the feminist manifesto \textit{This Bridge Called My Back}, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua.
\textsuperscript{17} In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court in \textit{Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission} struck down all limits on corporate funding of political broadcasts.


http://icasualties.org/oef/.


“Structurally Deficient and Functionally Obsolete Bridges by Year.”


http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/a/#e/sd-fo-bridges-year.