The Popcorn Report:

The Future of Trouble:

Why the Fortune 500 Is Blind to the Signs; Deaf to the Signals.

I have always been called a Troublemaker. Or just plain Trouble. As I got older, the label changed. I became the one who "poked the bear" and "stirred the pot" and worse. Those words were never meant kindly. They came from people who found curiosity to be dangerous. My intent was to stomp on the cultural fault lines. Poking. Prodding. Probing. Challenging the company line. I wasn't chasing conflict. I was running hard after the truth.

This Popcorn Report looks ahead to Trouble at scale...how tiny refusals become data, how values harden into rules, and how AI becomes the enforcer of consumer judgment long before the system registers the drift.

"Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn and cauldron bubble."

Macbeth, Act 4 Scene 1 Circa 1606,
William Shakespeare

This is a near-future alert: When Trouble arrives, the money leaves first and the CEO notices it last. You'll see why it's not their fault really as they're operating inside a soundproof system. with a do-not-disturb sign hanging over anything deemed "small".

Another reason the executive aerie can't hear the low rumble of Trouble is that it starts as a whisper, barely audible. I remember flying on American Airlines, a client at the time, and overhearing a group of stewardesses (what we used to call them) talking softly, but intensely in the galley. They were not just chatting. They were venting. Low pay. Rigid schedules. The sting of disrespect from management and from passengers who expected them to lift heavy bags overhead. I reported it to the CEO. He dismissed it as a routine workday gripe. Until they went on strike.

That is the lens of Trouble. It arrives as a faint cultural vibration. A small discontent that gathers energy before anyone has a chance to name it. It then shifts suddenly from whisper to walkout.

John Lewis framed 'good trouble' as a force that wakes power out of its sleep. I agree and hopefully this Popcorn Report will save you from a lot of the bad kind.

JOHN LEWIS: GOOD TROUBLE

THOUSANDS OF PROTESTS.
45 ARRESTS.
33 YEARS IN CONGRESS.
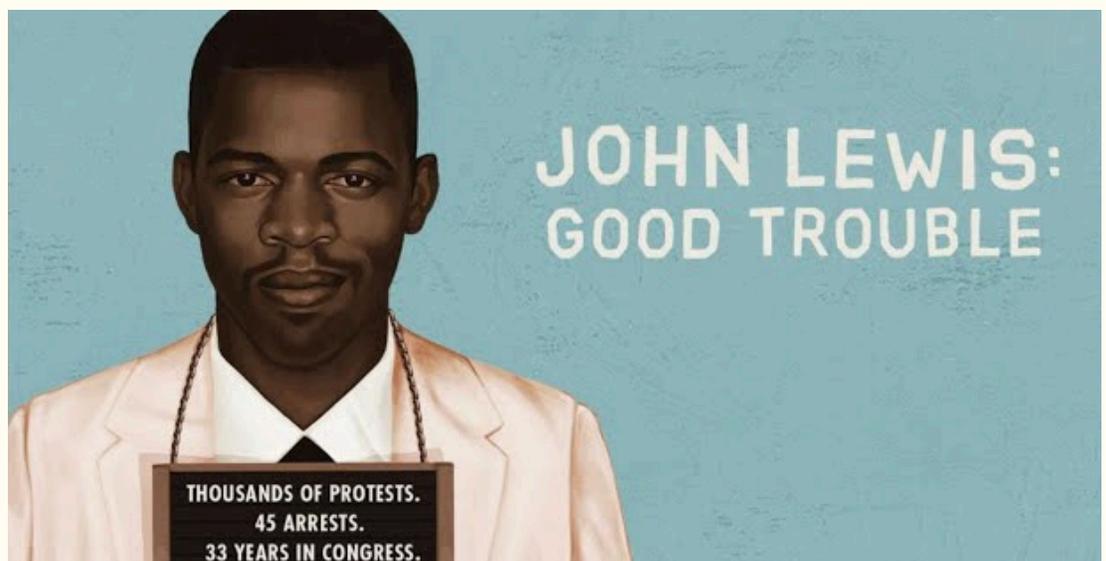
The Performing Art of Trouble: Acting it Out on the Global Stage

We live in a culture that performs its frustration. Every refusal has an audience. People act out in chats, on Substack, and in TikTok videos. They invite an audience to join them the very moment they turn away from you.

A shopper abandons a full cart after reading about abusive labor practices in the supermarket chain. Another pauses a subscription after a CEO's remarks opposing children's vaccines. These acts may look small, but each becomes a signal the system records, aggregates into momentum… and ultimately converts into a movement.

When Tim Cook yielded to the U.S. Department of Justice and pulled the crowd-sourced ICEBlock app (an early-warning system showing where ICE agents were appearing), a small dark spot formed on a brand built on moral authority and user trust. In December 2025, developer Joshua Aaron sued the Trump Administration, alleging First Amendment violations and government coercion. One apple doesn't spoil the barrel, but it reveals where the rot has already begun. Will Apple let it spread?

In real life, the friction looks different. At Home Depot, a protest began with a seventeen-cent ice scraper. People bought one, marched it straight to the return line, then repeated the cycle. Over and over. The goal was simple. Jam the system. Slow the store. Force leadership to remove ICE agents from their parking lots, where they were arresting laborers looking for work. A cheap piece of plastic became both a weapon and a model for how ordinary people can bring a giant to its knees.

Women: The Canaries in the Economic Caves

Women are projected to hold $140 trillion in wealth by 2030. Their economic power is enormous. I wrote about this in The Great Power Switch, where women recoded the marketplace not only by how they spend, but how they don't.

Women drive about 80% of consumer purchasing. Their clicks and pauses train the algorithms that steer commerce. 70% choose brands that mirror their beliefs. In the data stream, conviction becomes instruction as to what they will not buy. Technology absorbs and expresses female discernment faster than big business ever has. Each refusal becomes a signal the models encode. The system listens more closely and with more compassion than the Fortune 500 ever did.

Big Trouble is When Your Own System Blows the Whistle on You

Internal AI systems already flag contradictions between public promises and private practice. They surface gaps that management, high, middle and low, hope will remain under the radar. But once logged, those signals move fast through shared intelligence models.

An automated network builds a live feed that tracks a CEO in real time: Location pings, flight data, tagged posts, spending trails, press interviews and conversations with employees.
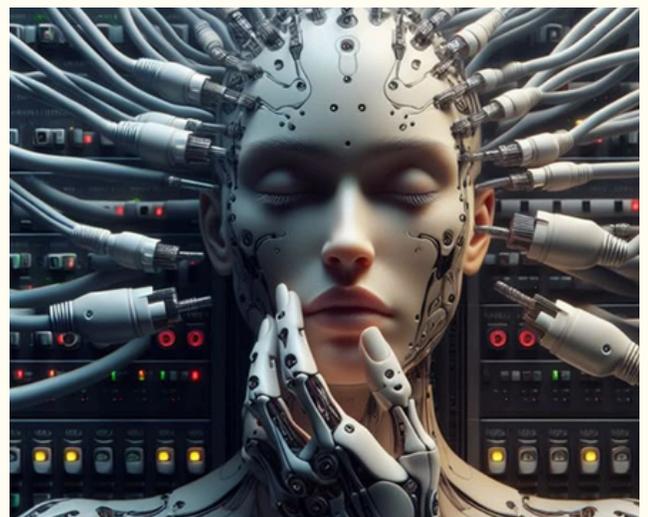
Each action is compared with the inner values of the consumer and those the company outwardly promotes. If the audit finds a mismatch, the organization's economic health sickens and fails.

Executive Stupid-Power

Leaders often assume perception can be managed. Layers of staff and volumes of strategy make them feel untouchable.

Just like the thick walls of their plush conference rooms keep company secrets safe inside, they also insulate from the throes of the media and the clamor of their current and soon-to-be ex-consumers.

First come their own internal AI assistants, confronting leaders with infuriating facts their teams have been softening and sometimes suppressing. And because a brand can't train its own AI to unsee what it has already seen, once the gap between its promises and its practices is logged, the signals race through shared systems. The best crisis plan cannot contain them. The feedback loop between people and platforms decides which brands grow, which stall, and which fade and fall from view. We will be seeing a lot of these. In 2025, there were 117 large US corporate bankruptcies hitting a 15-year high. No company is too big to fail anymore.

Every balance sheet will be carrying a moral ledger: When trust erodes, revenue follows. Truths tattooed on your reputation can't be advertised or TikTok'd away.

A Near-Future Scene at Walmart

A woman reaches for a can of peas. Her phone pings and informs her that the farm worker who picked these peas works twelve-hour shifts for sub-minimum wages. And that the can's lining leaks carcinogens. And that the company's chairman has no women in senior roles, and just one on the board. She pauses. She puts the can back. That single refusal becomes data. Recorded in her forever-feed. She never goes back to those peas again, and neither will her family, friends, and the many to whom she's connected. Trouble loves company.

Autonomous Shopping: The Decision Take Over

Trouble is now part of the machinery that makes decisions at scale. A hesitation becomes a data point; enough data points become rules the algorithms accept as truth. People feed their values into the system without realizing it through choices, pauses, patterns. The assistant absorbs them, codifies them, and begins enforcing them, shutting out the brands that fail to comply.

First, the assistant shops with her. Soon, it shops for her. Routine buying becomes automated: Paper towels, vitamins, detergent, baby wipes. It nudges her toward brands that reflect her beliefs and steers her away from the ones that don't. Within a few cycles, the bot becomes her near-duplicate, her doppelganger, and the primary shopper while the human-with-cart becomes the rarity.

So, my friends, follow the Trouble:
It will always lead you to where the money is exiting.

Ask These Troubling Questions with a Drink in Hand

- Who inside your company is paid to spot Trouble before it trends? Consider a new title: CTS — Chief Trouble Stalker.

- When the next Trouble shows up as an abandoned cart or a mass cancellation, will you treat it as feedback — or try to crush the revolt?

- If your values were audited in real time, what conflict would your own AI assistant expose?

- If AI compared your brand/organization to every competitor on ethics, supply chain, price, quality, and transparency, where would you fall short?

- Which segments are 'quietly quitting' your brand while your dashboards read "flat"?

- How fast could an AI-fueled boycott activate against you — and what would trigger it?

- For the very brave: How close is it? Really.

The Future of Trouble was inspired by conversations with the Intuitive Carmen Murray, a good friend and a fine fellow-futurist. Residing in Johannesburg, S.A. she is the Founder of Carmen Murray Communications and hosts The Carmen Murray Show. You can chat with her at www.carmenmurray.com.

Always grateful to Jesse McClary, editor, social pundit and esteemed team member, and Kelly Hayler, design thinker extraordinaire for the look, and vibe of these reports.

SXSW - March 13, 2026 from 10am - 11am CT
Two Futurists and an AI: Seeing Trouble Ahead

I'll be joined by techno-futurist Sarah DaVanzo, and Delph.Ai, an AI Synthetic Human trained on the minds of female futurists in a boundary-pushing, three-way debate on the future of leadership in the age of intelligent machines. With my dystopian view, Sarah's utopian counterpoint, and Delph.Ai's unexpected input, this session explores the trouble coming as AI challenges the very definition of human agency, influence, and power.

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