

The Magazine They Warned You About

CURRENT AFFAIRS

\$10.95

VOL. 2, ISSUE 6

NOV./DEC. 2017



THE ECONOMICS SPECIAL
DOESN'T THAT JUST SOUND THRILLING?

*Colleges and
Sexual Misconduct*
p. 17-21

The Economics of Food
p. 55-59

Hello From Busytown
p. 68-70



The Middle Ages
p. 23-28



*The Money-Sucking
Machine*
p. 42-47

TABLE OF

Wealth and Equality
p. 62-67

*The Morality of
Meat Consumption*
p. 50-54

*Gentrification
and the
Romantic City*
p. 32-41

The Police
p. 6-14

CONTENTS



Walmart

THE INTERNET ALLY'S HOUSE OF MIRRORS

See only the marginalized people who coincidentally agree with everything you say!

WELCOME to WOKELAND

"Ladies and gents, maggots and minions, creditors and credulous—welcome, one and all, to the carnival that not only takes your cash but pats you on the back while doing so! Welcome to Wokeland!"

THE CENTRIST CENTRIFUGE

It spins around endlessly, yet somehow keeps drifting further right!

LOCKHEED MARTIN

CAN YOU BOMB A BROWN COUNTRY?

America is great because America is good!

PUC

?

ME

AND



**CKER UP TO A POLITICIAN
OF YOUR CHOICE! ♥**

**WE SUPPORT COMMUNITIES BUT
WE'RE TOUGH ON CRIME**

Once You Get On, You Can't Get Off

Coca-Cola

Nestlé

**WITNESS THE DREADED
BERNIE BRO**

She's a woman,
but she favors
mandatory life
sentences for
jaywalkers!

He's black, but he
supports the Hyde
Amendment!

What in the actual fuck is
wrong with you people?

Don't look at him!
His whiteness will
blind you!

White men like you
ought to be ashamed
of yourselves!

Come watch Ophelia Gwinn,
the legendary lady prosecutor, as she
fires blanks at bad guys! That's right -
she's a woman, AND she's kicking ass!

That's right, folks, step right up,
she's a dead shot. Women can do
anything men can do, and better!

ExonMobil

FEMCOPS: THE BEST COPS

The prisoners don't know the
bullets are blanks!

Haha! This prisoner appears
to have wet himself! If you call
this torture, you're a misogynist!





THE NICE COP

by Nick Slater

Americans believe a lot of lies about the police. In fact, most people can agree on this. They just disagree about what those lies are. Is the typical cop a cold-eyed executioner with a brutal disregard for human rights, or a selfless hero who risks his life to protect the community? Depending on who you are, you probably think one of those descriptions sounds utterly ridiculous. And you're right. You recognize an obvious caricature when you see it. Just as the average Trump voter is neither a cross-burning Klansman nor an amiable unemployed plumber who just wants his job back, the average police officer is also a more complicated creature, a "sausage of angel and beast," in the words of poet Nicanor Parra.

But "complicated" does not necessarily mean "good," or "righteous," or even "defensible." After a certain number of rapes and murders by police, it becomes much more difficult to believe that "a few bad apples" are responsible for the flood of dead bodies and terrible headlines. The cases come from every part of the country—huge East Coast metropo-

lises, laid-back liberal enclaves on the Pacific seaside, and even the sleepy small towns of the Midwest. Isolated incidents stop being isolated when they happen every week. Something is clearly wrong with America's law enforcement.

Is this because cruel people become cops, or because becoming a cop makes people cruel? I used to think the answer was obvious, until I watched my friend kill a man on Facebook Live.

Jeronimo Yanez, better known as the cop who shot Philando Castile, was one of my best friends in high school. We played on the same baseball team and hung out in the same Chipotle parking lot. We went to senior prom together. On graduation day, we rolled our eyes and laughed while our parents took ten thousand pictures.

We drifted apart in the years that followed, as high school friends usually do, though once in a while he'd pop up in my newsfeed. My

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CURRENT AFFAIRS VOL. 2, ISSUE 6 (NOV./DEC. 2017)
CURRENT AFFAIRS IS PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY FOR \$60/YEAR BY CURRENT AFFAIRS LLC, REGISTERED AT:
CURRENT AFFAIRS LLC, c/o HARVARD BUSINESS SERVICES, 16192 COASTAL HWY, LEWES, DE 19958
PERIODICALS POSTAGE PENDING AT NEW ORLEANS, LA AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.
POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO 631 ST. CHARLES AVE., NEW ORLEANS, LA 70130
PRINTED IN KANSAS BY ALLEN PRESS, INC.

ARTWORK

“Welcome to Wokeland,”
“Magazine for
Moms” (p. 4-5, 19)
— Chris Matthews

“The Nice Cop” (p. 6)
— Hokyoung Kim

“Starbucks,” “Centrist
Dad” (p. 13, 15-16)
— Mike Freiheit

“Spot the Neoliberalism”
(p. 30-31)
— Nick Sirotich

“The Wealth-Sucking
Machine” (p. 42, 45)
— Maxwell J. Singletary

“The Meat
Holocaust” (p. 50)
— Katherine Lam

“Externalities”
(p. 55, 56-57)
— C.M. Duffy

“Socialist Monopoly”
(p. 60-61)
— Pranas Naujokaitis

“Life in Busytown”
(p. 68)
— Ellen Burch

“C.A. in Pictures”
(p. 71)
— Brianna Rennix

eyes would linger for a second over this CliffsNotes version of his life. Went on a fishing trip—cool. Got married—good for him. Graduated from the police academy—wait, he’s a cop now?

Huh. Weird. What else?

Oh, here’s a photo of Jeronimo holding his baby daughter. Here’s one of him with a classroom full of smiling third-graders. Here are a dozen generic snapshots of an ordinary human enjoying some small and unremarkable pleasure. Five minutes with Photoshop, and that could be *your* face blowing out birthday candles.

Then, one day, my feed became an endless stream of articles saying that Jeronimo was a murderer.

THE PEOPLE WHO SHARED THESE STORIES were outraged and heartbroken. Some of them said that Jeronimo was a heartless racist who killed a man and deserved to burn in hell. Many agreed that his acquittal on all charges was yet another mockery of justice in an America that has become a brutal police state where government-sanctioned killers are all but immune from legal consequences, even when they execute an old man eating chicken in his own backyard.

To these people, I would say one thing:

You’re right about the police, and you’re wrong about Jeronimo.

BEFORE WE CONTINUE, I have to make an apology of sorts. There are inherent problems in telling a story like this one, not the least of which is: why spend thousands of words talking about a cop who killed a human being and then walked free? Don’t “writers of conscience” have a moral obligation to elevate the stories of the oppressed above those of the oppressors? Isn’t Philando Castile, the man who was killed, the person whose story we really ought to be telling? Isn’t profiling his killer a waste of time, at best, and an implicit rationalization of police brutality, at worst?

These are all valid points, but they’re not the only valid points. Our first duty is to mourn the death—and celebrate the life—of Philando Castile. But we should seek to understand why Jeronimo Yanez pulled the trigger. We need to do the difficult and uncomfortable work of exploring how this particular “sausage of angel and beast” was made. Was Jeronimo rotten from the start, or did he become contaminated by a toxic environment? We can’t respond to this tragedy, or the broader tragedy of police violence in America, without a good answer to the question. Understanding what made Jeronimo shoot Philando Castile is not an act of indulgence. It’s a tactic for preventing future violence.

Although I never met him, I have to think that’s something Philando Castile would want. Before his life was snatched away, he made a reputation as a man of incredible kindness and compassion. His family and friends have spoken about him far more eloquently than I could. His pastor, Danny Givens, said, “you felt seen by him.... you felt like you mattered, like you meant something to him at that moment.” His friend and co-worker, John Thompson, recalls that “if kids couldn’t afford lunch, he would pay for their lunch out of his own pocket. And that was against school policy. And I mean kids can’t afford lunch right now. They miss Mr. Phil at that school. They miss him. I miss my friend.” Another colleague, Joan Edman, put it simply: “this man mattered.”

I believe that Castile’s death was a violation of the fundamental agreement that underpins any society—namely, that its members agree to not slaughter each other—and therefore that it is what most people would consider “a crime.” By definition, that makes Jeronimo Yanez a criminal. Critics of the criminal justice system are fierce and convincing in their call for criminals to be treated as human beings. I draw certain conclusions from that, but I understand that others will draw their own. You’d have a point if you said, “but Yanez isn’t *actually*

a criminal—he's already been humanized by a system that literally let him get away with murder because he was scared." This is true, and it is terrible. Yet even if you believe that he's an inhuman monster, and you hate everything that he represents, it's still generally a good idea to know your enemy, if only to fight him more effectively.

It is neither my intention nor desire to portray Jeronimo as a sympathetic figure. I just want to give a truthful description of the person I knew, because I believe that his story can help us understand why America's police problems cannot be solved by "smarter" or "nicer" cops. This is the most dangerous lie about the police. If they could turn my friend into a killer, there is a deeper evil at work.

I MET JERONIMO YANEZ ON THE first day of our sophomore year. It was September 2004 and I had just transferred to South St. Paul, proud home of the South St. Paul Packers. The school took its name from the historic Union Stockyards just down the street. Its slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants were slowly being replaced by respectably bland business centers, but a faint odor of boiling fat still wafted up from the riverside when the wind blew just right.

South St. Paul was the kind of blue-collar town that inspires entire Bruce Springsteen albums. Many families had lived there for over a hundred years. They traced their roots from the Eastern European immigrants who came to work in the stockyards, and who had built venerable social institutions (i.e. drinking establishments) with names like "Croatian Hall" and "Polish National Association." Polka music was enjoyed, meat raffles were held, bowling leagues were well-attended.

Life was changing, though. New faces were starting to appear in town, in larger and larger numbers. Many of these newcomers were Latino, some were black, a handful were Hmong. They moved for the same reasons humans usually move—to find better jobs and houses.

Their new neighbors greeted them with that most typical of Minnesotan peculiarities: polite standoffishness. People waved hello when they drove past, but they rarely stopped to chat. A trip to the grocery store was an exercise in avoiding eye contact. In a tight-knit town where everyone knew everyone, an element of uncertainty had been introduced.

If that sounds like a lukewarm euphemism for "racism" to you, let me be clear—you're right. But it's not a complete picture. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie once warned us against the danger of a single story. At the heart of Adichie's argument is a loud and insistent truth: "it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person."

South St. Paul, like any place or person, has its ugly stories. Thirty years ago it was declared a federal disaster area after 12,000 meatpacking jobs were lost, an economic disembowelment that was subsequently treated with Band-Aids. These days, its police chief is cheerfully preparing for an imminent race riot. The meth hasn't helped much, either.

All of these stories are true, and the picture they paint of South St. Paul is not a flattering one. Look at the facts in isolation, and you might wonder if there's any hope for a town like this. If you're a neo-Calvinist

tough guy like *National Review's* Kevin D. Williamson, you might go even further—doesn't this backwater dump "deserve to die"?

But there is a lot of good in South St. Paul, too. Like the International Baccalaureate program, which provides a world-class high school education while letting students earn a college degree for free at the same time. Or the girls' hockey team, which was featured in *Sports Illustrated* after helping to popularize the sport with girls across the nation.

Or, believe it or not, Jeronimo Yanez.

In the words of Adichie, Jeronimo was a man who engaged with all the people and all the stories of the world he lived in. If you'd had to pick a utopian police force from a pool of the most kind, helpful, community-minded people, Jeronimo Yanez would have been the first name on your list.

More than a decade after he graduated, he's still beloved by his former high school teachers. They speak about him with a warm, quiet sadness that is earnest and heart-breaking. He was a "respectful, kind, and hard-working student," according to Christopher Bakken, who teaches English and American literature. "I know his family well and I teach with his father, and I know he's been raised to be a great man." Bakken said Jeronimo was the kind of guy who got along with everybody. He remembered how "kids really seemed to gravitate towards [Jeronimo]" at school.

Jeronimo's natural charisma was irresistible. Former classmate Shannon Alexander recalled how "he would always dance before or after football games, surrounded by the players." His sense of humor was infectious. "One night at Chipotle we were sitting in the car, waiting for our friends," said Alexander, "and I started dancing to this song. Jeronimo burst out in laughter, making fun of my moves. To this day I remember his laugh and the shoulder move I was doing. He still owes me a dance lesson."

In a town where racial tensions often ran hot, Jeronimo was a peacemaker. He charmed everyone from the angriest red-necks to the fiercest gang members. He was

friends with the black kids, the white kids, the Hispanic kids, the Muslim kids, the rich kids, the poor kids, the gay kids, the goth kids, and just about anyone else he met.

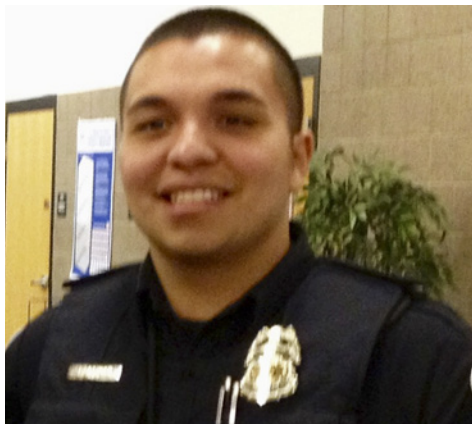
"Jeronimo was always the kindest, sweetest, and most humble of all people," said Donny Geng, long-time baseball coach and a living legend in town. "He always had the biggest of smiles and always went out of his way to include others."

Everything these people said is true, and here I'll add a memory of my own. It's about Jeronimo and a man we'll call Bill. Bill was a developmentally disabled adult whose family lived down the street from Jeronimo's. Every summer, Jeronimo and Bill would spend their days exploring the town together. They'd buy snacks at the gas station and wander down the tree-lined sidewalks. Jeronimo was Bill's guide and caretaker, and his friend.

One day, I was driving to baseball practice when I saw the pair of them crossing the road in my rearview mirror. Jeronimo pointed at something—I couldn't tell what—and it made Bill clap in delight. Then the light changed. Cars began to creep forward. Bill and Jeronimo hurried to reach the other side, Jeronimo with his hand raised toward the oncom-



Philando Castile



Jeronimo Yanez

ing traffic, protecting the precious and delicate life of his neighbor.

That's the kind of guy Jeronimo was.

Go to any police academy in the country, and you will not find a recruit with more natural patience, compassion, or friendliness than Jeronimo Yanez. He is a gifted communicator and thoughtful listener. He is a good person with a loving family. He is smart, funny, and hard-working. He is the Platonic ideal of a nice cop.

He's also a murderer. It seems reasonable to suggest that the system has failed.

THIS IS THE PART OF THE STORY I'VE BEEN afraid to write. It's the part that will probably ruin a lot of relationships with wonderful people who I love and respect. But it would be an insult to Philando Castile and his family to deny the obvious, which is that Jeronimo is a murderer by any sane definition of the word.

That Jeronimo would grow up to be a murderer was not inevitable. In fact, at no point during Jeronimo's childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood did it even seem the slightest bit plausible. He didn't drown cats for fun, he didn't pick fights after school, and he didn't drunkenly grope co-eds at frat parties. But the defining characteristic of Jeronimo's personality wasn't just the absence of maliciousness—it was the presence of goodness. He had a genuine desire to befriend the people he met and to help them in any way he could. For the first two decades of his life, this impulse was recognized and rewarded by people with authority: his parents, teachers, and coaches. It also gained him the respect of his peers. Living in this kind of environment taught him that social status and admiration were earned through kindness and generosity.

When he joined the police, he began to hear a different message. He was taught to see enemies everywhere. According to prominent police advocates like Jim Pasco, executive director of the national Fraternal Order of Police, cops face "a trifecta" of threats to their physical and professional security. "There's a hostile element in the community at large. There's in many instances a lack of support on the part of elected officials and police management. And there's this ubiquitous social-media effort to discredit all police officers because of the extraordinarily rare misconduct by a very few," says Pasco. He's not the only powerful official to push the narrative of cops as long-suffering victims. "There unquestionably is a creeping apathy among the public about the work and role of its dedicated police officers," said New York's police commissioner James O'Neill. Just a few months ago, the nation's top-ranking law enforcement officer, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, sang a similar tune: "Unfortunately, in recent years law enforcement as a whole has been unfairly maligned and blamed... [a]mid this intense public scrutiny and criticism, morale has gone down, while the number in their ranks killed in the line of duty has gone up."

The myth of the persecuted policeman is the foundation of the modern American police army (and make no mistake, it's a goddamn army, with the line between the police and the military steadily becoming blurrier). They are taught to think of themselves as warriors from Day One at the academy. As one long-time police trainer said: "This nation is at war, whether one chooses to admit it, or not." The same trainer writes, with all apparent seriousness, about the decades-long struggle of the "police survival movement." If you find yourself thinking he sounds delusional, you'll be reassured to know that his only goal is to "engage in a nonpolitical, factual discussion of this issue and give you my educated answer" to the question of whether or not police officers should be taught to think of everyone they see as a potential enemy combatant.

This man, as depressingly (and terrifyingly) stupid as he may be, does have a point. America *is* at war—it just happens to be a class war, and the cops are protecting the bad guys.

Police officers always have been, and always will be, the servants of the rich. When the rich feel threatened, they demand more protection. Sometimes this means hiring more servants ("we need more cops on the beat!"), and sometimes this means arming those servants more heavily ("the gangsters have Molotov cocktails, so our cops need flamethrowers!"). But the elites' message to their cop-servants is always the same: the streets are crawling with murderous, criminal scum. You (and your gun) are the only thing that stands between civilization and utter chaos.

As the brutal money-gods of American capitalism destroy what little remains of our social safety net, inequality will continue to worsen. Already, more than 50% of the world's wealth is owned by 1% of its population. It's a fine time to be grotesquely wealthy, but the precariousness of the situation is lost on nobody (hence the recent popularity of nuke-proof bunkers and remote private islands). In the meantime, the rich seek to secure the loyalty of their police minions by lavishing them with flowery praise and expensive new weapons to keep the unwashed mobs at bay. Through a combination of bribery and brainwashing, America's ruling class recruits people from humble backgrounds like Jeronimo's to do the dirty work of suppressing dissent and protecting the lives and property of the rich.

The end result of this program of turning people into officers: Jeronimo Yanez shot Philando Castile to death in front of a four-year-old girl. We all saw it happen. Even his lawyer said it was tragic, in a bizarre moment of guilt-laced honesty. The jury's decision is a lie and everyone knows it, at least until the lie passes into history and becomes truth. If that happens, the Castile case will be just another sad chapter in the long and bullshit-rich saga of police reform.

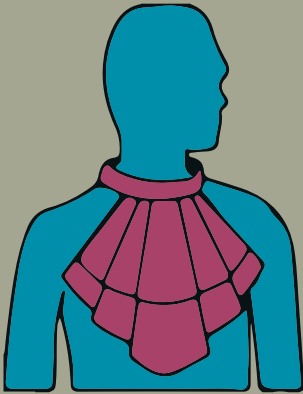
"POLICE REFORM," AS THE PHRASE IS USED in the contemporary United States, generally refers to the idea that while American law enforcement may have its flaws, there's nothing that can't be fixed by two silver bullets: technology and training. Proponents of reform are fearless in their determination to ignore a growing mountain of evidence that these simply don't work. Training and technology cannot, and will not, solve any of the real problems with policing. Reforming the police in this timid and impotent manner is like taking Tums for your stomach cancer. But that doesn't discourage its advocates from cheerfully prescribing it every time a kid gets shot.

Consider the body camera, the zombie cockroach of police reform ideas. Touted by Study A, discredited by Study B, body cameras are hotly debated every year, to little effect. In 2015, the Obama administration authorized a three-year, \$75 million program to provide the wretched things to cops across the country. Like many of Obama's policies, it made sense as long as you didn't think about it too hard. A body camera means evidence. Evidence means accountability. Accountability means objectivity. Objectivity is good.

It's a nice idea—the only problem is that it doesn't actually work. Let's even leave aside the Big Brotherly implications of a vast police surveillance network with cutting-edge facial recognition tools running at all times (and if that idea doesn't alarm you, you probably don't realize that you commit three felonies a day without even trying). The deeper problems with body cameras are obvious to anyone with a rudimentary understanding of how buttons work. What's to prevent a cop from turning off his body camera right before he shoots someone? The plausible deniability here is an attorney's wet dream. If an accident occurs at the wrong time, say, in the heat of a tense confrontation between heavily-armed officers and a frightened teenager, what's a cop to do except shrug his shoulders and fire away? Why would someone who can't be trusted to operate a firearm responsibly be any better with a camera that could potentially incriminate him?

But let's take it a step further and give police the benefit of the doubt,

NEWS FROM THE FRONT



the scheme

In a *Vanity Fair* profile of now-disgraced *New Republic* editor Leon Wieseltier, we find the following lines: "Wieseltier was soon bringing to the office another habit that he also enjoyed outside the workplace: frequent cocaine use...To support this expensive pastime he regularly loaded dozens of books he received as literary editor into the trunk of his Honda Accord and hauled them to Washington bookstores, selling them to finance purchases of 'truth serum.'" Gentle reader, we must confess: this appears to us an extraordinarily sound idea. As a highly-regarded national political periodical, we are regularly deluged with unwanted review copies of various books. Until the present time, our strategy for ridding ourselves of them has been to set them alight and roast marshmallows over the flames. Selling them to finance our bad habits, however, is a far more sensible proposition. Alas, our editors do far fewer hard drugs than you might expect. However, our editors do have an uncommonly large monthly cravat budget. At last, our review copies will go to a worthy cause.



fun fact

Current Affairs is firmly committed to the cause of international socialism.
Travailleurs du monde, unissez!

the prize

We are pleased to announce the winners of our "Most Inensitive and Morally Indefensible Column Of All Time By A Mainstream U.S. Pundit" contest, a.k.a. The Yglesias Prize For Callousness In Punditry. Third Place goes to Harry Biswager's *Forbes* column "Give Back? Yes, It's Time For The 99 Percent To Give Back To The 1%," which argued that poor people should be paying rich people to thank them for the good they do. Second place goes to Megan McArdle's "Beware of Blaming Government for London Tower Fire," in *Bloomerg View*, which argued that the people who believe in fire safety regulations don't understand that economics means poor people have to die in fires. First place goes to Kristen McQueary's "Chicago, New Orleans and Rebirth," in the *Chicago Tribune*, which expressed a longing for Chicago to have a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina, since it would enable the privatization of the school system. Thanks to all who submitted horrendous opinions.

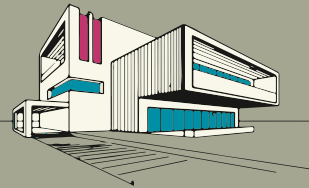


letter

To the editor:

Your article about Ben Shapiro was extremely dumb, factually inaccurate, and elitist to the point of being nauseating... You are a coward. You mock someone when they can't defend themselves, and when you have the chance to debate them, you resort to violence instead (or hide in your safe space)...I know I am clearly much smarter than you... Grow up. The Democrat party has become the party of children.
Louis Burwell

Mr. Burwell,
You are right. It was unfair for us to pick on someone clearly incapable of intellectually defending himself. We apologize for our outrageous and uncalled-for violence.



architecture

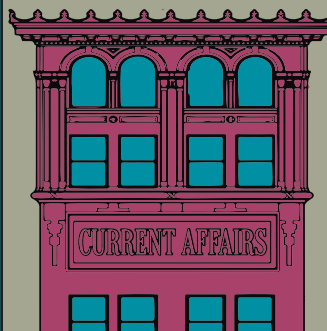
We are grateful to the numerous architectural theorists who have written to inform us that all of our opinions are worthless and that our magazine should rather shut its doors before ever again wading into aesthetic issues about which we know nothing, being intellectually retrograde amateurs with no formal training in the subject and no understanding of French theory. We now realize that our preference for buildings to be "attractive" and "comfortable" is sentimental, ahistorical, and reactionary. Never again shall we accidentally endorse beauty or suggest that Brutalist buildings are unpleasant to live around. We realize now that judgments of architectural merit are to be left to professionals, and that laypeople's opinions on the subject are the result of false consciousness and prejudice.

periscopes

Due to a regrettable error in the Charts Department, last months Horoscopes column was accidentally replaced with a Periscopes column. While we recognize that the more nautically-curious among our readership may have found the substitution gratifying, we understand that for many others, a magazine loaded with submarine-based infotainment is a most unwelcome surprise. Sadly, refunds cannot be provided to the aggrieved.

lost/found

After the recent Subscribers' Ball in the lobby of the Current Affairs building, a number of objects were found to have been left behind by presumably-inebriated guests. Many of these items are obscene. They may be collected surreptitiously from the building's Loading Dock.



a worry

A social media user writes:

"I was almost about to subscribe when I read the line on your website 'Subscribe to the magazine that will change the way your friends think about you!' What? No, the reason your audience likes your content is because it educates them, not because they want their friends to change the way they think about them."

Do not worry, charmingly sincere reader! This was intended as jest. However, we do find that even when our subscribers' motives are only of the noblest and most selfless kind, and they take our magazine solely from a desire for self-betterment and edification, collateral consequences inevitably follow. No matter how much you may wish otherwise, your *Current Affairs* subscription will end up improving your social life, boosting your income, and making you more attractive to members of the sex to which you are attracted. It is not what we had intended. But it cannot be helped.



the pivot

We regret to announce that the planned *Current Affairs* "Pivot to Video" has been canceled. We recognize that as a 21st-century media institution, it is considered our duty to lay off all staff and focus on multimedia content and native advertising, and we realize how many of our audience must have been excited by the prospect. Disappointed readers can rest assured that we will inevitably still find some way to ruin our brand with vacuous Silicon Valley horseshit.

the editor

A reader writes:

Does nobody edit the editor? Can none of you find a way to keep him from publishing every last worthless thought that comes into his mind.

Reader, if only you knew how we had tried. But he cannot be stopped. There is no reasoning with him. We are but prisoners of his capricious whim.

and imagine a scenario where a responsible police officer is using their body camera exactly as it's intended. Imagine that the officer pulls over a car for some minor traffic infraction, like driving with a busted taillight. First he radios the dispatch and checks in. Then he switches on his body camera before exiting his vehicle, just like he should. He walks over to the driver and asks for his license and registration. The driver obeys. As he hands the officer his papers, he politely informs the officer that he is carrying a firearm. The officer panics and shoots the driver.

Later in court, he claims the man was reaching for his gun. The judge asks to see the body camera video. The officer complies, as is his legal obligation, but the video is inconclusive—he was filming the driver from the shoulders up. It's impossible to prove the driver *wasn't* doing something suspicious with his hands. The jury acquits the officer on all charges.

In this case, the equipment functioned perfectly. All the proper proce-

We can't respond to this tragedy, or the broader tragedy of police violence in America, without doing the difficult and uncomfortable work of exploring how this 'sausage of angel and beast' was made.

dures were followed. The evidence was presented in a court of law where it could be evaluated by a jury of the police officer's peers. The system worked like clockwork, and none of it made the slightest difference. The body camera-clad officer did everything right except not killing a person.

Advocates of police reform have a rebuttal, as you might expect. They concede that the technology, great and powerful as it is, can't solve every law enforcement problem by itself. If you *really* want to fix the police, they say, you also have to train them better. Luckily, there's no shortage of training programs for American cops who get itchy trigger fingers at the sight of anyone under the age of 60 who's not wearing a three-piece suit and carrying the latest issue of *The Economist*.

Few industries are as lucrative and fast-growing as the sensitivity training industry. Police departments can choose from a veritable smorgasbord of bias-reducing programs: plenty of racial sensitivity training, LGBTQ sensitivity training, and Muslim sensitivity training, of course, but there's also training to help cops resist the natural urge to shoot people who are blind or disabled.

THE ONLY PROBLEM IS THAT NONE OF THIS works, either.

Police training courses often exist in name only (or at least, as watered-down versions of already watered-down concepts). For example, back in 2010 over \$1.5 million was awarded to Minnesota police departments for training on "basic civil rights, community-based policing, and racial and ethnic sensitivity." (The money came from a brutality lawsuit against the Metro Gang Strike Force, a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement team infamous for robbing and beating people of color.) Seven years later, not a single course has been offered. Among the many officers who were supposed to receive training but never did: Jeronimo Yanez.

Nevertheless, the program has managed to spend \$215,000. Much of that went into the pockets of Neil Melton, former head of the Minnesota Peace Officers Standards and Training Board. He earned more than \$8,000 a month from July 2014 to August 2015, during which time he

managed to train a grand total of zero officers.

The straight-faced cynicism at work here is breathtaking. Though the program was originally designed as a weeklong intensive course at state colleges and universities, it recently underwent a "significant change of focus" and is now planned to be offered online, so as to "reach more officers in an economical way".

You might be tempted to argue, "Yes, but that doesn't prove that *every* police training course is such a useless moneypit. Many of them actually exist, with instructors and books and everything. Some are even taught by doctor-experts with impressive research credentials. Every day, the brightest minds of academia are developing new tools to help police officers overcome their prejudices."

The most influential of these tools, the scam that launched a thousand seminars, is Harvard's famous Implicit Association Test (IAT). It was the brainchild of Project Implicit, an organization founded in 1998 to "educate the public about hidden biases." The IAT is commonly used in police sensitivity training courses across the country. It is the fraying, pseudo-intellectual twine that binds together the rotten planks of the platform for police reform.

Back in 2001, the University of Washington hosted a workshop called "What's Wrong with the Implicit Association Test?" Its conclusion was that there were, in fact, at least ten things wrong with the IAT, ranging from its basic assumptions to its methods of measurement. In 2008, the American Psychological Association published a feature questioning whether the IAT's mainstream popularity was merited by its actual science. In 2017, the Chronicle of Higher Education covered an exhaustive study by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Harvard, and the University of Virginia, spanning more than 20 years and 80,000 participants, that concluded "the correlation between implicit bias and discriminatory behavior appears weaker than previously thought" and also that "there is very little evidence that changes in implicit bias have anything to do with changes in a person's behavior."

Translation: trying to fix the police by eliminating their subconscious biases is like trying to housetrain your dog by teaching it English.

In his brilliant and scathing expose on the IAT, Jesse Singal explains how the test "went viral not for solid scientific reasons, but simply because it tells us such a simple, pat story about how racism works and can be fixed: that deep down, we're all a little—or a lot—racist, and that if we measure and study this individual-level racism enough, progress toward equality will ensue." The government loves programs like these because they "easily produce heaps of qualitative data", which can be used to create an illusion of progress, while simultaneously allowing its beleaguered PR teams to "promote an interesting and provocative story line about race in America." As Singal notes, "It might be advantageous to various people to *say* implicit bias... is the most important thing to focus on, but that doesn't make it true."

Look at the evidence and it becomes clear that police training programs that focus on eradicating the implicit biases of individual officers are based both on shoddy science and shoddy reasoning. Subconscious racism and structural racism are not mutually exclusive, but they are also not equally influential. Singal quotes a Stanford sociologist who says, "I think unconscious racial prejudice is real and consequential.... but my sense is that racial inequality in America is probably driven more by structural factors like concentrated poverty, the racial wealth gap, differential exposure to violence, the availability of early childhood education, and so on." Poverty? Wealth gaps? Exposure to violence? These problems can't be solved in a week-long seminar. By focusing on the elimination of implicit bias, America's police forces are neglecting the cause of the disease to focus on its symptoms.

This is not a sign of stupidity but of slippery bureaucratic cleverness. Police reformists don't deny that "big picture" changes are necessary. In fact, they're swift to admit some kind of action—or at least the appearance of action—is needed. According to these reformists, the solution

is “community-based policing.” The premise of community-based policing is that people distrust the police because they just don’t know the officers well enough. Get the cops out of their cars and have them walk around the neighborhood a bit, and you’ll rebuild that trust. Throw some barbecues, kiss some babies, and watch the good vibes grow.

Behind closed doors, law enforcement rolls its eyes at the mere mention of the term. *The Wire* famously mocked the ideas behind it. Community-based policing is the kind of fuzzy nothing-ism beloved by progressives from L.A. to D.C., and distrusted by almost everyone else. The cops aren’t wrong to despise it. Despite its shiny cloak of modern science and statistics, the reality is that community-based policing is based on a Dickensian pipe dream: “if men would behave decently the world would be decent,” as George Orwell put it.

The only people who *don’t* seem to recognize the absurdity of community-based policing are the politicians who advocate it. Although they like to portray themselves as advocates of “common sense” and “family values,” they appear to see nothing wrong with the fact that their vision of community-based policing still tolerates the murder of community members with no justification or legal consequence.

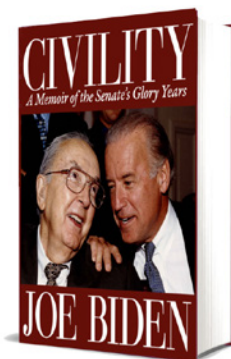
Take Rep. Tony Cornish, a politician and police chief from southern Minnesota. In an op-ed titled “A fair trial with a reasoned verdict, and constructive work under way,” published shortly after the jury acquitted Jeronimo of all charges, Cornish claimed that “the media [threw] officer Yanez under the bus” while “pandering politicians” made “ridiculous divisive comments” about the case. It’s obvious from the first excruciating sentence that Cornish is the kind of pompous tyrant whose brutality is matched only by his cluelessness. “I have decided that someone with knowledge of both police tactics and the law should speak up,” he writes, as if quoting the right subsections of the right reports could magically un-murder a person.

According to Cornish, “there was justification for the initial stop” and Jeronimo’s subsequent actions were “not uncommon or out of the ordinary.” He was adamant that because “Philando Castile did not follow Yanez’s commands and continued reaching for something,” killing him was “not unreasonable according to the law.” Cornish said that the Yanez case ended with “a reasonable verdict” that correctly interpreted the “‘justifiable taking of a life’ statute.” He warns that “it is scary to think of changing the law to make it ‘easier’ to convict anyone, cop or civilian.” (To the best of my knowledge, however, this principled freedom fighter has not penned any op-eds against Minnesota’s new anti-protest laws.) Cornish states that there is “[no] reason to abandon the best criminal justice system in the entire world,” because “law enforcement is listening.” After all, “they have put much more emphasis on ‘community policing.’” He proudly informs readers that the Law Enforcement Coalition “came in with a request for more training and will receive \$13 million for training in dealing with suicidal people, mentally ill people, crisis intervention, and special training in ‘implicit bias.’” This is the institutional equivalent of the old “I’m sorry about the sexual assault, but don’t worry, I’m going to rehab” defense. [Note: Between writing and publication, Rep. Cornish

REMEMBERING A TIME WHEN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM WORKED FOR LITERALLY EVERYBODY...

“I’ve been around so long, I worked with [Mississippi segregationist Senator] James Eastland...Even in the days when I got there, the Democratic Party still had seven or eight old-fashioned Democratic segregationists. You’d get up and you’d argue like the devil with them. Then you’d go down and have lunch or dinner together. The political system worked. We were divided on issues, but the political system worked.”—JOE BIDEN

In “Civility,” Joe Biden looks back fondly on his time as a U.S. senator. It was a less divided era, when just because someone was a Klansman, didn’t mean you couldn’t be his golfing buddy. Filled with warm reflections on such colorful figures as Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond, Biden laments the partisanship and division that followed from desegregation.



ANNOUNCING OUR NEW TOTALLY INNOCUOUS FAMILY-FRIENDLY IMPOSSIBLE TO MISCONSTRUE HOLIDAY CUPS



was forced to resign over sexual harassment allegations.—Ed.]

It's Cornish's closing statement, though, that should terrify you: "We may attempt to reform both police tactics and the criminal justice system, but we have to be extremely careful on what we all interpret as 'justice.'" Even Cornish isn't quite clueless enough to simply scrawl IT'S NOT MURDER IF A COP DOES IT in bright red crayon across the bottom of the page. But he might as well have. Evidently, "community policing" is a system where a certain amount of collateral damage by way of murdered civilians is to be expected, and to expect anything better is taking some lofty ideal of "justice" too far.

In a decent society, people like Cornish wouldn't have authority over a pumpkin patch, let alone a community of human beings. If these are the architects of reform, then the pillars of American justice have already crumbled beyond the point of repair. We need to start thinking about more radical solutions.

NICER COPS ARE NOT THE ANSWER. NEITHER ARE tech-savvier cops. Pretending that police reform can lead to meaningful change is comforting but delusional. Police reform has proven useless because none of its proposals have directly addressed the fundamental problems with American cops, namely that they beat and kill the people they're supposed to protect at alarming rates, and they spend an insane amount of money in the process.

This can be attributed to three main causes:

- 1) Cops have too much contact with citizens.
- 2) They're too heavily armed.
- 3) They've been trusted to 'police' themselves.

Each of these issues must be resolved for American law enforcement to shed its well-deserved reputation for brutality. And if we want to make meaningful changes, we have to start by forgetting everything we've been taught about cops.

Look at any children's book about jobs, and you'll notice a common theme: the police officer almost always appears next to the firefighter or paramedic. Before you know how to read, you're already being indoctrinated with the idea that police officers are just as noble and benevolent as the people who protect you from being burned alive or falling into deep, scary wells.

But cops have more in common with jailers and dogcatchers than they do with emergency first responders. Cops exist to control and punish people. Even their staunchest backers admit this. The only real similarity between a fire department and a police department is the word "department." Their actual purposes could scarcely be more different. If a firefighter is perfectly efficient, he saves more people per fire. If a police officer is perfectly efficient, he controls more people per punishment. The barometer of success for a cop is how well he limits people's freedom.

Thus, the essence of community-based policing (ordinary citizens having more daily contact with police) is little more than authoritarianism with a smiley face. Instead, we should seek to *minimize* the amount of interactions that people must have with cops. Traffic stops are a prime example. This is the most common scenario for a police-citizen encounter, and cops have been trained to approach each one as a potential ambush. Traffic stops frighten everybody and serve the best interests of nobody except municipal accountants. Every time a cop pulls someone over—or has any interaction with anyone at all, for that matter—the chances of violence skyrocket.

This is why it's so important to disarm the cops. We should start by taking their tanks. Then we should take their sniper rifles, their attack helicopters, and their bomb-delivery robots. The sheer quantity of high-powered weaponry is astounding. In 2014-2015 alone, American police departments spent over \$2.2 billion on surplus military equipment. That is an almost inconceivable crap-ton of bayonets, M-16s, mine-resistant vehicles, and other things that no police department in the nation has any reason to have.

But it's not just military gear that cops have embraced. They're also learning to think like soldiers. They take training courses with names like "On Killing", where they learn how "to overcome the powerful resistance to kill," a description of such cartoonish villainy that you wonder if it's taught by a guy in an Emperor Palpatine mask. (The one that Jeronimo Yanez took was called "Bulletproof Warrior".)

As long as cops have powerful weapons (and are trained to use those weapons whenever they feel threatened, which they are told should be "always") innocent people are going to die. It is ridiculous to think that you can arm your police with a military-grade arsenal, tell them that everyone they see is a potential threat, and *not* have bloodshed in the streets. (Oddly enough, this was the part of the reasoning behind the original SWAT units: people realized high-powered weaponry didn't belong in the hands of cops on the beat, and they had the authority to prevent cops from acquiring such weapons.) It may be a necessary evil to have some units of armed police, but they should be few, small, and lightly-armed with pistols, shotguns, and rifles (after all, "good guys with guns" seem to do just fine with these). In the event that unarmed police had to confront armed suspects, they would do what cops already do: call for backup.

And when those backup cars pull up, they should each be carrying at least one person who isn't a cop. Every police unit should have a civilian observer present at all times. This is because the police, even according to polls of police officers, have proven themselves utterly incapable of policing themselves. Citizens need to have direct oversight over cops in the street, cops behind desks, and every cop in between. They need to be able to monitor police actions in real-time and intervene on behalf of their fellow citizens. They need to conduct their own investigations and inquiries, instead of relying on the "internal discipline" of a corrupt institution.

Cops will protest that this would make their jobs much more difficult. They'll claim, quite rightly, that these observers are likely to be antagonistic and meddlesome. The more-literate types will pen angry op-eds, wailing that their mightiest efforts risk being stifled by rules and regulations.

But that's the *entire point* of having actual, real-time oversight by a third party. A cop's job is to coerce people on behalf of the state. We should be doing everything we can to make that job as difficult as possible. Cops are a fact of life, and it's probably good for your mental health to just accept that. But we should treat the existence of police officers with vigilant and begrudging acceptance, nothing more. At the same time, we should take positive and concrete actions to mitigate the effects of this necessary evil. Creating a vast new workforce of active, engaged citizens to serve as police observers would be a good first step.

Imagine if your local police department stopped buying armored fighting vehicles and used that money to hire your elderly neighbor who can barely afford her medication, or the nice young couple next door with a mountain of student loans and a baby on the way. Might that be a more effective method of "outreach" than giving the K9 unit a Twitter account? And wouldn't it be much easier to "build relationships with the community" if the community wasn't cold and starving?

ASERIOUS OVERHAUL OF AMERICAN POLICING REQUIRES a revolutionary attitude toward the country's institutions. We have to see things clearly. We have to understand that law enforcement, at its absolute best, is a nuisance to be tolerated with gritted teeth. The police are inherently coercive and violent by the very nature of their work. Every American, especially those of us who love personal liberty and individual freedom, should be intensely distrustful of anyone who is authorized by the state to lock us in cages. We should do everything we can to limit their power over our lives.

None of this brings Philando Castile back. None of it absolves Jeronimo Yanez of the guilt he'll carry till the day he dies. Nothing can ever cleanse American law enforcement of the innocent blood in which it is drenched.

But we still have to scrub. ❖

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CENTRIST DAD

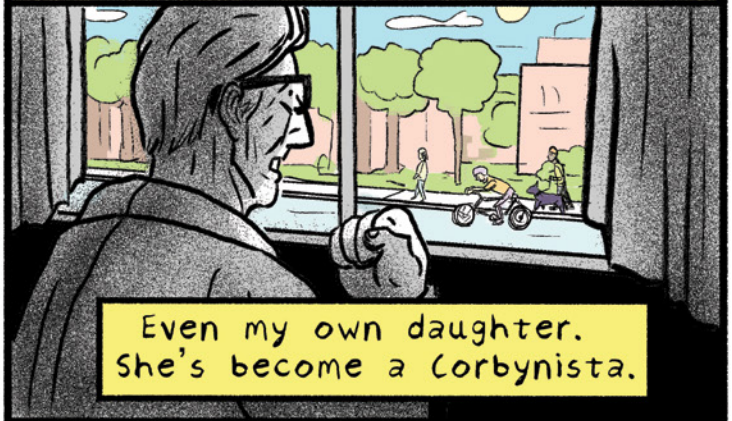
STORY:
LYTA GOLD
ART:
MIKE FREIHEIT

DARKNESS. RUIN. CHAOS.



The socialist fairytale digs deep roots in the British Foundation. My comments are swords in the darkness, bright corrections to childish tomfoolery.

Fact: Once we strode down a bright road of steady growth and stately progress. But they wouldn't wait. The youth have no patience. They cried "inequality" and "crushing rents".



My daughter. I log these hours of strong, focused content for you. All for you.

I go out for a litre of milk. Jezza's fanatical eyes beat down on me. Promising hope. Promising joy.



Doesn't he realize that life is a series of crushing disappointments, each more miserable than the last?

He stares. So calm. As if he hadn't been thoroughly eviscerated by the press for thirty-odd years.



When it's time to crawl away from your own house after the wife tosses you out, after you're forced into the Kensington flat you inherited from your parents.



Fact: When I was young I believed in socialism, anarchism, all the rest. I believed until reality mugged me, left me bleeding in a gutter.

Fact: History is over. It ended when my wife left me. She said I was posting online too much, but do you see how it is out there? So many stupid young women believing so many stupid young things?



They are so ignorant and so beautiful. Only I can save them. With my words. I must drown them in a flood of my white-hot wisdom.



We need to set the market free. We need to remove the chains from its bold, straining limbs. Let the market stride over the surface over the earth, exploring, educating, lifting up the young and the ignorant. We must unite under the banner of God the Market. Only then can Europe be saved

My daughter won't phone me. And my wife has moved on. They say I refuse to change. They say I'm living in a past that no longer exists, clinging to a dead reality that never was.

But I comment and comment, vlog and vlog, until the day comes at last...

The day my straying nation understands she needs me once again.

SEX *and* DUE PROCESS *on* CAMPUS

by Marina N. Bolotnikova

HERE ARE SOME CLAIMS COMMONLY MADE ON THE left about sexual assault: It's chronically unreported and rarely fabricated, so we should always believe victims; consent and non-consent are always separated by a sharp line; and rapists always know exactly what they're doing. Not only are these premises untrue, but they're not even consistent with feminist ideas about how and why sexual assault happens. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos's recent changes to Title IX sexual assault policy have, obviously, been a total disaster, but the left's unwillingness to have an honest discussion about it has made us unable to respond. The Trump administration's "reforms," and an environment of heightened interest in sexual violence in general, should be a moment to refocus our discourse.

Sexual assault at colleges really became a cultural flashpoint after 2011, when the Obama administration published its "Dear Colleague" letter, a document that told schools to use certain procedures to investigate sexual harassment and assault if they wanted to remain

in compliance with their obligation to prevent sex-based discrimination under Title IX. The guidelines seemed like a reasonable response to what had previously been the status quo, when colleges simply did not take sexual violence seriously as a Title IX violation. According to the letter, schools were now to judge assault and harassment cases using a "preponderance of the evidence" standard. Under this standard, the schools would find in favor of the accuser if it appeared "more likely than not" that an accused student was guilty. "Preponderance of the evidence" is a lower standard than the "beyond a reasonable doubt" standard that we associate with criminal trials, but it's a standard commonly used in civil rights cases, and thus could be deemed appropriate for an internal disciplinary process at a college. Schools were also expected to meet basic requirements for due process, which meant conducting independent investigations, giving the accused access to the evidence against them, and, importantly, allowing both sides to appeal. Before then, it had been common for schools to allow the accused to appeal a judgment, but not the accuser, meaning that

assault and harassment victims who objected to an adjudicator's decision had no avenue to force the school to take a second look at their case.

Even if you agree that these guidelines are mostly fair on their face, which I do, it's hard to escape the reality that the processes subsequently set up by schools under the new regime were often absurdly unfair. Around the same time that the "Dear Colleague" letter was issued, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights had publicly announced that it was investigating dozens of colleges for mishandling sexual assault cases. Many of those schools then rushed to create procedures that were meant to comply with the law but that actually confused matters more

because they didn't treat sexual assault cases with the rigor that they deserve. There was often no separation between the individuals who investigated the accusations and the individuals who judged the cases, and Title IX officers—whose entire job is to ensure that colleges comply with Title IX standards, and thus have a professional stake in the way cases are decided—were often put in charge of investigations. Nancy Gertner, a Harvard Law School

professor who supports the Obama-era guidance but has criticized its implementation, says that, "If the analogy is to civil rights cases, you would get a statement of the accusations, you have counsel, there is discovery where you find out what the nature of the accusations are, and there's a neutral decision-maker. If you don't have those things, then preponderance is essentially a very, very weak standard."

Predictably, then, in September 2017, DeVos announced that she was withdrawing the "Dear Colleague" letter. It's strange that some of the same liberal critics who have pointed out what was wrong with Title IX under the Obama administration have been so credulous in embracing DeVos's reforms. "What promises to emerge from the new rulemaking process—which will generate mountains of public input—is more, rather than less, regulation and enforcement of schools' obligations to all parties under Title IX," Jeannie Suk Gersen declared in the *New Yorker*. But whatever the failings of the university systems that were produced under Obama-era guidance, DeVos's public statements display no understanding of what made the earlier processes unfair. She has invited so-called "men's rights activists" to provide feedback on Title IX, and much like men's rights groups, the department's own officials think most sexual assault accusations are fake. Top OCR official Candice Jackson told the *New York Times* last summer that "the accusations—90 percent of them—fall into the category of 'we were both drunk,' 'we broke up, and six months later I found myself under a Title IX investigation

because she just decided that our last sleeping together was not quite right."

Jackson is not quite wrong—many sexual assault cases *do* take place in intimate partner contexts and very often involve alcohol. But her statement, which she later apologized for, reveals that she has no intention of taking this seriously. Her new, internally contradictory Dear Colleague letter and accompanying Q&A say that schools must provide the same rights to all parties, but then also say that schools can provide the right to an appeal to the accused alone. The administration's talking points superficially promise fairness to everyone, but their actual substance allows schools to provide full due process rights to one side and not the other. The real goal of the new guidance is to allow schools to return to their pre-2011 status quo, though this is exceedingly unlikely. Many schools already have firmly established Title IX procedures and promise to defend them.

So we're still left with the question of what it *would* mean to take these cases seriously, and balance due process rights against the right of students to an environment free of sexual harassment. If the left pretends that there's no tradeoff between the rights of the accused and the right to an environment free of sexual harassment, then we aren't being serious, and we invite the right to expose this unseriousness and set the terms of the discussion. Anne McClintock, a thoughtful and well-regarded feminist scholar, wrote in a *Jacobin* essay in October that the University of Wisconsin's "'philosophy' was to 'rehabilitate' rapists simply by letting them remain in school." Later, she continued, "Why do administrations protect the rights of the accused? Universities have strong financial incentives to under-investigate and under-report. Administrators seek to protect their brands." McClintock's argument presumes her conclusion in its premise: if a student has been accused, we already know he is responsible and should proceed as though he is. I worry that we've reached a dangerous place if feminists are willing to sneer at due process rights as the tools of brand-protecting administrators, and treat students found responsible for misconduct as though they're constitutionally incapable of rehabilitation.

AT THIS POINT, PEOPLE WHO CALL FOR limiting the rights of accused students will argue that college disciplinary proceedings aren't the same as a public trial, because universities set their own community norms and weigh different interests in their proceedings than the state does. This is true, they aren't, but that's hardly a legitimate rationale for an unfair system. Sexual assault cases still have lasting consequences for the students involved. The University of North Carolina, for example, was sued in 2016 (so far, unsuccessfully) by media organizations to release the names of students found responsible for sexual misconduct; the publication of such a list could be life-altering for an accused student who was

"If the left pretends that there's no tradeoff between the rights of the accused and the right to an environment free of sexual harassment, then we aren't being serious..."

The Magazine For Moms



unfairly convicted. Advocates often point to federal statistics indicating that a vanishingly small percentage of rapists will ever go to jail, to show that wrongful convictions are not a credible threat compared to the problem of underreporting. But it's dishonest to use national numbers from the criminal justice system to make an argument about the climate on university campuses, where the incentives have significantly changed, and reporting is encouraged rather than discouraged.

I think these problems don't reflect merely the excesses of the Title IX movement (or an "overcorrection" for sexual assault, as it's been cast everywhere in the media), but a fundamental misapplication of the feminist ideas that underlie our model of sexual harassment and assault. Read carefully, radical feminist literature provides us with some insight about what's at stake in this debate. In the 1970s, legal

which a man had sex with a woman who was extremely drunk and who, he thought, had perhaps told him to stop, though he wasn't sure and didn't bother to check. Many freshman boys in the audience vocally balked at the suggestion that this could be assault. All right, you might say—so there are still people who don't know the difference between consensual sex and sexual assault, but given how far the public conversation has advanced, their plausible excuses for not knowing have narrowed. Why should we be concerned with protecting those men?

This is a good point, and might be an unanswerable argument, if consent and non-consent *were* always separated by a bright line, which was not only discoverable by an adjudicator, but even clearly-understood by both parties in a sexual encounter. Yet ambivalence and uncertainty—sincerely conflicting and confused desires—make

“LEFTISTS MUST INSIST ON A RIGHTS-BASED RATHER THAN VENGEANCE-BASED POLITICS.”

theorist Catharine MacKinnon was thinking about how the law could address the fact that all women experience unwanted sexual attention. She thought gender and sexual violence were basically inseparable, and sexuality itself was the source of women's second-class status. “Male and female are created through the eroticization of dominance and submission,” she wrote in 1983. The very idea of “sexual harassment”—which was previously a private reality of women's lives, absent from public discourse—emerged from MacKinnon's insight that coercive sexual attention can constitute *discrimination* against women. With this shift in public understanding, harassment in workplaces and schools became a public issue sanctionable under civil rights law.

This same premise—that violence is deeply embedded in the dynamic between men and women—animates today's sexual politics, including the Title IX movement. But feminist writers made another important point: because patriarchy relies on a link between sex and violence, sexual assault often isn't even recognized as such, and a man could violate a woman while genuinely being unaware of it. As MacKinnon put it: “Many women are raped by men who know the meaning of their acts to women and proceed anyway. But women are also violated every day by men who have no idea of the meaning of their acts to women. To them, it is sex.”

This argument made more sense when MacKinnon was writing, an era when marital rape was only just beginning to be recognized as a crime. Public consciousness around sexual assault has obviously changed since then, but it's still true that many men don't understand the difference between consent and non-consent. Watch the indignant reactions of male college students to unambiguous sexual assault scenarios, and this becomes frighteningly clear. At my own college sexual assault training in 2010, students watched a hypothetical scene in

sexual violence unique among crimes. Harvard Law professors Jacob Gersen and Jeannie Suk Gersen point out in their analysis “The Sex Bureaucracy” that “[w]e are...in many ways beyond the so-called ‘he said, she said’ problem in which two people's accounts of the facts differ, and the question is which account to believe. Many of the current fact patterns appear to be situations in which he and she (or he and he, or she and she) say much the same thing about the facts of the incident, but give different meanings to the experience. The different meanings need not be radically dissimilar to result in different determinations about sexual misconduct.” This is indeed what MacKinnon meant when she argued that existing jurisprudence had no real way of dealing with rape: “[T]he deeper problem is the rape law's assumption that a single, objective state of affairs existed, one which merely needs to be determined by evidence, when many (maybe even most) rapes involve honest men and violated women.” And then there are cases where a woman's narrative not only differs from a man's, but might itself be sincerely ambivalent (“ambivalence—simultaneously wanting and not wanting, desire and revulsion—is endemic to human sexuality,” as Gersen and Suk Gersen put it). It doesn't benefit feminists to deny these complications, because to do so would unravel the entire foundation of a feminist account of sexual violence.

In the context of a campus sexual encounter, for example, an “honest man, violated woman” scenario might take the form of a man and woman who have sex while they are both drunk. Perhaps they don't know each other very well and don't communicate explicitly about what they want. Perhaps there was no physical force, but the woman feels ambivalent about the whole thing. Perhaps she feels in retrospect that she wasn't really in control of what happened and didn't feel safe

saying no. A university might decide that the man should be held responsible because his partner's judgment was impaired by alcohol, and he didn't take steps to ensure her consent. But what if, for example, the man *and* the woman—who, remember, were *both* drunk during the encounter—say the sex wasn't consensual, and both seem to be telling what they genuinely believe to be the truth? Should the man be held responsible as a matter of anatomy? As a matter of the imbalance of power between men and women? How would we handle an otherwise identical case where both parties are men—or where neither is?

Title IX's more subjective, interests-balancing "civil law" standard, rather than a criminal law standard, is one plausible way to address the interpretive problem of sexual assault cases. Title IX activists are right that criminal law can't be our only way to address gender-based violence. Alexandra Brodsky, an attorney and Title IX advocate, writes that people's discomfort with college Title IX procedures like the preponderance standard "speaks to the monopoly that the criminal law holds in Americans' understanding of responses to gender-based violence." Ideally, given a difficult case where there may be no witnesses besides the two parties themselves, the preponderance of evidence standard is supposed to make it easier to weigh the interests of accusers and accused equally. Still, in many cases when someone has been hurt by unhealthy or degrading sex, the available evidence still simply doesn't justify any kind of sanction. As Brodsky, who is thoughtful about how to address sexual violence through legitimate means, said to me: "A lot of bad, unequal, damaging sex just doesn't break a rule, and I think our efforts to root out the causes of that and to promote sex free from patriarchy is going to need tools other than law and discipline."

TITLE IX ACTIVISTS ARE RIGHT THAT criminal law can't be our only way to address gender-based violence. Preponderance is generally the standard of evidence applied in civil cases. In a university context, sexual assault is exactly the type of case in which preponderance is useful, because schools have a strong obligation to promote a gender-equal environment and the impact of sexual assault on victims is very high. But this still doesn't solve the fundamental problem of how we find and interpret facts. Think back to the scenario where the accuser and the accused's facts are the same, but their interpretations diverge. This is the hardest type of case to adjudicate, and it might mean that many real cases of sexual assault, even using the preponderance standard, could go unpunished because there isn't enough evidence. (There are still many things that a victim could do, like requesting a residence change, that don't require an accused student to be found responsible.) On an aggregate level, this is an obviously unfair male bias in our jurisprudence, but this is also the price we pay for a system that's fair to individuals.

A "believe the victim" ideology should mean that we take women's subjectivity seriously, but it's often used as a kind of self-justificatory mantra to argue that we should always take a victim's account at face value, and ignore the accused's defense. The framework that's been embraced by colleges has inappropriately assimilated the ideas of thinkers like MacKinnon to collapse categories like "rape" and "unwanted sex that's still consented to," and categories like "unwantedness" and

"ambivalence." We urgently need to apply the insights of radical feminism to our social problems—realizing that sexuality is still bound by the imbalance of power between men and women—but these goals are better realized through cultural means, rather than a legal or disciplinary framework. They should not come at the expense of due process rights.

SEXUAL ASSAULT ACTIVISTS HAVE ANIMATED an important shift in public consciousness around how women's oppression works. This is taking place not just on university campuses but everywhere in our discourse, as in the #MeToo social media campaign that emerged in light of the revelations about Harvey Weinstein and seemingly every man in the media earlier this year. Millions of women posted about experiences ranging from rape, to unwanted sexual attention that wouldn't meet anyone's criteria for a punishable crime, but that still reflects a patriarchal power structure. It makes sense that the fight over how to distinguish among these categories has raged the most on university campuses, where students form intimate relationships with one another that could also, if they become abusive or emotionally harmful, conflict with Title IX rights.

The 2011 "Dear Colleague" letter defines sexual harassment simply as "unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature." This is so unspecific as to cover things that virtually every young adult has engaged in. Unwanted sexual attention can be unfortunate, awkward, patriarchal, and dehumanizing, but this doesn't mean it will always meet the criteria for creating a hostile environment. Gersen and Suk Gersen write that "in a letter to the University of Montana, OCR wrote that rather than limit sexual harassment claims to unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that creates a hostile environment, the university should define sexual harassment 'more broadly' as 'any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature.'" The former includes behavior so threatening that it prevents a student from functioning freely and normally at school, like rape and continued exposure to one's rapist. The latter could really mean anything; it's useful as a cultural goal but basically useless in an adjudicatory context.

The cynicism of DeVos's Title IX "reforms" illustrates something important for the left. It does not help us to defend unfair policies that deprive people of basic procedural rights in order to meet our cultural goals. These same strategies degrade our discourse, and are then used by those on the right, who are better at it and more ruthless about it, to deprive people of rights. The danger of a "believe the victim" paradigm that denies the accused any procedural rights (in addition to the harm that may result to wrongly-accused individuals, or individuals who are sanctioned in a way that is out of proportion to their conduct) is that the right will use the exact same arguments to strip victims of their procedural rights, casting this as a necessary "corrective" for excesses in the other direction.

Leftists must insist on a rights-based rather than vengeance-based politics. It's understandable that feminism has come to this point. I used to embrace this same logic as a fervid college student. But I think we can do better than this. Betsy DeVos may not take due process seriously, but the left must. Even as we vigorously critique the limits of an individual rights-based paradigm, we also must defend it. It's still the best that we have. ♦

FORTUNE

WHICH DISASTER WILL BEFALL ME TODAY?



<p>CHAOS</p> <p>1</p> <p>Public opinion will turn against you as your economic policies plunge the country into a recession. You will begin to suspect that your closest advisors are plotting against you. The paranoia will cause your decision-making to become even more erratic, further alienating the populace.</p>	<p>PERIL</p> <p>12</p> <p>You will suddenly realize that your roommate's succession of one-night stands have all been using your towel.</p>
<p>8</p> <p>You will finally work up the courage to declare your feelings to your love interest over text. A "... bubble will appear beneath your heartfelt message, hover there for a full fifteen minutes, vanish, reappear again briefly two hours later, and then vanish again. At the end of the day, your text will still be unanswered.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>A dear friend whom you have not seen in years will show up in town on a surprise visit. You will find yourselves utterly unable to replicate your former rapport, and will, over the course of a strained and awkward dinner, gradually come to realize that you now despise each other.</p>
<p>7</p> <p>You will find a venomous snake in your bagged lunch. Recalling in fear, you will accidentally knock over a priceless piece of ancient pottery. You will be lured at by docents of later, for unrelated reasons, you will be arrested on charges of indecent exposure. You will not be able to remember what you did.</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Glancing down in the middle of an important presentation, you will notice that the waistband of your underwear is visible above your belt, and that both your shirt and the end of your necktie are tucked into it.</p>
<p>CALAMITY</p> <p>6</p> <p>Donald Trump will be President of the United States. You will accidentally drop your copy of Current Affairs in a storm. You will be bitten painfully by an angry dog, but the dog will be so small that you feel embarrassed telling anybody even though the wound was actually quite severe.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>The actor who played your favorite character on a beloved childhood television show will today be revealed to be a cat stranger and/or pedophile.</p>
<p>ERROR</p>	

INSTRUCTIONS



TELLER



The Middle Ages

were pretty interesting, actually.

by Brianna Rennix

THE SUMMER BEFORE TENTH GRADE, I WAS ASSIGNED A book to read for AP European History called *A World Lit Only By Fire*. It was written by an elderly scholar of 20th-century history who, by his own admission, had never studied the Middle Ages before, or consulted any primary sources from the period. The blurb on the back of the book sums up its general tenor pretty well: “*In handsomely crafted prose, and with the grace and authority of his extraordinary gift for narrative history, William Manchester leads us from a civilization tottering on the brink of collapse to the grandeur of its rebirth—the dense explosion of energy that spawned some of history’s greatest poets, philosophers, painters, adventurers, and reformers, as well as some of its most spectacular villains—the Renaissance.*”

The Middle Ages, the book confidently informed us, were a thousand-year period during which literally *nothing* happened. Everyone just sat around in a

puddle of their own liquefied shit, scratching their plague buboes, worrying, if they lived near water, whether all the great big ships were going to fall over the edge of the world. I mean, these people didn't even have *clocks*. How do you even know *what time it is* if you *don't have clocks*? Clearly, medieval people were idiots, who probably didn't even think of themselves as individuals. Thank God the Renaissance came along, and everybody suddenly remembered that Greece and Rome had existed, and spontaneously invented Science, or we would probably all be *dead*.

Now, at this point in my adolescence, I was something of an amateur medieval historian. I had watched numerous episodes of a TV show called *Cadfael*, starring Derek Jacobi as a 12th-century Benedictine monk who solves murder mysteries, and I knew that *lots* of things had happened during the Middle Ages. I stormed in on the first day of school and gave my AP Euro teacher a piece of my mind. What about Roger Bacon! What about illuminated manuscripts! What about Gothic cathedrals! "And nobody in the Middle Ages thought the world was flat!" I fumed. "Washington Irving just made that up in the 19th century while writing a biography of Christopher Columbus on a tight deadline!"

My teacher, who was the JV wrestling coach, received my complaints benignly, but without any apparent interest. This, I have since discovered, is about as good a reception as you're ever going to get if, in an ordinary social setting, you choose to launch into an unprompted rant about how the Middle Ages were *pretty interesting, actually*. Bearing this in mind, the popular conception of the Middle Ages still needs correcting. Most people, if they think of the Middle Ages at all, think of them as the "Dark Ages," the long stretch of obscure barbarism between the glory that was Rome and the other glory that was the Renaissance. But that is false: they were pretty interesting, actually.

THE MIDDLE AGES ARE IN THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION these days more than they were previously—and not just because of all of us have at least one friend who won't shut up about *Game of Thrones*. The alt-right and "Bannon-style conservatives," those charming new spurs on the evolutionary tree of white supremacy, have a special fondness for the period, believing that current conflict between "Islamic extremists" and "the West" is merely a continuation of an elemental "clash of civilizations" that began with the Islamic caliphates in Europe and the Crusader states in the Holy Land. The Crusader battle cry *Deus vult* (God wills) is cropping up all kinds of places, from YouTube comments sections to the walls of vandalized Midwestern mosques. At the neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, a few polo-shirted knights-errant even came bearing faux-medieval shields.

None of this is anything especially new: white supremacists have a well-documented fondness for the Middle Ages, or rather, whatever Wonderbread version of the Middle Ages was being acted out on Hollywood

soundstages in the 1950s. But the increased prominence of medieval references cropping up in right-wing hate speech has prompted a number of medieval academics to wonder if they should be publically denouncing white supremacy to their college survey courses. (There was also a minor scandal in the world of medieval academia when a tenured professor at the University of Chicago was revealed to be an ardent camp follower of Milo Yiannopoulos, whom she inexplicably praised as a "chivalrous" defender of the weak). And there's no denying that actually, teaching history correctly can sometimes change minds: Derek Black, a formerly active white supremacist whose godfather was David Duke, became disillusioned with his family's ideology partly through being exposed to a more nuanced presentation of medieval history in college. (Now he's apparently a graduate student of early medieval history. *Deus vult* indeed!)

It's also worth pointing out that there is a separate, less prominent tradition of left-wing enthusiasm for the period, mostly in connection with early English socialism of the industrialization-skeptic, cooperative school. In 1888, William Morris wrote a novella called *The Dream of John Ball*, based on the so-called Peasants' Revolt of 1381. This homage to John Ball, a renegade priest, was based on a remarkable speech he is said to have given to a crowd of discontented English farmers, as recorded in a slightly later Latin chronicle:

Whan Adam dalf, and Eve span, Wo was thanne a gentilman? And continuing his sermon, he tried to prove by the words of the proverb that he had taken for his text, that from the beginning all men were created equal by nature, and that servitude had been introduced by the unjust and evil oppression of men, against the will of God, who, if it pleased him to create serfs, surely in the beginning of the world would have appointed who should be a serf and who a lord. Let them consider, therefore, that He had now appointed the time wherein, laying aside the yoke of long servitude, they might, if they wished, enjoy their liberty so long desired. Wherefore they must be prudent, hastening to act, first killing the great lords of the realm, then slaying the lawyers, justices and jurors, and finally rooting out everyone whom they knew to be harmful to the community in the future. So at last they would obtain peace and security if, when the great ones had been removed, they maintained among themselves equality of liberty and nobility, as well as of dignity and power.

All this a good 400 years before Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, or the Declaration of the Rights of Man!

The internet, too, has awakened a new kind of enthusiasm for medieval cultural products: these days I see a lot of medieval art, a great deal



of which is hilariously odd (sometimes intentionally, other times unintentionally), making the rounds on social media. In a more serious vein, there has also been a lot of interest in sharing medieval art that depicts people of color, disrupting the mistaken notion that medieval Europe was some kind of monochromatic country club.

Now, we mustn't go too far in the other direction: the Middle Ages were not some kind of utopia of happy farmers and cheerful craftsmen, as the early Arts & Crafts socialists sometimes liked to imagine. Nor, as I've sometimes seen it claimed on the internet, was it an inherently more "tolerant" era than the post-exploration era of conquest and imperialism, due to the fact that there was no "racism" and no "slavery." It's true that medieval people didn't think about race in the biological terms that modern racists do—to the extent that medieval thinkers had a "scientific explanation" for race, they theorized that it was climate-based, such that if you relocated and adjusted to a drastically different climate, your children would likely be born looking like the natives, not like you—but they definitely drew distinctions between different "peoples," and religious hatreds, particularly anti-Semitism, were often extremely virulent. And while slavery wasn't a visible fixture of the social order the way it had been in the Roman world, or as it would become again in parts of the early modern world, there was a lucrative slave trade in non-Christian slaves between Eastern Europe and the Middle East. From these "Slavs," in fact, we derived our word "slaves."

On the other hand, a lot of other stereotypes we associate with the Middle Ages are simply wrong. Medieval people didn't really burn women as witches: that was an innovation of later centuries. And although Neil deGrasse Tyson cautions Flat Earthers that their thinking is "five centuries regressed," educated people in the Middle Ages never believed the world was flat. No: some clever bastards in antiquity had deduced the roundness of the earth through careful observation of the sky and of the horizon, long before the invention of the telescope. Scholars of the Middle Ages preserved this ancient knowledge, and re-confirmed and expanded upon it through their own calculations. (That the Earth is a globe is certainly not something I'd ever have figured out on my own, without having been told. Possibly, I am too stupid even to have lived in medieval times.)



SO HOW SHOULD WE THINK OF THE MIDDLE AGES, then? Well, I don't know. For starters, it's a huge swathe of historical time: the Middle Ages encompass approximately the years 500-1500. It makes as much sense to say, "what should we think of everything that happened between 1500 and 2500?" ("What, *everything*?" you would exclaim. "The colonization of the Americas? The invention of the accordion? The shocking discovery that our entire universe is a poorly-designed video game being focus-tested in another dimension? It's too much!") Europe is a big geographic region, too. When we talk about the Middle Ages, typically, we're just talking about Europe—you could theoretically talk about "medieval" China if you want to designate the same group of centuries, but since Chinese history is divided into a completely different set of periods based on its own civilizational timeline, that doesn't make a lot of sense. But even if we're just talking about the European continent and immediate environs, that's still a lot of space, subdivided into a lot of ever-changing units.


Typically, the giant block of "the Middle Ages" is split into roughly three parts: the early Middle Ages (500-1000), the high Middle Ages (1000-1300), and the late Middle Ages (1300-1500). The late Middle Ages shade imperceptibly into the equally vague period known as "the Renaissance": and it was during "the Renaissance" (and, later, during "the Reformation" and "the Enlightenment") that people began talking about the "the Middle Ages" or even "the Dark Ages," writing off the preceding ten centuries as a useless detour. The high Middle Ages have gradually managed to shed some of the "Dark Ages" stigma: this was the time of troubadours, of soaring Gothic cathedrals, of vigorous scientific




and philosophical inquiry, of quasi-modern literature like the letters of Abelard and Héloïse (which conclusively demonstrate that the feelings people have when they're being ghosted by an ex have not altered a jot for the past 900 years), so the idea that "nothing" was going on during this period is fairly quickly disproven.

The early Middle Ages (500-1000), however, still get a pretty bad rap: it's thought of, even by some academics, as a period of cultural and technological stagnation. But I want to put in a good word for the early Middle Ages as a time period that is well worth studying, and not just because it produced a lot of interesting texts and beautiful art. It was a time, after all, when a massive political confederation (the western Roman Empire) was slowly, and sometimes painfully, reconstituting itself into new political units. Given that much of recent human history has been the story of the building and sundering of political unions, and that our species may be doomed to come together and pull apart in this cyclical way for the foreseeable future, it seems worth paying attention to exactly how this happens at particular historical moments, with a view to doing it with more goodwill and less bloodshed on future occasions. It is also true that The Economy Was Weak during the early medieval period, broadly speaking, relative to the periods before and after—but given the pace at which we are devouring our own planet, we might think to be grateful that things slowed down a bit for five hundred years. The Romans, to give just one example, systematically hunted the great beasts of North Africa and Mediterranean Europe almost to the point of complete extinction, out of their intense appetite for animals to torture in gladiatorial games—and many people died in this agonizing way too, of course, for the edification of the Roman populace.

Rome may not have "fallen" in the dramatic fashion that's sometimes popularly imagined, but the societies that were once territorially encompassed by the western Roman Empire did change a lot during the Middle Ages. It is a rather interesting thing, if you wander through the pre-modern section of any art museum, to move through the "Roman" rooms to the "medieval" ones. You go from a lot of marble sculptures of jacked dudes (sans their original paint, and sometimes, alas, sans their original arms, thanks to the ravages of time) and elaborate funerary portraiture, to—well, usually, lots and lots of images of the human body in excruciating pain. Saints staring fixedly at skulls, martyrs smiling blandly while holding simulcra of their soon-to-be-gouged out eyes in a little dish, contemplative mothers holding plump, ugly babies, those same mothers standing weeping while an emaciated, adult version of their child is crucified before their eyes. The medieval world, *very* generally construed, was a world that devoted a lot of imagination to human suffering, and also to the love and pity



that the witness of suffering gives rise to. You could call this a morbid fixation, of course, but if you are the sort of person who gets tired of the way modern society constantly pushes human suffering under the rug, or treats it as a cheap form of entertainment, something about this openness resonates—something about it feels profoundly sane, for all its discomfiting oddness.



NOW, I DON'T MEAN TO SAY THAT THE MIDDLE AGES WERE some kind of paradise of tenderness and empathy. That it was not, as a general matter, as the victims of any pogrom during the period could certainly tell you. Warring nobility were incredibly violent: the Crusades were to some extent simply an attempt to get as many of them as possible to get out of Europe and kill helpless people in *some other damn place*. The medieval Inquisition, though not as wide-ranging or bloody an institution as it's sometimes presented in popular culture, was, when operational, as thorough a mind-fuck as anything in 1984, with "spiritual physicians" diligently seeking to reprogram their patients back to orthodoxy. And life generally could be very hard, of course. Much of the population was bound to the land, and while in some places peasants voted on local councils and probably wielded some degree of *de facto* control over their own affairs, their horizons were very restricted, and as in all agrarian societies, when the weather was unfavorable too many seasons in a row, a lot of people died. Medieval medicine was not all quackery—a medieval recipe for an eye salve was recently discovered to actually be incredibly effective at killing MRSA, for example—but it wasn't *great*, and there was a decently high likelihood that you were going to die a medically gruesome death.

But! But! But! The past is another country, as they say; and as with countries very distant from one's own, distant periods in history are both startlingly familiar and fascinatingly strange. When studying any time in history, it is always an interesting exercise to look for human beings you recognize beneath the strange trappings of historical difference. Many of us office-worker types, for example, will perhaps relate to medieval scribes. Their candid marginalia, scrawled alongside the text of the books they were painstakingly copying, speaks of a general dissatisfaction with the tedium of their work ("Now I've written the whole thing, for Christ's sake give me a drink," wrote one irritable monk), shading into the kind existential dread that often comes over us in hours of drudgery ("This is sad!" wrote another. "O little book! A day will come in truth when someone over your page will say, 'The hand that wrote it is no more.'")

I myself have a particular fondness for medieval Irish monks, who were something like the perpetual international students or H1-B visa-holders of the early medieval world, constantly cropping up in distant courts and monasteries with their slightly off-kilter Latin and their intellectual bags of tricks. Ireland had never been part of the Roman world, nor did it have a formal written language until the Latin alphabet was introduced with the coming of Christianity, but the Irish quickly developed a reputation for scholarly talent. One Irish monk, Sedulius Scottus, installed himself in Liège in the mid-ninth century, where in his warring patrons, much as academics do in poetry extolling a simple but pleasurable life:

FROM THE EDITOR

A Magazine of Politics & Culture CURRENT AFFAIRS

Jeffrey Preston Bezos
Chief Executive Officer
Amazon, Inc.

631 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70130 • (504) 264-3453 • currentaffairs.org

Dear Chairman Bezos,

I am writing to you on behalf of the City of New Orleans. (The City has not officially authorized us to speak for it, but I can assure you that *Current Affairs* is viewed locally as its *de facto* cultural ambassador.) We were saddened to see that in various lists of hundreds of possible cities where Amazon might locate its Second Headquarters, our fair Crescent City was not mentioned a single time. Buffalo, Fresno, Bridgeport: we saw the unlikelyst of places mentioned in the press as possible contenders. Not once did the name "New Orleans" come up.

I consider the oversight unfortunate. After all, what city screams "21st century technology hub" like New Orleans? The internet is accessible in several places around our locality, and our mail carriers have even been known to successfully deliver Amazon packages. Even the website for City Hall is now functional, after extensive resources were spent clearing the nutria (that is a large bayou rat) out of the server closet. No city is more prepared to meet the daunting challenges of a streamlined globalized world than we.

Our public transit network is second to none, by which I mean that if you asked people "Would you rather have this public transit system or none, our public transit system is second after 'none.'" Our rolling stock of 100-year-old streetcars can get you from uptown to downtown in less than four beers. There is even a bus somewhere. Our city possesses more infrastructure than any other within the State of Louisiana, and has the highest national statistics on DPC (daiquiris-per-capita). It's true that the unemployment and poverty rates are astronomically high compared with other cities you may be considering, but think of this as good for business: economic despair means it's easier to find a minimum wage workforce willing to pack and haul boxes for twelve hours at a stretch! And don't be put off by the sky-high murder rate: our severe inequality means you will be isolated well away from all exposure to human misery, possibly on one of our lush restored former plantations.

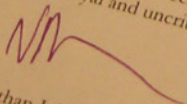
New Orleans is the perfect city in which to locate Amazon's new headquarters. You may have heard rumors that our city is "corrupt," that you can "buy justice" here. It is true, of course, that bulk quantities of justice can be purchased at the court clerk's office by cash or check. But you of all people should agree that this simply makes us "a friendly environment for business" that "nourishes entrepreneurs." Corruption is just another word for efficiency, if you really think about it. We are embodying the Silicon Valley dream of commodifying and selling government services on the free market.

Enclosed are several bags of Mardi Gras beads. These are available by the ton here. Your overworked non-union employees may find that wearing them adds a sense of frivolity to the workplace, and causes the hours spent serving you to feel moderately less purgatorial. It may take an awful lot of Mardi Gras beads to convince an Amazon worker her life is bearable. Fortunately, we *have* an awful lot of Mardi Gras beads!

I recognize that you may be dubious about my testimonial. You may have seen my recent articles in prominent magazines with titles like "The Sad Spectacle Of Cities Groveling To Amazon," and "If Jeff Bezos Is Looking For Something Useful To Do With His Money, He Could Start By Letting His Employees Negotiate A Fair Contract." It is also true that I once referred to you in *The Huffington Post* as "fiendish" and "megalomaniacal." I am sure, however, that to your ears such adjectives seem the highest possible praise. But I am also sure you will agree that New Orleans' virtues speak for themselves, even if you were somewhat put off by my assertion that "Amazon's fierce opposition to unions shows that Bezos is unwilling to grant his workers any democratic input into the company they give much of their lives to."

The City of New Orleans awaits you. Choose wisely, and laissez les bon temps rouler!

Humbly and beseechingly,
Your loyal and uncritical servant,



Nathan J. Robinson

*I read or write, and I teach or search for truth;
I call on heaven's throne by night and by day.
I eat, drink freely, and with rhymes invoke the muses:
and snoring I sleep, or keep vigil and pray to God.*

Another, anonymous Irish poet, installed at a continental monastery around the same time, was very fond of his white cat, Pangur Bán, writing a delightful poem in Irish about their happy cohabitation:

*When we two are (tale without boredom)
alone in our house,
we have something to which we may apply our skill,
an endless sport.*

*... He is joyful with swift movement
when a mouse sticks in his sharp claw.*

*I too am joyful
when I understand a dearly loved difficult question.*

*Though we are always like this,
neither of us bothers the other:
each of us likes his craft,
rejoicing alone each in his.*

Well, that's all very nice and *hygge*-like, you might say, but these guys were monks: they were societal elites, to some extent. What about the lives of *ordinary* people? That's always hard to speak about with much specificity: in societies where written literacy is limited and durable writing materials are costly, there's always a problem of elite bias in surviving sources. From John Ball's speech in the 14th century, we can gauge that there were probably festering discontents among the working classes, but we don't have too many of their own words.

Literary accounts aside, one way to try to imagine yourself into the body of an ordinary person from another time or place is through a human universal: music. There's a lot of surviving music from the high Middle Ages and onwards. Medieval scribes developed a system of musical notation called "neums," which isn't as precise as modern musical notation, but gives a pretty good idea of what the tune was supposed to be. From written descriptions and from manuscript illustrations, we also know what kinds of instruments were popular, and from this, a presumably fair approximation of medieval music can be reconstructed.

One of the biggest and most interesting collections of medieval music are the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, written down in the 13th century in what is now Spain. These songs were centered around the Camino de Santiago, an important pilgrimage route that attracted rich and poor pilgrims alike, and was lined with hospitals to provide the travellers with food, drink, and housing along their way: people made the journey to express devotion, do penance, or seek healing for their illnesses. Many of the songs have strong affinities with Arab musical forms, reflecting the fact that much of the Iberian peninsula was under Muslim governance throughout the Middle Ages, and that there was, despite frequent political and religious conflicts, considerable cultural interchange between Christian and Islamic kingdoms.

THERE ARE LOTS OF RECORDINGS OF THE CANTIGAS available, and speaking as a complete musical ignoramus, they are *awfully fun* to listen to. This is not Gregorian chant (not that I have any problem with Gregorian chant!), nor does it bear much resemblance to what we think of as "classical" music. These are songs made to walk to, or dance to: you can imagine people singing them together to enliven the long pilgrimage route. Some of the songs are simply lovely, like the song about a nun who falls pregnant and prays to help to the Virgin Mary, who then miraculously and painlessly removes the child from her body; or the song about a woman who prays to Mary to save her dying silkworms, promising in return to make her a beautiful silk altar-cloth by a particular feast-day. Mary saves the farm, the woman somehow *completely forgets* to make the altar-cloth, but then, in a second miracle, she discovers that

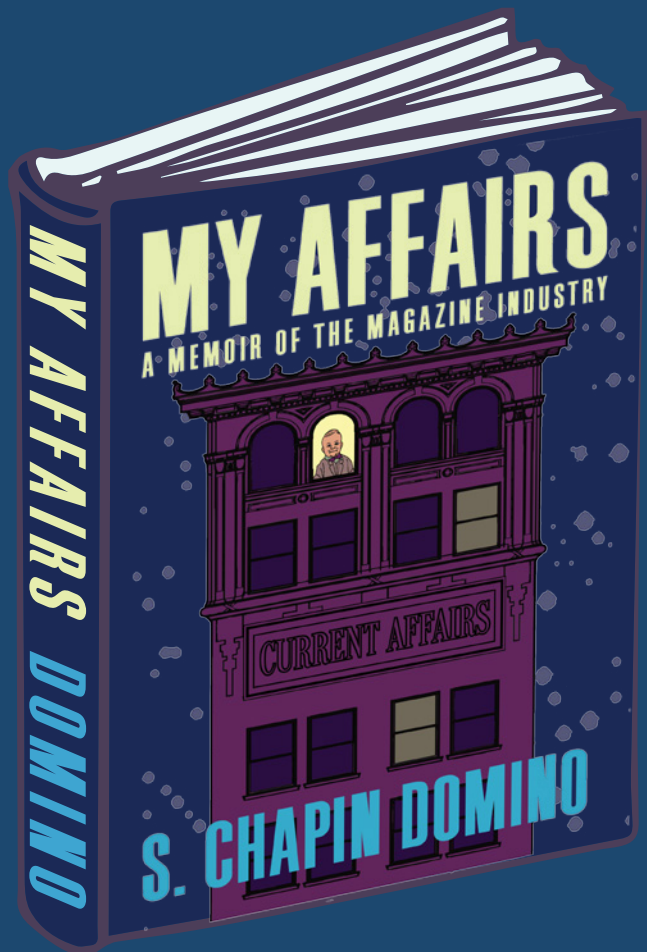
the good silkworms have woven the cloth themselves of their own accord. Other songs, meanwhile, are *completely bananas*, like the song about a fornicator whom the Devil persuades to cut off his own penis and then kill himself. Mary intercepts his soul in the nick of time, as the Devil is carting it triumphantly off to hell, and restores the suicide's life—but, sadly, not his penis. (The first line of this insane ditty, incidentally, is "Non e gran cousa," which means something like "It's No Big Deal"). Along similarly horrifying lines, there's also a song about a priest who spots a spider in the communion wine, but, knowing the wine is already consecrated, faithfully drains the cup, spider and all; when he subsequently sickens and prays to Mary for help, she guides the physician to make a small hole in his arm, after which *a live fucking spider crawls out of it* (MARY WHY), which the astonished congregation of nuns decide to keep as a pet. Additionally—while there are a handful of predictably skeezy songs about Jews and Muslims getting up to evil deeds—there are also a number of songs with a marked theme of interfaith entente, like the song about how a Muslim king besieged by another Muslim king calls on his Christian allies for help. They come to battle with a banner of the Virgin Mary, and Mary, seeing this, helps the Christians' Muslim friends to victory. It's not exactly *Kumbayah*, but the refrain of the song is probably not something the *Deus Vult* crowd would be hugely in favor of: *Pero que seja a gente / d' outra lei e descreuda / os que a Virgen mais aman / a esses ela ajuda*. "Though they may be of another law and unbelievers, those who love the Virgin most, them she will help."

A very frequent theme of this strange repertoire of songs is that Mary will help *literally anyone*. It doesn't matter what you did; it doesn't matter if you screw up your penance; it doesn't matter if you even believe in her. Ask and ye shall receive; she is your mother and she will take care of you. Opiate of the masses, you could call it, to get people on the road and spending money on pilgrimage souvenirs. But I still can't help but find it rather moving. This belief in universal love crops up too in one of the best-loved works of the high Middle Ages, the "Showings" of Julian of Norwich, which is the first known work in English by a female author. Aged thirty and near death from a severe illness, this "poor unlettered creature" (though she was perhaps laying that part on a bit thick; women weren't allowed to preach, and so often resorted to "visions" to express their theological views) had a lengthy fever-dream in which she saw the whole of the created universe sitting small as a hazelnut in the palm of Christ's hand. From this mystic vision, she understood that God had made this fragile thing, and loved it, and would keep it; that he existed in full communion with all the suffering in the world; that although sin existed, God had pity for everyone, most of all for weak and miserable sinners, and would never abandon anyone, but would help every living thing to become good. The most famous line of Julian's vision is also perhaps the best supplication ever made for dire times:

And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. ♦



THE LONG-AWAITED MEMOIR FROM S. CHAPIN DOMINO, LEGENDARY PUBLISHER AND CHAIRPERSON OF CURRENT AFFAIRS...



I was an unhappy child. My parents did not believe in magazines, for religious reasons. We had none in the house except *Parables Monthly*, a journal of Biblical exhortations and admonishments pitched at a teen audience. Of course, that didn't stop me from sneaking down to the newsstand and blowing my pocket money on a *House & Garden* or *Golfers Digest* whenever my mothers were out of town. How I remember those precious evenings spent out back behind the news barn, devouring features on the Top 10 Hardwood Floors For A Genuine Country Touch or the Drive Techniques That Will Make Your Putter Obsolete. Back then I couldn't have told you a thing about paper quality and binding methods, now the twin passions of my publishing life. Magazines were simply magic to me: how did they get all those words

in there, I wondered, thinking there must be some sort of "factory" or "building" where it was all put together. How wrong I was! Of course, most of the boys at school were the children of magazine editors, but I dared not ask my naive questions, lest they scoff at my ignorance and pelt me with stones. Instead, I read the biographies of the Great Editors of bygone yesterdays: Harold Ross at the *New Yorker*, Tina Brown at *Vanity Fair*, Larry Flynt at *Hustler*, Sidney Jason Owls at *Netherparts*, Lois Horfunsteady at *The American Journal of Sociological Neuroscience*, P.Q. Weltspace at *Small Boats Monthly*. Each a legend in his or her time, each betrayed by their lessers, their visions compromised by the forces of myopia and avarice. I was determined to avoid the fates of these felled giants. I still remember the night when,

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standing by the college fountain tossing pages from 1920s *TIME* magazines into the burbling water, I resolved to become Publisher rather than Editor. Nobody pushed the Publisher around. What the Publisher said went, and I intended to go. Capital, of course, was the question. Where to get it and how to wield it, in order that I might maximize my control over other human beings. Such has ever been the noble businessman's dilemma! But sweet Providence soon released a dropping upon me, in the form of an ample loan from a recently expired uncle's corrupt estate attorney. A space was procured at the back of a bar called Mike's Garage. Ironically, the space was a garage, though the bar itself was not. In those first days, the magazine was assembled entirely from scrap pages torn from other magazines, which we purloined before sunup from the newly-delivered stacks outside the Book Emporium. When asked to describe our magazine, I said it was half *Cosmopolitan*, half *Atlantic*. They didn't realize I meant this quite literally! Soon, of course, we procured our own printing press, a hulking copper-and-tubes behemoth that had weathered better days, when it was deployed spitting out funeral announcements and pornographic seaside postcards for dingy vacation spots out east. It used to rattle and shake like it was afflicted with a serious neurodegenerative disorder! The steam from that thing was so thick you could roast your coffee in it, and we did. The pages of those first editions used to stick together like they'd just been given

a slathering of hi-strength horse epoxy, but we figured that if anyone actually wanted to read the innards, they could either fetch a prying tool or spring for the digital edition. Needless to say, reader complaints were many, but we employed a felonious ex-bouncer named Belch to "take care" of subscriber relations. The results were never pretty, but Belch certainly lived up to his name! Since then we have never had any trouble with the public. Of course, since this was New Orleans, there were kickbacks to be forked out and councilmen to be greased, but a lifetime of greasing and forking on the mean streets of the French Quarter had prepared me well for the grimy duties of professional publishing. Of course, the Poly-Baggers Union gave us some hassle, but they too eventually saw reason when faced with God's two greatest tools of persuasion, violence and money. The articles then were shoddy: rarely in English, and usually incomprehensible. We had paid a man to pull letters from a jar and sprinkle them into the moulds at random, but the resulting journalism was not up to the exacting standard I had ambitions toward. (It did, however, win a National Magazine Award in 1980, for the short story "Hpaurngffff," which was taken as a bold commentary on the ambiguity and emptiness of contemporary fiction.) Still, we perspired. A dream had been dreamt, and it wasn't just going to be casually forgotten like a child on a teacup ride. We were slowly building an empire, and we didn't care who knew it...

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A photograph of a historic restaurant interior, likely in New York City. The scene features a curved wooden bar in the foreground with stools, a large ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and another smaller chandelier in the background. The walls are decorated with intricate patterns, and an American flag is visible in the background. The overall atmosphere is warm and nostalgic.

EVERYTHING YOU LOVE WILL BE EATEN ALIVE

The Nature & Logic of Capitalism

Jeremiah Moss, *Vanishing New York: How A Great City Lost Its Soul*,
Dey St./William Morrow, 465 pp., \$28.99.

HERE ARE TWO DIFFERENT VISIONS FOR WHAT A CITY ought to be. Vision 1: the city ought to be a hub of growth and innovation, clean, well-run, high-tech, and business-friendly. It ought to attract the creative class, the more the better, and be a dynamic contributor to the global economy. It should be a home to major tech companies, world-class restaurants, and bold contemporary architecture. It should embrace change, and be “progressive.” Vision 2: the city ought to be a mess. It ought to be a refuge for outcasts, an eclectic jumble of immigrants, bohemians, and eccentrics. It should be a place of mystery and confusion, a bewildering

kaleidoscope of cultures and classes. It should be a home to cheap diners, fruit stands, grumpy cabbies, and crumbling brownstones. It should guard its traditions, and be “timeless.”

It should be immediately obvious that not only are these views in tension, but that the tension cannot ever be resolved without one philosophy succeeding in triumphing over the other. That’s because the very things Vision 2 thinks make a city worthwhile are the things Vision 1 sees as problems to be eliminated. If I believe the city should be run like a business, then my mission will be to clear up the mess: to streamline everything, to eliminate the weeds. If I’m a Vision

2 person, the weeds are what I live for. I love the city because it’s idiosyncratic, precisely because things *don’t* make sense, because they are inefficient and dysfunctional. To the proponent of the progressive city, a grumpy cabbie is a bad cabbie; we want friendly cabbies, because we want our city to attract new waves of innovators. To the lover of the City of Mystery, brash

personalities are part of what adds color to life. In the battle of the entrepreneurs and the romantics, the entrepreneurs hate what the romantics love, and the romantics hate what the entrepreneurs love. In the absence of a Berlin-like split, there can be no peace accord, it must necessarily be a fight to the death. What’s more, neither side is even capable of *understanding* the other: a romantic can’t see why anyone would want to clean up the dirt that gives the city its poetry, whereas an entrepreneur can’t see why anyone would prefer more dirt to less dirt.

“In the battle of the entrepreneurs and the romantics, the entrepreneurs hate what the romantics love, and the romantics hate what the entrepreneurs love...”

V*anishing New York: How A Great City Lost Its Soul* is a manifesto for the Romantic Vision of the city, with Michael Bloomberg

cast as the chief exponent of the Entrepreneurial Vision. “Nostalgic” will probably be the word most commonly used to capture Jeremiah Moss’s general attitude toward New York City, and Moss himself embraces the term and argues vigorously for the virtues of nostalgia. But I think in admitting to being “nostalgic,” he has already ceded too much. It’s like admitting to being a “preservationist”: they accuse you of being stuck in the past, and you reply “Damn right, I’m stuck in the past. The past was better.” But this isn’t simply about whether to preserve a city’s storied past or charge forward into its gleaming future. If that were the case, the preservationists would be making an impossible argument, since we’re heading for the future whether they like it or not. It’s also about different conceptions of what matters in life. The entrepreneurs want economic growth, the romantics want jazz and sex and poems and jokes. To frame things as a “past versus future” divide is to grant the entrepreneurs their belief that the future is theirs.

Moss’s book is about a city losing its “soul” rather than its “past,” and he spends a lot of time trying to figure out what a soul is and how a city can have one or lack one. He is convinced that New York City once had one, and increasingly does not. And while it is impossible to identify precisely what the difference is, since the quality is of the “you know it when you see it” variety, Moss does describe what the change he sees actually means. Essentially, New York City used to be a gruff, teeming haven for weirdos and ethnic minorities. Now, it is increasingly full of hedge fund managers, rich hipsters, and tourists. Tenements and run-down hotels have been replaced with glass skyscrapers full of luxury condos. Old bookshops are shuttered, designer clothes stores in their place. Artisanal bullshit is everywhere, meals served on rectangular plates. You used to be able to get a pastrami and a cup

Photo of Cafe Edison, previous spread, courtesy of Bess Adler. All other photographs courtesy of Jeremiah Moss.





of coffee for 50 cents! What the hell happened to this place?

It's very easy, as you can see, for this line of thought to rapidly slip from critiquing to kvetching, and Moss does frequently sound like a cranky old man. But that's half the point, he wants to show us that the cranky old men are not crazy, that we should actually listen to them. It's not a problem with them for complaining that the neighborhoods of their childhood are being destroyed, it's a problem with us for not caring about that destruction. Moss is a psychiatrist, and he does not see "nostalgia" as irrational, but as a healthy and important part of being a person. We are attached to places, to the memories we make in them, and if you bulldoze those places, if you tear away what people love, you're causing them a very real form of pain.

Moss loves a lot of places, and because New York City is transitioning from being a city for working-class people to a city for the rich, he is constantly being wounded by the disappearance of beloved institutions. CBGB, the dingy punk rock music club where the Ramones and Patti Smith got their start, is forced out after its rent is raised to \$35,000 a month. Instead, we get a commemorative CBGB exhibit at the Met, with a gift shop selling Sid Vicious pencil sets and thousand-dollar hand-

bags covered in safety pins. The club itself becomes a designer clothing store selling \$300 briefs. The ornate building that once housed the socialist *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper, the exterior of which featured bas-relief sculptures of Marx and Engels, is converted to luxury condos. Its ethnic residents largely squeezed out, bits of Little Italy are carved off and rebranded as "Nolita" for the purpose of real estate brochures, since—as one developer confesses—the name "Little Italy" still connotes "cannoli." A five-story public library in Manhattan, home to the largest collection of foreign-language books in the New York library system, is flattened and replaced with a high-end hotel (a new library is opened in the hotel's basement, with hardly any books). Harlem's storied Lenox Lounge is demolished, its stunning art-deco facade gone forever. Rudy Giuliani demolishes the Coney Island roller coaster featured in *Annie Hall*. Cafe Edison, a Polish tea house (see photo p. 32-33), is evicted and replaced with a chain restaurant called "Friedman's Lunch," named after right-wing economist Milton Friedman. (I can't believe that's true, but it is.) Judaica stores, accordion repairmen, auto body shops: all see their rent suddenly hiked from \$3,000 to \$30,000, and are forced to leave.

All the newsstands in the city are shuttered and replaced; they go from being owner-operated to being controlled by a Spanish advertising corporation called Cemusa. Times Square gets Disneyfied, scrubbed of its adult bookstores, strip joints, and peep shows. New York University buys Edgar Allen Poe's house and demolishes it. ("We do not accept the views of preservationists who say nothing can ever change," says the college's president.)

The aesthetic experience of gentrified places is horrifying to Moss. They are "glittering pleasure domes for the uber-

is actually recourse for complaints against abusive managers. If the only person above you is the owner, and the owner is a tyrant, there's not much you can do. Still, the core critique is completely valid. Chain retail exists to make the world more efficient, but ends up turning the world uninteresting. I have actually noticed that I am less inclined to travel because of this. Why would I go to New York, when I can see a Starbucks right here? Monoculture is such a bleak future; local variation is part of what makes the world so wonderful. You can measure

“It's almost literally impossible to write a good poem about an Applebee's.”

wealthy,” places scrubbed of their authenticity. The “corporate monoculture” takes hold: new buildings are all glass boxes, full of grinning, shiny, happy people who don't really know what it's like to live. Moss talks about his first experience walking along the infamous High Line park; he was immediately told off by an official for getting too close to the plants. Moss was “creeped out by [the] canned, fabricated unnaturalness” of this “undead limbo”: “I felt like I was in the home of a fussy neatnik with expensive tastes.” A park should be a place to run around and have fun, not a museum, but the sort of people who live in the luxury condos around the High Line do not really understand the concept of unbridled joy.

They are people who shun all risk, who want corporations to take care of them and make them comfortable: Applebees, Olive Garden, Starbucks, and Target are soothingly familiar, and make it easier to come to New York City from elsewhere without ever having to feel as if you've left home. “7-11 makes me feel safe,” says one person thrilled about the chain coming to New York. It's easy to criticize places like these as lacking “authenticity” compared to their counterparts: a tiny Italian restaurant in which actual Italians make third-generation recipes is simply *more real* than an Olive Garden. But I think “authenticity” is often a dubious criterion of value: there's no reason a Serbian or Japanese family can't open an Italian restaurant, if they can make the food well. The more important problems are those of centralization, homogeneity, and inequality. Starbucks is bad not because of its coffee (though the coffee is bad), but because Starbucks is turning the world boring and uniform, and power over how Americans drink coffee is concentrated in the hands of a single man, CEO Howard Schultz.

This complaint against the demise of the mom-n-pops and the takeover of chain retailers is now decades old. And it has its flaws: sometimes labor practices can be better at large corporations than at the celebrated “small business,” because there

whether a place is succeeding by whether it's possible to write a good song or poem about it. It's almost literally impossible to write a good non-ironic poem about an Applebee's. Compare that with nearly any greasy spoon or dive bar.

THE MOST DISTURBING CHANGE, HOWEVER, is the inequality. The Romantic city is a democratic city: everyone has their little piece of it, nobody can simply reshape the entire place in accordance with their preferences. But the emerging version of New York City is a place where a disproportionate amount of power is held by landlords and developers, who can essentially do as they please. If you run a little cafe, they can multiply your rent by ten and get rid of you. If you own a home, they can seize it via eminent domain and build a new headquarters for a pharmaceutical company. They alone decide whether or not any given paradise will be paved, and whether a parking lot or a Duane Reade should be put in its place.

Developers often insist that they don't deserve their negative reputation. They wonder why some people hate them when all they do is build useful things that improve cities. But anyone who doesn't hate developers clearly hasn't understood things from the perspective of those who see their neighborhoods razed and beloved businesses shuttered. We know for a fact that, if developers were put in charge of the world, nothing would last if demolishing it would be profitable. I live in the French Quarter of New Orleans. I am dead certain that if someone could make \$100 million by putting a skyscraper in the middle of it, they would. It's only thanks to the influence of wealthy residents that the area is able to keep the things that give it its charm. Even then, the neighborhood has been gentrified beyond recognition: what was once a thriving multi-ethnic residential neighborhood has become a ghost town full of





rich people's empty *pied-a-terre* condos.

The very existence of landlords is staggeringly unfair. A person can live in a place 30 years, pay thousands of dollars a month in rent, and still have their home demolished without having any say in the decision. One thing Moss's book shows very clearly is that a world of renters is a world in which people have little power to control what happens to them; those decisions rest in the hands of the people who actually own the properties. Eviction is an incredibly cruel and destructive process, yet landlords engage in it casually. Moss brings up a set of often-ignored victims of gentrification: the elderly people who have run their stores for decades, and are suddenly forced out. Many are bewildered and depressed by the sudden change, left without a sense of purpose.

The greed of landlords and developers is a prime reason that New York is steadily transforming into "Disneyland for billionaires." But government policy also bears direct responsibility. Throughout New York history, city officials like Robert Moses have either neglected or waged active war against the ethnic populations that stood in the way of development. ("Look on the bright side... the city got rid of a million and a half undesirables," a mayoral aide observed about the fires that destroyed countless tenements in the 1970s, allegedly partially due to the city's intentional neglect of fire services.) But Michael Bloomberg was explicit in his commitment to making New York a city for the rich. Bloomberg's city planning director, Standard Oil heir Amanda Burden, stated the administration's aspirations: "What I have tried to do, and think I have done, is create value for these developers, every single day of my term." Bloomberg himself was even more frank, calling New York City a "luxury product," and saying:

"We want rich from around this country to move here. We love the rich people."

"If we can find a bunch of billionaires around the world to move here, that would be a godsend... Wouldn't it be great if we could get all the Russian billionaires to move here?"

"If we could get every billionaire around the world to move here it would be a godsend that would create a much bigger income gap."

It didn't even seem to cross Bloomberg's mind that a flow of wealthy people into the city might not be such a "godsend" for the small merchants who would see their rents shoot up. The consequences of Bloomberg's approach were exactly what you would expect: home-

lessness rates exploded and median rent is now more than \$38,000 a year in a place where the median income is \$50,000. Bloomberg's solution to the homelessness crisis was for the city to buy the homeless one-way bus tickets out of town. He was critical of the very notion of a "right to shelter," implying that shelters might be clogged with rich people taking advantage of the system: "You can arrive in your private jet at Kennedy Airport, take a private limousine and go straight to the shelter system and walk in the door and we've got to give you shelter."

The increasing inequality in New York City has led to some absurd results. Brand new skyscrapers are filled with residential condominiums without any actual residents in them; the properties are owned as investments by the international super-rich, while homeless people sleep out front. Developers only grudgingly put affordable units in buildings, and some new construction has even included class-segregated separate entrances for affordable units and luxury units (the infamous "poor door"). At the same time, developers have been lavished with tax breaks and incentives; it's estimated that Donald Trump, over his career in New York real estate, received \$885 million in tax breaks, grants, and other subsidies.

The effort to replace poor people with rich people is often couched in what Moss calls "propaganda and doublespeak." One real estate investment firm claims to "turn under-achieving real estate into exceptional high-yielding investments," without admitting that this "under-achieving real estate" often consists of people's family homes. (Likewise, people often say things like "Oh, nobody lives there" about places where... many people live.) One real estate broker said they aspired to "a well-cultivated and curated group of tenants, and we really want to help change the neighborhood." "Well-cultivated" almost always means "not black," but the assumption that neighborhoods actually need to be "changed" is bad enough on its own.

In fact, one of the primary arguments used against preservationists is the excruciating two-word mantra: *cities change*. Since change is inevitable and desirable, those who oppose it are irrational. Why do you hate change? You don't believe that change is good? Because it's literally impossible to stop change, the preservationist is accused of being unrealistic. Note, however, just how flimsy this reasoning is: "Well, cities change" is as if a murderer were to defend himself by saying "Well, people die." The question is not: is change inevitable? Of course change is inevitable. The question is what kinds of changes are desirable, and which should be encouraged or inhibited by policy. What's being debated is not the concept of change, but some particular set of changes.

Even "gentrification" doesn't describe just one thing. It's a word I hate, because it captures a lot of different changes, some of which are insidious and some of which seem fine. There are contentious debates over whether gentrification produces signif-

icant displacement of original residents, and what its economic benefits might be for those residents. *The New York Times* chided Moss, calling him "impeded by myopia," for failing to recognize that those people who owned property in soon-to-be-gentrified areas could soon be "making many millions of dollars." But that exactly shows the point: Moss is concerned with the way that the pursuit of many millions of dollars erodes the very things that make a city special, that give it life and make it worth spending time in. A pro-gentrification commentator, in a debate with Moss, said that he didn't really see any difference, because "people come for the same reason they always have: to make as much money as possible." That's exactly the conception that Moss is fighting. People came to New York, he says, because it was a place worth living in, not because they wanted to make piles of money.

MOSS HAS SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY interventions that might help to reverse the troubling changes. They are: putting decisions over new developments and chain stores to a community vote, re-zoning the city to limit formula retail, instituting rent increase caps for small businesses, expanding landmarking to legacy businesses, vacancy taxes on *pieds-a-terre*, lowering fines for small businesses, and ending tax giveaways to developers. They're all worth thinking seriously about, though Moss doesn't go into much detail. But the more important thing is to at least get on the same page values-wise: New York City should not be a mega-mall, and should not look be indistinguishable from Dallas or Toledo. He also wants to convince us of one thing above all: "hyper-gentrification and its free market engine is neither natural nor inevitable." The belief that Development and Growth should be the goals of a city is a piece of propaganda. For one thing, these words are vacuous. Actually, "development" is a truly insidious word, because it automatically suggests that what developers do is progress. Who wants to "inhibit"? Everyone wants to develop. What that can mean in reality, though, is demolishing a beloved local library and putting up a high-end hotel in its place. Moss wants us to recognize that these are not the result of mystical forces, but of decisions made by human beings: landlords, developers, and city governments. When the Gap moved to the East Village, to much protest, a Gap employee observed that despite the protests, "like everywhere else, they will accept it." And they were right: the Gap stayed, people moved on. This seems to always happen: people complain, then things change, then they accept the new reality. Moss wants us to refuse to accept it, to recognize that we don't have to accept changes we don't like, that change should be organic and democratic rather than imposed by the will of the rich. *Vanishing New York* calls for people to take their cities back.



I HAVE TO CONFESS, I DIFFER A LOT FROM MOSS in my conception of what a good city should be like. I have always found New York City to be something of an armpit, and not because it's full of high-priced condos. Many of the people Moss adores, the bohemians and artists, I find fairly intolerable. Moss is a poet, and wants a city of poetry. I am not a poet, I generally detest poetry. Moss has a strange fondness for *mean* New York, the New York that told everybody else to fuck off. I thought that New York was kind of an asshole.

But that's okay: the philosophy of *Vanishing New York* is that cities shouldn't all be the same, that they should have different attitudes toward life and different cultures. If I am more New Orleans than Brooklyn, that means we have a diverse world in which New Orleans and Brooklyn are very different places. The one thing that we should all be scared of, wherever we live, is the collapse of those differences, the streamlining and

homogenizing of everything.

And yet the logic of capitalism sort of demands that this occur. If efficiency is your goal, then you're going to have chain restaurants. They're just more efficient. If you must perpetually grow and grow, then you're going to have to demolish a lot of things that people dearly love. If everyone embraces the pursuit of financial gain, then landlords are never going to cut tenants a break merely because their business is a neighborhood institution. In a free market world, everything you love will be eaten alive, unless you're rich.

The great contribution of *Vanishing New York* is in showing what will continue to happen in a highly unequal world that places more value on innovation than romance. Unless and until social priorities change, the City of Mystery will be slowly destroyed, a gleaming, deathly boring City of Wealth rising in its place. We can have one of these, or the other, but we cannot have both. And I know which I'd rather live in. ♦



nothing *for* money

*how bullshit financial products
slurp up people's wealth*

BY K. M. LAUTREC

IN CONSUMER FINANCE, THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF shadiness: fraudulence, dubiousness, and bullshit. First, there are the outright criminal acts, like Wells Fargo opening millions of accounts in people's name without their permission, or the swindlers who call pretending to be the IRS or tech support or a grandchild and steal their money that way. Since the fraudulent acts are already against the law, the main discussions are about who should be going after those who commit these crimes, and whether that regulator/prosecutor is doing a good enough job.

Then there are the dubious financial products, the ones that aren't clearly *illegal* but obviously cause harm to consumers in one way or another. This might be payday loans or car title loans or subprime auto loans generally. It might be check cashing, or debt collection. They're predatory, but they're legal. And the finance industry has a ready defense of them prepared, insisting that while these products may be expensive or harmful, people need them. For predatory loans,

the borrowers need cash and have no other way of getting credit. For check cashing, people need to turn checks into money and don't have access to the banking system. (Even for predatory debt collection, the industry will argue that too many restrictions on debt collectors will make it harder for lenders to sell debt and they will have to make credit more expensive on the front end.) Those astronomical prices for the loans or check cashing (and the vicious collection tactics) are just ways of pricing risk and keeping credit available to everyone.

This defense is used for every financial product: people voluntarily use it, therefore they must derive a benefit from it. But by turning to the third category, the "bullshit" products, we can see why the fact that people pay for something is no indication that they actually want or need it. We could grant for the moment that payday and title lenders and check cashers actually do provide people with something of value. (Though this still leaves open questions like: "Why have we built a society where some people have to pay 500% interest on a loan

just to be able to pay more money than they can afford for medicine to keep them alive?” and “Why should there exist an industry that makes billions of dollars off the misfortunes of the most desperate and vulnerable people? Couldn’t we just provide them with basic banking services?”) But the existence of a class of “services” I call BFPs (Bullshit Financial Products), which offer *no* value for money, should make us skeptical of the industry’s arguments,

People pay for BFPs because they think they’re getting something for their money, but actually aren’t. Sometimes people pay for them by accident, never even realizing what they have agreed to. BFPs are insidious. They are a series of schemes for sucking people’s money out of their pockets, and trying to avoid having them notice. What’s more they’re legal, they’re surprisingly common, and people are inventing new BFPs all the time. These products show that a number of exploitative financial “services” offered to poor people are not the “necessary evils” the industry would like us to think they are: they may be evil, but they sure as hell aren’t necessary.

So let’s have a look at how some of them work.

overdraft protection

This might be the mother of all BFPs. Just look at what it’s called: “overdraft protection.” What a great thing, right? *Of course* I want to be *protected* from overdrafts! They sound bad!

What is it? It’s a fee you get charged when you don’t have enough money to pay your normal, non-fee expenses. It works like this: say you have \$100 in your checking account. You go and buy something that costs \$101 with your debit card. Instead of having the transaction declined, your bank will cover that extra \$1 and let the transaction go through, but they’ll charge you a \$35 fee for the privilege. So you have your \$101 item or items, but to get them you had to pay your \$100 and now you owe the bank \$36. Overdraft protection “protects” you from having your debit card declined when you don’t have any money. So instead of making decisions based on how much money you actually have, you get to be in the dark until later when you notice your account balance has fallen deep into the red.

The bank will tell you this is protecting you from having important transactions declined. But it’s hard to imagine a situation in which you would automatically want the bank to cover you and charge \$35 instead of at least having the opportunity to think about it first. Maybe you’d rather put back a few dollars of groceries than pay a \$35 fee. Or maybe you’d rather deposit \$20 before paying the electric bill instead of paying the fee.

But wait, there’s more. You incur that fee on *every* transaction that dips you below your account balance. At the end of the day when they process your transactions, your bank is probably stacking the transactions from largest to smallest instead of chronologically. So say you have \$100 in your account. You think you have \$200 in your account because you recently deposited a \$100 check, but that check actually hasn’t cleared yet. So you go about your day. In the morning you get a cup of coffee for \$5. You get a \$10 arepa for lunch and spend another \$5 on tea and a cookie in the afternoon. Then after work you go to the grocery store and get \$90 of groceries for the next couple weeks.

If your bank processed your transactions chronologically, you would only get charged an overdraft fee on your groceries—that was the only time you spent more money than you had in your account. So you spent \$110 throughout the day with \$100 in your account, the bank spotted you that \$10 that you thought you had to begin

with, and now you owe them \$45. But your bank probably didn’t do that. Instead they probably stacked them, meaning that first they deducted the \$90 for groceries, then the \$10 for the arepa, then the \$5 for coffee and \$5 for cookie and tea. They still only spotted you \$10, but they did it for two \$5 transactions and therefore they’ll charge you two fees. So now, because they stacked, instead of owing the bank \$45 you owe them \$80 (\$10 extra plus \$35 fee * 2). Like magic. Now imagine that again but with an actual normal number of transactions in a day. You can end up owing hundreds of dollars in fees just because you didn’t have enough money to begin with.

Not only is this practice extremely slimy, it’s also extremely common and extremely profitable. In the first three quarters of 2016, around 600 banks surveyed by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group took in \$8.4 billion in overdraft fees. That’s \$17.76 in fees *per banking customer* (not just the customers who got charged fees) in eight months. In larger banks (with more than \$1 billion in assets) overdraft fees accounted for 8.1% of their net income in that time period. Think about that! Given all the myriad ways that these banks make money—including lending people money—this one completely useless fee accounted for almost 10% of the money they made. In 2015, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and JP Morgan Chase reaped a combined \$5.4 billion in overdraft fees—\$5.4 billion just from fees charged to people because those people didn’t have enough money.

Starting in 2009, at least some banks were required to get at least some customers to affirmatively agree to overdraft protection before they could be charged fees. But of course given what a money maker these fees are, major banks spend a lot of time and money trying to figure out how they can get as many customers as possible to “agree” to overdraft protection. In one notable example, TCF Bank would put its overdraft consent forms in the middle of a stack of forms customers were required to sign in order to open a new account. For existing customers, TCF would simply call and ask if they wanted their account to “continue to work as it does today?” If the (probably baffled) customer said yes, TCF took that as consent for overdraft protection. (If these practices weren’t egregious enough, TCF’s CEO literally named his yacht *Overdraft*. Hah. The CFPB filed suit in January.)

HERE’S THE THING: I HAVE PAID OVERDRAFT FEES. At the time I didn’t know it was an optional thing—I thought it was just a fact of life that if I accidentally spent more than I had using my debit card it would cost me much more money. Since I learned about overdraft protection I have switched banks twice: once to a national bank and once to a regional bank. Each time I learned some months after the fact, when it occurred to me to check, that I had “agreed” to overdraft protection when I opened my accounts. This particular BFP is probably the most ubiquitous—you will find it anywhere from the largest national banks to your friendly community credit union. Even if you’re careful and you know how it works and you’re on the lookout for it you can still find yourself having “agreed” to it. And then it lies in wait until the very moment when you are most vulnerable, waiting to charge you money for nothing. (By the way, I would really love to hear from anyone who has had a positive experience with overdraft protection. If you exist, write in and let us know about an instance when you were glad to pay your overdraft fee in order to have your transaction processed on the spot. What was the transaction? Why was it worth the extra \$35 or whatever the fee amount was? Why was that better than using a credit card if you had access to one?)

student loan assistance

Here are some true and stupidly inconsistent facts: (1) The federal government considers federal student loan repayment options to be easy to figure out, and thinks students shouldn't need help determining their options and filling out the right forms. (2) Also, federal student loan repayment is extremely complicated, involves dozens of options, conditions, and restrictions depending on when you got your loans, what type of loans they are, what your current repayment status is, etc. (3) In addition to all that, the companies in charge of servicing your student loans, to whom you might reasonably turn for help figuring out your repayment options, will openly admit that you should not expect them to protect your interests.

What to do? Whence to turn? I don't know. Call your congressman. (If you're really having trouble, call your area legal aid. Legal aid offices are quickly building a lot of expertise in student loans. Don't think too hard about why attorneys who can only help people with little or no money have to be experts in people paying the federal government for receiving an education.) Here's what not to do: respond to any ads or mailers you get about student loan assistance.

I get these things in the mail all the time. Here are some common features. They'll come in some sort of official-looking tear-the-edges-and-unfold format to make them seem like a government document. They'll have boxes on them and probably some numbers like "Customer Number" or "Benefit ID #" (these are meaningless). They will try to make you feel like something is urgent or time sensitive BY USING ALL CAPS and printing the word NOTICE and/or EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY. They may also give you a deadline for responding.

The actual content will vary. Some of the less egregiously false ones will say something like "student loan consolidation could lower your student loan payments" (this is true—with about a billion caveats). The really bad ones will say completely untrue things, e.g. that there's a "new law" and you're eligible for benefits or that you can have your loans completely forgiven. They used to reference Obama sometimes. I haven't seen one that references Trump yet, but it's probably out there.

What will these companies actually do for you? Usually the same thing they do for everyone else. You will call them and they will gather all of your information and then they will tell you that you should consolidate your loans and apply for income-based repayment. Sometimes that's true! If you're in default and you need to get out of default immediately, or if you have certain kinds of loans that don't qualify for income-based repayment, then sometimes consolidation is a good idea and the right way to become eligible for payments based on your income. But sometimes it's not true! Maybe you're not in default and you could get on income-based repayment immediately. Maybe you're already on income-based repayment. Maybe you're in default but it would be better for you to rehabilitate your loans than to consolidate them. *Maybe you really are eligible for loan forgiveness.* (You're almost definitely not eligible for loan forgiveness, but it is possible.) These are usually not the sort of details that these companies concern themselves with.

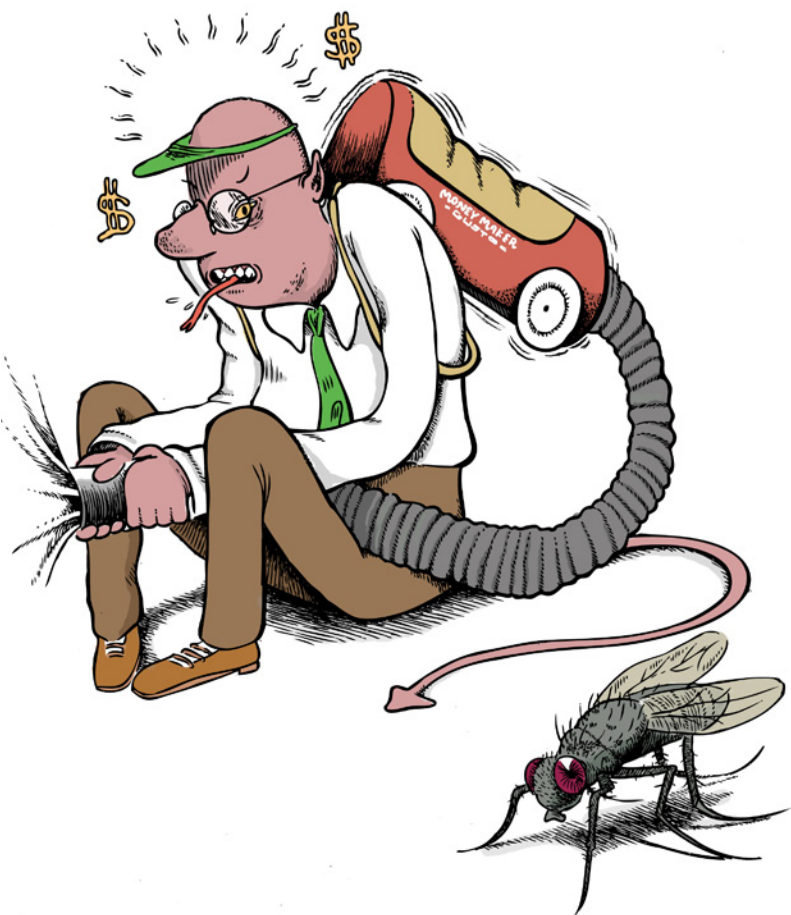
So they'll promise to help you by consolidating your loan and getting you on a lower payment plan. OK, fine, how much does it cost? IT COSTS SO MUCH. Many of these companies will charge an upfront fee, usually several hundred dollars. Then they will continue to charge you fees *every time you make a student loan payment forever.*

They may not even tell you these are fees. One company was telling people that their monthly payments were \$39 when their actual monthly payments were \$0, plus a \$39 per payment fee! If you have your student loans for 20 years (the time period at the end of which, if your income has been sufficiently low the whole time, you can have your loans forgiven), that fee ends up being \$9,360!

And here's the rub. Once you have some idea of what you need to do with your student loans, it actually is pretty easy to do it yourself. Sure, it can be hard to figure out what the right arrangement is. (Remember, though, these companies don't really do that anyway. They just do the same thing for everyone.) But once you know, for example, that you want to consolidate your loans then try to get on an income-based plan, that's pretty easy to do! It's like two forms. You can get them online and fill them out yourself over the course of about 10 minutes. They don't require any special expertise at all. *They are designed so that borrowers can fill them out on their own.*

So the student loan assistance companies will literally charge you many thousands of dollars to do something that: a) is not even necessarily the right thing for you; and b) is extremely easy and fast to do yourself if it is the right thing for you.

It's definitely true that dealing with student loans is hard. A lot of people need help. You can't always just do it on your own. But it's also true that these companies don't really help. They take advantage of confusion and desperation to squeeze thousands of dollars out of struggling people. Be wary!



EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY – FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN NOTICE

DO NOT DISCARD – SECURED DOCUMENT
PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL



PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO 1297

Student Loan Consolidation & Payment Reduction Program Prepared For:

[REDACTED]
EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY NEW LAWS DISCOUNTING
FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS

BENEFIT ID #: [REDACTED]

FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN PROGRAMS
STUDENT LOAN CONSOLIDATION

NOTICE DATE: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Due to your student loan balances totaling over [REDACTED]; you may now be eligible to receive benefits from a new law that has passed regarding federal student loans including TOTAL FORGIVENESS in some circumstances.

PLEASE NOTE: PROGRAMS MAY CHANGE, SO PLEASE CALL **WITHIN 21 DAYS OF RECEIVING THIS NOTICE.**

CALL BEFORE YOUR NEXT PAYMENT IS DUE: [REDACTED]

NEW FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN LAW BENEFITS

- Lower Monthly Payments
- Lower Interest Rates
- Forgiveness Programs
- Bring Loans In Default To Good Standing

EASY QUALIFICATION PROCESS

- On Adjusted Gross Income And Family Size
- Stop Garnishment
- No Minimum Or Maximum Loan Balance
- 100% Money Back Assurance

We are a consumer advocacy group. We are not debt collectors. We work on your behalf with the U.S. Department of Education to find applicable financial relief programs to make your Federally Insured Student Loans flexible and easy to manage. New payments will be based on your current adjusted gross income, ability to pay, and all financial hardships considered. Without Department approval for further program extensions, interest rates will likely increase in 2015.*



CALL TOLL-FREE TODAY TO REDEEM YOUR FEDERAL BENEFITS: [REDACTED]
REFERENCE BENEFIT ID: [REDACTED]

STUDENT LOAN CONSOLIDATION

payment accelerators

The way most loans work is that interest charges are assessed over time based on whatever your remaining principal balance is. The principal is the amount you borrowed in the first place. So if you go get a car loan for \$30,000 at 5% annual interest, your principal balance is \$30k. Your monthly payment for this loan is probably around \$566. But of course your first payment doesn't all go to that \$30k, some of it goes to interest. In this case, one month's interest on \$30k at 5% is \$125. So when you make that first payment, you pay \$125 to interest and the remaining \$441 to principal. Then the next month's interest is calculated based on your new principal balance, which is a little less than it was before, so the next month's payment goes a little bit less to interest and a little bit more to principal. And so on. This is a very simple description of how scheduling loan payments works. It's called amortization.

Eventually your last payment will cover whatever tiny bit of interest has accrued on your now tiny principal balance, plus that remaining principal balance. Then you will have paid off the loan, plus interest. In this example, you will have paid about \$3,968 in interest. Meaning you paid \$33,968 for a loan of \$30,000. Again, basics of lending.

Another basic of lending: if you pay more than your required payments, you will a) pay your loan off faster and b) pay less money overall in interest. Let's see how that works. If you pay an extra \$500 in the first month of your car loan above, you'll pay the loan off a month earlier and your total interest payments will be around \$3,830. Catch that? That means you would only pay \$33,830 for your \$30,000 loan. You can save \$138 over the course of five years just by paying \$500 extra at the beginning instead of spreading it over time. You have to pay the \$500 eventually no matter what—the savings comes from paying it at the beginning. If you put in an extra \$500 every year, your total interest paid would drop to around \$3,594. So, again, paying more money toward your loan than your normal monthly payment requires means you pay less money overall. Got it?

With that background we can talk about payment accelerators. These are companies that offer to help you pay more money toward your loans earlier on. And, they promise, they will thereby help you save money on interest and pay your loans off faster. And that's true. As we've seen above, if you pay more money earlier on, you pay less interest overall.

They usually structure their programs by your paydays. For example, they'll tell you: "Wouldn't it be easier if instead of paying your loan monthly, your loan payments matched up to your paydays?" Most people get paid every two weeks. So, they say, they will withdraw half of your monthly payment every two weeks matching your payday, and then they'll send it to your lender for you. And since you get 26 paychecks every year but only need to make 12 monthly payments (i.e. 24 half-monthly payments), you end up paying a whole extra monthly payment toward your loan each year. That's

how they help you pay early and save interest. But the questions, as always, are what are they charging you for this "help" and do you really need it?

First, they generally charge you *a lot*. The companies that do this for your mortgage will sometimes charge you a full mortgage payment up to \$1,000 to start the program, and then a fee of \$5 or so every time they withdraw a payment from you, which is usually every two weeks. If you used a payment accelerator for your whole 30-year mortgage, you'd pay almost \$5,000. There are also companies that do this mainly with auto loans. They charge a little less, but it's still a lot. Most of

them will charge you \$399 at the beginning and then \$2-3 per withdrawal, again usually every two weeks. So for a five-year loan, even if you pay it off six months early, you're still looking at almost \$700 in fees.

And no, you really don't need their help or to pay their fees. You can 100% do this yourself for free. In fact, your lender might even have their own version of this program that you can enroll in directly. Or you can just set up automatic payments from your bank. Make them match your paydays if you want, especially if you're the sort of person (like me) who needs automation to impose discipline on their budget, lest you see some cash in your bank account and end up with novelty lamps and military dog portraits. Or, if you're more disciplined you can just send a check for whatever extra amount you can afford at the end of the year. You will still save money on interest and you will do it without paying hundreds or thousands

of dollars in fees to some random company for the privilege. (And you can save even more money by sending those hundreds or thousands of dollars in fees to your lender instead.)



*Left: the sort of notice you might get in the mail.
Note how duplicitous it is.*

Above: The sort of thing you should get to spend your money on instead of BFPs.

THE MYTH TOLD ABOUT MARKETS IS THAT PEOPLE always buy products because those products provide some kind of value. That's one defense of payday lending: sure, it might charge poor people exorbitant interest rates and get them caught in never-ending debt traps, but it's offering a service that those people clearly want and need. (Though again, they only need this because we live in a hideously unequal society.) For some dubious financial products, one can argue that people are better off with them than without them.

But BFPs show that some "products" are really nothing more than legalized trickery. They exist to take advantage of people's confusion. In some cases, where notices are designed to look like government documents, companies intentionally stoke that confusion. With a BFP, you're paying for something that either (1) does you no good or (2) you could easily do yourself, if you weren't being bamboozled into thinking you were being offered a real service. The BFPs are just a way to siphon off people's limited wealth by exploiting their vulnerability. But it makes sense that they exist. There's a hell of a lot of money in overdraft fees. ❖

THE CURRENT AFFAIRS

PRINCIPLES FOR LIVING

SAGE ADVICE FROM THE NATION'S PREMIERE LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

Make sure not to become a fascist. If you see others around you becoming fascists, give them a stern talk.

Classiness is overrated. Novelty is overrated. Basic human decency is underrated.

Show peace and goodwill to all God's creatures. Do not favor the cute ones just because they are cute.



If someone reads you their poetry, and the poetry is bad, remember that the pursuit of artistic excellence is ill-served by dishonesty.

Avoid efficiency. When you see efficiency emerging in others, stamp it out with haste.

If you can't understand what you've just said, chances are others cannot understand it either.

Eliminate all nuclear weapons. Preferably quickly. Try not to detonate any in the process.

If the situation could be improved, improve it. Be sure you know what you are doing. If you do not know what you are doing, hesitate momentarily.

Do not grow facial hair unless somebody has specifically requested it.

The heart can cause us to do odd things. This cannot be helped, but always beware the human potential for romantic misadventure.

Be just as nice to the drummer as you are to the actual band.

Things that are new are rarely good. If you innovate something, and you are not sure whether it will help, err on the side of incinerating it.



Only commit acts of sacrilege if they prove a point.



Remember that everyone has an anus. If you forget, remind yourself by prodding your own.

A good bowl of porridge now and then can't hurt. Though what good it will do is unclear.

Subscribe to Current Affairs. (Obviously.) Make sure all those you care about have subscriptions to Current Affairs as well.

Show zero tolerance for people whose values differ from your own, unless those values seem as if they might be kind of harmless in small quantities.

Always ask rich people how they justify having so much when others have so little. Point out the holes in their justifications. Do not let them change the subject.

Always do your best, even if it is functionally indistinguishable from your worst.

Take responsibility for your actions, even if your body insisted on doing them without consulting your brain.

Drafting furious letters-to-the-editor is usually ill-advised. You will regret them in the morning, but the editor will be wounded permanently.

Make love at frequent intervals, but always with permission and never merely for the sake of it.



Never miss a parade if you can help it. If you can spare the time, join the planning committee.

If you learn to play the piano, and you have not learned to boogie-woogie, you have not learned to play the piano.

Make amusing noises in public settings only if you are absolutely certain the noise will amuse.

Never live in a city that is not called "New Orleans." Never offer words of praise about states that are not Louisiana.

Never start an aggressive war in a foreign country.



Lick the envelope manually instead of using a special industrial licking-brush. Your recipient will appreciate the extra effort. (Exceptions can be made for those who have to lick many envelopes in a row, or who lack tongues.)

If you must leave unexpectedly in the middle of the night, never to return, be sure to leave a handwritten explanatory note on scented paper. The choice of scent is crucial in determining how news of your absence will be received.



Do not hit people with sticks. Even if they work in the financial sector.

Perform a citizen's arrest of Peter Thiel.

There is no place for humorlessness in a world so ludicrous as this.

There is nothing shameful about building a tent indoors.

Discount the opinions of blowhards. If someone makes their living giving opinions, trust nothing they say.

Pajamas are for children. The mature adult wears undies and a dressing gown.

Build more domes. Preferably elaborate ones. What happened to good domes?

Challenge the principal on his/her various abuses of power. Do not let him/her get away with replying "Didn't we expel you months ago?"



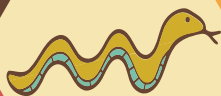
If someone says "I have a disease" as an excuse for refusing to attend an important event, ask them which disease. If it is something curable, cure it.

If you have a spare room, be sure to house a refugee in it.

If your career involves denying people access to things they urgently require, seek alternate employment.



Rebuild the original Penn Station exactly as it was, then hold an enormous hoedown in it and invite everyone in New York.



Do not tweet. Do not look at his tweets. Do not go near any tweets period.

If you are in the desert, lying on your belly asleep, with your mouth wide open, be aware that a snake might crawl into it.

Dress well. When others are poorly dressed, do not disparage them. Buy them cravats and jabots as a "subtle hint."

Avoid mutant pastries; perish the cronut.

All hats should have wide brims, all umbrellas should be the full length of a human leg. Anything less is barbarism.

Leave no cake uneaten.

From time to time, deliberately sprinkle some nonsense into your speech to check whether people are actually listening to you or just pretending.

If you aren't very good at singing, be sure to sing occasionally, in order to reassure others like yourself that they are not alone.



Give liberally to charity, but not bullshit charities that give apps to starving children or whatever.

Give hugs to strangers. Be sure to obtain consent.

If you are a DJ, remember that you have a moral responsibility to ensure that the public only ever hears good music.

Never steal a police officer's service pistol unless you have an uncommonly strong talent for persuasive apologies.



If you like someone, build a colossal limestone monument to them. If you really like them, double the size and add a cupola.

If you have not subscribed to a magazine lately, why not subscribe to three today? Better yet, get three subscriptions from one magazine, and give the extras to a gentleman you are trying to woo.

Send friends postcards regularly. Be sure the postcards do not feature distasteful photographs.



Do not throw the newspaper away without first asking those nearby if they would like to read it next.

If you are a midwife, try to make sure the baby understands what she/he has gotten themselves into by joining the universe.

If you are a soldier, and you are asked to use a bayonet in an unseemly way, loudly question the propriety of the act. Resign if necessary, preferably in spectacular fashion.

Just because a magazine editor is incapable of hanging a collectible copy of the first edition on the office wall without bashing a large hole in the drywall, doesn't mean you and the other staff need to mock him over his ineptitude for three whole months. Consider the possibility that he is self-conscious about his lack of practical skills, and you are making him feel hurt and useless.

Always use "Pardon me" instead of "Excuse me." There are no excuses for what you did.

Always taste your own urine before encouraging others to do so.

Never insult a tradesman, unless he has paid you to do so as part of a televised advertisement.

If you are a racecar driver, remember that going extremely fast around a concrete oval doesn't necessarily make you a good person.

If you have the opportunity, try to investigate whether your political opinions are correct before murdering someone in the name of them.

If you must ruin a child's birthday party, try to make it up to them by declining to ruin the next one.

If you spot loneliness, stamp it out quickly through exuberant friendship.



Never adopt a dog that looks like yourself. This is narcissism.

Never ask a question you do not know the answer to. Failure to follow this rule can lead to calamity.

If you are the president, try not to make a hash of it like the rest of them did.

If you realize you know no sailors, do your best to meet one. Likewise for haberdashers, bricksmiths, handwelders, yardworkers, fishwives, ironlaunders, longpushers, boatdockers, and tunemongers.

Leave generous tips, unless you are poor, in which case leave whatever you can, plus a nice little note saying how much you enjoyed yourself.

Every time you consider eating a sausage, consider the forlorn faces of sad little piglets.

Only have arrogance in proportion to your confidence, and only have confidence in proportion to your understanding. Also remember that you understand nothing.



Be sure every piece of knowledge you acquire is useful. If it is not useful, forget that you know it.

Do not read too much into a busy signal. They could just be busy.

If you are Richard Dawkins, try to think how you might have framed things better.



Tell children amusing lies. Only tell a child a lie if that lie is amusing.

Unmask all falsehoods, puncture all idols, irritate all authorities, charm all acquaintances.

Replace all public and private transit with adorable streetcars that have bells that go ting-a-ling.

If everyone in the room is staring at you with their mouths open, it is possible you may have just accidentally said something racist.



Overthrow capitalism, but preferably without making everything worse.

Try to make eye contact, even with the beady-eyed.

Always furnish rooms in a way that makes guests feel at ease. Do not contradict pleasing surroundings with an abrasive personality.

Never forget the dead. Be sure to occasionally ask them if they need anything.

Do your best to avoid furthering Satan's plans. If Satan offers you a hamentash in exchange for your services, politely reply "No thank you, sir, I do not take the Devil's hamentashen."

Birds really aren't all that bad, once you get to know them.

If you can spare the time, revive a struggling city.

"Mistake not the visions of your diseased brain for the truths of science."

Form a doo-wop group. Serenade the elderly.





MEAT

and the

H-WORD

by Nathan J. Robinson

I AM GOING TO BEG YOU. I AM GOING TO desperately plead with you. Let me say the word, and let me say why I'm saying the word, and then let's have a discussion about it. I know that for some people, even to suggest that the word might apply to this case is tantamount to denialism. Just to have the conversation is to dishonor the victims. I realize, too, that I don't strictly need this word, of all words, in order to discuss the subject. I have been advised that it is counterproductive: feelings about the word are so fraught that the offense caused will outweigh any good I could possibly do, and will cause me to be far less persuasive than I otherwise would be. And isn't this about persuasion, ultimately? But I can't help it: every time I examine the facts, I can't stop thinking the word. If I'm being honest with you, and I want to be, I need to be able to tell you the question that I'm stuck on, and the question contains the word.

The word is "holocaust" and the question is this: "Given the amount of suffering and death that it entails, why is it improper to describe the mass slaughter of animals for human consumption as a holocaust?"

I appreciate why people react badly to any description of the loss of non-human life as a holocaust. One of the most disturbing features of the capital-H Holocaust was the dehumanization process. David Livingstone Smith, in *Less Than Human*, describes how a common prerequisite to atrocities is reconfiguring perceptions of a group, to make them seem *not just metaphorically* but literally "subhuman." We all know that the Nazis described the Jews as rats and the Hutus describe the Tutsis as cockroaches. "Comparing people to animals" is such a common feature of organized brutality that any argument to draw parallels between animal-victims and people-victims can be seen as partly replicating the very thought process that led to the actual Holocaust.

Here is something animal advocates are often quite bad at expressing, though: “comparing people to animals” can either be intended to diminish the people or to elevate the animals, and these two thoughts are so dissimilar that even to call them both “comparing people to animals” is misleading. The version that elevates animals is perhaps more properly thought of as “comparing animals to people”: if you dehumanize a person by comparing them to a rat or dog, you are also implying that there is something disgusting and worthless about rats and dogs. If those creatures weren’t considered “lesser,” the animal-comparison wouldn’t be an insult. It would be somewhat meaningless. Instead of encouraging us to “stop dehumanizing people by comparing them to animals,” animal advocates are suggesting that we get rid of the whole idea that there are Men and there are Beasts. Besides, our animal pejoratives aren’t even consistent. They’re based on weird folk-stereotypes only partially grounded in the actual nature of various species: calling someone a *rat* suggests they’re filthy, but calling them a *squirrel* means they’re hyperactive, and there are no particular connotations associated with other rodents like gerbils and capybaras. (It really is strange how a culture can assign expected anthropomorphic traits to each species: the nervous ostrich, the grumpy walrus, the industrious beaver, the clever fox, the lazy ass.)

It’s important to be able to clearly and carefully make the distinction between elevating animals and diminishing humans, but it’s harder to do in practice than it sounds. Utilitarians like Peter Singer get into trouble all the time when they make some appalling remark comparing disabled children with chimpanzees. I happen to think people are right to find this insensitive, because nobody can just willfully ignore the connotations that certain words actually have in practice, or the *effect* that these comparisons might have in a world where dehumanization is so dangerous. But in their intention, the utilitarians often mean to say that chimpanzees are *as important* as humans rather than that some humans are *as unimportant* as chimpanzees. How callous you find this remark depends entirely on what your preexisting ideas about the value of a chimpanzee life are. We’re so conditioned to think that monkeys and pigs are our lessers that it’s hard not to hear these words as insults.

WE ALL KNOW, OR AT LEAST we can all figure out with a moment’s honest reflection, that our dominant attitudes on animals are inconsistent. Someone can be incredibly disturbed by the notion of eating their puppy, but happily consume bacon every other morning, and the cognitive dissonance between the two positions never seems to cause any bother. If we’re being serious, though, we know that many sows are smarter than chihuahuas, and that all of the traits that cause us to love

our pets are just as present in the animals we regularly devour the murdered corpses of. (I am sorry, that was a somewhat extreme way of putting it.) This is a commonplace observation, but in a way that’s what makes it so strange: it’s obvious that we have no rational reason to think some animals are friends and others are food. The only differences are tradition and the strength of the relationships we happen to have developed with the friend-animals, but that’s no more a justification of the distinction than it would be to say “I only eat people who aren’t my friends.” Even though nobody can justify it, though, it continues. People solve the question “Why do you treat some animals as if they have personalities but other equally sophisticated animals as if they are inanimate lumps of flavor and calories?” by simply pretending the question hasn’t been asked, or by making some remark like “Well, if pigs would quit making themselves taste so good, I could quit eating them.”

The truth is disturbing, which is why it’s so easily ignored. I’m sure I don’t have to remind you of all the remarkable facts about pigs. First, the stereotypes are false: they are clean animals and don’t sweat, and they don’t “pig out” but prefer to eat slowly and methodically. They are, as Glenn Greenwald puts it, “among the planet’s most intelligent, social, and emotionally complicated species, capable of great joy, play, love, connection, suffering and pain.” They can be housebroken, and can be trained to walk on a leash and do tricks. They dream, they play, they snuggle. They can roll out rugs, play videogames, and herd sheep. They love sunbathing and belly rubs. But don’t take my word for it—listen to the testimony of this man who accidentally adopted a 500-pound pig:

She’s unlike any animal I’ve met. Her intelligence is unbelievable. She’s house trained and even opens the back door with her snout to let herself out to pee. Her food is mainly kibble, plus fruit and vegetables. Her favourite treat is a cupcake. She’s bathed regularly and pigs don’t sweat, so she doesn’t smell. If you look a pig closely in the eyes, it’s startling; there’s something so inexplicably human. When you’re lying next to her and talking, you know she understands. It was emotional realising she was a commercial pig. The more we discovered about what her life could have been, it seemed crazy to us that we ate animals, so we stopped.

I want to note something that often passes by too quickly, which is that the sentience of animals like pigs and cows is almost impossible to deny. Animals can clearly feel “distress” and “pleasure,” and since they have nervous systems just like we do, these feelings are being felt by a “consciousness.” If a human eyeball captures light and creates images that are seen from within, so does a pig’s eyeball, because eyes are eyes. In other words, pigs have an internal life: there is something it is like to *be* a pig. We’ll almost certainly never know what that’s like, and it’s impossible to even speculate on, but if we believe that other humans are conscious, it is unclear why other animals wouldn’t be, albeit in a more rudimentary way. No, they don’t understand differential calculus or Althusser’s theory of interpellation. (Neither do I.) But they share with us the more

morally crucial quality of being able to feel things. They can be happy and they can suffer.

Of course, critics suggest that this is just irrational anthropomorphism: the idea of animal emotions is false, because emotions are concepts we have developed to understand our own experiences as humans, and we have no idea what the parallel experiences in animals are like and whether they are properly comparable. The temptation to attributes human traits to animals is certainly difficult to resist; I can't help but see sloths that look like they're smiling as *actually* smiling, but these sloths almost certainly have no idea that they are smil-

ing. Likewise, whenever I see a basset hound I feel compelled to try to cheer it up, even though I know that sad-eyed dogs aren't really sad. Even if we do posit that animals feel emotions, nobody can know just how distant their consciousnesses are from our own. We have an intuitive sense that "being a bug" doesn't feel like much, but how similar is being a water vole to being an antelope versus being a dragonfly? All of it is speculation. David Foster Wallace, in considering the Lobster Question ("Is it all right to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure?"), noted that the issues of "whether and how different kinds of animals feel pain, and of whether and why it might be justifiable to inflict pain on them in order to eat them, turn out to be extremely complex and difficult," and many can't actually be resolved satisfactorily. How do you know what agony means to a lobster? Still, he said, "standing at the stove, it is hard to deny in any meaningful way that this is a living creature experiencing pain and wishing to avoid/escape the painful experience... To my lay mind, the lobster's behavior in the kettle appears to be the expression of a preference; and it may well be that an ability to form preferences is the decisive criterion for real suffering."

And lobsters are a trickier case than other more complex creatures, since they're freaky and difficult to empathize with. As we speak of higher-order creatures who have anatomy and behavioral traits more closely paralleling our own, there is at least good evidence to suggest that various nonhuman animals can experience terrible pain. (Again, hardly anyone would deny this with dogs, and once we accept that we just need to be willing to carry our reasoning through.) Once we accept that these beings experience pain, it next becomes necessary to admit that humans inflict a lot of it on them. We massacre tens

of billions of animals a year, and their brief lives are often filled with nothing but pain and fear. The "lucky" ones are those like the male chicks who are deemed "useless" and are "suffocated, gassed or minced alive at a day old." At least they will be spared the life of torture that awaits most of the creatures raised in factory farms. I don't know how many atrocity tales to tell here, because again, this is not something unknown, but something "known yet ignored." I can tell you about animals living next to the rotting corpses of their offspring, animals beaten, shocked, sliced, living in their own blood and feces. I could show you horrible pictures, but I won't. Here's Greenwald describing a

“Comparing people to animals’ can either be meant to diminish the people or to elevate the animals...”

practice used in pig farms:

Pigs are placed in a crate made of iron bars that is the exact length and width of their bodies, so they can do nothing for their entire lives but stand on a concrete floor, never turn around, never see any outdoors, never even see their tails, never move more than an inch. They are put in so-called farrowing crates when they give birth, and their piglets run underneath them to suckle and are often trampled to death. The sows are bred repeatedly this way until their fertility declines, at which point they are slaughtered and turned into meat. The pigs are so desperate to get out of their crates that they often spend weeks trying to bite through the iron bars until their gums gush blood, bash their heads against the walls, and suffer a disease in which their organs end up mangled in the wrong places, from the sheer physical trauma of trying to escape from a tiny space or from acute anxiety.

Separate from the issue of "conditions" is the issue of killing itself. Obviously, it is better if an animal lives in relative comfort before it is slaughtered, and better if their deaths are imposed "humanely." But personally, I find the idea of "humane slaughter" oxymoronic, because I'm disturbed by the taking of life as well as by suffering. This part is difficult to persuade people of, since it depends largely on a moral instinct about whether an animal's life is "inherently" valuable, and whether they should have some kind of autonomy or dignity. Plenty of people who could agree that animal torture is wrong can still believe that eating animals is unobjectionable in and of itself. My disagreement with this comes from my deep gut feeling that opposing torture but endorsing killing is like saying "Of course, the people we eat shouldn't be kept in tiny cages before we kill them, that's abominable." Once you grant that animals are conscious, and have "feelings" of one kind or another, and "wills" (i.e. that

there are things they want and things they don't want, and they don't want to die), the whole process of mass killing seems irredeemably horrifying.

I WANT TO COME BACK TO THE H-WORD. I THINK about the Holocaust a lot, the capital-H one. I'd imagine I think about it more than most people I know. I'm almost the opposite of a Holocaust denier: I find it so real, and the implications of its reality so unsettling, that it is difficult for me to ever quite get it out of my head. I almost think that in order to get on with your life, you have to operate in some state of quasi-denial: affirming intellectually that the Holocaust happened, but avoiding feeling viscerally what that actually means. "Six million" remains an abstract, the victims are black and white photos rather than conscious beings with pulses and itches and toes like yourself. The idea of watching your children be dragged away from you and shuffled off toward a gas chamber, it's just... it's too much, and you almost have to deny it, or at least not think about it too much, because it's just so unbelievably sad.

My morbid inability to let go of the Holocaust leaves me thinking a lot about those varying states of denial. Nearly everyone is in some degree of denial about how much pain there is in the world, because grasping its full dimensions is, first, impossible, and second, would be paralyzing and make life unbearable. But because we have to overlook enormous amounts of suffering if we're going to live, have to stop thinking about the old people crying alone in their hospital beds, and the sick children whose every second of life has been spent dying, it is going to be very easy to miss an atrocity in our midst. It has never been a mystery to me how ordinary Germans could ignore what was going on around them. They did it the same way we ignore all of the pain that millions of strangers are going through at any given moment. As long as other people's terror isn't in the room with you, as long as it's off behind barbed wire a few miles away, it's not just easy to ignore but almost impossible to notice. Walk through any American city on a nice day and see how easy it is to forget that the country has two million people in its prisons. They're off in rural counties, and as long as you don't go looking for them—and as long as you're not among the populations from whose numbers the incarcerated are mostly drawn—none of it will even exist for you. (For three years, I used to do the same ten minute walk from my apartment to school and back every day. It was only in the third year, after noticing it on a map, that I realized I had been walking directly past a jail with hundreds of inmates in it. People were locked in rooms, living lives, and I passed by obliviously.)

Because people slip so naturally into oblivious complicity, it's crucial to actively examine the world around you for evidence of things hidden. What am I missing? What have I accepted as ordinary that might in fact be atrocious? Am I in denial about something that will be clear in retrospect? Every time I apply this kind of thinking to meat-eating, I get chills. Here we have

set up *mass industrial slaughter*, a world built on the suffering and death of billions of creatures. The scale of the carnage is unfathomable. (I know sharks aren't particularly sympathetic, but I'm still shocked by the statistic that while sharks kill 8 people per year, humans kill 11,000 sharks per hour.) Yet we hide all of it away, we don't talk about it. Laws are passed to prevent people from even taking photographs of it. That makes me feel the same way I do about the death penalty: if this weren't atrocious, it wouldn't need to be kept out of view. "Mass industrial slaughter." There's no denying that's what it is. Yet that sounds like something a decent society shouldn't have in it.

I've tried my best to figure out a way to avoid my conclusion, because I know only a small fraction of other people share it. But it's a simple and, to me, inescapable deduction: (1) non-human animals are conscious beings capable of suffering, (2) unnecessarily causing conscious beings to suffer and die is morally reprehensible, (3) humans cause billions of nonhuman animals to suffer and die every year, mostly for their own pleasure, (4) by killing and eating animals, humans are doing something deeply wrong. The difficulty of avoiding this conclusion is what disturbed David Foster Wallace during his time at the Maine Lobster Festival. He realized that it seemed preachy and extreme, but as a thoughtful and philosophically rigorous individual, he couldn't escape the morally troubling implications of boiling lobsters alive. The lobsters just didn't seem to want to be killed, and however normalized the practice may be, however easily we may take it for granted that these creatures are of little moral worth, once you begin to scrutinize these assumptions, to see that they're built on very little, and that a creature does seem to be experiencing something resembling pain, it becomes tough to defend our actions.

I still know I'm taking a risk by using the word "holocaust." The dictionary definition may be "any mass slaughter or reckless destruction of life" (and the word even originally referred to the burning of sacrifices, i.e. animals), but there are plenty who are skeptical even of applying the term to *other genocides*. To speak of a "pig holocaust" can seem trivializing and insensitive. *And yet*: once again, ideas that seem true and reasonable by instinct become harder to defend once scrutinized. It's true that how bad you believe the industrial slaughter of animals is, compared to the industrial slaughter of humans, depends on whether you believe suffering is suffering, and the degree to which its gravity depends on the intellectual sophistication of the sufferer. You might also think that certain atrocities perpetrated on 100 million pigs are not as bad as those same atrocities committed against five fully-functioning human beings. A lot depends on your subjective weighting of the value of very different lives, and none of that has any obvious "true" answer. Personally, though, I keep having that feeling of being unable to escape my discomfort: knowing what's out there, knowing the cages, the blood, the billion squeals of pain, I hear over and over those same questions: "Why is this different? How can it be justified? What are you choosing not to realize?" And yet again that same terrible word: holocaust. ❖

THE HOT MESS OF THE FREE MARKET'S SIDE EFFECTS



*How Every Little Thing
Affects Every Other Thing*

BY ROB LARSON

Professor of Economics, Tacoma Community College

AH, THE SOUND OF YOUR NEIGHBOR'S CAR ALARM GOING off in the middle of the night. The reeking smell of a cigarette smoker upwind. The tumor in your lung tissue caused by car exhaust on your drive to work.

In the incredibly sophisticated field of economics, we call these little gifts "externalities," the side effects of economic transactions. When two parties in a market agree to buy/sell something, the effects of the decision aren't confined to the contracting persons/entities. Instead, because we live in a world of butterfly effects, every agreement reverberates beyond those who make it. With complicated modern goods and services, that's especially true.

In the field of economics, we like to celebrate markets for their efficiency. I have fifty bananas and want fifty dollars, you have fifty dollars and want fifty bananas, a voluntary market exchange makes everyone better off. But the sloppy side effects of commerce, the butterfly effects, cut into the level of efficiency a system can claim, because it's no longer so clear-cut that "everyone" is benefiting from a transaction. Thus, in economics, there is a tendency to minimize the importance of externalities, to suggest they're rare or insignificant.

This is why there are several widely-used synonyms for externalities in economics, and they share a tendency toward the cutesy and diminutive. One popular term is "neighborhood effects," e.g. the car alarm example, where we admit there are external effects of commerce but they're limited to your immediate vicinity and often have an "aw, nuts" character to them. Another euphemism is "spillovers," since the ripple effects of economic activity "spill over" onto other parties. (Aw, we made a widdle spill!)

But externalities are no laughing matter. Global climate change, and every single ecological and economic ramification it comes with, is an externality. So are desertification and most of the wave of animal extinctions across the globe. In the aggregate these things get pretty serious, and can reach far beyond the horizon of any individual consumer. They undermine the pretense of economists that markets are highly efficient. If you want to find out why these "spillovers" matter, just ask a Gulf fisherman.

CONSIDER A HAPPY AMERICAN, EATING. THE MEAL MIGHT be the enduringly popular fast-food model—a burger with fries and a soft drink. To the consumer, the transaction is simple: you drive to the McDonald's, choose some greasy calorie dump, swipe your plastic card, and leave with a steaming bag of factory-processed food. As long as you think the food is worth the price, this market transaction is going to happen.

But there are side effects. For example, both the burger and the soda were probably produced with corn. American feedlot cows are often fed cornmeal to fatten their tissues, and the main U.S. soda sweetener is corn syrup. So what? Well in the developed world, we boost our farm productivity with fertilizers, chemicals produced from oil or natural gas that improve crop yields. A variety of commercial fertilizers are on the market, but often their main feature is to add nitrogen to the soil—nitrogen being a limiting element to the growth of many plants and crops. So the use of this fertilizer is a major part of producing your disgusting American fast food meal, including not just the corn but also the wheat in the bun and maybe the potatoes in the fries.

But fertilizers are added to many developed-world farms with great abandon, often with little care toward directing them to the growing plant roots, instead spraying them all around the rows. When the wet Midwestern winter and spring arrive, a good deal of this deployed fertilizer is washed off the farmland, directly from the surface or through shallow soil layers, and into the farm's irrigation or wastewater system. This means the swept up fertilizer runoff ends up in the streams and creeks around commercial farms, and then accumulates in the great rivers draining agricultural regions.

Having all this spare nitrogen in stream and river water has real consequences. Eventually, the flow of fertilizers reaches the ocean. The huge volume of nitrogen compounds crazily and enriches the growth potential of



this water, a process called “eutrophication,” a second-degree externality, caused by the first externality of the farm runoff. This, in turn, enables the growth of algae, which grow faster with additional nitrogen, just like our crops do. The suspended organisms collect into the bigger rivers as water flows down the regional basin, until reaching the ocean. The algae have short life spans and die. Once they do, their remains sink and are consumed by coastal ocean bacteria. This process consumes the dissolved oxygen present in fresh- and saltwater-bodies. Because of the vast amount of nitrogen from making

our American food, the amount of algae in the river outlets is huge, and the consumption of oxygen from their decomposition is likewise enormous.

It may seem weird to worry about the level of oxygen in the seas—everyone knows you can’t breathe underwater. However, people who are not self-injuring imbeciles may be aware that there is dissolved oxygen in most bodies of water in various amounts, and this of course is how animals like fish breath through their gill systems. Oxygen is essential for most forms of animal life, from fish to shrimp to squid. So the huge blooms of



“The
benefits of
entrepreneurs
and
investment
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while the
side-costs and
externalities
are neglected.”

algae that occur in estuaries are actually a very big deal, ecologically and economically. Consider the Gulf of Mexico, the large saltwater body that the Mississippi River drains into, with water flowing from a giant part of the North American landmass. As the river dumps millions of tons of nitrogen-rich fertilizer into the estuary annually, and the resulting algae decompose, the oxygen levels fall to such low levels that sea animals can't live—creating an area of very low dissolved oxygen, or “hypoxia.” These hypoxic regions are more often referred to as “Dead Zones,” with only some microorganisms able to survive.

According to NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the dead zone in the Gulf this year is the biggest ever measured, with hypoxic conditions present in an area the size of New Jersey. The scientific literature documents how “Organisms that can swim, such as fish and shrimp, flee the area. But less mobile creatures, such as starfish and clams, desperately seek oxygen by abandoning the security of their sea-floor burrows or climbing to high points that might penetrate oxygenated waters. Some brittle stars even stand on their points, stretching to catch some oxygen.”

Some dead zones occur naturally, since even rivers draining undeveloped areas still bring in more nutrients than usual after heavy rainfall in the drainage basin, which can encourage far more modest blooms of algae in natural conditions. Geologists have found fossil records that prove previous episodes of natural hypoxic conditions in the Mississippi estuary after heavy rains and floods, going back to the early 19th century and well before the advent of large-scale commercial fertilizers.

But the artificial dead zones have grown with the worldwide growth of fertilizer use, taking off after World War II. The spike was especially dramatic in the U.S., at a time when driving and fast-food diets were becoming American staples. Jack Davis observed in the *Alabama Review* that “In a not-so-surprising correlation, the physical size of Americans in the lifetime of boomers grew together with the dead zone.” And thus, our fertilizers become infertilizers.

THE STATE-SIZED DEAD ZONES HAVE THEIR OWN KNOCK-ON effects. Notably, they force the fishing industry to travel further, to find more oxygenated areas or even the margins of the hypoxic zones, where mobile marine life clusters. The conservative *Wall Street Journal* notes that “Gulf Coast shrimpers are having to travel farther to catch their harvest... Further travel... causes fishermen to crowd into more-limited areas and requires higher fuel expenses. The catch also tends to come in smaller.” Fishermen complain “It's devastating for us... It kills everything in the water... Instead of talking about it, we need to start doing something about it.”

Traveling further to fill their nets of course implies that the zones are causing a *third-degree* externality, triggered by the original externality of the runoff and the secondary externality of the dead zone itself. This entails higher fuel costs for the often already-strapped fishermen, but of course also further increases carbon emissions, leading to a *fourth-degree* externality in the chain reaction kicked off by your Value Meal™.

An elaborate analysis in the *Proceedings of the National Academy Sciences* provides robust evidence that the dead zones are not only causing higher fuel use in the Gulf but also increasing the price of large shrimp relative to smaller shrimp. This is because low oxygen suppresses opportunities for shrimp growth and thus limits the harvests of large shrimp, driving up its relative price. This, too, is yet another side-effect of the commercial activity of farming a thousand miles away, another fourth-degree externality. Furthermore, it's robustly expected among scientists that climate change itself will decrease the size of fish worldwide, as specimens reach their optimal metabolic rate earlier than fish in cooler oceanic eras. So the shrimp trawlers will not be alone in bringing in skimpier hauls in the future, even as the crop-damaging impact of higher temperatures is expected to be fought by farmers using more fertilizer. This means dead zones are self-reinforcing, causing *and caused by* higher carbon emissions.

But despite these grave environmental developments and rotten economic outcomes for the regional workforce, Americans can enjoy their McMuffins in peace. Environmental scientists with Iowa State surveyed fellow residents of the

giant Mississippi basin, finding that only 11% “were even aware the dead zone exists.”

It should be remembered too that the oceans are already a pool of externalities, owing to far more of our economic activity than fertilizing crops. Numerous scientific reviews have documented the long-lasting scars of our serial oil spills, with the prominent US science journal *Nature* reporting previously-undescribed forms of seafloor slimes and wildlife harm from the novel combination of petroleum and detergents employed at the site of the Deepwater Horizon blowout. They suggest that the chemical dispersants, designed to be used on surface oil, effectively kept much of the oil from the surface where TV cameras could see it, and kept it at depths and forms that are especially deadly to young organisms, and “more likely to affect even the smallest creatures.”

The list of economic ripple effects in the seas is long, from the acidification of waters caused by chemical dissociation of carbon dioxide emissions to the behavior-warping, deafening noise of modern commercial shipping and naval vessels. Floating plastic patches in the centers of the oceans’ currents and the spiking species extinctions from habitat destruction add to the toll. It’s an open question just how many of these little “neighborhood effects” the ocean systems can handle before major collapses in function.

The role of the dead zones in this possible future may be bigger than we imagine. Both scientific and economic sources are observing that the measured relation of hypoxia to seasonal runoff suggests that the over-rich nitrogen is building up in the watershed over the years, in sludgy riverbeds and shallow wetlands, and that it will therefore persist long into the future regardless of how quickly humans may respond to the problem. Researchers studying past episodes of disastrous worldwide drops in oxygen levels due to historic climate change find their work is “destined to become uncomfortably applicable in the not-too-distant future.”

That’s a problem for our economy. But also for economists.

WITH OUR HAPPY HISTORY OF trivializing today’s overlapping, self-reinforcing externalities, it’s unsurprising that we economists have not built a stellar record of helping to address them. That hasn’t been made any better by the corporate money that floods the economics field, or the fact that Donald Trump has been appointing right-wing hacks to positions requiring the services of competent economists.

Consider the tenure of Scott Pruitt, former Oklahoma attorney general and shale drilling hand puppet, at the helm of the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt has made no secret of his antagonism to the basic mission of the EPA before and since his appointment, and has gone about aggressively dismantling its limited regulations with as much discretion and secrecy as possible.

One major Obama-era regulatory regime targeted by Pruitt is the Waters of the United States, which would expand existing federal regulations for larger bodies and extend them to adjoining wetlands and smaller rivers. Originally, the EPA’s staff economists had estimated the costs to farmers and real estate developers, ranging from \$236 to \$465 million. But they found the policy would also prevent costly pollution, creating an estimated savings of \$555 to \$572 million—an obvious net gain on sheer money terms, to say nothing of the inherent value of these natural systems.

The national press reports that in June, Pruitt’s lieutenants instructed the EPA economists to write a new analysis of the rule, one with the costs included but not the benefits. One of the many recent retirees from the Agency told the *New York Times*, “On June 13, my economists were verbally told to produce a new study that changed the wetlands benefit...

They produced a new cost-benefit analysis that showed no quantifiable benefit to preserving wetlands.”

Anyone with experience arguing with conservatives will see how annoying this is, since the right-wing canard since the advent of the environmental movement has been that while liberals may point to nice benefits of government programs for environmental protection (or education or welfare), they fail to consider all the costs. These are alleged to include lower business investment and economic growth. So we get examples like Milton and Rose Friedman, the famous conservative authors, arguing against the EPA by insisting it has “no effective mechanisms to assure the balancing of costs and benefits.” To the Friedmans, this meant the EPA was bound to strangle business with endless burdensome regulations. Looking at the Pruitt case however, it appears that if the EPA has no mechanism for doing so it is because one of them has been fully chopped out of the picture—the one that argues *for* EPA action.

Likewise, consider the great US libertarian Henry Hazlitt, who introduced Hayek and other right-wing Austrian School economists to American readers. He wrote that anyone favoring government intervention is failing to see the “secondary consequences,” which are held to be less favorable than the near-term positive results. So tax money spent building a bridge employs people, but the tax collections reduce consumer buying power which would have created other jobs in the free marketplace. Similarly, an increase in the minimum wage has the obvious outcome of raising immediate purchasing power for the low-wage workforce, but fear the heinous secondary consequences of higher inflation and unemployment!

But notably, these secondary consequences that Hazlitt refers to are only apparent among *public* policies. Side-effects of *private* commerce somehow fail to be included. This right-wing practice, of bringing out fine economists to draw attention to the secondary consequences of public policies but utterly failing to mention any in the capitalist marketplace, continues to this day. Every time a Freedom Caucus member goes on Fox News and rants red-faced against taxes collected by The Government, the spotlight focuses laser-like on the downside, and never mentions the legitimate benefits provided by public programs the Fox viewer typically relies on. So the Friedmans’ argument that costs are not considered alongside benefits by liberals has a mirror image—on the Right, the costs of the EPA and unions and public employment are foregrounded, while the benefits are neglected or just ignored. Meanwhile the benefits of entrepreneurs and investment are celebrated, while the side-costs and externalities are neglected. It is the conservative tradition, following its long heritage of intellectual opportunism, that is unavoidably guilty of its own accusation. Irony loves company!

WE SHOULD CUT THROUGH THE DESPAIR A BIT HERE and note that there are proposals to take near-term action to somewhat reduce the incidence of the dead zones. Simple protection of near-creek trees and wetlands allows for significant filtration of nutrient-laden runoff before it’s swept into headwaters, and tiered, two-stage ditches have been used in some states to further limit new additions to the built-up problem. However, the Mississippi River Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force, set up to monitor and propose these ameliorative measures for hypoxia, found that the mid-summer area of hypoxia in the Gulf remains close to triple the task force target, and the main factor appearing to influence its size is how wet the spring was in the Midwest.

So, in consideration of this tangled mess of an economic-ecological system, will we be able to rise up to overthrow capitalism before its neglected “spillovers” utterly ruin the oceans and skies, along with beautiful species and essential ecosystem services? Or will the dead zones, and their cratering oxygen levels, only grow in the future?

Don’t hold your breath. ♦

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Nobody likes Monopoly. This is because it emulates and amplifies the least fun parts of capitalism—the parts where we act like greedy dicks for no good reason. Current Affairs Socialist Monopoly fixes this problem for good.



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WHO CARES ABOUT INEQUALITY?

by David Adler



LLOYD BLANKFEIN IS WORRIED ABOUT inequality. The CEO of Goldman Sachs—that American Almighty, who swindled the economy and walked off scot-free—sees new “divisions” in the country. “Too much,” Blankfein lamented in 2014, “has gone to too few people.”

Charles Koch is worried, too. Another great American plutocrat—shepherd of an empire that rakes in \$115 billion and spits out \$200 million in campaign contributions each year—decried in 2015 the “welfare for the rich” and the formation of a “permanent under-class.” “We’re headed for a two-tiered society,” Koch warned.

Their observations join a chorus of anti-inequality advocacy among the global elite. The World Bank called inequality a “powerful threat against global progress.” The International Monetary Fund claimed it was “not a recipe for stability and sustainability” —threat-level *red* for the IMF. And the World Economic Forum, gathered together at Davos last year, described inequality as the single greatest global threat.

It is a stunning consensus. In Zuccotti Park, the cry of the 99% was an indictment. To acknowledge the existence of the super-rich was to incite class warfare. Not so today. Ted Cruz, whom the Kochs have described as a ‘hero,’ railed against an economy where wealthy Americans “have gotten fat and happy.” He did so on Fox News.

What the hell is happening here? Why do so many rich people care so much about inequality? And why now?

THE TIMING OF THE ELITE EMBRACE OF THE anti-inequality agenda presents a puzzle precisely because it is so long overdue.

For decades, political economists have struggled to understand why inequality has remained uncontested all this time. Their workhorse game theoretic model, developed in the early 1980s by Allan Meltzer and Scott Richard, predicts that democracies respond to an increase in equality with an increase in top-rate taxation—a rational response of the so-called ‘median voter.’

And yet, the relationship simply does not hold in the real world. On the contrary, in the United States, we find its literal inverse: amid record high inequality, a proposal for one of the largest tax cuts in history. This inverted relationship is known as the Robin Hood Paradox.

One explanation of this paradox is the invisibility of the super-rich. On the one hand, they hide in their enclaves: the hills, the Hamptons, Dubai, the Bahamas. In the olden days, the poor were forced to bear witness to royal riches, standing roadside as the chariot moved through town. Today, they live behind high walls in gated communities and private islands. Their wealth is obscured from view, stashed offshore and away from the tax collector. This is wealth as exclusion.

On the other, they hide *among us*. As Rachel Sherman has

recently argued, conspicuous consumption is out of fashion, displaced by an encroaching “moral stigma of privilege” that won’t let the wealthy just live. Not long ago, the rich felt comfortable riding down broad boulevards in stretch limousines and fur coats. Today, they remove price tags from their groceries and complain about making ends meet. This is wealth as assimilation.

The result is a general misconception about the scale of inequality in America. According to one recent study, Americans tend to think that the ratio of CEO compensation to average income is 30-to-1. The actual figures are 350-to-1.

Yet this is only a partial explanation of the Robin Hood Paradox. It is an appealing theory, but I find it doubtful that any public revelation of elite lifestyles would drive these elites to call for reform. It would seem a difficult case to make after the country elected a man to highest office that lives in a golden penthouse of a skyscraper bearing his own name in the middle of the most expensive part of America’s most expensive city.

“I love all people,” President Trump promised at a rally back in June. “But for these posts”—the posts in his cabinet—“I just don’t want a poor person.” The crowd cheered loudly. The state of play of the American pitchfork is determined in large part by this very worldview—and the three myths about the rich and poor that sustain it.

The first is the myth of the undeserving poor. American attitudes to inequality are deeply informed by our conception of the poor as lazy. In *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, Martin Gilens examines the contrast between Americans’ broad support for social spending and narrow support for actually existing welfare programs. The explanation, Gilens argues, is that Americans view the poor as scroungers—a view forged by racial representations of welfare recipients in our media.

In contrast—and this is the second myth—Americans believe in the possibility of their own upward mobility. Even if they are not rich today, they will be rich tomorrow. And even if they are not rich tomorrow, their children will be rich the next day. In a recent survey experiment, respondents overestimated social mobility in the United States by over 20%. It turns out that the overestimation is quite easy to provoke: researchers simply had to remind the participants of their own ‘talents’ in order to boost their perceptions of class mobility. Such a carrot of wealth accumulation has been shown to exert a downward pressure on Americans’ preferences for top-rate taxation.

But the third myth, and perhaps most important, concerns the wealthy. For many years, this was called trickle-down economics. Inequality was unthreatening because of our faith that the wealth at the top would—some way or another—reach the bottom. The economic science was questionable, but cultural memories lingered around a model of paternalistic capitalism that suggested its truth. The old titans of industry laid railroads, made cars, extracted oil. Company towns sprouted across the country, where good capitalists took care of good workers.

But the myth of trickling wealth has become difficult to sus-



*John D. Rockefeller
at age 90*

tain. Over the last half-century, while productivity has soared, average wages among American workers have grown by just 0.2% each year—while those at the very top grew 138%. Only half of Republicans still believe that trimming taxes for the rich leads to greater wealth for the general population. Only 13% of Democrats do.

Declining faith in trickle-down economics, however, does not necessarily imply declining reverence for the wealthy. 43% of Americans today still believe that the rich are more intelligent than the average American, compared to just 8% that believe they are less. 42% of Americans still believe that the rich are more hardworking than the average, compared to just 24 that believe they are less.

It would seem, therefore, that the trickle-down myth has been displaced by another, perhaps more obstinate myth of the 1% innovator.

The 1% innovator is a visionary: with his billions, he dreams up new and exciting ideas for the twenty-first century. Steve Jobs was one; Elon Musk is another. Their money is not idle—it is fodder for that imagination. As the public sector commitment to futurist innovation has waned—as NASA, for example, has shrunk and shrivelled—his role has become even more important. Who else will take us to Mars?

The reality, of course, is that our capitalists are anything but innovative. They're not even paternal. In fact, they are not really capitalists at all. They are mostly rentiers: rather than generate wealth, they simply extract it from the economy. Consider the rapid rise in real estate investment among the super-rich. Since the financial crash, a toxic mix of historically low interest rates and sluggish growth have encouraged international investors to turn toward the property market, which promises to deliver steady if moderate returns. Among the Forbs 400 'self-made' billionaires, real estate ranks third. Investments and technology—two other rentier industries—rank first and second, respectively.

But the myth of the 1% innovator is fundamental to the politics of inequality, because it suspends public demands for wealth taxation.

If the innovators are hard at work, and they need all that capital to design and bring to life the consumer goodies that we enjoy, then we should hold off

on serious tax reform and hear them out. Or worse: we should cheer on their wealth accumulation, waiting for the next, more expensive rabbit to be pulled from the hat. The revolt from below can be postponed until tomorrow or the next day.

All together, the enduring strength of these myths only serves to deepen the puzzle of elite anti-inequality advocacy. Why the sudden change of heart? Why not keep promoting the myths and playing down the scale of the “two-tiered society” that Charles Koch today decries?

THE UNFORTUNATE ANSWER, I BELIEVE, is that inequality has simply become *bad economics*. For decades, the dismal science waved its hands around the question of inequality. At worst, it was seen as an unfortunate by-product of development, a transitional phase along the Kuznets curve. At best, it was seen as a necessary incentive for the working class. Without the carrot of vast wealth accumulation, who would innovate?

Over the last decade, the academic tide has turned. Recent studies at the IMF and OECD have concluded that high levels of inequality hurt economic growth. They estimate a 6 to 9% reduction in American and British growth rates in the last 20 years as a result of rising inequality—in other words, falling by *half*. Such a drastic decline in developmental prospects has motivated both agencies to adopt pro-equity policy programs. “In It Together,” cheers a 2015 OECD report.

Looking closely into this literature, though, we find that most of the analysis isn’t really about inequality at all. The mechanisms that link inequality to growth are, instead, actually about deprivation. Consider the challenge of “human capital accumulation.” Many analysts suggest that inequality hurts growth because poor individuals will choose not to invest in education if it is too expensive for them to afford. Encouraging human capital accumulation is fundamentally not about taming inequality, per se, but about building effective and accessible systems of education. The same is true about health, the other key mechanism in the inequality-meets-growth literature. Poor health means poor economic performance. But improving health outcomes does not necessarily require inequality reduction at all.

We could leave it there. If deprivation is the problem, we might reason, then we should focus on deprivation. No need to run on about the new Gilded Age. Poverty is simple. We can fix it. And we should. To fill out the subtitle of the OECD’s report, “Less Inequality Benefits All.”

But these reforms still leave the basic structure of our political economy unchanged. When workers have better health care, Google will still be Google, and Goldman will still be Goldman. They will still be too big to fail and impossible to jail.

No, the program of poverty reduction advocated by America’s business elite would not hurt profit margins. On the contrary, it will grow them. Such was Henry Ford’s insight a century ago, when he advocated for decent wages on the grounds that people needed money to buy his cars. Poverty is not bad because it is poverty. Poverty is bad for business.

Read this way, the inequality agenda reveals its conservative core. Tackling inequality, for the elites that are fighting to do so, is not about sacrifice on the part of the rich. It is about making sure that the tide that lifted their boats leaks through the dam to lift those of the poor, as well.

“The poor are most definitely not poor because the rich are rich,” writes Warren Buffett, a leading billionaire critic of inequality, in the *Wall Street Journal*. “Nor are the rich underserving. Most of them have contributed brilliant innovations or managerial expertise to America’s well-being.”

It seems, then, that arrival of the anti-inequality agenda does not coincide with some moral awakening. On the contrary, much of the energy behind this new movement flows from fear. High levels of inequality threaten to foment resentment among the working classes. And high levels of working class resentment threaten to confiscate the resources that the super-rich have captured through their brilliant innovations. “I see pitchforks,” warned tech investor Nick Hanauer, in a 2014 letter to his ‘fellow Zillionaires.’

It’s a familiar scene, historically speaking. In Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s *The Leopard*, set in the *Risorgimento*, a prince confronts the forces of unification in Sicily in the nineteenth century and laments the decline of the dignified feudal order. “For everything to stay the same,” his nephew suggests to him, “everything must change.”

And so super-rich are beginning to realize. The premise of the elite embrace of the anti-inequality agenda is that “the pitchforks are coming.” But the promise of the anti-inequality agenda is to fine-tune the status quo to preserve the pecking order. “It’s not just that we’ll escape with our lives,” Hanauer writes. “It’s that we’ll most certainly get even richer.”

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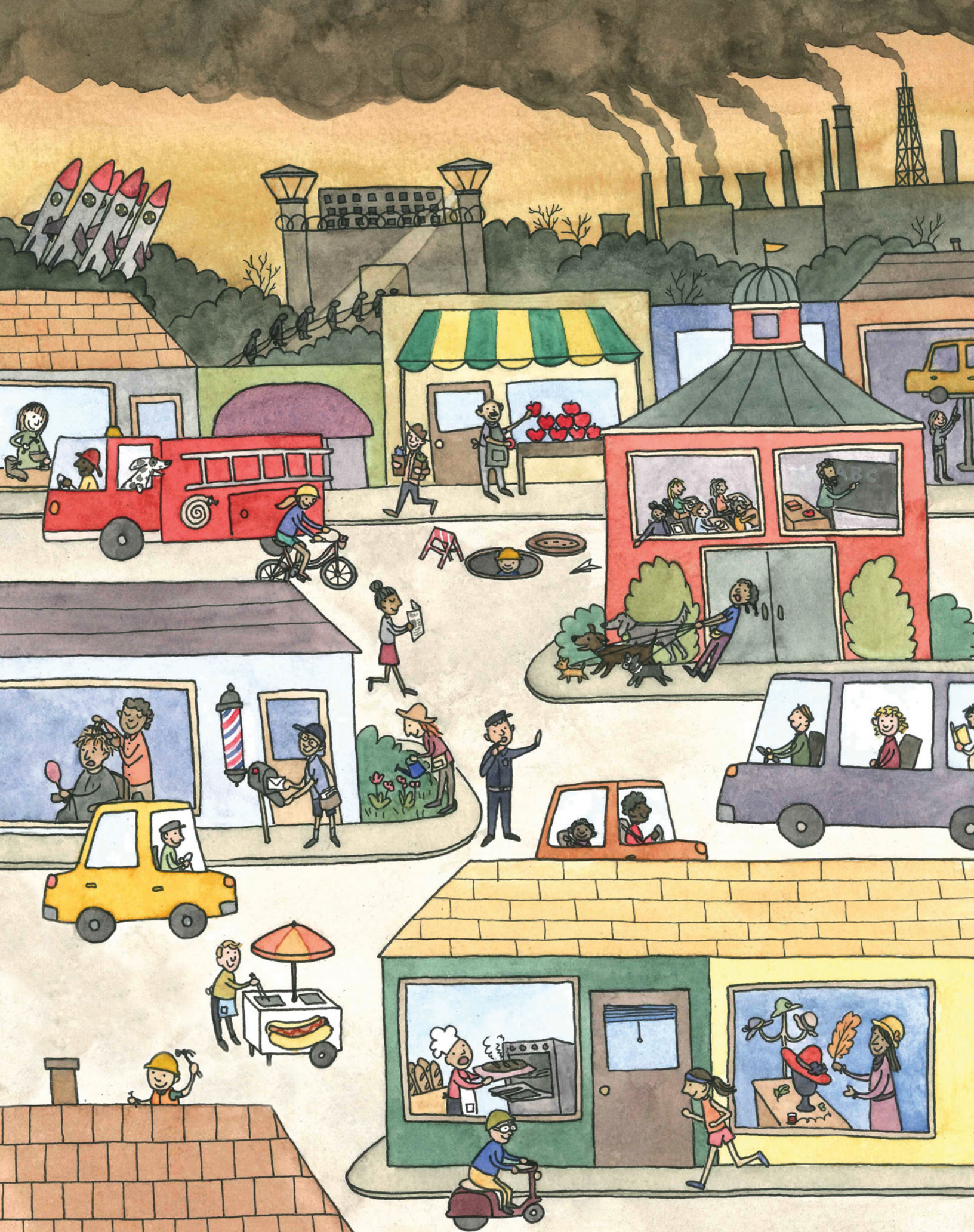
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I will spare you \$100 million — and the literal hundreds of pages it would take to reach \$1 billion. But it's a powerful exercise, I believe, because we all know exactly what we would do with \$10,000: we would pay student loans, we would pay medical bills, we would save toward a mortgage. And we can see, from the piles of \$10,000 that compose these larger figures, just how many “good” and “decent” lives can fit into the

Perhaps, then, we should drop the word all together to focus on a more fundamental concept in play here — that of power. The problem with the elite anti-inequality agenda is that it is fundamentally about the *preservation* of power. The progressive agenda, instead, must begin from the premise of *redistributing* that power. This involves progressive taxation, sure. But it extends to a much wider range of policies, laws, and institutions. Only this comprehensive evaluation can set out the terms of the inequality debate, forcing the anti-inequality elite not only to soften the consequences of inequality but to redress its causes. Because everything must change, and nothing should stay the same. ♦



LIVING IN BUSYTOWN

I HAD NEVER LIVED IN AN APARTMENT WITH A balcony before. I always lived on the first floor. If I stood at my window, I would be just above the eye-level of pedestrians. Being inside gave me roughly the same perspective on the street as being outside, except through a pane of glass. But the balcony changed all that: I am now three stories above the pavement, and I can look down and examine everybody's business.

I didn't think this would change my worldview, but it did. Just as going up in a plane turns people into ants, and inspires reflection on the smallness of human achievement and the pettiness of civilizational conflict, moving to the third floor turned my city into Busytown. The resulting observations were both charming and discouraging: I am now somewhat more hopeless about the possibility of solving existential global problems.

RICHARD SCARRY'S BUSYTOWN BOOKS SHOW happy anthropomorphic animals going about their daily lives in a small town. The animals are disproportionately cats, pigs, rabbits, dogs, and foxes. Each has a role in the town: a pig runs the drug store, a raccoon owns the hardware store, a bear teaches schoolchildren, a goat fills potholes. (Then there is Lowly the Worm, who seems to do very little of anything.) The differing careers among the species even inspired an academic article about class divides in Busytown, John Levi-Martin's "What Do Animals Do All Day: The division of labor, class bodies, and totemic thinking in the popular imagination," *Poetics* 27 (2000) pp. 195-231. An excerpt:

It is clear that foxes in particular, and predators in general, are most likely to be in positions of command (see Table 2). The mayor

is a fox, the airplane pilot is a fox, etc... Pigs and raccoons tend to be at the bottom of any authority relation. Owls are unusual in that they are totally disconnected from authority relations - evidently, they are residual craftsmen not yet proletarianized by industrialization... That the use of the pig legitimizes class stigmatization is seen in the disproportionate number of foolish mishaps that pigs cause in this work.... Fully 16% of the pigs are involved in a mishap of some kind, far more than any other species, and unlike the other species, they are the cause of the mishap 75% of the time.... These interpretive glosses are supported by our findings, but can we make sense of the scheme as a whole? Let us arrange the major classifications in a Durkheimian schema... Fig. 4 plots this order in a three-dimensional totemic space, in which the relative positions of the species provide a key both to their hierarchical relations and what Evans-Pritchard (1950 [1940]: 109f) called 'social distance': "the distance between groups of persons in a social system, expressed in terms of values". The order of animals is stretched into a U-shape. Animals at the bottom of the U may be considered to be dominated, animals on top dominating. As we shall see, while there is a logic to the horizontal placement of species, it is not to be interpreted as a single latent dimension. The dominated animals are raccoon, bug/skunk, pig, and mouse. Note that Table 5 demonstrates that the vertical dimension here correlates quite well with the percent of the species that are professionals, who have authority, and who have skilled jobs.

And so on. But to those of us who have not had the good fortune to end up as sociologists, the Busytown books are far less theoretically rich. They are simply ways of introducing children to words and concepts: the pilot flies the plane, the fire-fighter fights the fires, the butcher chops the other animals into delicious chunks... Yes, the butcher in Busytown is a pig who

cheerfully vends sausages and bacon, a phenomenon that has inspired *another* work of theoretical Scarry-analysis, “Animal cannibalism in the beloved world of Richard Scarry.” It points out that the Busytown pigs never seem to question where their pork dishes come from, and this ostensibly egalitarian world of pigs, dogs, and cats may in fact be a sinister Orwellian society in which “some animals are more equal than others.”

BUT LEAVING ASIDE—FOR THE MOMENT—THE political dimensions of Busytown, I’d like to return to my balcony. Looking out from it, I get roughly the same perspective on my city as one gets reading a Scarry book. And so I see a similar, though slightly darker, version of urban life. The UPS man delivers the packages. The beer truck unloads the beer. The flower seller opens the flower shop. The police officer frisks a youth. The drunk couple shout at each other. And what strikes you, over time, is how strange “routine” feels. Just as when you say a word over and over it loses all meaning and becomes bizarre, watching the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker from 30 feet up (the perspective of a god, though a decidedly minor one), one begins to see the rhythm rather than the people. And the rhythm is so consistent, even if there are minor variations (the package on this doorstep rather than that, gleeful drunks rather than angry drunks), that it almost feels as if we have no free will at all, that everything runs as a sort of clockwork.

Then, of course, something unusual happens, and people become people again. A parade, a block party, an accident. If you watched long enough, though, those too would begin to seem routine. And every time this feeling comes over me, this sense of all human lives wandering along narrow bounded paths through space and time, I get very worried. When you look at it from above, people do seem so much like individuals, with particular defined sets of roles. And I begin to wonder how all of these people, going “day in, day out” through their quiet rhythm, could ever come together to solve a huge collective problem?

How, I wonder, could they ever even begin to address something so monumental in its implications as climate change? How are they going to eliminate nuclear weapons? Politics seem to take place at the very fringes of this world, and its consequences seem to just *happen* to people. For a person whose day is defined by a routine—get up, bathe, eat, open the flower shop, sell the flowers, close the flower shop, go have a drink with some people, go home, eat, sleep—where is there time to be “political”? How

could the people of Busytown ever come together to stop something that threatened them all, when their lives are so defined by their particular identities? Busytown seems to have far more community spirit than most places human beings inhabit, but it’s still difficult to know how they would fix a vast problem that required all of their effort. In Busytown we are all workers, and workers’ lives are defined by their work:

Everyone is a worker

How many workers are there

One, two, three, four, five, six

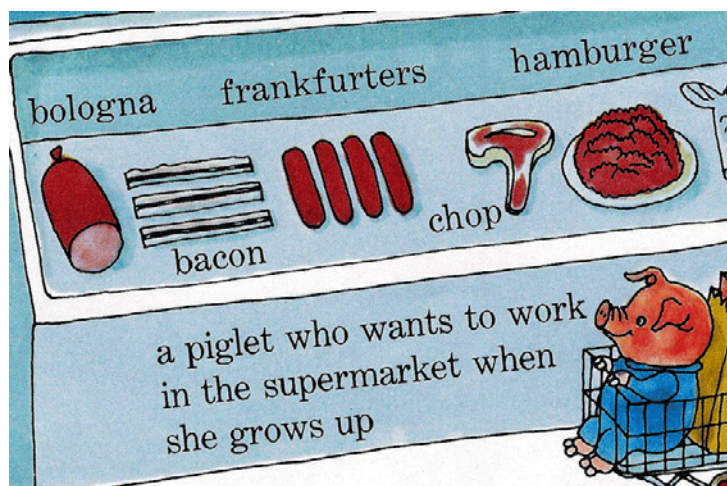
What do these workers do? ...

Up on the third floor, watching Busytown go to work, you do see something encouraging: so much of human life is pleasant and ordinary. Everything seems right with the world. But the experience of watching the world go by is like the experience of reading Scarry’s books: everything looks idyllic at first,

but there’s plenty going on that you’re not seeing. You’re not seeing the vast system of prisons that are extracting a substantial portion of the population. You’re not seeing the militarized borders keeping people out. You’re not seeing the slaughterhouses, the war zones, the landfills, the graveyards. You see public life, and public life looks fine. But in any of the houses, there could be a deeply lonely person.

A child could be growing

up in fear, a grandparent could be slowly losing their faculties. All of this is part of life, but nobody can bear to think about it, so it doesn’t show up in Busytown.



In Busytown, some pigs are definitely more equal than others.

from RICHARD SCARRY'S BEST WORD BOOK EVER

EVERY PERSPECTIVE LIES, BUT EACH LIE IS different. Look only at the world’s miseries and you miss its ecstasies. Look only from the plane or the balcony, and you miss what it’s like on the ground. Look at earth from a distance, and we’re an insignificant pale blue dot. And I suppose what anyone who wants to understand the world should do is try to figure out how it looks from every angle. Examining the world from above let me understand the flow of life better, and induced troubling thoughts about the difficulty of breaking out of daily cycles when it becomes necessary. But I am also trying to remember to climb down, to see myself as a person in the world rather than a weary detached observer. Nobody in Busytown sees themselves from above, in the third person, the way the books portray them. And they can’t, if they ever want to get any work done. ❖

CURRENT AFFAIRS IN PICTURES

Recently, a writer for the conservative *National Review* called *Current Affairs* "garbled and incomprehensible." As a publication pitched at the Literate Proletarian, with the aim of being read profitably by all, we were alarmed by this assessment. To aid those who may find our prose tendentious and/or impenetrable, we now introduce pictorial version of some recent articles. We hope that by presenting our theses in this accessible form, they will be understandable even to *National Review* writers.



"How To Be A Socialist Without Being An Apologist For Atrocities"

This article argues that one can believe in having a fair economy without justifying every single bad thing ever done in the name of having a fair economy, e.g. mass murder and forced labor camps.



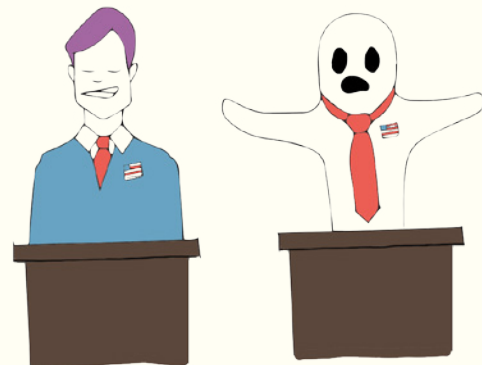
"It's Basically Just Immoral To Be Rich"

This article argues that if some people have a lot of money, and other people do not have very much money, the right thing is for the people who have a lot of money to give that money to the people who do not have very much money.



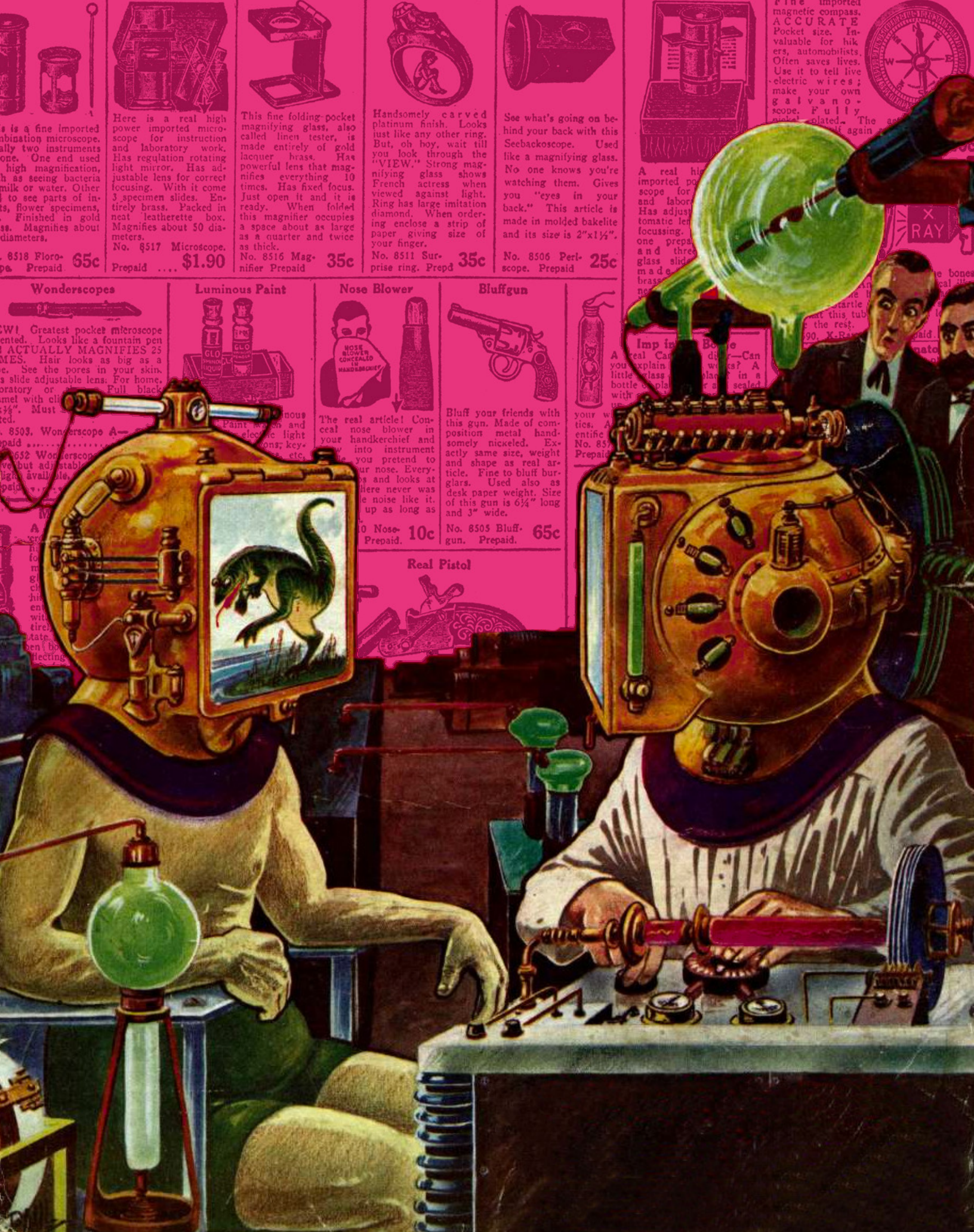
"Here Comes The Dystopia"

This article argues that private firefighting services, such as those that recently operated in California, are unfair and dystopian, because they put us on the path to a world where the only people who will have their houses saved from fires are those who can afford it.



"Ghost Candidates Are Not Acceptable"

This article argues that the Democratic Party was unwise to run a candidate for congress whom nobody had ever heard of, and who was so obscure that the media could not confirm that he actually existed. The article suggests that real people would be preferable.



is a fine imported combination microscope. Fully two instruments in one. One end used for high magnification, such as seeing bacteria in milk or water. Other end to see parts of insects, flower specimens. Finished in gold. Magnifies about 50 diameters.

No. 8518 Floro-cope. Prepaid 65c

Here is a real high power imported microscope for instruction and laboratory work. Has regulation rotating light mirror. Has adjustable lens for correct focusing. With it come 3 specimen slides. Entirely brass. Packed in neat leatherette box. Magnifies about 50 diameters.

No. 8517 Microscope. Prepaid ... \$1.90

This fine folding-pocket magnifying glass, also called linen tester, is made entirely of gold lacquer brass. Has powerful lens that magnifies everything 10 times. Has fixed focus. Just open it and it is ready. When folded this magnifier occupies a space about as large as a quarter and twice as thick.

No. 8516 Magnifier Prepaid 35c

Handsomely carved platinum finish. Looks just like any other ring. But, oh boy, wait till you look through the "VIEW." Strong magnifying glass shows French actress when viewed against light. Ring has large imitation diamond. When ordering enclose a strip of paper giving size of your finger.

No. 8511 Surprise ring. Prepaid 35c

See what's going on behind your back with this Seebackscope. Used like a magnifying glass. No one knows you're watching them. Gives you "eyes in your back." This article is made in molded bakelite and its size is 2"x1 1/4".

No. 8506 Periscope. Prepaid 25c



Fine imported magnetic compass. ACCURATE Pocket size. Invaluable for hikers, automobilists. Often saves lives. Use it to tell live electric wires; make your own galvanoscope. Fully nickel plated. The ash...



A real high imported periscope for use in laboratories and homes. Has adjustable lens for focusing. One prepared and three glass slides made in brass. No. 8503 Wonderscope A-Prepaid



X RAY

Wonderscopes

Wonderscope A-Prepaid. Greatest pocket microscope. Looks like a fountain pen. ACTUALLY MAGNIFIES 25 TIMES. Hair looks as big as a pore. See the pores in your skin. A slide adjustable lens. For home, laboratory or travel. Full black enamel with chrome. Must be used.

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Luminous Paint



Luminous Paint. Paints signs and electric light bulbs; keys, etc.

Nose Blower



The real article! Conceal your nose blower in your handkerchief and into instrument and you pretend to blow your nose. Every-

one here never was up as long as

No. 8500 Nose-Blower. Prepaid. 10c

Bluffgun

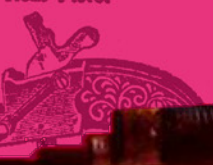


Bluff your friends with this gun. Made of composition metal hand-

somely nickeled. Exactly same size, weight and shape as real article. Fine to bluff burglars. Used also as desk paper weight. Size of this gun is 6 1/4" long and 3" wide.

No. 8505 Bluffgun. Prepaid. 65c

Real Pistol



Real Pistol. No. 8506 Real Pistol. Prepaid. 25c

Imp in Bottle

A real Can of Imps—Can you explain this? A little glass bottle in a bottle of glass. A sealed with a cork. No. 8507 Imp in Bottle. Prepaid. 25c

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