The One Thing Left That Isn't Disappointing CURRENTAFFAIRS JAN./FEB. 2018 **CRIME** HOW TO STOP IT FOREVER BEING SHAME ITS USES & ABUSES NORTH

THESE AFFAIRS

STANCES

Readers often wish to know where we stand on this or that topic, so they can formulate their opinions accordingly. But we have not yet written about all subjects. Here, then, are some editorial stances we hold.

about all subjects. Here, then, are some editorial stances we noid.	
Wearing T-shirts to work	Against
Timeliness	Against
Rooms decorated like jungles	For
Capitalism	Against
Podcasts	For
Podcasts about other Podcasts	Against
The Police	Against
Uniforms, Badges, and Sirens In Other Unrelated Contexts	For
Colorful rugs	For
Universal connectedness of all humankind	For
Identity Politics	Depends
Board Games	Against
Hopscotch	For
Stalin	Against
Corbyn	For
Tchotchkes	Depends on the tchotchk

question involves sending
Steve Mnuchin a box of poo
Prisons Against
Vast Majority of Animals For
Spiders Against

Crime

Against, unless the crime in

Spiders Against
All Other Magazines Against
Vaccines For
Invention of the Automobile No formal stance
Donald Trump as a President Against

Donald Trump as an Amusing Symbol Of All That Is Wrong With Things These Days

The Scientific Method For, as long as those using it don't get too pleased with themselves

Marching Bands For

Death Squads Against Poetry Against, w/ minor exception **Social Hierarchies Against Lack of Social Hierarchies** For For **Barrel Organs Against Gloves without fingers** For Cacti **Net Neutrality** For **Blowhards Against People Who Say They Are**

Mean
Big band music For, except before noon
Mambo #5 Against
Other Enumerated Mambos For
Rigidity Against, except like in

buildings and such

Consistency For and Against

NOT ENOUGH ABOUT RUSSIA

A reader informs us that while he has enjoyed our recent analysis and commentary on the President of the United States (whom we have daringly called a series of derogatory names), there has, on the whole, been "not enough about Russia." We originally found this comment somewhat puzzling, akin to complaining that a picture-book about bears had "not enough about cephalopods." But then we remembered the ongoing popular obsession with that bundle of suspicion and intrigue known as The Russia Thing or That Russia Stuff. Reader, let us make a confession: though our position has occasionally led us to be labeled the pliant felt hand-puppets of Comrade Putin (see Letters to the Editor, Vol. 2, Issue 6), we have generally found ourselves

unable to show much interest in the Infamous Russian Connection and its attendant investigations. This is, perhaps, a display of our bias and intellectual incoherence. But we find ourselves far more roused by subjects like "Will the planet soon be boiled alive?" and "Hev. why is it that some people die needlessly due to economic deprivation?" Not exactly the stuff of political thriller novels, we grant you. But tastes are personal. Still, a magazine cannot sit around saving whatever is on its mind. It is beholden to the Readership. It must hear their clamors and do its utmost to sate them. The Stones may have sung "You Can't Always Get What You Want," but they meant it with the implicit caveat "Unless You Read Current Affairs In Which Case You Actually

Can." Thus, we have committed ourselves to increasing mentions of all things Russian. The word "Russia" will be used more frequently, often with no connection to the subject at hand. Serious questions will be posed about whether a certain minor aristocrat who was once seen with a Trump offspring could have been an intermediary conveying secret messages of flattery between Putin and the President. Elaborate diagrams will be drawn, showing webs of loose connections among people with funny names. If you think Rachel Maddow's recent feature "Here Are All The Russians At The Davos Conference" was pointless and xenophobic, well, you ain't seen nothin' yet. We trust that in this way, American political discourse can be fruitfully advanced.

TO THE SUBSCRIBER WHO KEEPS SENDING US ORCHIDS



We appreciate the gesture but they are beginning to take up space. Further orchids will be returned to sender.

WE ARE NOT TRYING TO POISON JEFF BEZOS

Longtime readers will be aware that some mildly uncomplimentary remarks have been printed in this magazine about demented Amazon tyrant Jeff Bezos. None of these remarks was beyond the pale, exactly, but several may have rubbed suggestively against the pale. Nevertheless, in our last edition we attempted to make amends, as part of a campaign of flattery and toadying intended to convince Mr. Bezos to locate Amazon Headquarters #2 in our own beautiful city of New Orleans. As an inducement, and to give him a taste of authentic local culture, we included a crate full of colorful plastic Mardi Gras Beads. We have since, however, discovered that Mardi Gras Beads are poisonous, and contain lead, cadmium, and other noxious particulates. (See the comprehensive Wikipedia article "Environmental Impact of Mardi Gras Beads," which contains the additional disappointing factoid that they probably kill fish as well.) We are concerned, then, that our generous offering

has been misconstrued as an attempted poisoning, and believe this is the only explanation for why New Orleans did not make it to the shortlist for the head-quarters. Readers will surely know how awkward it can be when an innocuous gesture is interpreted as a death threat. We wish to assure Mr. Bezos that our sending him poison in the mail was in no way meant to offend.

ACTIVITY

Can you divide up the cookies in a way that accurately simulates the distribution of the products of labor between owners and workers under capitalism?



CORRECTIONS

In our July-August issue, we stated that architect Peter Eisenman had once built a dorm at the Cooper Union that frustrated the students with its poor design. In fact, the dorm was never built. Evidently Mr. Eisenman's proposed design was so obviously hideous and unworkable that even a university administration could not bring itself to commission it.

A reader writes:

To the Editors,

I've just finished reading the wonderful and still-relevant March/April 2016 issue, but spotted an unfortunate error on page 26, column 2, in "Such Miserable Times as These". The 1989 movie Weekend at Bernie's is referred to implicitly as being "a film about a dancing corpse." It's obvious that the article's anonymous author had in mind Weekend at Bernie's II, which can in fact loosely be described as "a film about a dancing corpse."

Thank you, J.P. McDevitt

Leftists But Then Are Really

Please only use this magazine for the purposes for which it was intended.



It is the position of some individuals that the Editor of Current Affairs is fallible in his judgments. While the Corrient Arians is railioned in its judgments. While the broader doctrine of "Current Affairs Infallibility" is still universally acknowledged ("All statements printed in this magazine are true by virtue of their having been printed in this magazine"), doubt has arisen among members of the editorial staff as to whether this applies

to the Editor himself. An increasingly vocal faction of the board believes that it does not.

A recent conflict in the editorial room must be dis-A recent commer in the eutorial room must be dis-closed to our readership: earlier this month, the Editor came into the weekly ldeas Brunch feeling "inspired." He had, he said, a concept that would "take this enterprise to the next level." Instead of merely pro-ducing a bimonthly periodical and affordable spin-off books, Current Affairs L.L.C. would branch out into the thriving Cat Calendar market with a special "Cats Of The French Quarter 2018." wall relander. "It can't me The French Quarter 2018 "wall calendar. "It can't go wrong," the Editor declared. "Cat calendars are as close to a sure thing as there is."

It was at this point that relations among the staff began to deteriorate. A Senior Editor piped up: "Why on earth would we sell a cat calendar? Aren't there like a million cat calendars already? ""Ah yes," replied the Editor. But these cats are in the French Quarter. It combines the adorable and the picturesque.

The Senior Editor remained dubious. "But are they, like, doing anything interesting? Is it supposed to be funny? Also, please tell me this isn't something that came to you in a dream.'

"It is of no matter whether this concept did or did not come to me in a dream," the Editor snapped. "Okay, but if we're going to spend a lot of time and effort on something like this, which is totally unrelated to our other work, maybe the Cats Of The French Quarter calendar should have something more interesting

"You mean like a plot?" the Editor asked.

"Un, sure?" The Senior Editor privately wondered what a calendar with a plot would even look like.

The Editor is the working and bread of the base.

The Editor left the meeting and brooded at his desk. He resented his fellow staff for failing to appreciate the vision behind the Cats of the French Quarter calendar. Nevertheless, he took seriously the Senior Editor's suggestion that Current Affairs should only sell calendars

with plots. And so he got to drafting... Soon, a new concept had been developed. The calendar would still feature cats, and they would still be in the French Quarter. But one of the cats would be a magazine editor. The calendar would be about the cat's attempts to convince the other editors of Kitten Affairs to allow the company to pivot to calendars. As viewers tore off months, they would see the progressive struggles of the misunderstood genius editor (named Cat Dastardly) as he dealt with the stupidity and cowardice of his lessas ne oeart with the supplorly and convarione of his less-ers. There would also be a subplot about time travel. Eventually, in December, Cat Dastardly would finally succeed in persuading his deputy, Whisters Killjoy, to allow the production of a metafictional calendar about a time-traveling magazine editor who is also a kitten. It would be called "Cat Dastardly and the Sands of Time. The observation to recognification are an explanation for units

The above is presented as an explanation for why our promised "Cats of the French Quarter" calendar will not be appearing as scheduled.

CAN ANIMALS BE JUSTIFIED?

Every issue of Current Affairs is special, but some are special in their own special ways. Our last issue, for instance, was called "The Economics Special" because a disproportionate amount of its contents dealt with inequality and the financial system. This was not intentional; we would never deliberately set out to inflict economic analysis on our readership. We are not monsters. (There is one publication, which shall remain unnamed, that has literally named itself in honor the dismal science. We find it hard to fathom what depravity of mind could lead one to feel this was a good idea.) But sometimes we look at a finished edition of Current Affairs and one editor will say to another, "I say, Ms. P___, looks as if we've gone a bit heavy on the econ this month, what?" And Ms. P___will reply "Good lord, Monsieur ____, how right you are. Well, we shall just have to call it a 'Special Edition' and imply that it was deliberate." And so it is done.

This month, there are more animals than usual in the issue. There is a lion. There is a crow. There are at least several others. It has therefore been decreed that this issue be called our "Animals Special." Of course, there are no actual articles about animals. But at this point, pretty much everyone knows what animals are, don't they? Or at least, they have some vague notion. There may still be hotly contested academic debates on the subject "Is an animal a 'process' or a 'thing'?" But generally the literature is settled.

There are separate normative questions to be asked about the kingdom of nonhuman beasts, e.g. "Can animals be justified?" This is a more serious inquiry than it may appear on first or even ninth glance. For there is a finite amount of resources available on the earth, yet some of us possess pet chinchillas while live humans suffer from malnourishment. Is this reasonable? Can helping animals be justified in a world where all the humans have not yet been helped, or is this some kind of "put on your own oxygen mask before your smother your child" scenario? We could, of course, say that animals have an equal entitlement to the outputs of the earth's bosom as we do. But that, too, comes with its own discomforting implications: those of us on the left frequently speak of distributing a Universal Basic Income to all of humankind. But if animals are people too, should they not share in this bounty? The concept of an "arthropod UBI" has been too little discussed in the literature, even though it is obviously one of the more morally pressing issues of our time.

Animals, then, contain many philosophical fruits that are ripe for the juicing. They "raise questions," so to speak. We cannot pretend that all of these questions will be answered, or even asked, within these pages. But what we can pretend is that this issue is in some way about animals, despite mentioning them only rarely. If we succeed at our task, even the smallest child should find that sufficient perusal of this edition will cause one eventually to encounter a skillfully-drawn picture of an octopus.



BIPARTISAN COLA-

ENGLISH FIZZ—Tastes like all the world's cultures and flavors stolen and mixed together until thoroughly bland

LENIN-ADE—Self-explanatory

BOTTLED SHAME—Tastes terrible, but PAST-ADE—Musty with an aftertaste

PYONGYANG POP—First chilly and bitter

LONELINESS ALE—There's... a lot of



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INCLUSION in the ATROCIOUS

by Eli Massey & Yasmin Nair

O YOU HAVE A MINUTE FOR TRANS RIGHTS?"

Every summer for over a decade, in nearly every major American metropolis, innocent window shoppers, bohemians, and tourists have been accosted by clip-boarded assailants from Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest LGBT non-profit organization, inquiring imperiously: "Do you have a minute for gay rights?" In more recent years, "trans" has also been used alongside "gay," and by June 2016, it seemed that "trans rights," as conceived by mainstream organizations like HRC, had reached a milestone when Secretary of Defense Ash Carter declared that trans people could serve openly in the military.

Yet on July 26, 2017, in a reversal that shocked many, President Donald Trump announced, via Twitter, a complete and total ban on transgender people in the armed forces. The policy was about as well thought-out as most of Trump's policies, leaving the Pentagon surprised, and his press team scrambling to answer simple questions like, "What happens to transgender people currently serving?" Speaking to *Teen Vogue*, Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of GLAAD, accused Trump of "issu[ing] a direct attack on transgender Americans... denying some of our bravest Americans the right to serve and protect our nation." Ellis's words suggested the matter was and is straightforward: Trump is a transphobe and the military ought to be a place that doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender identity.

On one level, of course, Ellis was completely right: denying anyone the opportunity to serve in the military on the basis of their gender identity is unfair, and though it shouldn't need to be said, *discrimination is bad*. But the push for trans inclusion in the military, much like the push to include women and gays and lesbians, can't simply be framed as a matter of "inclusion" versus "discrimination." That's because, given the brutal history of

United States military action, we also have to ask important questions about the meaning of participating in unjust institutions. Singling out the issue of inclusion without examining the institution itself produces morally incoherent stances. It can be akin to asking "Should women be allowed to serve in death squads?" or "Is the Mafia unfairly ethnocentric?" or "How can we racially diversify the board of Goldman Sachs?" In each instance, discussing the question requires one to accept the institution itself.

Queer radical activists and thinkers like Karma Chávez, Dean Spade, and Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore have argued that the fight for inclusion in the military, when seen only in terms of representation, not only elides questions about war, but also the issue of who serves to begin with. It has long been the case that the most vulnerable populations—queer, trans, and the poorest among us—are disproportionately the ones who end up becoming cannon fodder, while the children of the wealthy get to stay at home. After the racial desegregation of the armed forces, for example, even when there was greater "equality" among soldiers of different races, it remained necessary to analyze the economic and social factors that actually drove people of color into the military. Martin Luther King, in the speech against the Vietnam War that alienated him from those who saw race as separable from other questions of power, made the links explicit:

It became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home [through redirecting money to war that could be going to social programs]. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die

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COVER ARTIST



Aleksandra Waliszewska together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.

One cannot break off a single piece of the system, i.e. equality in enlistment practices, and ignore the rest of it. When proponents of inclusion rhapsodize about the human rights of LGBT people, we have to ask: what about the human rights of people abroad, many of whom are also doubtless LGBTQ, killed by American bullets and bombs? Setting aside who makes up the armed forces, we have to ask: what do they actually do? The United States military is probably the most destructive force on earth today. Our actions in Iraq alone destroyed the country, led to the death of 500,000 Iraqis, and destabilized the region. In April, Trump, in a vulgar display of strength, dropped the so-called Mother Of All Bombs (MOAB)—the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used—in Afghanistan, where our longest war (16 years) marches on with no end in sight. In Yemen, the Saudi-led, US-backed coalition has killed hundreds of civilians and deployed US-supplied white phosphorus, which burns human flesh down to the bone. Our actions in Syria, covert and overt, have fomented chaos, intensified the violence, and prolonged the suffering. And that's just a small sampling of recent history in the Middle East alone...

It's not just other countries that are dealt devastation. The US military has been noted for its failure to deal adequately with sexual assault, even going so far as to kick out service members who have been assaulted after they have complained. According to *TIME*, "[t]housands of victims have been pushed out of the service with less-than-honorable discharges, which can leave them with no or reduced benefits, poor job prospects and a lifetime of stigma." As Cordes points out, sexual assault is perpetrated or shielded by top military personnel, and it was even recently reported that several members of a task force appointed with preventing sexual assault in the military are being investigated for rape and sexual assault.

Add to all this the discrimination faced by most trans people and the fundamental gender inequality in the military, where women are still considered disposable sexual objects, alongside ongoing issues like racism and mental health concerns. The result is a toxic environment that makes already vulnerable trans soldiers even more susceptible to social, cultural, and mental crises. This is not even to mention what actually happens to soldiers on the battlefield, and the many combat veterans who struggle with a lack of healthcare, PTSD, and homelessness upon leaving the service. As Cordes concludes, because "the US will happily throw your body in harm's way," one may wonder whether the equal right to be mistreated and subjugated in a violent, hierarchical institution is worth fighting for.

T THE END OF OCTOBER OF LAST YEAR, A FEDERAL JUDGE temporarily blocked Trump's proposed ban, writing in her opinion that it "does not appear to be supported by any facts." Subsequent court rulings have required the military to accept transgender recruits beginning January 1 of this year. The Trump administration has decided not to appeal the ruling. But trans inclusion in the military will continue to loom large in the public roster of LGBT issues, particularly as the legal battle continues to play out. The emphasis is also likely to be sustained by LGBT groups that, having won the Holy Trinity of causes (gay marriage, hate crime legislation, and the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell) are looking for something new to get behind and fundraise around. HRC has jumped on the issue, despite a spotty prior record of fighting for trans people. (In 2007 they were the largest LGBT organization that declined to oppose a version of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act that excluded trans people.) After decades of neglect, trans issues have suddenly become immensely fashionable in the gay non-profit industrial complex.

The way that "Gay Inc." determines national LGBT lobbying priorities is important to remember, because it is a reminder that these political battles inevitably exclude certain populations whose interests may differ from those of the elite, such as those who want to have their human rights respected without having to clamor for "representation" or prove themselves exemplary and unthreatening citizens. We already saw this in the fight over gay marriage. First, of course, there are plenty of LGBT people who couldn't care less about marriage, or who

see it as a bourgeois institution they want nothing to do with. But it's not just that the fight for marriage wasn't a universally shared priority; it actually disadvantaged those LGBT people uninterested in marriage. One of the major arguments in favor of gay marriage emphasized equal access to healthcare. Yet as *Forbes* reports, since the legalization of gay marriage in the United States:

...growing numbers of employers have eliminated domestic partner health coverage and been requiring same-sex couples to be married before an employee's partner can receive health care benefit... The rationale is that there's no need to continue to offer domestic partner coverage now that same-sex partners can tie the knot.

Since everyone *could* marry, they *had* to marry, meaning that gays and lesbians were forced to enter into matrimony if they wanted insurance coverage. In this way, the long-standing queer political demand for universal healthcare—one made constantly by queers during the AIDS crisis—was erased, in favor of a different demand: equal access to marriage as a route to health.

It is perverse to make people participate in an institution they deplore in order to access resources that should be guaranteed to all. That should make some of the arguments for trans access to the military even more disturbing. It's the source of a stable job, free healthcare, and funding for college, and many people join for those reasons. But what can possibly be good about a society where trans people must sign up for the possibility of losing life and limb in order to be guaranteed such basic entitlements?

OME MIGHT BE UNTROUBLED BY THE AGENDA-SETTING role of elite organizations. "So what? Why does it matter who made inclusion a priority? Discrimination is both unlawful and immoral, and some people are getting benefits." How benefits are distributed among LGBT people matters just as much as whether they are given to LGBT people as a whole. It's crucial to remember that political energy is finite. All time and resources being spent on one issue is not being spent on another. When military inclusion is brought to the fore, issues like universal housing are shunted to the side, putting conservative issues like military diversity over matters that truly benefit far larger numbers of people. We can't ignore the specific power structures that gave rise to the push for inclusion, or ignore the ways in which money and political self-interest guide the direction of movements.

Issues do not enter and exit the public stage at random, but they are introduced by people with particular sets of interests. Opportunism can even be present in the resistance to trans inclusion. Donald Trump doesn't, of course, care in the least about trans people. But he may also be motivated by something more than pure, seething transphobia. In fact, according to *Politico*, Trump's sudden decision to announce the transgender service ban was motivated by a desire to salvage a House spending bill containing funding for his border wall. Trump, who has never previously shown much of an inclination to launch right-wing cultural crusades on LGBT issues, dropped mention of the subject when it ceased to promise any political dividends.

Likewise, we have to look at the sources of support for the inclusion initiative. In a prescient 2013 interview, Dean Spade, a trans advocate and lawyer, pointed out that the issue was merely bubbling somewhere in the background until it was taken on by one Jennifer Pritzker. If that last name sounds familiar, it should: a scion of the infamous, Chicago-based Pritzker family, she is described as the world's first and only transgender billionaire. Pritzker, a retired lieutenant colonel, served in the military for an extensive period of time: 11 years in the army and 16 more in the National Guard. In 2003, she founded the Pritzker Military Library, and in 2015, her organization gave \$1.35 million to an LGBT think tank at UC-Santa Barbara in order to found the Transgender Military Service initiative, aimed at bringing the topic to greater public discussion.

Spade observed that the Pritzker push for military inclusion distracts from more pressing issues facing trans people:

The campaign for military inclusion not only does nothing to support the grassroots work addressing the most urgent issues trans people face, it is actually likely to harm this work. As the Pritzker money pushes a national conversation on trans military service, all the red herrings used against trans people will play out in the national media. The right wing will have a field day with questions about how trans people use bathrooms and showers, whether government money should pay for gender-related health care, and whether and when we have to report our genital statuses.

Indeed, that is exactly what did happen, as trans inclusion in the military captured the imagination of liberals and leftists, and the country was roiled by persistent efforts to block trans people from using public bathrooms. But it's worth asking why we have the particular kinds of conversations we do, and who cares the most about shaping them. And, without saying that Jennifer Pritzker is "unrepresentative" of trans people—which would presume an essentialist notion of trans identity in which some people are more trans than others—one can point out that without the financial and political clout of the "world's first and only trans billionaire," trans inclusion in the military probably would not have become an item that flew to the top of LGBT groups' agendas.

UT IF PRITZKER REPRESENTS THE "PERFECT" TRANS person for the elite political class—wealthy beyond comprehension, and willing to push for conservative causes—it's also instructive to consider the fate of a trans person who doesn't have this kind of power and influence: Chelsea Manning.

Let's grant that we're all better off having had Manning serve in the military. But she was such an asset precisely because she did not "participate" in the institution according to its rules, but took it on, blowing the whistle and exposing government wrongdoing, including the murder of *Reuters* war correspondents by US armed forces. Manning's class background made military enrollment a natural fit. With a troubled home life, Manning took the Faustian bargain that so many smart, poor kids are tempted into, entering the Army to take advantage of the GI bill and hoping to pursue a PhD in Physics.

But that, as we know, was not to be. Manning found herself in an untenable position, with access to explosive information about her government's complicity in murder, and sought to make things right. Initially sentenced to 35 years in prison, she was subjected to conditions described by the UN special rapporteur on torture as "cruel, inhuman, and degrading." She was placed in solitary confinement for nine months before her trial, then punished with solitary again after a suicide attempt. (As her time in solitary was beginning, she responded with another suicide attempt.) The threat of additional solitary confinement hung over her for minor infractions including possessing contraband like expired toothpaste and an issue of Vanity Fair with Caitlyn Jenner on the cover. And it was only after the ACLU sued the federal government that Manning was provided with hormone treatment for her gender dysphoria. To the end of Manning's imprisonment, the military denied her the right to grow out her hair in an effort to further feminize her appearance, a treatment recommended by a psychologist.

As all of this was occurring, many gay and trans organizations remained deafeningly silent. Some prominent LGBT military advocates openly condemned Manning as a "liar" and a "traitor" (and intentionally misgendered her). HRC tweeted about Chelsea Manning once, when she was released, and issued few statements about her persecution. One HRC press release about her concluded in the final sentences that "What should not be lost is that there are transgender servicemembers and veterans who serve and have served this nation with honor, distinction and great sacrifice. We must not forget or dishonor those individuals. Pvt. Manning's experience is not a proxy for any other transgender man or woman who wears the uniform of the United States." The obvious insinuation was that not all transgender people serving in the military are traitors.

Individual transgender military activists were at least showing their true colors in angrily denouncing what they saw as Manning's betrayal of the country. They believe in military culture and values, and since Manning was punished for matters unrelated to her gender identity, it did not matter that her transgender status was worsening the impact of punishment. She was a traitor first and a transgender person second. HRC's inaction, on the other hand, may have come more from financial self-interest than a sincere belief in American empire. Back in 2013, reporter Christopher Carbone speculated in the *Guardian* that the quiescence of LGBT groups about Manning's plight was motivated, in part, by their financial ties to the defense industry. He pointed out that HRC is funded by military-industrial corporations like Lockheed Martin, Booz Allen Hamilton, and Northrop Grumman, all of which have made HRC's list of Best Places to Work for LGBT Equality.

Manning's treatment at the hands of both the military and LGBT organizations proves the fallacy of seeing "inclusion" as a coherent political issue, one that self-evidently benefits LGBT people equally. Inclusion or not, one's fate as a trans person is going to be far more determined by whether one poses a challenge to American empire or dutifully allows the US to use one's body to further its national interest.

T CAN BE AWKWARD TO CRITICIZE THE EXISTING PARADIGM on inclusion issues. Trump's public actions have shifted the discussion: because many of his policies (and his supporters) are so openly transphobic, and because trans people face many other forms of discrimination elsewhere, it has become difficult to claim a more complicated position against trans inclusion in the military without seeming to be tacitly supporting the right's anti-trans bigotry. There is an expectation that everyone should strike a defensive posture in a moment of crisis: you're either with us or with the transphobes.

Even progressive-left outlets like Democracy Now! routinely feature voices promoting the liberal agenda of inclusion. In a November 2017 segment, responding to the recent federal ruling rejecting Trump's ban, two guests on the program—a transgender marine and the director of GLAAD's Transgender Rights Project—waxed poetic about "people who are currently serving in the military, who have been serving for decades, proudly and courageously" and "the fundamental constitutional right to serve our country." But the last thing we need is a left that parrots all of the right's deceitful patriotic bromides about how wonderful and courageous and noble everyone in the military is. The left's message should be clear: the military is a terrible place in which to seek inclusion. It is built around hierarchy and violence. Making it a slightly better place for LGBT people is of limited worth.

In the rush to criticize Trump over the trans ban, people on the left ended up affirming the consensus that the military is a positive force in civic life. In an interview on Democracy Now! about the the inclusion of gays in the military, Lieutenant Dan Choi declared that "War is a force that gives us meaning. War is a force that teaches us lessons of humanity and allows us to realize something about our society." Yet, shockingly, host Amy Goodman — who founded the show with the tagline "The War and Peace Report" — went on to write op-eds praising Choi, like "Lt. Choi Won't Lie For His Country," describing Choi getting an affirming message from an Iraqi doctor "whose hospital [he] helped rebuild." ("Rebuild after what?" we might ask.) Whenever a marginalized group seeks inclusion in an institution, even if that institution is Raytheon and the members of the marginalized group in question are wealthy amoral militarists, the left is willing to suspend its usual critique of those institutions.

> GBT ACTIVISTS AND THEIR LIBERAL SUPPORTERS LIKE Rachel Maddow are fond of using the words of Theodore Parker—paraphrased by Martin Luther King, Jr. and usually misattributed to him—to discuss what they imagine as progress in LGBT rights: "The arc of the moral universe is long,

but it bends toward justice." This positions trans inclusion in the military as the natural efflorescence of a slow but steady upwards growth of the flower of LGBT liberation. In writing about and discussing the issue of trans inclusion in the military, liberals and lefties have been swayed and in some sense silenced by the rhetoric of inclusion, love, and belonging. It's possible, of course, to say that, notwithstanding left political ideals about war and the military, trans people who wish to serve should be allowed to. But critics of inclusion aren't saying they shouldn't be allowed. We are simply pointing out that *only* focusing on inclusion means ignoring even more pressing problems, namely the death and violence wrought by the institution itself.

Trans people face significant inequalities. In this, they are not unlike the many other marginalized communities in the US. But the difference for trans people is that many can face instant expulsion from their families and communities the moment they announce themselves as trans. That frequently comes about at a later stage in life, and can cause sudden economic precarity, made even more difficult as they attempt to access expensive hormones and treatments. Trans people are disproportionately prone to suicide, precisely because of this exclusion and deprivation. They are more likely to be murdered, especially those whose lack of career options forces them into dangerous forms of street-based sex work. Trans access to culturally sensitive healthcare—the kind where they are not routinely humiliated and poked and prodded like circus animals—is abysmal, and the situation is much worse for the many who are incarcerated. None of these conditions of systemic inequality and brutality is addressed by compelling people to enter an already violent institution like the military, and they are not alleviated by any gestures towards diversifying the place.

The relevant questions in discussing trans inclusion in the military ought to be: what are the likely material benefits, what are the likely material harms, and what are the consequences of discussing the presence of trans personnel only in terms of a matter of fairness to the included, without consideration of the larger forces that benefit from that inclusion? Inclusion can be symbolically powerful, and nobody should scoff at symbols. (Danica Roem's recent ascent to the Virginia House of Delegates and Chelsea Manning's bid for Senate, for instance, are both deeply powerful markers of necessary change.) But the symbolism can actually have perverse effects: when a vulnerable group is granted inclusion in an unjust institution, that institution is stamped with a kind of imprimatur of fairness and legitimacy. It suddenly becomes much more difficult to criticize the unjustness of that institution or make a systemic critique: "Our country can't be that racist. We had a black president." There is a reason that the Israeli Defense Forces proudly showcases the stories of Arab Muslim and Christian soldiers who serve within its ranks: symbolic inclusion is a fine way of masking systemic exclusion.

Did we celebrate Obama's historic candidacy? Of course. But we were also skeptical of the way his identity could serve to make his policies appear more progressive than they actually were, the way the symbol functioned to deflect attention from the reality. Obama was a Deporter in Chief who loved his drones and showed endless fealty to Wall Street. Black Americans as a whole did not do well during Obama's presidency, and the black wealth wiped out in the financial crisis was never restored. Yet progressive outrage about this was muted by the fact that Obama's presidency made the country seem more racially just than it actually was. If inclusion actually produces perverse consequences for all members of the marginalized group except the few individuals who are welcomed into the inner circle, it is worth wondering whether it can be counted as a "benefit" to the group at all.

Failing to challenge the premises of inclusion means forfeiting crucial political terrain. And it doesn't disrespect the humanity of trans people to point out the conservatism of demands for inclusion in atrocious institutions. Selective attention to injustice poses a far greater risk to LGBT people than does the refusal to spend one's time agitating for equal participation in empire. *



Tour Guide: All aboard! Strap yourself in-don't take up too much space-and please, hold all comments to the end. When credentialed authorities speak, the ignorant masses ought to stay silent, don't you agree? Of course you do!

Now-before we set off-a few words about our time machine. This lovely device you're seated in is a joint project by our dear friends at Lockheed Martin and the U.S. Department of Education. Our research has

confines of the present moment and take a really hard, serious look at our past. Once you've seen the most important and exciting events in the history of centrism, I think you'll understand how perfect and inevitable it was that we arrived here, on this flat, shrinking, globalized earth, the best of all possible worlds.

Are you strapped in? Are you ready? Too bad if you aren't, because technological progress will leave you behind regardless, ha-ha!

ual dancing, no more elaborately decorated huts, no more calorie-heavy feasts... they were really living above their means, weren't they, and getting chubby too, am I right? Give Orrag credit: he's really trimmed the fat. The Antelope People have become a lean, mean, producing machine!

(inaudible murmuring)

Sure, it was a hostile takeover. But that's how it goes. Whoever wins is morally justified in

FOR YOUNG SENSIBLE TECHNOCRATS ENGAGING IN MERITOCRATIC INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTRISM

shown that today's young people are indifferent to history. You millennials just want to protest, grade-grub, and complain about your identities. You eat too many avocados and not enough diamonds, you despise hard work and property ownership, you refuse to acknowledge the glory of a global capitalism that allows you constant real-time updates on all your favorite sexual abuse scandals! It's not enough to have a supercomputer strapped to your wrist, all you can talk about is the people who made the supercomputer and mined its constituent parts, their working conditions and power dynamics blah blah blah, skyrocketing inequality and it's all so unfair, I don't want to participate in this vicious system, I can't afford my rent, I'm terrified of getting sick because my insurance is garbage, I'm anxious and exhausted all the time, blah blah blah, me me me!

Well, that's why we're taking this journey today. It's time to step outside the narrow

(Deep whirring noises. The windows blaze with watercolor light. There's a moment of terrible, wrenching inertia—and the noises stop. The windows clear.)

Tour Guide: Now, we begin deep in the wilds of prehistory. The year is 4484 BC, and the local warlord is Orrag the Basher. Yes, that's his army, racing through the grassland. And that's Orrag in front, raising his club oof! You can see how he earned his name.

Now, I don't want to make any excuses for our friend Orrag here. He is a tad on the aggressive side. But on the other hand, it's pretty clear that the Antelope People weren't operating their agricultural fields at full capacity. In order to compete in a rapidly expanding global marketplace, they needed to increase their grain output by at least 130%... so let's skip ahead a little... and yes, see how much more productive the Antelope People have become? Orrag cut a lot of unnecessary overhead. No more silly rittheir victory, because if you have something, it means you earned it. Orrag and his soldiers obviously worked harder, that's all.

And let's be real: given the chance, the Antelope People would have become conquerors themselves. You see, human beings have always been nasty, brutish, and sectarian. In fact, we've never evolved beyond our early conditioning. Thanks to the rigorous science of evolutionary psychology, we know that, deep down in our cortexes, we're still the same competitive, cruel, status-obsessed, selfish, tribalist apes we've always been...

(one voice murmuring)

What's that? Are you suggesting there's no hard scientific evidence to support this theory?

(same voice murmuring)

Really? Not a single, identifiable genetic structure? Just a collection of unprovable hypotheses, and soft science data which might only indicate contemporary cultural biases?

(voice murmuring again)

But if that's true, then surely reputable scientists would no longer advance such an unpromising theory. As they do, we must assume its veracity. Well! Moving on!

(Deep whirring noises. The windows fade to watercolor, and then to mist.)

Now we're navigating the murky waters of myth-history. If you look closely out the lifting stone slabs to make inert, functionally useless monuments for the immortal glory of their leaders! Also, they were paid in beer. That's an ideal condition for you millennials, am I right? Payment in beer? It was even technically micro-brewed!

(silence)

Well. I think you'll agree that the technological marvel of the pyramids is worth a

(Rapid whirring, and more glowing watercolors—a bump of inertia, fading into bright, dusty sunlight)

We've arrived at the Theatre of Pompey, the Roman senatorial chamber. Even with your limited, touchy-feely education, you'll probably recognize the death of Caesar. Ouch! Yikes! That sure is a lot of knives!

You may be surprised I've brought you



viewports, you'll see the pyramids of Giza. These immortal monuments were built only for the greatest leaders and innovators of Egyptian society. Tragically, most tombs were looted over the years by greedy, grubby locals, who sold the golden treasures of their kings for "food" and other "necessaries."

(murmuring)

The people who looted the pyramids may have been the descendants of the slaves who built them? Well. At SYSTEMIC, we don't really like to use the word "slave." It has a great deal of hurtful historical resonance—in fact, it's unpleasant for us to hear that word, and we ask you to respect our desire not to be hurt by words that make us feel unpleasant. We prefer the term "contracted agents." Yes, the pyramids were likely built by some sort of contracted agents, but there really isn't much evidence they were ill-treated. Maybe these contracted agents enjoyed cutting and

certain amount of human suffering. But before we leave, I do want to touch on the mythic part of the story. If you go by the biblical legend, then 400 years of sensible partnership between the Egyptians and the Hebrews were shattered by the unauthorized Exodus. Even if these-let's call them foreign guest workers-were treated somewhat unfairly, was it really necessary to hurl Pharaoh and all his soldiers and chariots into the sea? Surely, if both sides had sat down and really listened, they could have reached some kind of practical compromise. Instead we have this myth—this terrible, misguided myth—that it's perfectly okay for workers to just walk away en masse from a job they don't like. I hope you'll understand how dangerous and destructive this story really is.

(murmuring)

Hold your questions to the end, please! We've got an appointment in Rome.

to this particular point in time. Wasn't the death of Caesar one of the events that signaled the end of Rome's already limited democracy? And how, you may be asking, could the end of a democracy count as a victory for centrism? Well! I'll tell you. The transition to empire—under the hand of Augustus-brought a much needed end to a period of populist unrest. As citizens of the 21st century, we would obviously prefer democracy, but sometimes people need to be ruled by strongmen rather than give way to the chaos of civil disorder. If you look closely at the early Roman empire, it was really a lot "freer" than many of our so-called current "democracies." Citizens enjoyed civil discourse and open inquiry—in fact, Augustus was so committed to the art of civility that he exiled poets for writing crude, impolitic verse! And on top of that, he really unleashed the creative/destructive capabilities of the Roman Empire. The Romans moved fast and

broke things; they conquered a great deal of the globe, spreading the light of Western civilization and progress—

Yes, you in the back—you keep waving your hand, even though, as I said, I'm not taking questions at this time—

(murmuring)

Ok-you want to know if we're going to cover any events from the point of view of the Near East, sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia,

I've asked—I've really asked you more than once, and-hey, let's show some respect here! Let's be polite, ok? Let's hold all questions and comments to the end, please!

Obviously, a certain degree of violence is necessary. All human beings are inherently selfish and tribalistic after all! But if you look at the Crusades, you see a beautiful moment of unity—the Christian West, uniting in common cause against the terrible threat of people living peaceably on their own lands. Who

(talk grows louder)

All right! Let's skip ahead.

(Loud machine whirring. The stage tilts dramatically, then rights itself. The windows clear, but they're barred with graceful iron railings.)

We've arrived at the triumph of Reason. Paris, the 18th century. It's the age of Voltaire, and witty repartee in exclusive salons. The birth of meritocracy. Why, if you were smart



South Asia, or the Americas before Columbus? Let me say, right here and now, that the planet is full of noble civilizations with vast and complex histories which we fully respect, absolutely. We're totally committed to racial equality, here at SYSTEMIC. You can believe us, because we keep insisting on it.

(More whirring, and glowing light. The TOUR GUIDE starts speaking before the image resolves.)

In fact, our next stop takes us to Syria. The year is 1098... now, you might say that the Crusades were a violent, shameful historical period. But it's important to hear both sides—that's not an ideology, incidentally, just good common sense. While we deplore the terrible violence of the Crusades, we have to remember that the West enjoyed many social and technological innovations as a result of the invasion, so really, we have to take the bad with the good.

(murmuring, crosstalk)

knows what would have happened if the West hadn't intervened? All kinds of terrible instability might have been unleashed—I mean, more than the instability that actually occurred. Plus, if you think about it, the Crusades could've been much more violent, much more depraved. Every situation could *always* be worse.

You see, a good centrist doesn't see the glass as half-empty or half-full. A good centrist looks at a chalice half-filled with children's blood and says, "Well, at least it wasn't filled all the way!"

(more crosstalk, loud and heated but still inaudible)

You know: that's the problem with you millennials. Your expectations are too high. If you want too much peace and happiness you'll only be disappointed. Progress is a slow and steady tortoise. Not every civilization develops—or can be allowed to develop—at the same rate. Rationally, we have to accept thatand ambitious enough, you too could rise up the ranks and participate in civil society, even if you were merely the son of a wealthy lawyer! Look in at the window-such elegance! Flowing wine and gilded wigs, the absolute attention to manners, the proper forms of things...

(angry crosstalk)

(TOUR GUIDE sighs)

You want to talk about the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Of course. More identity politics. You know, this is the same attitude that led to the revolution. The age of Voltaire was an age of spirited questioning, of discourse and real progress. Liberal democracy was coming, but the people spoiled it. They weren't willing to wait-

(laughter, crosstalk)

Because they were starving? You know, if you actually look at the numbers, I'll think you'll find that human mortality from deprivation actually *decreased* in Paris between 1788 and 1789 by a full 2%! Look at the numbers and tell me that isn't progress!

(crosstalk intensifies)

Yes, and so what? What about Haiti? Surely the slaves—er, contracted agents—would have been freed eventually. If only they'd had the patience to wait for the proper historical moment—you know, there's always a respectful

could only continue along the path of liberal democracy and muscular economic progress. Sure, we know there will be occasional setbacks. We're experiencing one right now. But the if you look at the grand overall data set, you'll see the numbers trend in only one direction—up and up and up forever.

(crosstalk)

Look at the numbers! Fewer dead from war, illness, poverty, disease—

is in the middle, following the narrow, winding path of reason through the mountains of insanity... we aim to reduce the number of people who must necessarily die so that our most brilliant innovators can achieve—

(shouting)

Progress is always right! Progress can't be disproven. If you just look at the numbers they'll take away all your doubt, all your anxiety—even when people die unnecessarily,



time and place to bring up this sort of thing—

(crosstalk and muffled shouting)

Well! Obviously we need to put some funds into a Tour of Historical Politeness! I'll contact our friends at Lockheed—but before that, we have one last stop. And after that—at the *appropriate* time—you can ask all the questions you like.

(This time, the machine thumps and roars. When the windows clear, the noises don't stop.)

I'd hope to put this into proper context, but you millennials have short attention spans. So. Here we are, our last stop: November, 1989. The fall of the Berlin Wall. The greatest triumph in the history of centrism. In fact, it marked the end of history itself.

I know this concept is confusing, so bear with me. When the Berlin Wall fell, the grand utopian myths—the plans to shake up and destroy the world—died with it. From this moment forward, human civilization

(crosstalk)

Well, yes, if your loved ones are among the dead, then I suppose—to repeat your colorful colloquialism—you "don't give a shit about the math"—but the numbers remain the numbers. The facts remain the facts. And the facts clearly show that modern history is one slow steady climb toward better numbers.

(Crosstalk. The TOUR GUIDE seems ill at ease—he keeps trying to interrupt, but the other voices drown him out.)

No, no, you don't understand! You don't have access to all the facts. If you look at the numbers you'd see that some mortal slippage is necessary. They're debits on the cosmic balance sheet—

(crosstalk intensifies)

No, no, this isn't an ideology! Communism, socialism, fascism—those are ideologies. Extremist utopian narratives... but centrism

even when workers aren't treated quite so ideally, you just need to keep faith in those glorious, ever-improving numbers!

(shouting intensifies)

History is over! Centrists are on the side of truth, and justice, and the spirit of inquiry, which leads us in only one rational direction—

(The shouting intensifies to the point where the TOUR GUIDE can't be heard. He appears desperate.)

TOUR GUIDE: (briefly audible above the melee): Can't you see it? Can't you see there's no more doubt, no more judgment, no more questions to be answered—

The machine whirrs to life. It groans as it returns to the present. As the curtain falls the Tour Guide screams:

That's it! No more questions! No more questions! ❖



ET US TRY A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT. Let's suppose that on a day in the near future all of America's political elites spontaneously agree to be cordial in public, with the media's biggest talking heads quickly following suit. Let's imagine they also sign a document agreeing to finally put their differences aside and work together in the common interests of the American people. Let's suppose (bear with me) that the document officially commits them to put evidence, common sense, and moderation ahead of petty squabbles and country ahead of party. To immortalize this historic treaty, they establish a new statutory holiday called Unity Day—a kind of centrist Bastille Day—commem-

subtext of every breathlessly-written cover story proclaiming a dangerous new era of polarization and warning us about the threat posed by populist demagogues.

For their part, politicians themselves, supposedly the greatest culprits in fostering a hyper-partisan environment, frankly can't seem to stop decrying it and declaring their intent to put differences aside in the name of bipartisanship and some idealized common good that always seems just out of reach. Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar wants to "bring back bipartisan talks" on healthcare. So does Republican Senator Lamar Alexander. So does Donald Trump! Paul Ryan and Nancy Pelosi, in a joint interview, proudly informed the public that "most of what we

The Curse of BIPARTISANSHIP

by LUKE SAVAGE

orating the end of political contention and marking the eternal reign of Reason. At the event's inauguration, statues are unveiled in honor of the *philosophes* at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the Brookings Institute whose collective wisdom finally toppled partisanship's *ancien regime*. In an image that will surely echo throughout the ages, a bespectacled David Brooks stands atop the National Mall to unveil a towering monument to moderation. Henceforth, the word "partisan" will be Washington's most vicious slur, and all but a few eccentrics will conduct themselves in a manner that ensures they are never tarred with it.

Having imagined all of this, let's ask ourselves: how much would life for the average person meaningfully change if this little farce were to become reality?

If a single cliché unites all of establishment political discourse in America, it might be the idea that the greatest obstacle to progress is Partisanship in Washington, i.e. powerful people's inability to get along. Variations of this hallowed fable, and the whole extended family that makes up the "Too-Much-Partisanship" industrial complex, are found all over Capitol Hill, cable news, and throughout all of the nation's papers of record. It's the rationale behind plenty of ludicrous astroturfed initiatives undertaken by political staffers upon their retirement. It's the

actually pass is bipartisan," with Pelosi lamenting that "what's newsworthy is what is controversial." Calls for bipartisanship are the background noise of institutional American politics, perpetually emanating from the Beltway in a dull, ceaseless drone.

The basic story generally goes like this: ordinary Americans are fed up with the petty squabbling that dominates DC. Reckless partisanship prevents compromise on the issues that matter and most people, who are manifestly non-ideological (whatever this entails), simply want to see their out-of-touch political representatives work across the aisle for a change. Brinksmanship prevails and nothing, so the expression goes, "gets done."

This trope, at once tired and ubiquitous, hinges on the idea that most people share a common set of desires and values and could agree on things if only the gosh darn politicians and talking heads would stop stoking division. There are no unbridgeable divides, only needlessly inflamed rhetoric. Politics is not a contest of right and left, rich and poor, insiders and outsiders, exploiters and exploited, just a meritocracy of discourse and ideas. This was the message that first landed Barack Obama in the national spotlight, with his 2004 "Red America, Blue America" speech. It was Jon Stewart's core message during 2010's *Rally to Restore Sanity*, which he framed as being about "tone, not content." It inspired

the almost satirical "No Labels" initiative undertaken by former Bush and Clinton advisors David Frum and William Galston, whose great emancipatory battle cry to the restless masses was "a grassroots answer to gridlock." More recently, it provided the backdrop for center-left think tank Third Way's bizarre safari into Trump country—a multi-city "listening tour" that will probably be cited by subsequent generations of sociologists as a case study in confirmation bias. (Their chief finding: ordinary Americans want Washington to Put Aside Differences And Get Things Done.)

GREAT MOMENTS IN BIPARTISANSHIP

The 1964 Gulf of Tonkin resolution

authorizing use of conventional military force in Vietnam, leading to a war that killed over 1,000,000 Vietnamese people and nearly 60,000 U.S. soldiers (Senate: 88-2; House: 416-0)

1994 Crime Bill

which expanded the death penalty, provided \$10 billion in funding for constructing new prisons, and eliminated education programs for prisoners (Senate: 61-38, 54 Democrats in Favor: House: 235-195, 188 Democrats in favor, signed by President Clinton)

1996 Welfare Reform Bill

gutting the social benefit system for poor families (Senate: 78-22, 25 Democrats in favor), signed by President Clinton

1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act

hastening the capital appeal process so that prisoners could be killed faster (Senate: 91-8, House: 293-133, signed by President Clinton)

1999 financial deregulation bill

removing various kinds of federal oversight over investment banking activity (Senate: 54-44, House: 343-86, signed by President Clinton)

2001 PATRIOT Act

authorizing indefinite detention and warrantless searches (Senate 98-2; House 357-66, 145 Democrats in favor)

2002 Iraq resolution

granting the authority to George W. Bush for the war that killed 500,000 Iraqis and created 800,000 Iraqi orphans (Senate 77-23, 29 Democrats in favor; House 297-133, 82 Democrats in favor)

2017 Senate resolution affirming Israel's right to full control of Jerusalem as its capital in violation of overwhelming United Nations consensus

Unqualified support for Israeli militarism and occupation may be the single most bipartisan issue of all; it was Chuck Schumer who advised Donald Trump to move the U.S embassy to Jerusalem. And let's not forget the more than a dozen Democrats who signed on to a measure to criminalize the BDS movement. (Senate: 90-0)

2017: House approves \$700 billion defense bill

the highest ever, which Forbes said made "Trump's [massive proposed military budget] look positively reasonable in comparison" (60% of House Democrats in favor)

The bipartisanship fable is one with a real, if superficial, appeal. For one thing, one part of its critique is true: the talking heads on cable news clearly *do* spend a lot of time stoking division for its own sake and tying themselves into knots to defend their chosen side. But it also offers temptingly simple solutions to what ails American politics: if powerful people's lack of collegiality and compromise is the problem, the fixes are obvious. Washington's grownups merely need to pull up their sleeves and use their indoor voices; cable news pundits need only become a bit less shrill; campaign cycles less reliant on attack ads. Then we could reach the hypothesized bipartisan promised land: a place where most people agree on all the big questions and every national debate is as high-minded as a friendly joust at the Oxford Union.

And all of this could come about while changing absolutely nothing about the fundamental structures underpinning America's politics or economy.

The most glaringly obvious hole in the anti-partisanship story is that those at the top of American politics and culture already, often visibly, get along pretty well. They exchange banter at the same awards dinners, appear on the same late night talk shows, occupy the same area codes, and tend to pay the same, criminally low, rates of income tax. They even enjoy the same shitty musicals.

ESPITE THE SUPPOSEDLY UNBRIDGEABLE CHASM of the partisan divide, examples of elite chumminess abound. Only four short years ago, Ivanka Trump was fundraising for Cory Booker. Samantha Power, who once harshly criticized Henry Kissinger's human rights record, joined him at a Yankees game and accepted an award in his name. Just days after they'd exchanged fire over the value of black lives on national TV, the Daily Show's Trevor Noah was sending Tomi Lahren (who compared Black Lives Matter to the KKK) a conciliatory batch of cupcakes. The legendary "Notorious RBG" was, of course, close friends with Antonin Scalia, whose recent posthumous book contains a gushing foreword from Ginsburg on how "some very good people have ideas with which we disagree." Van Jones, who was supposedly too much of a radical leftist to serve in the Obama administration, has just penned a book on how to "come together," a philosophy he has practiced by taking gleeful selfies with Eric Trump. All of the ex-presidents, Republican and Democrat alike, are close friends. (Except for Jimmy Carter, whose preference for building houses for poor people over attending golf tournaments has earned him a reputation as an "annoying cuss.")

The 2016 presidential election, which supposedly brought to the surface a uniquely divided America, is perhaps the perfect case in point. Prior to their formal political rivalry, the Clinton and Trump families enjoyed a friendly relationship for over a decade, the former infamously attending the latter's wedding in 2005. Even the election and its aftermath have failed to fully corrode these bonds. Mere hours before her shock defeat, Clinton made it known that she hoped to patch things up with Trump—a man who'd threatened to "lock her up" and who she and her supporters had routinely characterized as an existential threat to the repub-



lic itself. (Their daughters, incidentally, also vowed to continue as "good friends" and last August, Bill, Hillary, and Tiffany Trump were all cordially invited to the wedding of Sophie Lasry, the daughter of hedge fund billionaire Marc Lasry.)

Such camaraderie might be a bit less nauseating if it weren't emblematic of something deeper and more insidious.

It should come as no surprise that people closest to the center of power are often the ones fondest of extolling the virtues of bipartisanship and consensus. This is, after all, more or less the reality many of them already inhabit, and the one they more or less *need* to inhabit if they want to be upwardly mobile—genuinely controversial ideas are unlikely to get you a promotion. The Beltway may not be a place of total agreement—the range of acceptable opinion does, after all, span the vast expanse separating Paul Krugman and Ross Douthat—but it's certainly one where internal conflict rarely has serious consequences for those directly involved. Debates with outcomes that potentially affect millions of lives can provide raw material for jocular cocktail chatter at the nearest capitol bar or even become an occasion for the affable exchange of baked goods. Friendships may be strained, prestige may be lost, and members of the two competing political and cultural tribes may have to trade offices every few years, but the price of failure for those at the top still tends to be a teaching gig in the ivory tower, a lucrative job in lobbying or finance or, in the worst case scenario, a multimillion dollar book deal from Simon & Schuster. Even the most loathed former presidents can be afforded the equivalent of secular sainthood, so long as their successors prove to be even worse. Given the stakes, we can understand why bipartisanship is so appealing.

N IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF THIS PATHOLOGY, though, we risk overlooking its most glaring contradictions and most dangerous implications. In the wake of Trump, high profile Democrats have taken to evangelizing bipartisanship in increasingly absurdist fashion. After the Republican Senate passed its robber baron tax package in December, a lachrymose Chuck Schumer took to Twitter to lament "what could have been" describing tax reform as "an issue that is ripe for bipartisan compromise" (Schumer has long favored massive corporate tax cuts), while the Democratic Party's official Senate account praised Ronald Reagan's approach to tax policy. Despite a sweeping victory over Republicans in Virginia, newly elected Democratic Governor Ralph Northam is now preaching bipartisanship ("Virginians deserve civility...they're looking for a moral compass right now") and exploring ways he can work with those across the aisle to reduce spending on Medicaid. In a recent intervention, one William Jefferson Clinton even issued the groundbreaking suggestion that Americans work to "expand the definition of 'us' and shrink the definition of 'them." Pass the sherry.

Bipartisan posturing of this kind would be absurd in a healthy democracy, even at the best of times—after all, one of the reasons we elect people is so that they can debate and disagree. If you're not fighting with anyone, you're not fighting for anything.

But given the stated agenda of the current administration, not to mention countless other Republican-led administrations across the country, bipartisanship is perilous and counterproductive almost by definition.

One need only review a selected history of some "Great Moments in Bipartisanship," when members of both parties came together to serve their shared interest in... expanding the American war machine and imprisoning large numbers of black and brown people.

Despite some obvious areas of discord, then, it's not as if American elites have spent the past several decades disagreeing, cordially or otherwise, on a particularly massive scale. Both parties have largely promoted a corporatist agenda and their respective leaderships have been united in their mutual support for policies of unending war, mass incarceration, means-testing, and privately-administered, for-profit healthcare. The same plutocrats bankroll everyone's reelections: even the Koch brothers have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to Democrats. Hedge fund managers vastly preferred Clinton over Trump, and Wall Street can go back and forth depending on who seems marginally more favorable to their interests. (They adored Obama in 2008, but switched to ex-private equity executive Romney in 2012.)

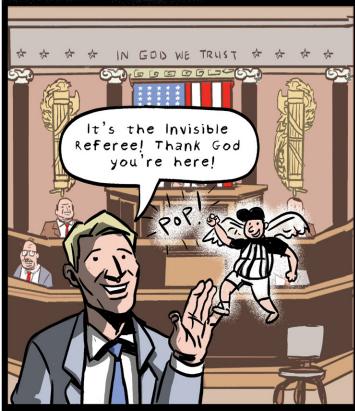
HEN THE EXISTING CONSENSUS IS OPPRESSIVE and exploitative, bipartisanship is simply partisanship for an unjust status quo. Put another way, the operating premise of those who promote bipartisanship is flawed. The problem isn't that elites are so acrimonious they can't agree or forge a consensus, but rather that they continue to be harmonious enough to do both, often with devastating consequences.

Bipartisanship of this kind is the reason tens of millions of Americans still can't afford healthcare and why so many elections are ultimately bought and sold rather than won or lost. It's how Washington elites from the centre-left to the centre-right can look upon a country where thousands of people die every year because they can't afford to go to the doctor and quite earnestly believe the remedy is another wretched compromise between the federal government and the (almost literal) bloodsuckers that are private insurance firms. It's the process through which Americans have found themselves engaged in destructive, open-ended war, and the reason that debates about military intervention invariably revolve around how to prosecute it most competently rather than whether to prosecute it at all. It's why the country's public schools and infrastructure are allowed to crumble while trillions in subsidies go to terrifying genocidal gizmos that would give Dr. Strangelove pause. It's why wealth inequality is soaring while wages continue to stagnate and why prisons are overflowing with the poor, racialized, and mentally ill while rapacious bankers are deemed too big to jail.

And it's how, in the midst of all of this, it remains possible, indeed downright respectable, to believe that the biggest obstacle to a decent society is bad manners. �

THE INVISIBLE REFEREE!



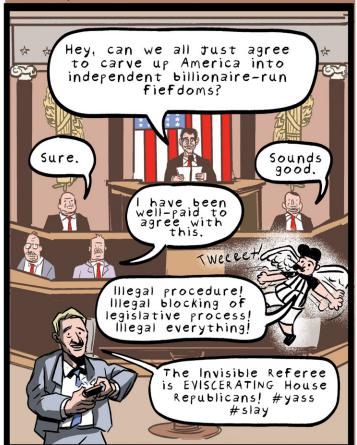


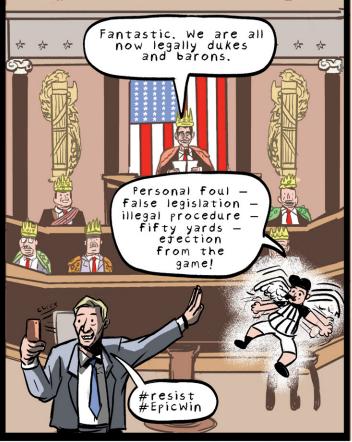












Story: Lyta Gold

Art: Mike Freiheit

F SOMEONE THREATENED TO JAB A RUSTY SPIKE in your eyeball unless you said one nice thing about globalization, you could do worse than mumble, "It's led to a lot of people moving across national borders." The free movement of human beings is generally acknowledged to be a good thing, whether you're a Bitcoin-hoarding technolibertarian, a revolutionary Sandersista, or a crusty Clintonite. There's certainly no shortage of humane and semi-humane arguments in favor of open borders. Journalist Gary Younge wrote a beautiful article in *The Guardian* in which he said, "As a principle, I think we should all be able to roam the planet and live, love and create where we wish." Meanwhile, in a blog post for Open Borders, economics professor Nathan Smith advocated for the exact same thing—except his reason for doing so was "there would be a lot less Islam in the world. And I would probably welcome that."

I also believe that open borders are a good thing (unsurprisingly, for reasons that are closer to Younge's than Smith's). The urge to move is one of the most fundamental human urges. We're happiest when we can choose our own environment. Why do people love taking road trips? Why do they love working from home? It isn't just because of the highway scenery, or the bathrobe-friendly dress code—it's the autonomy. This is such a rare experience for most of us that we don't dare to imagine it could be our right.

But when people like Smith advocate for open borders, they don't do so because they believe it would increase the average person's liberty and happiness. They're more interested in the financial implications. Most of their arguments assume that "higher standards of living" are a natural byproduct of increased mobility, though few bother to specify for whom. In the semi-coherent words of Thomas Friedman, this was supposed to create an international class of "globalutionaries" who would overthrow Third World dictatorships by eating at McDonalds, an idea so vigorously dumb it makes you want to swallow your own tongue.

But even the cleverest propagandists struggle to make a convincing case that open borders are truly meant for *everyone*. The very rich may enjoy gobbling up foreign passports and penthouses (according to *Business Insider*, there are at least 17 countries where citizenship can be purchased outright, plus many more that offer permanent residency with the purchase of luxury real estate), and the very poor may enjoy having the opportunity to become somewhat less poor (just ignore those pesky reports of forced migrant labor), but for the vast majority of people, the obstacles to living abroad remain as imposing as ever.

Expensive and complicated visa processes are the biggest reason for this, but language barriers can be almost as significant as legal ones. Unless your job is so important that you can dictate the terms of communication, or so menial that instructions can be delivered through grunts and hand gestures, it's hard to live in a place where you're not fluent in the local dialect. You can be the world's greatest Swedish-speaking toaster salesman, but good luck moving product in Senegal.

Language barriers are nothing new, and neither are our charmingly inept attempts to overcome them, Esperanto being the most famous example. The dream of a global tongue has a long, rich tradition of quiet failures: Volapük was invented in 1879 by a German Catholic priest named Johann Martin Schleyer, and Interlingua was developed by the International Auxiliary Language Associa-

tion during the mid-20th century. The fact that you've never heard any of those names should be all you need to know. It turns out that people have little interest in learning a language that sounds as fake as Klingon or Elvish. Perhaps it was inevitable that one day, the more pragmatic of the universalists would throw up their hands and say, "you know what, how about we all just speak English?"

They'd finally picked a winner. Today, nearly a billion people speak English. More than 600 million of them are non-native speakers. The British Council predicts that two billion people around the world will be using English by 2020. The language has gone viral, and like most viral sensations, few understand the mechanics of how it happened. Even fewer grasp the broader implications.

set adrift in the ENGLISH TEACHING INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

by Nick Slater

English didn't become humanity's de facto Common Tongue solely on the strength of Duolingo and YouTube videos. Capturing such a vast user base requires a lot of personalized outreach, and nobody's better at personalization than actual persons (yet). If you want people to learn English, you need to give them teachers.

The problem was solved by a brilliant stroke of capitalism. Just as the superfluous offspring of minor nobles were once enlisted to run the jails and sugar plantations of far-flung colonial outposts, today's surplus of middle-class cultural studies majors and aspiring novelists could be sent to stand in poorly-ventilated classrooms and lecture bored foreigners about adverbs. Soon a multi-billion dollar industry was born. Globalization had created a demand for English, and a massive workforce was needed to supply this hot new commodity.

For most of my adult life, I've been one of those workers. The search for a decent paycheck and cheap rent has led me across Asia and Europe, where I've taught classes for everyone from Korean kindergarteners to Vietnamese policemen to Andorran retirees. Along the way, I've noticed a curious phenomenon, which is that people in the U.S. tend to conflate teaching English abroad with saving the children, protecting the rainforest, and other selfless

acts of ambiguous do-goodery. They have a mental image of the typical foreign English student as a bright-but-impoverished young kid of interchangeable ethnicity from a 1990s infomercial. American acquaintances will often say that, by teaching, I'm helping to make the world a better place.

Most of the time I'm too polite to roll my eyes, but not always. The truth is that most of my students are from upper-middle-class families. Private English lessons are expensive and time-consuming. And while I'm sure that some of my students came to class because of their toe-curling love for grammatical structures, the most common reason given for enrolling in class was "to get a bigger salary." Having a formal certification of English competency, usually in the form of a standardized test score, is now a prerequisite for most university programs and high-level jobs around the world.

As a result, it seems to me that being an English teacher abroad is similar to being a yoga teacher in the U.S. We enrich the local communities we're in, but only the segments of the community who can afford it. At the same time, there *are* moments of real, genuine human connection with the people we do reach. I still have the handknit scarf a Korean mother gave me after I taught her son's class the lyrics to "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." My Vietnamese students would celebrate the end of every course with dinner at a nearby hot pot restaurant, which often involved an overly-enthusiastic young man feeding me a plate full of goat brain. On more than one occasion, I've downed shots of tequila with a classroom full of geriatric Andorrans. The vast majority of students I've taught have been kind, curious people with open minds and generous hearts. Just because they're not poor doesn't mean they're unworthy of empathy, compassion, and friendship.

It hurts to think I've been scamming them. I try not to think about how all the kids I've taught will one day be competing against each other to provide contract labor for the Musks and Thiels and Zuckerbergs of the world; or about all the money my adult students have spent on overpriced books and CDs that are cranked out every year by National Geographic and TED Talks and a hundred other educational content corporations. I do my best to rationalize my role in this system, and to minimize its anxiety-inducing effects on the people I care about.

But maybe I'm being scammed, too. The same faraway language academies that produce such bountiful quantities of multilingual hotel receptionists, customer service reps, and low-priced software programmers also make convenient holding pens for people like me: the dregs of the middle class, described by the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin as those "fervent, energetic youth, totally déclassé, with no career or way out." Hundreds of thousands of would-be revolutionaries, the kinds of people whose reckless dreams and dreary futures could be the spark that sets capitalism ablaze, have been reduced to glorified mimes and babysitters.

Most of us seem fine with it.

OLIN LAGESSE LEFT OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY IN 2009 with a bachelor's degree in English, thousands of dollars in debt, and a dim sense of his future prospects. Unable to land "a real job" after graduation, he spent the next six months trying to cobble a mishmash of parttime gigs into something resembling a livable wage. An unpredictable mix of retail shifts and door-to-door fundraisers was the best he could manage.

At a Thanksgiving party, he mentioned his struggles to a friend. She suggested that he consider teaching English in South Korea. "I knew almost nothing about Korea," says Colin, but after a quick internet search he was sold. "They were offering a free plane ticket, a free apartment, and on top of that, the salary it offered compared to the cost of living was amazing." Even health care, a dreaded topic for most American millennials, was practically free. Colin smiles when you ask him about it. "I never paid more than \$20 for a doctor's visit plus the prescription," he says.

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, you just didn't find jobs like that in the United States, especially if you were a recent college graduate with little work experience. But certain foreign countries were overflowing with cushy teaching gigs, provided you knew where to look. All you needed was a passport, a criminal background check, and a bachelor's degree, and the last two were sometimes optional. Word spread fast.

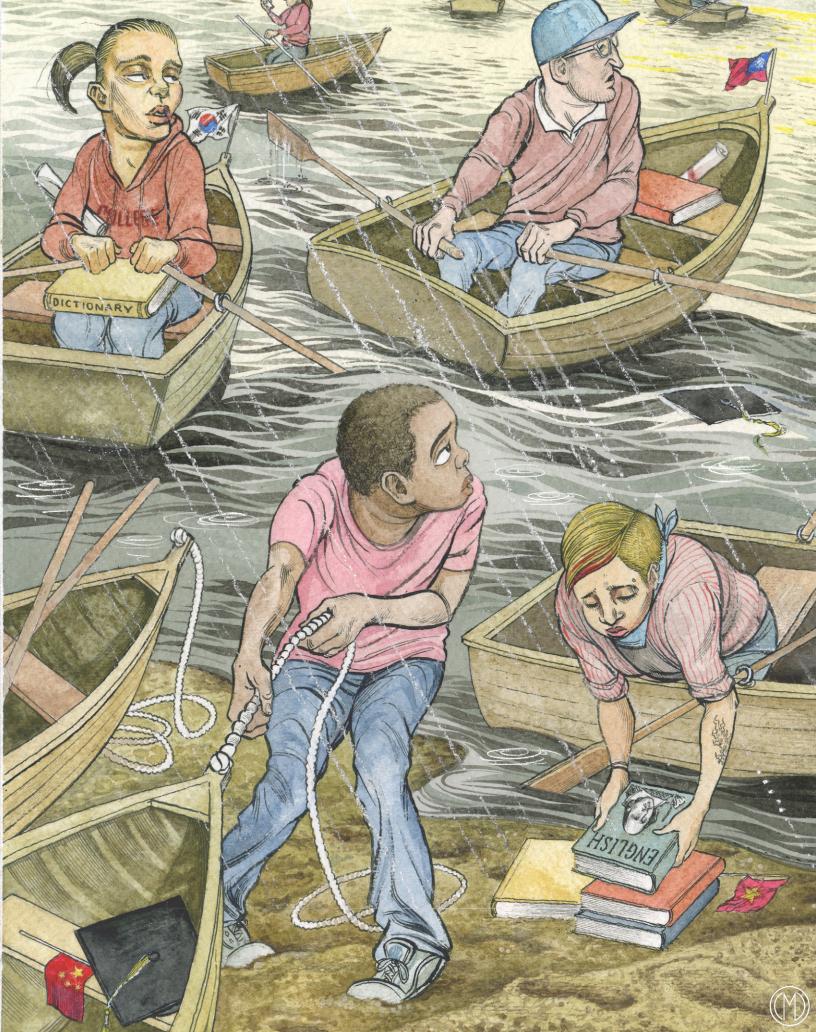
HERE WERE ALREADY MORE THAN A QUARTER OF a million English teachers working abroad when Colin landed at Incheon Airport in March 2010. Over 3,000 academies had been established in Asia alone, where the burgeoning middle classes of "tiger economies" like Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea were becoming connoisseurs of Western almost-luxuries like Outback Steakhouse and H&M and low-cost airlines. The globalization of the world's economy kept chugging along as planned. Even communist countries like China and Vietnam started to develop a ravenous appetite for English.

That was how Ed Weinberg had found himself sitting in a Saigon hospital one day in early 2011, recovering from a nasty motorbike wound on his leg. The only child of a middle-class Jewish family from New Jersey, he passed the time by writing calming emails to his parents, omitting any mention of stitches or infections.

Ed had arrived a few weeks earlier to enroll in a teacher-training course offered by the University of Cambridge. He chose to do it in Vietnam because of the price. "They teach the same curriculum at centers around the world," he says, "but the course I took in Ho Chi Minh City was half the price it was in New York. When you factor in living expenses, it's kind of a no-brainer."

An average Vietnamese worker earned about \$200 a month back then, working six days a week. By comparison, a foreign English teacher with decent qualifications could earn almost \$2,000 a month. However, Ed was drawn to Vietnam for more personal reasons.

"I was a bartender in Philadephia," he says, "and when people would ask me 'what do you do,' I would kind of shrug and tell them I worked at Restaurant X, but I did a little writing on the side. I was disconnected. When I was about to turn thirty, I got this superstitious feeling that whatever I was doing at that age would be a good indication of what I'd be doing for the next decade. And I decided I didn't want that life." To Ed, the best part of living abroad is "having a life story that I'm proud to have. Now when I tell someone my elevator pitch bio—hi, I'm Ed, I live in Vietnam—I feel like I'm talking about a life I've chosen, not just the situation I fell into." He thinks that leaving the States helped him look at the world with more hope and curiosity. "Living in a place like this, the little rejections of life matter less, because you identify with them less. Whenever you're in a shitty situation, all you have to do is add 'in Vietnam,' and it kinda takes the sting out. Like, 'I got gonorrhea... in Vietnam,' becomes this absurd and amusing thing, not a straight-up disaster."



OR MANY EXPATRIATE ENGLISH TEACHERS, THIS cheery parallel universe is a welcome relief from the disheartening half-lives they were living back home. Although nobody gets rich as an English teacher, and although it's just a matter of time before they're all replaced by high-tech Babel fish, the global ESL industry does provide an appealing bailout option for young middle-class Westerners. It's their escape pod, their last shot at flying away from the whirring metal jaws of capitalism. There's a certain dignity in the work, which is more than you can say for most modern industries.

Best of all, teaching abroad is irrefutable, Instagrammable proof that you're Doing Something With Your Life. It gives you a different way to measure your self-worth, a new metric that says that you, not your high school classmate with the garage full of Porsches, are the one worth envying. The only way to win a rigged game is to change how you keep score.

Still, the life of an ESL expat comes with some unavoidable pitfalls. Many teachers, like Sara Fowler, 26, worry about their relationships with distant loved ones. "Going home to Baltimore, I realized how much I missed my family," she says. The former Fulbright scholar has lived in Andorra for the last two years, where she skis in the winter and visits the beaches of nearby Barcelona in the summer. She loves the culture, the affordable cost of living, and the opportunities to travel. But if all things were equal, she'd prefer to be home. "Stepping foot in my hometown and knowing exactly where everything is, how everything works, what to expect, all that stuff... it was comforting in a way I hadn't really appreciated before. I joke about living abroad until Trump leaves office, but I think in the long run I want to be with my family and friends."

Other teachers, like 24-year-old Emilie MacShane, bristle at the industry-wide tendency to treat its workforce like tossable tissues. "I actually love teaching," says Emilie. "Growing up I always wanted to be a teacher." She took her first job at a school in Moscow a month after graduating from university. A harsh awakening soon followed. "I've struggled to find companies who treat you with respect for the work you do, because they think you're just there for a year before flitting off to the next place. In a lot of companies you're disposable, since most people just teach English as a means to an end, to stay in an exotic country and do some travel. Which is totally understandable, but it's not my deal," she says.

Nobody likes to be reminded of their own disposability. And despite our genetic predisposition to complain about family members, most of us don't want to completely abandon our kinfolk. Yet a willingness to be both disposable and isolated is a prerequisite for life as an expat English teacher. The fact that so many young people still choose a life of this kind hints at the deep-seated hopelessness of terminal capitalism. We know that the party can't last forever, but we also know that there's nothing waiting for us back home.

For the better part of a decade, it's been fashionable to suggest that millennials are a lost generation. Everyone from the sweatypalmed thoughtleaders of HuffPost to the slightly more respectable panic-mongers at Salon can agree on one thing: life sucks when you're born into a bad economy, and there's a good chance it's not going to get much better. But these iPhone-addled Snapchatters aren't the first generation to be considered lost. A century ago, another Lost Generation of expats—the one that gave us Hemingway, the Fitzgeralds, and those goddamn fedoras slumped across the bars of bohemian Paris and wondered aloud, "Christ almighty, how'd things get so bad?" The answer, then and now, is capitalism.

NDER CAPITALISM, EVERY GENERATION IS LOST. IN some decades it's relatively easy to ignore this, though these lulls are always followed by an unpleasantly long wakeup call. During these years, we're much more conscious of the sensation of being lost. While it isn't enjoyable, it does have a pleasant numbness to it. You may not be on the path to success, but at least you know there is a path. We all expect that someday we'll find ourselves.

And sometimes it works! Sometimes you stumble into a life that feels like it means something, like Anthony Morreale did. His story is an encouraging one for people who have nothing to lose by running away. "Looking back, I think living abroad really helped me get out of a rut," says Anthony, who started a Ph.D. in Southeast Asian history at Berkeley after returning from a year in Ho Chi Minh City. "I needed an adventure of some sort, but at the time it wasn't clear. I'm not actually out of the woods yet, but I feel like it was good for me." While living abroad, he learned Vietnamese, got married, and had a son. It's hard to imagine any of that happening had he stayed in the U.S.

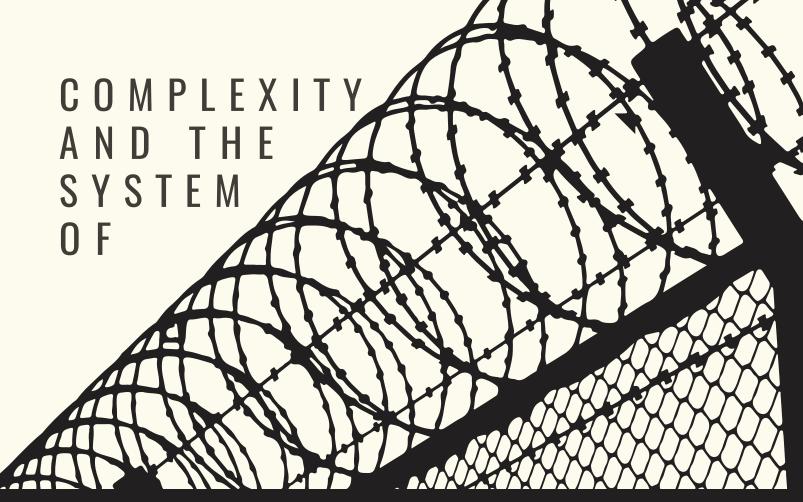
For others, going abroad is a chance to make up for lost time. Carl Beijer left the United States in March 2017. Back home, he'd been a frequent contributor to outlets like Jacobin, Chapo Trap House, and the Baltimore Post-Examiner. He now works 60 hours a week at a language school in Kiev, Ukraine. He's frank about the impact it's had on his writing: "Usually I just don't have time," says Carl, "and when I do write, I'm often out of sync with the immediate concerns and controversies of the American left." Still, though the weeks are long and the money could be better, he says he's happy. "There are a lot of reasons I left the U.S., but a big one is that I wanted to do something that directly helps the poor," he says. "It can be surprisingly hard to find full-time work doing that in D.C., especially if you don't want to live in poverty yourself."

According to Carl, a teacher's life isn't for everyone. "It depends on what you want to get out of it," he says. "If you spend too long teaching English abroad, it will probably diminish your prospects back home. On the other hand, a lot of the work you can find overseas is a lot more fulfilling and productive than what you'll get in the U.S. So it really depends on what your opportunities are, and whether you're the kind of person who will thrive abroad, or the kind of person who

It's an interesting question to ask yourself: what kind of person am I? How much would I sacrifice to find out? Can I imagine what my new life would look like?

For most people who go abroad to teach English, there's a level of complicity in greasing the gears of global capitalism. We can counteract this, to some degree, with small acts of rebellious humanity —teaching lessons about topics like the Israeli occupation of Palestine, photocopying textbooks to give away for free, encouraging students to question the systems into which they were born while also acknowledging that we, as outsiders, are not the ones who have the right to demand changes. We can make a conscious, sustained effort to treat our students, neighbors, and friends as fully formed human beings, and not exotic extras in our own globetrotting saga of self-discovery.

And, when the time comes, we can come back to join the fight. �



OST THINKING ABOUT crime is highly informed by passion and instinct, whether it is the bitter desire to see punishment inflicted on those who have done wrong, or sympathetic fellow-feeling with the accused and imprisoned. The vengeful part of the human soul says: If You Can't Do The Time, Don't Do The Crime. The merciful part says: Tear Down The Walls, Everyone Must Be Free. (When in doubt, it's usually best to defer to the merciful part. The merciful can make poor decisions that hurt people, but they never commit atrocities.)

This conflict between impulses was obvious in a recent controversy over the sentencing of Larry Nassar, the Michigan State doctor who sexually abused hundreds of young gymnasts over multiple decades. One would struggle to find a less sympathetic individual than Nassar. Instead of contrition, he showed brazen arrogance, writing a letter to the judge insisting that it would be too painful for him to listen to the victims' testimonies, dismissing the girls as "wom[e]n scorned." (Why Nassar's lawyer ever let him send such a self-damaging letter remains a mystery.) So it was quite obvious why Nassar's judge, Rosemarie Aquilina, displayed a certain relish in passing his sentence. Aquilina declared that it was a "privilege" to sentence him, that she was signing his "death warrant." She even suggested that, were it not for the Constitution's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment, she'd happily let some especially cruel and unusual things happen to him:

"Our Constitution does not allow for cruel and unusual punishment. If it did ... I would allow some or many people to do to

him what he did to others."

Aquilina earned praise from some for her staunch support of Nassar's victims. But when we look closely at her actual words, they show more than just compassion for those who were hurt. They also show a desire for payback. For



"many people" to "do to [Nassar] what he did to others" means that Nassar would be repeatedly raped. And Aquilina said that the only thing keeping her from sentencing Nassar to be raped was the fact that she was legally prohibited from doing so, rather than because there would be a moral problem with such a

Actually, we should note that Aquilina may have come closer than she thought to imposing her ideal of justice: rape and sexual victimization are ubiquitous in America's prisons, and as a child sex abuser with no prior time inside, Nassar has a non-trivial chance of being brutally assaulted exactly as the judge hoped. Precisely because Americans do not particularly care when monstrous people get "what's coming to them," prison rape is not an issue that especially stirs the national conscience. (It's even played for laughs, e.g. "don't drop the soap.")

Once we realize the implications of Aquilina's remarks, they become troubling, because a humane justice system does not include judges who openly fantasize about watching horrible things happen to defendants. If we are being fair to Aquilina, though, we can say that while she may have found it pleasurable to think about doing physical violence to Nassar, she did not necessarily mean her remarks literally. It's understandable that a judge who had just sat through dozens upon dozens of disturbing victim testimonies about a man's abuse would temporarily let her careful professionalism slip and convey her real human feelings.

Frankly, questions about retribution are fraught with difficulty. We can declare that vengeance is an ignoble instinct, that while it may be natural it needs to be overcome in favor of a calm, dispassionate response to crime that

focuses solely on how to reduce harms. But telling somebody who has been victimized, or who has seen a loved one victimized, or who has vicariously experienced some part of the trauma of a victim, that they "shouldn't" feel a desire to see evil punished also feels wrong. An eye for an eye may make the whole world blind, but try giving a forgiveness lecture to a parent whose child has been killed.

The truth is, criminal justice is very difficult to do well. Restorative justice initiatives, in which the victim and perpetrator try to achieve reconciliation over the perpetrator's wrongdoing, sound ideal in theory, and have produced some impressive outcomes in individual cases. But there are instances where it's simply inapplicable: for many domestic abuse victims, the last thing you want the justice system to do is further entangle the victim with their abuser. And you will rarely have ideal defendants or ideal victims, who are easily able to put aside all bad feelings and work together to make amends.

HE AMERICAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE system is, in many ways, horrifying. By now it's well known that we jail people at staggering rates, higher than any other country in the world. This shouldn't be the case: if every other country has figured out how to have a society with fewer imprisoned people, we are doing something wrong, and it should be fixable.

But it's difficult to know what reforms might actually work, which would actually get us toward a society with both low crime and a low (or ideally, nonexistent) prison population. And many of the talking points among criminal justice reformers obscure this complexity. We are capable of correctly identifying a series of problems (e.g. the criminal justice system is bloated, racist, and excessively punitive; prisons do not give inmates useful skills; the stigma of criminal convictions makes re-offending more likely; the police harass and abuse communities they are supposed to protect; public defenders are underfunded and the plea bargaining process is stacked against defendants; there is no real accountability for police who needlessly injure and kill people, etc.) Yet the word "reform" is, in and of itself, nothing but a feeling that something ought to happen so that these problems do not exist. What the "something" is, well, that's tough.

James Forman, in Locking Up Our Own, significantly complicates the most popular narratives about mass incarceration. Forman, a former public defender in Washington, D.C.,

was horrified at seeing his black teenage clients sent off to prison for years, sometimes for minor offenses. He believes that the prison system is an unconscionably harsh moral stain on the country. But in thinking about how D.C. courts became so manifestly unfair, Forman notes something counterintuitive: the black community, which has been most affected by the growth of prisons, also produced many political initiatives to increase sentences back in the 70s and 80s. Forman notes that when he was in D.C. courtrooms, sometimes the judge, prosecutor, court officer, and defendant would all be black. Yet the results were still clearly unjust. This seeming paradox has caused Forman to question the idea that the criminal justice system can easily be called the "new Jim Crow." After all, it ensnares poor people of all races, and sometimes black communities are "locking up their own."

The "paradox" is not really a paradox at all, actually: there is no single "black community," and black-majority cities and neighborhoods have huge class differences and political hierarchies. What Forman reveals is that many black judges and politicians at the local level actually saw crackdowns on crime in their communities as advancing the cause of racial justice; he recalls being exasperated every time a judge prepared to give a black teenage defendant a speech about how disappointed Dr. King would be if he were alive. Forman shows that as black neighborhoods were torn apart by the PCP and crack epidemics, some local leaders adopted the kind of "law and order" rhetoric more commonly associated with Richard Nixon. Black newspapers decried the "growing crime menace," with one even calling for drug dealers to be "tarred and feathered, burned at the stake, castrated, and any other horrendous thing which can be imagined." "We're going to fight drugs and crime until the drug dealer's teeth rattle," said Atlanta mayor Maynard Jackson.

Forman suggests that local policies had a greater role in increasing mass incarceration



than is usually assumed. While we tend to focus on "national campaigns, federal legislation, [and] executive orders" we should also look at "small choices" like how a public official responded to citizen complaints about used syringes in alleyways. Forman examines the mechanics of specific programs, like the anti-gun initiative Eric Holder launched when serving as U.S. Attorney for Washington, D.C. Forman shows how officials like Holder increased the use of indiscriminate searches, and that while they ostensibly targeted weapons they ended up ensnaring low-level offenders and increasing punitiveness more broadly.



(Conservatives sometimes like to bring up the effects of tough gun control laws on black people, as a cynical argument against new firearm restrictions. But it's correct that any new law, if enforced in a system that disproportionately targets minorities, will disproportionately punish minorities.) Forman doesn't downplay the role that white policy-makers played, but he believes that until we recognize the multiplicity of causes, we won't actually know where to start in fixing the problem.

Law professor John Pfaff, in *Locked In*, is similarly concerned with challenging conventional wisdom about criminal justice. Pfaff is scathing about what he calls the "standard story" pushed by critics of mass incarceration. The story they tell is that the prison boom was a consequence of the War on Drugs, which sent countless low-level drug offenders to prison, extended sentences for drug offenses to unreasonable lengths, and is driven by a profit-driven private prison system constantly hungry for more bodies. Pfaff says, while the fact that our prison population is outrageously large is not in dispute, this analysis of the causes is faulty in almost every way.

In fact, low-level drug offenses do not account for most of the growth in prison popu-

lations. Most people are imprisoned for violent offenses, and it will be necessary for reformers to accept that we can't significantly change the numbers if we focus solely on nonviolent offenders (the ones that are easiest to persuade the public to sympathize with). In fact, prosecutors have gotten tougher on all criminals, and we will ultimately need to make the argument that violent criminals, too, deserve to be punished less. It's going to be difficult, Pfaff says, because it requires acknowledging that "safety should not automatically be our paramount concern in every instance." It's easy to eliminate all risk of re-offending by never letting anyone out of prison, but that's why the elimination of risk can't be the sole factor guiding policy. Pfaff says there has to be a "cultural change," in which the public becomes less aggressively punitive toward people who have harmed others. That will not be easy.

Importantly, there needs to be more focus on decisions made by prosecutors, and less on parts of the system like private prisons, which are a symptom rather than a cause. Pfaff shows that it's not just laws or police that matter, but how prosecutors use their discretion to charge people with crimes. This makes mass incarceration largely a "state and local problem" rather than a federal one. Pfaff's book cautions us against pushing too hard for solutions that sound sensible (say, abolishing private prisons or releasing nonviolent offenders) but that will not have much of an impact on raw numbers of incarcerated people.

Pfaff has a number of useful suggestions for what actually will work, and his book isn't entirely discouraging and critical. The largest obstacles are actually political: when you try to close prisons, there are strong objections, because prisons are job-creators. The correctional officers' unions are powerful, but the lobby on behalf of violent criminal offenders does not have much clout. The reason cultural change is important is that it is a necessary prerequisite to political action: no state legislature is going to seriously risk the public backlash that occurs when an offender released under some new program goes out and commits some horrible crime. In order for the legislators' calculus to change, there mustn't be a public backlash, because we need to have built a widespread understanding that a more merciful criminal justice system is worth a small amount of additional risk.

When you begin to assess what it would actually take to repair the institutions of justice, you can become discouraged very quickly. It's not just that once you start get-

ting "practical," diving into the nuances and complications, there are all sorts of messy competing values and political obstacles. It's also that the scale of the task is so vast. Alex Vitale, in *The End of Policing*, portrays a system that is quite literally *beyond repair*. The central thesis of his book is that efforts to



reform or fix the police are doomed, because the core of the problem is the very structure of the policing system itself. Until you've altered *that*, any improvements will remain marginal and superficial. Furthermore, many reforms touted as improvements may actually make policing worse. Vitale says that "community policing, body cameras, and increased money for training reinforce a false sense of police legitimacy and expand the reach of the police into private lives."

ITALE'S BOOK GOES THROUGH an exhaustive list of policing's worst aspects. There are, of course, the shootings of unarmed people. (As well as armed people, who in many cases have broken no laws, as in the case of Philando Castile.) There is the increased policing of schools, and the arrest of students whose infractions would previously have been handled by the school administration. There is the criminalization of homelessness, and the police's harassment of the poor and vulnerable. There is the policing of sex work, which puts women in jail for making a living. There is the militarization of police, who begin to resemble branches of the armed forces rather than friendly neighborhood cops-on-the-beat. And there is the political surveillance and arrest of Muslims as part of the War on Terror. The relationship between police and the policed is not one of protection but one of control. Vitale views it as a "liberal fantasy" that "police exist to protect us from the bad guys." Because police forces are dysfunctional entities at their core, it's hopeless to think you can change them. For example, if you require body cameras, you may end up catching some misconduct on film, but you're also introducing a new form of electronic surveillance. If you require diversity training, officers will sit through it obligingly and then return to their regular routine. "There is no technocratic fix," Vitale says.

HIS FRAMING MAY OR MAY NOT BE HELPFUL. IT certainly does create a sense that the injustices are extreme and the solutions must match the scale of the crisis. But it also makes a fair criminal justice system seem so distant as to be impossible, since it requires nothing short of ending the police. And Vitale himself doesn't know how to do that. Alongside his criticism of conventional reforms, he does offer ideas for improvements: decriminalize sex work and drugs, redirect policing resources toward community centers and jobs for young people, establish separate unarmed entities to deal with mentally ill people to reduce the likelihood that deadly force will be used on them. But these are sketched out only briefly, and they all sound somewhat "technocratic" themselves. We can all agree that the police should be "ended," but what does that mean and how would it occur? I am worried that the statement "there can be no justice until there are no more police," when combined with the obvious fact that "it is inconceivable that there will be no more police," necessarily produces a despair that inhibits action. Vitale is actually somewhat more subtle whenever he talks about what steps can actually be taken, but he is prone to grand and unqualified statements like "the police are not here to protect you." (Often they're not, sometimes they are. Everything is complicated.)

So it's important to be wary of simple conclusions, because criminal justice isn't simple at all. But equally important is the need to avoid getting wrapped up in the details, and losing sight of matters that are simple. We can debate how best to create accountability mechanisms for prosecutors or what policies are best suited to recidivism reduction. But when you become too pragmatic and reformist in your thinking, when everything turns into "on the one hand, on the other" equivocation, you forget that it is necessary to be outraged by the outrageous, and to state clearly that which is obvious. In Keramet Reiter's 23/7: Pelican Bay Prison and the Rise of Long-Term Solitary Confinement, we see something that is indisputably an egregious abuse of basic human rights: the practice of keeping people in solitary confinement for years and decades at at time. Reiter tracks those who have been shuffled off to Security Housing Units and kept in their cells for, as the title suggests, 23 hours a day, 7 days a week.

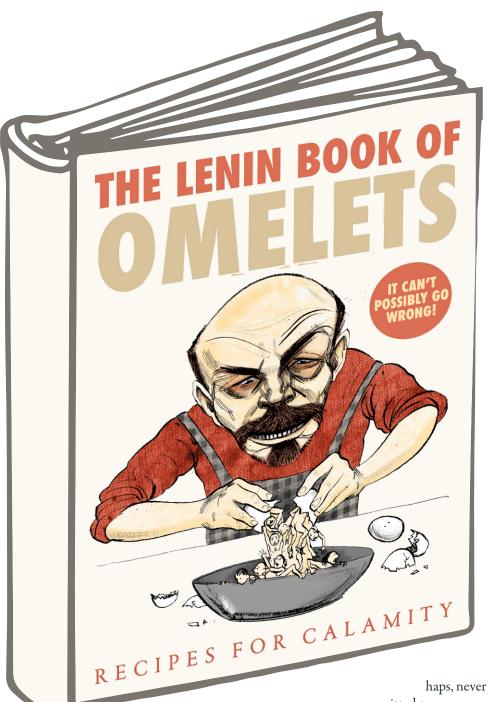
For many people, it may be hard to appreciate why solitary confinement is so objectionable. After all, solitude is peaceful. But Reiter suggests that skeptics should try locking themselves in their bathroom for an hour. Then lock yourself in it for a day. Now try a year, or ten. As could be expected, one's mental health often deteriorates rapidly. Putting someone in an empty room, with nobody to talk to, no hope of leaving, and no work to do, is a form of torture.

However much we may appreciate perspectives like Forman and Pfaff's, then, which add nuance to criminal justice conversations, many of the issues do not require nuance. They require direct condemnation, using moral language rather than the language of policy and problem-solving. Some issues present dilemmas: How should courts treat victims' desire for retribution? How can the New Jim Crow thesis be squared with the fact that most of the officers involved in the killing of Freddie Gray were black? If we reject the New Jim Crow thesis, what about the fact that the effects of today's justice system on black people in many ways resemble the effects of Jim Crow? Are public prisons actually any better than private prisons? Which of today's policing functions should be taken away from the police and delegated to other institutions? Which institutions should they be?

But while we must necessarily spend a lot of our time lost in the complications and caveats, we can never forget that we are dealing with a urgent human moral problem, and that every moment we discuss it, a million and a half people sit behind bars, some of them going mad alone in rooms that they are kept in 23 hours a day, 7 days a week. ❖







head, and short stature, he did not instantly appear a man destined to create a world-historic revolution.

Victor Sebestyen's Lenin: The Man, The Dictator, and the Master of Terror will, as the title suggests, leave its readers with a generally unfavorable view of Lenin. He does not come across as the sort of man one would want to go on a hike with or put in charge of a vast destabilized country. (Or allow to babysit a child: the book contains an anecdote about Lenin's limited patience as a babysitter, growing exasperated with a little girl who wouldn't stop making fun of his bald head.) As he inches closer and closer to power, one feels dread, knowing that a man who says things like "For us there does not, and cannot, exist the old system of morality and 'humanity'

invented by the bourgeoisie" is probably not going to be reliably humane in his governance.

That's not to say that Lenin was "inhuman," in the sense of appearing so cold and robotic as to be unempathetic. Sebestyen's skill is in drawing out Lenin's full humanity. He is no longer a crumbling stone face or a pickled corpse on display in Red Square. He is a person, a very real one whom we can actually imagine existing. With Lenin so often appearing, quite literally, as a two-dimensional cartoon, little more than a goatee and a flat cap, it's refreshing and engrossing to get to know him as a fellow flesh-creature.

He's still an unknowable and strange character in many ways. In his childhood, he is impetuous and easily angered (because of his enormous head he falls over and can't get up, which frustrates him). Like his older brother, he is a brilliant student, and rarely loses a game of chess. The most important moment of young Vladimir's life comes when his brother, aged 20, is executed for revolutionary activities. But nobody quite knows how he became a revolutionary himself: those who knew him expressed surprise when they realized just how political he was. There has, per-

haps, never been an individual so single-mindedly committed to a cause as Lenin. But whether it was bitterness over his brother's murder by the Tsarist regime, boiling outrage at its various other crimes, something innate, or a mix of all of that, one tries in vain to psychoanalyze Lenin and find the secret to his determination.

One thing that can be said for certain is that he wasn't motivated by love. This is not to say that Lenin did not love; Sebestyen emphasizes the depth of Lenin's relationships with the women in his life. But he shows no warm feelings of brotherhood for his fellow human beings. He is kind to cats and polite to his landlady, but in his personal relations Lenin is consistently abrasive and unnecessarily vicious, even to allies. He is constantly calling people shits and worms and cunts, and viciously denouncing those who question him. He is constantly fuming and raging, and as his life goes on and he

becomes more powerful, so do his tempers.

In Lenin's hostility toward fellow socialists, his refusal to see any disagreement as being in good faith, we see some of the most unfortunate recurring tendencies in political thinking. At one point Georgi Plekhanov, a fellow Marxist with whom Lenin would repeatedly clash, begs him to stop needlessly bashing "liberals" and cursing them to the heavens:

"There is no call now for abusing the liberals in general. This is not tactful. We must appeal from the bad to the good liberal. Those whom you contemptuously refer to as liberals, property speculators, etc. don't deserve to be called such. Liberalism in itself deserves respect. We must regard liberals as possible allies, but your language... is not at all that of an ally. Tone it down, my dear fellow!"

T'S A CAUTION MANY ON THE LEFT COULD STAND to heed today. Liberalism and leftism may be different, even irreconcilably so, but political reality requires being ready to ally and collaborate with those who share at least some of your goals. Lenin is infamous for his unscrupulousness, but he was also a kind of purist, and he loathed Mensheviks just as much as he loathed the Tsar, even though Mensheviks were fellow socialists who simply disagreed on tactical questions. The Menshevik-hate could be all-consuming: one day, Lenin went for a hike up a mountain with his wife. When they got to the top, she found the view so magnificent that she felt inclined to burst into poetry. Vladimir looked out on the stunning vista and instantly started muttering curses about Menshevik scoundrels.

Lenin does wonder why he is constantly having to do battle with people who agree with him, yet are inexplicably traitorous and stupid. It doesn't occur to him that the problem might be within himself, that few actual workers care much about the difference between a Bolshevik and a Menshevik, and that even his sister begins to find him impatient and intolerant to the point of writing: "Volodya, I feel I am being terrorized by you to the point that I am scared of making any incautious expressions."

Lenin was not just a sourpuss, though. He was also deviously Machiavellian, with nary a scruple to him. The New York Times review of Sebestyen's book says Lenin "pre-empt[ed] Frank Underwood's cynicism and murderous ambition by 100 years." That may be going a little far; Lenin did not, after all, ever throw a journalist in front of a train or push an old lady down a flight of stairs. But he certainly had few qualms about using brutal or underhanded methods. At one point, he declared: "Any method is justified in the name of the proletarian cause." When he was asked "Even dishonest methods?" he replied: "If it is done in the service of the proletarian cause, it is not dishonest." That is, of course, a terrifying thing to say. And plenty of people realized that at the time. While we are frequently cautioned to avoid applying contemporary standards to historical actors in contexts vastly different from our own, it's worth remembering that Lenin's interlocutors (who questioned the Machiavellian impulse) were just as much products of their time as he was. There were criticisms of Lenin at the time very similar to those we would make today, and both Emma Goldman and Bertrand Russell were horrified when they realized how little he cared about freedom, and how much he was willing to justify in the name of his cause.

ENIN IS PRAISED FOR HIS "STRATEGIC genius," as proved by the fact that he successfully ascended to power. But it's worth wondering how much of that genius was just the possession of a more calculating and amoral disposition than anybody else around him. He "outmaneuvers" his opponents, it's true, but often through being more willing to betray people than anyone else is. At one point, he even hatches a scheme to raise funds for the Bolsheviks by recruiting two handsome Party members to seduce a pair of heiresses. As soon as they are married, the men will hand over the inheritances to the Party. The plan is actually carried out, and when one inheritance is coughed up, Lenin is thrilled. (The other Party member gets cold feet about handing over the money after deciding he likes being rich and married, and he and his wife flee the country instead.)

Once you accept, as Lenin did, that you will necessarily need to "break a few eggs in order to make an omelet" (i.e. kill a few people in order to bring about desirable social change), if you don't have a fairly clear sense of just how many eggs it's permissible to break in the service of your omelet, you may quickly lose perspective and get carried away. This is the Robespierre lesson: yes, "revolutions are necessarily bloody affairs." The trouble is, how will you be able to tell which of your merciless actions are necessary and which are gratuitous? You can only do so if you have a very clear commitment to minimizing the number of "broken eggs," and if you spend most of your time justifying the breaking rather than figuring out how to do less of it, it's unlikely you do possess such a commitment.

Things quickly spiral out of control, then. At one point, Lenin's justice commissar goes to see him, and complains that Lenin's order to "shoot hooligans, marauders, and profiteers on the spot" will "destroy the revolution." (After all, leftists are supposed to deplore the death penalty.) But Lenin replies: "On the contrary... do you really believe that we can be victorious without the very cruelest revolutionary terror?" The justice commissar isn't buying it, and asks: "Then why do we bother with a Commissariat of Justice at all? Let's call it frankly the Commissariat for Social Extermination and be done with it." At this, Sebesteyn says Lenin's "face lit up": "Well put. That's exactly what it should be. But we can't say that."

The entire tragedy of Lenin is present in this anecdote. The secrecy and refusal to call things what they are, the slippage from "killing is a terrible necessary evil" to "you've got to be cruel to be kind." (At one point, Lenin even rebukes *Stalin* for

not being merciless enough!) All of it results in the production of a "morality" that can justify literally anything one chooses to do, as long as it is done in the name of the cause:

"Our morality is new, our humanity is absolute, for it rests on the ideal of destroying all oppression and coercion. To us, all is permitted, for we are the first in the world to raise the sword not in the name of enslaving or oppressing anyone, but in the name of freeing all from bondage... Blood? Let there be blood, if it alone can turn the grey-white-and-black banner of the old piratical world to a scarlet hue, for only the complete and final death of that old world will save us from the return of the old jackals."

To answer that old question, endlessly debated among Marx-

impose real constraints on what is permissible in the service of a goal. These problems have little to do with socialism itself, and would be problems in the pursuit of any end at all. The problem with the Bolsheviks is not that they pursued equality, but that they did it via an un-egalitarian authoritarianism, one that did nothing to uphold the values it ostensibly sought to bring into the world. Socialism is fine, but it has to be democratic: if the point is that the workers should be in charge, then the workers should be in charge, not some autocrat on high who comes up with endless justifications for why the workers actually need to be forced to be free through firing squads and re-education initiatives.

Unless your pursuit of egalitarian goals is tempered with compassion, caution, and humility, you may wind up smashing every egg you can find with no omelet to show for it...

ists, of whether the "seed of Stalinism was present in Leninism" or whether Stalin betrayed the revolution, one need only read Lenin's words. His own terror may have been far more discriminating and narrow in scope. But he created a way of thinking that made Stalinism a cinch to justify, and almost impossible to object to. Once you accept (1) that anything done to further the revolutionary cause is justified and (2) the Party leadership determines what furthers the revolutionary cause, then you have the ready-made philosophical ingredients for the rationalization of Stalin's crimes. All dissent is necessarily counterrevolutionary, and stopping counter-revolutionaries can be done by any means deemed necessary.

HE CENTRAL LESSON OF THE SOVIET TRAGEDY, to me, seems to be that unless your pursuit of egalitarian goals is tempered with compassion, caution, and humility, you may wind up going mad, smashing every egg you can find with no omelet to show for it. Ideas are powerful, and you have to be careful which premises you accept, because if you internalize bad ones, you may end up doing something appalling in the name of justice.

Importantly, this doesn't in any way cast doubt on the validity of socialism as a goal. Quite the opposite: it means those who see the disaster of post-revolutionary terror as an indictment of "socialism" are entirely mistaking the cause. The actual problem here is fanaticism, the belief that you cannot possibly be wrong, and the adoption of a moral code that doesn't

UT ALL OF THESE ARE PROBLEMS with Leninism, and the delight of Sebestyen's book is that it separates Leninism the ideology from Lenin the human being, so that we are not just dealing with a set of propositions, but with a person's life story. Sebestyen's book has been praised as novelistic, and he does manage to find those wonderful fumblings and bumblings that we always

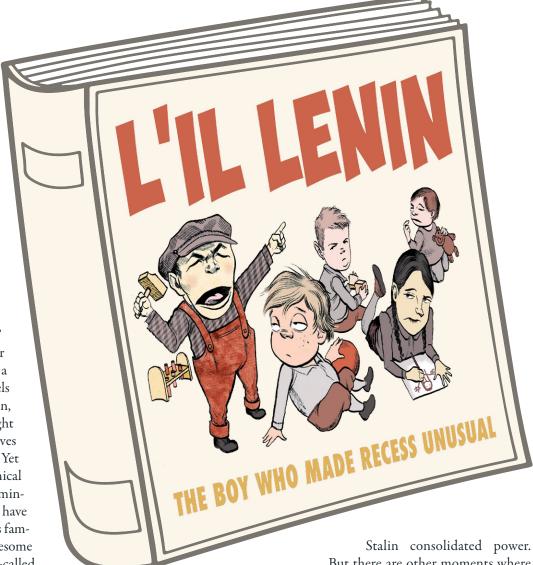
secretly suspect historic figures have engaged in, but that are so often left out of the record. The October Revolution itself was a bit of a mess. Nobody quite knew what they were doing. The guns commandeered by the revolutionaries for bombarding the palace were antiques that couldn't be fired. Someone was supposed to give a signal by raising a purple lantern, but nobody could find a purple lantern, because that's a ridiculous thing to set as your signal.

All of the characters here are as real as Sebestyen can make them, even the British police. At one point, when Lenin was meeting with other Russian revolutionaries in a London cafe, Scotland Yard sent a detective to sit nearby and find out what they were up to. The report he filed read: "Because I do not speak or understand the Russian language to any degree, I was unable to come to any conclusions as to what was being discussed."

Even Nicholas II is a person, albeit not a terribly sympathetic one. He is cruel and stupid. His childhood tutor said Nicholas was a dunce who spent most of his time picking his nose, and while he did know three languages, people commented that this merely enabled him to be dull and tedious in all three. Nicholas has a relatable moment when, like Louis XVI moaning that "the entire universe is about to fall on me" even though he had been "taught nothing" about how to be king, the tsar insists he never wanted to be a ruler in the first place. He feels hopelessly inept and put-upon, as we can all imagine we might be if suddenly finding ourselves the Emperor of All Russia. Yet Nicholas's vicious and tyrannical attitude toward his people diminishes any sympathy one might have for the man, even as he and his family come to a shabby and gruesome end in the basement of the so-called House of Special Purpose.

Lenin himself, though nasty and amoral, is so comically flawed as to be occasionally almost charming. In the pre-revolutionary years, he was constantly adopting elaborate fake names and disguises for his own "safety" that just ended up confusing all of his comrades, and which didn't fool the police for a second. Though audacious in print, he was cowardly in person, and would run away at the first hint that a situation could turn violent. He would send comrades off on incredibly risky missions, but personally wouldn't risk so much as a fistfight in a beer hall, and when cossacks showed up at a protest Lenin was the first to jump over the barricade and scarper, losing his hat in the process. Of course, he justified it as Necessary For The Revolution, since after all the safety of the leader is indispensable for a movement's political success. (One can imagine the grudging grumbles of his comrades as he explains this.)

The saddest and most touching moments of Lenin's life are the ones in which his shell cracks a little bit. There is, first of all, his pitiable decline, as he became slowly incapacitated while watching his revolutionary dreams crumble as



But there are other moments where

he seems to be actively resisting the urge to be more sensitive and less rigid. Sebestyen tells us that once, after listening to Beethoven's Appassionata Sonata, Lenin enthusiastically declared that he:

"...would like to listen to it every day—I always think with pride what marvellous things human beings can do... But I can't listen to music too often. It affects your nerves, makes you want to say stupid, nice things, and stroke the heads of people who could create such beauty while living in this vile hell. And now you mustn't stroke anyone's head — you might get your hand bitten off. You must hit them over the head without mercy."

Poor man. He wasn't a natural-born sociopath. He, like most of us, wanted to stroke people's heads and say stupid, nice things. Vladimir Ulyanov made himself into Lenin, the Machiavellian dictator, out of perceived necessity. Does it exonerate him for the catastrophe he ended up bringing about? No, it doesn't even begin to. But we can learn from it, and see where everything went haywire. Lenin was wrong because he believed that serving his fellow human beings required him to shed his humanity. If only he had embraced it instead. �



The Cruelties Of COULTER

by Brianna Rennix

NN COULTER IS A DIFFICULT PERSON TO CRI-TIQUE: not because there isn't a mountain of things to criticize about her, but because she has made her career by deliberately courting public outrage. This is a counterintuitively effective way to neutralize your critics' worst attacks. Sure, it's not hard to compile a list of Coulter's most demented quotations (for example, "We should invade [the home countries of 9/11 terrorists], kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity," or "I think women should be armed but should not vote.") But the people who love her love her, and the people who hate her hate her: what more is there to say? What damning evidence of Ann Coulter's prejudice and callous indifference to human suffering could you bring to light that she hasn't already shouted from the hilltops? Since Coulter is manifestly uninterested in debate, most of her detractors have long since decided that it's futile to engage with her ideas—especially when her whole personality presents such a tempting target for ad hominem attacks. But this, too, is a losing strategy. In September 2016, Comedy Central brought Coulter onstage on a flimsy pretense and roasted her for hours, a cringe-inducingly savage barrage of insults that revealed the depth of hatred that many people feel towards her. Coulter smiled fixedly through the whole ordeal, made some lame jokes, and plugged her latest book on Donald Trump. On the subsequent press circuit, she breezily deflected questions about the roast by remarking, accurately, that it had not been very funny. Two months later, Trump won the presidential election.

If we draw any useful lessons from these interesting political times, one of them certainly ought to be that personal insults are rarely effective weapons against individuals who are constitutionally incapable of shame. If anything, it only makes the people lobbing the grenades look like assholes, as they scramble more and more wildly for any ammunition that might surprise a reaction out of their target. In the Age of Trump, Ann Coulter's ideas must be dealt with directly, not dismissed out of hand simply because she is an unlikeable, outrage-peddling pundit. Her 2015 immigration manifesto, ¡Adios, America!: The Left's Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third-World Hellhole, was for some time on the top of the New York Times and Washington Post bestseller lists, and thus has presumably been read by a not-insignificant number of people, though the only major outlet that reviewed it at any length was the National Review. (Senior editor Jay Nordlinger concurred with most of Coulter's points, qualifying his enthusiasm with a magnanimous aside about how he supports immigration restriction reluctantly as a matter of principle despite having been sexually attracted to the young Latina bank teller who ordered him a new checkbook the previous day.)

¡Adios, America! may not have received much attention in the mainstream press when it was first published, but Coulter's assiduous promotion of her book won her more powerful allies than newspaper reviewers. Ahead of the book's scheduled publication, Coulter sent out advance copies, annotated with Post-It notes, to Republican presidential hopefuls. Coulter claims that Trump later told her that he had read the book "cover to cover." (He prob-

ably meant that he read both sides of the dust jacket.) On May 26, 2015, just ahead of the book's public release, Trump tweeted: ".@ AnnCoulter's new book-- "¡Adios, America! The Left's Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole"-- is a great read. Good job!" Less than a month later, Trump launched his candidacy with an anti-immigration message right out of Coulter's playbook: "[Mexico is] sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us [sic]. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

Of course, it's possible to overstate the significance of the connection between Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric and Coulter's book—many of the early Trump true-believers who helped make his candidacy viable, like Jeff Sessions, have long advocated restrictionist immigration policies—but it's also worth mentioning that Trump's campaign followed the electoral strategy advocated by Coulter at the end of her book. Pro-immigration Republicans like Jeb Bush, she suggested, were doomed to fail: "It's a sucker's game to think that Republicans can ever get to the Democrats' left on immigration." Instead, she prescribed an explicitly nativist platform: "The GOP's only move is to run the table on white voters, as Reagan did. By unapologetically opposing the transformation of America into a Third World country, the GOP would sweep the white vote—once white people recovered from the shock of any candidate asking for their vote." Coulter, evidently, was much wiser to the way the wind was blowing in 2015 than many respectable commentators and pollsters.

RECENTLY SUFFERED THROUGH THE ENTIRETY OF ¡Adios, America!, and I now bring the fruits of my joyless researches back to you all. My goal here is not to systematically refute every single one of Ann Coulter's claims, which would be tedious. For one thing, some of her claims are so silly that I don't even know what would qualify as a refutation. She spends seventeen entire pages trying to prove that Mexican immigrants litter too much in national parks. I, uh, don't think that's true?—but even if it were, I'm not prepared to seal the border over it. Sweeping declarations such as "one hundred percent of refugee and asylum claims are either obvious frauds or frauds that haven't been proven yet" also feel pointless to address at any length. Is the war in Syria a mass hallucination? Are the Rohingya perpetrating a 600,000-person hoax? Or is it that all the real refugees are sitting around twiddling their thumbs, while only the fake refugees bother to go register themselves with UNHCR or an asylum office? Who the hell knows.

The book is at its most forceful and unsettling, however, when it exploits fault-lines, hypocrisies, and blind spots in mainstream political rhetoric and reporting on immigration issues. My aim here is to show the strategies Coulter uses to make her points feel convincing to an unwary reader. I'll also offer suggestions about what arguments the left should be using to counter this type of rhetoric, and, in the process, make its own positions on immigration more coherent, persuasive, honest, and moral.

¡Adios, America! takes an inclusive, kitchen-sink approach to anti-immigration arguments, but the general thrust of the narrative is this. The United States is the greatest country in the world, because it was founded by white Protestant Anglo-Saxons, the most civilized, peace-loving, and tolerant folk the world has ever seen—with a little help from their slaves. (She throws in a couple paragraphs about the wonderful contributions of black people to American culture, as a poorly-camouflaged tiger-trap for those who would accuse her of racism.) Since our immigration laws were altered in 1965, however, this biracial entente has been threatened by hordes of newcomers from third-world countries. In particular, Mexicans have flooded over our porous border at unprecedented rates, as Mexico has descended into an orgy of cartel-fuelled barbarity. Most of these new immigrants hail from backward "peasant cultures," and when they enter the U.S., they bring their tribal and misogynistic cultural mores with them. These immigrants are not only taking American jobs, but committing crimes—especially sex crimes—at an astonishing rate. The liberal media has systematically concealed this crime wave through selective and dishonest reporting. The only solution to this problem is to completely secure the southern border with a fortified wall, and to declare a near-total moratorium on legal immigration, with possible exceptions for highly-skilled professionals from European countries. There should be no amnesty for undocumented people currently in the U.S. under any circumstances.

To a lot of left-leaning people, the above summary will sound like xenophobic tin-hat conspiracy theorizing of the most implausible kind. They will point to frequently-cited statistics showing that immigration helps the economy, that immigrants pay taxes, and that immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than nativeborn Americans. But Coulter has a counter-point to every one of those claims. Her book is replete with citations, adding up to nearly a hundred pages of end notes. It's very easy to imagine how, if a person came to this book with limited background knowledge, and a willingness to be persuaded—perhaps because they want to believe that immigration is dangerous, perhaps because they want to agree with the person who lent them the book, perhaps because they want to think of themselves as a hard-nosed realist who can accept Difficult Truths—they might find it at least partially persuasive. Even a left reader might at times stop to wonder—could some of this be true? Have I been wrong all this time? It's precisely this quality that makes ¡Adios, America! (and the many right-wing articles and exposes that advance similar arguments) so insidious.

In a spirit of generosity, I will mention that there are a few points Coulter makes that I don't entirely disagree with. For example, she argues that neither Democratic nor Republican politicians have historically had any real incentive to control flows of undocumented people across the border. Democratic lawmakers want more immigrants to become citizens, because immigrants (especially Hispanic immigrants) tend to vote Democrat. Republicans are beholden to big business donors who want a cheap, exploitable workforce. Rich people of both parties want low-cost nannies, gardeners, and housekeepers. The middle-class taxpayer, meanwhile, subsidizes the immigrants' stolen wages through welfare programs. (Undocumented people are ineligible for virtually all welfare programs, but it's true that they can sign up for benefits on behalf of an eligible U.S. citizen child.) This explanation is overly simplistic, of course, but in its broadest strokes, I do not think she is wrong. Democratic candidates do use immigrant communities very cynically, making them glittering promises in election seasons, and then abandoning them whenever they decide to look rightward for votes. Big business, meanwhile, is always on the hunt for the cheapest possible labor. Most politicians are fully aware that large parts of the U.S. economy runs on the back

COURFEMING OCCUPANTALIST ANGRY ENOUGH? AMARIANA

Yes, you've always been an angry feminist. But 2017 awoke a dragon in you, and you can no longer greet everyday examples of the systemic misogynist inequalities of our society with any kind of useful, focused wrath. All you want to do is burn down every goddamn thing in sight. Here at *Current Affairs*, we understand your anger, and in fact, we celebrate it. But in the time-honored tradition of women's magazines, we must ask: is it enough? Are you furious *enough*? When it comes to utterly crushing the patriarchy under the heels of all womankind (flat, stiletto, kitten, wedge, or platform), are you fully committed to the task? Are you ready to thrash the patriarchy until it's silent and bloody and lifeless and then just keep beating the fucking shit out of it because you *can't fucking take it anymore*?

NOT 100% SURE? TAKE THIS QUIZ!

1. You're walking home alone from a bar after a lovely night out with your friends. In the drizzling rain and your drunkenness, you only slowly notice something that should have been obvious for blocks: there's a car, quietly following you down the street. The driver wears a hat tipped low over his face, as if trying to make sure you won't be able to identify him later.

You're a woman, so let's be real: this isn't the first time something like this has happened to you. But tonight, instead of panicking and blaming yourself for your carelessness, you're prepared. You:

- A. Press the button on the top of your umbrella to release the hidden crowbar. Race toward the car, brandishing the crowbar and screaming at the top of your voice. Smash his headlights. Smash his windshield. Smash everything in sight including his ugly fucking face if he dares to open his fucking door. If anyone tries to help him, clobber them too. If you're arrested, burn down the police station.
- **B.** Turn into vapor. As your stalker stops the car and gets out, prodding at your suddenly empty clothes, enter his nervous system through his ears or, if you prefer, his nasal passages. Once you're well-situated in his neocortex, twist his neurons until he believes he's being chased by a horde of his previous victims. Run the stalker

through street after street until he splashes down into the nearest body of water. Make sure he's thoroughly drowned before you disentangle yourself from the limp bundle of pasta that used to be his brain. Oh, and before you turn back into your body, don't forget to float back to your clothes. That was a killer outfit and you looked amazing.

- **C.** Duck into the nearest subway station or 7-11. As his car slides past, frustrated in his pursuit, take careful notice of the license plate. Later, using not-so-legal methods, find out your would-be stalker's address. Plot your next steps carefully: you want to make sure you're not interrupted. And use your skinning knife. I mean, you didn't spend half a paycheck on a designer skinning knife not to use it, am I right? Tan the stalker's hide and use it to re-bind your favorite novels. Carefully dissolve the rest of the corpse in acid. Excellent work. They'll never know it was you.
- **D.** Yes, you could kill him. Maybe you even should. But that doesn't solve the problem, does it? After all, he's hardly the only predator out there, and you're hardly the only woman who's ever been stalked by a stranger—or an acquaintance, a coworker, an ex-boyfriend... you've had enough. You decide to build an army of women warbots. These warbots are ten feet tall and weigh three tons apiece; despite their size,

they're murderously fast. In blocky, sensible armor, not even the horniest moron could find them sexy—and if they do, who cares, because your warbots have just reduced them to bloody sludge. You seize the entire city in which the man stalked you, and refuse to surrender it until your demands for society in which all women are safe and equal are finally met.

- **2.** Your boss calls all the female employees into his office. He says that a former female staffer made an allegation of systemic sexism and lack of opportunities for women at the company, and he's feeling terribly upset about it. He tells you, his female employees, to come to him if you're ever feeling discriminated against, because he really, really wants to believe he's provided a safe and equal working environment for you ladies. And he's just so hurt by these accusations. God, is he hurt.
- A. Take a deep breath. Then let it out in a full-throated scream of rage. Don't let up until the windows shatter and even then keep howling like a banshee. Your fellow employees may join you or they may not. Regardless, don't stop shrieking until every pane of glass—including the screen of his computer and his company-issued phone which he barely uses because he can't even send a fucking email without your help though you haven't seen a cost of living increase in three goddamn years—has been reduced to uselessness.
- **B.** Join hands with the other women in the room until you collectively transform into a hydra. Take turns spitting acid at your boss until, blind and helpless, he screams out that he finally understands the error of his ways. He doesn't. He just wants the pain to stop. Keep spitting.
- **C.** Hack into the company records. Find each and every pay stub which clearly proves that a woman was being paid less than a man for doing the same job. Don't forget the contracted custodial staff: since this work is usually off the books, you may have to conduct interviews, but you'll find that all of these women, mostly immigrant women, were being paid less for a day's work than your boss earned in a lazy minute on the phone with his mistress. Go to your boss's house and mummify him in these reports. Don't forget to remove his organs first and store them in canopic jars. You take pride in your professionalism, as well you should!
- **D.** Send your warbots to slaughter all bosses, everywhere. Male or female, the problem really is power dynamics and bosses, isn't it? As

your warbots slay, they intone the mantra: "ONCE THE SYSTEM IS DESTROYED THE BULLSHIT WILL STOP." Is this mantra true? You're not sure. But you're willing to find out.

- **3.** A male friend makes a dumb sexist joke. How do you respond?
- A. Scream "HA HA THAT WAS SO FUNNY! YOU ARE THE FUNNIEST FUCKING MAN ON THE ENTIRE FUCKING PLANET! HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE SO FUCKING FUNNY ALL THE FUCKING TIME???" Keep screaming until he runs away. Chase after him, still screaming.
- **B.** Unhinge your lower jaw like a python and devour him. As you digest him slowly over several months, you may find that you have to burp more often than usual. Oddly enough, each burp comes out as a giggle.
- **C.** Write a long email, detailing all the ways in which your friend's subtly misogynist behavior, then and now, has frustrated the shit out of you over the years. Afterward, fill the time his shocked absence will leave in your life with learning a new skill, like crochet, or how to carve delicate goblets from the skulls of your former friends.
- **D.** Having seized a satellite and turned it into an orbital weapons platform, rain fire down on the earth until he apologizes. Then, just to be safe, keep firing.
- **4.** Last question! You've been invited to the state funeral of a wealthy, famous, highly respected man, who—like many wealthy, famous, highly respected men—was also a notorious sexual predator. Everyone knew about his crimes, of course, yet for years they quietly looked the other way while he abused vulnerable women and girls. What do you wear?
- **A.** A dress that combusts à la *The Hunger Games*, except that the flames consume everyone within a half-mile radius.
- **B.** A dress that turns into an earthquake.
- **C.** A dress that fires invisible poison darts. The poison leeches slowly into tear ducts over many years, turning those who dared to weep into pillars of highly polished stone.
- D. A live nuclear warhead.

ADD UP YOUR ANSWERS!

Mostly As:

You're a walking inferno of blind, howling rage. That's fantastic, and we salute you. Just make sure you aren't holding back for fear of upsetting people. There is no limit of acceptability for a woman's anger. A woman's feelings can never be "too much".

The world needs to start getting scared of upsetting **you.**

Mostly Bs:

You've become so furious that the borders of your body literally dissolve. Amazing! Just don't forget to take care of yourself afterward. Once you've dealt with the daily misogynist outrages, reconstitute your shape and treat yourself to a lavender-scented bubble bath. You've earned it.

Mostly Cs:

You've become polished, methodical. A true artist of female vengeance. But while it may be tempting to cling to tried-and-true methods, don't hesitate to devise increasingly diabolical punishments, each more cunning and vicious than the last. People may not understand your methods, but they'll certainly learn to respect them.

Mostly Ds:

You take no prisoners. Literally, your warbots have been programmed to never capture misogynists alive. You've shown incredible initiative in the broader battle against the patriarchy, and we cannot praise you enough. Just make sure you destroy the **entire** system, root and branch. The war is only over when you're certain that your daughters—and sons—will never have to endure the soul-destroying bullshit that is systemic misogyny.

of undercompensated immigrant labor. When either party makes noise about border security or calls for tighter immigration enforcement, it's usually not because they *really* want fewer undocumented people in the workforce, but because they are hoping to direct lowand middle-income voters' anger away from themselves and onto a totally vulnerable target. At times, Coulter almost sounds like a labor rights' activist, as she complains that guest worker programs are forms of "indentured servitude" that keep immigrants beholden to sponsoring employers, and thus unable to negotiate vigorously for better working conditions.

a Somali family who immigrated from a refugee camp with a child "who is blind" [Coulter's original emphasis, redolent of contempt]. "An immigration policy that benefits Americans would not result in news items like this one," she states.

The takeaway message here is that people with disabilities are fit to die in camps. "White, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon America," Coulter admonishes us at one point in the book, "has been a haven for minorities, women, children, plants, and animals." Not people with disabilities, though! Sorry, you're less deserving than plants.

Coulter thus makes it very clear that she doesn't merely object to,

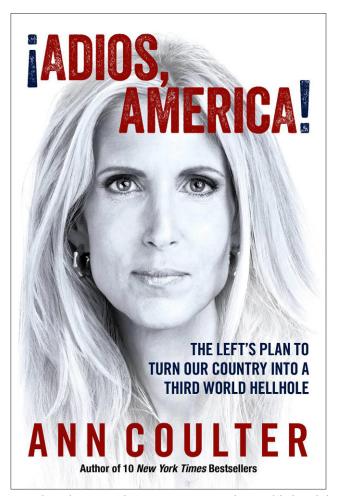
G WE MUST AGGRESSIVELY OUST RIGHT-WINGERS FROM THEIR HYPOCRITICAL POSITION AS DEFENDERS OF WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AGAINST DANGEROUS IMMIGRANTS...

UT BEFORE YOU RUN AWAY WITH THE IDEA THAT Ann Coulter is some kind of undercover socialist, let me be very clear: Ann Coulter is a racist who believes that immigrants are less than human. (This theme will recur throughout this article.) The argument that immigration is inherently bad because our current laws create unfair conditions for immigrant workers is basically incoherent—if you were truly concerned about the welfare of immigrant workers, it makes more sense to guarantee them labor protections than to just ban all the aggrieved workers from the country and Coulter doesn't develop it beyond a few throwaway remarks. For the rest of the book, Coulter's dominant message on immigrants and the economy is that we should—if we admit any immigrants at all—admit only those who have specific skill sets that benefit nativeborn Americans. This is the "points-based" or "merits-based" system touted by the Trump administration.

Now, "merits-based" immigration sounds perfectly reasonable to a lot of people: doesn't it make sense that we would want to attract the *best* immigrants, the way a football team tries to recruit the *best* players? But what "merits-based immigration" actually amounts to is reducing human beings to a number that symbolizes their economic value. Most conservative politicians and commentators are coy about what this would look like in practice. Ann Coulter is not. Ann Coulter comes right out and says it: *AMERICA DOESN'T WANT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES*. Why, she asks, should America accept immigration by "elderly relatives, arriving in wheelchairs"? Why should it accept pregnant women who will deliver "premature babies"? Excerpting from specific cases, she heaps scorn on immigration officials who approved the admission of a young man with a mental disability ("Please at least tell me that the mental impairment appeared after we were graced with Ikram's presence!") and

say, immigrants who kill people in drunk driving accidents, or immigrants who migrated in order to "take American jobs," or whatever other pat justification conservatives usually trot out. Even the most "sympathetic" and non-threatening immigrants are objects of disgust for her. That said, she reserves most of her fire for immigrants who have committed crimes: which, she thinks, is almost all of them.

Coulter trots out a lot of numbers to prove that immigrants commit crimes at a very high rate. These numbers are almost all garbage. I'd say this was a product of sloppy editing, but let's be honest, it was probably deliberate. Coulter states, for example, that immigrants incarcerated in New York's prisons are 70% percent more likely to have committed a violent crime than non-immigrants. This is a shocking statistic. It is also completely untrue. If you actually read the source Coulter cites—a 2008 report from the State of New York Department of Correctional Services—you will discover, first of all, that immigrants comprise 10.4% of the total prison population. (About 22% of the population of the state of New York are immigrants, by the way.) 89.5% of New York's prisoners, i.e. the overwhelming majority, are native-born Americans. 70% of immigrant prisoners and 56% of native-born prisoners have committed violent crimes. As the report mentions, this disparity in percentages is at least partly due to the fact that immigrants arrested for less serious criminal offenses are usually whisked away by ICE and put into deportation proceedings, whereas immigrants who have committed violent crimes will more often serve a punitive prison sentence before they are ejected from the country. I am no mathematician, but I am pretty sure there is no way to slice this data that will give you "immigrants are 70% more likely to have committed violent crimes than non-immigrants." At best, immigrants are 14% more likely to have committed violent crimes, but even that requires you to ignore all surrounding context. Coulter is simply lying.



In other places, Coulter manages not to thoroughly botch her numbers, but still presents them in a deliberately misleading manner. She breathlessly claims that Texas arrests "over 32,000 criminal aliens a year," from which we are clearly meant to infer, I don't know, that Texas is being terrorized by roving bands of immigrant desperadoes. What Coulter doesn't mention is that between 2009 and 2015, Texas arrested anywhere from 800,000 to 1.4 million people a year, which would mean that that 32,000 is a mere drop in the bucket: somewhere between 1% and 4% of all arrests. When you consider that the population of Texas is estimated to be about 17% immigrants, 32,000 actually seems—way too low. If that figure is accurate (it's probably not), it would be a signature data point in every pro-immigration white paper coming out of Texas. It certainly doesn't point very convincingly in the direction that immigrants are about to murder U.S. citizens in their beds. But Coulter presents these numbers without any kind of qualification, and if you are like me, with a poor head for percentages and estimates, 32,000 might well *sound* like a big number.

HIS IS ONE METHOD, BY THE WAY, OF DEALING with people like Coulter: sifting through their evidence point by point, cross-checking all their sources, systematically showing how they are falsifying and misusing information. Is it the *best* method, though? I don't really think so. That's not to say that source-checking isn't an extremely worthwhile and important thing to do, if you are interested in verifying the truth of an author's claims firsthand, but catalogues of citational errors are not exciting reading, and thus, I imagine, do not make for very successful counter-propaganda. (That said, if you would like a complete list of all the errors and obfuscations I found in ¡Adios, America! on a single pass, please don't hesitate to reach out.) And in fact, a large section of Coulter's book is devoted to dismantling the idea that we have any reliable data on immigration and crime.

As Coulter points out—accurately—our major source of data on incarcerated immigrants only describes immigrants in *federal* prison. The vast majority of immigrants are in state and local jails, but those only release figures on prisoners' citizenship status: it's not broken down based on whether the individual is a legal or an undocumented immigrant. Certain other subcategories of immigrant, such as those in immigration detention, may be completely missing from these data sets. Some studies on immigrant crime rely on self-reporting on census forms, which presents inherent problems. And of course, naturalized citizens, and first-generation citizen children of immigrant parents, are not counted as immigrants at all. This, to left-leaning people, seems uncontroversial: an American is an American, we think. But this is exactly what immigration restrictionists don't think, and there is a kind of logic to their objection. If you wanted to prove that all immigrants are dangerous, what better evidence could you produce than the fact that even immigrants who proactively seek naturalization (which is supposed to be contingent on "good character") end up committing crimes? That even their U.S.-born children turn out to be bad apples? Thus, though Coulter often cites statistics to give her text an appearance of authoritativeness, her main arguments on immigration and violence actually don't rest on these statistics at all. What she principally argues, rather, is that we know almost nothing about how many crimes are being committed by immigrants—and into this terrifying informational abyss, she introduces a whole host of anecdotal evidence and suggestive speculations. What all this amounts to, in the end, is: don't you FEEL like immigrants probably commit more crimes?

So where does this get us? On the one hand—looking at the numbers we do have, and feeling confident that Coulter's scaremongering has no basis in fact—we can always just say, "Okay Ann, sure: let's all agree that we need to collect better data on criminals, broken down more precisely by immigration status. When you see the real numbers, we'll be the ones laughing." But then we've implicitly accepted the premise that it's appropriate to make immigration policy decisions by measuring criminality across demographic categories. In the absence of hard numbers, Coulter resorts to scattershot tactics, like looking at the U.S. Marshals' Most Wanted list and remarking ominously that "ninety percent of the names... would not have been recognizable as names fifty years ago" and that "more than half the names are Hispanic." (Side note: does Coulter think there weren't any Hispanic names in the U.S. fifty years ago?) Amusingly, the day that I happened to view the U.S. Marshals' Most Wanted list, it was full of exotic names like "Frederick McLean" and "Robert King." Most of the twelve fugitives were just straight-up white guys. Only two individuals were born outside the U.S. The only plausibly Hispanic-sounding name on there was a U.S. citizen with the hyphenated surname "Abbot-Baerga." But on a different day: who knows? Maybe there would have been more immigrants and "Hispanics" on the list, and I'd've had nothing to joke about.

Unless you irrationally believe that there is something inherent about "immigrants" that makes them less likely to commit crimes, the whole "immigrants commit fewer crimes" counter-argument is one that has to be deployed carefully. If you concede the viability of data-based profiling, you may find things you don't like as you get deeper into the numbers. Are you going to presumptively bar immigration by specific kinds of people based solely on demographic markers of criminality? Suppose it turns out that immigrants *overall* commit fewer crimes, but immigrants of color commit more crimes than "white" immigrants. Suppose young male immigrants from specific countries commit more crimes than young men born in the U.S. Suppose all the numbers change in some unexpected way when you lump together immigrants and second-generation citizens into a single category. Suppose that when you break down the data minutely by immigration status, age, country of origin, and type of crime, you discover that some statistical subset of the immigrant population is disproportionately committing a particular type of crime.

his last speculation—that certain kinds of immigrants might commit certain types of crime with greater frequency—is one that Coulter explores at great length in ¡Adios, America! This the most disturbing and, probably, the most polemically effective part of the book. Her theory, you see, is that immigrants from "third world countries" are more prone to commit acts of violence against women and children. In particular, she claims, "Hispanic" immigrants, as a category writ large, disproportionately commit sex crimes against children and teenagers. Her "evidence," predictably, is that when she searches a news database for stories about gang rape, child rape, and incest, a lot of Hispanic-sounding names come up. Now, you might be thinking to yourself: "People of color are rapists' is literally the oldest trick in the book. Who the hell is still falling for this?"

But the way Coulter writes this section has a powerful emotional effect. She simply begins to recount, one after another after another, stories of horrific sexual violence. You will read about a sixteen-yearold girl gang-raped by a dozen teenagers and adults in the parking lot of her high school: brutally beaten, sodomized, urinated on, her unconscious body dragged by the feet across the concrete and abandoned by a dumpster. You will read countless stories of little girls molested, raped, impregnated by adult relatives and family friends. You will read about the infamous murders that led to the Supreme Court case Medellin v. Texas, where two 13-year-old girls stumbled across a gang meeting in a park and were raped in every conceivable fashion, after which their attackers strangled them to death, stomped on their corpses, and smashed their teeth. And so on, and so on, and so on. It is nightmare-making reading. It makes you feel confused and scared. These stories are not wild inventions: these are real things that happened to real people. You can look up the news articles. "Oh God, oh God, oh God," readers may start to think, "what if—what if it turned out to be true?"

This section was especially disorienting for me, because I have spent time on the border working with women who have recently fled Central America and Mexico. I have heard hundreds of stories of rapes. Many of the women have sexual abuse histories going back into their childhoods, sometimes at the hands of their own relatives. They recount horrific episodes of abuse by men who thought they were trash, who thought of their bodies as objects for their use. To support their cases, I compiled newspaper articles, reports, and studies on violence against women in their region of origin. The phenomenon of men murdering women and mutilating their bodies in a sexualized manner is prevalent enough to have a special word, "feminicidio."

Gender-based violence, for which local authorities typically offer no or haphazard protection, is one of the major drivers of migration from Central America and Mexico. Feminists within these countries decry a machista culture that promotes and excuses violence against women and girls.

Anti-immigration activists are fond of remarking that when an immigrant crosses a border, they don't magically change into a different person: they bring their prejudices and their habits with them. And this is not wrong. A man who abuses his wife or his niece or his girlfriend in one country will almost certainly continue to abuse her in a different country. There is something contradictory about taking very seriously the concerns of women's rights activists within a particular country, but then dismissing outright the possibility that men migrating from those countries might continue to be a threat to women in the new places where they settle. Even if I don't believe the absurd claim that "Hispanic" men are disproportionately prone to commit child rape, is there any chance that men migrating from countries where rates of physical and sexual violence against women and children are extremely high would commit those crimes at a higher rate in the U.S.? And what would we do if that were true?

Again, this is an area in which we have almost no reliable data. Police departments do not collect, or at any rate do not release, statistics about the race and immigration status of people arrested for sex crimes. The same kind of informational gap has given fuel to right-wing anti-immigration groups like VDARE in Europe, who promote the narrative that migrants and refugees from the Middle East and northern Africa are committing rape at a disproportionately high rate, and that the government, police, and media are colluding to cover it up. "That's just crazy," you might object. But this is the crux of the problem. Is the migrant-rapist theory created completely whole-cloth from anecdotes and speculation, in the absence of any consistent and reliable data? Yes. Does it feel like it could be true? Isn't there a kind of logic to theorizing that men coming from countries where women are marginalized and there is general impunity for gender-based violence—countries that women are themselves fleeing because of gender-based violence-might be more likely to behave aggressively towards women? What if we started collecting more data and it validated *some part* of the right-wing narrative about immigrant violence against women?

OW DO WE COMBAT A NARRATIVE THAT WE don't have enough facts to prove or disprove, where our intuitions in either direction may well be unreliable guides? With sex crimes, in particular, it's unlikely we would ever be able to get comprehensive data anyway: these crimes are certainly under-reported, and it would be hard to correct for how significantly the rate of non-reportage is likely to vary amongst different income, race, and immigration status groups. Ann Coulter would have us believe that "it's been a long time since we've seen much [gang rape, child rape, and incest] in the United States." (She then adds: "of course, there are lots of things we thought had been abolished a hundred years ago that our mass immigration policies are bringing back." As an aside, isn't it a bit peculiar that Ann Coulter believes that one hundred years ago, i.e. the year 1915, we "abolished" gang rape and incest in the U.S.? I'm not sure which is more surprising: the fact that Coulter apparently thinks child rape no longer happens amongst non-immigrants today, or that she acknowledges there was any child rape back in the Good Old Days when America was still white.) But it's very clear that child rape and incest occur in native-born populations too. We don't know the exact rate for certain. We don't how greatly it differs from the rates in more "violent" countries. For all we know, the difference is less drastic than we think.

One thing to point out is that groups like VDARE and people like Ann Coulter rely very heavily on stories of immigrants attacking native-born women and children to make their scare tactics stick. This is despite the fact that rape is usually—and incest and domestic violence are by definition—crimes committed within families, meaning that, in most cases, the victims would be other immigrants. This is where the whole right-wing narrative starts to fall apart. Anti-immigration nativists want to seize the high ground on women's and children's rights in order to make left-wing people look like hypocrites. "Don't you say you care about 'rape culture'?" they wheedle. But the fact is, these people are racists who do not give a flying fuck if immigrant women and children are raped or killed. If men are indeed committing acts of violence against women and children in Mexico and Central America, they won't stop committing them because we've put up a border wall. They'll just commit them on their side of the wall, and their victims will have one fewer avenue of escape. As far as Coulter is concerned, that's not our problem. Immigrant-on-immigrant crime in the U.S. is a bad thing because it distracts the police from protecting real Americans, not because it means that some immigrants are being injured or killed. When conservatives talk about "black-onblack" crime, they typically aren't advocating for a greater investment of attention and resources in black communities: what they are actually implying is that the whole problem would go away if black people simply ceased to exist altogether. It's the same thing here. Coulter has a lot of sympathy for American-born victims of violent crime, as indeed they deserve. By contrast, her total indifference to the lives of immigrant children is utterly chilling. Here are two representative passages:

- "The defendant in a story the Chattanooga Time Free Press... was thirty-six-year-old German Rolando Vicente Sapon, an illegal alien from Guatemala. He had persuaded his sixteen-yearold first cousin, Yuria Vicente Calel, to join him in the United States, where he immediately began raping her, got her pregnant, and then began sexually abusing their infant daughter. So the good news is: They have an anchor baby!"
- This case of incest, child rape, and murder was entirely an illegal immigrant affair. Baby Hope's parents were illegal immigrants, the cousin who raped and murdered her was an illegal immigrant, and the cousin who helped dispose of the body was an illegal immigrant. Wouldn't that be an important fact to put right up there in the headline? To even mention, at all? New York taxpayers had spent a kazillion dollars trying to solve this Baby Hope case. Weren't they entitled to know? ... The NYPD spent twenty-two years and a small fortune trying to solve a case that never should have taken place in this country in the first place. How many other crimes went unsolved because, for two decades, the police were pouring resources into a manhunt for a Mexican illegally in this country, who committed child rape and murder in New York City?

If you needed any further proof that Coulter considers immigrants sub-human, here it is. She literally believes that the sexual abuse of a woman and her infant is something to be glib about. She literally believes that investigating the rape and murder of a toddler was a waste

of taxpayer dollars. Coulter is not outraged that that baby girl was molested. Coulter is outraged that she wasn't molested in Guatemala. Coulter is not outraged that Baby Hope was raped, strangled, and discarded in a meat freezer. Coulter is outraged because Baby Hope's brutalized body wasn't discarded in a meat freezer in Mexico.

And thus we circle back to what is, in its way, a comforting fact. Anti-immigration activists of Coulter's ilk are not people passionately advocating for what they believe is the most sensible and humane model of human governance. They are monsters who literally believe that non-American lives, especially non-white non-American lives, are worth less than dirt. They are the wealthy world's equivalent of pandilleros and gangsters, people who hold human life cheap and do not care who they hurt, so long as they have their fun. (I'm certain Ann Coulter had fun writing this piece-of-shit book.) When the claims of people like Coulter make us feel uncomfortable, we must pay attention to that feeling, because we should always be looking for ways to correct our hypocrisies and improve our arguments. But there can be no true meeting of the minds between us and them, because their worldview is antithetical to those of us who believe in the universal brotherhood of man.

O HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR ARGUMENTS AND our messaging on immigration and crime? I'm not saying we should avoid mentioning the macro-level statistics that suggest that immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than native-born people: it's entirely appropriate to put those estimates forward to counteract individuals who speak as if a high immigrant crime rate is a proven fact. But it is not a silver bullet, and we should not treat it like one. By the same token, we also need to be less afraid of acknowledging that some immigrants, being humans, do commit crimes. Coulter mocks, with some justice, the frequent practice of journalists who hide the ball on the race or immigration status of criminal suspects in their reporting, burying this information late in the article or covering it with euphemisms. (Whenever I see "U.S. citizen" in a lede, I usually know what's coming.) The fact is, if we think these demographic factors are sometimes relevant to understanding a crime—for example, when a white cop kills an unarmed black man—we should just get in the habit of stating the perpetrator's and victim's races, genders, immigration statuses (and so on), in a matter-of-fact way, uniformly across all crime reporting. To do otherwise creates the appearance that the media is hiding something, which is, I think, the worst possible outcome. Journalists should be more willing to simply state facts, and, where they think a fact may be taken out of context, supplement it with additional analysis. We cannot prevent badly-intentioned people from misusing facts. But we can do more to head off the charge that the media is proactively concealing dangerous truths from the public, which only encourages people to engage in free-floating speculation unconstrained by any empirical boundaries.

In the same interest of transparency, I don't think we should oppose initiatives to improve data collection on crime, provided they are methodologically sound. But we also need to be more forceful in stating that we do not believe in racial or national-origin profiling in our immigration or our policing policies. This is because using demography as a proxy for criminality means punishing people for innate characteristics about themselves that they cannot help. After all, if we really wanted to reduce the U.S.'s rate of violent crime, the

easiest thing to do would be to simply get rid of all men, immigrant and non-immigrant. Did you know that 90% of homicides in the U.S. are committed by men? We could basically eliminate murder in this country, and save a lot of taxpayer dollars. This is a good illustration of why profiling is wrong. Imagine applying for a visa or seeking asylum at a border, and being told, "Sorry, no—people with penises commit too many murders." We must stand firm in our conviction that human beings are individuals and deserve to be treated as such, even when this is politically difficult.

We must also aggressively oust right-wingers from their hypocritical position as defenders of women's and children's rights against dangerous immigrants. We must emphasize that we, unlike people like Coulter, are committed to protecting victims of abuse, no matter who they are or where they live, and no matter who their abuser is. In fact, restrictive immigration policies *increase* violence against women and children: they trap them in violent regions, and cut off their ability to seek protection in a different country if their own country is unwilling or unable to help them. Restrictive immigration policies also prevent undocumented victims in this country from reporting their abusers to law enforcement, because they are afraid that the police will turn them over them to ICE, or that their abuser will do so when he finds out she talked. Many immigrant women have even been frightened to call domestic violence hotlines since Trump was elected.

Additionally—instead of focusing myopically on links between immigration and crime in the U.S.—we need to find better ways to talk about violence in neighboring countries, not only in terms of how it affects the U.S. in the form of immigration, but as an urgent reality that our domestic and foreign policies help create and sustain. Coulter points out, for example, that our national obsession with atrocities perpetrated by ISIS contrasts strikingly with our almost total silence on the massacres, mutilations, and bloody territorial battles being carried out by drug cartels (and, I would add, the police and security forces who are likewise active participants in the drug trade) in Mexico. "The American media's fixation on monsters twelve hours and several connecting flights away from the United States, while ignoring the savage butchery occurring in a country within walking distance," writes Coulter, "is so obvious that border fence advocates have taken to warning that Islamic terrorists might enter the United States through the wide-open Mexican border." Conservatives pay a lot of attention to the escalating violence in Mexico: they fear it, they are fascinated by it, it features heavily in their arguments for why immigrants are bound to be dangerous. Breitbart Texas daily publishes gory on-the-ground reporting from "citizen journalists" who would otherwise likely face torture or assassination if they attempted to run their stories in the Mexican press. (A record number of Mexican journalists have been murdered over the past twelve months.) Meanwhile, I don't see *The New York* Times scrambling to provide front-page billing for their beleaguered colleagues in Guerrero or Tamaulipas. A lot of left-leaning people I speak to don't even really know that anything especially bad is happening in Mexico right now, or in Central America either. These stories don't feature prominently in mainstream media, despite their shock value, probably because the left has no fixed policy positions on the matter—unlike the right, for whom it serves as fodder for their anti-immigration, pro-security positions.

We need more insistent voices in journalism and politics explaining how U.S. policies actively contribute to the terrifying upswells of violence we are now seeing in neighboring countries. For Coulter,

the explanation for the violence in Mexico and Central America is simple: these are backwards, uncivilized "peasant societies" who cannot govern themselves without killing each other. This explanation requires us to ignore the fact that it is *our* country's insatiable appetite for illicit drugs—coupled with our domestic drug policy, and our lavish dispensations of weapons, training, and cash for anti-narcotics operations in Mexico—that has created the violence we are currently seeing. *Our policies* have caused the market price of drugs to skyrocket, sparking massive cartel wars and incentivizing Mexican security forces to actively participate in the drug trade, at the expense of civilian lives. As opioid deaths have climbed in the U.S., so too have forced disappearances and horrific acts of violence against Mexican children, journalists, students, civilian bystanders, and ref-

"It is our country's insatiable appetite for illicit drugs that has created the violence we are currently seeing."

ugees in transit. Meanwhile, our political, financial, and logistical support for brutal regimes in Central America's Northern Triangle, our shoddy reception of refugees fleeing state violence, and our mass deportation policies have destabilized the region almost to the point of collapse. This is no "peasant" violence, whatever the hell that means: this carnage is the direct product of our country's ruthless pursuit of self-interest and sociopathic indifference to consequences.

At the moment, the right is more interested in what is happening in neighboring countries than many people on the left, and the chief lesson that the right has drawn from these catastrophes of human suffering is that we should simply build a wall and let all these people die. The left needs to step up. The crises that are driving much of the migration on the southern border are so severe that they dwarf most of our own national problems. We should be talking about this violence more than the right, because we should care about it more than the right. We should be advocating louder and louder for the changes we need to make to our own drug, security, immigration, and economic policies to alter the incentives and reduce the firepower of this violence. We need to stay abreast of popular right-wing arguments on these subjects, not as amusing objects of curiosity, but as narratives that must be proactively countered: with data, yes, but also with narratives, with emotional appeals, with policy proposals that clearly demonstrate that ours is not a party (or a movement, or a political philosophy) beholden to elite interests.

It's Ann Coulter's world now: we are just living in it. We must do everything we can to fight back. ❖

by Briahna Joy Gray

ONALD TRUMP IS A BAD PRESIDENT. But that's not why we loathe him. Indifference to the environment, the human cost of a tattered social safety net, and the risks attendant to reckless nuclear threats are hardly unique aspects of Trump's presidency: they're the American way. It's certainly alarming that Trump has repealed common-sense environmental regulations, threatened social services, and withdrawn from the Iran deal. But those acts, which would also feature in a hypothetical Ted Cruz presidency, don't explain the scale of the reaction to Trump. They don't account for the existence of neologisms like "Trumpocalypse," or tell us why late-night hosts and satirists are constantly inventing new, creative ways to mock POTUS's weave.

The feature that makes Trump unique, and the focus of a particular kind of outrage and contempt, is not his policy prescriptions or even his several hundred thousand character failings. God knows plenty of presidents have been horrible people. What sets Trump apart is his shamelessness.

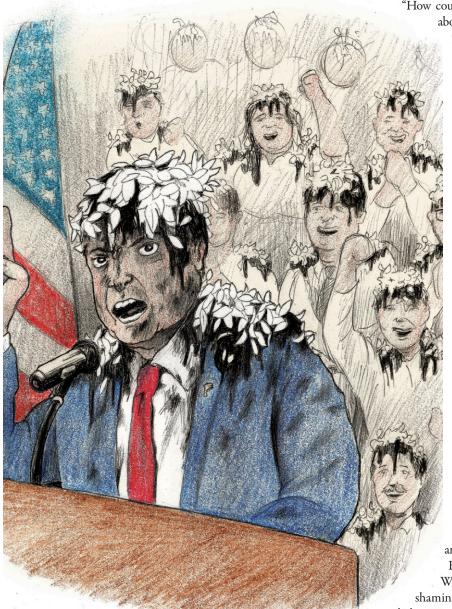
For example, Trump is not the first president or popular public figure to be accused of sexual assault—it's a crowded field these days. But he was the first to adopt a "takes one to know one" defense—using his political opponent's husband's accusers as a human shield to deflect personal responsibility.

Instead of following the prescribed political ritual for making amends after being caught in flagrante, namely, a contrite press conference featuring a stiff if loyal wife, Trump chose to go on the offensive, even insisting

that the infamous "pussy tape" must have been a fabrication. Trump established the pattern of "doubling down" early on when he refused to walk back his comment that John McCain's capture and subsequent torture during the Vietnam War disqualified him from being considered a war hero. It seems attempts to shame Trump only provoke more shameful acts which fail to faze him.

Where other presidents have been cagey, Trump is brazen. He did not invent the Southern Strategy, but he was the first to employ it with so little discretion that the term "dog whistling" now feels too subtle. (Remember, the tiki-marchers shouting "Jew[s] will not replace us" contained among them some "very fine people.") There is no shortage of vain politicians, but while John Edwards felt compelled to apologize for his \$400 haircut, Trump flaunts his saffron pompadour and matching face. Nepotism may be as old as the Borgias, but the boldness with which Trump has appointed family members and their agents to positions of authority still manages to stun. And while nuclear brinksmanship was a defining feature of 20th century presidencies, never before has the "leader of the free world" literally bragged about the size of his big red button and attempted to fat-shame the leader of a rival nuclear power.

Even when it appears as if Trump is on the verge of an apology or admission, he quickly lapses back into shamelessness. When Trump was criticized for lamenting violence on "many sides" following Heather Heyer's murder in Charlottesville, Trump was pressured by advisers into releasing a statement explicitly condemning neo-Nazis. But he soon walked it back, once again blaming "both sides" and the "alt-left" for being "very violent." (Again, remember which side featured a white supremacist who killed a woman.)



This impudence, this shamelessness, is essentially Trump's calling card. And those who object to it have often sought to restore the balance by trying even harder to shame him, or, in the alternative, by trying to shame his followers into acting like reasonable human beings. "[S]hame on all of us for making Donald Trump a Thing," wrote conservative writer Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry back in 2015. Throngs of protestors chanted "shame, shame, shame" along Trump's motorcade route after his "fine people" remark. *The Guardian*'s Jessica Valenti wrote that shaming is both justified and "necessary" because "there are people right now who should be made to feel uncomfortable" because "what they have done is shameful."

MSNBC host Joy Ann Reid has also sought to shame Trump voters, for example by tweeting: "Last November, 63 million of you voted to pretty much hand this country over to a few uber wealthy families and the religious far right. Well done." *Washington Monthly* contributor David Atkins has echoed this sentiment, tweeting: "Good news white working class! Your taxes will go up, your Medicare will be cut and your kid's student loans will be more expensive. But at least Don Jr can bring back elephant trunks on his tax deductible private jet, so it's all good."

"How could he/they!?" is a popular way to start sentences about either Trump or his supporters. The statistic that

53% of white women voted for Trump (*how could they??*) is a useful tool both for shaming others and the self-flagellation-cum-virtue-signaling characteristic of some white women who "knew better." Even suggesting that politicians *talk* to Trump voters is grounds for ridicule. Forget scarlet letters—nothing short of community expulsion will do. They're "irredeemable" after all. So why bother "reaching out"?

Believe me, I empathize. Trump's policies hurt people, and the people who voted for him did so willingly. Given the easy-to-anticipate consequences of their votes, Trump voters do seem like bad people who should be ashamed. We're often encouraged to engage more civilly with "people who disagree with us," but the divergent value systems reflected by America's two major political parties cut to the core of who we are. They are not necessarily mere disagreements, but deep moral schisms, which is why commentators like Valenti insist that a high level of outrage is appropriate to the circumstances. If you're not outraged, you're not taking seriously enough the harm done to the immigrant families torn apart by ICE. Mere factbased criticisms of various policy positions feel inadequate, as if they trivialize the moral issues involved. It seems important to add that various beliefs, themselves, are shameful. No wonder, then, that the shared impulse isn't just to disagree, but to "drag," destroy, and decimate.

Given what's at stake, I understand why shaming feels not only appropriate, but compulsory. It's an inclination I share and sympathize with.

But in practice, I think it's a mistake.

Why? As it turns out, social science confirms that shaming is an ineffective strategy for motivating moral behavior. According to a 2011 study by June Price Tangney,

Jeff Stuewig, and Debra J. Mashek, shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride each function as emotional moral barometers that help individuals to assess and correct behavior. But unlike guilt, which is tied to specific acts of wrongdoing, shame provokes a holistic negative self-evaluation that impedes one's ability to internalize and learn from bad behavior. While the person experiencing guilt thinks "what a terrible thing I did," and then considers the effect their actions have had on others, the person experiencing shame thinks "what a horrible person I am," and searches for a way to preserve their self-esteem. Guilt is adaptive: it causes us to isolate and rehabilitate a specific "bad" behavior. But shame is uniquely hard on the ego. The results can be disastrous.

Feeling their entire self-image under attack, shame-prone individuals are more likely to externalize blame and lash out destructively, including physically and verbally. According to the study, shamed individuals are prone to "turn the tables defensively" and direct their anger toward "a convenient scapegoat"—all in a bid to regain control and superiority in life. Moreover, where guilt evokes "other-oriented empathy" and is more likely to lead to behavioral change, shame

ADDING SHAME TO THE POWDER KEG OF WHITE RESENTMENT IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE THE REDEMPTIVE QUALITIES WE IMAGINE...

disrupts the empathy process. Instead of considering ways to remedy our behavior, shame prompts us to become self-protective and defensive of our identities. Does any of this sound familiar?

Defensive grandiosity, anger, and violence all characterize the altright movement, and while I can't definitively prove a connection, my instinct tells me that gloating over "white tears," while cathartic, doesn't exactly ease white Americans through the transition from white hegemony to racial equality. It is axiomatic that when you're used to superiority, equality feels like oppression. The left can internalize that insight as a way to process and dismiss white angst, or it can be used to our strategic benefit. As we lurch toward greater equality, the relevant question is not whether certain white Trump voters have an outsized persecution complex (they do), but whether adding shame to the powder keg of white resentment is likely to have the redemptive qualities we imagine.

Current Affairs contributor and Alt-Right Aficionada Angela Nagle has extensively chronicled the relationship between sexual insecurity, misogyny, and white supremacy in online chat rooms. The pick-up artist community, which caters to men who underperform traditional masculinity, has been a gateway group for many members of the alt-right—many of whom are able to locate a sense of belonging and an alternative source of pride in racial separatist movements. Last August, in Charlottesville, we saw the potential for how violent their externalized anger could be.

Of course, the responsibility for bigotry lies squarely on the shoulders of bigots, but it's worth considering whether the language we use might influence whether whites see the future as one to be afraid of, or as an inclusive one in which equality benefits them too. There are humanistic reasons for that: everyone, regardless of race, *should* be able to feel a sense of community belonging and individual pride in an egalitarian future. But it is also in the self-interest of racial justice movements to think about the social factors that help drive the discontented in one direction or another. If a particular method is found to actually fuel the growth of the alt-right, it needs to be examined critically, because nothing is more liable to hurt people of color than a flood of angry young men joining white supremacist groups. It may not be our "job" to assist white people's adaptation to a new

multicultural reality. But unless the political dynamics of backlash are carefully understood, important victories in the fight against racism may prove transient.

HERE'S AN ADDITIONAL STRATEGIC angle to this critique of shaming: it often causes us to misattribute the motives of our political opponents. Focused on the ethical implications of conservative political positions, the left often makes the arguments that feel most virtuous rather those which are the most persuasive and accurate.

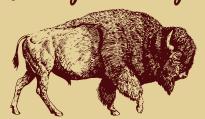
For example, liberals interpreted the GOP's support of senatorial candidate Roy Moore as evidence of Republicans' moral depravity. Who, after all, could support a man who, at age thirty-four, sourced dates by scouring family court for the underage subjects of custody proceedings? As journalist Jonathan Cohn put it, "[t]he GOP supports sexually assaulting children and taking away their health insurance. They are cartoon villains." But as justified as that criticism is—the Republican Party *does* show a callous indifference to both sexual violence and uninsured children—drawing the GOP as cartoon characters flattens and oversimplifies. Because it fails to acknowledge the right's perspective, it limits the left's ability to front more effective arguments.

Importantly, to many Moore-voting Alabama conservatives, support for Moore did not seem like support for pedophilia. For one thing, their distrust of the media led some of them to doubt the accuracy of reports on Moore's history. The GOP exploited their constituents' skepticism about mainstream journalism—an ongoing problem which Democrats need to address more meaningfully. A poll from December showed that 71% of Arkansas Republicans believed that the allegations against Moore were false—the product of a media conspiracy and the untrustworthy nature of the female psyche. It was not, then, that they were fine with sexual predators, but that they dismissed the story alleging that Roy Moore was one. (A small sliver of voters did think that accusations against Moore were true but voted for him anyway.) Suggesting that Alabama Republicans are "fine with pedophilia" misidentifies what the problems are, then. In fact, the issues that Democrats need to confront are (1) disbelief in women's accounts of sexual misconduct, and (2) a lack of trust in the press. These are both difficult barriers to overcome, but they're considerably more tangible and assailable obstacles than the vague notion that 'Republicans love pedophiles.'

Crucially, many Republicans also considered Moore to be the "lesser of two evils" and a better standard-bearer for the conservative agenda than his opponent. Certainly, Democrats can understand this impulse. History is replete with examples of Democrats for whom we've held our noses and voted. Just recently, in the lead-up to 2016, leftists who drew attention to America's Clinton-backed intervention in Libya—an intervention which, among other horrors, has contributed to the creation of shocking slave markets—were told that what *really* mattered was getting a Democrat in the White House and liberals on the Supreme Court. Following the nineties-era rape allegations against President Clinton, he was defended on similar grounds. And some commentators insisted Al Franken should retain his Senate seat for the good of the party, without drawing any firm conclusions about exactly how much sexual abuse by a public official

Notin Eurrent Affairs SALUTES A FINE STATE

These Are A Thing You Guys Have, Right?



CHIEF EXPURT

Did you know that the chief export of North Dakota is the sunflower? We are pretty sure that's true. The sunflower has all manner of useful properties, such as being a fit subject for paintings.



We Are Job Creators, Too

We may not have as many fruited plains or wandering buffalo as the Great State of North Dakota, but here at Current Affairs we do share one thing in common with it: we are job creators. North Dakota may be known for attracting oil-boomers and frack-mongers, and it's true that very little of that goes on here on planet Current Affairs. We couldn't even tell you what that device pictured on the right is, and we wouldn't know a pipeline from the proverbial hole-in-the-ground. The extraction of natural resources has always struck us as rather vulgar, and if there is one thing we are not, it is vulgar. We do not want to get our seagulls covered in oil, if you know what we mean. Getting your hands dirty may be essential in politics, but life is

not politics, and in life employees must wash hands before returning to work. Where were we? Oh yes, job creation. Your state creates jobs building pipelines and firing goopy liquids through them, we create jobs for newsstand captains and periodical-peddling street urchins. You may look down on us because we've never run a major energy company, but the next time you see a newsboy in a flat cap hawking the latest *Current Affairs* from a streetcorner, just remember: we did that.

Which
Is The Superior
of the Dakotas?
Do We Even
Need To Say?

FAETS ABBUT Bismarck

Say the words "North Dakota?" to almost any American and the answer you'll inevitably hear the most is "Bismarck." But while we all know the B-word and can parrot it reflexively, comparatively few among us can actually recall anything about Bismarck. Here, then are some key facts:

-Bismarck was born in 1815 and died in 1898

—Bismarck was known as the "Iron Chancellor" and is credited as the father of modern Germany.

Bismarck is credited with inventing the idea of the state pension system.

Bismarck has a
population of only
72,000. If they all showed
up at once, they
would still not
fill Wembley
Stadium.



They Have Pastimes

North Dakota is well-known among the states for its rich tradition of physical amusement, only some of which takes the

form of bloodsports. That innocuous youthful activity known as "bag-fighting" is just as popular in the state as its more sensible counterparts.





it has come to our attention

that while *Current Affairs* is beloved in 49 of the 50 United States, we have yet to sell a single subscription in North Dakota. Because we consider *all* Americans to be our children, we have taken it upon ourselves to lure and trap this last elusive specimen for our collection. We believe the potential North Dakotan subscriber will be more likely to consider a print subscription after being treated to this stirring tribute to their great state.*

LANDA E VANDO DE

THE PLANTS YOUR EXCUSE?!



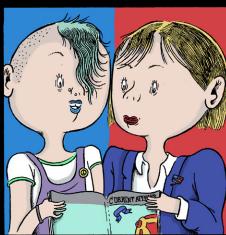
















we should let slide so long as they are on our side.

The same logic kept a number of voters from inquiring too much into the allegations against Moore: true or false, he's still a Republican. Sometimes this was driven by an absolute opposition to abortion: for those who see the practice as mass murder, even acts of gross sexual misconduct by a GOP politician won't justify voting for a pro-choice alternative. While the instinct to highlight Moore's history was correct since it made voting for him more difficult and allowed Doug Jones to eke out a victory, pretending that the GOP "supported" sexual assault likely had a different effect: to raise hackles and further embed already dug-in heels. Why? Because a bad-faith attack over shared values has never persuaded anyone. (When, dear progressive, were you last swayed by a Republican who claimed you simply don't care about the troops?)

By contrast, pointing out that a vote for Moore meant prioritizing low taxes over the safety of young girls clearly outlines the moral stakes of the choice at hand and gives the voter the opportunity to opt for what's right. The shaming option berates the voter for being deplorable. The guilting option provides an opportunity for redemption.

present in the endless debates around the role that race played in Trump's election. Many of the progressives who emphasize racism as the *only* relevant factor in Trump's appeal, and who downplay economic causes, have insisted that, at best, Trump voters pursued their (perceived) self-interest without regard to the human

collateral they left in their wake: At worst, they felt Trump's antipathy toward brown people was a plus. Framed this way, shaming makes perfect sense. Yet a shaming approach can make us indifferent to the complex human factors that underlie decisions we detest. Millions of white Americans have undergone economic hardship in the decade following the great recession, even though certain ethnic minorities suffered disproportionately from the recession. (Black Americans, for example, lost 40% of our accumulated wealth, which already represented a small fraction of white wealth). And many of the Trump voters who feel unheard and unrecognized by blue America may have a sliver of a point: The "establishment" of both parties has long abandoned labor and under-responded to issues that disproportionately affect rural communities, like the opioid crisis. (Keep in mind: many, not all, or even necessarily "most." Trump's base was notably more affluent and less economically stressed than Hillary's.) Applying shame to an entire category of people, rather than conducting a more nuanced assessment of why people feel the way they do and did what they did, means we might miss those among the blameworthy who might be identified as something more mutable, more persuadable than a "deplorable"—someone who might be convinced to join our side next time around.

If shaming *feels* cathartic, but is counterproductive to the goal of changing hearts and minds—which is, after all, indispensable for political success—perhaps we should shift from shame to guilt. If we narrow the focus from castigating the deplorable person to rebuking the deplorable belief, might we expand our appeal? Would it help preserve egos and tamp tempers to "hate the sin and not the sinner"? What if instead of satisfying but glib remarks about how voters in coal country deserve to lose their health care for being racists, we instead said: "Trump's policies have been a direct attack on the working

class. They were right to shake things up, but they should get something *better* than the status quo, not worse"?

This is the message that Michigan gubernatorial candidate Abdul El-Sayed has been using to win votes for a staunchly leftist agenda in a state that voted for Trump. "The vote for Trump was not a vote for hope or a vote of inspiration, it was a vote of cynicism and frustration with the status quo," El-Sayed says. "They didn't vote for Trump because of some animus for Muslims, they voted for Donald Trump because they felt that he was at least speaking to an experience that they faced." El-Sayed's own uncle voted for Trump: "This is a guy who would take us water skiing in the summers and snowmobiling in the winters, and he learned to prepare venison Halal so that my family could eat it. He wasn't motivated by some racial animus." We may agree or disagree with El-Sayed's actual analysis; perhaps one thinks he is too naïve, though as a Muslim candidate in the Rust Belt he likely has few illusions about American Islamophobia. But as a means of garnering political support for a left agenda, it's more effective to tell El-Sayed's uncle that he made a poor judgment that will hurt those like his nephew than to tell him he is a callous racist who doesn't care about his family as much as we, the virtuous, do.

Sarah Silverman has recently embarked on a project to use empathy as a more effective means of advancing progressivism with her show *I Love You, America*. On it, she substitutes compassion for condescension, and where other comedians are sardonic—using Trump voters as punchlines—Silverman is sympathetic to a degree that is, at times, frustrating, but is ultimately more constructive than the alternative. In the first episode, Silverman managed to pass the "beer test" with a conservative family—a hurdle Hillary struggled to clear in 2016—and she didn't do it by pointing out their ignorance. She did it by presenting them with a personification of liberalism so gracious and warm that it rerouted their anger to empathy. And empathy is a quicker route to change.

N IDENTIFYING THE USE OF SHAMING TACTICS as the cause of some of the defensiveness, anger, and violence we've seen from the right, I am not excusing that behavior. Nor do I mean to suggest that Trump supporters don't "deserve" to be shamed; the shaming itself is but meager retribution for the real harms which have resulted from the right's actions at the ballot box. Empathy has to go both ways: you have to understand why those who use shaming do it, and why the left's moral outrage isn't simply—as the right often suggests it is—an effort to seem righteous and superior: it comes from being genuinely disturbed and angered by the way marginalized people are treated.

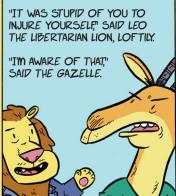
But by unpacking the role shame plays in our political discourse, we can use our words more strategically and become better equipped to move the country in the right (i.e. left) direction. As Trump's popularity continues to wane, and his supporters are increasingly confronted with the reality that his campaign promises were worth less than the worthless news networks who profited from them, it might be worth using the lessons of social psychology to clear a path to greater mutual understanding. We should focus our criticisms on Trump's specific beliefs and their human consequences rather than his integrity (or lack thereof). No one was ever reformed by a lecture about how racist they are. Save the "How could anyone..."s for Twitter, and don't underestimate the persuasive power of laying down a carefully calculated guilt trip.

Humanism is hard. But it's easier than four more years. .











"IF YOU CAN'T TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF" SNORTED LEO THE LIBERTARIAN LION, "YOU CAN HARDLY EXPECT OTHERS TO TAKE CARE OF YOU."



"IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO SUFFER, YOU SHOULDN'T **PECIPE TO PO SO!**

"IT WASN'T A CHOICE! I STEPPED IN AN AARDVARK HOLE!"

"IT MUST HAVE BEEN A CHOICE," SAID LEO THE LIBERTARIAN LION, "OR ELSE IT WOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED I, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE NEVER DONE ANYTHING UNLESS I WANTED TO!



"THAT'S BECAUSE

YOU'RE AN APEX

PREDATOR," SAID THE

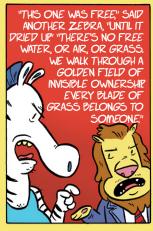
































"OF COURSE NOT! LIONS DON'T NEED TITLES! THE LAND IS OUR COMMON INHERITANCE."

"YOUR WHAT?"















THE HUNTER SLEPT WELL THAT NIGHT, SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE HAD VIOLATED NO LEGITIMATE PROPERTY CLAIMS. TO MAXIMIZE PROFIT, HE SOLD LEO'S TEETH, PELT, AND BONES ON THE BLACK MARKET. THE BLACK MARKET IS THE FREEST MARKET OF ALL!





NOT JUST A **FOREIGN COUNTRY**

But Some Other Planet Entirely

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there."

LL SAY IT IS. BUT IT'S WORSE THAN THAT, EVEN. After all, I can imagine the people of foreign countries. I can even visit them, should I feel the need. They seem quite real to me. People of 50, 100, 500 years ago, not so much. They're not just "different." They're so alien that it can be hard to believe they ever existed at all, at least not as three-dimensional beings with thoughts and livers and souls, the kind of creature I am. I know that, in the fundamentals, the experience of being human in 1918 was not especially different to the experience of being human in 2018: wake up each morning, stumble through the day, eat, scratch yourself, defecate, appease the cat, write some enduring work of political philosophy, fiddle with a household item to try to make it work properly, try to clear up a misunderstanding with a loved one or acquaintance, go back to sleep, possibly get up in the middle of the night needing to pee and accidentally walk into the door frame instead of through the door.

Basic human experience is so universal that it seems like it should be easy to empathize with everybody. We all find ourselves on the same weird little planet, going through the same life cycle, using roughly the same kinds of biological equipment. Of course, it can be difficult to fully appreciate that other people are just as conscious as you are, since we only ever see them from the outside and ourselves from the inside, but once we've managed to get past the inevitable childhood indulgence in "What if I am the only real person?" reflections, treating all the people as people ought to be fairly straightforward. It isn't, of course, thanks to the endless series of toxic prejudices that get in the way of valuing everyone equally. But I'm hopeful that someday it will be possible for there to be a rough shared recognition of everybody's common humanity.

That is, of course, except people from the past. People from the past will never seem quite human to me. Whether it's Pericles or Marie Antoinette or Sacajawea or Richard Nixon, attaching these names to real bodies, with torsos and anuses and night sweats and sneezes, requires an imaginative capacity far beyond my own. I am sure there are Lincoln scholars—and even people who aren't Lincoln scholars but just really like Lincoln—who have gotten themselves to the point where they think they can "feel what Lincoln felt" as he mulled a certain decision or drafted a certain rambling missive. I am not such an individual. Lincoln is unfathomable to me. He is a word, a beard, and a hat. He is not a person. Until Silicon Valley manages to reanimate him and bring him to my doorstep, my brain will forever place him in its Abstract-People file rather than its People-People file.

One problem is that while the similarities between Lincoln and myself are numerous (for example: he possessed a respiratory system, and so do I), the differences between our times are so significant that he becomes

literally unimaginable to me. To actually understand what a world with slavery was like, to be cognizant of that system on a human level, to think that it was not just "slaves being whipped" but "people undergoing the conscious experience of being whipped," and that this was happening day after day, year after year: this is easy to say but not very easy to truly feel. Life has changed so much, so quickly, that comparatively recent times seem positively ancient. Objectively speaking, slavery itself was very, very recent: it still stuns me to remember that there are people alive today who have met people who were once slaves. An older black woman of 2017, born in 1930, remembers sitting on the knee of her great-grandmother, born in 1850, whose girlhood was spent in slavery. It's not as if slavery's recency is obscure—any honest observer can see just how close it is from the social and economic legacy it has left. Here in New Orleans, the antebellum mansions are still full of white people, and the neighborhoods below sea level are still black. The past is stamped on the present in

ways that are only possible to overlook if you have a vested interest in forgetting.

It's also true, though, that part of our disconnection from the past occurs simply because so much has changed so fast as to give even the serenest mind a violent boggling. The five oldest living people (all either Japanese or Italian, oddly enough) were all born before the Wright Brothers got aloft at Kitty Hawk. The entire history of aviation, from the biplane to the drone strike, occurred within the lifetime of still-living people. There are individuals wandering around the Earth today who saw Hitler's face. Until just a couple of years ago, there were some who had lived under Queen Victoria. They hadn't lived under her for long, mind you, and only as very young children. But still: Queen Victoria!

In an instant, it all transformed completely. I don't, of course, need to monologue about How The Internet Changed Everything, not because it's false but because I think we're past the point where we're capable of marveling at it, even if we try to step briefly out of our context and look at things from without. Perhaps the most impressive quality of our many impressive things is how quickly they all become so unimpressive. I can't feel real wonder even at that which I know to be wondrous, not even at devices and processes that seem to be almost indistinguishable from magic. A Roomba is like something out of the Jetsons but it seems comically stupid and inept. Of course, we're all still grumbling that we haven't gotten our flying cars yet, but I'm sure they'll come. And when they do they'll pollute the skies and kill millions, and we'll instantly shift from being amazed to being frustrated by their inadequacy and their role in reproducing social atomization and conspicuous consumption.

I don't mean to imply, as some do, that human beings are Insufficiently Grateful For Innovation. (See the recent written output of Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, who now spends much of his time chiding the world for failing to appreciate how much it has benefitted from the fruits of the Enlightenment.) I try to avoid both frameworks that suggest everything is getting worse (complaints about "late capitalism" or a "neoliberal age") and ones that imply everything is getting better (words like "innovation," "progress," and "development," which allow one to smuggle in the assumption that certain kinds of changes are automatically for

the best without ever having to actually make the case for why that is).

When you start to look at most technological change as producing "difference" more than "improvement," gratitude seems like the wrong response. Is the automatic check-out an improvement? It's a difference. It's an improvement if you want to eliminate jobs, or if you don't like interacting with cashiers. It's not an improvement if you actually liked having a job, or if you miss interacting with the cashier. Computers get faster. Are they better? They're faster. If you like faster, they're better. If you couldn't give a damn, then they're just different. Twitter exists. Is it good? I don't know that that's a meaningful question. It does some good (people meet each other, good jokes are told). It does some evil (people taunt each other until they want to kill themselves, Donald Trump uses it). Words like "innovation," which stack the deck in favor of the good brought by a change, prevent us from seriously examining costs and benefits. Taken mindlessly to their extreme, they also produce an "innova-

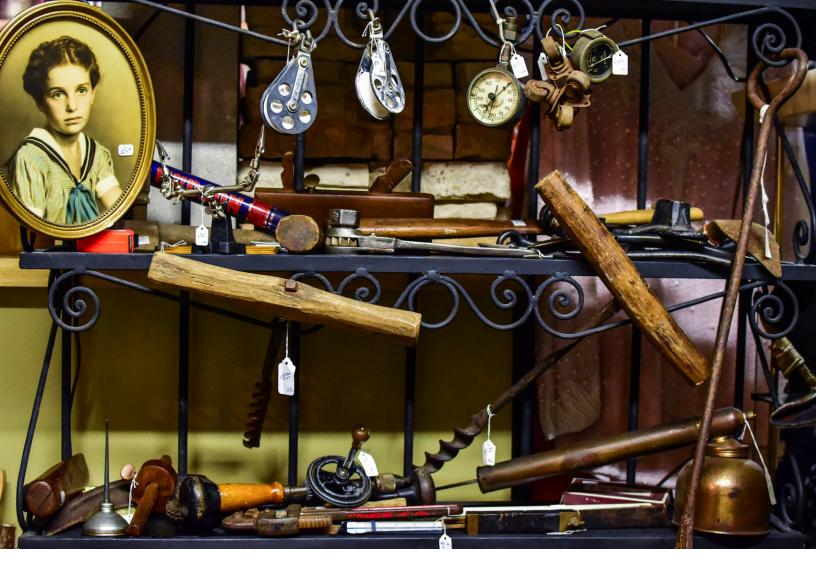
Photographs by Lissy Brown

us from seriously examining costs and benefits. Taken mindlessly to their extreme, they also produce an "innovation for the sake of innovation" mindset, which invents the Juicero, or slaps a QR code on everything regardless of whether it actually benefits from the addition of a QR code. You don't have to be a Luddite to believe that the desirability of changes should be assessed case by case.

HOPE THE PEOPLE OF 100 YEARS FROM NOW don't have as much trouble relating to me as I have relating to those 100 years behind me. Maybe the 20th century was just unique, in dividing an old world from a new one, and things will slow down now. The difference between 1998 and 2018 seems nowhere near as vast as the difference between 1958 and 1978. Perhaps the sixties were a one-time growth spurt, and nothing that unusual is ever going to happen again. Certainly, it's hard to imagine music ever changing as much as it did in the years between Perry Como and the Sex Pistols. But then again, it's hard to imagine the future generally; there have been few recent attempts to conjure non-dystopian visions of civilizations 100 or 1000 years from now. All conceivable destinations are either apocalyptic or unfathomable.

Time is so peculiar. It's best not to think about it too much. That's why I try to avoid going back to places I haven't seen in years. Inevitably, my nostalgia glands will convince me that sites of appealing memories have since gotten a lot worse. (And they probably have.) But when one visits spots of significant events, there's also the queer feeling of being the helpless prisoner of your single moment. If I go to an empty auditorium, and remember when it was full, it somehow feels strange to me that I can't put the people back, that nothing I can do will restore things to the way they were.

I understand so well why human beings fantasize about time travel.



Without it, you're so completely powerless. Nothing you do can ever be undone. If a single mistake, a moment's indiscretion, causes calamitous consequences—even death!—well, tough shit. It's not just that we all wish we could go back and kill Baby Hitler or Toddler Stalin. It's that it would be very nice to be able to make mistakes without the resulting harms being irreparable. As it is, time is cruel: I wonder about the people who have made a split-second decision that has resulted in the loss of somebody else's life, like the Conair pilot who accidentally turned down the wrong runway and killed everyone in the plane except himself. How many times in the years after must he have repeated the phrase "If I could just go back..."? But the dead stay dead forever.

That's always struck me as so fundamentally *unfair*, though I realize it's senseless to rage at cosmic injustices. "Surely it's not actually forever." I often think of my dead friends, and say to myself in frustration "Goddamn it, there's got to be some way to bring them back, no?" It just seems wrong that a charming girl who once kissed me could disappear into eternity because she made a bad judgment at a red light. What kind of sordid, petty universe would impose the death penalty over a *stoplight*? This is the stubborn refusenik in me speaking, the part of my character that simply will not come to terms with anything that Should Not Be The Case. In order to make it through life without losing our minds, we all have to recite some personal version of the Serenity Prayer ("Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.") But however much I know I need to sigh and bear it, know that she's not ever going to be here again no matter how well I may prove to the Judge that she didn't deserve what happened, my every instinct has always been to scream: "Fuck the Serenity Prayer! I demand the impossible!" That feeling of defiance can be healthy, but it's also insane.

I associate this Irrational Hatred of Time, rightly or wrongly, with

America. Here they like to call it the "can-do" spirit, but it's really a sort of bullheaded war with reality. Sometimes that leads to unexpected success, a risk that pays off, or a triumph that comes from ignoring what everybody said about your chances. We did, after all, put a man on the moon and invent the H-bomb. (Well done, U.S.) It is also, however, what makes many Americans assholes. (Aside: I have found written in my notes the question: "Is their obstinate refusal to accept things as they are part of why Americans are so religious?" Then afterwards I've written "Probably not, but it seems like a nice thing they could tell themselves if they wanted to.")

I do *like* something about the totally oblivious American insistence that You Can Do Absolutely Anything And Nothing Stands In Your Way. It stands in refreshing contrast to the English national motto "Best not hope for much, today will probably be dreary again." I like that here we're supposed to simply behave as if we don't live in a world of physical limitations. And I intend to pass on the madness: if I ask my daughter what she wants to be when she grows up, and she says "I'd like to go back and prevent the Second World War from happening," I intend to respond "By God, good luck to you, little girl." It seems immoral not to.

OU CAN TRY TO ESCAPE TIME. You can do it through anti-aging creams and forehead lifts and such. You can do it through suicide, which is cheating somewhat. You can, of course, do it by building a time machine, though the parts are hard to find. Or you can do it by buying a bunch of brand new minimalist furniture, in pure, simple geometric shapes with no ornamental touches to remind you that you are still a part of history and will die like the rest of them did. Modernize yourself: resist any inclination toward nostalgia, memory, or tradition, and hope you

are blissfully absorbed into the Singularity sooner rather than later.

I get that urge from time to time, especially when I am in antique stores. To be honest, I don't like them very much, for the same reason I don't like used bookshops, or graveyards. Being surrounded by dead people's things, whether it's their fishing rods, libraries, or buried skeletons, unnerves me. The possessions of the dead emanate *death*. Not too strongly: I can still appreciate an antique music box without dwelling too much on the lives of those who may once have heard it tinkle. But the Bad Thought does wander into my mind: "Oh, just burn it all. What a *mess*. Get rid of this dross. Start over. All things must pass, best make it sooner rather than later."

I think on some level, when I have this lunatic notion, I am frightened, or at least nervous. I am trying to avoid thinking the Scary Thought: about every single life that passed so that these objects could get sit and get cobwebby in this dinky antique mall. "They're dead people!" my head screams, as I try not to let this exclamation come out of my mouth while standing in the shop. "Every object is a dead person! Whatever you do, it all ends here in the lampshades and figurines!" Sometimes I begin to hyperventilate and have to cling to a wall, or run out. (Yes, this has happened. Once in a bookshop, where I suddenly looked at a shelf and said "History, oh god, the slaves!" and fled down the stairs and into the street.)

This is what we might call "an overreaction," one that probably comes from having made the unwise decision to take a philosophy course in college, without remembering that in order to live well, it's essential to forget everything said in college philosophy courses immediately after having taken them. But let's be honest: every object in the antique store—the lighters, the doilies, the necklaces, the stopped clocks—each is the shadow of a human life actually lived. All the nicks and scratches, the chunks gouged out of the side, are the results of relatable but unknowable incidents: I often wonder who will ultimately end up with the book of mine that has the ketchup stain on its pages. (It was not my ketchup, though it was my fault.) Where will you be in 2250, ketchup-stained book? Hopefully with someone who treats you better than I did.

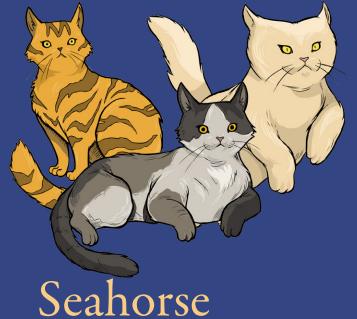
Sometimes the darkness contained in the objects is more visible. I was once prowling through a large antique mall in Boston, in a section mostly stuffed with half-assembled train sets and Coca Cola signs, when on a tucked-away shelf I recognized what was unmistakably a small ebony bust of Adolf Hitler. I did feel a touch of shock, though I shouldn't have. It just seemed unbelievable that this thing should be here: it dated from a time when its subject was slaughtering people by the million. All of that, and now the only terrain the Third Reich controls is this shelf, which it shares with some kewpie dolls and a lamp.

It's an inevitable experience, actually, browsing leisurely through some nondescript bric-a-brac and then suddenly encountering The Racist Thing. I'm still always caught off guard by it: "Ah look at these charming figurines, is that a—oh god." Usually it's some grotesque smiling "pickaninny" sculpture, which the shop owners always insist on displaying casually as if it's totally natural and not at all horrible or sad. I suppose they're right not to cull the past: if a random selection of 1930s toys is going to include The Racist Thing, it would be a comforting lie to remove it. Ditching the Sambo dolls may make better facilitate warm nostalgia, but if you're going to appreciate old things, you need to do so in full knowledge of their context.

"Just get rid of it all. History is too bloody, too weird, too distant, to be dealt with. We can't change it, so we might as well not attempt the impossible task of getting inside the heads of all those peculiar alien beings who lived in the years before ours." I know, though, that I am being cowardly when I turn away from it. If you want to really understand what is going on, you'll never do it until you fully accept the implications of a simple fact: they were all just as human as you, and you're just as historical a creature yourself. •



The Current Affairs Field Guide to Socialist Animals



Domestic Cat (Felis catus)

Often mistakenly identified as *libertarian* in character, the common domestic cat displays many characteristics more aptly described as *socialist*. When not confined to an artificial, *atomized* environment such as a house or apartment, cats naturally form complex, *mutually co-responsible* colonies. Individuals retain highly independent and even snobbish behaviors, often leading to *factionalism* within the colony, or even full-blown *schisms*. Additionally, cats belong to the *labor-reductivist* behavioral niche: once basic bodily needs have been met, the domestic cat shows little interest in empty work for work's sake.

Preferred Habitat: Streets, bodegas, bars, cafes, libraries.

RANGE: Worldwide.

STATUS: *Ubiquitous* and *underreported*. Like *socialist* ideology, the domestic cat is highly popular, yet holds proportionately little political influence.

(genus Hippocampus)

There are over 50 species of seahorse, all of which display remarkable gender equality. After engaging in an elaborate and respectful series of courtship dances, impregnated males carry the eggs to term. Many individuals are gay, bisexual, or otherwise radically queer. Monogamy is practiced by some individuals, but without the oppressive institution of state-sponsored marriage. With no power hierarchy, seahorses could be said to form the most purely socialist societies on the planet.

Preferred Habitat: Under the sea. They do not thrive in zoos, aquariums, or straight bars.

RANGE: Worldwide.

STATUS: *Unknown. Radically queer* populations are frequently more vibrant and extensive than conventional estimates will allow.



Western liberal societies have long been terrified of the Komodo dragon to an extent which may appear disproportionate to their actual qualities as predators. But Komodo dragons do in fact represent a considerable threat to the status quo. Unlike other reptiles, Komodo dragons hunt in groups. They rarely let go of the historic crimes of their oppressors, and have been known to dig up human graveyards to gnaw on the bones. Their bite—and their wit—is highly toxic. One scathing article from the pen of a Komodo dragon can permanently damage a columnist's career. Having descended from extinct species that were likewise terrifying to criminally unequal societies, Komodo dragons may someday evolve into their full potential and finally devour capitalism.

PREFERRED HABITAT: Hot, dry environments, including grasslands and low-lying tropical forests. Komodo dragons are not afraid of fences, and display no respect for *private property*.

RANGE: Confined to small spaces, both in the real world and online.

STATUS: Vulnerable, for now.



beyond the propaganda

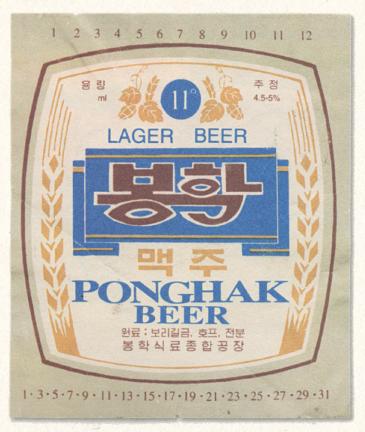
easy to forget, because we casually blur the difference between states and populations all the time. "China is devaluing its currency." "France won't join the coalition." "Iran is building a nuclear weapon." The vast majority of people, though, have very little to do with any of the acts attributed to their countries as a whole. The gap between the Iranian leadership and the Iranian populace is striking, for instance. The government are hard-line religious fundamentalists, while a substantial portion of the people themselves are laid-back cosmopolitans. The names "Putin" and "Russia" are often used interchangeably, even though one is a country of 144 million people and the other is, if you did not know this, a single individual among those people. It's not just something we do to other people, either: many Americans abroad have being treated to resentment and mockery that is more properly directed at our President.

We tend to see countries as undifferentiated blobs. There are "the Spanish," and they have Spanish characteristics like tardiness and exuberance. Everyone gets their stereotype, even if judging the French by its haughti-



est Parisians is as unfair as judging the United States by its most insufferable Manhattanites. Sometimes a distinction or two gets drawn: after a few million Iraqi casualties, Americans finally just about understand that the country is divided into Sunni, Shia, and Kurds. But to go one step beyond and actually treat people as individuals, to really set aside whatever prejudices and generalizations one may have about their race or nation, well, good luck.

The tendency toward flattening and stereotyping is at its worst with a country like North Korea. After all, even if "people are not their governments" holds true most places around the world, if there's one place where the opposite is true, it's the DPRK. We noble, prejudice-free humanists may not want its citizens to be "monolithic" and "indistinguishable," but that's exactly what the Kim family has spent the last decades trying to ensure, so it's easy to find justifications for the popular stereotypes of North Koreans as either cowering prisoners or robotic servants of the state. There is also an information problem: in a closed society that punishes independent thought, the private opinions of individ-



ual North Koreans are beyond reach. All accounts must necessarily be stitched together from a mixture of defector testimonies, parsed propaganda, and eyewitness accounts from visitors exposed to a state-curated view of the country.

Yet while some of the difficulties are inherent, it's also true that most of us don't try nearly as hard as we should to understand the country, and to figure out what is actually going on there. Until recently, if you asked me to jot down all of the things I knew about North Korean life, my answer would have been pitiful: empty streets, no electricity, malnutrition, inordinate quantities of both soldiers and political prisoners. The rest of my knowledge amounted to: (1) basic knowledge about



the history of diplomatic (non)-relations between North Korea and the U.S. and (2) "fun fact" type bits of depressing trivia, like the fact that penthouse apartments in North Korea are actually the least desirable because the elevators seldom work. Realizing how scattershot and lazy my understandings have been, I have been trying to get beyond propaganda, to access, if not the "real" North Korea (whatever reality is), at least a version of it with slightly less of a barrier between me and the real human beings who inhabit the place.

One way to realize how much people have in common is to examine that which is most mundane. Nicholas Bonner's book Made In North Korea: Graphics From Everyday Life In The DPRK offers a gallery of the most "boring" North Korean objects, the bits and pieces that get thrown away, but which Bonner has spent years stuffing in his pockets and smuggling out out of the country. The collection he has amassed includes: hotel welcome cards, coasters, toothbrush containers, receipts, candy wrappers, luggage tags, biscuit boxes, stamps, boarding passes, ticket stubs, wrapping paper, toys, instruction manuals, airline safety cards, notepads, guidebooks, cigarette cartons, tinned food labels, beer logos, sugar packets, and air sickness bags. All of this "rubbish" is easily overlooked. But Bonner insists that in these scraps, we can see thoughtful and elegant graphic design. He says there is "a great understanding of harmony and beauty" in these products and that the country "punches above its weight" in design.

He's right. These little scraps are mesmerizing. There is a coherent aesthetic to many of them, and Bonner draws attention to the repeated use of the country's "traditional motifs and color palette." It's no surprise that that should be the case, since authoritarian rule provides an easy shortcut to aesthetic consistency. But the fact that there should be "things of beauty" at all is at odds with the idea of the country as a place of unmitigated bleakness. It's true that you constantly feel the hand of the government, sometimes implicitly and sometimes less so (the box for a toy gun depicts an armed hedgehog shooting a U.S. soldier). Yet looking at the designs makes you wonder about the designer. Even a luggage tag was designed by somebody, and it's impossible for a state to actually eliminate creativity even if it is channeled toward political ends. Propaganda itself often displays striking artistic skill and ingenuity.

Because North Korean product packaging is not designed for "branding" purposes (with a few exceptions like beer and tobacco, there are no brands), it has an unusual simplicity, directness, and even elegance. Everything is what it says it is: a can of peas just says Can of Peas and a container of chicken has a picture of a chicken on it. The package replicates its contents, which means that instead of trying to sell you a LifeSaver, it will be informing you that it holds sweet candies. Instinctively, of course, that's depressing, because a world in which there is one kind of soap called Soap is monotonous. But Bonner says that we should avoid the easy temptation to overlook the virtues of North Korean design. Pyongyang itself, he says, is in its way more beautiful than Beijing, thanks to its wide avenues and orderly design. That beauty may have been built on a mountain of human suffering, but, if we're being honest, so have many of the world's aesthetic treasures. If we see these works as sullied by the



circumstances of their creation, and refuse to acknowledge their virtues, we are once again allowing the state to take credit that properly belongs to the people themselves.

Those people have far more dimensions to their character than their government's (or, for that matter, our government's) propaganda would have us believe. In North Korea Confidential, Daniel Tudor and James Pearson go through various aspects of daily life, and try to give a sense for what it is like to be a North Korean. It is not, in fact, entirely a life of unremitting misery for all. For one thing, any use of the category "all" North Koreans flattens the crucial class distinctions that exist in the country. Like every communist state, it is not communist, and there are those who live very well and those who are destitute and mal-



nourished. In Pyongyang, there are latte-sipping urbanites, while in rural areas farmers still plow with oxen.

According to Tudor and Pearson, black markets are increasingly making many North Koreans more "international" than the regime would like, and parts of the country are now "awash with luxury goods." Thanks to the smuggling in of DVDs and USB sticks, North Koreans watch a lot of films and television shows from outside the country. North Korean tablet computers may not be connected to wifi, but they exist, and some even come pre-loaded with Angry Birds. North Korea has its own ludicrous brand of K-pop, but it isn't considered cool, and music from elsewhere is preferred. Perhaps most incongruously, many North Koreans are partiers by nature, and the generally heavy alcohol intake means that social evenings can get raucous. Pointing out that "fun is not actually prohibited by law" does seem to reinforce our dismal picture of the place. But to have a full understanding of the place, we should remember that every day there are some young North Koreans playing CounterStrike and reading comics. There is irony. There is laughter. And there







is love, as Barbara Demick touchingly documents in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*, which tells of smitten teenagers sneaking out of the house, slipping through the endless darkness, and finding their way to one another for a romantic rendezvous.

UMAN BEINGS ARE MUCH MORE SIMILAR than they are different, and if you could get inside the minds of North Korean citizens, you'd recognize familiar feelings. Poet Jang Jin-sung, in his memoir Dear Leader, recalls his time writing poems in honor of the state. He anguishes over his assignment, which is to create an epic poem that somehow explains why the reunification of Korea under DPRK leadership will actually benefit South Koreans. It is tense work, especially considering that another poet was allegedly banished to the countryside for referring to the Leader's tears as "dewy." Eventually he pulls it off, through the use of a clever pun, and is feted by the Leader. But there is one tiny moment in his narrative that I knew absolutely: when he arrives at the government arts office to start work, the other poet he will be working under says: "I'm sure you've heard of my poem ____." Jin-sung, of course, says he has, even though he hasn't. Everywhere you go, there are certain universals. One is people lying about having read each other's poems.

No state is able to completely stamp out the humanity of its citizens. Some of them have come close. But even when resistance remains in people's heads, and almost nobody dares give voice to it, it's there. Tudor and Pearson suggest that the subversion of the state on a minor scale is actually quite routine. Bribery is ubiquitous, and the search for higher-quality consumer goods and more entertainment leads to all kinds of surreptitious rule-breaking. It may not be politically motivated, but it is a demonstration of the obvious: many, if not most, North Koreans are ordinary human beings doing what they can to survive under a monstrous totalitarian regime, rather than automata who exist solely to serve their Leader.

That's not to say that patriotism is coerced rather than sincere.

A lot of it surely is sincere. Chol-hwan Kang, in The Aquariums of Pyongyang, recalls that as a child, he sincerely saw Kim Il-Sung as a kind of Santa Claus, who neither urinated nor defecated. One of the most frightening aspects of nationalism is how easy an instinct it is to activate: witness Berlin's rapid transformation from 1920s bohemian enclave to 1930s Aryan dictatorship. G.K. Chesterton, in The Napoleon of Notting Hill, gives a fictional account of the birth of a nation: in a time when patriotic sentiment is a relic of history, a mischievous English king decides to make the various boroughs of London into their own nations, complete with individual rituals, flags, and founding myths. The whole thing seems ridiculous for a few decades, but in the next generation, the leader of Notting Hill begins to take it all very seriously. What looked too absurd to believe, when seen from the outside, looks too obvious to deny when seen from the inside. It can't simply be taken as a given that the people of the DPRK are privately dubious about their government.

If they do believe it, we should be very worried, according to B.R. Myers's The Cleanest Race. Myers says that the DPRK's governing ideology has been misunderstood by the United States. We think of it as "authoritarian communist," thanks to its all-powerful state and various Stalinist trappings. But Myers says this is misleading: the regime is closer in character to fascism, because of its racism and nationalism (Stalinists have many unappealing qualities, but they do not build their ideology around race and nation). The communist elements, Myers says, are window dressing. Even Kim Il-Sung himself knew little about Marxism, and he dismayed the Russians when they quizzed him on it. And strictly speaking, the regime operates as a monarchy. Myers says that "socialism" is not the right term, because it doesn't describe the self-image we see in the state's propaganda, which heavily emphasizes the purity of North Koreans and their need for a protective parent-leader. Demick acknowledges that Kim Il-Sung "rejected traditional Communist teachings about universalism" and "was a Korean nationalist in the extreme" who treated Koreans almost as a "chosen people."

Myers is pessimistic about the future, because he believes the North Korean state is determined to reunify the peninsula, and



is driven by an ideology that may be even more frightening than totalitarian Marxism. But different North Koreas are portrayed by different analysts. Tudor and Pearson, for example, depict a regime that is actually somewhat fragmented, where Kim Jong Un is only one among several power factions, and where a class of elites seems more interested in preserving status and wealth than in a grand race-based reunification project. Their prediction is that markets will slowly penetrate North Korea, though without much effect on the regime's structure, since "the new, rising capitalist class generally seeks to *join* the existing elite... rather than undermine it." (Shocking, I know.) Myers portrays an alarming fascist threat, while Tudor and Pearson show us a corrupt state with a population that mostly seeks to get along with life.

T'S VERY DIFFICULT TO KNOW HOW TO NEGOTIATE among the different available pictures of the DPRK. But however we choose to resolve the discrepancies, it's worth remembering and trying to account for our inevitable biases. For example, personally, I find Myers' explanation appealing. If I'm being honest, though, that's probably partly because it lumps Kim Jong Un in with right-wing fascists, and distances him from the left. I've always felt that "socialists" have no more responsibility for dictatorships that call themselves socialist than democratic republicans have for, well, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Since I oppose dictatorships universally, pointing out that there have been "leftist" dictatorships poses no actual challenge to my politics. Instinctively, though, I confess that I'd feel relieved if Kim Jong Un was lumped in with the right rather than the left.

Everyone will look at North Korea through their own lens, and it's hard to keep myself from projecting my own sense of human nature onto the people of a country I've never visited and know barely anything about. I see human beings as inherently creative, differentiated, and resistant, thus I like to think of the individual North Koreans who privately mutter to themselves "Oh, God, not another bloody parade in honor of the Leader." But for others who see humans as inherently compliant and sheeplike, and who believe the state has a great power to mold its subjects, my "indi-

vidualistic" perception will be seen as a delusion. Without access to the consciousnesses of those we are talking about, we are left speculating based on our own preexisting understandings.

It's important to try our best, then, to remember the actual people we are talking about, and to be careful not to "use" them as a tool for proving ourselves right. I'm wary of being too interested in North Korea, because I am not sure that interest always comes from a defensible motive. There's something luridly fascinating about a country so dark and peculiar, and the volume of "escape from North Korea" books published suggests to me that some of them are being read the same way "true crime" books are read. One can get fascinated by North Korea the same way one can get fascinated by Nazis. These are the morbid fascinations, the ones we have not because we're actually being compassionate about those subjected to atrocities but because it can be strangely enjoyable to read about the terrible things that happen to people. (That is, after all, half of why *The Daily Mail* sells papers and gets clicks.)

In looking through books like *Made In North Korea*, we can also get the urge to treat the country as quaint and lovely. I even found myself slipping briefly into justifications, the charming objects seeming like they mitigated or excused the brutality necessary for their creation. I have to constantly remind myself that if I met an escaped North Korean dissident, and said "Yes, but you have to admit that the hotel restaurant napkins are just darling," I would rightly be met with a "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

It is not a country of adorable curiosities, then. It is not a country solely made of prison camps and starvation, but it is a country where prison camps and starvation are significantly present. It is not a country of servile robots, but it is also not a country of heroic cynics who privately spit on the Leader's portrait. It is just a country of people. People who lie about having read a poem, people who sneak off in the dark when they're not supposed to, people who are brutal and people who are kind, people who inform on their neighbors and people who don't, people who embrace the power structure and people who loathe it. Try as it may, a government cannot erase its people's humanity, because even a government must be made up of people. �





Our New MONUMENTS

1. Tomb Of The Unknown Blues **Singer**—in honor of the zillions of musicians who wrote songs that became hits but never saw any royalties.

2.Monument to the Iraqi Man Who

3. Tribute to the Great American Sanitation Worker

4. Battle of Noel Hill-The final struggle in the War on Christmas. 950,000 brave soldiers sacrificed their lives to

action in South Carolina, ascending the flag pole outside the capitol to personally rip down the Stars and Bars.

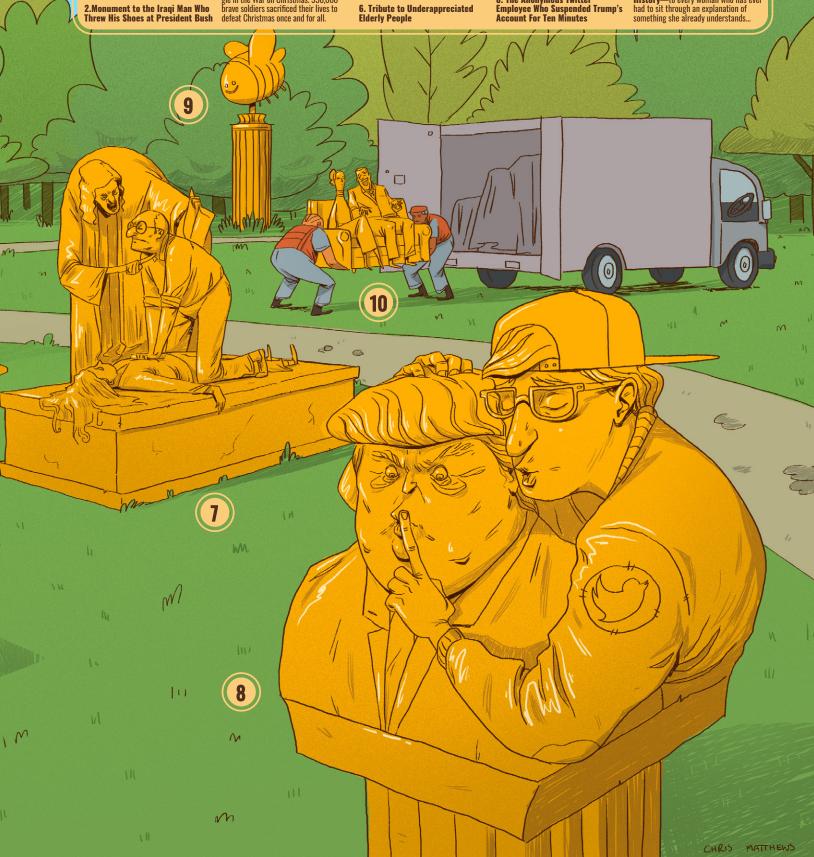
7. Bureaucrats Who Have Defied Orders In Order To Save Lives—to those who don't care what the judge says...

8. The Anonymous Twitter Employee Who Suspended Trump's Account For Ten Minutes

9. Bees-Just to thank them for all their hard work.

10. Exasperated Women of

History—to every woman who has ever had to sit through an explanation of something she already understands...





Formerly Known

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Detachment

by Elle Hardy

N A COLD OCTOBER DAY IN Chanhassen, Minneapolis, a few desiccated leaves shiver on branches, their former comrades evicted and scattered by the elements. The only thing in sight that is solid enough to withstand the relentless wind is Paisley Park, the late Prince Roger Nelson's home, recording studio, and the scene of his untimely death.

The facade of the largely windowless monolith is hospital-grade white, with a network of vaults and pyramids that recall a ancient funeral complex. The interior of Paisley Park feels unnaturally cleansed of life: the scuff marks on the top of *Purple Rain*'s piano are among the only visible signs of a vanished human presence. But Paisley Park was just as bleak and empty, they say, when Prince was still alive. A week or so before he died in 2016, the singer was spotted riding a bike around his property, alone, aimless, childlike. He was last seen looking

"frail and nervous" outside a Walgreens, before expiring of a fentanyl overdose in an elevator in his palace. His body was discovered 13 hours later by his staff, the people who were paid to be around him.

Rolling Stone writer and Minneapolis native Neal Karlen formed a decades-long correspondence with Prince. The singer would call him in the dark hours, Karlen wrote, to "talk about loneliness and death." It was painful for Karlen to imagine what his friend might have been thinking and feeling in his last moments of life. "I just pray Prince wasn't cognizant, even for a mite of a moment," Karlen wrote, "that he was dying alone in a nondescript elevator."

There is universality in the existential terror of a lonely death: it is a fate that strikes rich and poor alike. Divorce, technology, and erosion of communities have left people feeling increasingly alienated. The curse of isolation is raging across the wealthy world, but nowhere is it felt more keenly than in the United States, the world's great capitalist project. Prince, a man who redefined music during his life, had the most com-

monplace of 21st-century deaths. Increasingly, Americans of all classes are living lonely, and dying alone.

"Loneliness is personal, and it is also political," writes British author Olivia Laing in her 2016 book, Lonely City. "Like depression, like melancholy or restlessness, it is subject too to pathologization, to being considered a disease." As she discovered over the course of writing her book, loneliness does not simply strike solitary figures: it strikes people who are married, who are successful, who have friends. The key element is the absence of a human connection, a true feeling of intimacy with others. And although, according to Laing, it's often been said that "loneliness serves no purpose," she believes that it has received insufficient attention: "I don't think any experience so much a part of our common shared lives can be entirely devoid of meaning."

Since Prince released Purple Rain in the 1980s, the percentage of American adults who say they are lonely has doubled from 20 percent to 40 percent. Behind the numbers lies a heartbreaking fact: feeling isolated is self-perpetuating. The longer a person goes without experiencing a meaningful human connection, the more they lose their ability to sense social cues. Chronically lonely people tend to retreat from reality, as the agony of feeling unloved and unlovable causes their range of emotions to narrow and darken. They find themselves becoming paranoid, and instinctively fleeing contact with others. Their view of the world becomes increasingly hostile.

Before I arrived at Paisley Park, I had spent a year travelling misery's poorly-lit backstreets, seeking to understand America's epidemic of loneliness. I came to realize how loneliness and death are inextricably connected. The sad paradox is that, although the people who suffer from loneliness are increasingly numerous, there is, by definition, no community and no camaraderie among them.

RIFTING THROUGH SAD, SEEMINGLY identical towns in Ohio and Kentucky, I reached the opioid capital of America: Huntington, West Virginia, where one in four are addicted to pharmaceutical drugs like fentanyl, or to heroin. On the hill overlooking the town cemetery, almost every house had raised a white flag: a for-sale sign in some form of decay. Most people with money had long since departed. The population on this side of the tracks lived in public housing or squatted in vacant properties. The day I arrived, the sunshine had finally overcome days of grey sleet, but there was barely a person to be seen. Doors were shut, shutters drawn. The people of Huntington kept their pain and despair indoors.

One person I encountered was a woman named Lezlie, who had grown up in McDowell County, south of Huntington, a place so desolate that even Walmart packed up and left. Like almost everyone in West Virginia, Lezlie's family had worked in the mines, and had been repeatedly fucked over by all forms of power. She was introduced to Oxy by her mom at 10. After years of addiction and jail and rehab, Lezlie defined a purpose

for herself: to transition somehow from isolation to *solitude*, the state of being alone without being lonely. Today, Lezlie was burying a friend in the cemetery, one who had been a particular inspiration to her in getting clean.

"Drugs are no respecter of person, and death certainly isn't either," said Fred Kitchen, a local funeral director and president of West Virginia's Funeral Directors' Association. The city, which runs the cemetery, said it hasn't seen any increase in burials, but the members of the Funeral Directors' Association see the death certificates, according to Kitchen, and know that there has been a massive increase in people dying of overdoses. "The Indigent Burial Fund has ran out of money four months early, which is placing a huge burden on everyone," he said. "We get 2.2 million dollars a year, and the last two or three years, we keep running out early."

Americans are drinking themselves to death at record rates, with around 90,000 people dying each year from drink-related diseases, in addition to crashes, accidents, and homicides under the influence. Yet the neighborhood bar, which once promised at least a temporary fix for sadness, is disappearing. Around 10,000 local haunts have closed over the last decade, predominantly in Midwest and Appalachian towns like Huntington. In 2014, they were closing at the rate of six each day. At the same time, opioid and heroin deaths are rising year by year, to around 50,000 in 2016, more than car crashes or gun violence. The most common age group of those dying is 45 to 54.

But opioids are not the sole killers of the lonely and the poor: people die too for want of medical treatments they cannot afford. In Tifton, a small Georgia town cleaved by race, I met Sherry Smith in her tiny, dark apartment, long past the point where paved roads had given way to dirt. Two weeks earlier, she had been sharing this space with her brother, George Tabor. He was hospitalized with pneumonia and a time bomb in his 34-year-old heart. When it came time for his surgery, his employer, Applebee's, said he was three months shy of the twoyear employment period for him qualify for healthcare.

Two days after George emerged from his coma, the hospital discharged him. He died a day later, home alone while Sherry was working under the pressure of unpaid bills. "Are we really in the land of the free if you get sick and they won't take care of you?" she asked through a deluge of tears. "Are you going to heal yourself?"

Finding myself unable to meet her eyes, my attention was drawn to many surfaces hosting empty photo frames. The only thing she had left of George—family photographs—had been taken to the funeral parlour she couldn't afford. She feared they would be held as collateral for payment of his headstone. Meanwhile, the medical bills Sherry didn't know she wasn't obligated to pay kept arriving, itemized.

OOR, DISPERSED, AND WITH FRAGILE RELATIONSHIPS with relatives, George's family, like tens of thousands of others, turned to crowdfunding his funeral. Seeking online funding for your relative's funeral is like playing the lottery: there's a chance your fundraiser could go viral, that a community of supporters could form around your family in their darkest time. The energy that, collectively harnessed, could be used to agitate for a better social contract, is instead fragmented across thousands of individual, desperate pleas. Many people never find the winning ticket. Alongside rising funeral costs, there has also been a corresponding increase in the number of unclaimed bodies. "Up in Atlanta, they get them out of the morgue and give them a pauper's grave, about ten or fifteen people a month," said Larry Taylor, who conducted George Tabor's funeral. "The county will pay funeral directors \$1,100 a body, and on Saturday they'll do a mass grave."

In the end, George's family's appeal yielded \$80, but it cost \$200 alone to pay the county for the plot, and another thousand to give him a headstone. I walked the dusty road back to central Tifton past the cemetery, where George's naked plot sat on an awkward slope near an intersection of road. A creased corflute sign was pitched into the grass in front of it: *Affordable HEALTHCARE*. *Call Today!*

Basic human dignity is increasingly out of reach for most working-class people. Welfare has become a slur, just as sadness has become a pathology: these things are treated as identifying labels for weak and troubled individuals, rather than as alarming signs of a society increasingly indifferent to suffering. The kind of union that would demanded have that George's employer provide him with health

Meanwhile, poor women

coverage was busted long before George was even born.

seeking abortions in areas of the country where safe medical procedures are prohibitively expensive, or hopelessly far away, find themselves turning to the internet in search of both emotional support and medical advice. For so many of us, the rise of technology has been a major exacerbator of loneliness: between 2010 and 2015, teens in the United States who presented with classic symptoms of depression—feeling useless and joyless—surged 33 percent, while suicides from 13 to 18 year olds increased by 31 percent. "All of the possibilities traced back to a major change in teens' lives," writes Professor Jean Twenge, "the sudden ascendance of the smartphone." She noted that teenagers who spent five or more hours a day online were 71 percent more likely than those who spent less than an hour a day online to have at least one suicide risk factor.

But for some people in situations of profound isolation—like women contemplating self-abortions—the internet may

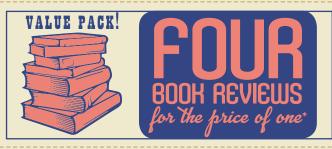


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A Demand For Better Literature*

IF YOU FORGOT TO BUY YOUR BOOK-LOVING FRIEND A GIFT FOR THE HOLIDAYS, THIS MAKES A TERRIFIC BELATED EXCUSE! be the only slender tether they have to some form of human compassion. We do not know the full extent of self-abortion, but internet searches for how to go about it have spiked over 40 percent since 2011. It is estimated that up to 200,000 women in Texas alone have tried to conduct their own termination.

Online communities and tightly-guarded secret forums for women seeking to end their pregnancies are proliferating. It's preferable to the days of coat hangers in the bathtub, but it by no means alleviates the ordeal of going it alone. I spoke to a number of women across the South and Midwest who had self-aborted, driven to this intimate trauma by zealous laws that caused them to feel deeply alienated within their own communities.

Missouri's abortion legislation meant that the procedure, travel, and accommodation would have cost Alana a month's salary. Struggling financially and unable to take time off from her job, she ordered the drugs online and used her weekend to conduct a major medical procedure herself. "All I had was my pug. She stayed right by my side the whole time and snuggled with me harder when I cried." She replayed the horror stories she had forced herself to read about. "The biggest risk is that you won't expel everything and die of sepsis, or that you'll bleed out."

Lee, from Corpus Christi, Texas, spends much of her time roaming online forums, trying to find people to talk to about the experience of self-abortion, something she could not even share with her girlfriends. "The loneliness of knowing that people you love may disown you for what you've done was the hardest part for me," she said. Suffering from severe depression and anxiety from her experiences, and unable to get treatment for them, she had resorted to self-medicating.

Violence is lining your enemies up against a wall; power is the calculated withdrawal and denial of services. Holistic alleviation of medical and mental afflictions is placed deliberately out of reach of poor and working class people, where only the fittest—a handful of outliers blessed by chance—have any hope of reaching them. For everyone else, life becomes about finding ways to shut off pain receptors in the brain. Somewhere higher up, other individuals are raking in the obscene profits of their misery.

UR NEED TO BELONG IS HARDWIRED, YET sociologists say that the kinless are becoming a critical demographic trend in society. If life was already solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short, it has become even more so. In the 1980s, the Japanese began using the word *kodokushi*, lonely death, to describe the phenomenon of people who died alone and weren't discovered for long periods of time. Kodokushi tripled as Japan's economic woes set in, with the elderly, unemployed, and welfare recipients increasingly left to rot forgotten. In the U.S., death by loneliness has increasingly taken the form of "despair deaths"—booze, drugs, obesity, poverty, isolation, and suicide—which have risen dramati-

cally in recent years. Rising inequality does not completely account for this trend, but there is a significant overlap. Despair deaths have contributed to the decrease in America's life expectancy for the first time in decades. "Both social isolation and loneliness are associated with increased mortality," one research study noted, with the authors theorising that it may be the "emotional pathway through which social isolation impairs health."

As a way of staving off fear of the end of life, American culture has developed a perverse theology of death, parlaying the idea that unbearable amounts of pain in this life will be rewarded with opulence in the next. Jessica Mitford, British aristocrat turned American communist, examined this culture of excess in her 1963 expose of the funeral industry, *The American Way of Death*. A new mythology had been built up, she said, "to justify the peculiar customs surrounding the disposal of our dead." The funerary industry was a racket, profiteering from the fog of grief, "a huge, macabre, and expensive practical joke on the American public."

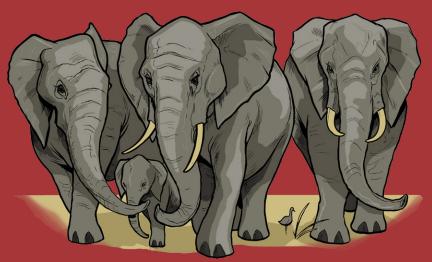
VER THE DECADES, FUNERALS have become the third largest expenditure in life, after a house and car. Beginning in the years of post-World War II optimism, Americans developed a taste for mausoleums. "They came out of notions of the modern

dream, and represented the way that we hoped the world was going to be in Eisenhower's America," Chicago photographer John Faier told me, after a decade travelling the country to document mausoleums for his exhibition *Queen of Heaven*. "These spaces are very antiseptic, even though they're embellished with matching lamps and carpets and wall carvings," he said. "They exist because it was seen as the American way."

Mausoleums are a reflection of the culture in which they were built: monuments to ambition, celebrations of grandeur. In America's case, they represent the acceptance of trickle-down greed as the highest good in life. Travelling to crypts around the country for over a decade, one thing has struck Faier above else: the only signs of life he has ever encountered in these spaces are fruit flies. "I've never, never seen a mourner in my ten years—not even a representation that anyone has been there. The people buried in these spaces are forgotten."

Blinkered by our universal dread of a lonely end, we are ignoring this metastasizing culture of death because the only alternative is a radical overhaul of everything in American life. Just as Paisley Park, Prince's grand project, unwittingly became his mausoleum, the country is slowly entombing itself in despair. Wealth and success offered Prince no immunity to the American nightmare; as the consummate outsider, as someone who refused to conform, he was never a testament to its dream. "His biggest and perhaps only fear," Neal Karlen wrote after Prince's passing, "was dying alone." *

The Current Affairs Field Guide to Socialist Animals



Domestic Dog (Canis lupus familiaris)

The scientific community is bitterly divided on the *socialism* of dogs. While dogs display *socialized pack behavior*, they are also known to have *authoritarian tendencies*, and may be easily led by *dominant*

personalities. A number of studies conducted in Greece indicate that dogs sometimes attach themselves to *leftist student protests* (see Skilos M, Kyon TH. "Are Greek Protest Dogs the World's Best Dogs?") Other studies, however, show that many police departments throughout the world employ canine units; ergo, some dogs are literally cops. Are dogs true *socialists*, or *reactionaries* who will betray the *revolution* when the time comes? The research continues.

Preferred Habitat: Alongside humankind. Dogs prefer to be part of the *masses*, whether the *masses* are fighting for *justice* or surrendering to the will of the *state*.

RANGE: Worldwide.

STATUS: Good dogs. Bad dogs?

Elephant (family Elephantidae)

Proudly *matriarchal*, elephants form organized herds of 8-100 (mostly female) individuals. They share *communal care labor*, and kick out males when they become sexually aggressive and *brocialist*. Their *matriarchal* character, gentleness, and *herbivorous diet* have led many male researchers to conclude that elephants are harmless. However, new research has revealed that elephants have a secret form of *sub-sonic communication*, producing deep rumbles at a frequency too low to be heard by the human ear. It is possible that the *revolution* is coming, and when it arrives it will be in the form of a sudden *stampede*.

Preferred Habitat: Ensconced in the herd, and perhaps someday ensconced in the ruins of *capitalism*.

RANGE: Africa, Asia, and zoos around the globe where they chew thoughtfully and stare at humans with cool, unfathomable eyes.

STATUS: Endangered, but biding their time.



Octopus (order Octopoda)

The 300 species of order Octopoda tend to be intelligent, playful, and restless. They have a great dislike of systems, and have been known to escape from zoos with daring regularity. All octopuses are anti-prison advocates, and generally hostile to law enforcement. When confronted by authorities they will disappear in a blaze of ink and insults. If faced with a needless bit of technological frippery such as an undersea camera or a miniature robotic submarine, they will take it apart, piece by piece, just to make a point.



Preferred Habitat: Under the sea.

Some biologists hypothesize that the open ocean is generally more conducive to socialism (see Seahorse; Manatee).

RANGE: Worldwide, including the abyssal depths of freedom.

STATUS: Completely done with your oppressive bullshit.



Manatee

(family Trichechidae)

The manatee—commonly referred to as the sea cow—is the most socially responsible of all animals. Peaceful, slow, and *majestic*, the manatee is both a confirmed *vegetarian* and a gourmand, chewing thoughtfully on a diverse variety of water plants for up to seven hours per day. While some humans consider the manatee mermaid-like and beautiful, others have labeled them funny-looking. Manatees themselves are indifferent. They have evolved beyond the artificial beauty standards imposed by consumer capitalism.

Preferred Habitat: Warm fresh or salt water, preferably free of the plastic offal of a decaying human civilization.

RANGE: Shrinking due to *climate change*, a byproduct of capitalism.

STATUS: Threatened, but could swiftly bounce back under full socialism.

(genus Corvus)

Crows have consistently ranked highest on the Schulmann-Kazmir Sassy Animal Scale. Talkative, prankish, and fond of memes, crows enjoy living alongside human habitations. The crow population increased dramatically along with the growth of the proletariat, and, much like their historic human compatriots, crows have proven experts at turning the side effects of capitalism into useful tools. Many institutions consider crows to be a nuisance animal because of their tendency to commit *private property* damage and their general sassy disrespect for authority (see Schulmann-Kazmir scale, above).

Preferred Habitat: Large communal roosts, lined with the repurposed garbage of consumer capitalism. They enjoy going through your trash and mocking all your wasteful, meaningless choices.

RANGE: Worldwide, including world mythology, in which they frequently appear as anti-authoritarian tricksters, or as omens of death, change, and transformation.

STATUS: Permanently laughing at you.



THEILUSTRATORS



Naomi Ushiyama



Lizzy Price



Mike Freiheit



C.M. Duffy



C.M. Duffy



Naomi Ushiyama



Tyler Rubenfeld



Maxwell J. Singletary



Pranas Naujokaitis



Nick Sirotich



Chris Matthews



Lizzy Price