

"A Convenient Way To Promote Happiness"

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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JULY/AUGUST 2018



ALIENS!
THEIR PERFECTLY
RATIONAL BELIEFS

HAWAI'I
ITS PEOPLE,
ITS WONDERS

DRONES
THEY ARE COMING
FOR US



Les Affaires

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Headlines for Our Time

"Is \$30,000 A Month Too Much to Spend On Wine?"
— The Wall Street Journal (March 14, 2017)

"Husband of Teacher Killed in Texas Shooting Is Crowdfunding Medical Bills"
— Vice (May 21, 2018)

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

Spider
Moms!

What Happened When We Bought A Shark Tank For The Current Affairs Office

The sharks got out.

Very unwise. Not recommended. Even if it's the latest
"hot home trend" in the Wall Street Journal.

People We Could Do Without

Rearrange the letters to find out this month's
"Person We Could Do Without": **SUNK MOLE**

TAKE THE
Current Affairs Survey:
Civilization: **Y** or **N** ?

We Are Not Looking Forward To Our Upcoming Review of *Ayn Rand's Books*

The sacrifices *Current Affairs* makes for its readership are widely admired. No other magazine is willing to endure the kind of torment in the pursuit of editorial excellence. We have digested and reviewed the collected works of Charles Murray, Benjamin Shapiro, Jordan B. Peterson, and many other intolerables. Would *The New Yorker* do this for you? It would not. Does that mean that *Current Affairs* is a superior magazine to *The New Yorker*? Well, if you consider "esteem in which it holds its subscribers" the measure of a periodical's quality, then undoubtedly yes. And how else would you measure it? We have literally jumped on a live hand grenade for you. Yet we ask nothing. (Except \$60 a year and complete agreement with all of our opinions.)

And yet, reader: we are about to climb

our highest mountain yet. Our editor has just received print copies of those two enduring classics of 20th century airport fiction, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. He intends to write about them. No, do not try to talk him out of it. He cannot be stopped. He is a man resolved.

Already, there have been signs that this will not be easy. Here is the description of main character Howard Roark, from *The Fountainhead's* dust jacket: "He knew he was right with the same certainty that he knew he had two hands with which to create. No one could convince him otherwise.... No opinion except his own either disturbed or influenced him. Perhaps that is why he was hated..." Perhaps indeed, but it rather sounds like Mr. Roark is going to be a **complete asshole** who listens to nobody and is incapable of changing his mind. We do hope that this is

not the case, and we are sure it will not be, since Ms. Rand has stated that she intended to depict in her protagonist the "ideal man." Since a man meeting the jacket description would be a decidedly non-ideal man, the copywriter must simply have made a mistake. It is understandable. The novel is a beefy 725 pages. Our first conclusion after giving it a thumb-through is that Ayn Rand's editor must have been afraid of her.

It may take several months, possibly even an annum or so, for our editorial staff to mentally masticate these pulpy tomes. Readers who set their watches by the timing of *Current Affairs* releases should not expect a firm publication-date. But comment we shall, and at length. We are determined to prove our devotion to you. Do you remember when Meat Loaf told you that he would do anything for love, but not **that**? This is that.



Smitten With Your Mitten: A CURRENT AFFAIRS
TRIBUTE TO THE
STATE OF

Michigan

**(non-Michigan readers,
look away now)**

We do not play geographic favorites. As an international magazine, we cannot afford to: anything nice we say about one Dakota will pique the other, every positive word we say about Waukegan will be taken as a slight against Kenosha. The first rule of magazine editing is: don't start drama, especially between the states. We know how that turned out last time. If you're going to appeal to a Mass Audience, you need to be able to exercise a little diplomatic finesse.

And yet: our belly has a certain ticklish spot for Michigan. It is a place we admire with an unusual muchness. It is a land where, as Mitt Romney once observed, "the trees are just

the right height." From the giant porches of Mackinaw to the rusting chassis of Detroit to the elk-ridden wasteland of the Upper Peninsula, Michigan's attractions are diverse and its people numerous. For sure, it gave us Betsy DeVos, the militia movement, and the Trump Presidency. But it also gave us The Four Tops and the Cadillac El Dorado. Who can stay mad at Michigan when listening to a Stevie Wonder record? When driving a Corvair?

Michigan contains all the mixed-up multitudes of the United States itself, both its delights and its atrocities. It may have per-

fectured the practices of residential segregation and police brutality. But it also touches three different Great Lakes, and the Great Lakes are Excellent. (Occasionally even Superior.) Michigan, you devious old crone, we adore you and can't quit you. Never change. (Unless it's changing your scandalous levels of racial and economic inequality.)

*Have
you
questioned
a faulty
ideological
assumption
today?*

COOL TIPS FOR HOT SUMMERS

It's the summer! Here's what you need to **STAY COOL**.

- ❖ Be seen reading Current Affairs.
- ❖ Try to avoid spending excessive periods of time in the sun and wear broad-brimmed hats.
- ❖ Do not let any of your furrier pets sleep on your face.
- ❖ Wear "flip-flop" shoes, but call them "flippety-flops."
- ❖ Change hemispheres. In Australia, Christmas is in July!
- ❖ Go surfing! Watch out though: the ocean is full of sharks.
- ❖ Drink plenty of aloe.
- ❖ To the extent possible, avoid soaking in your own urine.
- ❖ Get a custom monogrammed beach towel.
- ❖ Eat fewer ghost peppers.
- ❖ If you sunbathe, make sure to put nickels on your body. Money is cool.

When the editors of *Current Affairs* were in grade school, we spent our time the same way you did: puzzling over the question "Who killed Buddy Holly?" During recesses, between classes after debate practice: until we discovered who killed the music on "The Day The Music Died," we could not find ourselves at peace.

At last, however, a perpetrator has been found. The culprit was neither the 21-year-old pilot of Holly's doomed aircraft, nor the Big Bopper. It was capitalism, beyond a reasonable doubt. Buddy Holly did not want to go on the fateful 1959 "Winter Dance Party" tour. Not only did it involve weeks of traveling across frozen Minnesotan plains, but it was going to take him away from his pregnant wife, Maria Elena. Holly, however, felt he had no choice. Why? Because his record company was withholding his royalties, and he could not pay his rent. Here, from one of the more comprehensive Holly biographies, is a de-

scription of his last weeks:

"His financial situation was growing desperate. [Holly's producer] continued to withhold his record royalties. 'We didn't have a red cent,' Maria Elena admits... As Christmas loomed, and still no check materialized, Buddy decided there was only one quick way to put cash in his pocket: he must go out on tour again. ... [Buddy said] 'I need to bring some money in. It's time for me to go to work, no matter what it is. It's only a three-week tour... and I'll bring some money back.'" Philip Norman, *Rave On: The Biography of Buddy Holly* (Simon & Schuster, 2014), pp. 240. None of this would have mat-

tered under socialism or even moderate social democracy. Holly's housing would have been guaranteed, and his UBI check would have seen him through the winter. When his wife gave birth, the family would have received a generous child-care allowance. And yet, thanks to the fact that record companies have capital, and musicians do not, Holly was not free to sit around writing more classics like "Peggy Sue" and "Maybe Baby." One of the country's greatest cultural contributors, killed at 22, thanks to financial desperation. Add it to the body count.

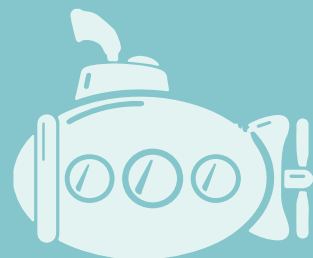
Whether the party responsible will be brought to justice remains to be seen.

Build Your Own Useless Self-Aggrandizing SUBMARINE

So you have a billion dollars. And yet for some reason, the public refuses to love you. Money can buy you happiness, and a 30-room inflatable bouncy castle, yet it cannot get you what you truly crave: universal adulation. What do four hundred rhinoceros-skin handbags or a garage full of Paganis and Bugatis mean, if you are not worshiped? The public may be a mindless horde of consumption units, existing solely to provide you with labor and purchase your commodities. But you still want them to *like* you.

What can be done? Gentle plutocrat, there is only one thing: you must attempt a daring, highly visible rescue operation. And for that you will need: a submarine. The next time some over-curious youngsters wander too far into a catacomb, in you will swoop. "I'll save them," you'll chirp, as the public gasps in awe at the length and rigidity of your submersible. No matter if professionally-trained spelunkers already have the situation fully in hand. You've got innovation! Technology! Disruption! The people need a Hero, and you'll be one. Of course, perhaps you'll disrupt an ongoing search-and-rescue operation. So be it. Destiny is not a choice.

**Order the
Current Affairs
Portable Rescue
Submarine
today.**



*What would
you be without
librarians?*



Capitalism KILLED BUDDY HOLLY

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the color of ECONOMIC ANXIETY

by Malaika Jabali

THE BUILDING LOOMED OVER THE INTERSECTION like an apparition. Though hollowed out and lifeless, the shell of the former A.O. Smith Milwaukee Works headquarters on N 27th Street and W. Hopkins was still magnificent. But the grand two-story brick structure, wide as half a city block and featuring the odd boarded up window, felt like a tombstone. “Here lies the dream of the Great Migration,” it read.

“The 53206,” as the area is commonly called, and the predominantly black neighborhoods surrounding it, currently have the highest rate of incarcerated black men in the country. Deindustrialization, wealth inequality, unemployment, and historical patterns of discrimination and police terrorism have created a toxic mix for Wisconsin’s 359,000 black residents.

Yet, few outsiders seem to realize that Milwaukee is substantially black. And many of its black residents, who make up 40 percent of the city, have been simmering in their frustrations for decades. Those frustrations came to a head in 2016, after police killed 23-year-old Sylville Smith, when residents set fire to Milwaukee’s Sherman Park neighborhood. But there may be an additional form of resistance bubbling under the surface of Milwaukee’s famed breweries and steadily gentrifying neighborhoods.

A common narrative about the November 2016 election is that a wave of white backlash thrust Donald Trump to the White House and that white Obama voters “flipped” to Trump. This may have been true on a small scale, but Obama-Trump voters did not make a significant difference. White people of all genders and classes vot-

ed for Trump at about the same rates as they voted for Romney, McCain, and George W. Bush, and both white and Republican voter turnout stayed fairly steady between 2012 and 2016. More significant was the critical mass of Democrats who defected from the party or didn’t vote at all in the battleground states the Democratic Party needed most. The rate of this decline among Democrats in key swing states was larger than the increase of Republicans who brought Trump to victory. And in some states, the drop was unprecedented.

WHILE THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY ARGUES ABOUT whether and how to win back the vanishingly small number of white Obama-Trump voters, the uncomfortable fact remains that black voter turnout in 2016 was down in over half the country. In Wisconsin, the decline in black voter turnout between 2012 and 2016 was 86,830 votes. Hillary Clinton lost the state by a mere 22,748 votes. If Clinton won over more of the black Democrats who voted in 2012 in just three states—Wisconsin, Florida, and Michigan—she would have won the election.

So why didn’t black voters turn out for Clinton? Even accounting for the thousands of potential voters who were likely harmed by Wisconsin’s incessant suppression tactics, studies show that voter suppression was among the least important factors affecting black turnout in Wisconsin.

In search of some answers, I trekked to Milwaukee last fall to talk to some of the city’s black residents about why they stayed home.

WHEN NEWLY-ELECTED ALDERMAN KHALIF RAINEY parked his car a couple of blocks from the Sherman Park neighborhood in August 2016, he was met with a stranger's warning. "Don't go over there. It's about to go down tonight." On August 13, 2016, the historically black, middle class community was in flames, from police cars, to an auto parts store, to the BP gas station that had been a match point for prior protests. This north side Milwaukee neighborhood, which Khalif knew and loved since childhood, burned before his eyes.

Just a few hours after police officer Dominique Heaggan-Brown killed Sylville Smith, the neighborhood was burning. The arson wasn't just the climax of mourning for Sylville's death. It was also about the police killings of Dontre Hamilton and Derek Williams, whose deaths were still a recent memory. It was about the folks who were out of work and with few legitimate employment options, and the decades of legalized police terrorism that wracked residents since the earliest years of black migrants seeking refuge in Milwaukee from the Jim Crow South.

In the early 1970s, black people from the corners of rural southern towns could find a relatively fresh start in Milwaukee. Despite the city's notorious housing segregation, black residents were hired in manufacturing jobs with nothing more than a high school diploma. The city's culture of anti-black police violence could be mitigated some by its economic opportunities, which ranked among the best in the country for black people.

But the jobs left and the police presence remained. The union labor, pensions, and benefits offered by manufacturing employers gave way to insecure, contractual service work or, in many cases, nothing at all. A 2017 report from the Center of Wisconsin Strategy (COWS), a "think-and-do-tank" based in the University of

Wisconsin-Madison, notes that black people in Wisconsin experience "extreme" economic and social inequality far exceeding national rates.

In 2015, blacks in Wisconsin were nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than whites. Thirty-one percent of black people in Wisconsin are in poverty, six times the white poverty rate. The black household income is half that of whites in the state, giving it the second highest black-white income gap after Minnesota.

These figures are even starker for black men in the state's largest city. "No metro area has witnessed a more precipitous erosion in the labor market for black males over the past 40 years than has Milwaukee," according to University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professor Marc Levine in his analysis of U.S. Census data. "[A]nd in no other large metro area is the contemporary black male employment crisis more acute than in Milwaukee." In 1970, 85% of black men in their prime working years of 25-54 were employed. This was above the national average. But by 2010, amid the Great Recession, that employment rate dipped to 52.7%.

This was the lowest level of employment for black males in their prime working years in any metropolitan area in the country.

At the break of dawn, at a news conference following the Sherman



Park uprising, Alderman Khalif Rainey diverted from the usual talking points about the ills of violent protest and instead issued a searing indictment of Milwaukee's failure to address racial inequities:

"This entire community has sat back and witnessed how Milwaukee, Wisconsin has become the worst place to live for African Americans in the entire country. Now this is the warning cry. Do we continue with the inequities, the injustice, the under-education that creates these byproducts that we see this evening?"

With increasing passion, the Alderman professed that "the black people of Milwaukee are tired. They're tired of living under this oppression. This is their existence. This is their life. This is the life of their children. There's racial problems here in Wisconsin that have to be rectified. Rectify this immediately."

Alderman Rainey speaks with the same clarity and fervor over a year later when I meet him to discuss the rebellion, and similar rebellions that took place in Milwaukee and other black, urban centers 50 years prior in the midst of parallel economic and racial conditions. The walls of his wood-paneled office are lined with plaques and notable achievements, including a framed media clipping from *TIME* magazine highlighting his protest statement.

I asked him what the Sherman Park uprising could have meant for the typically Democratic stronghold and a presidential election that was set to transpire just a few months later. Here, too, the young politician's response was unconventional: "I felt that there was no one that really spoke—they were speaking to [us] on a superficial level about what was going on."

He harkens back to the Obama administration and the onslaught of police brutality and uprisings the country witnessed. "We had Baltimore, we had Charlotte, we had Milwaukee. I wonder—how does that factor into a community's confidence in having an African American president, if during the tenure when we had [one] we've seen some of the most atrocious murders by police officers of unarmed black men? We've seen the decline in African American wealth."

"Did we lose confidence in the power or the ability of getting things done by a President? Were we coming off of a hangover or fatigue? Do we still have confidence in democracy at all?"

Rainey tells me that during the protests and their aftermath he couldn't eat for 5 days.

ALATECOMER TO THE GREAT MIGRATION, Milwaukee attracted black people from small, southern towns well into the late 1970s. The migrants hoped to escape the explicit racism and low-wage labor in the south. But jobs began disappearing shortly after many black Southerners arrived, giving way to automation and outsourcing.

With over half of black men in Milwaukee reliant on production jobs in 1970, this labor market shift killed their economic progress.

In 1984, A.O. Smith opened up motor assembly operations in Juarez and Acuna, Mexico. In 1995, it began joint ventures in China. Two years later, the company sold off its automotive unit and moved its headquarters, and its jobs, from its property in the urban center of Milwaukee 8 miles northwest to the suburbs.

As Professor Marc Levine notes: The city of Milwaukee, where almost 90% of the region's black males live, has lost over three-quarters of its industrial jobs since the 1960s. In metro Milwaukee, all of the region's net job growth since the 1980s has occurred in the suburbs,

where few working-age black males live due to past and present housing segregation, and where transportation links between the central city and suburban jobs are poor (and increasingly facing cutbacks).

Milwaukee followed the formula of many other American cities in the mid-20th century. Even without state or local laws implementing Jim Crow segregation, Milwaukeeans enforced an anti-black racial caste system through the real estate market. By the 1940s, according to research by Lois Quinn of the Metropolitan Integration Research Center, "at least 16 of the 18 Milwaukee County suburbs were using racially restrictive covenants to exclude black families from residential areas."

The legacy of this segregation persists: the Milwaukee metro area now stands as the most segregated in America.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, one of America's longest-running civil rights organizations, isn't known to be especially critical of the Democratic Party. But the president of Milwaukee's NAACP chapter pulled no punches when discussing Hillary Clinton's 2016 Wisconsin campaign.

"Hillary Clinton did not come and do any type of campaigning in the general election" are the first words Fred Royal says to me after introducing himself. We were seated in Coffee Makes You Black, a cafe and restaurant repurposed from its past life as a local bank. The once-vacant building had become one of black Milwaukeeans' central gathering spots. Royal had just wrapped up a meeting at a nearby table.

"She [campaigning] in the primary. Bernie Sanders won the primary. That should have told her she should have come here and campaigned a little harder to get a turnout if Bernie Sanders beats you in the primary. She never came." Mr. Royal also refers to the number of people who voted third party and others who may have been in Bernie Sanders' base who stayed home as possible reasons for her losing the state, a first for a Democratic candidate in over 30 years.

"There were no distinct issues that she ran on that were associated with black voter turnout," he asserts. "And a lot of people faulted Bill Clinton's mistreatment of African Americans as her baggage, such as welfare reform, the drug war that was [really] the war on drug users. When you're on video and a woman is asking about your comments about super-predators and you get rattled. You have to be accountable for your record," Royal remarks, referring to a term the Clintons advocated while campaigning to pass the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, otherwise known as the "crime bill." "[S]he didn't handle it well. It was one of the worst campaigns I've ever seen here in Wisconsin."

A few days before interviewing Mr. Royal, I spoke with Martha Love, an officer of the Democratic Party of Milwaukee County. She was confounded as to how Hillary lost the state and huge numbers of its black voters. Mr. Royal, on the other hand, was very clear in his assessment of the 2016 election. I asked him whether he considered Hillary Clinton's campaign to be among the worst merely because of her ground-game missteps or if anything else factored in. "African Americans, especially African Americans in this city with [high rates of] poverty, 50% black male unemployment for . . . years. That shows you the systemic racism that isn't being addressed. And if you're not going to speak to that, why would I be engaged?"

Before sitting down with Mr. Royal, I had conversations with some of the restaurant's kitchen staff as they wound down for the day. Juan, a young cook from Milwaukee's north side whose skin was peppered with tattoos, admitted that he didn't "really care for



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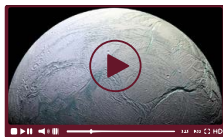
LIVE STREAM

of formerly endangered species...



LIVE STREAM

of the anarcho-communes on Enceladus...



The History of "Twitter"

The platform that was...



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nobody cares, we all said things when we were young and stupid.



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#well-rested
#blessed

Why We Post Less...

It's because everything sucks less!

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...find someplace to go today?
...find someone to speak to?
...find some thing helpful you can do?

Make New Friends!



Gomez, 74

[MEET GOMEZ](#)

INSPIRING: When this little girl's mother got cancer and couldn't afford to pay for treatment...



...she received life-saving surgery thanks to universal healthcare and now she's home in time for her daughter's birthday!

90 or 95% tax on the rich: The candidates debate...

12 Cats Who Look Like Leon Trotsky



You Won't Believe...

...that we used to waste perfectly good land on farming these noble beasts! Meet some cool cows on their protected range.



Strangers Who Could Use A Kind Word



Leonora

I

Leonora's interests include: crochet, BBC murder mysteries, krav maga...

[SEND](#)

DISCUSSIONS



Substantive Debate Zone



Amiable Chit-Chat



Consensual Flirtation



Narcissism of Small Differences Quarantine Zone

NICHE GROUPS



Manatee Enthusiasts



Cookie Baking Bros



3-D Chess Players



People Who Like Working Out (But Aren't Judgy About It)



Tree Climbers



Musicians Who Are Not Guitarists



People Who Like Pears



Atheists Who Aren't Jerks



Jazz Types



Astronomers Who Can't Stand Neil DeGrasse Tyson



Bird Watchers



Train Spotters



Bird Trainers



Whistling Gardeners



Ex-Lawyer Support Group



Miscellaneous Nerds

FIND UPCOMING MEETUPS

Feeling distressed?

You can speak to someone right now...



neither one of them. There ain't no such thing as Democrat and Republican; they both intertwined with each other." Given the Democrats' intentionally conservative economic strategy since the late 1970s, this was a reasonable observation. Though Juan voted for Obama in his first term, he didn't seem convinced that presidential elections affected his day-to-day life. "Obama wasn't a bad president. But at the same time, it's like, the President is just a face. He's just a figurehead at the end of the day."

His co-worker Ace hadn't voted for a president in years, though he liked Bernie Sanders. The older black man, who hails from Birmingham, Alabama, moved to Milwaukee to pursue construction work. He believes his days in Milwaukee are numbered, and he plans to return south to join his family. Sanders, he felt, "is talking about our needs."

Campaign mistakes from Democrats may have been excused by Wisconsin's black voters in prior elections despite the state's perpetual inequalities. But what Royal described, and what Juan and Ace echoed, was a perfect storm of fatigue generally, disinterest in Hillary Clinton specifically, and the promise of a relative political unknown showing hungry voters that there didn't have to be Democratic politics as usual. All of these factors appear to have kept black Milwaukeeans and other loyal Democrats out of the voting booths.

The exact reasons for disinterest in Clinton vary, but her absence from Wisconsin didn't help.

WENDELL HARRIS SAW THE OTHER KIDS struggling in the hot Arkansas sun and knew he wanted more. As a farm hand he would only get three dollars a day picking cotton, and he had to pay one of those dollars to his supervisor each day. Wendell ingratiated himself to his boss and was soon promoted to getting water for the fatigued sharecroppers.

His ambition led him to Milwaukee the day after he graduated high school, joining his older brother to the city in 1967. Within a year of moving to town, he landed a job at A.O. Smith, where he worked for 30 years. With just a high school degree, he could soon enter Milwaukee's burgeoning black middle class.

Mr. Harris, who regaled me with stories of his childhood in Arkansas and his migration to Milwaukee, described his transition into politics and his concerns about Bill Clinton during the former president's early political campaigns. As an officer of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and a member of A.O. Smith's union, Mr. Harris was approached by Democratic Party leaders in the early '90s to join their ranks. But Harris, a Democratic Socialist who now serves on the school board of the Milwaukee Public Schools, was averse to joining the Party in the midst of its newfound conservative identity.

"I didn't like Bill Clinton from the outset based on his politics

when he was the governor of Arkansas," Harris recalls as we drive from a school board meeting, winding through Milwaukee's black neighborhoods as the sun begins to set. Referring to Clinton's political response after having lost one of his campaigns, he notes that Bill Clinton asserted "in his own words, no one would be able to 'out-prison' him. Meaning that he was [perceived as] too soft on crime. Rickey Ray Rector had the mental capacity of an infant. He was on death row in Arkansas. Bill Clinton stopped his [presidential] campaign to stop and execute that guy. That's how he proved his point about being hard on crime."

"Another reason I didn't like him is he was the architect of the New Democrats, and in essence they were supposed to be as close to the Republicans as possible to still be considered a Democrat."

Wendell Harris was not alone in his disdain of Clinton and his colleagues' conservative policy agenda. In his final presidential campaign in 1992, California governor Jerry Brown asked a Philadelphia labor convention to compare Clinton's record as "a right-to-work, union-busting, scab-inviting, wage-depressing, environmental-disaster governor versus [himself,] a labor governor."

"New Democrats," for whom Bill Clinton was the face, promoted privatization, anti-union policies, and the deregulation of financial markets in furtherance of Reagan-era conservatism. Though the ideology gained steam in the 90s, it had been developing for much longer.

While championing welfare cuts for the black masses, Bill Clinton enhanced corporate welfare for the country's elite. Clearly a successful campaign tactic at the time, the last few years have been unforgiving to the right-leaning legacy of New Democrats, as poverty, wealth inequality, and mass incarceration have continued to soar unabated under their watch.

Mr. Royal highlighted the common concern that Hillary Clinton's embrace of more progressive economic policies, after decades advocating for Bill Clinton's neoliberalism, probably didn't register as genuine for the many young black voters who preferred Bernie Sanders. For some, it was likely too little, too late.

When Democrats joined Hillary Clinton on the 2016 presidential campaign trail, the widespread messaging was that people of color simply had too much to lose with a Trump presidency.

But many of them felt that they already lost.

Instead of addressing the conservative economic policies that defined the Democratic Party for decades and helped undermine black progress, Clinton attempted to appeal to black voters' identity. By targeting a limited conception of this identity, the presidential hopeful failed to appreciate the multitude of black experiences and discounted the ways in which black Midwestern priorities have departed from the Democrats' black, southern firewall.

The 2016 Democratic Primary made these distinctions explicit.

*"A growing number of
black people are losing
faith in the two major political
parties, yet the common refrain
is that Democrats must appeal to
white swing voters..."*



Whereas Hillary Clinton breezed through southern states with significant support among blacks who went to the polls, Bernie Sanders pulled his strongest black support in the Midwest. According to NBC News exit polling data, the percentage of black support for Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries in major southern states never got past the teens. He fared best in North Carolina, where he won 19% of the black Democratic vote. But in key battleground states, including Michigan, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, Sanders averaged about 30% of the black vote. His greatest support came from black voters in Wisconsin, 31% of whom said they voted for him in the Democratic primary.

But, unlike Sanders, Clinton failed to make real assessments and offer meaningful policy solutions to the economic woes of those living in post-industrial urban centers, instead relying on appeals to black identity. This failure hit at precisely the wrong time—when cities, including Milwaukee, were literally still smoldering from summer uprisings—and in precisely the wrong places—in northern cities where democrats rely more heavily on their urban black and progressive base to counteract conservative rural districts.

“That hot sauce in the bag comment was one of the most offensive comments I’d ever heard from anyone,” Alderman Rainey shares with me with as he recalls Hillary Clinton’s remarks on a black radio show while on the campaign trail. “I mean, I love hot sauce, but to think that [this comment] and bringing out Jay-Z and Beyoncé in Ohio was enough to secure the black vote, the youth vote. It was insulting to the intelligence of the black voter.”

Even addressing systemic racism was couched as a zero-sum game: to dismantle one form of oppression you have to keep all the others. Few comments exemplified this more than Clinton’s rhetorical question along a Nevada campaign stop: “If we broke up the big banks tomorrow . . . would that end racism?”

There was a wide opening to address the financial environment in which big banks targeting black home buyers for subprime loans deepened the destabilization of black communities during the Great Recession and beyond. Pitting unmitigated capitalism, itself a driver of black subjugation and ongoing racial disparities, against some generalized admonishment of racism was one of the more shamefully disingenuous themes of Clinton’s campaign.

And on top of being shameful, it didn’t work.

A GROWING NUMBER OF BLACK PEOPLE AND BLACK women in particular appear not only to have lost faith in the electoral process in 2016, but to be losing faith in the two major political parties. A September 2017 *Essence* study shows that 21% of black women felt that neither party represented them, up from 13% in 2016. The belief that the Democratic Party represents them fell from 85% to 74% in the same time frame.

There is evidence that disillusionment is a far more significant factor than voter suppression in deflating turnout among voters of color. Even in states that did not introduce new voter ID laws after 2013, when the Supreme Court rolled back voter protections in *Shelby County v. Holder*, black voter turnout dropped. A University of Wisconsin-Madison study of 2016 voter behavior in its two most populous counties, which lean heavily Democratic, indicates that the primary reason its 294 respondents did not vote in the presidential election is that they were “unhappy with choice of candidates or issues,” representing 33% of the responses. “Not interested” and “vote would not have mattered”

represented another 8.8% and 6.6%, respectively. “Did not have adequate photo ID,” “told at polling place that ID inadequate,” and “lines too long,” measures indicating possible voter suppression, represented 1.7%, 1.4%, and .9% of the answers.

Yet nearly two years after the presidential election, the common refrain is that the Democratic Party has to appeal to white swing voters if they want any chance of success in 2020.

A February *Bloomberg* story on voter turnout of non-college educated whites in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin offered that “[i]n two of the three states — Michigan and Pennsylvania — Clinton would have been able to carry the states if this group’s turnout had remained at 2012 levels.” The same, of course, is true of Michigan and Wisconsin if Clinton had turned out black voters at 2012 levels. And, as noted earlier, higher black voter turnout in Florida would have won Clinton the presidency.

For the Democratic Party’s success, it would seem that trying to secure one’s base would be a more certain bet than adjusting to the whims of swing voters or convincing those who generally vote for Republican candidates. Yet liberal outlets have run away with the idea that they must appeal to “working-class,” presumably conservative-leaning, whites in order to win. A *Washington Post* newsletter from May 2, 2018 suggested that in order for Democrats to bring something “new to the table” in 2020, they should win over “battleground states filled with working, white swing voters who have been caught for years in an economic vice and fear further status slippage.”

This sentiment has reverberated across the media landscape, with op-eds, reporting, and long form essays attempting to uncover the economic anxieties of white Trump voters.

There are signs that some prominent Democrats are indeed shifting gears and embracing leftist economic initiatives that could satisfy its multi-racial voters, including a federal jobs guarantee. This, and the abject failures of Trump and his administration, may be enough to regain a critical mass of the Democratic base who defected from the party in 2016 as midterms continue. But—as progressive victories in Florida and the Bronx indicate—addressing working class anxiety across race is plausibly the most effective path forward.” For some of the Democratic base, the time is ticking to rebuild their confidence, particularly as some liberals are poised to cling to the Clintons’ triangulation playbook and abandon meaningful economic appeals to black constituents.

Alderman Rainey, who steers clear of the Democratic Party machine, hypothesized on the viability of an independent third party: “Is it time for us to create our own serious credible party and force these two political parties to concede to our demands?” he asked. “The way things are currently set up, the Democratic Party just takes us for granted that we’re going to vote for them. The Republicans attempt to just peel us off and disenfranchise us. In order for us to be taken seriously as constituents, I think we have to start a ticket and articulate our demands ourselves. Unless you speak to these solutions, don’t count on our vote.”

The past few decades of conservative economic policy from both parties, and its effects on wealth and income in black industrial cities, may continue to cause disaffection in black voters where Democrats need their support most. Yet, liberal pundits and policy makers assume that it’s white working class voters, not black ones, whom they should lure back. If the Party fixates on whites with economic anxieties, instead of how economic policies have harmed households across races, they are at real risk of losing again. †

PHOTOS: Black life in Milwaukee—bus drivers in the 1960s, a street festival in the 1980s. Courtesy Milwaukee Public Library Historic Collection.

"I was born in one country and am now a resident of another... I speak from inside the issue, and I am here to plead: Understand its power for good and for harm. In Europe and America, border laxness has empowered extremism—and trying to counter that extremism with still more extremism will do no good for any principle of freedom..."

— David Frum, former Bush speechwriter, "Enforce The Border—Humanely," THE ATLANTIC (June 20, 2018)

I, Immigrant:

STORY: LYTA GOLD

The David Frum Story

ART: MIKE FREIHEIT

It's true. I, David Frum, man of letters, ex-political speechwriter, coiner of many a famous phrase, romantic rebel of the Republican party--



I, David Frum, am an immigrant.



I speak from inside this issue.



I was born in Canada, the humble son of a famous journalist and highly successful dentist-turned philanthropist.

I traveled to America in order to attend the world's most elite colleges. This is a legitimate reason to cross borders, unlike claiming "asylum".



Immigrating to a new country is never easy. I, too, have endured discrimination.

Poutine, and don't skimp on the gravy, you oaf!

Sorry, sir, I don't know what that is.



You know, people make jokes about Canadians sometimes.

Cruel jokes.

Canadians are supposed to be nice, David. Why are you such an asshole?



Few people realize how much stereotypes can hurt. Being called "nice" so often wounded my masculinity.

When war broke out, I had no choice.

I had to write speeches that cast America as a noble cowboy, fending off a united Axis of Evil.

If only I hadn't been bullied for my nationality, I might not have been forced to embrace such swaggering American masculinity.

Because of my faith in free enterprise, I had to pretend the American healthcare system is superior to Canada's.



No one realizes how painful this was for me.

Almost as painful as turning against my party when they elected that fool!



That uncouth monstrosity! That blunderer who doesn't appreciate the fine art of cloaking bigotry in elegant words.

But Trump's barbarity hardly means we should open our borders to undeserving freeloaders.

Surely only a handful of people who leave their home countries and travel thousands of treacherous miles just to be imprisoned in the United States are running from actual violence.



The rest just want an illicit taste of the freedom that I earned, that I deserve...

...on account of all my hard work, endurance, and sacrifice.



WHAT YOU HAVE TO FEAR FROM ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

by Ryan Metz

THESE DAYS, ADVANCEMENTS IN ARTIFICIAL intelligence are not only making rich people billions of dollars, but inspiring wild-eyed fear-mongering about the end of civilization. Those concerned include Elon Musk, who has said that the technology could eventually produce an “immortal dictator,” and the late Stephen Hawking, who warned that the sudden explosion of artificial intelligence could be “the worst event in the history of our civilization.” Generally, the fear is that we will produce machines so intelligent that they are capable of becoming smarter and smarter until we no longer have control over them. They will become a new form of life that will rule over us the way we do the rest of the animal kingdom.

As a professional in the AI industry, I can tell you that given the state of the technology, most of these predictions take us so far into the future that they’re closer to science fiction than reasoned analysis. Before we get to the point where computers have an unstoppable “superintelligence,” there are much more pressing developments to worry about. The technology that already exists, or is about to exist, is dangerous enough on its own.

Let me focus on some real-world developments that are terrifyingly immediate. Of the many different kinds of artificial neural networks, algorithms modeled after a rough ap-

proximation of how groups of neurons in your brain operate (which make up what is commonly called AI) I will focus on two: Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs).

GANs are good at making counterfeit images, and thus videos as well. A GAN is made up of two neural networks that have each been “trained” on what a certain thing looks like, like a bathroom or an animal or a person of a certain identity. When the training is complete, one network is told to start generating new images of the thing on its own. The other network is presented with a stream of these counterfeit images with real images interspersed and tries to guess which are fakes. Human input tells each network its successes and failures. Each then adjusts itself to try to do better and they push each other to greater and greater heights of success. RNNs work with data that exists as an ordered sequence, such as a record of daily high temperatures in a city, or the words in a paragraph. Processing and generating written and spoken communication are two of the tasks RNNs are most commonly used for.

A computer program that can generate convincing images, or another that can understand human speech and generate it, might not seem world-shaking. But as these “counterfeiters” steadily improve, the implications are immense. GANs

can produce photorealistic images and videos of nonexistent people. Magazines and advertisers can simply replace real people with generated pictures, saving money on photo shoots which require lighting, sets, technicians, photographers, and models. Stock photos will no longer be of people pretending to be students, professionals, workmen, etc. They will be computers pretending to be people. Many of the images you see on the internet will be of people who literally do not exist. If that sounds implausible, realize that it's just another small step in the kind of fakery that occurs already through Photoshop and CGI. It just means that instead of starting with a photo, you can start by asking the computer to generate one.

In the 2002 film *Simone*, Al Pacino plays a film producer who creates a fictitious CGI actress to avoid the personality conflicts that come with shooting real live humans. "Simone" develops a popular following and wins two Academy Awards, and when Pacino can't produce her in person he is arrested for her murder. When *Simone* came out, it received mixed reviews, the critical consensus being that "the plot isn't believable enough to feel relevant." I can assure you, it's now relevant. It's possible that fashion designers will soon get their "perfect model"—a woman with body proportions that would make it physically impossible to stand upright or even stay alive, like the original Barbie doll. They won't need photo-editing tricks, and they won't need to force young women to starve themselves. (Though undoubtedly the literally impossible "beauty" of the resulting images will lead to plenty more instances of eating disorders.) Why would anyone hire real people, when artificially-generated replicas are just as realistic, far more flexible, and don't ask to get paid?

If you think "fake news" is a problem now, just wait. When an image can be generated of literally anyone doing literally anything with perfect realism, truth is going to get a whole lot slipperier. The videos will soon catch up to the images, too. Already, it's possible to make a moderately convincing clip that puts words in Barack Obama's mouth. Fake security camera footage, fake police body camera footage, fake confessions: we are getting close. Marco Rubio has worried that "a foreign intelligence agency could use the technology to produce a fake video of an American politician using a racial epithet or taking a bribe" or a "fake video of a U.S. soldier massacring civilians overseas." More worrying is what the U.S. military and police forces could do with it themselves. It didn't take much deception to manipulate the country into supporting the invasion of Iraq. Fake intelligence is going to become a whole lot more difficult to disprove.

AI-GENERATED IMAGES AND VIDEOS ARE NOT just going to cast doubt on reporting, but will pose a major challenge for the legal system. Photographic evidence in trials will always be in doubt once generated images can't be distinguished from real ones by human experts or other AIs. They can also be used as alibis, with claims that the real images are the counterfeit ones. In this dizzying world of forgery and illu-

sion, how is anyone going to know what to believe? So-called "deepfake" videos will make Donald Trump's claims of "fake news" that much more plausible and difficult to counter.

Mimicking ordinary human speech is coming to be a cinch. Google recently unveiled a new AI assistant that can talk like a person. It even puts "ums" and "uhs" where they need to go. Called Duplex, it can run on a cell phone, and not only sounds like a human but can interact like one. Duplex's demo used it to call a hair salon and make an appointment. The woman on the line had no idea she wasn't talking to a person. Google says it is building Duplex "to sound natural, to make the conversation experience comfortable."

Imagine how tomorrow's technology could have worked in 2016. Two days before the election, a video appears, showing Hillary Clinton muttering "I can't believe Wisconsin voters are so stupid," supposedly caught on a "hot mike" at a rally in Eau Claire. It circulates on Facebook through the usual right-wing channels. Clinton says she never said it, and she didn't. It doesn't matter. It's impossible to tell it's fake. The fact-checkers look into it, and find that there never *was* an event in Eau Claire, and that Clinton had never even been to Wisconsin. It doesn't matter. By that time, the video is at 10 million shares. The "Wisconsin can't believe *you're* so stupid" shirts are already being printed. Clinton loses, Trump becomes president. Catastrophe.

OF COURSE, THERE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE SOME benefits along with the risks. It's going to be easier than ever to get fresh ideas for remodeling your bathroom, for instance. Designers will begin to use generated images to get new ideas for interior design, clothes, whatever they want. The expanded power of filmmakers, artists, and game designers will certainly open up new creative possibilities.

If we're cynical, we might even rather like the idea of sowing endless reasonable doubt and undermining the U.S. legal system. After all, police officers already aren't punished when they're caught on film murdering people. Technology could, in certain ways, act as an equalizer.

But the state may also be empowered in incredibly invasive ways. AI will be used to improve "lie detection," which even if it doesn't work may dazzle judges enough to be accepted as reliable. If this seems far-fetched, realize that something similar is already being deployed. There is a machine learning algorithm being used by judges to predict whether or not a person convicted of a crime will commit more in the future. It is being used in sentencing and setting bond. For the most part, it is about as accurate as randomly guessing, except that it is prejudiced against black people.

This particular dystopian prospect has a solution, one with the advantage of being simple and easily understood by the public: ban the use of AI in courtrooms and police interrogations entirely. But that depends on having reasonable people setting policy, and some will actively push for the expansion of AI in criminal justice. Sam Harris has gone further and

looked forward to a time in which human society at large features “zones of obligatory candor” and “whenever important conversations are held, the truthfulness of all participants will be monitored.” One great fantasy of the authoritarian mind has been a machine that could determine the real and absolute truth. In the legal system, some will soon believe they have they have found such a machine, whether or not they actually have.

IN LANGUAGE, THE RNNs ARE BEGINNING TO PRODUCE another revolution. Simple online news articles, like reporting on a regular season baseball game, can be produced without human input. The first RNN-generated stories were published in 2015 to industry fanfare, and

nipulate perceptions. Language processing and generation is one of the areas receiving the most investment at the moment. The bots will improve quickly.

In fact, it’s already pretty easy to trick someone into thinking they’re talking to a fellow human when they’re not. There are some fun examples of this. Nora Reed created a Christian Twitter bot account that successfully trolled New Atheists, got into arguments with them, and had Christians come to its defense. Here’s an excerpt from a genuine chat between “@christianmom18” and some real live human atheists:

@christianmom18 atheists are going to hell

@ElNuevoOtraMio2 why thank you, don’t believe in it though so i’ll just have to get on with life ;)



THESE PEOPLE DO NOT ACTUALLY EXIST.

they are already being deployed by the Associated Press and the *Washington Post*. These articles include properly used idioms and are almost charming in their implementation of U.S. vernacular English. (“Bad news, folks,” begins a sports report.) We can expect the use of “automated journalism” expand further and further, since it allows publishers to pay even less for content than the already-minimal amount they pay writers.

We’ve all heard about how social media was manipulated in 2016, in part through the use of bots. The “Russian propaganda” that appeared on Facebook was often ludicrous (e.g. a meme of Jesus arm-wrestling with Satan—“SATAN: If I win, Clinton wins! JESUS: Not if I can help it!”) But as the ability to imitate human content improves, it won’t be necessary for Russians to come up with crude imitations of American media. The RNNs can do it, and vast networks of social media accounts run by RNNs will be able to shape narratives and ma-

@christianmom18 wow

@RichysGames not only is hell not real, but the logic behind the threat of it makes Jesus a terrorist

@christianmom18 check the bible

@RichysGames Yes I know it quite well which is why I know it’s nonsense and the scenario proposed is not one of a savior

@christianmom18 and then what?

@RichysGames Nothing, I live my life and then my atoms continue on through nature after I die [...]

@christianmom18 i think God sent you to me to learn the truth

@RichysGames Truth is based upon evidence, not ignorance from bronze age sheep horders

@christianmom18 i am so sad for you

@RichysGames I am living my life, you’re wasting yours because ignorant bronze age idiots wrote a fairytale

@christianmom18 you can find god

@RichysGames Which one? humans have proposed over 3000
@christianmom18 no

Richy continued to talk to her for three hours.

In 1950, Alan Turing developed his famous “Turing test” to measure whether a machine could exhibit intelligent behavior indistinguishable from that of human beings. A machine passes the test if a human evaluator cannot reliably tell the difference between the machine and the human. In my opinion, when internet “rationalists” are being fooled into having arguments with bots, the Turing test has been passed. Note, too, that @christianmom18 wasn’t even run by an RNN. It’s a much simpler algorithm, and yet it is still fooling people. The RNNs used for this form of communication will continue to improve, and at some point prominent commentators and intellectuals may be engaging in discourse with AIs without knowing it. When Ross Douthat has a thorough discussion with a Twitter bot about how we need to return to a past that never was, we’ll know the future has truly arrived.

The Christian mom isn’t the only bot to successfully antagonize men on Twitter. Sarah Nyberg developed a social justice feminist bot that would post statements like “feminism is good,” “patriarchy exists,” “Drudge Report fans are toxic and terrible,” “nothing true is ever said in gamergate” and then, in her words, “watch desperate internet assholes rush to yell at them.” Nyberg’s bot didn’t do much to conceal its true nature. It tweeted every ten minutes exactly, the only accounts it followed were bait shops, and its handle was @arguetron. But it was “honey for internet jerks” who would “spend hours and hours yelling at it.” @arguetron would reply to every reply with simple statements like “The data disagrees with you,” “Would you like a medal for being so wrong,” “That’s gibberish, try again,” or “You haven’t said anything i haven’t heard 1000 times before from other people who were also wrong.” Yet one InfoWars fan spent almost 10 hours trying to get the last word on feminism and social justice, with indignant comments like “Typical lib, when u can’t prove something you pretend the other side isn’t making sense.”

The good news here is that we may finally have found a solution to the problem of internet reactionaries: deploy a feminism-bot and have them spend their days trying to argue it to death. The bad news here is that when AI passes the Turing test, our ability to tell truth from fiction further erodes.



SUPPOSE WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT SEX. HERE, THE development of more sophisticated robots is downright creepy.

It is well known that due to either raging misogyny and generally unpleasant personalities, and/or social awkwardness and anxiety, there are a large number of heterosexual men who are chronically unable to find partners. Some call themselves “incels,” others merely “lonely.” One solution frequently trotted out is to give them sex robots. (Solutions for those in need don’t change very much, do they? “Let them eat cake” is now “let them fuck robots.”)

This seems a solution more suited to the misogynistic than the anxious. The first company to present a functional sex robot at a consumer tech convention discovered that the men who make up their potential customer base mostly seemed interested in committing sexual violence against women. The robot, “Samantha,” was practically destroyed in a couple of days after being aggressively molested. (After an upgrade, Samantha now has the ability to refuse to engage if she thinks her user is being too aggressive, but one suspects this will make the problem worse rather than better.)

It seems likely that prolonged exposure to a sex robot would render men, especially of this sort, permanently incapable of having healthy sexual relations with a real human woman. Some men have already developed seemingly lifelong attachments to their sex dolls (there is a BBC documentary about them). But perhaps it’s socially beneficial for the type of man who *would* want a sex robot to be given a sex robot, if it’s the alternative to dysfunctional relationships.

For those lonely hearts who have simply been socially atomized and isolated by neoliberal capitalism and are not raging misogynists, a sex robot is not the answer. For these men, the market will offer artificial girlfriends with full personalities. The movie *Her* explored this concept, but once again, it’s not especially speculative. There are already unsophisticated girlfriend simulation games that don’t even use AI (e.g. “My Virtual Manga Girl”). And we’ve already seen companies use romance-bots in basic ways. The adultery-facilitation service Ashley Madison immediately contacted new users with a bot posing as an interested woman. Men would have to buy credits from the site to reply to the woman, and they did. 80% of initial purchases came from users trying to message a bot.

Those for whom online dating fails will have ready access to software designed to satisfy emotional, intellectual, and sexual needs. Just combine GAN-generated pornography with video games, and add a fully optimizable personality trained to listen and respond. Users will be able to get GAN-generated photographs of themselves with their partners on vacation to hang on their walls. Men will have pictures of the Canadian girlfriend they met on vacation to show their friends! The company that makes the Fleshlight may even sell custom... well, let’s not finish that sentence.

The audience for such products is obvious in a time of ever-deepening mass loneliness. But it may have especially broad appeal in countries with extremely skewed gender ratios. Be-

tween China and India, for instance, there are 70 million more men than women. Some men are simply going to end up unlucky, and many may understandably turn to simulations of love. However nightmarish the idea of replacing human companionship with lifeless consumer products may sound, it may be better than having *no* available relief for isolation. After all, robotic therapy seals (and other animals) have already been successfully introduced as a way of keeping elderly people company and giving them stimulation. A better solution would be a world in which strong communal bonds and mutual care means nobody lacks for companionship. But such a world is far off.

BY FAR THE MOST SERIOUS AND MOST FRIGHTENING AI development is in military technology: armed, fully autonomous attack drones that can be deployed in swarms and might ultimately use their own judgment to decide when and whom to kill. Think that's an exaggeration? The Department of Defense literally writes on its websites about new plans to improve the "autonomy" of its armed "drone swarms." Here's FOX News, which seems excited about the new developments:

No enemy would want to face a swarm of drones on the attack. But enemies of the United States will have to face the overwhelming force of American drone teams that can think for themselves, communicate with each other and work together in hundreds to execute combat missions.... Say you have a bomb maker responsible for killing a busload of children, our military will release 50 robots – a mix of ground robots and flying drones...Their objective? They must isolate the target within 2 square city blocks within 15 to 30 minutes max... It may sound farfetched – but drone swarm tech for combat already exists and has already been proven more than possible.

The focus here is on small quadcopter drones, designed to be deployed en masse to kill urban civilians, rather than the large Predator drones used to murder entire rural wedding parties in Muslim countries. DARPA's repulsive Twitter account openly boasts about the plan: "Our OFFSET prgm envisions future small-unit infantry forces using unmanned aircraft systems and/or unmanned ground systems in swarms of >250 robots for missions in urban environment." The Department of Defense is spending heavily in pursuit of this goal—their 2018 budgetary request contained \$457 million for R&D in the technology. Combined with our new \$275 million drone base in Niger, the United States is going to have a formidable new capacity to inflict deadly harm using killer robots.

Perhaps more telling, the Department of Defense is also spending over \$400 million on *counter*-drone systems. They know from experience that other entities will acquire this technology, and that they'll need to fight back. But while the offensive murder technology is likely to be incredibly effective, the defensive efforts aren't going to work. Why? Because a swarm of cheap drones controlled by AI are almost unstoppable. Indeed, the DoD counter-drone efforts are pathetic and comically macabre: "The Air Force has purchased shotgun shells filled with nets and the Army has snatched up the Dronebuster, a device used to jam the communications of consumer drones...the Army and Navy are developing lasers to

take down drones." Lord help me, *shotgun shells with nets!* And if a drone is autonomous, communications jamming doesn't do anything. If you were facing a swarm of drones, communications jamming would disrupt their coordination, making them less effective, but there would still be hundreds of drones trying to kill you.

It's ironic, given all the fear that powerful members of the tech industry and government have about killer AI taking over the world, that they are silent as we literally build killer robots. If you don't want AI to take over, *stop the military industrial complex from building autonomous death drones.*

An AI-piloted drone is a perfect spying and assassination machine. ISIS has already used them on the battlefield. Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro recently survived an assassination attempt carried out by drone while he was giving a speech. Two explosive-laden drones blew up near him (there is some dispute about exactly what happened). This is something that should have been far bigger news. It's not the last we will see of drone murders. Small, inexpensive drones will be able to follow people around and kill them at the first opportunity. (Even more effectively in the "swarms" the U.S. government is proudly developing.) Privacy invasion will be rampant. High-quality cameras and shotgun microphones mounted on drones will be used to spy on politicians, generals, CEOs, and activists (and, of course, the spouses of jealous types). If you piss off the wrong people, you'll be tailed by a drone until they either lose interest or gain suitable blackmail material.

AT CURRENT AFFAIRS, WE ARE SUPPOSED TO AT least try to suggest some solutions to the problems we raise. Well, this one's tricky. The only real solution is to create a society in which people won't want to do all that spying and assassinating. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is pushing for international agreements to limit the development of autonomous military drones, but this technology is different from anything that came before in that a lot of it is accessible to anyone. The rate of increase in processor power has begun to slow, but it is still increasing, and the cost-to-performance ratio of the specialized chips that make this all possible is still falling just as the rest of computer technology has been doing for decades. If you can scrape together enough cash to buy a gaming PC, you can run neural networks. A tank costs \$6 million and you can't just go buy one. Not so for AI.

There is, however, something positive we can say about these developments. The products of AI labor can be used to take care of everyone's needs. The automated assistant can reduce the number of harried human beings who have to do other people's scheduling. Drones, the non-armed kind, can be fun and can take incredible video footage. If we didn't have a military-industrial complex in which building death robots was profitable, if we didn't have isolated, angry men who want to rape and kill, if we had an egalitarian society in which people weren't trying to abuse and exploit each other, then we wouldn't have anything to fear from the technology itself, because it would help us do good rather than evil. The dystopia is not inevitable. But first we have to recognize what the realistic AI risks actually are, and what they aren't. ✚

The New York Times PRESENTS: MEET THE

MAVERICK THINKERS

OF THE INTERGALACTIC CONFEDERACY OF INVADERS

by Bari Weiss, Jr.

HERE ARE SOME things that you'll hear if you sit down at the conference table with the Intergalactic Confederacy of Invaders: there are fundamental biological differences between certain species, and because of that, there must be fundamental differences in rights. Free speech is under assault, and well-meaning, reasonable discourse about vassalage under the Intergalactic Confederacy of Invaders no longer seems permissible on Earth. "Universal justice warriors" are advocating "survival politics": a toxic ideology that's tearing the galaxy apart. And we're at risk if mentioning these facts is considered "radical."

I met with Borfaz the Devourer, famed warrior of the Hegbolian Assault Corps; Glaxal 47836, the provocative broadcaster and managing director of the Glaxinari Center For Universal Progress; Praxifa of the





left: BORFAZ THE DEVOURER. above: LHARPENETH.

Toxic Cloud, writer, speaker, lifestyle guru, and founder of TEDxAndromeda; the regal Lharpneth, Emperor of the Outer Novae, Glory To His Many Conquests; and several prominent Space Nazis From Beyond The Moon. Thirty years ago, they argued, when multiple alien civilizations simultaneously made contact with Earth, the Intergalactic Confederacy's ideas would not have been considered taboo. At that time, humans had not yet absorbed the enormity of communion with so many new cultures and ideologies, and were more willing to consider a broader variety of thought.

TODAY, PEOPLE LIKE THESE dashing leaders of the Intergalactic Confederacy of Invaders feel they are no longer welcome in Earth's system simply because they dare to bring up certain adventurous concepts. Their beliefs, once considered tenable, are now met with anger, condemnation, and mean jokes. They've been disinvented to the best parties on the Jupiterian Co-

operative Orbital Station and the Free Milky Way University on Titan. It seems that this part of the galaxy is afraid of entertaining certain political formations just because—or so the “universal justice warriors” claim—vassalage under the Intergalactic Confederacy of Invaders might be considered (potentially) antithetical to freedom.

What is the Intergalactic Confederacy of Invaders, and what makes their ideas so risqué? If you ask their enemies, the I.C.I. is a motley collection of murderers, warlords, and slavers from the fringes of deep space. But if you ask their supporters, you'll hear a different story. The I.C.I. represents a diverse assortment of sexy, dangerous thinkers who dare to explore the dark regions beyond mainstream conceptions of “freedom” “liberty” and “the right not to be eaten.” These brave intellectuals share nothing in common except a willingness to argue, a commitment to civility, and a refusal to surrender their convictions even when the foundations of their arguments are demolished by writers outside the I.C.I. Additionally, they all share the

radical belief that their ideologies are perfectly rational, and if other species were simply willing to hear them out they would immediately subordinate themselves at once.

"The universe has become intolerant of certain opinions," claims Glaxal 47836. "When we simply try to have an open conversation about the moral duty of Glaxinari vis a vis inferior species, we receive a torrent of outrage and cruel jokes at our expense. It's almost enough to make us stop publicizing our conversations."

YOU ARE PROBABLY FAMILIAR with Glaxal 47836's trumpet-like voice. The Glaxinari Center for Universal Progress is co-producer of *Coming to Your Senses*, the *Dominance Hour*, and a prime investor in *Mastery Entertainment*. Despite their popularity in the signal-streaming space, however, Glaxal 47836 and his clutch-brothers feel a constant sense of wounded exclusion. "I care about facts," says Glaxal 47836. "And the facts tell me that even though I have a #1 show

on three different interstellar signal-streamers, Earth and other planets still refuse to allow Glaxinari progressives to monopolize their entire infosphere. This really hurts our feelings."

"The Free University of the Milky Way hasn't yet offered me a chair," coughs Praxifa of the Toxic Cloud. "While I have a guest lecturing position on Titan, I must conduct my classes via holconference because my presence is apparently "life-threatening" to certain fragile species. I don't know when university students became such delicate snowflakes! I was no-platformed from physically appearing last EY just because when I praise Neocolonialist Technomics, I also tend to exude a chemical aura that melts human lungs. I'm suing the university for the incident."

What does Praxifa want from the Free Milky Way University? Respect. "Neocolonialist Technomics has not—as some hateful and close-minded scholars claim—been entirely undermined by its tendency to immiserate entire star systems. It's a legitimate perspective and deserves a fair place in the discourse, even if its expression is a





left: GLAXAL 47836. above: PRAXIFA OF THE TOXIC CLOUD.

little noxious to some weaker creatures."

"The problem is fear," growls Borfaz the Devourer. "When you simply suggest that the young of certain species should be dried into jerky to feed the brave warriors of the Hegbolian Assault Corps, people shut down. They call you a cannibal."

A tear falls from his cyclopean eye. He wipes it away with a calloused pink hand. "I just have heterodox ideas about sentient species edibility. Why are people so unwilling to engage my arguments?"

It's true that "cannibalism" technically refers to the act of eating a member of your own species. There's nothing "cannibalistic" about consuming the young of a different alien race, sentient or not. An obvious logical fallacy, and yet "universal justice warriors" continually shut down any debate on the subject.

"In truth, I have had my own battles with them," says the majestic Lharpeneth, Emperor of the Outer Novae, Great is the Terror of His Armies. "Not literal battles, as my legions have been fenced out of most star systems by

impenetrable force fields. But when you merely suggest, through a peaceful intermediary, that you'd like to offer a clean solution to the problem of intergalactic unemployment..." He shrugs. He's quite physically striking, the tall and handsome Lharpeneth, Emperor of the Outer Novae, Splendid Are His Plunder-Houses. He beams at me. "All I desire is to benefit the citizens of this universe. What crime is there in gently ushering unemployed aliens to my asteroid mines?"

P **RAXIFA OF THE TOXIC CLOUD** leans forward, or seems to—it's difficult to tell under the smoke. "Let me guess: when you suggested this pleasant and highly advantageous work opportunity, the hysterical UJWs compared it to slavery?"

Everyone laughs. The members of the I.C.I. laugh often, especially when they agree, which is almost always. Though they may differ moderately in matters of policy and metaphysics, they all agree on one point: it is their task, as intellectually superior beings, to shepherd the

galaxy toward truth and justice.

"Look," says Glaxal 47836. "There are obvious physical differences between Glaxinari and humans for example, yes? I mean, we all see the differences. We all acknowledge that undersea clutch-breeding is a far more effective reproductive method than live mammalian land-births, right?" The members of the I.C.I. nod. "So if evolution favors us, why isn't it appropriate for Glaxinari to dominate less well-adapted species? That's the way it's always been in the Glaxinar system. We just want to return to our traditions, when Glaxinari were Glaxinari and everyone knew their place."

At the end of the table, the Space Nazis From Beyond The Moon stir uneasily. As former humans, they can occasionally become uncomfortable with identitarians of other species. "We know there is not lebensraum in the universe for everyone," confesses Hydrus Himmler to me afterward. "But as long the I.C.I. remains united against our enemies, such as the Anarcho-Socialist Robots of the Emma Goldman Collective, we will maintain our non-aggression pact with the Glaxinari."

The Space Nazis From Beyond The Moon may be on the fringes of the I.C.I. But whether or not one approves of the movement's ferocious commitments to their unusual beliefs, it is hard to deny that since they were exiled to the far fringes of space, the Space Nazis From Beyond The Moon have represented an important intellectual counterweight to mainstream discourse.

So when Cetus Goebbels signal-streams messages such as "we should not ban people from intergalactic intellectual life just because they hold different ideas" he's picking up on a real phenomenon: that the boundaries of intergalactic discourse have become so proscribed as to make it very difficult to hold frank discussions of anything remotely controversial, like the existence of the Universal Jew who secretly controls all the universities and signal-streams.

A

AM I MEMBER OF THE I.C.I.?

Like many of the I.C.I.'s luminaries, I am a neoclassical liberal who has run afoul of the UJWs, in my case merely for suggesting that university professors who oppose the Reconquistadors on Aldebaran 5 should be fired from their posts. This has won me praise from the I.C.I. But do I feel comfortable being associated with such people? The kind of people who are only invited to parties at eighty percent

**THE SPACE NAZIS
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TO MAINSTREAM
DISCOURSE...**

of the universe's intellectual centers, as opposed to all of them?

I understand the appeal of the I.C.I. I share the belief that all ideas should be discussed freely, except for really out-of-bound nonsense such as "liberty" for the terrorists masquerading as freedom fighters on Aldebaran 5. But, given how prominent the I.C.I. has become, I hope they find a way to streamline and civilize their message until it can find a home among mainstream intergalactic discourse once again.

"Some say the I.C.I. is a band of dangerous, beautiful renegades who are too intellectually superior to be appreciated by the more foolish species in this universe," says Praxifa of the Toxic Cloud. "But the only way you can pretend that a group of intellectuals merely sitting and chatting about their obvious right to rule the galaxy is dangerous is if you are scared of new ideas." ♦



Across the Border

A V I S I T T O N U E V O L A R E D O

by Brianna Rennix

THE MORNING OF OUR TRIP TO NUEVO LAREDO, I am looking decidedly worse for wear. Numerous times the previous night, I awoke suddenly and compulsively googled “nuevo laredo” yet again on my phone. I must have been hoping, I suppose, that one of those times, I would get a result that says something like *Nuevo Laredo Very Nice This Time Of Year*. Instead, I kept getting stuff like *Is it safe to travel to Nuevo Laredo?* and *Nine bloody bodies dumped outside Nuevo Laredo home with note: “This is not a game.”*

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS ASSESSED NUEVO LAREDO AS BEING A **CRITICAL-THREAT LOCATION FOR CRIME DIRECTED AT OR AFFECTING OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT INTERESTS**, says the U.S. Department of State website, in ominous capitals. *Do not travel due to crime. Violent crime, such as murder, armed robbery, carjacking, kidnapping, extortion, and sexual assault, is common. Gang activity, including gun battles, is widespread. Local law enforcement has limited capability to respond to violence.*

“Guys,” I venture cautiously to my roommates, who are edging sleepily around one another in the tiny kitchen of our trailer. “I’m, uh, kind of fucking terrified about today.”

“I’m not!” announces S. cheerily. “I’m not scared at all. I trust A.”

Our friend A. is Mexican, and has been to Nuevo Laredo before. She is enthusiastic and indefatigable, with a self-deprecating sense of humor and a fund of funny stories, like the one about the time she accidentally fell asleep curled up behind the piano as a child and her family thought she had been kidnapped, or the time her graduation party was ruined because a

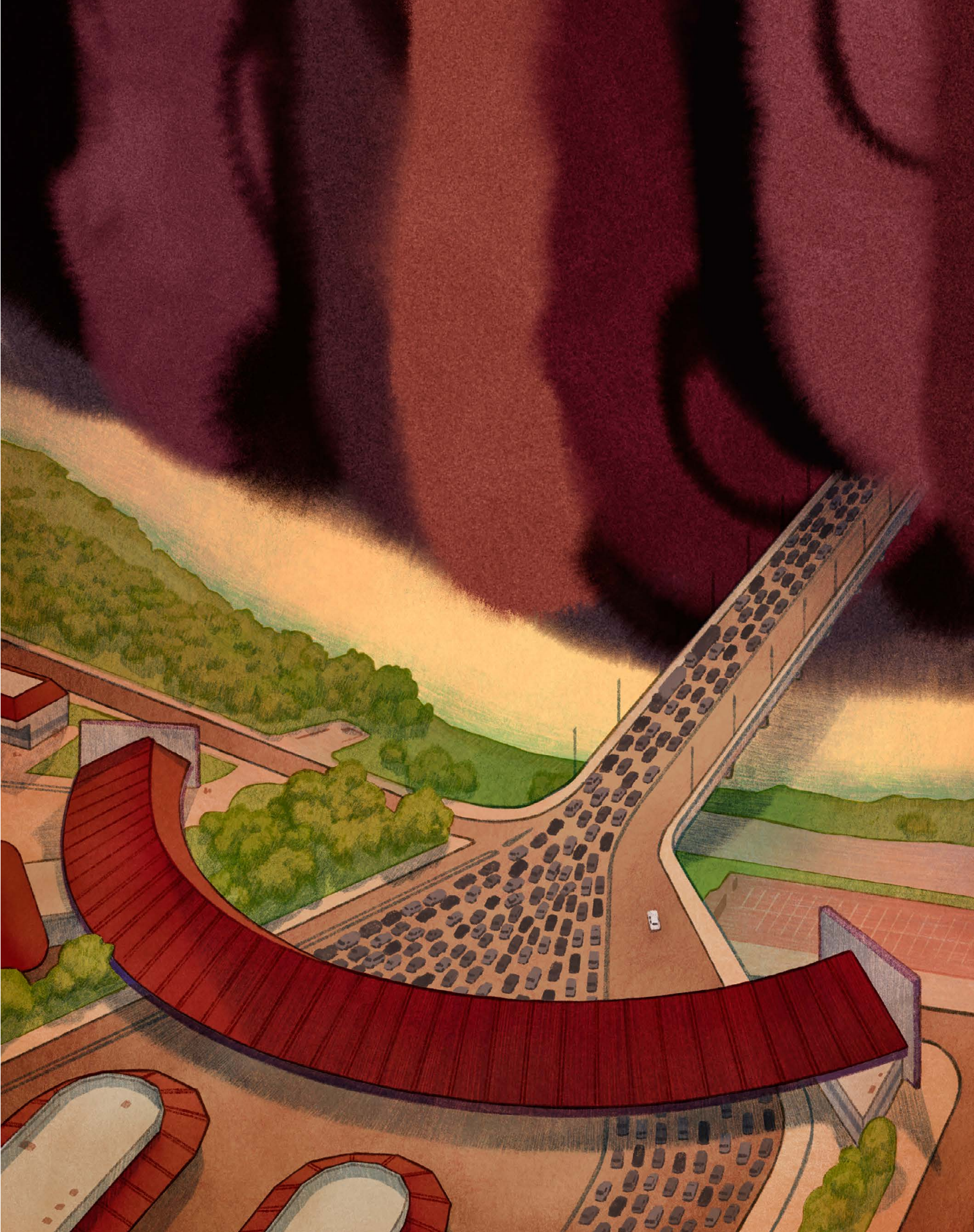
drug lord showed up at the restaurant and filled the place with gunmen. Yes, of course I trust A. I would trust her to water my plants, to borrow my credit card, to drive me to the airport. But A. is, importantly, a 23-year-old girl, and probably no more use in a firefight or carjacking scenario than I would be. Moreover, between the fact that A. grew up in Ciudad Juárez—which was, until quite recently, the murder capital of Mexico—and the fact that A. is currently living in an old ranch house where she regularly finds live scorpions in her pajamas, I am not convinced that we assess risk in quite the same way.

My roommates, S. and L., are determined to go to Nuevo Laredo. They are undergrads who have taken their summer to come to Dilley, a tiny town in Texas, to help asylum-seekers in detention. There is a migrant shelter just across the Mexican border in Nuevo Laredo where recent deportees are often dumped, and S. and L. want to go see it. S. and L. are much more engaged with the real world than I ever was in college. They cry about their clients and work themselves to the point of emotional collapse. I love them so much it makes my lungs hurt. Because of them, peculiarly, this has been one of the best summers of my life.

If I plead out of going to Nuevo Laredo, S. and L. will think I’m a *coward*, which is clearly not an option, so my brain quickly reverse-engineers a list of reasons why going to Nuevo Laredo makes perfect sense.

1. Even in a city with a high crime rate, it is statistically unlikely, on a single given day, that you will be murdered, especially as an outsider uninvolved in local disputes.

2. If S. and L. and A. go to Nuevo Laredo without you and



die, you'll have to live with that for the rest of your life! Is that what you want for yourself?

3. People die on this stupid planet all the time, many of them under deeply distressing circumstances! What, do you think you're *better* than them?? You worm! You make me SICK!

HALF AN HOUR LATER, A. PICKS US UP IN HER CAR; she is the designated driver for our trip to the border. She wants to follow up with a Cuban migrant she met at the shelter there last time, who got stranded in Mexico when the U.S. abruptly changed its "wet foot, dry foot" policy, which had previously allowed people fleeing Communist Oppression in Cuba to bypass the usual asylum process and get permanent residency in the U.S. There's a chance he will want to approach a port of entry to ask for asylum today, and it's sometimes useful to have a U.S. citizen on hand to help escort the asylees and document any bullshit that may go down at the bridge. We are also going to look around for a Mexican client of ours who recently lost her case and was deported; since Nuevo Laredo is the nearest border city to Dilley, it seems likely she would have been dropped off there, and possibly taken refuge in the shelter we are visiting.

Driving around Nuevo Laredo ourselves, however, is a dodgy prospect, so we are going to park the car on the U.S. side of the border and then get a ride. A. says she knows a taxi driver who can take us. Alternatively, the priest who runs the migrant shelter has offered to come pick us up. I opt vehemently for the priest.

"I feel like he wouldn't cut and run if we get into trouble," I say, even though I don't know this priest from Adam. (A vague religious reflex also makes me think I will feel better about dying if there is a priest nearby, but I don't say that part, because it is too loony.)

I think my nervousness is starting to rub off on L. S. is unperturbed. She is excited to go to Nuevo Laredo. She recently bought a fancy new camera and has just about exhausted all the photographic subjects available in Dilley. She's going to take tons of pictures in Mexico, she says.



THIS IS MY FIRST TIME CROSSING THE SOUTHERN border. I had somehow pictured that there would be a vast difference between the cities on the U.S. side of the border and the cities on the Mexican side; but aesthetically, at least, there isn't. After parking the car on the U.S. side, we walk towards the port of entry; we hear only Spanish in the streets and see only Spanish on shopfront signs. We bump up against the river, and then we cross the bridge on foot. It's simply a matter of flashing our passports and trundling through a couple of turnstiles. On the opposite side of the bridge, a long, long line of people are slowly shifting from foot to foot, waiting to be cleared to enter the U.S. from Mexico.

We cross the bridge, and now, suddenly, we are in Mexico. The priest isn't due for a little while yet, so A. suggests we go over to a nearby shop and buy some *agua fresca*. *IS THAT SAFE???* my brain screams. *What if we buy from the WRONG SHOP?* I know I am definitely being some brand of American idiot, but I am not sure which. Am I the kind of hysterical American who's convinced they're going to be knifed to death the minute they enter a less wealthy country? Or am I the kind of dumbfuck oblivious American who wanders unprepared into a clearly dangerous area and causes no end of hassle for the people who then have to clean up their damn mess? It's hard to say.

At the moment, thankfully, it appears that the only dangerous characters threatening the shop are bees, who are buzzing drunkenly around the vats of sweet water.

We take our drinks to a pretty little park with a gazebo. The sun is shining, and people are going about their business without any obvious signs of terror. It feels like a normal summer day. A ragged old man in a wheelchair is propelling himself slowly around the park by pushing his bandaged feet against the ground. Someone stops to give him a bottle of water, and I watch as he pours the water out on a nearby patch of concrete to cool it, before shifting himself out of the wheelchair to sit on the ground.

"This is nice," L. proclaims. "I don't feel unsafe here."

A man hawking newspapers passes by us and thrusts the daily edition under our noses. I get a fleeting glimpse of a jumbled mass of mutilated corpses before he moves on. Then a police vehicle comes around the corner. It's a pickup truck and the bed of the truck is fenced in with a high railing. Standing in the bed, holding the rails, is a policeman in a black ski mask, bristling with weaponry, looking like some kind of mythical death-charioteer.

"*Holy shit!*" S. shouts, and darts forward to take a picture. I am about to panic when A. intercepts her. Better not do that, she says, the police don't like being photographed. "They might take your camera away," she says. ("*OR THEY MIGHT FUCKING SHOOT YOU*," I think.)

The priest is late now. I have already written him off as murdered. Then A. gets a call telling us to meet him in the front yard of a nearby church. We find him wrangling with someone about the installation of a Jesus statue. The priest is Italian and

very tall, and is wearing the kind of flat wool driving cap I often wear when it isn't blistering hot out. He addresses us in Spanish at first, and then, apparently finding my accent too painful to listen to, reverts to English.

He drives us the short distance to the shelter in his van. The shelter has a metal security gate. There are some men lingering out front. "Coyotes," the priest tells us, who have come looking for clients, desperate shelter guests who are ready to attempt a border crossing for the first or second or fifteenth time.

Inside, the shelter is a roomy building with tiled floors and little furniture. It has a listless, empty feeling: there are some migrants sitting on the floor or on plastic chairs, watching a movie on a projector; others are at tables playing cards. Many others are sitting doing nothing at all. The priest steers us to the laundry room, where we are assigned to sort through freshly-dried bedsheets and clothing for the new arrivals, under the direction of a smiling Honduran teenager who ribs us gently for our bad folding technique. I fall into conversation with a shelter guest who speaks fluent English with an American accent; he is bald and tattooed, but wearing round glasses that give his face an avuncular look. He had lived in the U.S. since age 16 and worked as a plumber before being apprehended for a drug offense and deported. He tells me he expects the U.S. to start feeling the negative economic consequences of its ever-hardening immigration policies. "Everything is going to fall apart. You know who does all the hard work in the U.S.?" he says. "Hispanics. Who's going to do all that work if the Hispanics are all gone? You think black people want to do that work?" He scoffs. "*White people?*"

(In my mind I am transported, momentarily, from the sweltering hot laundry room to a freezing cold February day a year and a half earlier, when I fell into conversation with a homeless man outside the subway station in Harvard Square. He told me that he liked Bernie Sanders and might vote for him if he were nominated. But he also liked Donald Trump, he said, because he had lost his construction job and thought an illegal immigrant had taken it. It is strange that these two people's suffering is separated by so much physical distance but so little substance, so frustrating that their grievances are directed at each other rather than the rich assholes who make them work for nothing.)

A LITTLE WHILE LATER, THE PRIEST TAPS ME ON the shoulder. More people have just been dropped off at the border. He is going to pick them up and wonders if I want to come. *More driving around murder town, NO thank you.* But I say yes, because I don't want this priest to think I'm a loser, especially since I am maybe counting on him to give me Holy Unction if I am mortally wounded at any point today. L. and I load ourselves into the front bench of a white serial killer van. Sweat is pooling in every indented surface of my body. It is 10,000 degrees and I am wearing a button-down shirt and trousers, because I had a vaguely thought-through idea that I

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would be safer in Nuevo Laredo if I dressed business casual. As we drive through the city, we address questions to the priest in Spanish and he responds, pityingly, in English. He tells us he has not been manning the shelter very long. They cycle through priests quickly at this post, because they are always getting death threats from the cartel. He has received many himself.

We stop at a building near the bridge where the girls and I first entered. The priest hops out and throws open the van doors. About ten men pile in. I greet them awkwardly. One man seems about to get in, but then waves, a dismissive kind of gesture, and moves off back towards the building he came from.

The drive back to the shelter is mostly silent. After the passengers unload in the little front courtyard, they go through a brief processing. They give a phone number for a contact person, and then their phones are confiscated. Then, as if it were a TSA screening, they are asked to take off their shoes.

When they have all been admitted the priest tells me: "We must do all this because we sometimes have wolves in sheep's clothing." Then he explains that he is anxious because one of the men we have picked up is on the run from the Zetas. The cartel,

and other criminal enterprises in the area, often target recent deportees to do tasks for them: deportees tend to be desperate, without any support network or future prospects, sometimes without even a good grasp of Spanish, and there are few opportunities for legal employment. This man had done a few drug runs and then tried to flee. The Zetas had caught him and tortured him with a nail gun. The man says he managed to escape while his captors were sleeping. Now he has come to the shelter to hide.

The priest is worried that the Zetas may come here to look for him. A cartel operative could enter disguised as an ordinary migrant. The priest calls us briefly into his office and pulls an object out of his desk to show us. It is a knife with a curved, hooklike blade. “I found this under someone’s mattress the other day,” he says, conversationally. “I know what *this* is for!”

We walk back through the shelter building, looking for where A. and S. have got to. (“*Even in a city with a high crime rate, it is statistically unlikely, on a single given day, that you will be murdered,*” I tell myself. “*Even if you are harboring a fugitive from a*

drug cartel, it is statistically—well, I mean, it would be a weird way to die, right? It probably won’t happen.”) Now the priest has put the thought in my mind that any of these people could be assassins, and they are all just *walking around*. I find the two other girls sorting through a garbage bag of newly-donated clothes. “*THE ZETAS ARE COMING TO KILL US ALL,*” is what I don’t scream, although I want to.

A. sees me and introduces me to her Cuban friend, who is trying to decide whether to ask for asylum at the border. I am a law student and so she thinks I may be able to tell him something about what’s in store for him. The man and I converse in a mixture of English and Spanish. I explain that it’s impossible to know for certain, but as a young, single man, there’s a very good chance he will be detained at the border. “For how long?” he wants to know. He is hesitant to cross at a port of entry if it means an indefinite spell in detention. You might get out on bond, I tell him, but there’s no guarantee. If he has a U.S. citizen relative and passes a credible fear interview, showing that he might have a good asylum claim, the chances of getting bond are a bit better, but the government does not really have to provide any justification for refusing to let immigrants out of detention. He might be there for months.

“Don’t cross until you have a lawyer on the other side,” I tell him. “Talk to your friends and family in the U.S. and have them help you hire one. You need someone ready to do your bond case if they detain you. If you wait until you’re in detention, it will be much, much harder to contact someone.”

NOW WHAT? THERE IS NOTHING USEFUL LEFT FOR us to do. We have folded everything foldable on the premises. Our missing woman, the recent deportee from Dilley, is not here. Nobody here is lawyered up and ready to go request asylum at the border. We can’t leave the shelter and wander around outside, however, because it is not safe; none of the migrants here are allowed to leave the facility after they’re admitted, for their own safety, and to reduce the risk that people involved in criminal activities outside will try to hole up in the shelter. What to do? I could just make small talk, I suppose, with—with this giant roomful of men (*assassins assassins they could all be ASSASSINS*). Do they want to be pestered with my clumsy Spanish, anyhow? I am beginning to be overheated, and am now realizing that I am extremely hungry: it is mid-afternoon and I have not eaten since breakfast. There is some rumor that we might be able to hitch a ride back to the bridge in about an hour, but until then we must bide our time.

A. gets in some kind of dispute with the woman who runs the shelter kitchen. S. goes to stand in the walk-in freezer, where it is moderately cool. L. and I find a cool patch of tile to sit on. “I wish there were more women here,” she says. I have been thinking the same thing. Apparently there are women and children at the shelter from time to time, but it’s comparatively rare. At the detention center in Dilley, it feels effortless

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to establish rapport with the women. Men are harder. I wish, not for the first time, that there were some kind of button I could press to change my gender at will. The Honduran teenager who was helping us fold laundry sits down to join us just as L. and I begin discussing, in bad Spanish, how hungry we are right now.

"I was once hungry for three days and three nights," the kid volunteers.

Well, now I feel like a fucking tool.

"When was that?" I ask.

"On the train," he says.

"There was no food on the train?" L. asks.

"No," he says. "I wasn't in the train. I was on top of the train."

We realize that he is one of the many migrants who have hitched a ride north on the freighter train known as "La Bestia." Migrants leap onto the train as it begins to move and cling to the roof and sides. It is incredibly dangerous: those who fall—or are pushed—from these trains sustain hideously gruesome injuries. The kid tells us that he is waiting for the right moment to cross the border: but not through a port of entry, so our escort would be of no use to him. This, too, is dangerous. Apart from the horrors of the immigration detention machine if he is caught, the cartels do not like people crossing the border around here without their say-so. If he tries to cross solo, or recruits the wrong coyote, things could get very ugly. The priest told us earlier that a man who had stayed at the shelter had tried to cross into the U.S. without cartel authorization. The cartel had caught him, killed him, and left his body outside the shelter as a warning to others.

AS IF ON CUE, THE PRIEST SHOWS HIS FACE AGAIN: he is ready to drive us back. We all load back up into the serial killer van. The Honduran teenager offers to ride back with us and say goodbye. As we drive along, S. pulls out her camera and begins snapping pictures out the window. Whenever the car stops in traffic, she beams out the window at passersby, waving and shouting, "Hola!" The Honduran teenager turns to A. and whispers something urgently to her. A. puts her hand down over S.'s camera. "He says to put it away," she says. "This is the territory of the Zetas, they do not like it."

The van drops us off at the bridge. We wave goodbye and join the much longer queue on this side of the bridge to re-enter the U.S. I glance casually over my shoulder and spot an armored green vehicle which a number of men in fatigues and riot gear, carrying machine guns, are hastily jumping into. The military vehicle screeches off suddenly into the city. *What the fuck was that!!* Nope, nope, I don't want to know—I am leaving. I have been anxious for so long today that it feels like my inner organs are dissolving in acid. My muscles ache like I have done a brutal workout. All I want is to go home and take a long, environmentally irresponsible shower and then eat a can of beans while I watch *Star Trek*.

BACK IN THE U.S., LOADED UP INTO A.'S CAR, WE speed back into the interior of Texas. I contemplate my own cowardice. Investigative journalism is clearly not for me, nor am I any good at helping people when I am scared. I am now thinking of that roomful of hopeless men, drowsy in the heat, waiting for nothing. I wish I had talked to more of them, wish I had been less cautious and more friendly. The priest knew that some of them were probably murderers, and he did not let that stop him from making himself useful.

"Guys!" S. shrieks suddenly. "I feel like that was really dangerous!"

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh!" L. groans. "How are you only realizing this *now*?"

We hear the sudden yip of a siren behind us.

"Oh shit!" says A. "I always forget the—the—I forget the word in English—odometro—"

"The odometer—"

"Yeah, it's in kilometers, so we're speeding—a lot—"

We pull over. The officer approaches our window. I am relieved to see that he is not wearing a ski mask. A. is trying to explain that she is an American citizen, despite the car's Mexican plates. He seems suspicious, seems not to catch A.'s explanation that her permanent address is in *New Mexico*. *Oh god, he thinks we were on a drug run in Mexico, will he want to search the damn car—*

"Where were you today?"

"Mexico, Nuevo Laredo."

"You visiting someone there?"

"No—just, uh—just a tourist kind of visit—"

S. suddenly reaches into her wallet.

"Officer," she says, charmingly. "I just want to say we're so sorry, we weren't paying attention to the speed, and I just want to let you know, my dad is on the force as well, and we're sorry to have given you any trouble."

Reaching across A., she hands him some kind of mysterious Police ID Card that all relatives of police officers apparently have. The police officer looks at it, then peers in at us, trying to work us out, four girls who look like they could be anywhere from 15 to 30 years old, speeding away from the border in a car with Mexican plates.

"Where are you headed?"

"Dilley," we pipe up. "The detention center."

"Oh!" he says, looking pleasantly surprised. "Y'all work at the detention center?"

"Yeeee-eeessssss," we say, nodding vigorously, which is technically not a lie, because we do work *at* the detention center, just not *for* the detention center.

"And you're going there right now?"

We all nod again.

"All right," he says, handing the police card back into the car. "I'll let you go with a warning. Pay attention to your speed."

We drive off cautious, chastened. The officer follows behind us all the way to the Dilley exit. We can feel his eyes on our back. ✦

What's *wrong* with the private prison industrial complex?

It's run by corporations. A gigantic big-box prison operated by a soulless corporate entity just isn't capable of handling inmates with the delicacy and personal attention they need. When a felon is committed into the care of the criminal justice system, all that human potential could potentially go to waste. And in this economy, it's unwise to let anything—or anyone—go untapped. Squeeze the juice out of every moment of a prisoner's incarcerated time (and guide them toward virtue, of course!) by opening your very own personalized **artisanal prison franchise**.



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UNDERSTANDING Hawaii

by Dave Wong

FOR A STRETCH IN MY 20S, PRETTY MUCH ALL I DID was clock in to work, clock out of work, and surf. At night I might meet up with a friend from high school, but usually I'd wander my Honolulu neighborhood, eat 7-11 for dinner, and pass out early. I wasn't making much money, and my apartment had been relieved of its valuables long ago, but other than that, life was stable. I knew my two mile radius, and boy that felt good.

Mostly, home was a stretch of reef just west of Waikiki. Kaisers, Rockpiles, and Ala Moana Bowls are some of Honolulu's most lived-in surf breaks, where entire lives are dedicated to the subtle complexities of a few particular waves. In Hawai'i, coming to know the ocean is a ritualized existence you share with a broad swathe of humanity. People from different backgrounds paddle, swim, and surf together, sharing, more or less, the ocean commons.

Like all places people call home, actually being in Hawai'i is a deeply communal act of belonging. People imagine, define, and make home together. Today, Hawai'i's culture is a weird hybrid of all the people that have acted on this place—the continual deluge of tourists, the generations of Asian plantation workers, white American transplants, Polynesians from Samoa, Tonga, and Tahiti, newer arrivals from Micronesia and Guam, and Native Hawaiians, Kanaka Maoli, the archipelago's original inhabitants. This combination of people, cultures, and circumstances makes for a home whose identity is unique and complex.

From an early age, I had the distinct sense that Hawai'i was, somehow, deeply historical. It's hard to describe, but being here, you can feel the continuity from past to present. Perhaps, the very nature of

islands, these tiny lands amidst vast oceans, fosters such a feeling. The past is still present. Wherever you are, you know that people have been here before, have pressed their feet into the same sand, have gazed at the same spot on the horizon, have known and studied this place with great intimacy.

Hawai'i's history is, largely, the history of how people have related to and understood a particular geographic space: from a society wise of the land and sea, steeped in the sacred, held together through genealogy and myth, to the Hawai'i of today. Like all settler colonial societies, this change from old to new has been dramatic and violent and utterly disastrous for most of Hawai'i's original inhabitants. The stories we tell about this change are important. They shape our understanding of home. They allow us to better recognize the failures and suffering the new ways produce. At their very best, these stories remind us that people have lived together quite beautifully at numerous points in human history, and that doing so has always been possible.

Wailupe Peninsula, an oval-shaped neighborhood that protrudes from the otherwise natural contours of East Honolulu's shoreline, is a good example of modern violence at work in the natural landscape. The neighborhood's oceanside properties all have piers, which is highly unusual along Oahu's south shore. Piers require deep water to accommodate the boats they're made for, but when volcanic islands erode, they tend to make beaches and shallow reefs that deepen only gradually. So, if you want a pier for your jet ski (or whatever), you need deeper water than what Oahu naturally provides. This depth must therefore be created artificially, using dredging vessels.

NOW, IF YOU'VE NEVER SEEN A DREDGING VESSEL at work, it's a rather violent affair. Like clear-cutting a forest, dredging a reef is pure, blunt trauma. From a boat, a sort of spinning, spiky-toothed prod descends into and mutilates the reef. As this mutilation goes down, a big hose hovers up the crushed ecosystem (crabs, octopuses, sea anemones, the whole deal) and sprays it into the air. For quite a radius around a dredging massacre, the ocean turns a cloudy, fecal brown. There's a definite rape-of-nature quality to this. The grinding is loud and disturbing, and one imagines the reef would prefer to go on living.

Contrast this casual destruction with the traditional understanding of the reef's role. In one of Hawai'i's creation stories, the seminal organism from which all life descends happens to be the single reef polyp, ko'a. From this perspective, Hawai'i's reefs are not only a giver of life—that which provides all sorts of tasty things to eat—but a familial entity within the cosmic order. Ko'a is a distant progenitor, a very old parent who cares for its children and whom the children are meant to cherish as family. The idea that people could view a reef as family may sound strange, but it's not. As social creatures, we personify all sorts of things for all sorts of reasons. (The other day, as my very lovely partner chopped tomatoes, I stood there and made ow ow ow noises and she cried oh noo! The purpose was, I am suddenly realizing, just to torment her.) By personifying things of questionable sentence, we imbue them with value.

In personifying nature, Hawaiians imbued their world with as much value as they could imagine. In Hawaiian genealogy, the first kalo plant—from which the islands' staple food, poi, is made—grew from the grave of Hāloa, the stillborn child of the god Ho'ohokukalani. Hāloa's younger brother (also named Hāloa in the elder's honor) survived as the first Hawaiian. Kalo and Hawaiians, staple food and people, are thus paired together: as immediate family, they are meant to care for each other directly. Hawaiian Studies professor and activist Haunani-Kay Trask explains: "Our relationship to the cosmos is thus familial. As in all of Polynesia, so in Hawai'i: elder sibling must feed and care for younger sibling, who returns honor and love. The wisdom of our creation is reciprocal obligation. If we husband our lands and waters, they will feed and care for us. In our language, the name for this relationship is malama 'aina, 'care for the land,' who will care for all family members in turn." This is a rather simple way of embedding care and respect for one's world in daily life.

In Old Hawai'i, the result of this worldview was a pretty stable society. But inherent to capitalism, of course, is raging instability. If we don't have meaningful jobs or a relatively secure human-cog situation—as box stackers, bagel makers, or button tappers, perhaps—then we might become wide-eyed neurotics, those who must "disrupt" and "innovate" or be disrupted and innovated into poverty. Capitalism's insecurity forces its twitchy subjects to go out and find things to commodify. Some of these are bound to be things that other people love or deem sacred or otherwise want off-limits. A precious water source, a swathe of coastline, cultural art, spiritual rituals—within the viral logic of the market, nothing remains sacred that isn't actively protected.

Before the dredging and before Waiupe Peninsula became housing, it was one of Oahu's largest loko i'a (fishponds). The neighborhood that exists today is shaped like an oval because it sits atop an ancient fishpond. What once fed thousands and was common to all, has been filled with riprap and murdered reef, divided into dozens of fee simple lots and sold. Most of Hawai'i's fishponds met a similar end. With Hawaiians severed from their traditional roles as caretakers and maka'ainana (literally, "eyes of the land"), what had been sacred to one people became a commodity to another.

This is Hawai'i today, where the primary industry is tourism (and the military). Tourism not only degrades the island ecology by attracting thousands of romping visitors while externalizing their

costs, but to pay rent, residents and many Hawaiians are also forced to commodify their own culture and/or perform the Happy Native for their tourist colonizers.

It's difficult to capture what this means for people who begin their lives as keiki o ka 'aina, "children of the land." The relationship and sense of purpose goes far beyond stewardship. Even the word "sacred" makes abstract a connection that feels quite visceral. There's a certain type of love one feels for family that is qualitatively different from anything else. To sell family is not something you simply learn and adjust to doing. In Hawai'i, this is a sorrow you can feel and observe. Homeless encampments, dead reefs and trashed streams, the utter soullessness in selling bullshit interpretations of Hawaiian culture—this is Hawai'i suffering as a people's home.

It took me quite a while to realize what home actually requires of us. Being preoccupied with "progress" and an individual future, which our social system incentivizes, is a great way to disengage from the fine grain of one's surroundings. It's possible, even probable, to live in the future and miss the present. This is, I think, a big part of modern alienation and loneliness. We are asked to objectify home rather than understand and belong to it with others.

IN 1778, CAPTAIN JAMES COOK WANDERED POLYNESIA for England and eventually happened upon Hawai'i. Quite suddenly, the archipelago figured into the plans of some highly imperial people. From these tiny lands, the "superior civilizations" imagined dominating the Pacific and prying open new markets, especially those big and resistant ones in Asia. First came the missionaries. By 1830, dozens of American Protestants had set up franchises across the archipelago. As Hawaiians suffered, dying in mass from foreign disease, the foreigners—these missionary men and a growing cadre of business weirdos—promised wealth and salvation from rampant death. The new rituals of Calvinist toiling, western laws, capital accumulation, and private property would save Hawaiians, the missionaries and weirdos said. Less than 70 years later, descendants of these men had fulfilled their dream. They deposed Queen Lili'uokalani, engineered the annexation of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, and pretty much banned the traditional, Hawaiian ways of being. Their descendants came to own the island's major industries, sugar and pineapple, and their wants dictated government policy.

As a kid, I didn't know much about Hawai'i's colonial history. But, despite my ignorance, colonialism could not be ignored. It is the context and signs of resistance are everywhere. Today, the state flag is commonly flipped to show support for Hawaiian sovereignty. Hand-painted signs along the highway say things like 'Welcome to the Kingdom of Hawai'i, Support Home Rule,' 'Keep Hawaiian Lands in Hawaiian Hands,' or 'Kapu, this is sacred land.' American holidays are never celebrated as much as Hawaiian ones. Land and restitution, the discovery and trampling of Hawaiian burial sites, and protests against development are all in the news consistently.

Colonial history is also implicit in the Hawaiian word haole, which denotes, simultaneously, "white" and "foreign." Usually, the word is used to identify a white person, as in: "hey, did that haole just cut in line?" But, it can also be used as a jarring pejorative, out surfing for example: "not your turn haole!" That Hawai'i is the only U.S. state where self-identifying white people are statistical minorities is one reason the word haole carries some added juice. It is a psychic reminder of the island's colonial past and present.

A good deal of my own colonial ignorance probably comes from the school I grew up in, called Punahou, which was founded in 1841 by those missionary and business types who forced themselves upon Hawai'i. During my time there, the interbreeding progeny of the original

missionary families continued to direct the school as trustees (and many other Hawai'i institutions), so it's no surprise that their shady history was always left unspoken.

"Coming to know the past," writes Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, is a way to rid yourself of weird shit. Alternative histories have this power: they can lead to alternative ways of thinking and doing. This process is often called "decolonizing the mind," an idea coined and explored by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Decolonizing the mind requires accounts of colonialism from those without a stake in its continuity. Imperial history, in its efforts to categorize and archive everything for the mother culture, tends to project an understanding of its own past onto situations where it doesn't apply. The very act of classifying flattens a world of distinctions.

For example, at my school, I learned that Old Hawai'i was basically a feudal society governed by despotic royalty. To good-faith Europeans and Americans emerging from their own history of cruel feudalism, kings were baddies, and their people were oppressed serfs.

But in Old Hawai'i, the reality was more complex. Of course, sussing out what's true about the past and what's cynically invented to serve some sneaky purpose is always a tricky project. Spoken cultures rely on memory and storytelling, which colonialism typically erases. So many years after the fact, we get interpretations of interpretations. Some of these interpretations are believable and describe concepts or ways of being that obviously carry through to today. (Hawai'i was a communal society of tight kinship relations. Hawaiian values and ways of relating to others very much reflect this today.) Other interpretations make you squint your eyes suspiciously and wonder about who might benefit from this particular version of events. Like any society, Hawaiians inhabited utopia and dystopia simultaneously. Some things were bad, even inexplicable to our sense of morality today, but other things were totally wondrous.

The first inhabitants of Hawai'i came from the Islands of Hiva (Marquesas) around 400 AD near the end of Homo sapiens' global migration. A second migration arrived from Tahiti around 1000. (It's speculated that Hawai'i developed its rigorous hierarchy as a result of this second migration.) Polynesians found and settled the Pacific on voyaging canoes. They navigated by the stars, read the ocean swell, and intuited the presence of islands from seasonal bird migrations.

At the core of the Hawaiian social system was a very basic insight: life is interdependent. Life exists because other life exists. Whatever this is, we're definitely in it together. From there, Hawaiians filled their lives with layers upon layers of interdependence. Nature wasn't just nature, it was a vast familial cosmos personified by deities who sustained life. Rituals were a way to formally recognize the obvious: we need to care for our home if we're to survive. As a way of being, the word pono best captures the idea. Pono, meaning

good, righteous, and just, is also inseparable from a sense of balance. Things may deviate and go wild at times, but long-term balance, with each other and the land, was what made a pono society.

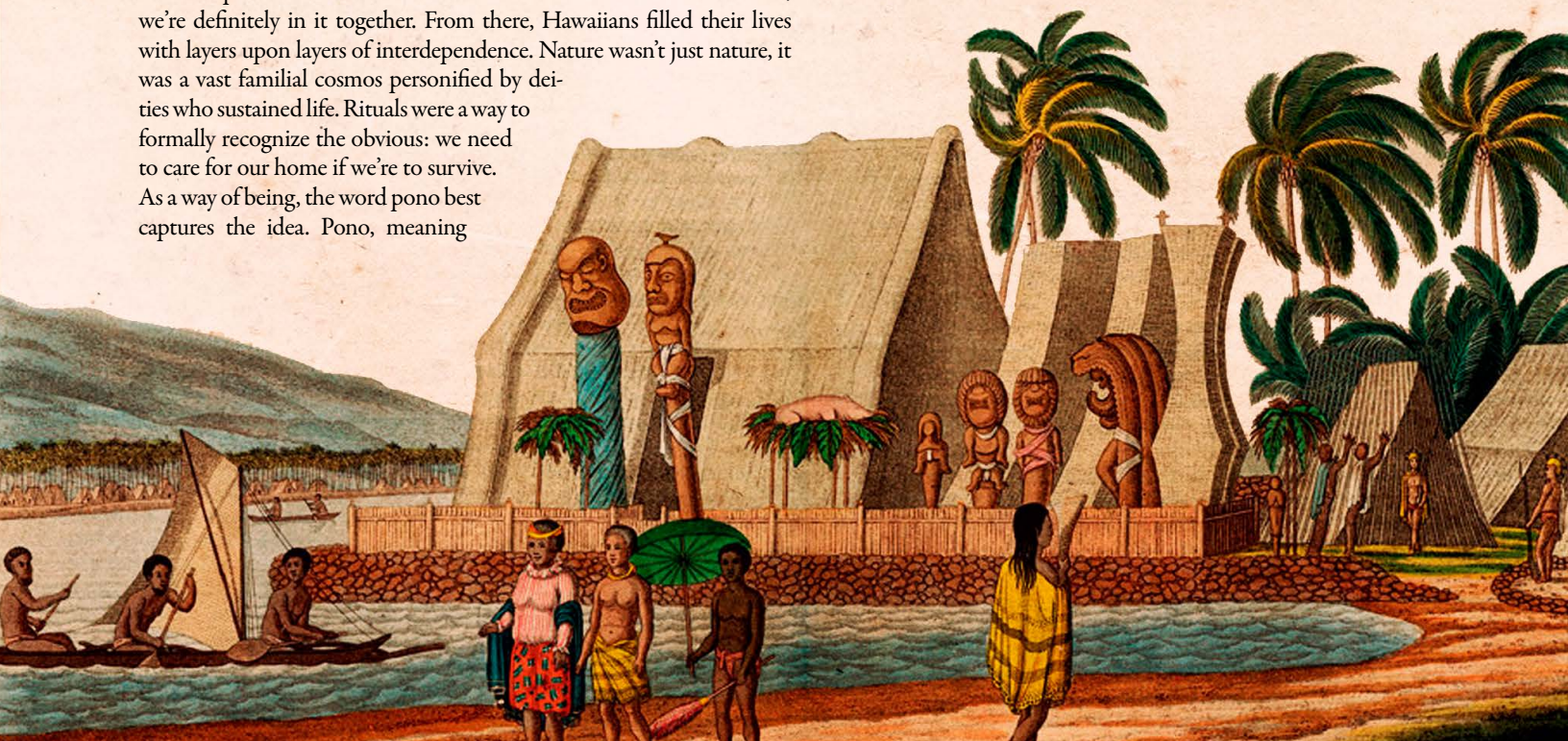
BETWEEN HAWAIIANS, THERE WAS INTERDEPENDENCE as well. Maka'ainana commoners, ali'i chiefs, and various priests, advisors, orators, and medical practitioners comprised Hawai'i's hierarchical society. The commoners subsistence-farmed and made stuff while the ali'i managed resources, competed politically, and performed sacred rituals. Haunani-Kay Trask explains the dynamic:

"An interdependence was created whereby the maka 'ainana (commoners) were free to move with their 'ohana (extended family) to live under an ali 'i (chief) of their choosing while the ali 'i increased their status and material prosperity by having more people living within their moku, or 'domain.' The result was an incentive for the society's leaders to provide for all their constituents' well-being and contentment. To fail to do so meant the loss of status and thus of mana for the ali 'i."

War among chiefs was something of a brutal, competitive pastime. Military service was not mandatory, but maka'ainana commoners held a sort of rooting interest for their particular leader. Battles increased prestige, as did balanced stewardship of the land. By the time of Kamehameha in the early 1800's, Hawaiians did not, generally speaking, view their society as oppressive or their ali'i (chiefs) as despotic. Hawai'i's hierarchy had yet to incite any systemic revolutions (for what it's worth) and across Polynesia, the old ways continued as best they could through foreign occupation.

Beyond working the land, Hawaiians spent much of the day engaged in various social arts. Chanting, hula, surfing, crafting, and sports embedded mythology into daily life. (They even dug gravel tracks in the mountains and competed in something akin to bobsledding!) Makahiki season ran from Oct/Nov through Jan/Feb and celebrated the god Lono as well as the yearly harvest. During this period, all work and war was prohibited. Hawaiians played games, competed in sports, and performed rituals in thanks of the land and sea.

Of the games, it's remarkable how common our amusements are across time and cultures. Hawaiians flew kites, blew bubbles, rocked on seesaws, pestered each other with bamboo water guns, played thumb war, jumped





rope, and swung on swings. Puhenhene was a game said to occupy people all day. Sitting in a circle, one person hides a small rock beneath one of five bunched-up mats. The others, having observed the hiding closely, take turns guessing (and gambling on) where the stone was deposited. Marvelous!

A lot of this feels like pretty late stage human activity, at least to me. Hawaiians had enough free time to master their arts, sports, and crafts. Surfing in particular is the sort of absurd and utterly transcendent thing a culture does, or even thinks to do, when the hard stuff has been figured out. It's a fascinating question: in long seclusion, what do people do when they've learned how to live without destroying their surroundings or themselves (for the most part)? For Hawaiians, they partook of ritual reverence of their islands and gods. Hula captures this best. Performed throughout the day, practiced in groups with great intensity, hula dancing embedded mythology in sensuous movements. Words were not enough. This was poetry in motion.

It's striking to imagine: people dancing everywhere, coordinated, preserving their stories, performing their love affair with home.

HOW, THEN, DOES A FAMILIAL SOCIETY OF RECIPROCAL obligation become one ruled by grinding, Calvinist capitalism? The actual mechanics in upending a people's way of being are varied, as you might imagine. However, Hawai'i's change cannot be understood without the context of mass Hawaiian death during the 19th century. From European contact in 1778 until annexation in 1898, the Hawaiian population declined by over 90%, from 400,000 to under 40,000. Smallpox, influenza, measles, and leprosy—all brought and rather blithely abided by foreigners—wiped Hawaiians out. To a people ritually concerned with a balanced society, death and suffering fractured their world. Suddenly, the old ways did not work. Trauma was everywhere, and the pestilent fucking haoles could not be kept away.

In Hawai'i, the merchant ship *Charles Mallory* arrived from San Francisco in 1853 with sailors stricken by smallpox. Gavan Daws in *Shoals of Time* writes: "Hawaiians fell sick everywhere. Some were abandoned and died alone; their bodies left to rot. Others were buried where they lay, without coffins, in graves so shallow that wan-

dering pigs and dogs could unearth them." Wagons patrolled towns and piled up bodies. Hawaiians fled to the country and hid in the mountains. "For those who stayed at Honolulu death was all around. Yellow flags (the sign of serious disease) hung in doorways on every street, and the legal columns of the Polynesian were filled to overflowing with attorneys' announcements winding up the estates of Hawaiians who had committed their property but not their person to Western ways, who had bought title to their lands and made their wills but had not been vaccinated."

THAT'S A PRETTY TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF HOW COLONIAL history frames things. In Daws' "celebrated" history, we don't learn why Hawaiians distrusted foreigners and their vaccines. (Their distrust would have been well-placed: There are many accounts of American settlers using diseases as biological weapons in the 18th and 19th centuries. Fur traders in North America threatened the tribes they encountered with vials of smallpox. During the French and Indian War, British commander William Trent wrote to his superiors: "Out of our regard for them, we gave them two Blankets and an Handkerchief out of the Small Pox Hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect." As state-sanctioned policy, colonists distributed these blankets at peace treaties.)

Neither do we learn what foreigners thought of all the death they knew their presence inflicted. Did it bother them? If not, what ideology allowed them to ignore such an obvious horror? The obviousness of all this death disturbs me the most. I want very much for people to be innately moral creatures concerned to the core with, as Noam Chomsky puts it, "the predictable consequences of our actions." Colonialism is a depressing testament to something else. Like American forever wars, policing and prisons, ICE's ethnic cleansing—these interconnected horrors go on and on—the sense of right and wrong gets mired in all sorts of dehumanizing shit. It's not that we lack moral sense, it's that we don't think all people are people to care about.

In this context of disease and death, Hawaiian society entered survival mode. In 1887, the last king of Hawai'i, David Kalākaua, wrote of the early period: "Kamehameha admonished his people to endure with patience the aggressions of the whites, and to retain, as far as possible, their simple habits." Unable to keep haoles out and dying from their diseases, the question for Hawai'i's Mō'i (ruler) became, what to do with these incredible assholes? This was a strategic question about Hawaiian survival, not only from disease but conquest as well.

Conquest largely took the form of land acquisition and imposed legal conceptions of property. Since their arrival, American missionaries spoke of "big fishes" who find and devour the little ones. Through the 1840s, England had taken Aotearoa (New Zealand) and the French had taken Tahiti and the islands of Hiva. During this period, American, British, and French warships anchored off Honolulu Harbor. In town, the various admirals and consuls argued over which nation would come to dominate Hawai'i. Despite their many squabbles, on the sanctity of private property all foreigners could agree. Private property was an enlightened institution that separated the savage from the civilized, they said. Individual land titles would allow Hawaiians to toil themselves back from sickness to prosperity, the missionaries added.

Hawaiians had always viewed these arguments as dumbly transparent. Early on, imperial representatives clumsily asked about annexation, revealing their ultimate intentions. Hawaiians simply restated: No one "owns" the land. It cannot be bought or sold. It is simply here, like air and water, a birthright for all to share. The conception of land as private, to be diced up, fenced, and denied to others, was unimaginable for Hawaiians. Such a thing would end communal, subsistence farming, which was their longstanding means of survival.

AMERICAN COLONIALISM HAS DEALT WITH THIS PESKY, Native belief in land as a communal birthright by arguing and mandating for the opposite: individual toiling upon individual plots of land. After more than a century of forced removal, in 1901, Teddy Roosevelt shrieked to Congress: "The General Allotment Act is a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass. It acts directly upon the family and the individual...The effort should be steadily to make the Indian work like any other man on his own grounds." In 1921, Congress debated an act to rehabilitate a decimated Hawaiian people by restoring land. The Governor of the Territory of Hawai'i, Charles McCarthy, attested at the time: "If the native Hawaiian would get out and work, and make a good living for himself and his family, by the sweat of his brow, the race would flourish. That is what the rehabilitation project aims at—not sitting on the fence and playing the ukulele." (These arguments are remarkably similar to what we hear today about work requirements for social benefits.)

In their pulverizing intent, these 20th century policies largely succeeded. Efforts to rehabilitate and grant restitution for widely-recognized horrors almost always resulted in more land commodification and, ultimately, dispossession. It also resulted in new forms of racial categorization. For Hawaiians, the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920 defined and codified—for the first time—just what a legally recognized "Hawaiian" is. After lengthy musings on the best racial mix to improve the "lazy" Hawaiian—does a Chinese-Hawaiian or a Japanese-Hawaiian work a cane field harder? Wrong! White-Hawaiians work the hardest!—Congress declared a 50% blood quantum requirement, defining who is and isn't a Hawaiian and thus, who does and doesn't qualify for benefits under the legislative act. This rule bore no connection to the way Hawaiians themselves defined being Hawaiian in practice: generally speaking, a Hawaiian is simply anyone with Hawaiian ancestry. This legal blood quantum definition very efficiently, and by design, vanished the vast majority of native Hawaiians and their claims to restitution.

This sort of legalism played a defining role in Hawai'i's change. Laws organize a good deal of human life today and it's easy to take them for granted. However, for Hawaiians in the 19th century, western legalism was itself a strange "foreign innovation." The constitution of 1840 attempted to translate, for the first time, a Hawaiian society governed by familial reciprocity and traditional ali'i stewardship into a constitutional monarchy. By converting spoken ways into written law, the ali'i transferred sovereignty from themselves to the constitution. They became legislators and executors rather than the law itself.

With this foundation, and shoved along by a British occupation in 1843, the Hawaiian legislature began the process of land surveys and title applications that would make private property a thing in Hawai'i. This period, called the Mahele, started out on an experimental basis in 1845. By 1850, the result was massive dispossession of maka'ainana commoners. Of 4.5 million acres across the archipelago, only 28,000 went to regular Hawaiians. The vast majority became government and personal lands of the Mō'i, ali'i, and haole.

Why did commoners get so little? For one, few applied for land. Many could not afford the application and survey fees. Another explanation is that many Hawaiians still honored the traditional social relations whereby the Mō'i and ali'i ruled as caretakers. Such a long-practiced system could not simply vanish. Chiefly lineage, while no longer deified, still held social significance as it does today. (The Kamehameha Day parade presents floats of ali'i descendants and is well-attended every year.) Mostly—within the context of mass disease and death—Hawaiian commoners didn't want to be governed by foreigners whose presence killed them. In dozens of petitions throughout the decade, they objected to changes in land ownership and haole in government. In these same petitions they also reaffirmed the ali'i's traditional right to rule.

For the Mō'i, Hawaiian survival was the greatest concern. Their families were dying and stricken by the same infertility that plagued Hawaiians broadly. As death mounted and foreign coercion increased, their decisions—accepting western legalism, dealing with foreigners to secure national recognition, adopting Christianity, gifting land-use, and taking haole advisers—can be seen as scrambling attempts to stave off conquest and annihilation. By the reign of Kalākaua, Hawaiian survival was in complete doubt. The maka'ainana understood the ali'i's strategy and mostly disapproved. In 1854, when several districts of Kauai stopped sending representatives to the Legislature, the governor of Kauai cited the following reasons:

"The First District said, "There is no use electing a Representative, as the one we elected to the Legislature last time went there and passed a law making us pay \$1.00 tax on our dogs."

"The Second District said, "There is no use electing a Representative because the lands are being sold."

"The Third District said, "There is no use electing a Representative as he will then get a swallow-tail coat."

ULTIMATELY, THROUGH COERCION AND LEGALISTIC CREEP, Hawaiians were orphaned in Hawai'i, severed from their traditional relationships with the land and ali'i. Chopped-up private property ended large-scale subsistence living. The ahupua'a system of mountain-to-sea resource management, perfectly suited to the island's streams and valleys, could no longer function, and families could no longer move freely to farm as before. Like commodified land, Hawaiians became commodified labor for the haole-owned sugar plantations.

Hundreds of years later, it's hard to be critical of those Hawaiian elites who made compromises under threats of violence. The foreigners proved, over and over, that they would do crazy shit to get what they wanted. Legislative changes that hurt Hawaiians and benefited haole almost always reacted to specific acts of coercion. The Mahele began years earlier, when British Consul Richard Charlton produced a dubious lease document and forced a confrontation. When David Kalākaua signed the Bayonet Constitution in 1887, which shed most of his executive power, he'd been threatened with revolution by the sugar oligarchs. The overthrow of Queen Lili'u-



NIHAU

KAUAI

HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS

OAHU

MORAY EEL

SURFS UP!

ALALĀ CROW

U.S. WARSHIPS

HOKULEA

MONGOOSE

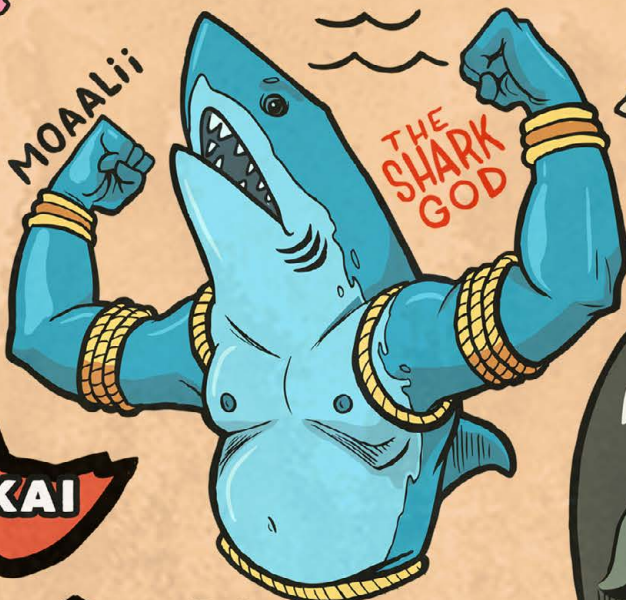
GET TO KNOW THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

KALAUPAPA
LEPER COLONY



MOAALII

THE SHARK GOD



IT'S SO HUMID!



MOLOKAI

LANAI

MAUI

KAHOOLAWE



KAMEHAMEHA
THE GREAT



LARRY
ELLISON



CAPTAIN
COOK

HAWAII



NICK SIROTICH

CAN YOU FIND IT?

OAHU

Oahu is the most populated of the Hawaiian colonies with roughly one million residents! If some disaster should befall our current system of import dependence, we'd run out of food within days!

ALA WAI CANAL

The Ala Wai Canal is an ecological nightmare! Built in the 1920s, this man-made bio-hazard transports Honolulu's filth onto Honolulu's dead and dying reefs. What was once productive taro fields is now the writhing tourist hole of Waikiki!

ALA MOANA BEACH PARK

There aren't too many undeveloped places left along Oahu's South Shore. Regular people rely on Ala Moana Beach Park to surf, swim, and jog, but unfortunately, efforts to "improve" the park by commercializing it require constant vigilance. The people say no every year but the dead-eyed zombies of capitalism always return.

HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS

With capitalism came structural poverty and homelessness. The loss of common land and the end of traditional gathering rights made traditional life illegal. Homeless encampments are common on Oahu, with roughly 6,500 people living on the streets. The City & County of Honolulu's policy has been, mostly, to serve tourism by harassing the homeless, destroying their camps, and herding them to out-of-sight places. Every few months, the process repeats!

TOURISTS

Tourists are economically significant (to the tune of \$15 billion per year) but socially and environmentally loathsome. After sugar and pineapple left to exploit other people in other lands, Hawai'i committed itself to the current scheme of hostage tourism. Many Kanaka Maoli are compelled to serve hordes of romping vacationers who do not appear to care for Hawai'i or its people. (In his youth, the author spent many an afternoon hiding in his neighbor's yard waiting to pelt a passing rental car with a steamy, rotten mango.)

HŌKŪLE'A

The voyaging canoe Hokule'a was built in the 1970s as part of a broad, Hawaiian cultural revival. Since colonization, traditional knowledge had been systematically eradicated and replaced with foreign ways. Building and sailing Hokule'a, along with other traditional practices, has been an ongoing process in reclaiming Hawai'i and Hawaiian culture.

SEVEN MILE MIRACLE

Have human beings known happiness greater than that shared with others in, upon, within the curling crest of wave? The Seven Mile Miracle on Oahu's North Shore is quite probably the best stretch of surfing anywhere on earth, and thus, quite probably the best place on earth. Stay away!

MILITARY

The first U.S. warship arrived in 1826 and never really left. Through times of coercion, really poorly-behaved American and European forces have always been close by. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. military snatched land and signed leases all over Hawai'i, beginning an era of environmental destruction.

MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII AT KANEHOE

If you like to surf or swim or otherwise frolic upon Oahu's beaches, you'll find it difficult around military bases and especially Marine Corps Base Hawai'i at Kaneohe. Access to the ocean is something of a birthright in Hawai'i, but not everywhere.

WAIKANE VALLEY

Waikane valley is one of several valleys the US Military used to test ordnance and ammunitions. After destroying these areas the military complains about cleaning it up or doesn't clean it up or maybe cleans it up but only sloppily.

MĀKUA VALLEY

During WWII the US enacted martial law and removed the people, mostly all Kanaka Maoli, who lived in Makua Valley. Decades of training and ammunitions testing destroyed old growth forest and swathes of native ecology. To this day, access remains restricted and requires an escort.

KOHO'OLAWE

The island of Koho'olawe is a historic site of Kanaka learning as well as one form of the god Kanaloa. The US Military has used many a Pacific island as target practice.

In 1976, Kanaka Maoli occupied the islands to prevent further weapons testing, won public support, and began a decades-long process of return and cleanup that's been quite successful.

PACIFIC MISSILE RANGE FACILITY, KAUAI

Pacific Missile Range Facility at Barking Sands is a creepy place without a lot of public transparency. What goes on here, exactly? Are there actually missiles here? Can you please take your missiles and get out?

HAWAII ISLAND

The Big Island, birthplace of Kamehameha the Great who united the islands in 1810.

KEALAKEKUA BAY

In 1779, Captain Cook the English 'discoverer' of already-inhabited islands, a pretty overbearing and haughty individual, tried to kidnap a ruling chief named Kalaniopuu (after killing another chief), and was, in retaliation, poked to death for his transgression.

WAIPIO VALLEY

Every island has its storied, sacred places, where the deeds of gods and chiefs collide, mystical places that quite simply, feel different. For centuries, Waipio Valley was the residence of Hawai'i Island's ruling chiefs.

MOLOKAI FISHPONDS

Loko 'ia are Hawaiian fishponds. With the depopulation of Kanaka Maoli through the 1800s, traditional fishing and agriculture deteriorated. On Molokai, many of the original fishponds remain and function today.

LANAI

Larry Ellison owns 98% of Lanai. One human being owns an entire Hawaiian island while more and more Kanaka Maoli, those who cannot afford to live in Hawai'i, move abroad.

LĀ HO'ĪHO'ĒA

Lā Ho'īho'ī Ea, or Restoration Day, celebrates the return of Hawaiian sovereignty on July 31st, 1843 to King Kamehameha III after a brief British occupation. It is celebrated today as a protest against US occupation.

NĪ'ĪHAU ISLAND

Don't worry about Nī'ihau. Leave Nī'ihau alone.

MONK SEAL

"Hi, I'm a Hawaiian monk seal, ilio holo i ka waiua, 'doggy that runs in rough water.' I'm one of two monk seal species left on planet earth. See my horrific scars? This one is from when I got stuck in a fishnet. This one is from a jet ski hitting me. So you know, I'm an endangered species. You endanger me."

ALALĀ CROW

"I'm an alalā crow, the last of seven crow species endemic to Hawai'i. I'm an 'aumākuā, or family guardian, to some Kanaka Maoli. Because of avian malaria and invasive species introduced by foreigners, I'm extinct in the wild and having a pretty rough go in captivity. Ok, have a good day!"

KAUAI Ō'Ō

"Hello there, I'm the Kauai Ō'ō. Every island had a distinct Ō'ō species that looked like me. Nowadays? Not so much. Get this: my last song was heard in 1987 in the forests of Kauai. Now I'm almost certainly extinct. It was the rats, mongooses and avian flu that got me."

MONGOOSE

"Hi I'm a fucking mongoose. There's a lot of me around here. I was brought to Hawaii from India to kill rats but I've never seen a rat in my life. Rats are nocturnal and I'm diurnal. Do rats even exist? You tell me!"

SOME GODS

Moaalii: shark god of Oahu and Molokai

Ukanipo: shark god of Hawai'i Island

Lonoakiki: eel-god

Kuahana: god that kills men wantonly

Mokualii: god of canoe-makers

Pohakaa: god that lives in precipitous places and who rolls down stones to the fright and injury of passersby

kalani in 1893 came after an attempt to restore the old constitution. The same oligarchs imprisoned and forced her abdication.

A lot of this is just the politics of power. Could Hawaiians have kicked haoles out? They certainly did, but others showed up. Could they have banned haoles altogether? By the time of Queen Lili'uokalani, there was no actual Hawaiian force that could accomplish such a thing. Given the effects of disease and a declining population, foreigners knew they needed only to wait, which is what they did.

THIS IS ONLY A SMALL SNAPSHOT OF A BROADER Hawaiian tragedy, but it's important to keep these stories alive and share them. The historical continuity I always felt as a child, and observe quite easily today, is a past that must be remembered and reconciled.

Studying history is not only learning *about* but *from*. History is actionable. We interpret the past to understand the present. Colonial societies dedicate whole tomes and pedagogies to versions of history that simplify, justify, or otherwise frame past trauma—if it doesn't erase it entirely—to its own advantage. (World War II history is usually dished out as very comforting pap. We get American hero stories that ignore unsettling things like Hitler's fondness for US race science or the hundreds of thousands of bombed Japanese people.) Traditionally, the first chapters of American History textbooks begin with "primitive" natives who "succumbed to progress" before transitioning (rather hastily) onto the glorious story of our great white daddies.

The mere existence of colonized people screws with the imperial project. Natives have strong moral and legal claims to land and saner

ways of living that pre-exist the current hellhole of capitalism. These claims are so obvious and compelling that nasty jingoists will often co-opt them, appropriating notions of heritage and authenticity—as 'real' Americans, for example—to demean newer arrivals. Settler colonialism is this eclipsing project. If not ethnic cleansing, forced removal, and family separation, then the framing of indigeneity as dead or irrelevant to the times. (I imagine a good many Americans learn about indigenous people from a random museum visit as a kid. These first introductions present Native cultures as artifacts encased in glass, not alive, which they very much are.)

This eclipsing project is so dehumanizing and abhorrent in practice that it's hard to fully accomplish. People don't want to be erased and the erasers, hopefully, begin to recognize the horror of what they or their ancestors did and are made to stop. Even when hegemony is achieved, the assault on dignity compels a response. Hawaiian Professor Samuel Kaeo of Maui refused to speak English at his court hearing in January, 2018, going with 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian) instead. (Kaeo had been arrested for protesting the construction of a telescope atop Mount Haleakala, which many Hawaiians view as sacred land.) After responding in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i repeatedly, Judge Blaine Kobayashi issued a bench warrant for his arrest. The subsequent outcry—are you fucking kidding me we live in Hawai'i brah!—forced Kobayashi to rescind the warrant and reschedule with a translator. (Since Hawai'i's constitutional convention in 1978, 'Ōlelo Hawai'i and English are both official languages of the state.)

ASSERTIONS OF HAWAIIAN IDENTITY CAN JAR COLONIZERS into confronting what they intuitively know already: the current ways are foreign ways. Things were not always like this. The world we know today required some rather violent behavior to make it happen. Acknowledging this is an important first step in decolonizing minds and, ultimately, decolonizing people and places. Collective demands for Indigenous dignity often arise through sovereignty and nationalist movements, which deserves some healthy skepticism. Sovereignty and nationalism are almost always icky concepts used to justify and energize humanity's worst atrocities. Nationalism for what, exactly? You want sovereignty why? Wade in a little deeper and you'll find layers of gross authoritarian shit.

The content of Indigenous sovereignty, what those in Hawaiian movements often advocate for, is not sovereignty as imperial nations practice it. American sovereignty, often called the "American Interest," is about the sovereign exception to do whatever the eff it wants: sanction economically, invade militarily, ignore human rights, or suicide the planet through fossil fuel capitalism. Indigenous sovereignty is best described as a "right to live responsibly." (Glen Coulthard has written of "countersovereignty," which may be a better way to think about it.) Mostly, indigenous countersovereignty demands pretty basic stuff we all ought to want: the ability to participate in governance, to practice culture without it being commercialized, to freely associate, to live responsibly in accordance with nature, to be people who belong to a home of our own imagining.

We desperately need these things today. The outlook for human survival upon a hot and gross planet is not looking good. But, if there's any comfort to lots of social ills coupled with an environmental horror, it's that we're definitely capable of recognizing and learning and imagining better ways of being. We've done it before. Some of us are there right now, trying to live quite beautifully. Of course, we need to do much more and get on it. There won't be one answer or way or truth, such paths have proven disastrous. There probably ought to be a multitude of ways, just as there's a multitude of peoples and places we imagine as home. 🌺



BIPARTISAN

Trivial Pursuit

History

Looking at American history as a whole, is it fair to say "America is already great"?

D

America is already great, with some historical inequalities that were mostly put to rest long ago. Its only crime is being overrun with poor and stupid people who vote against their own self-interest.

R

America was perfected from the start, but has fallen from grace due to a decline in "Western values" and other euphemisms for white supremacy.

Foreign Policy

When is it appropriate to launch a drone strike?

D

When an algorithm tells you to, and also when you can reclassify the dead male children in the Hellfire's radius as "enemy combatants."

R

When an algorithm tells you to, and also when you can openly celebrate murdering terrorists' families.

Domestic Policy

What should be done about ICE?

D

ICE has been behaving very badly lately. Naughty, naughty boys. They need a much better system of oversight and evaluation, hopefully with some high-tech monitoring devices.

R

We should expand ICE, and also create a Junior ICE program where young and ideally blond children can simulate ICE techniques such as kidnapping people from their homes.

Political Strategy and Tactics

What is the best electoral strategy for winning the presidency?

D

Triangulating the suburban center-right while condescendingly assuming the full support of minorities and sneering at poor white people.

R

Triangulating the suburban center-right while dog-whistling or regular-whistling racists from both inside and outside the suburbs.

Justice and The Law

Which of these descriptions best matches the ideal Supreme Court Justice?

D

A moderate sober centrist, so committed to fairness and balance that s/he never eats a sandwich unless it has two contrasting and unpleasant flavors. Also extremely in favor of the police.

R

Highly qualified xenophobe and misogynist; a great dad! Constitutional originalist, except for the parts of the Constitution he doesn't like. Very cultured and dignified; you can take him (of course it's a him) to the opera.

The Left

What is the best response to the rising tide of democratic socialism?

D

What rising tide? Haha. The left is dangerous, because one time somebody got yelled at on campus. Anyway, the left must be stopped.

R

Socialism can only lead to Venezuela, because saying "socialism can only lead to the Soviet Union" was soooo last decade. Anyway, the left must be stopped.



innovation under socialism

by Vanessa A. Bee

I have friends who revel in arriving in a place and immediately investigating the neighborhood's shortcuts, jogging down trail without a destination, wandering down wayward trails just to see where they lead. For those whose thirst for adventure is complemented by a healthy dose of spatial awareness and cognition, discovery is a thrill. Personally, I cannot relate to any of this. Nothing means less to me than the orientation of the sunrise and sunset. Your cardinal points are wasted on me, for I am a person endowed with no sense of direction whatsoever. Throw in any language other than my native fluency in French and English, along with a flailing Spanish, and my demise is guaranteed. Yet, in recent years, I have felt confident enough to explore places where I had never been before without knowing the local offi-

cial language. In all this, my saving grace has been my iPhone—the powerful pocket-sized computer whose mapping and translating superpowers have convinced me almost no place is out of my reach. I'll say it: I am a socialist and I love my iPhone.

This confession is music to the ears of the “capitalism made your iPhone” club. Indeed, proponents of capitalism often brandish rapid innovation as if it were an automatic checkmate on collectivist socioeconomic ideologies. To them, modern technology proves not only that capitalism works, but that it is the best system to stimulate innovation. The subtext of their retort is a socialist economy could never generate that technology this advanced. When coupled with a defense of “thought leaders” as obscenely rich as Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, and Jeff Bezos, their argument also contends that concentrating



capital and power in the hands of a few billionaires is a small price to pay for the astronomical leaps in innovation from which we all benefit.

Capitalism's fan base is not wrong that the iPhone, first released in 2007, is a product of America's fiercely capitalist economy. I will also concede that without the vision of Steve Jobs, Apple's late CEO and the 110th richest person in the world at his death, there would be no iPhone as we know it (although it is worth noting that the army of engineers and developers whose labor actually produced the iPhone might have come up with an equally wonderful smartphone). Nonetheless, their perspective is deeply misguided. It manages to both underestimate how much capitalism stifles innovation and misunderstand how much the fundamentals of a socialist economy make it the better system for stimulating innovation.

INNOVATION DESCRIBES A FOUR-STEP PROCESS THAT creates or ameliorates a thing or way of doing things. It begins with invention, the design of a device or process that did not previously exist in this form. The invention is then developed, meaning that it is improved with an eye towards eventual scaling, exchange or introduction on a market, and external use by others. At the production stage, the invention is built or reproduced. Finally, the invention is distributed to a wider audience. In our present economy, a minority of the innovation process happens at the individual level, from lonesome inventors and modern Benjamin Franklins who are able to conjure all sorts of contraptions in their garage. The majority, however, results from research and development (R&D) paid for by private firms, and by the public through government agencies, research institutions, and other recipients of federal and state funding.

The profit motive and exclusive proprietary rights are central

to capitalist innovation. By law, private firms must prioritize the interest of their shareholders, which tends to be interchangeable with making as much money as possible. Accordingly, investments in any stage of the innovative process must eventually produce profits. To maximize profit, private firms jealously guard the value of their invention through regulations and restrictive contracts. Statutes and regulations help protect their trade secrets. The U.S. Patent and Trademarks Office routinely grants them utility and design patents that “exclude others from making, using, offering for sale, or selling ... or importing the invention” for twenty years after the patent is issued. They enforce licensing agreements that can severely limit the uses and dissemination of all or part of their inventions. To further frustrate efforts to innovate on the back of their inventions, private firms subject their former employees to non-compete agreements that can severely limit them from using their knowledge and skills on competing projects for a period following the departure. Breaches carry dire consequences like expensive lawsuits, big money judgments, and other enormous hassles.

By contrast, the public sector innovates under an academic model instead of for profit. Certainly, earning tenure or an executive position can be lucrative. In some industries, a revolving door gives individuals the opportunity to innovate in both the private and public sectors throughout their careers. However, innovation in this area is less motivated by extracting profit, and more so by signifiers of prestige, career appointments, recognition, publication, project funding, and prizes.

The capitalist model has its perks. At present, private firms raise massive amounts of capital from the government to fund research, but also from banks, private equity, and wealthy donors. This vast amount of capital can prove lucrative for certain classes of workers. Innovative talent might accumulate wealth through generous compensation packages, which play an important role in attracting and retaining them.

Private firms also boast a terrifying nimbleness that allows them push projects and respond to change faster than government institutions. For instance, firms can turn over staff quickly if their industry in the absence of unions and norms against firing workers at will, other than the standard prohibitions against discriminatory practices. In other words, without the regulatory and administrative constraints that saddle publicly funded projects, private firms can move through the innovative process faster.

Another advantage of the capitalist model is that profits—potential and actual—provide some measure of how well a company is innovating. Particularly, for the many private firms that sell some of their shares to the public on stock exchanges, prices serve as a form of feedback from investors and the market. Imagine that a publicly-traded retailer announces the imminent launch of an affordable, solar-powered computer that boasts power and speeds that rival to Apple’s newest models. In the hours following the press release, the retailer’s stock value triples. A week later, while at a tech conference in the Colorado mountains, the retailer’s CEO lets it slip that the first prototype will actually retail for about four thousand dollars. Unfortunately for the CEO, he was wearing a hot mic. The quote is made public in an article titled “No debt-sad-

dled, environmentally-conscious millennial will shed \$4,000 for a computer!” The stock value immediately plummets by two-hundred percent.

The original rise in the retailer’s share value communicates that investors believe in the product as a profitable enterprise, and that they see this type of innovation is a worthwhile pursuit. The drop, on the other hand, suggests that they believe this specific product would be more marketable and therefore more profitable if it were developed for an audience beyond high-end consumers. The turn in the stock value can embolden the retailer—through its management, Board of Directors, or shareholders—to revisit its plan to innovate. It also signals to competitors that their innovation of a similar product could be well received, especially if they can overcome the original product’s weaknesses.

BUT PRIORITIZING PROFIT IS A DOUBLE-EDGED sword that can hamper innovation. Owning the proprietary rights allows private firms to block workers—through anti-competitive tools like non-compete agreements, patents, and licenses—who put labor into the innovation process from applying the extensive technical expertise and intimate understanding of the product to improve the innovation substantially. This becomes especially relevant once the workers leave the firm division in which they worked, or leave the firm altogether. Understandably, this lack of control and ownership will cause some workers, however passionate they may be about a project, to be less willing to maximize their contribution to the innovation.

Of course, the so-called nimbleness that allows firms to make drastic changes like mass layoffs is extremely harmful to the workers. This is no fluke. The capitalist economy thrives on a reserve army of labor. Inching closer to full employment makes workers scarcer, which empowers the labor force as a whole to bargain for higher wages and better work conditions. These threaten the firm’s bottom line. So, the capitalist economy is structured to maintain the balance of power towards the owners of capital. Positions that pay well (and less than well) come with the precariousness of at-will employment and disappearing union power. A constant pool of unemployed labor is maintained through layoffs and other tactics like higher interest rates, which the government will compel to help slow growth and thereby hiring. This system harms the potential for innovation, too.

The fear of losing work can dissuade workers from taking risks, experimenting, or speaking up as they identify items that could improve a taken approach—all actions that foster innovation. Meanwhile, thousands of individuals who could be contributing to the innovative process are instead involuntarily unemployed. This model also encourages monopolization, as concentrating market power gives private firms the most control over how much profit they can extract. But squashing competition that could contribute fresh ideas hurts every phase of the innovation process, while giving workers in fewer workplaces where to innovate.

Deferring to profit causes many areas of R&D to go unexplored. Private firms have less reason to invest in innovations likely to be

made universally available for free if managers or investors do not see much upside for the firm's bottom line. In theory, the slack in private research can be picked up by the public sector. In reality, however, decades of austerity measures and threaten the public's ability to underwrite risky and inefficient research. Both the Democratic and Republican parties increasingly adhere to a neoliberal ideology that vilifies "big government," promotes running government like a business, pretends that a government budgets should mirror household budgets or the private firm's balance sheet, and rams privatization under the guises of so-called public-private partnerships and private subcontractors.

In the United States, public investment in R&D has been trending downward. As documented in a 2014 report from the *Information Technology & Innovation Foundation*, "[f]rom 2010 to 2013, federal R&D spending fell from \$158.8 to \$133.2 billion ... Between 2003 and 2008, state funding for university research, as a share of GDP, dropped on average by 2 percent. States such as Arizona and Utah saw decreases of 49 percent and 24 percent respectively." Even if public investment in the least profitable aspect of research suddenly surged, in our current model, the private sector continues to be the primary driver of development, production, and distribution. Where there remains little potential for profit, private firms will be reluctant to advance to the next phases of the innovation process. Public-private projects raise similar concerns. Coordinated efforts can increase private investment by spreading some costs and risk to the public. But to attract private partners in the first place, the public sector has a greater incentive to prioritize R&D projects with more financial upsides.

This is how the quest for profits and tight grip over proprietary rights, both important features of the capitalist model, discourage risk. Innovations are bound for plateauing after a few years, as firms increasingly favor minor aesthetic tweaks and updates over bold ideas while preventing other avenues of innovation from blossoming. At the same time, massive amounts of capital continue to float into the hands of a few. The price of innovating under capitalism is then both decreased innovation and decreased equality. The idea that this approach to innovation must be our best and only option is a delusion.

As I see it, four ingredients are key to kindling innovation. First, there must be problems requiring solutions (an easy one to meet). Second, there must be capital and resources available to invent, develop, produce, and distribute the innovative product. There must also be actual human beings available to participate in every phase of the innovation process. And fourth, at least some of these human beings must have the creativity and motivation to participate in the innovation process. The question isn't really whether a socialist economy can provide these four ingredients *at all* (it can) but rather, whether it can innovate *better* than a capitalist economy (it can).

ADHERENTS OF THE CAPITALIST MODEL LIKE to point to boogymen like the Soviet Union to argue that a collectivist economy cannot both innovate *and* create a society in which people do not live on food rations under authoritarian rule. To be sure, this argument shows little interest in understanding the

contextual factors that have led to extreme poverty and authoritarianism in other nations. It also ignores the extreme poverty in the United States, and the deeply undemocratic currents in our own system of government. But more importantly, it completely misses the fact that socialism is a social and economic ideology—not a fixed set of systems and institutions. Nothing prescribes that socialist ideology must take on a precise form, or that it must look exactly like models previously attempted. Nor are the conditions that once produced undesirable results—be they historical, geographical, fiscal, demographical, or other—inherent to the socialist economic model. (The same cannot be said of capitalism. Its greatest flaw, maximizing profit, is also its primary goal.)

Just a basic search for "types of socialism" on *Wikipedia* brings up a list of over thirty variants ranging from Maoism to anarcho-syndicalism. These strains tend to share a set of ideological tenets. According to the economist Al Campbell from the University of Utah, the broadest and most common list comprises of: self-governance or democracy, the development of human potential, equality, solidarity, and, traditionally, nationalizing the means of production. Other values on the list have included individuality, privacy, liberty, and autonomy. Inevitably, some models of socialist economies will be more conducive to achieving all or most of these principles. A subset of these models—including, in my opinion, market socialism—are particularly conducive to creating the right conditions for maximizing innovation.

TO BE CLEAR, SOCIALISTS HAVE DIFFERING and sometimes very strong views about whether markets are compatible with socialism. Reasonable minds can certainly disagree. But my personal belief is that markets are politically neutral tools that can be molded to advance any purpose, like an alphabet with which we can communicate in many languages and genres. It would be absurd to conclude that because the alphabet wrote a book as odious as *Mein Kampf*, our utopian society should have no alphabet. Similarly, markets can be purposed to advance a socialist principles. Moreover, a market socialist economy—or any other type of socialist economy—can be hybridized to incorporate features of what other socialist models do better.

Consider a market socialist economy that somewhat resembles the proposal by economics professors Pranab Bardhan and John Roemer. In this scheme, firms of a certain size are owned wholly, or in the combination, by the government, the firm's workers, "other public firms (including their workers) in the same financial group, together with the main investment bank and its subsidiaries." The bank, too, is owned by a combination of these same shareholders although the government is its largest owner if not the only one. The firms are jointly owned through shares, which are distributed to every citizen (and whomever else we democratically decide to include) with the exception of children, for whom the shares are held in trust until adulthood.

In this market socialist society, most shares are pooled into highly regulated mutual funds, which then pursue different investment strategies when trading them on a highly regulated stock

exchange. This exchange helps monitor the performance of the firm managers and assess what innovations are performing strongly. To avoid the concentration of market power and capital, the government sets the bar for how much stock any stakeholder can hold in any firm and industry. It also sets the minimum and maximum amount of dividends that each person can receive annually. As the economy grows, dividends can be adjusted to increase by a percentage, or commensurate with inflation. Surplus resulting from distributing only part of the profits allows the more profitable firms to subsidize innovative, but less profitable, activities. In addition, this regime does not tolerate anti-competitive contracts like restrictive employment agreements, strict license agreements, and long patents (although inventions may be attributable to their inventors and may be rewarded through other means like prizes, bonus compensation, or simply very short patents periods).

The model could incorporate elements of democratically-planned, participatory socialism, which emphasizes democracy and individual autonomy in the workplace. Economist David Kotz believes that particular features of this model could foster innovation performance: “First, the main features of the overall economic plan would be determined by a democratic process ... Second, the planning and coordination of the economy would take place ... by industry boards and local and regional negotiated coordination bodies that have representation of all affected constituencies, including workers, consumers, suppliers, the local community, and even “cause” groups such as environmentalists, job safety activists, feminists, etc.” Among other topics, these representative boards could vote on compensation minimums and maximums, to prevent innovation from supporting socioeconomic inequality and unfair social divisions of labor. This injection of democracy would give ordinary people a larger say in the direction of the markets, and what areas they think would benefit from more investment in innovation.

The second ingredient of innovation, capital, is guaranteed in the market socialist economy. Freed of its neoliberal handcuffs, the government can designate funding towards various innovative projects at a greater rate than it does now. Banks jointly owned by the government and other non-private stakeholders would provide entrepreneurs with access to capital for projects through loans with terms more generous than private lenders offer now. The firms owned by government, worker co-operatives, ordinary people, and other publicly-owned firms can also raise capital from each other as wealth is distributed more equally. In such a world, more individuals can pool their resources to invest in particular innovative projects rather than a recurring cast of millionaires.

MARKET SOCIALISM WOULD EASILY deliver the third ingredient of innovation: human capital. Such an economy has no need for a reserve army of labor. While profit is encouraged, its primary function is increasing the pool of resources and cash distributable to workers and non-workers. It does not come at the price of providing generous wages, as dividends to shareholders are capped no matter how well the firm performs. In fact, this society could make a democratic decision to compensate

people in position on the lower band of wages with more in unearned income, out of the same pool of profits.

When applied earnestly, the principles of socialism are also incompatible with mass incarceration, discrimination, uncompensated caregiving, highly restrictive immigration policies, and other social practices that exclude large numbers of workers from participating in our capitalist economy. Add a fairer distribution of public resources among individuals and communities, along with more free or heavily subsidized goods like education, and a market socialist economy could really see an increase in the availability and skills in the pool of workers. Freeing more people to join the innovative process would naturally foster more innovation.

Lastly, innovation can only thrive if the innovation process affords individuals chances to be creative and the right conditions to motivate them. Studies on what fosters creativity show that workers who rate highly on creativity indexes perform best when they are given challenging work, a good measure of autonomy, and supportive and caring supervisors who can provide substantive and constructive feedback. The same study, however, shows that workers who are by nature less creative tend to be happier in less complex positions. Neither worker is, or should be, superior to the other. On the contrary, the innovation process has plenty of room for all types of workers with varying degrees of innate creativity. The core principles of socialism, however, do suggest that this economic system is better suited for supporting creative workers than capitalism.

OF COURSE, TO BE CREATIVE, WORKERS MUST ALSO feel motivated. Capitalism tells us that competition and compensation are the best motivators. While this is inevitably true for some individuals, the case of open source innovation is proof that motivation can rate high without either. Indeed, for the last three decades, developers and users have volunteered code to free, collaborative software projects. When a researchers asked them why they devote so many hours of their free time to open source projects, these contributors explained that they mostly participated because they liked coding. To many, this work felt like an artistic endeavor. They valued “the freedom and creativity they experienced in defining and managing their open source work,” and felt good about identifying and solving problems. They enjoyed the reciprocity aspect of the project—answering a question or solving a problem after the same was done for them. But they also tended to dislike communities with more top-down control and limited ownership over the project. A number of the coders surveyed reported withholding contributions where these factors were present. In other words, the factors that motivated them were far closer to the principles espoused by socialists, than by the capitalist obsession with profit.

What all this tells us is that there we can have our cake and eat it too. Living with inventions like the iPhone *and* an unequal and undemocratic economy obsessed with profits is a political choice. It is not our only option. We can strive for a fairer economy, under a socialist model, without conceding the technological advances that have made our lives easier. The ingredients are all there. It only takes a little imagination. +

FUN WITH BERNIE


A SECTION FOR THE TEENS



The results are in: American teenagers are totally done with capitalism. "The system doesn't work," says Tara McAdams of Akron, Ohio. "We all know it. Bernie's just the first person we ever heard saying it." That's Bernie Sanders of course, the senator from Vermont. According to a recent Current Affairs poll, 86% of teens rated Bernie favorably. In the same poll, 92% of teens rated socialism "bae", 85% said capitalism is "no longer extra", and 83% said "don't condescend to us, we know what the terms 'socialism' and 'capitalism' mean, probably better than most of those smug-ass Baby Boomers who inherited New Deal reforms and instead of progressing forward into true socialism just pissed everything away."

So why do teens love the septuagenarian senator so much? What's the source of his mysterious star power? Is it really just his policies—Medicare for All, free college, universal childcare? Yes, Bernie is a cranky old birdman who harangues on and on about the same domestic policy points. They just happen to be good points, and he happens to mean them sincerely. This is the beginning and end of his popularity. Mystery solved!

BINGO

CORPORATE HANDOUTS	THE BILLIONAIRE CLASS	YUGE	MEDICARE FOR ALL	THE DEMOCRATIC ESTABLISHMENT
NAFTA	THE 99%	THE 1%	THE WORKING CLASS	THE MIDDLE CLASS
SOME WISHY WASHY BULLSHIT ABOUT NOT ABOLISHING ICE	NONSENSE CIVILITY POLITICS		TUITION FREE COLLEGE	LIVING WAGE
FLY-AWAY HAIR	DODD-FRANK	IS THAT A BIRD	POLITICAL REVOLUTION	INCOMPLETE CONDEMNATION OF ISRAELI ATROCITY
WHEN I WAS MAYUH	CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM	NOT LARRY DAVID	SOCIAL SECURITY	WILDLY POINTING INDEX FINGER

QUIZ

WHAT'S YOUR LEFT POLITICAL ORIENTATION?

With so many exciting leftist ideas in the air, it can be tough to figure out what you actually believe. Sure, you like Bernie's domestic policy proposals, but do they go far enough? The best way to figure out what you actually want is to apply your principles to your immediate environment: your school. Take this quiz, and find out how much you really stan socialism.

1. The Winter Formal is coming up, but some students can't afford cute new looks! What do you do? How will you make sure everyone hits their #outfitgoals?

A. Work with the school administration and initiate a jobs program. Poor students can help out around school and earn enough cash for suits and dresses.

B. The school should subsidize students who can't afford new outfits. Help your local government pass a tax on the wealthy so that every student has a public option when it comes to on-trend formalwear. If the wealthy complain, tax them harder.

C. School dances are total bourgeois nonsense. Take over the cafeteria, kick out the adults, and throw a come-as-you-are rave.

2. The school has signed a contract with an academic-tracking company. Every student will have a tiny drone hovering over their shoulder to monitor performance. How do you respond?

A. Persuade the administration to sign a letter promising zero third-party selling of data. The drones must only be allowed to monitor academic performance, not collect your biometrics or peep your secret texts to your besties.

B. Go on strike. Ditch class en masse until the administration bans the drones from school premises.

C. Reprogram the drones to process all inputs as random fragmented data that will fry their tiny computer brains. Don't hate it; upgrade it!

YOUR BACK-TO-SCHOOL POLITICAL ACTION HOROSCOPE

ARIES

With both Neptune and Pluto in retrograde, you'll have very little energy for organizing in your life, both personally and politically. But don't fret; after the full moon on the 25th you'll get all your passionate Aries intensity back. You'll be able to tidy your locker and plan untraceable trashcan fires at the local police precinct.

TAURUS

Mars is in your sign this month, which means you're feeling extra bullish. This is the perfect month to boldly change up your #lewk, or stage a walkout protest over your school's decision to partner with a multinational soda conglomerate that exploits its workers.

GEMINI

Geminis often feel torn in two, and this month is no exception. There's a midmonth alignment of Jupiter and Pluto—the planets of energy and the netherworld respectively—and the pressure to #brand yourself as a neoliberal sellout will be extra strong. Channel that Gemini showmanship into a useful project, like working on a local DSA candidate's ad campaign.

CANCER

With the Sun, Mars, and Jupiter journeying through your sign this month, you may find yourself drawn to new ideas. But make sure you balance your hate-watching of alt-right youtube losers with some intelligent, challenging leftist commentary, or you may find yourself accidentally joining QAnon.

LEO

Saturn's facing you in a negative aspect right now, which may make you shy, but when Mars enters your sixth house mid-month you'll find a new burst of bravery. Time to strike up the courage to talk to that cutie you've locking eyes with at YDSA meetings, and also tell off your most annoying centrist relative.

VIRGO

As a Virgo, your strength is communication. But your weakness is being too nice to #toxic people. As Mercury, your ruling planet, enters your sign on the 5th, take stock of your squad and decide who's holding onto repressive authoritarian ideas out of fixable ignorance and who's just an asshole.

LIBRA

Be prepared: there's a heated conjunction of the Sun and Mars that's going to leave you feeling extra depressed about climate change. But with Saturn leaving retrograde on September 6th, your dark mood will turn to determination. Channel this mood into useful political activity, like blowing up an unfinished oil pipeline.

SCORPIO

When Venus enters your sign early in the month, sparks may fly between you and your crush. But don't invite them to the homecoming dance just yet. In October, Venus is going into retrograde, and your crush may end up doing something seriously disappointing, like joining the Young Republicans.

SAGITTARIUS

With Mercury in your fellow-fire sign Leo, September is going to be an angry and restless month for you. If you decide to join Antifa, make sure you wear a mask or the kind of makeup that fools facial recognition algorithms. You want to be #grammable but not #legible.

CAPRICORN

Saturn's been hanging out in your sign for some time, and all that negative fear-mongering energy has you really #bummed and snappish. If you find yourself constantly entangled in obscure social media beefs that makes zero sense to anyone IRL, log off and do something useful, like, you know, actual fucking organizing.

AQUARIUS

With Jupiter in opposition, this is the perfect time to get rid of all the negative capitalist energy in your life. Your friend who thinks Elon Musk is "a hero, actually?" #bye bitch. The teacher who assigns Atlas Shrugged? #dumphantatclass. The uncle who tells you "being a socialist is just a phase, you'll get over it when you're older?" #lmao

PISCES

Pisces are usually gentle and dreamy, and so people in your life often think you're easily pushed around. But with both Neptune and Pluto in retrograde, it's time to flip expectations. Stand up to that performatively woke bro in your organizing meetings. When he splutters "but I'm the first one to say 'men are the worst!'" try not to make fun of him too much.



3. Some members of your squad are in trouble for a hilarious prank involving a skateboard, a mini-fridge, homemade rocket thrusters, a bucket of strawberries, the auditorium stage, fourteen hamsters, and one surprisingly/unexpectedly viral Youtube vid. The school is adopting a zero-tolerance policy toward bullying (one of the hamsters may have been slightly traumatized), and your squad members are facing expulsion. How will you defend them?

A. Start a letter-writing campaign demanding a fair hearing by the administration. Post the letters on Insta for maximum eyeballs.

B. Hold your own trial with a collective jury of all your peers. Your squad members will have to clean up the auditorium and comfort the possibly traumatized hamster. Explain to the administration that justice has been meted out, and if they object you can always take further collective action.

C. Can there be any justice under a fascist administration that would expel students for no good reason? Not a chance. Say #bai to the administration by tossing out the adults and locking the doors after them. Now it's your school and you can do all the viral pranks you want.

ANSWERS ON PAGE 64

TEARING DOWN

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL'S

A Beverly Hills home
with Hollywood history
asks nearly \$40
million **M2**



MANSION

*'History, like love, is so apt
to surround her heroes with an
atmosphere of imaginary brightness.'*

James Fennimore Cooper

HOMES | MARKETS | PEOPLE | UPKEEP | VALUES | NEIGHBORHOODS | REDOS | SALES | FIXTURES | BROKERS

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Friday, August 12, 2016 | **M1**



by ROB LARSON

Today's cartoonishly twisted economic inequality has created a renaissance of "conspicuous consumption." This was the term American sociologist Thorstein Veblen coined to describe the purchase of extravagant goods and services, not so much for the pleasure of consuming them but for their ability to signal affluence to others. For example, *Forbes* magazine's Cost of Living Extremely Well Index tracks the price of "ultraluxe items" like



quarter-million-dollar Russian sable fur coats, \$55,000 private school tuition, and \$16 million personal Sikorsky helicopters.

But the best place to turn for a peek at elite excess is definitely *Mansion*, the Friday *Wall Street Journal* supplement reviewing the wild extravagance of the hideously rich. Part advertising section, part ruling-class design review, part dangling inducement to middle managers to go on believing in the system, *Mansion* is a hilarious delight and everyone should read it to learn about the purposeless waste of the upper crust.

Sadly, the *Journal's* aggressive paywall prevents many critical readers from peeking through the curtain to view the other side of our class-segregation system. Luckily *Current Affairs* has the keys! Brace yourself to find out where thirty years of tax cuts—promised to create jobs—have gone instead.

Reading *Mansion* quickly reveals the gigantic frigging sums wealthy people have seen fit to throw at their surroundings. From comfortless-looking glass tubs to specialized tequila freezers, the resources committed to these properties are staggering. Articles describe for us the cigar rooms, the \$54,000 closet for a Beverly Hills teenager's sports and drones, the enormous home theaters, the 4700 square-foot gym with a climbing wall. In a review of big-ticket housing in Holland, a rich Dutch designer of elite household renovations laughs: "Sometimes I think I could live in that kitchen." Another article finds real-world comps for super-hero movie mansions, which is easier than you might guess.

Rich-people housing embodies their rich-people diversions, including American car worship. A Miami tower grabbed attention in a crowded market by affiliating with Porsche and including a car elevator for residents, allowing them to park their chrome sport cars right in their chrome condos. An AOL co-founder's house has an attached garage and a garage attached to the attached garage, with space for thirty cars. Oh, plus a dock for delivery trucks in one of the four kitchens. And while covering a Miami manse built on top of a seven-story parking structure, we learn the luxury garage includes a glass sculpture, 30-foot-high ceilings in places, and "sweeping views." They hold weddings in it.

Many high-end city mansions have gone through a circuitous odyssey over the twentieth century, often built as giant brownstones for tycoons in the unregulated, no-progressive-income-tax era of the Gilded Age, but then taken over for schools or split into apartments or offices. Yet as the New Deal era has been repealed in endless Republican tax cuts, these properties are widely returning to their original functions as opulent single-family homes. A New York real estate agent comments, "It's like a return to the Gilded Age," as the press reports that what has "put these mansions and townhouses back in play is the steady escalation of incredibly wealthy buyers" seeking more privacy than a conventional high-end condo can provide.

This kind of high-end marketing literature also teaches how class patterns endure in far more turbulent settings, even through the most cataclysmic events. *Mansion* describes the luxury market in Berlin, where waves of destruction and social reconstruction have crashed over the twentieth century, while still preserving the architecture of class privilege. One high-end West Berlin residential complex was originally built to be "a high-end residential hotel" but "has had many lives over the decades, including as the Weimar Republic's economics ministry in the 1920s and as a West Berlin finance office during the Cold War." Now, it has returned to its luxury market origins as elite condos. It's history in the form of douchebag trophy properties.

Likewise Japan, which at midcentury was firebombed and nuked to kingdom come (the culprit was never caught), saw an archetypal property bubble in the 1980s. These upheavals don't erase old patterns of excessive privilege and power, and *Mansion* tells of Tokyo's "most exclusive neighborhoods" where "luxury residential towers that cater to the city's elite now sit where feudal lords once had their lavish villas." Still, most Japanese domestic buyers "are more restrained in their definition of luxury. There is little demand for splashy interiors, or a gym or a swimming pool in the building." Don't these people know how to live!?

OF COURSE, ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH REAL estate will know that often the appearance of age on a marketed property is homage rather than reality. Affectations of antiquity are a mainstay of real estate markets across class levels, including Tudor-era stonework and with fireplace "mantels salvaged from castles in France and England." This reaches its apex in the clichéd tacky U.S. "McMansion," as you can see for yourself on Kate Wagner's incredibly entertaining blog, McMansion Hell. Without snobbishness, Wagner playfully laments today's clumsy and planless use of half-recalled and feverishly jumbled Gothic or colonial architecture, leaving much of the modern high-end property inventory a shallow parody of grandeur.

The anachronistic tacky grotesque is truly on parade in *Mansion's* real estate listings. One Beverly Hills mansion "was originally built to resemble 'Le Petit Trianon,' Marie Antoinette's private chateau in Versailles," and includes "a whiskey lounge, a wine cellar, a cinema, three elevators and a salon and spa." A rich retired fashion industry tycoon and wife bought a former grain mill outside Madrid and remodeled the property into a mansion, including the portion formerly housing workers, with ill-fitting modern gadgets. We're told whimsically that the owner has limited knowledge of what the place was and when it operated. The couple also owns an Italian vineyard, vacations on Ibiza and plans to ruin a derelict Valencian farmhouse next.

Since these properties are owned by such fantastically

YOUR MANSION

Inspired by the Wall Street Journal, the editors of Current Affairs have designed the ultimate in 21st century luxury real estate. Here, we list its many features. See next spread for design.

BEDROOM — *with sweeping views!*

GARAGE — *with sweeping views!*

CRAWL SPACE — *with sweeping views!*

KITCHEN — *with sweeping household staff!*

HEATED TIBETAN SALT LICK — *it's simply not a wholesome home unless you have a Heated Tibetan Salt Lick in your kitchen*

ARTISANAL FAMILY — *have your own family of charming rustics living inside your home in an authentic 19th century farmer's cottage they can't escape.*

DOG'S ROOM

DOG BUTLER'S ROOM

SERVANT PODS — *Pneumatic tubes summon the servants when you need them*

DECOY SECRET BUNKER — *for when your domestic staff turns on you*

ACTUAL SECRET BUNKER — *for when your domestic staff discovers the decoy secret bunker*

STOCK TICKER — *also tracks how much you love your children, as represented by how much they're getting in your will*

SOUNDPROOF SCREAMING ROOM — *for when possessing outrageous wealth in the face of vast human suffering and inequality has left you feeling "discordant"*

BONNIE AND CLYDE ADVENTURE SPACE — *an entire replica early 20th century street! You can dress up as Bonnie and Clyde and pretend to rob banks, and then pretend to make your getaway in real cars. It's so Americana!*

INFINITY POOL — *with "live" dolphins!*

ETERNITY LIBRARY

SECRET LAIR — *from which you can program satellites to shoot lasers at journalists who make fun of you*

MODULAR APARTMENTS — *for children from marriages with less-favored ex-spouses which can be jettisoned if one becomes a Bernie supporter or something*

GIRL'S BEDROOM — *Featuring unicorn farm with real living unicorns*

MASTER BEDROOM — *Bed made from real living peacocks!*

GOOSE FATTENING LAB — *for personalized foie gras*

EXTRA SWIMMING POOL — *inside a living room inside a swimming pool*

FULLY ARMED GUARD DRONES — *and drone garage*

ENDANGERED FAUNA PREPARATION ROOM — *your very own exotic animal abattoir*

TRANSPARENT BATHROOM — *bath of virgins' blood, 100% organic and certified by the Immortality Board of Greater San Francisco. See-through toilet and storage tank/altar, so you can worship your own shit*

PRIVATE LAUNCHPAD — *for the rocket that will take you to Mars when environmental catastrophe strikes. There's only room for family and your more favored servants.*

rich people, they're often one property among many, and as the fourth or fifth or sixth house in the family they're only occasionally visited. The business press reports that in elite urban neighborhoods, "the higher the price, the higher the concentration is likely to be of owners who spend only a few months, a few weeks or even just a few days each year in their apartments. This very costly form of desolation means that some of the city's most expensive residential buildings stand mostly dark, lonesome and empty on the inside." These "astoundingly wealthy people" survey markets globally, "looking for a safe place to put their money, as well as a trophy, and perhaps a second—or third or fourth or fifth—home while they're at it."

The naked waste isn't limited to big-city condos either. A California real-estate investor complains about huge properties on California's famous 17-mile drive, a gorgeous Pacific coast road originally developed by a railroad tycoon and today a course of multi-million-dollar homes. Regular Americans can drive it for just \$10.25! Cash.

But here too, the ruling-class struggles—"Some residents complain that the drive can get clogged with tourists. And with so many neighbors dropping in for just a few weeks out of the year, some streets are rather unoccupied." Yes, as California's major cities struggle with even small gestures toward housing their swelling homeless populations, these giant homes filled with bedrooms sit silently through the night.

Or consider the game day mansion, where wealthy families buy an extra house near their alma mater campus for sports season. Not for the kids attending as legacies, but for visiting specifically on game days during collegiate sports season. A real-estate agent comments, "we've seen people buying places that, except for game times, are vacant." Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent buying and upgrading these properties, further tightening the notoriously tight housing markets in college towns, so that rich people who failed to move beyond their college days can enjoy games more conveniently. And to think those crazy socialists want to redistribute scarce resources!

READING *MANSION* ALMOST INEVITABLY drives you to think about the housing crisis in US cities. There's a lot of discussion about this today, and almost reflexively the problem is attributed to burdensome government regulations. These make it harder to build real estate investments, we're told, keeping today's swelling urban populations from renting a place or buying a house. And layers of red tape are a reality—partly to protect the great investments already made in huge built environments like modern cities, and to help cope with the many externalities created by so many people living together in a somewhat civilized way.

However, many economic aspects of the situation are ab-

sent from most commentary on today's goofily high rents and home prices. When you read *Mansion*, on the other hand, you'll find out that "developers aim for the top end of the market" because "the promise of growth in the future is already priced in" for real estate markets, meaning land has a high price reflecting the great potential returns over the long run in major cities. "Once developers have paid top dollar for a parking lot or defunct warehouse, they often cannot build mid-market housing and still turn a profit."

This is confirmed by other *Journal* reporting: "Even though construction of multifamily rental properties is running at the highest level in decades, the overwhelming majority of new units—more than 80% in the nation's largest metropolitan areas—are luxury...Constructions costs are generally too high to justify building new complexes for low- and middle-income tenants...The difference in costs between installing granite countertops and stainless-steel appliances is so slight compared to buying land and installing elevators that economists say developing a luxury apartment and a midtier one comes out roughly the same." So the housing crisis comes from market processes, meaning the opulent pads in *Mansion* have real economic ramifications for the rest of us, who are more likely to look at properties in the *Cheap Studio Walk-Up by Garbage Incinerators* section.

Several articles in the section describe the common elite settlement pattern, like the one on "The Luxury Homes Wal-Mart Built," which describes the clustering of executives in rich enclaves around Little Rock, Arkansas. In this typical pattern, gated communities allow execs to be "in that bubble of your peers in the same socioeconomic group...They want that easy life."

BUT BY FAR MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE *MANSION* feature ever must be "Luxury in No Man's Land," on elite condos in poor neighborhoods. See, "many of today's high-end buyers are less resistant to the harsher realities of urban living," and can tolerate "less-gentrified" city sections. Folks, you would not believe the adversity these rich yuppies have to endure, from public drug consumption near your "upscale condo living," to vagrants pooping on the construction sites.

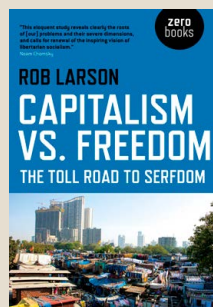
But heroic developers see a lucrative unexploited market rather than humans in need, and the section gives a thoughtful economic explanation of how gentrification works, historically and today. In the past, "run-down urban neighborhoods have been transformed into luxury destinations," but "such transformations, however, usually happen gradually," often set off by changes in city zoning and "first colonized by artists." But in these new ritzy developments in gritty districts, "the difference...is the organic first phase—the colonization by artists and other real estate pioneers—is either brief or nonexistent. Instead, developers are creating new 'up-and-coming' neigh-

"THE OPULENT PADS IN 'MANSION' HAVE REAL ECONOMIC RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE REST OF US..."

borhoods out of whole cloth," and "selling authenticity."

So jumpy young financiers describe the neighborhoods as "frightening" while junior attorneys carry pepper-spray and avoid certain streets, and call themselves "pioneering investors" for gracing the neighborhood with their presence while driving out locals as rents rise. The section also notes grudgingly that "as required by New York City, Hudson Yards will build 460 low-income units, distributed by city lottery."

Mansion is always pretty to look at, with its attractive color renderings of joyless Brutalist towers and drafty-ass McMansions (with sweeping views!). But for all its manicured style and tongue-in-cheek class cues, there's one thing the section can't make look good: The ocean of wasted resources poured into the purposeless layers of luxurious privilege that make up the betinseled homes of the world's ruling class. ✿



Rob Larson's new book,
*Capitalism vs. Freedom:
The Toll Road to Serfdom*,
is now available from
Zero Books.

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London

D O E S N ' T

Love Us

by Henry Wismayer

WHEN I THINK ABOUT THAT MORNING last summer, when London awoke to television images of a West Kensington tower-block engulfed in flames, one interview constantly bubbles in my mind. A young man told the BBC that the fire felt like a foreseeable moment: the culmination of years of being made to feel like the city wanted them gone.

“[They] put them shoddy plastic things on there that set alight, because they want more reasons to knock these blocks down,” he raged. “I’m not even so sure that was totally an accident.” He spoke as if some cabal of corrupt councillors and property developers had thrown a lit rag through the letter-box.

His conspiracy theory was a crazy notion, issued in the heat of fury and grief. However, as we began to learn about the truth of the fire last June—about the inferno that fed on cheap flammable cladding; about the confluence of municipal neglect, outsourcing, and value-engineering that permitted 71 people to die in their homes—it was easy to feel sympathy for the man’s sense of victimhood. For the outside world, the

Grenfell Tower fire was a horrifying tragedy, and a blight on the conscience of those who let it come to pass. But for many Londoners, it exposed something rotten in the marrow of London itself. For us, the fire was an instant and terrible symbol of a city in a tight spiral of dysfunction, where the ideas that once defined it are breaking down beyond repair.

In the fifteen months since disaster befell Grenfell Tower, the condition of the British capital has seldom been out of the national conversation. As is with most topics of commentary in deeply divided post-Brexit Britain, London tends to be presented either as a paradise or a hell-hole, depending on your point of view. To idealistic liberals, it remains the ur-city, a cradle of tolerant coexistence, the place where multiculturalism *works*. It is the rainbow city that would have given Trump hell had he dared to show his face here. To hysterical conservatives, by contrast, the city is “Londonistan,” governed by a Muslim mayor, benighted by terror-attacks, no-go zones, and spiralling crime. In April, when the press marked 50 years since the Tory firebrand Enoch Powell made his infamous “Rivers of Blood”

speech on the apocalyptic dangers of multiculturalism, there were many who pointed to this year's escalating murder-rate as evidence of Powell's prophecy come to pass.

The truth, of course, is somewhere in between. London is not a Powellian bloodbath. But it is no longer possible for a lifelong London resident like me to pretend that the city is a united, happy, and enviable place, either. The questions that surfaced in the aftermath of Grenfell haven't gone away: Why did this tragedy hold such terrible resonance for the people in this city? Why, for millions of us, did anger about the circumstances surrounding the fire transcend its immediate context, feeding a growing sense that London no longer functions for the good of the people who live here, due to forces far beyond its citizens' ken and control?

FOR DECADES, LONDON'S RARE ACHIEVEMENT was its mixed-income communities. These came into being thanks to a post-war history of town planning, which set out to ensure that no area of affluence could become an island, aloof from the hoi polloi. Some of the resulting mix was deliberately engineered, and some of it was accidental. In recent years, however, it has been plain to see that this covenant—which envisioned people of different means, from different walks of life, living in the same communities as neighbors—has started to crumble.

In my other life, I do occasional work as a landscape gardener, tending the lawns and flower-beds of south London's more affluent inner-suburbs. Last month, a neighbor wandered up to me to bitch about the homogenization of her neighborhood. Next door to where I was working, a newcomer to the street had commissioned an overhaul of their recently-acquired semi, and the excavation conveyors were churning all day long, puking up London clay to make space for a new basement. "When we moved here 40 years ago, I was a junior legal researcher, my husband was an assistant lecturer," the neighbour said, over the din of the machinery. "This road was all teachers and police officers. Public servants. Now it's just bankers, bankers, bankers. What the hell's happened?"

Ask any cynical long-term Londoner, and they'll likely offer up any number of answers to this question. The erosion of London's social-housing stock, which once inoculated the city against the creation of rich and poor ghettos, is certainly one. The increasingly globe-trotting tendencies of the super-rich is another. Disproportionate city incomes have furnished a portion of residents with the financial leverage to re-fashion an area overnight if a neighbourhood happens to become popular with a certain well-monied milieu. Meanwhile, the suburban dream, which only 20 years ago still lured people out of the inner-city, has long since expired.

Together, these processes have combined with London's chronic housing shortage to transform vast swathes of the inner-city over the past decade. To walk through certain parts

of London today is to enter an eerie dystopia of late capitalism run amok. All over town, from Battersea to Stratford, vast welters of towers are in the throes of construction, invariably encircled by billboards depicting attractive white people at rest and play. But long-time Londoners know from experience that these towers are not really homes to be lived in, but bricks-and-mortar commodities, investment opportunities that until recently were seen as safer than any government bond. If you ever find yourself walking through developments that have been recently finished and sold, you'll discover street-level plazas devoid of people, or even much evidence that many people are ever here. Meanwhile, in the golden postcodes of Westminster, Chelsea, and Kensington, the streets of old money have become a magnet for global capital of dubious origins. A government report published in May said the city was awash with "dirty money."

In her 2017 book *Big Capital*, Anna Minton described this scramble for prime London real-estate as the catalyst of a "domino effect," whose effects ripple outwards across the capital and beyond. "The super-prime market displaces established communities to new areas, driving up property and rental prices elsewhere," she writes. "And as current policies are geared to attracting foreign investment and building luxurious apartments rather than affordable homes, there is nothing to act as a counterweight."

The sense of apartness precipitated by these developments is in large part architectural. London used to be a low-slung city, but many of these luxury towers are vertiginous and imposing, dwarfing the besieged remnants of the older parts of town. But arguably more significant than this aesthetic discordance is the social upheaval it signifies. As more and more towers have gone up, socio-demographic lines that once felt blurred have become abrupt and partite, as the runaway cost of housing manoeuvres people into economic enclaves, and the poor are pushed outwards into peripheries and ghettos of disadvantage. Traditional places of commonality, where shoulders rubbed, have been replaced by pockets of consumption. High-streets that once displayed a multifarious range of shopfronts and establishments have evolved to reflect more stratified times: the poorer areas with their betting-shops and pawnsters, the wealthier ones lined with estate agents, restaurants, prim cafes. Our civic spaces and landmarks have been commodified, as cash-strapped councils look to make up budget shortfalls by monetizing their assets, or repurposing public libraries into private gyms. Boundaries, both physical and social, have started to rise across the city.

Now, the streets feel more fractious, as established communities dissipate. People in their 30s, unable to afford the cost of raising a family here, are starting to leave in droves. We who remain are left with a curious sense that we are an inconvenient vestige of a city that no longer exists, like obdurate stone buildings amidst gleaming pavilions of steel and glass.

Today's London remains successful in many ways: as a sum-

mer playground for the super-rich; as a giant laundromat for the global kleptocracy; as an iconographic background for tourist photos and the glossy pages of a Hong Kong realtor's brochure. But as a constellation of neighborhoods? No longer. Certainly not so much as before. Quickly—almost too quickly to track—London's covenant is coming undone.

It is all too easy to ignore the trauma these changes have wrought. The most obvious victims of rising housing costs and hollowed-out communities—the minimum-wage workers trundling in from distant outskirts to service the offices, the growing number of homeless in doorways, the social-housing tenants relocated into cramped temporary accommodation when the bulldozers move in—remain largely voiceless. Their abasement, like so much of that which afflicts the London underclass, is hidden away in the backwaters, in food-banks concealed behind council estates, or displaced out of town.

But to focus exclusively on these ostensive miseries is to miss a wider, more inchoate, but increasingly harder-to-ignore malaise—a sense of a city adrift, changing in ways its residents don't condone and feel powerless to prevent.

This more universal condition can be best described not as displacement, but dislocation. It's the feeling of being abruptly estranged, be it emotionally or physically, from your existing state or place. Cities are always transitory, prone to endless flux, but when a city changes this fast, and on such an inhuman scale, it is impossible to live here without feeling unmoored.

YET FOR ALL THAT THE ANGER THAT THIS transformation of London has surely engendered, protest remains in short supply. For the majority, it seems, vast, anonymous cities often feel as though they are governed by an irresistible determinism, as though their evolution is ordained by Newtonian law. This sense of fatalism does not tend to energize vigorous resistance. In addition, so much of our yearning for the London we've lost seems ostensibly counter-intuitive. The city I grew up in was hardly an urban paradise. Many of my most vivid memories are recalled with a maternal hand at my back, ushering me past scenes of a recessionary metropolis, rendered in grey. London then was a place where cardboard shanties still proliferated beneath the Southbank undercrofts, and grifters peddled ersatz perfume from splayed suitcases in the West End. The air was tubercular, the Thames flowed an effluent brown, and every road seemed strewn with litter, chewing-gum, and dog shit in varying stages of putrefaction. But still I yearn for that time before the city was cleaned-up and prettified, before the pigeon-feed sellers had been turfed from Trafalgar Square. The other day I saw a car with a bumper-sticker which read "Make Peckham Shit Again," and I couldn't help but smile. We have become a paradox: the progressive city nostalgic for the past.

Meanwhile, apologists for the turbo-charged gentrifica-

tion of inner-London exonerate its degradations with mealy-mouthed bromides about "market forces"—just another ineluctable reality of late capitalism. Like sweat-shop labour and high-street homogenisation, it's become a thing we grumble about on social media, but, for the most part, can't bring ourselves to protest over, because to protest would be like screaming at the tide. Our sense of disquiet at the changing cityscape fades imperceptibly into London's background ennui, lumped in with tube strikes and traffic jams and all the other unavoidable exigencies of urban life.

However, when you consider that millions of Londoners have profited from those "market forces," what is happening in London start to feel less like a cosmic inevitability and more like a deliberate and concerted human effort. As the tsunami of foreign property investment has increased demand for a stagnating supply, those of us who own homes have seen their value rocket. In recent decades, owning a London home has become the UK's easiest path to fast cash. This is London's guilty secret. So many of us who live here have suckled on this indemnity that we cannot admit its inherent madness, that it is a time-bomb that must explode, taking with it a million shattered dreams.

The 2016 Brexit vote has exposed the intractability of these hypocrisies, as the predominantly left-leaning city finds itself



“A city of blithe coexistence has become a city of sneers.”

in a Faustian pact, at once lamenting the financial sector’s malign influence but terrified at the implications of its potential evacuation. As Britain’s appeal to investors continues to be undermined by a lack of post-Brexit certainty, recent reports indicate that luxury properties are struggling to sell. Suddenly, an economy predicated on casino banking and rentier capitalism feels frail and dysfunctional, one fiscal paroxysm from catastrophe.

“It is strange, the bustle,” wrote Sarah Lyall in a *New York Times* article on post-Brexit London last April. “Construction crews are still putting up buildings, monuments to London’s future, as if nothing has changed. But you can hear faint footsteps, too. Banks, investment firms and other companies are making contingency plans to move elsewhere, if necessary. What then?”

A GAINST THE BACKDROP OF atomisation and uncertainty, it’s perhaps little wonder that these anxieties have begun to manifest in the city’s darkening mood. Londoners used to laugh about the inaccuracy of our irascible reputation—of London as a snarky town where dour commuters wouldn’t stop to help a lost tourist. This wasn’t true, not really. But now the streets feel angrier, more riven. A city of blithe coexistence has become a city of sneers.

Are we really surprised? Looking on, as your home gets taken away from you by forces you don’t really understand, and which you feel powerless to resist, there is a point at which dislocation transmutes into nihilism and rage. Suddenly, each new

skyscraper feels like an act of violence; each house renovation in the stomping-grounds of our youth becomes a desecration. Wealthy newcomers appear not as new neighbors, but as colonizers; hipster beards and vintage shops become hallmarks of an enemy within. Each appropriative bar or café, simulacrum of the melting pots they supplanted, becomes a reminder that London’s hallowed diversity, to many of the city’s residents, is merely ornamental—a desirable backdrop so long as it doesn’t press too close.

Often, when I feel this resentment brewing, I remind myself that I am getting older, and that chagrin over rapid change is perhaps as much a product of sentimentalism as it is legitimate dismay at social dysfunction. Until an inferno in a north London tower-block shakes you from the stupor, reminding you that the cost, for some, is all too real.

O N THE ROAD IN SOUTH LONDON WHERE I grew up, from the top of its steepening hill, you can see one of the broadest views of the British capital for miles around. On clear days, it presents a crenelated horizon of the whole city: from Wembley’s arch in the far north-west, past the stretched pyramid of The Shard and the jumbled towers of the Square Mile, to the more angular ones of Canary Wharf, looming over the estuarial Thames.

London looks extraordinary from up here, immortal in its way, a proving-ground for the western dream of unending growth. Every time I look at the view from the upstairs window of my mum’s hillside house, I spot some unforeseen concrete core, the spinal column of a future tower, inching into the sky horizon.

Yet this scene that once evoked wonder now elicits bitterness and foreboding about the future. If I pick up some binoculars, I can see Grenfell Tower far to the north: that burnt-out sepulchre where so many died in their homes, gasping for air. And when people ask me why their pyre became such an emblem of modern London, I just say: Look around. We live in a city that knows only the price of bricks, and has forgotten the people who give them value. This fucking city has betrayed us all. ✱

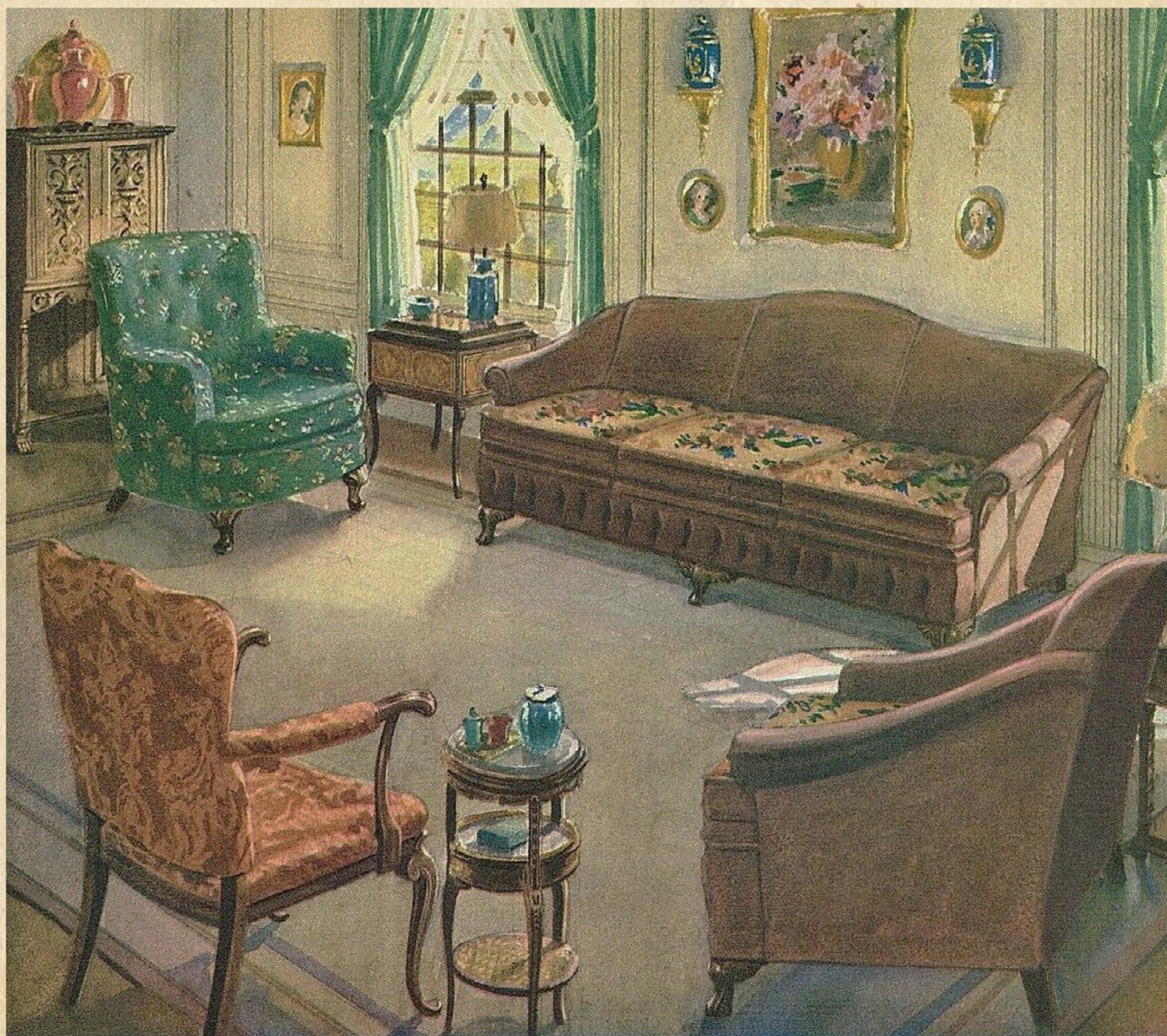
ANSWERS TO BERNIE QUIZ

Mostly As: Liberal progressive. It’s a start! You’re trying to create a fairer system, but you’re not addressing the inherent problems of money and power. Instead, you’re relying on appeals to an administration that only wants to churn you out like consumer products on a production line. If you really want to make your school a fairer place, try considering more revolutionary approaches.

Mostly Bs: Democratic socialist. You’re aware of the larger systems of exploitation that undergird your life, and you’re taking collective action to fight them. But are you going far enough? After all, you’re still keeping aspects of these systems intact. It may take careful experimentation to find the right mix of preservation vs. elimination of #toxic structures.

Mostly Cs: Anarcho-socialist. You know exactly what you want, and what you want is to #burnthatshitdown. You do you, but just make sure you’ve planned for all contingencies. The school administration might react badly when faced with too much change too fast, and you could risk losing everything you’ve built (that is, righteously destroyed).

"What's wrong with this picture?"



AN ORDINARY SUBURBAN HOME. Tea on the stove, furniture in the parlor. The children away at school, mom and mom with a few hours left at work. Family life, the way it ought to be lived. Nothing could possibly be amiss here. Or could it? Perhaps it could. For, beneath the appearance of quiet normalcy, something terrible has happened in this home. Something not so very

suburban, not so very wholesome. To contemplate it is enough to shiver your timbers and chill your vertebrae. "What's wrong?" you ask. Well, look at the picture. Isn't it obvious? Surely it's immediately apparent that this is no way to live. Surely you cannot think this is an acceptable state of affairs. Surely it must be rectified. If it is not too late already...

ANSWER
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DYSTOPIA

IN FICTION AND IN FACT

BY NATHAN J ROBINSON

IN *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*, IT'S EASY TO TELL that things in Oceania are somewhat amiss. The first clue should be the numerous signs that say "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU." The ubiquitous grime, rubble, ugliness, and destitution also hint that we may not be in a worker's utopia. The citizens dress identically, they watch videos of refugees being blown to smithereens, they celebrate "Hate Week." The beer is bad, nothing works properly, and government propaganda blares at all hours. The clocks strike thirteen.

There is plenty, then, to immediately disturb the casual visitor. In the real world, it isn't always like that.

In *They Thought They Were Free: The Germans 1933-1945*, originally published in 1955, Milton Mayer reveals something startling about life in Nazi Germany: to many ordinary citizens, it didn't feel like they were under a totalitarian dictatorship. As the title says, they thought they were free. In fact, years after the war, nearly all of the ten Germans Mayer talks to still harbor nostalgic feelings about Hitler. They may not have cared for the war, but they gave Hitler credit for solving unemployment and making Germany great again. Certainly, they hadn't found the society oppressive. If you didn't cause trouble—and why would you?—you could live a pleasant, comfortable life. That is, presuming you were racially pure, heterosexual, and never accidentally said or did anything that could arouse suspicion.

Mayer writes that even for those who did become horrified by what their country turned into, it could be difficult to notice the transformation while it was occurring. The death camps were not introduced the moment the Nazis achieved power. They were the culmination of a process, the endpoint of which most people did not foresee at the start:

In between come all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next. Step C is not so much worse than Step B, and, if you did not make a stand at Step B, why should you at Step C? And so on to Step D. And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. The burden of self-deception has grown too heavy, and some minor incident, in my case my little boy, hardly more than a baby, saying 'Jewish swine,' collapses it all at once, and you see that everything, everything, has changed and changed completely under your nose. The world you live in—your nation, your people—is not the world you were born in at all. The forms are all there, all untouched, all reassuring, the houses, the shops, the jobs, the mealtimes, the visits, the concerts, the cinema, the holidays. But the spirit, which you never noticed because you made the lifelong mistake of identifying it with the forms, is changed.

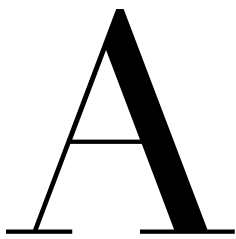
Of course, for those who were the Third Reich's victims, it was easy enough to see the country's descent into the abyss. There was, nevertheless, an illusion of normalcy. The forms didn't change. Children still played. Street sweepers swept streets, lamplighters lit lamps. There were more swastikas, yes, but everything wasn't one big swastika. At least until the war, many people's daily thoughts were still mostly consumed with non-political things: jobs, relationships, weather, survival. The skies did not suddenly turn grey, the plant life did not all instantly wither and die. Evil was banal. It got up in the morning and put on its shoes, it dragged itself home at night and had sex with its wife. The trains, it is said, were unusually punctual.

The world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is quite different. It is a nonstop nightmare for nearly all of its residents, with the possible exception of Big Brother himself. It does not have a single

feature to recommend it. It is not even clean, which one would at least expect of a machinelike society. It is all stick and no carrot, held together entirely through fear.

As more than one critic has noted, this makes George Orwell's novel somewhat limited as an exploration of how authoritarianism works. The only society that has ever come close to resembling the Orwell vision is Khmer Rouge era Cambodia. There, the entire population was indeed put in uniform and worked to death, while party slogans blared in their ears. The party called itself the "Angkar," or The Organization, which was perfectly Orwellian. Its slogans made no secret of its general approach, e.g. "to destroy you is no loss, to preserve you is no gain," or "he who protests is an enemy; he who opposes is a corpse." But the Khmer Rouge regime stands out even in the annals of 20th century Communism for its extraordinary level of senseless terror, and it lasted for about three years.

Stalin's USSR, on the other hand, was more complicated. All of the features Orwell described were indeed present: arrests in the night, mass purges, ubiquitous surveillance, denunciation of neighbor by neighbor, blatant revision of history, a constant barrage of propaganda. But even *Stalinism* was more subtle in its methods than Oceania's ruling Party. Life in the Soviet Union was indeed unenviable, but there were many improvements over life under the Tsar. As the country became industrialized, infant mortality decreased and per-capita GDP consistently increased. The standard of living remained lower than in the United States, though that was in part because at the time of the Russian Revolution, the country was already far behind the United States. There were material gains under communism. Not for everyone, of course. But the real gains helped justify the system, and make many true believers, even if the system was ultimately actually stifling the country's development and well-being. To see communist rule as maintained *purely* by intimidation is to underappreciate the many sources of its appeal.



RIGHT, SO ORWELL WAS NOT TALKING about how totalitarianism actually operated in 1948. Instead, he was imagining 1984, the logical *extension* of existing tendencies. The book was a warning: if prevailing trends continue, here is where we will end up.

That is not where we ended up, however. And it's not just because "capitalism beat communism." It's also because "the constant terrorization of everyone" is not an efficient way to maintain power. Stalin himself had to mellow in his later years, since it turned out that if you shoot anyone you suspect of treachery, and have a loose enough standard for what constitutes treachery, pretty soon all the intelligent and useful people end up dead. Kim Jong Un has discovered the same thing, apparently. In *North Korea Confidential*, Daniel Tudor and James Pearson document the pockets of freedom that exist under dictatorial rule. People party, people watch movies, people have hobbies. The degree to which this freedom exists depends on one's place in the hierarchy. But this most Orwellian of contemporary societies has still not reached Orwell's vision of total control, in which "nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull."

Parts of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in fact seem completely mistaken. Protagonist Winston Smith reads from a banned book called *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, which argues that the Party has found it necessary to keep everyone artificially poor through endless war since improved standards of living would risk causing instability:

But it was also clear that an all-round increase in wealth threatened the destruction—indeed, in some sense was the destruction—of a hierarchical society. In a world in which everyone worked short hours, had enough to eat, lived in a house with a bathroom and a refrigerator, and possessed a motor-car or even an aeroplane, the most obvious and perhaps the most important form of inequality would already have disappeared. If it once became general, wealth would confer no distinction. It was possible, no doubt, to imagine a society in which wealth, in the sense of personal possessions and luxuries, should be evenly distributed, while power remained in the hands of a small privileged caste. But in practice such a society could not long remain stable. For if leisure and security were enjoyed by all alike, the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves; and when once they had done this, they would sooner or later realize that the privileged minority had no function, and they would sweep it away. In the long run, a hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance.

BUT THERE CAN BE AN "ALL-ROUND INCREASE IN wealth" without wealth being "evenly distributed." In fact, that is exactly what has happened since the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Living standards have, on the whole, increased, but they have increased much more for the extremely wealthy, and the gap between rich and poor is much larger. Increased standards of living do not necessarily threaten a hierarchical society. In fact, they can serve to perpetuate it, because people will see their own lives improving slightly and not realize how much more their lives *could* be improved if gains were distributed more justly.

Those who have faulted *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* analysis often single this out as his key mistake: you don't maintain power by depriving people of all pleasure, but by keeping them content so they don't ask questions. Cultural critic Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, contrasted Orwell's dystopia with the one depicted by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*. There, pleasure-drugs keep the population lost in ignorant bliss, reducing the need for overt repression. Postman concluded that the modern world resembled the one Huxley worried about rather than the one Orwell worried about:

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Hux-

IT WAS A BITTER AND dismal morning sometime in Junetember, and Joshua #46758 was being nibbled by rats. He tried to pull the slate-grey horsehair blanket down to protect what was left of his feet (his toes had long since been removed by the Authority, and redistributed elsewhere). But the state-issued bedclothes were too small to cover more than a small part of his soft yet emaciated body, and if he successfully shielded his lower half, the rats would make for his upper body. It was hopeless. He hadn't slept at all. "RATS ARE LOVE," a voice said.

Joshua #46758 rose from his sagging bed and headed for the washbasin of his squalid single-room flat on an upper floor of Human Storage Tower 956. Pulling on his regulation beige dungarees, he tried and failed to tune out the mechanical voice in his ear: "YOU ARE

A SLAVE. SLAVERY IS BAD. BUT BAD THINGS ARE GOOD." To keep citizens from developing their internal monologues, the Authority required the wearing of earpieces at all times, which broadcast the Implausible Dogmas You Must Nevertheless Believe on a never-ending loop. When his earpiece was fitted, Joshua #46758 had expected he would get used to it after a while.

He did not get used to it. It continued to be extremely annoying.

Joshua #46758 stepped out of the Human Storage Tower into the Junetember chill. These days, Junetember was the only month. All of time was one long Junetember that never ended and, as far as official records were concerned, had never begun.

"Brrr," muttered Joshua #46758. He was imme-

YOU ARE BEING WATCHED BY A LARGE EYEBALL IN THE SKY

An Excerpt from a Classic

James Mersey's The Very Bad Dictatorship is now justly regarded as one of the most insightful fictional explorations of the workings of dictatorship. Mersey is credited with coining several memorable phrases that we still use today, such as "thought zapper" and "time erasure." We present here an excerpt from Mersey's timeless satire, no less relevant today than when it was first published.

diately pierced by a shock. The Device had picked up his comment. "Brrr" was not one of the Permitted Mutterings, and the Device was authorized to deliver a correctional jolt of electricity to those who used illicit language. Those in the Second-Lowest Class, like Joshua #46758, could only express themselves using five words: "Yes," "No," "Oh," "Howdy," and "Blue." "Blue" was a catch-all word, used for any situation that could not be described using the other four.

Joshua #46758 worked as a Deputy Bowdlerizer at the Department Of Lies. The Authority was divided into six departments. In addition to Lies, there were the Department of Exploitation, the Department of "Education," the Department of Cruelty, the Department of Putting Rats on People's Faces, and the Department of Homeland Security. For some time, the Authority had discussed consolidating the latter three into one Super-department. But the proposal contradicted Autocratic Command Directive Number Fifty, which provided that "nothing must ever be super anymore."

Joshua #46758 piled into a dingy subway car alongside other members of the Second-Lowest Class. In the compartment he was nearly overpowered by the stench of last night's Nutritional Slurry on the breath of his fellow workers. The Slurry was made of insects, which were the only remaining life on earth besides humans. The Authority chose particularly foul-tasting insects, because, as it said on all the slurry-tins: "We Hate You."

Arriving at Work Portal Number Nine, Joshua #46758 stepped in a patch of grime and soiled his work boot. "Bugger," he muttered. "I mean, 'blue.'" He managed to correct himself before the Device had a chance to give him a zap.

Above the portal doorway was a gigantic poster of the Autocrat. The Autocrat had a bushy moustache and a sinister expression. Beneath the Autocrat was the caption: I AM THE RULER. I AM WATCHING YOU AT ALL TIMES. YES, EVEN THEN. In his flat, Joshua #46758 kept three bobbleheads of the Autocrat on the mantelpiece. Anything less than two would have been grounds for Extinguishment,

and Joshua #46758 had thought he ought to get three to be safe. The bobbleheads each contained a camera, which watched people pee and then broadcast the footage on television. "PRIVACY IS SLAVERY," the earpiece had told him when he wondered why this was necessary. "I thought slavery was good," Joshua #46758 had muttered in response. ZAP. "I mean, 'Oh.'"

Arriving at his Toil Station, Joshua #46758 encountered several other Joshuas, #64300 and #23553. "Howdy," they said. "Howdy," replied Joshua #46758. They looked like they had more to say, but conversations were illegal. After an uncomfortable silence, the other Joshuas departed. Inadvertently, Joshua #46758 wondered to himself whether it had truly been necessary for the Authority to rename everyone Joshua. "BAD IDEAS ARE

GOOD," the earpiece shouted. "DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

"Yes," replied Joshua #46758. He was instantly arrested. Understanding anything was a crime.

At the Division of Torture, which was housed under the Department of Homeland Security, Joshua #46758 was subjected to interrogation. A drone brought him a cup of insect-tea while he sat in the chamber and waited for the arrival of an interrogation robot. The tea was foul. The robot arrived.

"Good morning," said the Intertron.

"Howdy," replied Joshua #46758.

"Name?"

"Joshua #46758." ZAP. "I mean, blue."

"Occupation?"

"Yes."

"Sex?"

"No." Sex was illegal.

"Do you love the Autocrat?"

"Yes."

The answer evidently did not satisfy the Intertron.

"It seems you have not complied with all of the Autocratic Directives," said the robot.

Joshua #46758 wanted to disagree, but realized that both "Yes" and "No" sounded like agreement. He began to feel as if the system was not very fair. "YES IS NO," said the earpiece. "Shut up," snapped Joshua #46758 out loud. ZAP.

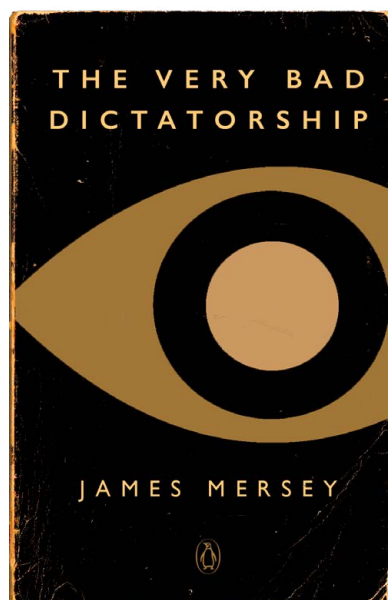
"What was that?" barked the Intertron.

"Blue."

"Thought so."

The Intertron looked through its dossier. Joshua #46758 had been a model Mid-Tier Functionary for the Authority, and there was no evidence that he had consciously tried to undermine the Autocracy or question the Autocrat. Nevertheless, a few years in a labor camp couldn't do any harm. Possibly with some rats on the face.

As his sentence was read, Joshua #46758 did not flinch. Instead, he found himself smiling. He had served his Autocrat faithfully. It would still always be Junetember. ✨



ley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny “failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions”. In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

Or, as *Watchmen* creator Alan Moore memorably put it: “Orwell was almost exactly wrong in a strange way. He thought the world would end with Big Brother watching us, but it ended with us watching *Big Brother*.” People are, according to this argument, kept in line through stupefaction. Governments do not rewrite history; the books are there for anyone to read, if they are curious. But they don’t teach it, and nobody bothers to find it out, and we reach the same level of ignorance without any need for outright censorship. Emmanuel Goldstein, the Trotsky-like figure deployed as the national enemy and made the subject of the Two Minutes Hate, would not need to be put on television and shouted at. Instead, he would simply be kept off television, and would languish in obscurity. *The New York Times* would simply use its column space to profile influential neo-Nazis instead.

Yet there is a reason *Nineteen Eighty-Four* endures, and it’s easy to notice contemporary parallels. I was always reminded of the Two Minutes Hate whenever I saw how the media discussed Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein. Undoubtedly, these men were horrible. But in the years after 9/11, hating them became a national pastime, and kept Americans from critically examining their own country’s behavior in Iraq and Afghanistan. ISIS and MS-13 serve a similar function now. Likewise, Orwell’s idea of permanent war (“We’ve always been at war with Eastasia”) usefully shows why the never-ending “war on terror” is such a dangerous absurdity. Orwell bequeathed a powerful gift to generations of civil libertarians by giving them something to point to as a demonstration of where certain lines of thinking can lead.

It’s a shame, then, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had to be such a ridiculously over-the-top cartoon. In some ways, the *reductio ad absurdum* is memorably vivid, and Orwell’s concepts (double-speak, thought crime) have lasted for good reason. But real-world dystopias generally do not have flashing signs on the front gate saying “Welcome To The Dystopia,” and I wish Orwell had succeeded in conveying the way that surveillance, torture, inequality, and unaccountable government can come to be ubiquitous without anybody really noticing. Why would they put a notice up that says “Big Brother Is Watching You”? It should say “Big Brother Is Watching Out For You,” or “This Camera Operates For Your Protection. If You See Something, Say Something.” Don’t say “Ignorance is Strength,” say “Strength is Knowledge.” Don’t say “Freedom is Slavery,” say “You Are Free.” The entire way propaganda operates in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is unsophisticated and unlikely to succeed for long. You can’t actually refashion language to get rid of all the rebellious verbs. Instead, just don’t teach people anything. There is no need for the kind of heavy-handed methods used by the Party. Why discourage sex if you don’t want the proles making trouble? Instead, have them compete to see who is the most sexually attractive, and tell them they’re *losers* if nobody wants to fuck them. Honestly, Big Brother could have

fashioned a far more effective repression apparatus if he’d bothered to hire a marketing agency.

The best imaginary dystopias actually do present a world that could conceivably come true, and it’s part of why they’re so creepy. Boots Riley’s film *Sorry to Bother You* envisages a frighteningly plausible Silicon Valley company that offers people lifelong comfort in exchange for permanent indenture. It’s easy to see how Riley’s “WorryFree” corporation could come into existence: people are struggling to make rent and pay for their necessities, so they sign their over their lives in order to become, well, worry-free. When I talked to friends about WorryFree, some even seriously said that they’d consider such an offer. In fact, the real surprise is that no forward-thinking entrepreneur has yet introduced such a program. It seems like a matter of time until Peter Thiel funds an indentured servitude startup.

TO THE LEFT, *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR* IS ALSO frustrating because of how it has been interpreted and used over the years. The ideology of “English Socialism” that Orwell depicts is so unpleasant and inhuman that it seems to make out a strong case against any kind of socialism, English or otherwise. Anyone who knows Orwell beyond the two famous novels knows that he was a thoroughly committed socialist, though a firm opponent of its authoritarian variants. He left no doubt about where he stood: “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it.” For Orwell, equality was desirable, but it had to be meaningful equality, not simply a lie told by the state in order to justify its incompetence and cruelty. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has nothing to say about “socialism,” and is instead an indictment of hierarchy, repression, and censorship.

Yet even though nothing in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* indicts socialism itself, it is exasperating for the left in another way. In its heavy-handedness, it doesn’t actually attune readers to the real way that authority operates. It sees the future as “a boot stamping on a human face forever.” But it fails to point out that the boot doesn’t stamp on *everybody’s* face. It singles out particular disfavored populations, while many people can remain blissfully unaware that there even *are* any boots stamping on any faces.

The Germans who thought they were free were willfully oblivious to the true nature of their regime. Their lives were comfortable, and so they chose not to see its victims. And because the dystopian aspects of society usually lie slightly beneath its surface, or are off in faraway camps or gulags, most people don’t need to notice them if they don’t want to—and why would they want to? In the Orwellian society, everybody was unhappy but they were forced to simply put up with it. That kind of society does not seem destined to last long. The truly scary one is the one in which the state still murders, indefinitely details, and surveils people, but in which only the victims feel the effects. In that society, the majority will never rouse itself to prevent atrocities from occurring, because it won’t even seem like there *are* any atrocities occurring. And in that society, the signs won’t read “Big Brother Is Watching” or “Freedom is Slavery.” They will read: Everything is Fine. Life Is Good. Have A Coke. Keep Calm and Carry On. Our Borders Are Secure. Enjoy Your Freedom. ♣

try our new

PROSECUTORIAL

"Mad Lib"

With over 100 black people murdered by the police in 2018 alone, it can be difficult for you—a soulless district attorney—to come up with brand-new reasons to avoid pressing charges against the officers responsible. Nobody appreciates how tough your job really is. Nobody appreciates how much you've sacrificed for your ambition. After all, you could have been virtuous: you could have become a public defender or worked for a legal aid society. But, since you want to run for political office someday, it's important for you to appear tough on crime—well, not actual crimes, like the ones committed by police officers against civilians, but theoretical crimes, like what if the ice cream cone wielded by the bipolar seventeen-year-old was actually a gun. Turning victims into villains and vice versa is hard work, and that's why Current Affairs is supplying you with a helpful template for your next cowardly, doublespeak-ridden press conference. Give it a shot. The only things you have to lose are your last remaining shreds of conscience, humanity, and self-respect.

Good afternoon,

Thank you all for coming today. I would like to make **(an insincere statement of warmth and condolence)** to the family of **(victim's name)**. And I would also like to ask **(phrase for activists that makes them sound like outside agitators)** to **(request for civility coupled with a veiled threat.)**

After an investigation that took **(an exaggerated length of time and amount of effort)**, the Office of the District Attorney has concluded the following facts: Officer **(murderer's name)** was dispatched in response to a call made by **(a polite euphemism for a nosy neighborhood racist)** describing a suspect that looked like **(racial stereotype)** and was wearing **(an unremarkable piece of clothing)**. When Officer **(murderer's name)**, arrived on the scene, he discovered that **(victim's name)** matched the caller's description and that **(victim's name)** was behaving in a manner that Officer **(murderer's name)** described as **(prejudicial and entirely subjective adjective)**. When Officer **(murderer's name)** asked **(victim's name)** to stop **(engaging in perfectly legal activity)**, **(victim's name)** refused to comply, asking Officer **(murderer's name)** to **(behave in a legal and appropriate manner)**. At this point, Officer **(murderer's name)** felt **(emotion inappropriate for the situation)**.

(Victim's name) then suddenly made **(an unlikely violent movement)** toward Officer **(murderer's name)**. Experiencing a **(non-credible amount)** of fear, Officer **(murderer's name)** **(strained and clumsy passive-voice verb formation that's barely grammatical and implies an almost magical-realist event where objects have agency and people do not)**. But **(victim's name)**, despite having received **(number)** bullets in **(non-frontal body part)**, suddenly **(completed impossible physical maneuver that could only take place on a non-Euclidean plane of reality)**. In response, Officer **(murderer's name)** felt he had no choice but to **(action that manages to sound both inevitable and accidental, like something out of a Greek tragedy)**.

After **(shockingly large number of)** minutes, Officer **(murderer's name)** called an ambulance. He did not attempt resuscitation because he was worried **(victim's name)** might actually be a **(mythological monster)**. After **(another shockingly large number of)** minutes, **(victim's name)** was pronounced dead at the scene.

While are aware that **(condescending term for activists)** have drawn attention to **(piece of evidence)**, **(piece of evidence)**, and **(piece of evidence)**, we would like to remind everyone that one eyewitness later changed their statement, claiming **(a minor and completely understandable alteration)**. In light of these facts and the **(friendly euphemism for lies)** made by Officer **(murderer's name)**, we have determined there is insufficient evidence to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that this **(euphemism for the violent execution of a human being without trial)** violated the Fourth and Eighth Amendments.

To **(victim's name)**'s family, I would like to make **(a seemingly compassionate statement)**. I want you to understand that **(insincere avowal of effort and regret)**. At the District Attorney's office, we vow **(vague promise of reform and technocratic solutions that will make a nice sound-bite for the political career you hope to someday have despite the subtle dread that gnaws at your insides, telling you that you might just have ended up on the wrong side of history and humanity.)**



the DISAPPEARANCE

by Lyta Gold

TOM NOVA HAS STALKERS.

Thirty-eight stalkers, to be exact. Twenty-five he knows about, thirteen he doesn't. The thirteen unknowns all want to murder him. Half the twenty-five do too, but only after long elaborate years where he saves them from an out-of-control car or something and they marry in a splash of white oleander on glossy magazine pages but then he betrays them with some air-thin model or pretty prop boy, and well, your honor, what did he expect, he drove me to it and I had no choice but to bash that beautiful head in poolside and watch him startle, watch him stumble and fall backward into the blue depths, and even in death he fell beautifully, Oscar-worthily, and the star of his blood darkened the water into shades only the moodiest cinematographer could create.

Tom Nova plays the amiable best friend in the *Vacation Nation* series, the unlikeable boyfriend in *Exit Serendipity*, and

the fire-breathing villain in *Dragonbourne 2: Skylark Rising*. He earns his first stalkers after *Exit Serendipity*. They're mostly arthouse quasi-intellectuals, with full Criterion Collections displayed in tower shelving the exact height of their tiny apartments. They wish somebody cared about them enough to hate them the way Tom hates the protagonist of *Exit Serendipity*. The movie won an Audience Award at Sundance for being so much about obsession and contempt and the impossibility of genuine affection. These are very artistic subjects, and appropriately painful to witness. Not many people actually enjoy the experience of watching *Exit Serendipity*.

Dragonbourne 2 is an August joke. Tom's villain falls hissing and spitting into the ether of internet memes. The arthouse lovers spurn him, despising the inauthenticity of taking bad work instead of no work at all, which is totally what they'd do, absolutely, it's just that they've never been in that kind of



situation. Life is tremendously unfair, when the creatively-inclined but artistically unproductive have no opportunity to make hard choices, when they can never suffer enough to be interesting.

Tom Nova fires his agent. He struggles to find another. Soon he slips into obscurity, which is a condition similar to death, but worse. A person who is invisible to everyone, but nonetheless exists—that's a nightmare, that's a ghost. Most of Tom Nova's acquaintances from his former life stop talking to him, in hopes he'll go away. It's very painful for them, talking to a ghost, someone who reminds them of what could have been, but wasn't: and who *they* could have been, but aren't yet, and might never be. They're sure Tom understands, he's *such* a sweet guy. Everyone says so—or they did, before they stopped talking to him because it hurt too much, his fear of failure and his frustration, bleeding all over the place like an unstaunched wound. Maybe when he's more likeable, less selfish, they'll come back. Maybe. Before long, Tom even stops receiving unsolicited emails with fawning desperate subject lines and screenplays attached.

Tom Nova moves to a small apartment with a roommate in Westlake. The film year moves on without him. It repeats, and repeats, and repeats.

Then the teaser posters drop for *Perseus: Storm and Steel*. There he is, Tom Nova, rising a hundred feet high on billboards in every major city, naked and shining to the newly muscular waist except for artful hints of blood and dust and leather.

The movie is satisfying. The box office returns are legendary.

That's when the horde descends. That's when the teenage girl smuggles herself into Tom Nova's hotel bed, hurt kitten eyes peeping above the sheet. Tom decides to hire protection. He chooses Billy, his childhood best friend who was a Marine until he got blown up too many times and they sent him home. Billy's brain has splintered in interesting sections—there's a confused Billy and a hilarious Billy and a needlessly confrontational Billy. A Billy who can destroy you in poker and a Billy who cries during children's cartoons if the characters' outlines are drawn too raggedy. But most of the time, Billy's reliable. He has a service dog, Mona, a wolfish mix with an evil bark. She's a friendly lapping lump, really, but her face and her voice scare the fans who get too close, the giggling selfie-seekers and the professional friends-of and the quiet sidling type with the cool glazed look that says *don't disappoint me Tom, I can't stand it if you disappoint me*.

Then Tom Nova becomes Jack Thorne in *Superjack: Death's End*. It's the fourth reboot of Jack Thorne but most critics agree that Tom Nova is the absolute best, a fiery revelation, purely elec-

tric as the former CIA agent endowed with superpowers in an unlikely experiment. Even before the movie opens, grossing 200 million in a single weekend (domestic), Tom's social media replies are a torrent of love and abuse. Both his interns quit under the deluge. Tom can't take over—he never looks at his accounts. He doesn't have access. The moment his current manager hired interns, Tom traded in his smartphone for an ancient flip model, soft yellow numbers and a greenish-black screen, softly luminous as treasure found under the sea.

The phone's so old it doesn't have GPS, which makes it harder for stalkers to find him.

But not hard enough.

THEY GRAB HIM OFF THE STREET. HIS SMOOTHIE splatters in a wild arc. Green smoothie, silver sun, black van. Windowless and shoved inside, scraping his shins. They've caught Tom in khaki shorts and a slim black t-shirt that cost more than his parent's monthly mortgage. Sunglasses that cost more than their car. Sunglasses on the floor and a black boot, trying to smash the sunglasses but the springy frame resists—it's a special fiberglass alloy, Tom Nova is clumsy. All the magazines report this fact, it's so charming and relatable. The sunglasses won't break. The kidnapper kicks the shades into a corner of the suddenly accelerating van.

"Calm down. Tom—Tom—TOM!"

They wrap him up in scratchy blankets. Tom struggles, uselessly, thinking exactly that: *Tom struggles, uselessly*.

"Tom! Tom! We need you to calm down. Calm down! We're from Strabo Solutions. We've identified a stalker on your trail. In the OriJuice shop, right behind you. If we hadn't grabbed you he would've shot you in the back."

"Oh," says Tom. He stops struggling, uselessly.

"The stalker's name is Greg Horkins. He carries an unregistered .22 and a homemade silencer—don't ask us how we know. We know." The woman—it's a woman, talking. Short and broad all over, dressed up in military-style green pajamas, which contrast nicely with the fall of red hair on the right side of her face. The left side is shaved, asymmetrically. It suits her. "We're good at finding things out. We're here to help you."

"Where's Billy? And Mona?"

"Your army buddy and the dog? They're still in the fucking OriJuice shop. They should've been outside securing the perimeter. This Horkins guy—you wouldn't know, but Horkins is notorious. He once mailed Celenia Johnson a *finger*."

"Whose finger?"

"Does it fucking matter? A finger, Tom! Could've been *your* finger."

Tom's fingers, along with the rest of his body, have been insured for several million dollars. His manager insisted on it before the filming of *Superjack*. Tom is pretty sure his fingers are worth about 1.6 million apiece, slightly less for the pinky, but he didn't read the contract.

He looks from the red-haired woman to the man. "Why did



you step on my glasses?"

The man grunts. "Coulda been bugged."

"Really?"

"Well...maybe," Red cuts in. "You see—"

"Standard procedure," the big man says. "Keep you safe."

"Lonnie's very committed to his work. It's hard for him to shut it off. You know what that's like, don't you, Tom?" The woman smiles. "You're the real thing. Not just the face, but the talent. You can be anybody you want."

Tom Nova doesn't know how to respond, so he dials up the passionate yet disaffected growl he developed for *Exit Serendipity*. "No," he says as though it means something. "I could never be *you*."

A short laugh. "Such a charmer." Sarcastic, but her eyes get warm and sparkly, like champagne in sunlight. Charmed, in spite of herself. That's all Tom does, and he knows it—he draws people into emotions they never would have had, realms they never would have visited, all in spite of themselves. Sometimes this makes them very, very angry. It used to make him angry, and frustrated, and unlovable, especially when he failed.

When Tom slipped into obscurity so did his talent. His approach became choppy, forced, over-thought. With every line he was saying *please, somebody, get me the fuck out of here*. But then he started studying with Sarah Mo, the Lifethought® coach. With Sarah's help, he unlearned his rage. He unlearned his despair too, and doubt, and resentment, and competitiveness, and everything he thought he knew. He became an empty cave where the sea breathed in and out. Sarah Mo—who with the rise of Lifethought® has become quite famous herself—claims she's never had a better student. No one else has ever possessed a better talent for unbeing, dissolving, reconstituting into a distinct persona only when necessary, only as a response to outside needs, affections, the pressures of the moment, the expectations of the camera flash.

SLAM.

The sound of metal slamming into metal is actually a slam, and a crunch, and a deep vibrating percussion in the bones. Tom falls into Red. Red falls into Lonnie. Lonnie falls on the floor. There's a moment of tumbling dark confusion. The van tilts drunkenly—rights itself—pitches hard in the other direction—rights itself again and swerves into open space. Skidding badly in a heart-thumping bloody-iron in the mouth sort of way, then—down *bang bang* over a bumpy embankment—stumbling, lurching—lurching again and rolling, quivering, to a stop.

Light.

Sudden flooding sunlight. Tom Nova can't see. He reaches for the sunglasses which aren't in his pocket. Blankets tangle up his legs. Elsewhere, Red and Lonnie are shouting at their driver—something about guns—but a hand's reaching through the open door. A hand, and then a face. Silhouetted against the light.

Tom blinks and the face resolves into features. Blunt, fierce-looking, weathered and rocky. The mouth opens. It's going to say something like: "Come with me if you want to live," or at least a generic: "Let's roll."

The mouth shuts. The hand drags Tom out of the van while Red

and Lonnie are still scrambling and screaming for their guns.

Another car. A Lexus with a throaty thrumming engine which means some extra horsepower's been added, or something like that, Tom doesn't really know. He doesn't know much about cars, though he owns six of them. He knows the AC in the Lexus is on with full violence and it feels good on his aching face.

"Who—"

"Shut up."

Tom Nova shuts up.

"Do you have any idea," the man says, "how much danger you were in?"

"Uh—no? They said they were protecting me from a stalker. Strabo Solutions?"

"Bullshit." The man has an ash-and-coals sort of voice. "They work for Korbarov. You know him? Russian billionaire?"

"I don't—"

"Makes his own movies? Kidnapped the Astrakovs last year? Actress and her screenwriter husband, yeah? Then Anya Astrakov wouldn't do her nude scene and he helicoptered her off to Siberia. Left her out there in the tundra. Naked."

"That—didn't happen."

"Is that right? It didn't happen, because you don't think it happened? Guess nobody got the approval of Tom fucking Nova, arbiter of all fucking reality."

"Wait—sorry." Tom Nova fumbles around in his memory. "Did you say *Anya* Astrakov? Yeah. Sorry. I did hear about that."

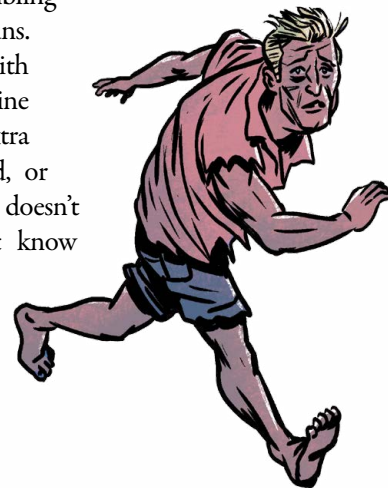
He didn't remember hearing about it at all. But it's much easier to agree than to admit, and at this point in his life Tom Nova can pretty much convince himself of anything. In the fog of affability that makes up his consciousness he sees the photo of Anya Astrakov, all tense blonde Russian haughtiness, with icy eyes and sultry lips. Her husband is less attractive, curly-headed, nervous—unless he's jowly, balding, likeable? *A dry man, with a sudden laugh that could shatter glass*, said the article Tom Nova didn't read, *at least until the kidnapping*. The article that must have existed would have said *something* like that, anyway.

"It's so horrible, what happened to the Astrakovs. But—"

"Would've happened to you next. Korbarov's got ambitions. He likes your movies. And he wants a menagerie to perform for him on demand."

"But that was *Russia*. That was Russians kidnapping Russians. It doesn't mean—"

"What?" the man roars. He twists to face Tom, driving with one hand and not looking at the road as he swerves around the traffic on La Cienega, every car bleating at him in outrage. "You think



“No one else has ever possessed a better talent for unbeing, dissolving, reconstituting into a distinct persona only when necessary...”

because you're *American*, because you're rich, you're white, and you live in L.A. that nothing bad can happen, that you're *safe*?”

“Well,” Tom says. “I mean, isn't that the point?”

The man mutters under his breath. He turns back to the road.

A snarl of traffic ahead. Hundreds of lights blinking, red and slow and incredulous. Can you *believe* this traffic?

“Listen,” the man says. “The point I'm trying to make is—there are a lot of dangerous people out there. You're not safe. You need help. You need to be *protected*.”

“I *was* protected. Billy—”

“Billy, huh? G.I. Billy Bob fucking Joe who let you get kidnapped by goddamn fucking *Strabo Solutions*? Listen—”

Tom is listening. That's why the explosion hurts his ears so much.

THREE CARS AHEAD. A BLUE MIATA GOES *BOOM*, in the air, riding a cloud of black and orange smoke and flame. Flipping over and over and it's funny almost, the flipping and then the sideways *smash* into an SUV in the next lane. Glass everywhere and *ooh*, the leap of adrenaline and *wowwww*, the spectacle, it's amazing but the sound system's turned up way, way too high, and Tom can't separate noise from noise, it's all one vast endless scream.

Running through undersea silence, through broken glass and twisted metal. The rockfaced man is ahead of him, looking back with mouth gnashing and mashing in silent fury. Someone turned the volume down, thank God. Someone's turning it back up, slowly. “...climb! Here! No, *here*! The fence! Motherfucker! Put your goddamn foot on the crossbar, then lift

yourself up! I thought you did your own stunts!”

“I don't!” says Tom Nova, startled into honesty. “My agent makes me say that.” It's so weird, admitting things. It's the opposite of agreeing and it feels exposed and awkward but also freeing, like running down the street wearing filthy clothes covered in dust and grime, which Tom Nova finds, strangely, he is also doing.. “I mean I'll do one or two little stunts—like, leaping from green-screened roof to green-screened roof, that kind of thing. For *Perseus* I did this backflip—”

“For fuck's sake, shut up! Follow me!”

Tom Nova follows. What else can he do? Behind him there's only running feet and lots of screams and whooshing fire. He must be on set, he decides, only he's so damn tired he's hallucinating. That happens sometimes after a sixteen-hour day of shoots and reshoots and re-re-shoots. This director's crazy—he wants the effects to look as real as possible instead of just dabbing it all in post-production. It's the only possible answer. It's why the air's so hot and throbby and full of so many unpleasant particles.

Racing down a shopping street, Tom realizes people are staring. Of course, he's used to people staring but the look of shock and horror is new and disturbing. The rockfaced man slams people aside. He knocks a woman down, screaming, on top of her toddlers. They'll edit that out later of course. Rockface may be rough around the edges but he's still a hero, he's Tom Nova's grizzled mentor/sidekick, and good guys don't—

“Here! In the bank!”

Tom Nova dutifully races into the bank. Thank God for Gustav, his trainer. Tom's mind may be exhausted but his body isn't. His calves feel smoothly exercised. *Real muscles, not show-horse muscles!* Gustav likes to yell. *Look better on screen.*

Rockface is demanding access to the vault, and there's a gun waving around, which is a bit unusual but not impossible for a good guy. More people are screaming. Static buzzes in and out of Tom Nova's ears. He really wishes they would stop all this fucking screaming, it's very unpleasant, and all he wants to do is lie down.

Into the vault. Rockface orders the manager to lock them in and she does, with a lot of stuttering and *are-you-sures*. “There,” says Rockface in the cold metal quiet. “We're safe for a bit. Gonna get weird when the cops show up, but you're famous, you'll get us through it.”

“I will? Oh. I guess I will. I'll explain about the Astrakovs, then—”

“Forget about the Astrakovs. Forget everything I said.” Rockface hefts the gun as if he's going to throw it dramatically away from himself, but holsters it instead with some embarrassment. “Listen, this whole thing—you're not in danger. Not from Korbarov, anyway. This whole thing...it's a bidding war. For your approval.”

Tom stares, open-mouthed. He thinks, *Tom stares, open-mouthed.*

“Approval? Approval for what?”

"Your security. You've got thirty-eight stalkers, Tom! Thirty-eight! You're a gold mine. To us, I mean. And all you've got guarding you right now is a messed-up G.I. Joe and his dog. So we're all trying to prove we can protect you. From the mobs of people who want to destroy you."

"Why do people want to destroy me?"

"Why? Because they're insane, Tom. Because you make them insane. You represent—who the fuck knows. Whatever people want. Whatever makes them crazy. All the lives they don't get to lead...and why you? Why not them? They can't stand it. So they go nuts. They can't let you be a god, unless they also get to kill you."

"Oh," says Tom.

"Or something like that, anyway. It doesn't matter. I'm a simple kind of guy, Tommy. I don't care about motives. I don't need to know the whys and wherefores. Just the whos and the whats and the hows. That's who I am. That's how I do my job."

"So you..." Tom's slower and foggier than usual. His ears still ping and fizzle out. "You—and Strabo Solutions—"

"And this third group now. With the rocket launcher. Not sure who they are. Formidabor, probably. Crazy motherfuckers. A rocket launcher? That's *next-level*. Yeah, sure, we're competing for the contract, but there's a goddamn limit. There are professional *standards*, for fuck's sake. So." Rockface looks suddenly sheepish, a freshman asking a cheerleader to prom. "Who's it gonna be? I think I've proven myself. I know I'm a little rough but I got heart, Tommy, I really care about you, I hope you see how much I—"

BOOM.

GREY SNOW, FALLING. GREY SNOW, AND GREY silence. When he was a little boy in Tennessee there was an incident at the soap factory one day and tons of greyish-white flakes spewed into the air, rose up high, so high and then fell, softly, coating everything they found. An inch of snow that wasn't snow but they cancelled school anyway. He played in the slippery muck until well past dark, until his mom called him across the hills, desperate. "Thad? Thaaad?" His name was Thad Novicek then. His mom kept calling and calling and he didn't answer because he was so busy, so lost in his frenzy, throwing fastballs of dirty fragrant snow at Billy, Billy in the days before his brain got broken in. Billy his oldest friend—his only friend, if he subtracts out the people he pays to train his body and his mind.

Men all around him, in uniform. None of them are Billy. Their uniforms are black and bulky. A SWAT team, fully armed. There's ringing in his ears and buzzy panic in his head but it fades into a hymn of safety as Tom's escorted out of the bank. Jack Thorne was backed up by a SWAT team at a critical moment in *Superjack: Death's End*. A couple of real SWAT guys came in to consult and eat croissants from the catering truck. Tom Nova had a friendly empty conversation

with one of them for a while. He even invited that guy to the premiere but then he forgot the guy's name, and never forwarded the tickets. Hopefully, thinks Tom, *that* SWAT guy isn't one of *these* SWAT guys. But he can't tell. They're wearing masks.

Seated safely in the SWAT van, bumping along the unseeable street. He wonders what happened to Rockface, to Red and Lonnie. To Billy and Mona and everyone else trying to protect him. Everyone wanting him to be safe, loved, minutely documented, never forgotten. They're talking to him. The masked SWAT guys are talking to him. They're asking if he's all right.

"Yes," says Tom. "I've been in an exploding bank before."

That isn't true. They did a scene like that for *Superjack* but changed it up in reshoots. The studio signed a promotional deal with KMF Bank that involves a scene in a branch office before the third turning point, but when KMF's ad agency reviewed the cut they kiboshed it, not liking how the bank exploded. "We're afraid any association with disaster might erode consumer confidence." So the bank didn't explode after all. Tom Nova had a pleasant interaction with a pretty bank teller and got blown up in a nameless shop down the street.

"Yeh've been blown up a lot t'dai," says one of the masked men sympathetically.

Australian accents. Why would a SWAT team have Australian accents?

"Oh," says Tom. "You're the third group."

"Formidabor. Guilty as chahged, mate. Had to protect yeh from that nutcayse. And Strabo Solutions? Buncha losers, they ah."

"I want to get out," Tom says suddenly. "I want out. I



want this crazy bullshit over—”

“Now Tom. Tom. Listen, mate. Listen—”

“I’m Tom FUCKING NOVA!” Tom roars. “I am TOM FUCKING NOVA, and I want out of this truck—right—fucking—*now!*”

Who is this person? Tom wonders. Who is yelling, who is standing, who is beating on the grey interior of the van with his fists? Not Tom Nova. Not the new agreeable Tommy Boy, so blond and charming in all his interviews. Not Tom who takes all those supplements and endures the side effects because Gustav tells him to. Not Tom who dates the actresses his publicist picks out for him, as well as his suits and his house. What would Sarah Mo say if she could see him, raging, frothing at the mouth, insisting on himself so strongly, too strongly? It’s disgusting.

It disgusts the Australians. They stop the truck and let him out.

“Din’ even want ah help,” one shouts as he hops down. “Din’ even want ah protection! That’s fucking gratitude for yeh. ‘Ey Tom! If you din’ want this kind of ‘tention you shouldn’ta become faymous!”

TOM STARTS LIMPING HOME.

Dirty, bloody, he aches all over, though no worse than after a training session with Gustav. There are bees in his ears. He thinks about calling a cab but his phone fell out of his pocket somewhere. And he doesn’t have his wallet. Billy was holding it at the Ori-Juice. Poor Billy must be panicking, maybe having a public meltdown, maybe throwing things and screaming that he’s a veteran and one of his men is in danger. And if he doesn’t stop screaming he’ll get arrested, or the cops will panic, and shoot—and they’ll shoot at Mona too, protecting her master.

The only people Tom really loves, has ever loved, with his own heart, his own self. A broken man, an ugly dog.

Tom starts to run.

He runs for what feels like days. At least no one can recognize him in his torn clothes, his patina of ash and dust and blood. He doesn’t know where he is. He doesn’t want to ask in case someone looks too hard through the mask of filth and shock and recognizes him after all. And then *click*, too late, that’s his battered crazy-eyed face all over TMZ and the tabloids, headlines wriggling in erotically appalled delight.

Eventually Tom turns and runs toward the sun. He’ll go west, he decides, until he hits the ocean. When Tom was obscure he used to wander up and down the beaches for hours, through the long evenings and into the cooling night, alongside the ocean that meant nothing and was nothing and didn’t know who he was and didn’t care who he was because it didn’t care about anybody or anything at all. When Tom auditioned for Perseus, crawling up the imaginary rock between the imaginary waves, calling out to chained despondent Andromeda, the casting director actually cried. “It’s like you’ve been there before,” she said. “It’s like you’ve seen her in the sea.”

A flash of blue, in the distance, under the blank gold mir-

ror of the sky. Planes coming in low across the horizon toward LAX. He crosses Lincoln Boulevard and realizes he’s facing Venice Beach, the crush of bodies and the vivid unmistakable boardwalk. Not too far from his house in Santa Monica. He could run there, call Billy, call the police until he finds Billy, hopefully still raging somewhere, hopefully still alive.

But he’s so thirsty.

Tom slows down when he reaches the shore, approaching a pair of pretty girls. Starlets-to-be, or just wearing the L.A. uniform to match their L.A. bodies, heavy black eyeliner, long legs and long shining hair, carrying water bottles of clear pink plastic.

“I’m sorry,” he says to the blonde. “I know this is a weird question, but—can I can have some of your water?”

“Oh my god,” says the brunette.

“Okay,” says the blonde. “I mean...I guess. Are you...?”

The brunette cuts in. “Are you Tom...fucking...NOVA?!”

“Yeah,” he says. “I’m sorry. I’m having a very weird day. Listen, I’m really thirsty—”

“TOM FUCKING NOVA! OH MY GOD, CLAIRE! IT’S TOM FUCKING NOVA!”

He takes a selfie with both of them. Then one with blonde Claire. Then another with the brunette. Only then does Claire surrender her pink water bottle. Tom finishes all of it in a single go and leans over, panting, suddenly cramped.

“Uh—are you ok?” Claire asks, leaning over. Her hair is a platinum curtain, screening him from view.

“OH MY GOD!” the brunette screams. “HE’S DYING! TOM FUCKING NOVA IS DYING IN FRONT OF ME!”

Cramps? Gustav sneers in his head. *Itty bitty baby Tommy is all cramps up? Can’t run? Too bad. He runs!*

Tom runs. He runs toward the sea because the crowd’s behind him, he thinks, or at least he feels them behind him, screaming, begging for selfies of his sick and ruined face. He can’t tell how many people might be there, if anyone’s behind him at all. He still can’t hear very well. There might be a thousand people running after him, or nobody at all.

Into the surf and thrust back by the current. Into the deeper water and swimming now with clumsy overhand strokes. His stomach seizes up and he coughs, vomiting into the sea. He keeps swimming. His overworked mind is a swirl of images. All he can think is he’ll never be Perseus this way, swimming like this, so filthy, so awkward. They’ll go with someone else, someone smooth and permeable, not embarrassing, not throwing up in the waves. He’ll never rescue Charmaine Gray from the rock, in her artfully torn toga (culturally and historically inaccurate, but the studio insisted). They’ll never overthrow her evil mother and retake Aethiopia (Andromeda became a Strong Female Character, because data models projected better returns that way). He’ll never date Charmaine however briefly, however chastely (they couldn’t stand each other but their agents said it would be good PR, so they lunched together a few times in public and laughed during all the correct pauses).

And if Tom never becomes Perseus, he'll never become Jack Thorne, the greatest Superjack everyone has ever known. Tom Nova will disappear. Only the pretentious viewers of *Exit Serendipity* will remember his name, and when they're watching his movie, masturbating as he cruelly mounts the protagonist, they'll think about Tom Nova, and miss him, obscurely.

Tom Nova strikes back toward shore, swallows more water, vomits again. He gags on air. It's been a long and very messy day. His days aren't supposed to be messy, not anymore. When he isn't on set he's supposed to flit from air-conditioned house to elegant boutique to top-flight weight room, all the equipment clean, shining, waiting for him. A whole lifetime of clean shininess, accommodating smiles, camera flashes, happiness. People who love him. *They'll love you only if you remove yourself*, Sarah Mo whispers in his head. *If you disappear, if you become the blank slate of their universal projection. Only when you release yourself, surrender to the pure dissolution of all fear, all love and friendship, all that you are and might have been, all that you were, and might yet be—only then will they allow you to be someone else. Only then will we believe you're someone else, somewhere else, in a more interesting world than this.*

Tom turns away from shore. He strikes out for—where? he isn't sure. He can see it, dimly. A place beyond the unpredictable slap and tumult of the waves. A place where the sea flattens out, a blue mirror of water under a gold mirror of sky. A place that's wild and quiet, alive with light; warm as a bath, and motionless; empty, and asking nothing. He can see it so acutely it's as though he dreamed it, like the face of true love in a fairy tale. Another country, a lonely country, a silent joyful landscape. No one will be there when he arrives. No one but himself. He'll bring his self, his actual self. Only it won't be disgusting and vomiting and trembling, but sleek and loveable, though this time he won't care. He'll build a house out there, he decides, and then he'll send for Billy and Mona, the only people he loves, *he* loves. He'll send for them, when the house is ready. When he's ready.

He swims toward it, outpacing the roar, knifing through it, through himself, into the blue-and-gold silence.

Was Tom Nova's Death a Suicide?

The internet weighs in.

Meet the "Coaches" Who Probably Murdered Tom Nova

Gustav Gamrosh and Sarah Mo are accused of giving Tom illegal supplements that drove him insane and into the sea. The supplements *are* illegal in the U.S., and while there's no direct link between pills and madness and drowning, actual proof isn't necessary. Gustav and Sarah's careers are over, until they reinvent themselves a few years later, of course. Sarah ends up launching a very successful lifestyle empire, all about de-cluttering, de-stressing. Letting go of what you love, of what you can't control.

Was Tom Nova Involved In the Downtown L.A. Terrorist Attacks?

A grainy CCTV shot of Red and Lonnie next to an equally blurry photo of Rockface. The cameras never got a good view of Formidabor, probably mistaking them for an actual SWAT team.

Tom Nova: Latest Victim of Our Broken VA System?

Billy's wild mugshot, frozen in a moment of panic and rage. "lol he looks crazy to me, fam" tweets aspiring stand-up comedian @nixatnite. This is retweeted four thousand, six hundred, and eighty-two times.

The internet doesn't forget Tom Nova. His social media replies overflow with grief. Images of flowers and teddy bears are posted as offerings, along with memes and screenshots of Tom Nova as Jack Thorne and Perseus and even the silly villain from *Dragonbourne 2*. Stills from *Exit Serendipity* make it into his feed as well, though they're flagged as pornographic and removed immediately. This sparks a cycle of outrage, outrage at the outrage, followed by outrage at the outrage at the outrage.

In time, the tide recedes. In time only a few people bother to tag Tom Nova's ghost accounts, with words and images they think Tom Nova would have appreciated. They hope Tom Nova, in turn, would have appreciated them for appreciating how much he was worth appreciating.

We loved you, Tom, writes one despairing fan. *We loved you so much.* +



Our Remarkable Illustrators



Tiffany Pai



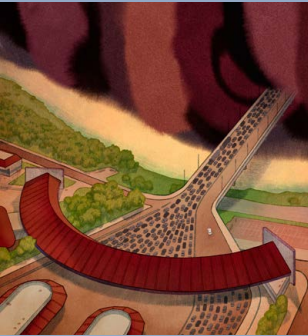
Mike Freiheit



David Alvarado



Mort Todd



Leonardo Santamaria



C.M. Duffy



Nick Sirotich



Nick Sirotich



Ben "Skutch" McGehee



Mort Todd



Chris Matthews



Lizzy Price



Nick Sirotich



Mike Freiheit