

Socialism With Cajun Characteristics

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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FOOT BALL

HAS SOME
PROBLEMS

CREATIVE JOBS

THAT YOU
THINK YOU
WANT BUT
DON'T

WORLD WAR ONE

WHAT WAS
THAT ALL
ABOUT?

WHO KILLED EUROPE?

(SPOILER:
NOBODY)

NATIONS

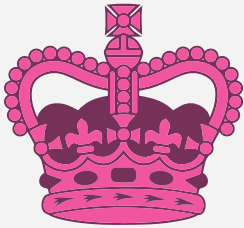
THEIR NATURE
AND PURPOSE



ILLCIT AFFAIRS

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF **CHARLES ABRAHAM** (1951-2018)

subscribers are ROYALTY



If you walked into the offices of the *New Yorker*, and asked if you could have a chat with the editor, at best you would be sneered at and at worst you would be escorted off the property. It would not matter if your subscription had been paid in full. Casual interaction between staff and subscriber is simply Not Done at the major periodicals. Here at *Current Affairs*, we operate on a somewhat different principle: subscribers are royalty. This does not mean that "the subscriber is always right"; if the subscriber disagreed with something written in a *Current Affairs* article, for instance, they would most certainly not be right. But it does mean that the subscriber will always be well-treated and appreciated. If you show up on our doorstep, wet and bedraggled after a Louisiana monsoon, the editor will put a towel round your shoulders and fix you a sazerac. To us, you are perfect.



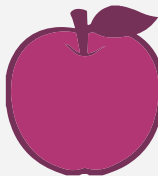
CUT IT OUT

Twitter founder "@Jack" Dorsey recently announced his intention to get rid of the "like" feature on the platform, due to its alleged contribution to the debasement of public discourse. We were distressed to hear of this planned change, as it has always been our position that the ability to place a small heart next to something someone else had said was one of the service's few redeeming features.

Current Affairs considers itself as much a Social Aid & Pleasure Society as a magazine, and we are thus committed to improving the public welfare when we can. To preserve the function of the "like"/"favorite" feature, we therefore present these cut-out tiny paper hearts, which can be removed from this magazine and stuck to your favorite tweets as needed. Let us not allow megalomaniacal billionaires to sap the love from the world.



Apples AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR



It is well-known that the so-called "Red Delicious" apple is not, in fact, delicious. To the contrary, it is revolting, with its thick, leathery skin and its almost total lack of taste. *Slate* calls it the "apple that sucks," an apple designed purely to look like an apple with no regard to the actual experience of consuming it. We give it to children so that they have some Wholesome Fruit with their lunch, even though its likely effect is to make children believe all fruit must be tasteless. Fortunately, we all know there is a better apple: the honeycrisp. It is big, sweet, and juicy. It looks great, feels great in the palm, and makes a satisfying crunch when you bite in. It is the perfect apple. But here is a true fact about the honeycrisp: it was developed at the University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station's Horticultural Research Center. That's right: the public sector. The honeycrisp is a socialist apple. This is what the state can do for you: think not of government cheese, but of the beloved honeycrisp apple.

CORRECTION

In the last issue's "Table of Contents," nearly all page numbers were listed incorrectly. We sincerely hope this did not significantly inhibit readers in their navigation of the magazine. The person responsible for the error has been dealt with appropriately.

On Subjects Uncovered

For as much as there is in this magazine, it remains true that the number of things not in the magazine exceeds the number of things in the magazine by a significant margin. This is an imbalance we seek slowly to correct. It has been remarked that



"*Current Affairs* is a many-tentacled entity," and indeed it is. But with a tentacle, the question is never "how many are there?" but "where are they going?" In other words, yes, we are a magazine of diverse subject matter. What shall we cover next, though? We welcome reader input into this question.

Email editor@currentaffairs.org or write us at 631 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70130 with your suggestions. It is a very large world and we do not know all of the things that are in it. We need your help to find them.

This Time It Was LABOR UNREST

Regular readers of *Current Affairs* will have noticed that the magazine's releases follow a somewhat relaxed schedule. The May-June issue is printed mid-July and received early August, the July-August issue is printed mid-September and received yesterday. This being the September-October issue, it can be expected approximately... well, Happy New Year! Our readers are generally forgiving types, and don't mind a bit of a wait as long as when the issue comes, there are high-quality essays and a drawing of a lobster in it. (See p. 41.) Nevertheless, we feel like we owe them an excuse. It is only polite. Admittedly, we have been running fast through the List Of External Social Factors To Blame. First we pinned it on Trump. Then our print shop. (Sorry, Allen.) Then the mercurial and elusive S. Chapin Domino. But now we have a new candidate: the union. Yes, it was labor unrest. The subeditors belong to the International Amalgamated Brotherhood of Periodical-Makers. Contract negotiations broke down over the "no swearing in the magazine" provision demanded by the publisher. The workers struck. Months of tension ensued. A compromise was ultimately reached whereby a list of approved swears can be used under specified circumstances. Labor peace is restored. Here, then, is your issue. If you are upset that it is late, blame the left.

Quote of the Month

"No young man who spent as many years in Bangkok as I did can be against sex. Don't use that word ['prostitutes']. They were women of the evening. Courtesans. We liked them, and they liked us. In a lot of places you had to woo the ladies. It involves money on the man's part, yes, but it also involves consensual relations." — **CHARLES MURRAY**

Open Letters

Dear PROUD BOYS,
Everyone likes to feel as if they matter. It's perfectly natural. That's one reason why people join bowling leagues or croquet clubs. Or, in your case, a "Western chauvinist" street gang. Now, a lot of people have made fun of you for this. They have pointed out that for being such very proud boys, you have remarkably little to be proud of. They have noted that your boasts about having "built Western civilization" are comical, since most of you are have built exactly nothing, except perhaps an ever more toxic and stupid political environment than before. (This is indeed something of an achievement.) But we at Current Affairs do not engage in petty mockery. We are constructive critics, and we address you seriously and with compassion. Instead of telling you to grow up, we shall ask you sincerely: have you considered becoming socialist feminists instead? It's far more fun, and makes a lot more sense! Really, why don't you give the left a chance? You won't have to be enraged all the time. (You'll just grumble all the time—but constructively!) Boys, give it up and come over to the other side. We'll put the kettle on for you.

—Current Affairs

Dear CROWN PRINCE MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN,
It can be difficult to learn to take criticism. Sometimes we all get a bit miffed at those who point out our failings. Our first instinct might be to invite them over then forcibly dismember them. But this instinct is not the right one. After all, when someone criticizes you, it is an opportunity: an opportunity to reflect on who you are, and whether there might be something true in what they're saying. If you dismember someone every time they disagree with you, you won't end up learning from your mistakes. You won't grow. You'll be stuck in the same bad habits! Based on recent events, this seems like a lesson you would do well to take to heart. Instead of thinking of Jamal Khashoggi as an enemy in need of assassination, you could have thought of him as a resource. Perhaps he was wrong about you. If so, you had nothing to fear! But if he was right, then maybe it was time to do some listening. We hate to say it, but by murdering and dismembering a guy after he accused you of suppressing free speech, you kind of proved his point! Better to show him he's wrong by being nice.

—Current Affairs

DYSTOPIAN HEADLINE OF THE MONTH

"Can't Find An Affordable Home? Try Living In A Pod" — NPR



"PodShare's site is laden with millennial-friendly tech buzzwords, like the sharing economy, pod culture, nomadic freelancers, access not ownership, and even 'Podestrians,' the company's name for guests, each of whom get profiles on its website. 'We're creating a social network with a physical address,' said Beck. 'Our open-floor model offers the highest rate of collisions for social travelers. We do not identify with hostels—we are a co-living space or a live-work community.'"

A Tribute To The Brilliant

Christopher Matthews

In the illustration credits for the previous issue, a work of art was attributed to Nick Sirotich that was in fact by Christopher Matthews. We regret this error. Mr. Matthews did not deserve such shabby editorial oversight. He is a treasured part of the Current Affairs family, whose endlessly inventive contributions have livened up the pages of a once-dreary journal. Hats off to Chris!

TO THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE EMAILED OUR EDITOR

The editor would like to apologize for his failure to reply in a timely fashion to various kind emails that have been sent to him. He hopes you will not hold his ineptitude against him and wants you all to know just how grateful he is for your feedback. Please do not feel neglected or betrayed. He promises that he will reply as soon as he gets his life in order. It may be a while yet.



with you through DARK TIMES

You may have noticed that these are somewhat dark times. Civilization stands wailing upon the bridge, with bats in her hair. It can be difficult to know quite what to do. But while we at **Current Affairs** do not have a solution, we do have one promise: we will stay with you through it all. You may be afraid, but you shall never be alone!



SIX EUPHEMISMS FOR NAZIS

for your next **NEW YORK TIMES** profile

- folksy nationalists
- retro salute enthusiasts
- business-friendly colorful rogues
- counterfactual history re-enactors
- heroic underdogs standing up to the oppressed
- romantically misunderstood murder-fans

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ANSWERS ON PAGE TEN



Towards the WIKI SOCIETY

by NATHAN J. ROBINSON

WIKIPEDIA IS NOW SO GOOD THAT WE DON'T tend to think about how good it is. It's just there, and it feels as if it's always been there. "Oh yes, the vast free repository of human knowledge, what about it?" But Wikipedia is remarkable. Astonishing, really. It's built on a model that exists almost nowhere else online. It's like nothing else in existence. And it gives us a bit of insight into how we might reform other platforms, even society itself.

First, let's remember just how "top-down" almost all of the largest web services are. Google, Facebook, Amazon, Twitter. Each a multi-billion dollar company, each run for profit and owned by private investors, each controlled by a powerful CEO. Facebook, Twitter, and Google make money almost entirely through advertising: companies pay them to put products in front of users' eyeballs, and the platforms alter the user experience accordingly. Each of these companies operates exactly the way you'd expect of a corporation seeking monopoly power. They crush tiny competitors, they buy politicians (Google and Facebook give more money to Republicans than Democrats), and they are extremely secretive about their internal decision-making process. They do not tell you the algorithms that determine what they will show you, or the experiments they are using to figure out how to manipulate users' psychology. (Facebook had a brief scandal in 2014 when it was revealed to have tested different ways to mess with people's emotions, seeing if it could bump users toward happiness or sadness with the display of positive or negative news. Over 700,000 news feeds had been tampered with. It also, even more creepily, kept track of status updates that people had typed and deleted without posting.)

There is nothing even beginning to resemble "democracy" at these companies. Like most corporations, they are dictatorships internally. Amazon workers are infamously mistreated, and Jeff Bezos' wealth increases by \$215 million *per day*, meaning that he makes the median annual Amazon salary once every nine seconds. Amazon workers have had to fight hard just to reach \$15 an hour base pay, which in many places is still far short of a living wage.

Users do not have any voice in company policy. Their only input comes in the form of a binary market choice: use the service or don't. If you don't like the way Facebook's ads work, go find some other social media network. But because there *is* no other social media network like Facebook, there is no online shopping portal like Amazon, and there is no bottomless pit of short-form blather like Twitter, it's not clear where else there is to go. You can get the internet out of your life completely, which might be good for many people's mental health. But some of us actually rely on these companies for our livelihoods. *Current Affairs* articles, for instance, are distributed primarily through Facebook and Twitter shares. If these companies were to, say, block our accounts, or even bump our material downward so that fewer users saw it, we'd take a significant hit to our revenue. And if we *did* incur the ire of one of the tech monoliths, if Amazon stopped selling our books or Google stopped displaying our pages in search results, there would be absolutely nothing we could do about it. They don't have to give us an appeals process. Nobody votes on it. If Mark Zuckerberg wakes up one day and decides he'd like to put *Current Affairs* out of business, he could probably do it. We are reliant entirely on maintaining the good will of a benevolent overlord.

WIKIPEDIA IS SOMETHING ELSE. IT has no advertisements, it seeks no profits, it has no shareholders. It's incredible to think of the amount of money Wikipedia has given up by steadfastly refusing to publish even the most unobtrusive promotions. In the early days, when there was still a live debate about whether the site should have ads, even just ads for nonprofits, there were those who thought it insane to insist on keeping the site absolutely pure. And yet the purists won.

Being a nonprofit among the profit-seeking monopolies distinguishes Wikipedia. But what makes it like absolutely nothing else in the world is its governance structure. It's a genuine democratic platform, its rules controlled by its users. There is nothing else quite like that anywhere.

Let's consider the radicalism of the Wikipedia model. It's a "free encyclopedia that anyone can edit," as we know. It has well over 5 million articles in English (40 million total in 301 languages), all of which are put together through the collective effort of volunteers. Readers write a paragraph here, fix a date there, add a citation or two, and over time a vast compendium of human knowledge emerges. It has been stunningly successful, and is one of the most visited sites on the web, with over 18 billion pageviews.

But Wikipedia is not just edited by users. Its policies themselves are stored in wiki pages, and can be modified and updated by user-editors. The governance of the site itself, the processes that determine what you see, are open to revision by the Wikipedia community, a community that anyone can join. Not only that, but every change to Wikipedia is transparent: its changes, and the debates over them, are fully available in a public record.

One of Wikipedia's core rules is: "Wikipedia has no firm rules." That does not mean "anything goes." It means "the rules are principles, not laws" and they "exist only as rough approximations of their underlying principles." But the ethic of Wikipedia is that everything is subject to revision, open to discussion, and that anyone can discuss it.

This has meant that Wikipedians have had to, over time, figure out how to govern themselves. Political philosophers have long been infatuated with the concept of the "state of nature," the condition humankind would find itself in before it had designed governing institutions, and much political theory is concerned with examining how the people in this hypothetical world should construct a state. Or, if humankind suddenly finds itself stranded on a desert island, what procedures ought we to set up to keep everybody from eating each other? The course of Wikipedia's development has been one of the few real-world examples of such a scenario.

The site began chaotically; in its early days, it was frequently criticized for the presence of misinformation. In an incident that became notorious, journalist John Seigenthaler wrote about the problems with his own Wikipedia entry, which falsely implied that he had been a suspect in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Its editorial discussions were a mess, too. It

wasn't clear how the users should resolve disputes about what to include and what not to include, or how to make an article reflect a "neutral point of view." (Some right-wing activists were so disgusted with the site's supposed bias that they founded the much-derided "Conservapedia," which promised it would be "free of corruption by liberal untruths." Conservapedia on Harry Potter: "[A]t Hogwarts, chapel is conspicuously absent. A failure to mention Christianity, combined with the presence of wizardry, have led some to wonder whether Rowling is substituting paganism for Christianity.")

Over time, however, Wikipedians sorted themselves out. They developed their practices. They figured out how to stop trolls and vandals. They use consensus-based decision-making: what goes into articles is not the result of a simple up-or-down poll among editors, but comes out of a discussion process whereby the editors are supposed to work together to reach compromise. They established procedures for adjudicating disputes, including some hierarchies about who could decide what and who would have the final say. If the community couldn't sort out a disagreement itself, the dispute would go to an "arbitration committee" elected by the volunteer editors, and editors would each make their case to the committee.

Watching editorial discussions on Wikipedia can be fascinating. The community has developed a code of conduct (Wikiquote) designed to encourage collegial and productive collaboration, and prevent disagreement from descending into acrimony:

Respect your fellow Wikipedians, even when you disagree. Apply Wikipedia etiquette, and don't engage in personal attacks. Seek consensus, avoid edit wars, and never disrupt Wikipedia to illustrate a point. Act in good faith, and assume good faith on the part of others. Be open and welcoming to newcomers. Should conflicts arise, discuss them calmly on the appropriate talk pages, follow dispute resolution procedures, and consider that there are 5,716,660 other articles on the English Wikipedia to improve and discuss.

Some aspects of Wikipedia's culture are almost sickening in their loveliness. Users give each other awards called "barn-stars." Anyone can create one of these awards, and give one to anyone else. Some examples:

- ✦ THE RAY OF SUNSHINE — "bestowed on that person that, when you see their name at the top of your watchlist, you know that all is right with the world"
- ✦ THE RESIST HIVETHINK AWARD — for those who buck consensus in productive ways
- ✦ THE GOOD FRIEND AWARD — "for people who have helped new/inexperienced Wikipedians to successfully create their first article"
- ✦ THE RESILIENT BARNSTAR — "given to any editor who learns and improves from criticisms, never lets mistakes or blunders impede their growth as Wikipedians, or has the ability to recover/finish with a smile."

There is even an award given to people who have been treated unfairly by others, as a way of saying sorry and encouraging the community to be nice to them. It all makes for a thought-provoking prototype for what a non-monetary system of social rewards might look like in a post-capitalist society. (I wonder if any teachers have tried this kind of “anyone can give anyone else an award at any time” system with their kids.)

It is not all peace and love and rays of sunshine at Wikipedia, though. Things get *very* contentious—predictably, the “talk” page for the article “Gaza Strip” contains a heated dispute over use of the term “military occupation.” But it mostly gets figured out. Here, for instance, see some excerpts from a debate over whether the lede for the “Donald Trump” article should contain the sentence: “Trump first stirred controversy in Republican politics over his promotion of birther conspiracy theories”:

*Please indicate whether you **support** or **oppose** something similar to the above text, along with your reasoning.*

Oppose — *Insignificant for lede - was less significant than his reality TV and other activities at the time, and definitely insignificant in relation to being elected.*

Support the idea, but oppose the wording on the basis the sentence is awkward to parse.

Support — *Most political science and history treatments of Trump's involvement in politics notes that the birtherism is an important and noteworthy initial stepping stone for Trump, bringing him great prominence.*

Support — *Very relevant to Trump's political career, much more so than reality TV, for example.*

Oppose — *Undue weight in my view for the lede itself. Not a significantly major event in Trump's life and the text in the main body of the article is sufficient in my opinion.*

Today, the sentence does not currently appear in the article's lede, though the body text discusses Trump's “birtherism” in some detail.

The operations of the “arbitration committee” can also be fascinating to observe. It operates a little like a court: users request the arbitration committee get involved, the committee agrees to hear a case, the evidence from both sides is presented, and the committee votes and issues a final decision. When I looked, there was a dispute over whether an editor who described another as “pushy” had, among various other offenses, been engaging in a “personal attack” in violation of the rules.

But the procedures and hierarchies Wikipedia has developed can also be somewhat complicated. The arbitration guidelines run for pages and pages. Bureaucracy always tends to spread like a fungus, and some have argued that as Wikipedia has developed its

guide-lines to deal with every scenario, the site has become unwieldy. The Wikipedia community has its own specialized language (the arbitration pages discussed the presentation of “diffs,” which are color-coded pages displaying the differences between one version of an article and another). There's a learning curve, and that means that only certain types of people are going to want to become Wikipedia editors. One criticism that has been made is that even though theoretically “anyone” can edit the encyclopedia, in practice only a small number of people make a large percentage of the edits.

I'M NOT SURE HOW VALID THAT IS AS A CRITICISM. After all, any volunteer project like this is probably going to rely heavily on “hardcore” contributors. But it does make for a problem of bias: Wikipedia's users are disproportionately white and male, which means that the articles can tend to reflect their interests (good lord, you should see how in-depth the ones on video games are). Wikipedia necessarily reflects certain wider social inequities; working moms have less time to contribute to unpaid editing work on encyclopedias, so working moms have a lesser part in the collective “voice.” The “unpaid” nature of the work raises some problems, since it's going to mean that those with money and leisure time get to build the thing, and determine what goes into the Definitive Compendium of Human Knowledge. On the other hand, Wikipedia is far less “elitist” than any other

encyclopedia ever created: you don't have to have any credentials or connections to participate. You just have to know what you're talking about. The barriers to access are still present, but the level of openness has no parallel elsewhere.

ON THE WHOLE, IT'S IMPRESSIVE HOW CLOSE Wikipedia has come to achieving its stated goal of "viewpoint neutrality." The articles are, for the most part, reliable and trustworthy. I'd defer to Wikipedia over any other encyclopedia, in part because Wikipedia is so transparent: I can see all of the sources, and all of the discussion and changes that have led to the article existing in its present form.

Wikipedia's unique participatory model has actually allowed it to escape the kinds of scandals that have eroded public confidence in other platforms. Whereas Twitter and Facebook have been criticized for allowing "fake news" to proliferate, and for poor decisions in deciding which content to remove, Wikipedia hasn't had major public embarrassments for a long time. Facebook has run into trouble for decisions like removing breastfeeding pictures and war photography as part of its "anti-nudity" policy, and has only reversed course after significant public pressure. Wikipedia, too, makes content moderation decisions on a daily basis, but the reason you don't hear about them is that the arguments are resolved through the site's own processes.

If you object to something Facebook does, you cannot change it yourself. You cannot even ask Facebook to change it; they're very unlikely to amend corporate policy on the basis of what one person tells them. You will have to, instead, publicly campaign about the change, and hope Facebook listens. If your campaign gets enough attention—as the outrage over breastfeeding photos did—then the company may be sufficiently embarrassed and reverse course. But you will never know what went into the decision one way or the other. It will all be opaque. Nothing is opaque on Wikipedia. There are transcripts. Records. Everything is hashed out in the "public square."

Decisions about moderation are "value-laden." How do you decide what constitutes "harassment"? Should racist speech be permitted, and who should determine what racist speech is? If one person is offended by nudity, and another person isn't, should our platform screen out nudity? At the major tech companies, these decisions are made by unelected groups of Silicon Valley executives. Mark Zuckerberg has repeatedly said that he doesn't believe in the right to privacy. So Facebook doesn't respect people's privacy. Judgments do not reflect the collective will, but the preferences of whichever rich dork happens to rule the company.

Wikipedia shows us that this doesn't have to be the case. Participatory governance can work. It has problems, but those problems are for the community itself to work out. Imagine if our social networks were run on a "Wikipedia model." What if Facebook's terms of service, its newsfeed algorithms, its features and options, were all determined through the deliberation of users themselves? You might think this would be a

disaster; many people fear democracy and think rule by philosopher-kings is preferable. I think the problems of Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Amazon, contrasted with the success of Wikipedia, show that the opposite is true. It's rule by kings that is the disaster, because kings never actually understand what's good for the community as well as the community itself does.

There are also severe dangers that come with concentrating power in the hands of an unelected minority. Facebook's algorithms are completely secret, which means that we don't know when and how we're being manipulated. If the company wished to, it could send voter registration reminders to *only* those users from one political party. It could inflate or deflate the significance of a news event, make or break a media company. And these possibilities are not just theoretical: last year, Facebook decided that too much news was making people unhappy, and was causing them to spend less time on the service. So news articles got de-prioritized in the feed, while dog and baby photos were elevated. Many people probably didn't even notice the change. Media outlets noticed, though. Small tweaks mean big changes in traffic and revenue.

Obviously, it's hard to imagine everything running like Wikipedia runs. For one thing, Wikipedia requires only a very small paid staff, because it doesn't have much real-world infrastructure. Amazon, on the other hand, has half a million employees. But participation is a *principle*: applied to Amazon, it might mean that all workplace policies are set by employees. Managers can be voted on and recalled by workers. It might mean something else. Wikipedia shows one version of an adaptable ideal: the people who are affected by decisions ought to be the ones making them.

WIKIPEDIANS ARE FIRMLY INSISTENT that the site is not a "democracy," because it doesn't defer to "majority rule" and instead uses a consensus process. I don't agree with them. They're a democracy, whether they

like the term or not. Democracy is commonly misunderstood as mob rule, but it isn't. Democracy is about participation in power, and Wikipedia's experiment is the closest thing we have to a complete open-participation model. It is a little outpost of communism in the brutal capitalistic world of Silicon Valley: nobody owns it, everybody is equal, there is no money exchanged, advertising is banned, and people do things because they like doing them, rather than because they have to or because they're paid for it. These values are completely absent from the other major information channels on the internet. But they're good values. They should spread. A world run like Wikipedia would be a wonderful world indeed. ♣

I - S P Y A N S W E R S

1. White puzzle pieces 2. Medal 3. Saints helmet 4. Zombie blood tube 5. Builder figure 6. Coke bottle 7. American flag 8. EU flag 9. Hand cream 10. Five dollar bill



EXAMINING THE GREAT WAR

by Abel G. Sterling

IN THE UNITED STATES, THE FIRST WORLD WAR'S centennial anniversary has been marked by unusual ambivalence. The war doesn't quite fit into a tidy narrative of American greatness, of America's rise as the "indispensable nation" that defeated Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to rule the world now and, hopefully, forever. World War One does not easily lend itself to a morality play justifying the United States' emergence as global hegemon, the conventional American historical narrative for the twentieth century history. Nor does the war dominate American popular culture's imagination like the Second World War. World War One poses much more of a challenge for proponents of American militarism: what Very Serious Lessons can be drawn from a conflict that began with the assassination of a ridiculous-looking central-European arch-duke named Franz? That devoured 16 million lives over a geopolitical dispute that was fuzzy even at the time? That seemed to offer no moral except that war is hell and people will blow each other to bits by the score for seemingly no reason?

The challenge of forcing the First World War into the "good war" rubric of the Second hasn't stopped some from trying. Lacking a genocidal, mustache-twirling villain along the lines of Nazi Germany to explain what the war was "about" hasn't hindered

attempts to invent one. The recent *Wonder Woman* film (2017) tries to fashion one out of a demonic, megalomaniacal Erich Ludendorff in love with the smell of his own gas (OK, spoiler alert: he's controlled by Ares and the gas is magic). Others are finding politically convenient ways to celebrate American greatness in its participation in the war. Most recently, an op-ed by Geoffrey Wawro on "How 'Hyphenated Americans' Won World War I," applauds how white immigrants and their children "fought as bravely and desperately as native-born Americans," to the dismay of the homogenous Germans. He appears to be promoting a new account of America's (military) Greatness-Through-Diversity in his recent book, titled *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I*. Embarrassing details like the hundreds of thousands of black Americans who fought in segregated units with inferior equipment, and who returned to a hero's welcome of lynchings and race riots, make no appearance in the op-ed, though it would be shocking if they aren't discussed in the book.

Having first vanquished his enemies in the worlds of international finance and the automotive industry, Elon Musk too has famously weighed in on the war, naming the conflict as one of the "[t]hree separate occasions in the 20th-century where democracy would have fallen ... if not for the US." (The others

being World War II and the Cold War.) According to Musk, these wars cemented America as “the greatest force for good of any country that’s ever been.” While on Reddit and elsewhere, commenters were quick to mock Musk’s bold foray into grand historical theorization, it turns out that Musk really isn’t that far from the mainstream of American historical consciousness.

The most emblematic example of the prevailing American narrative might be PBS’s three-part, nearly six-hour documentary miniseries titled *The Great War*, which first aired in April 2017, almost exactly one hundred years after the United States joined the war. *The Great War* tells us quite explicitly how the hawkish liberal cultural establishment of *West Wing* watchers has come to understand the events of 1914 to 1918 on this side of the Atlantic. The series’ subtitle says it all: “A Nation Comes of Age.” The story of the First World War, in PBS’s telling, is of the United States’ reluctant emergence as “the pre-eminent world power” in a kind of Bildungsroman. Europe of 1914 “was a bastion of culture and enlightenment, but beset by ancient dynasties and autocratic rulers competing to control the world’s resources.” While on the one hand, Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia were ruled by exotic-sounding Kaisers, Sultans, Tsars, and so on, on the other hand, the narrator notes that “Great Britain and France, two democracies, jealously guarded far-flung colonial empires.” The assassination of the “obscure archduke” in Sarajevo, then, was “a pretext to unleash imperial rivalries.”

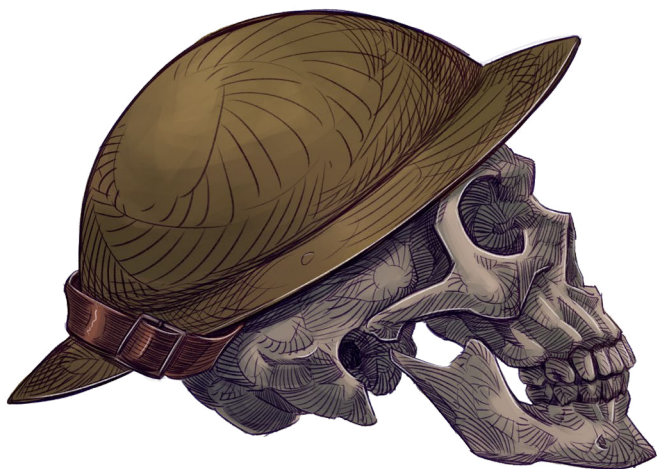
To be fair, that’s a pretty neat and concise way to summarize the European context for the First World War. But, as the years of war went on, the immensity of the war’s upheavals, not to mention German atrocities, unrestricted submarine warfare, and the Zimmermann Telegram, inexorably pulled a rather naively idealistic, innocent, and uninvolved United States into the conflict, which it finally joined in April 1917 on the side of imperial democracies Britain and France (oh, and Russia).

In *The Great War*, we learn that for President Woodrow Wilson, “[a]n idealistic Democratic crusader... the war was a crusade ‘to make the world safe for democracy,’ a chance to transform

the international order in America’s image.” This is indeed what Wilson argued before Congress on April 2, 1917, demanding American entry into the First World War, then nearly three years old. Wilson claimed war would finally resolve “the menace to... peace and freedom [that] lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people.” Germany’s “unlawful violence,” in the form of unrestricted submarine warfare and disregard for neutrality, and the implications of the Zimmermann Telegram (the ludicrous diplomatic maneuver by which Germany promised that, in the event it went to war with the United States, it would return Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico to an impoverished Mexico embroiled in civil war) demanded American involvement. This would come in the interests of “peace and justice” and because, in those words we still hear to this day, “[t]he world must be made safe for democracy.”

WILSON ECHOED RHETORIC THAT HAD been circulating the Entente since the war’s inception. At the war’s onset in 1914, Britain too was beset by apocalyptic, millenarian rhetoric, with figures like H.G. Wells proclaiming victory would bring about a kind of messianic age. In 1914, Wells’ *The War That Will End War* pushed for Britain to enter the war against Germany firstly “to protect the integrity of Belgium”, as the invasions of Belgium and Luxembourg constituted crimes of such immensity that they demanded the exercise of “our honour and our pledge” in the face of “German Imperialism.” Britain’s goals of 1914 needed to include the destruction of “an evil system of government and the mental and material corruption that has got hold of the German imagination and taken possession of German life.” Though fought “without any hatred of the German people,” this was a necessary war against the German Empire’s “evil” and “physical and moral brutality.” Wells predicted victory over Germany could lead to “disarmament and peace throughout the earth.”

The language of a war for democracy and freedom is central to the story in *The Great War*, though the documentary quite carefully avoids saying that this was actually what the war was about. It does delve into some other possible motivations for the United States’ involvement, such as ensuring the massive loans to the Allied Powers would actually be repaid. But all of these are overshadowed by the United States’ innocent idealism, particularly when confronted by the appalling reality of what was unfolding in Europe. Although it makes some gestures at even-handedness, *The Great War* lingers on the outrage generated by German atrocities in Belgium, but not quite to the point that it regurgitates the Allies’ lurid “Rape of Belgium” propaganda. Viewers are meant to feel how Americans felt at the time reading journalists like Richard Harding Davis, who compared Germany to a “mad dog” running amok in a village, perpetrating outrages against civilization itself, and making it “the duty of every farmer to get his gun and destroy it.”



AT TIMES, *THE GREAT WAR* IS AN INSIPID love letter to Woodrow Wilson. We hear all about his personal life, his profound desire for peace and freedom, his insecurities and fears, and even how his upbringing might have been what made him such a colossally racist bastard. That said, it doesn't entirely take Wilsonian rhetoric at face value. The documentary delves into the contradictions of waging a war for democracy while disenfranchising women and black Americans (and often massacring the latter) at home. For the United States, the First World War was both unifying and dividing, and attention is paid to anti-immigrant "hysteria" and wartime restrictions, to the point that some internet reviewers felt the documentary was "too political." But, even in drawing attention to these admitted blemishes in America's past, the narrative still tells Americans what they want to believe about themselves, or, at least, what a powerful faction of liberal hawks wants them to believe. The segregation and humiliation of black soldiers, race riots, and nativist paranoia were obstacles that needed to be overcome so that the United States could live up to its founding ideals. We see that American democracy may be flawed, but it's improving; that the free American people have and continue to strive to bring freedom to oppressed peoples around the world; and above all, that the United States neither is, nor was, an empire. The narrator quotes Woodrow Wilson establishing that "we have no selfish ends to serve. We seek no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind." Writer A. Scott Berg informs us "Wilson realized the country had a new power. We were not going in for treasure, we were not going in for territory. We were not there to be an imperial nation."

In its conclusion following the armistice of November 1918, *The Great War* focuses on the fate of Wilson's brainchild: the League of Nations, and laments the political maneuvering and partisanship that conspired to prevent the United States from joining that international body. Historian Margaret MacMillan suggests that this might have been the true tragedy of World War One: "We can't help asking what if. I mean what if the United States had joined the League? What if the United States had been in the League when Mussolini rose in Italy? What if the United States had been in the League when Hitler rose in Germany? Just what if." This is how the ultimate lesson, never quite explicitly stated, comes out. We see that the United States is, or should be, in the words recited by Keith David's gravelly voice in ads for the United States Navy, "a global force for good." The remedy for the world's ills is more selfless involvement and intervention by the United States.

The problem with all of that, though, is that it's a load of total bullshit. Despite the proclamations by the likes of H.G.

Wells and Woodrow Wilson of a war to end war, or crusade to make the world safe for democracy, the First World War was not a war for democracy, freedom, peace, or justice, even if some of the participants were motivated by these notions. If we take off the blinders of liberal imperialism, and step back and look at World War One from a world-historical perspective, it becomes staggeringly obvious that the war was fought between tyrannical, immensely undemocratic empires over the spoils of 19th century industrial capitalism and global imperialism. The First World War was an imperial war waged by empires for empire, utilizing the new organizational and technological innovations of the Second Industrial Revolution. Ignoring the immense imperial element of the conflict, and refusing to see the United States as an imperial power among others, even as its leaders saw little opportunity for territorial gain, makes the First World War an incomprehensible bloodbath.

NO DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY SHOULD include the United States of 1914, a country that despite its Fifteenth Amendment, brutally disenfranchised millions of black people in the American South, and in which women, the majority of the population, could only vote in eleven out of forty-eight states (New York became the twelfth in 1917). Nor did the United States ever seem particularly interested in peace. Even without delving into the United States' genocidal conquest and colonization of the western portion of the North American continent, by the turn of the twentieth century, America had more in common with European empires than the Wilsonian fantasy spun by *The Great War* would have us believe. Just like its counterparts across the Atlantic, the United States pursued an aggressive, imperial foreign policy abroad, and America had only recently been embroiled in horrendously violent colonial wars in the Pacific and the Americas. A mere sixteen years before the outbreak of the "war for freedom" in Europe against Teutonic barbarism, the United States had itself waged a nakedly predatory war with Spain, snatching the country's colonial possessions in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Higher estimates for the number of civilian dead in the Philippines, where American forces engaged in counterinsurgency warfare of astonishing viciousness, approach one million, and some claim that the United States committed genocide. Historian Glenn Anthony May has argued that the American war in the Philippines may have constituted a "total war," that is, a war unlimited in scope, acknowledging no boundaries between civilian and military adversaries. We often forget that Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden," emblematic of an era of imperial megalomania, was directed not at the British Empire, but at American involvement in the Philippines.

American military excursions just in the period from 1890 through the end of the First World War must have made the

German Kaiser green with envy. These include the 1893 overthrow of the independent Kingdom of Hawai'i and its subsequent annexation to the United States in 1898, a state that had previously enjoyed diplomatic recognition by France, Britain, and the United States itself. Among other adventures, the United States carved Panama off from Colombia in 1903, invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, essentially ruled Cuba as a colonial dependency from 1898 until the Cuban Revolution in 1958, invaded and occupied the Dominican Republic from 1916 until 1924, and this is not to mention repeated interventions and occupations of Nicaragua, Honduras, and parts of Mexico. While not formally incorporated into an American

"The First World War was an imperial war waged by empires for empire."

empire per se, Central American "banana republics" were nonetheless forced into subordinate, exploitative colonial relationships with the United States. Outside its own backyard in 1900, the United States joined with its peers Britain, Japan, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary in the invasion of China during the Boxer Rebellion, contributing 2,500 soldiers, with American marines even participating in the battle for Beijing. Following the war, the United States, like its imperial counterparts in Europe and Asia, was a recipient of Chinese indemnities.

Far from an alien European phenomenon, the United States practiced empire with enthusiasm. We can grant, at least, that the United States never quite exerted direct foreign rule over a population vastly larger than the one it considered to be its own citizens, mostly choosing to bully and exploit its weaker and poorer neighbors. The term "democracy" is even less applicable to the United States' ally and partner in the First World War, the British Empire, where a tiny, elite gaggle of tea-swilling European men wielded despotic power over a global empire of nearly 500 million people, then around one quarter of all people on earth. Like Americans, proud Britons fancied their country to be a democracy, perhaps one that championed liberty in an empire of freedom, although even on the island of Great Britain itself, property restrictions to the franchise were not fully eliminated (for men) until 1918.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO QUITE PROPERLY ARTICULATE THE absurdity of claiming that the British Empire of 1914 was fighting a war for peace, freedom, or democracy. In 1914, Britain was at the apex of its power. It was the wealthiest country on earth, commanded the oceans with the world's largest and most powerful navy, and had positioned itself as the global hegemon. Britain, quite possibly the most warlike state in human history, did not become the ruler of a quarter of the world (both in terms of land and population) peacefully, nor did it do so with altruistic intentions. Even if we leave out the horrors of British rule in India, where untold millions died in famines from 1876 to 1900 (termed "late Victorian holocausts" by Mike Davis), and only examine the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there aren't enough pages in this magazine to do justice to any list of horrors perpetrated by the British Empire to further the interests of its ruling elite.

If we just look at the practice of settler colonialism alone, the United States largely limited itself to one measly continent to conquer and practice what geneticist David Reich might now call "population replacement." British migrants, prisoners, farmers, and soldiers fanned out across more than three continents, building genocidal settler democracies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa.

In the decades immediately preceding the First World War, British imperial fantasies of wealth and power seemed to transcend any conceivable earthly limit. During the so-called "Scramble for Africa" of the 1880s and 1890s, in a drive to conquer territories stretching from the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa to Cairo in Egypt, Britain took control of enormous territories, including the lands that now constitute Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa. In their conquests, the British never hesitated to deploy the bleeding edge of technological or organizational innovation, particularly when asserting their rule over relatively helpless "natives." In one notable episode of imperial aggression, the Anglo-Zanzibar war of August 27, 1896, a British naval bombardment by modern warships killed or wounded over 500 hundred defenders of a recalcitrant ruler in just under 40 minutes. On their end, one British sailor was injured. British forces were also early adopters of the Maxim gun, an early machine gun, which they put to good use on September 2, 1898 at the Battle of Omdurman in what is now Sudan. The numerically inferior Anglo-Egyptian force suffered fewer than 50 dead and a few hundred wounded, while massacring 12,000 and wounding 13,000 Sudanese. Even when facing white people of European descent, the British found their commitment to justice or freedom failed to hold them back. From 1899 to 1902, Britain fought campaigns to invade and annex the independent South African Afrikaner republics, where Britain pioneered one of those notorious innovations of the twentieth century, the concentration camp. In British camps, 26,000 civilians, mostly women and children, died under horrendous conditions.

NONE OF THIS IS TO SAY THAT THE GERMAN EMPIRE was, or would have been, any more benevolent. Not long after Germany's unification in 1871, German thinkers came to imagine a colonial empire as a key economic and military asset, a guarantor of national prestige, and a place to house surplus population. Like Britain, Germany participated in the Scramble for Africa, as well as colonization in the Pacific, though its conquests were certainly more modest than those of the more established colonial powers. It was, after all, the German colonial empire that perpetrated what some have called the first genocide of the twentieth century from 1904-1908 against the Herero and Nama people of what is now Namibia. Following years of brutal land expropriation, German colonial officials faced an uprising by some of the region's indigenous inhabitants in which over a hundred Germans were killed. In retaliation, German forces deliberately attempted to annihilate the entire Herero and Nama population, slaughtering those who survived battle, and driving much of the remaining population to starve or die from thirst in the desert. Many survivors who were not executed on sight in a racialized war of annihilation were deported to slave labor in the Shark Island concentration camps. Higher estimates for the number of indigenous lives lost exceed 100,000. It's no wonder that scholars have investigated links between German genocide in Namibia and the Holocaust.

To be sure, there were important differences between the western empires of 1914, but for the most part, these were in differences in the details, not in kind. To understand the First World War, then, we have to look at the geographic, political, and economic worlds these empires inhabited and hoped to dominate. Although Britain was the wealthiest and most powerful country on earth in 1914, it was experiencing a relative geopolitical decline. The United States, with its vast and growing population and immense natural resources (including most of the world's oil) overtook the British economy in the late 19th century, and seemed destined to usurp Britain's position as global hegemon. On the European continent, Germany was the ascendant power and the most dynamic European economy. The German Empire industrialized at an astonishing pace at the end of the 19th century, with its steel production, for example, exploding from half of Britain's in the 1870s to matching it in the 1890s, and then doubling it before the First World War. By 1914, Germany had far surpassed Britain as the largest European industrial economy, making it the second largest economy in the world after the United States. The German army was also the largest in Western Europe, second in size globally only to Russia, and as the war proved, by far the most competent and effective. To Britain and France, German foreign policy, arising from an up-and-coming power, appeared especially threatening—its colonial *Weltpolitik* in particular. Denouncing its "encirclement" by hostile powers, demanding "a place in the sun," the rising German Empire threatened to challenge the global order.

When we look at them now, German leaders' fears of encirclement were entirely rational. Despite boasting an expanding econ-

omy, a booming population, and a powerful military, the country was quite hemmed in. To the west lay France, a smaller and, for the time being, weaker country with a large colonial empire in Africa and Asia. To the east, the almost incomprehensibly vast Russian Empire stretched more than 6,000 miles to the Pacific Ocean. And in the North Sea and on the world's oceans, the British navy controlled the waves, threatening to cut off German access to vital commodities, raw materials, and the world market. This is, in fact, what happened during the war. In the race for colonial possessions in Africa and Asia, Germany had made considerable gains, but certainly nothing to allow it to compete with Britain, Russia, or the United States. One way out of Germany's encirclement could have been closer union with the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the south and east, and building a German-dominated customs union to serve the German economy, styled "Mitteleuropa." Other possibilities included building a European empire in the east, and colonial expansion in Africa: possessions like the Belgian Congo lay between German colonies.

By 1914, German imperialists faced a world that had been largely carved up before their country had even been founded, threatening to relegate Germany to a subservient position at the mercy of foreign powers. The final straw, according to historian Edward Dickinson in *The World in the Long Twentieth Century*, may have been the slow disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. With the discovery of oil in the fragile Ottoman Empire, potentially the largest reserves in the world, the Middle East assumed new strategic importance in the



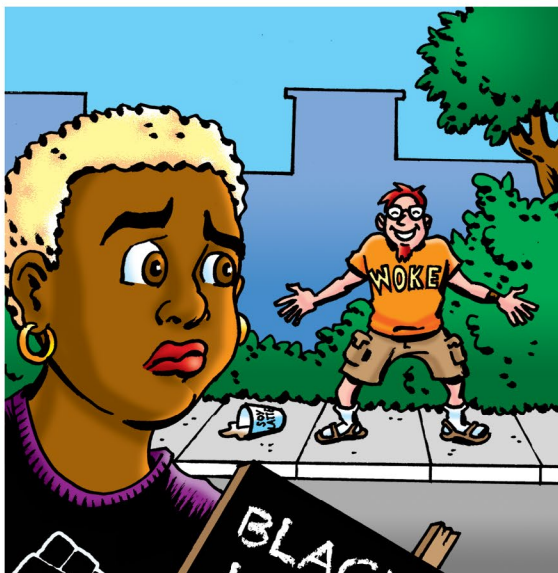
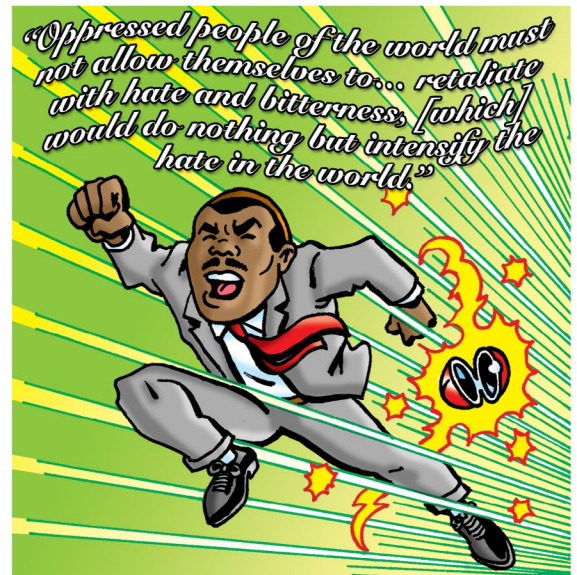
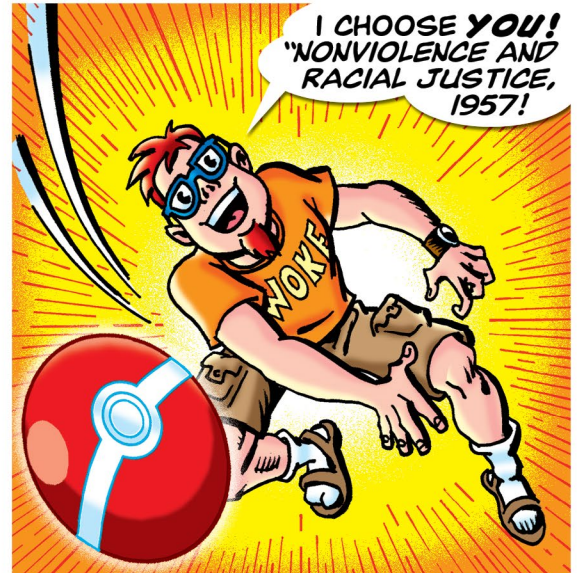
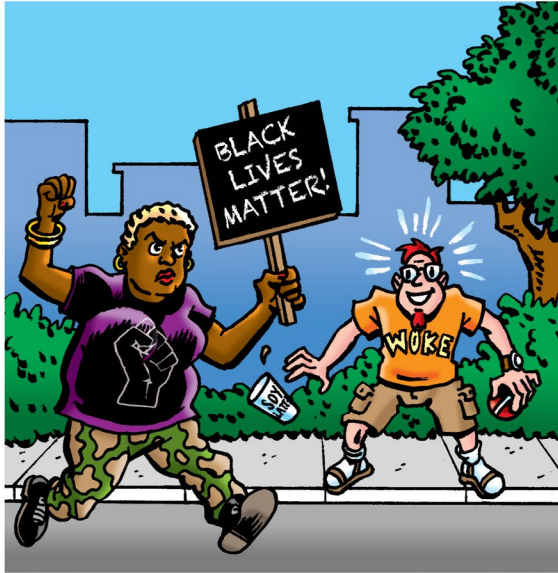
HEY, WHITE PEOPLE!

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minds of imperial planners. In their eyes, the Ottomans' wealth and vulnerability raised the possibility that whoever gained access to the region's resources might be able to compete as a world power in the century to come. To the British, Germany's alliance with and influence over the Ottoman Empire, including the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway bringing German power to the Middle East, threatened to do just that. This was a moment of enormous opportunity: with so little of the world left unconquered, if Germany did not move to change the facts on the ground in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, the opportunity to become a world imperial power might be lost forever.

The war that unfolded in 1914 was a war between empires over empire. Despite whatever rhetoric they used, the empires fought over the power and wealth to shape the fate of the world in the twentieth century. Nothing makes this clearer than the outcome of the peace settlement that followed the Central Powers' defeat. Britain and France dismembered the Ottoman Empire, and divided Germany's colonial empire between them. In the Middle East, Britain, as usual, took the lion's share, including the oil-rich Iraq. In Africa, British imperialists finally realized their Cape-to-Cairo dream. Wilsonian self-determination only applied to the new states in eastern and central Europe amputated from the war's losers.

The Great War does hint at more pragmatic motivations for American involvement when the narrator tells us that under Wilson, America saw the war as "a chance to transform the international order in America's image," and was fighting to "determine the shape of the peace." Facing an apparently hostile Germany threatening to destabilize a world order that was actually working quite nicely in America's favor, in 1917 the United States chose to put its weight on the side of Britain and France. In any case, these were countries with which it was already deeply economically entwined, and became increasingly so as the war dragged on. It was in the United States' interest to ensure that the world order that emerged from the chaos of the First World War did not threaten its own ascendance.

Little of this was lost to astute observers at the time. In his 1915 *The African Roots of the War*, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote:

The present world war is, then, the result of jealousies engendered by the recent rise of armed national associations of labor and capital whose aim is the exploitation of the wealth of the world mainly outside the European circle of nations. These associations, grown jealous and suspicious at the division of spoils of trade-empire, are fighting to enlarge their respective shares; they look for expansion, not in Europe but in Asia, and particularly in Africa. In the European conflict, "the ownership of materials and men in the darker world is the real prize that is setting the nations of Europe at each other's throats to-day.

SIMILARLY, IN THE PREFACE TO *IMPERIALISM, THE Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin described World War One as "a war to decide whether the British or German group of financial plunderers is to receive the most booty." He

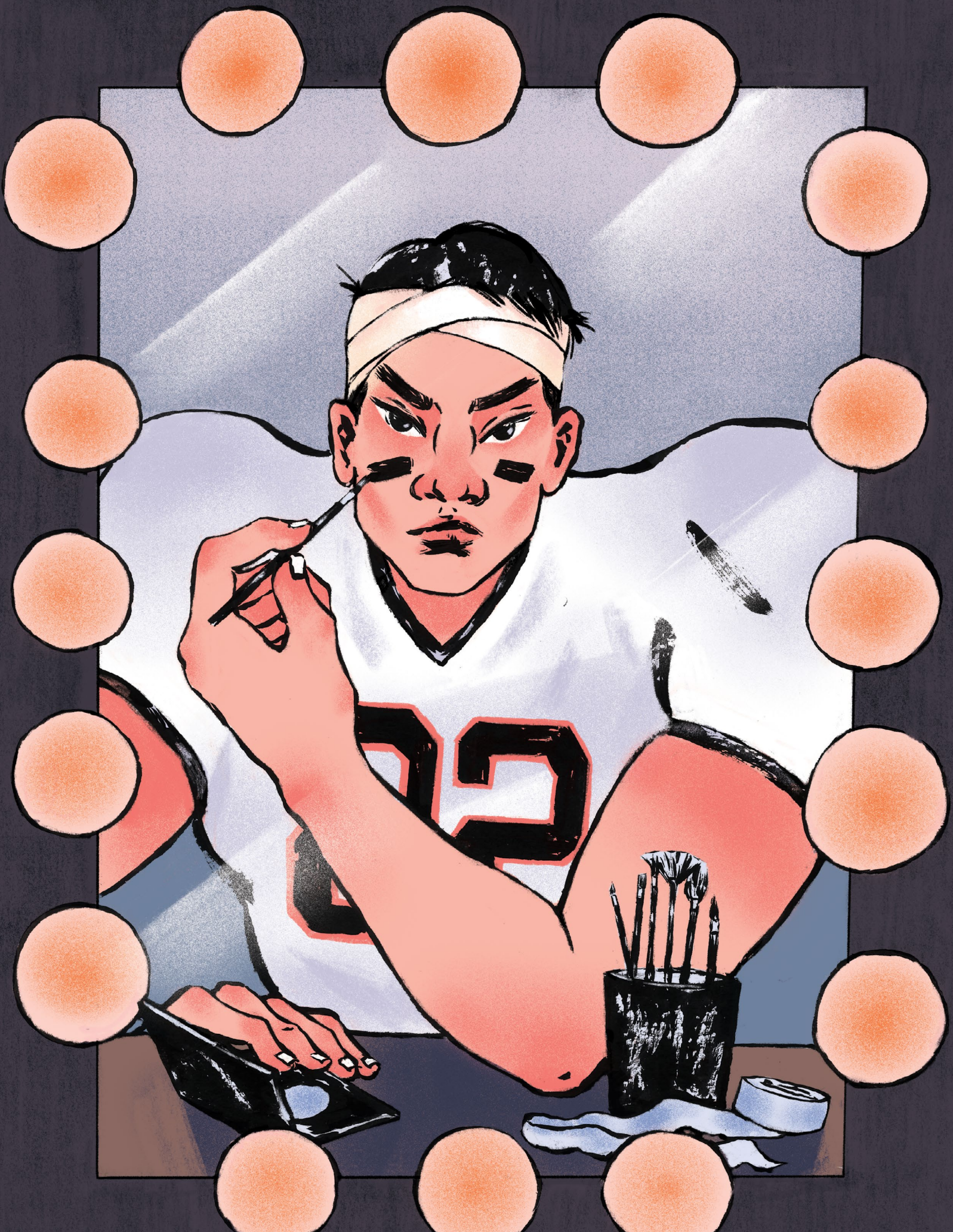
denounced the conflict as "an annexationist, predatory war of plunder...on the part of both sides." In his powerful June 16, 1918 speech in Canton, Ohio, American socialist leader Eugene Debs too condemned a war "waged for conquest and plunder":

"Every solitary one of these aristocratic conspirators and would-be murderers claims to be an arch-patriot; every one of them insists that the war is being waged to make the world safe for democracy. What humbug! What rot! What false pretense! These autocrats, these tyrants, these red-handed robbers and murderers... the purpose of the Allies is exactly the purpose of the Central Powers, and that is the conquest and spoilation of the weaker nations that has always been the purpose of war."

SOON AFTER, DEBS WAS ARRESTED AND imprisoned for sedition, supposedly for encouraging resistance to the draft in that very speech.

Perhaps these are the thinkers we should keep in mind as we contemplate World War One in 2018, one hundred years after its conclusion. From 1914 to 1918, millions of young men fought and died unimaginably cruel deaths, pitted against one another as pawns in an imperial game, a catastrophic and unnecessary conflict waged by greedy megalomaniacs hoping to play Risk with the fate of the planet. Millions more died in the influenza pandemic and the civil wars that followed. When we look at the main antagonists discussed here—the United States, Britain, and Germany—the First World War had no standout "bad guys."* While more autocratic than Britain or the United States, the German Empire of 1914 to 1918 was not the nightmare Adolf Hitler created twenty years later. Nor were there any real "good guys." The United States, Britain, and France were themselves exploitative, predatory empires that fought to defend and expand their wealth and power. While the high ideals of democracy, freedom, and civilization certainly motivated some of the war's participants, the post-war settlement shows what the victorious imperial regimes believed to be the stakes and the spoils. So one lesson we should take away a hundred years later is to subject any rhetoric of a war for peace, for freedom, or a fight "to make the world safe for democracy" to a healthy skepticism. Clearly, justifications for the United States' ongoing and seemingly unending involvement in the Middle East periodically tap into this discourse. Another lesson is to challenge the systems of wealth, power, prestige, and exploitation that undergirded the imperial competition that made such a conflict conceivable or even desirable. Above all, if we hope to build anything approaching a true democracy, we should reject imperial fantasies of greed, control, and domination, in all the different forms they take now. These are the dreams of empire that shaped the world of 1914. Ultimately, the fact that there was a Second World War, one even more horrible and one with truly exceptional villains, shows that the First resolved little in the name of peace, freedom, or democracy. ♦

* NOTE: This does not mean that there were *no* bad guys in World War One. The dying Ottoman Empire's vicious murder of around 1.5 million Armenians certainly places it in that category.



FOOTBALL

IT'S PROBLEMATIC!

by Lyta Gold & Oren Nimni

A N AMERICAN SOLDIER MARCHES SLOWLY down the runway. His precision is impeccable. His white gloves gleam in the fluorescent lights. He holds his sword upright, without shaking, without physical weariness or any expression on his face at all. He looks exactly like the masculine ideal of the unemotional, perfectly disciplined soldier.

The scene is from *Paris is Burning*, the critically acclaimed 1990 documentary about New York City ball culture. The gay Black man dressed up as a soldier is attempting to achieve what's known in the drag world as "realness." Drag queen Dorian Corey explains the term in a voiceover: "The realer you look, it means you look like a 'real' woman. Or a 'real' man. [Meaning] a straight man. It's not a takeoff or a satire. No, it's actually being able to be this." This kind of drag, where men dress up as an extreme, straight-passing form of masculinity, is less well known in the contemporary drag scene, which mostly features drag queens and (more rarely) drag kings. But there is a place in American culture where you still find men dressing up to perform a hyper-stylized, deadly serious masculinity: American football.

There is one very critical difference between football and drag, which is that drag is self-aware. In drag, gender exists only so far as

it's a performance: sometimes as realness, sometimes as satire, often gloriously as both. But in American football, the players put on padding and uniforms that exaggerate the breadth of their shoulders and narrow their hips. They stride out onto the field under the glare of fluorescent lights, cheered on by beautiful women in skimpy outfits, saluting a flag (usually held up by soldiers in white gloves), in order to play a game that features such phrases as "penetration," "pound the ball," and "hit the hole." It's basically just one big advertisement screaming, "See we're men! We're straight! Buy into this product, and become a man just like us!" And yet the vast majority of people—players, fans, and sportswriters alike—remain blissfully or deliberately unaware that this is a performance. This is straight male realness, hyped up past it into the surreal. Imagine a John Waters movie that doesn't even know it's a John Waters movie.

There is something that feels very "American" about American football, and Colorado State University historian Robert Gudmes-tad suggests the cartoonish masculinity of the game can be linked to our unique national anxieties:

"Postwar affluence and the increase in white-collar jobs, when combined with concerns about the power of the Soviet Union, led many Americans to fear that men were too effeminate and weak. These anxieties created fertile soil for the growth of football, which became a way

to affirm masculinity and fight the supposed “muscle gap.” If you didn’t embrace football—which seemed to embody Cold War ideas of containment—you might be suspected of deviant behavior like homosexuality or communism.”

This is not the only way in which the broader issues of the country at large are reflected in the game. In football, we see so many of the trends that characterize the United States: not just gender performance but anti-worker corporatism, healthcare woes, and, of course, racism. For some time, these issues have been hidden from view, undiscussed in a sports world that prefers to celebrate idealized male warriors who owe their loyalty (and silence) to the fans, the team owners, and bountiful America itself. But of course, football players aren’t warriors or symbols. They’re people, with bodies that can be damaged, and minds that are aware of their rights as workers, their

suicide in prison). The autopsied brains of dead football players carry the scars of their terrible, unhealable injuries. In one study, 110 out of 111 deceased football players (who had donated their bodies to scientific research into the mental conditions they had suffered during life) showed signs of CTE.

The NFL instituted some minor rule changes this year intended to reduce the number of head injuries. But each time a rule change is proposed, there is protest from some quarters, with fans and commentators suggesting that it’s ruining the integrity and masculinity and red-blooded raw steak-iness of the game. During a *Monday Night Football* broadcast, former Dallas Cowboy-turned-sportscaster Jason Witten called the new roughing-the-passer rule—designed to prevent head injuries—too soy-boy lefty. Witten commented: “... they’ve just gone too far with that rule. I knew they wanted to make

“THERE IS ONE VERY CRITICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FOOTBALL AND DRAG, WHICH IS THAT DRAG IS SELF-AWARE.”

precarious status as celebrities, and the violence and inequality directed at Black men in this country.

The left has a tendency to disdain sports. Sports are considered irrational, a distraction from the Very Serious Business of politics, a “bread and circuses” corporate spectacle, an entertainment for the mindless masses (who are, for some leftists, curiously not imagined as workers). That’s unfortunate, not just because football can actually be really fun to watch and follow—have you ever seen an entire game turn on a sudden pick six?—but also because it’s a major national institution where important questions about gender, race, and labor play out. Yes, football is a corporate festival for the masses, an unconsciously campy celebration of masculinity and America and whiteness and Our Troops and sacrificing yourself for the greater good (i.e., your employer). That’s precisely why it deserves our attention.

THE DAYS WHEN ONE COULD ENVY THE LIVES OF football players are past. With increasing awareness of the prevalence of CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy), we know that football players not only put their bodies at risk, but also their brains. In 2015, the *New York Times* reported on the devastating story of Ryan Hoffman, a former star lineman at the University of North Carolina who developed severe symptoms of mental illness and ended up homeless. Soon after being profiled, Hoffman rode his bicycle into oncoming traffic and was killed. His autopsy revealed the presence of CTE. There have been other prominent cases, from Junior Seau (who committed suicide), to Aaron Hernandez (who murdered at least one person and then committed

it about the health and safety, and protecting these quarterbacks, but it just seems like we went a little bit to the left wing on that, you know?” Leigh Steinberg of *Forbes* comments that “every protective rule change is initially greeted with controversy” and “football purists always claim that these changes ‘sissify’ football, or say ‘What’s next, putting a dress on the quarterback and letting him play in a rocking chair?’” But as Steinberg observes, “these critics are not around later when a player is suffering from dementia or CTE.”

The health risks of professional football are contested; some research has suggested a reduced life expectancy for career NFL players compared with those who quit earlier in life. Football players are probably healthier than average due to their athletic lifestyles, but also prone to unique risks. The NFL, for its part, has vigorously contested findings suggesting that professional football hurts its players in the long run, and has been criticized for attempting to downplay the significance of CTE despite investing in medical research on concussions. *SBNation* has written that the league “has a history of supporting concussion research...but only when that research supports what it’d like to believe.” Convenient!

There are plenty of injuries besides head injuries, and some players have clearly been worried. Heisman Trophy winner and former Raiders running back Bo Jackson commented last year that if he had been aware of CTE’s risks, he wouldn’t have taken up the game to begin with, and he didn’t want his children playing the sport. This year, cornerback Vontae Davis quit abruptly in the middle of a game. A ten-year veteran of the NFL, he had suffered multiple injuries, surgeries, and rehabs throughout the course of his career. In a written statement, Davis said:

"...today on the field, reality hit me fast and hard; I shouldn't be out there anymore. I meant no disrespect to my teammates and coaches. But I hold myself to a standard. Mentally, I always expect myself to play at a high level. But physically, I know today that isn't possible, and I had an honest moment with myself. While I was on the field, I just didn't feel right, and I told the coaches, 'I'm not feeling like myself.' I also wondered: Do I want to keep sacrificing? And truthfully I do not because the season is long, and it's more important for me and my family to walk away healthy than to willfully embrace the warrior mentality and limp away too late."

Lots of sportswriters and fans were angry and upset at this refusal of the warrior mantle, Davis' perceived dereliction of duty in the face of the enemy (in this case the enemy was the Chargers, who recently left their adoring fans in San Diego for indifferent L.A. which, to be fair, is a rather evil move). Davis' supporters included Arian Foster, former star running back, who also quit abruptly, in the middle of the 2016 season, after a career littered with soft-tissue injuries and surgeries. Foster tweeted: "this football culture has somehow brainwashed people and players that your health as a human, being prioritized over a sport is somehow disloyal. This isn't a desk job. When your heart isn't in it fully you can hurt yourself or others, for good. Walk away when you know it's time." *SB Nation's* Ryan Van Bibber called Davis' actions "kind of awesome," fulfilling a lot of people's "American Dream," the "working class fantasy" of "walk[ing] off your steady job that makes you miserable" and burning your bridges. Van Bibber portrayed it as a kind of "take this job and shove it" moment, but it wasn't quite that: Davis was gracious and rueful; he just realized he had to quit before the job destroyed him.

In that sense, professional football really is a lot like many working-class jobs, in which you're selling your body's best years to your employer (and told, implicitly or explicitly, that you ought to be grateful for the opportunity). Of course, NFL players are paid a lot more money, but in some ways that's deceptive—the typical career length is 3.3 years. The average salary may be 2.1 million, but that's not much for a potential lifetime of physical injuries including possible brain damage. Many aspiring football players graduate college without ever really taking classes (college football players are supposed to keep up their grades, but many universities find ways of letting their star athletes glide by without ever having to find out which building is the library). After leaving the NFL, players often find themselves adrift, with knee injuries and memory problems, the money quickly gone. *Sports Illustrated* estimated that "78 percent of NFL players end up broke or under financial stress after they retire." If you're not a star player, and you haven't trained for another job, and you've damaged your body or mind, how are you supposed to spend the next 40+ years of your life?

Then, of course, there's the exploitation of college athletes. They're not paid at all, even though they make enormous amounts of money for their university through TV contracts, ticket sales, and merchandising. They're not even allowed to sign endorsements, or license their own images. The popular *NCAA Football* video game series takes the players' stats and assigns them to randomized names and unsmiling, characterless, computer-generated portraits. It's an absurd situation, justified on the grounds that the students are effectively unpaid interns, playing for "exposure" and for sheer patriotic love of their university, all while head coaches and athletic directors regularly pocket million-dollar salaries.

Consider the situation of Nick Bosa, a star defensive end for Ohio State. Early this season, Bosa suffered a core muscle injury and went through surgery, then rehab. He would have been back to play in December in time for the playoffs, but instead decided to withdraw from college, finish his rehabilitation without rushing back, and wait for the NFL draft. If Bosa had decided to return in December and then, God forbid, re-injure himself, his draft stock would drop precipitously, along with his possible post-college paycheck. But some view this kind of decision as a betrayal. Here's commentator Mike Farrell at *Rivals.com*:

*"What about your teammates? What about winning a national title, the goal of every high school football player out there? What about loyalty? Yes, I understand that Bosa is working for free and has millions at stake at the NFL level, but quitting when you could likely play for a team that is undefeated and could make the playoffs reeks of selfishness to me."**

Ah yes, what about Bosa's *loyalty* to his life-consuming, dangerous, unpaid job, every additional day of which increases his risk of hurting himself so badly that he *never* gets paid for his talents? Bosa is not supposed to view himself as a person, or even as a worker who earns a salary. Instead, he's supposed to be a fighter, a true man, someone who is loyal and rugged and will sacrifice even his own body for a higher cause. But what *is* that cause? Who is it all for—the hometown, the college, and then later in the NFL, the city? Who does football actually serve?

IN THE CASE OF THE NFL ITSELF, THE ANSWER TO THAT is: chiefly, a lot of extremely rich white people. All thirty-two NFL team owners are white. (The Green Bay Packers are actually owned by the Green Bay community in an unusual, near-socialist arrangement, but it's a very white town, so we'll count it.) Some teams have been owned by the same family for multiple generations. (In the case of the Detroit Lions and the Ford family, the ownership has been both constant and hilariously incompetent.) This means that while players may be well-compensated, they're still laboring on behalf of capitalists. The "means of producing" football, the franchise, are controlled by the owners, while the labor is sold by the players. If the laborers dissatisfy the owners, they can be terminated (contract depending). The NFL might appear different from the typical American workplace, but structurally it's basically the same, just with more pom-poms.

This makes the racial aspects of pro football even more troublesome. 70% of NFL players are Black, while the majority of the fans are white. Most of the top twenty highest-paid players are white, and until recently, Black players had dominated the positions that suffered the most injuries and the least prestige. The hugely important, celebrated, and so-called "intellectual" position of quarterback was almost exclusively white for decades. This has shifted in recent years, and since the early 2010s there has been a wave of talented young Black quarterbacks entering the NFL.

One of these was Colin Kaepernick. When Kaepernick began taking a knee during the national anthem in 2016 in support of Black Lives Matter, he was met with outrage from fans, who saw it as a kind of insubordination. Kaepernick had transgressed an im-

* At the time Bosa withdrew, Ohio State was undefeated and poised to make the playoffs, but their future is much less certain after an unexpected and humiliating loss to Purdue. It is possible that one of the writers of this piece is a Michigan fan and finds this situation absolutely hilarious. This is a small example of how football and its concurrent regional rivalries can be so, so much fun.

bird cafe

"just an absolutely
horrible idea"™



portant unspoken rule—he had not maintained dutiful obedient silence, like a good (Black) soldier, but had questioned authority. He had demonstrated “uppityness” and needed to be disciplined. Sure enough, while Kaepernick was a highly skilled player who would have ordinarily have been signed, at least as a backup quarterback if not as a starter,* he became a “risky investment” and was permanently exiled from professional football. His collusion case against the NFL is pending.

The Kaepernick story shows us some of the ugly racial dynamics in contemporary football, which are rooted in American history itself. Black men in America have long been stereotyped as mon-

FOOTBALL IS ULTIMATELY A PERFORMANCE, A GRAND spectacle, but not a spectacle that understands itself or will tolerate athletes who violate the unwritten codes of hero-soldier behavior. The fans are supposed to have fun—and football is fun!—but no one is supposed to question anything, or consider the players as anything more than costumed gladiators hurting each other for public consumption. The violence then becomes an end in itself. Nothing must interrupt the sacred rituals of masculine realness.

And that’s ultimately what makes football so funny, and so sad: its un-self-consciousness, its inability to reckon with what it ac-

“THERE IS SOMETHING UGLY INDEED ABOUT THE SPECTACLE OF MOSTLY BLACK MEN RISKING THEIR BODIES TO CREATE PROFITS AND ENTERTAINMENT FOR WHITE PEOPLE...”

strous physical specimens who are dangerous, cannot be injured, and should use their physical talents to entertain white people. They are supposed to be uniquely physically strong, but need to be controlled by white authorities. While they are considered to embody hypermasculinity, they are also deemed disposable, replaceable, like those randomized faces in the *NCAA Football* video game. There is something ugly indeed about the spectacle of mostly Black men risking their bodies, season after season and year after year, to create profits and entertainment for white people, and being punished if they choose to publicly speak up for racial justice. As commentator Dave Roth wrote:

“Last year, when NFL players insisted on the recognition of that fact—when they pressed the point that they were in fact still people that lived and suffered in the same world as everyone else, and demanded to be seen and heard as such—the force of the backlash was intensified by a certain ruffled shock. The NFL, like the broader culture in which it exists, is sentimental about all the wrong things and lazy in a way that approaches actual malice. The negative responses, from Trump on down, mostly resolved to huffy complaints at being rudely awakened from pleasant dreams of kind policemen. But there was, beyond the bursting of that bubble, also an authentic surprise at hearing this protest from these people. It was as if everyone had forgotten that NFL players could say anything with more substance than ‘Omaha, set.’”

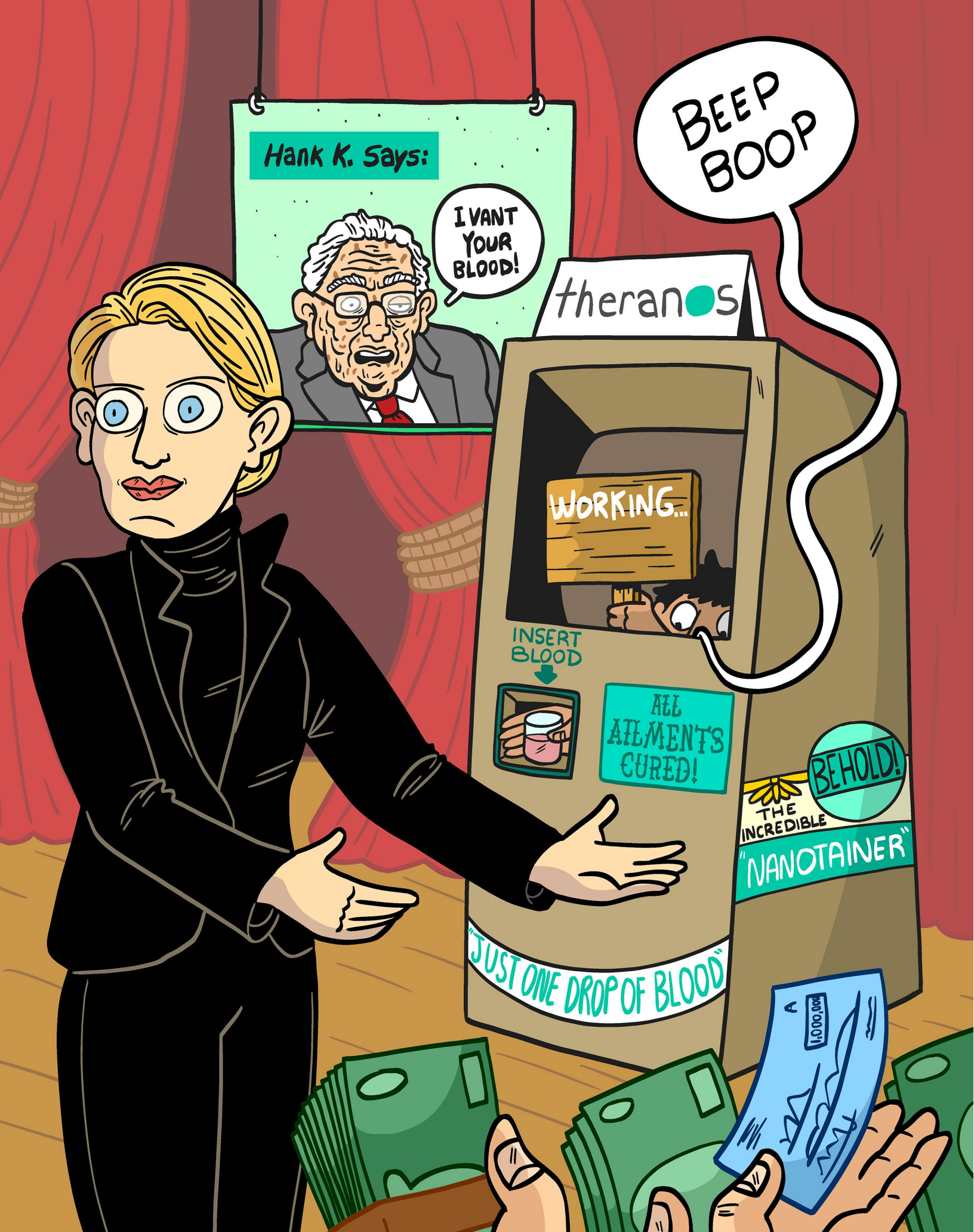
Kaepernick and the other NFL players who supported him have dared to use their profile to help people who are in danger, who are hurt, who are dying, and to draw awareness to civilians being killed by police. But just as disobedience can be punished with death by the police—resisting arrest, like Eric Garner—refusing to be a silent servant of white owners can be punished with exile.

* Nathan Peterman had a starting quarterback job, and he can only throw a football as long as it’s to the other team.

tually is: a big silly show of masculinity, a campy send-up of the American military, complete with flags and fireworks and big hugs after the battle. But instead of playing around and slyly exposing the imaginary lines of gender and race, football runs full tilt into the construct. It’s a mad performance of mutually assured destruction where the stakes of masculinity are constantly raised. Where you have to want to hit harder, receive less medical attention, and destroy your body even more to keep up with the frenzied pace of the game and the ever-longer season. Actor and ex-football player Terry Crews—after he came forward with a #MeToo accusation against a white producer and was lambasted for not defending himself, like a man—put the problem plainly, saying:

“I love being a man. I’m a dad. I’m a husband. I love what being a man is. But when you’ve twisted up the definition, when all of a sudden I have to do everything you say in order to be a man—that’s a cult. ‘Cause cults are about control. If you step out of line, you’re drinking Kool-Aid and we’ll kill you. That’s the whole point of a cult. Anybody who steps outside of what they deem as this definition of manhood you’re gonna find yourself in the cross-hairs.”

“Realness” is always, ultimately, a joke. Masculine realness is not an achievable state, just a play, a show, for awards and points. The feminist project can help make men more comfortable with themselves, so they can stop chasing after this impossible, poisonous vision of Being A Real Man. What is happening now in football—whether the NFL likes it or not—is that its players are slowly moving in the direction of redefining masculinity as something that can radically demand *not* to be hurt. Something that may no longer celebrate the endurance of pain, and will continue to question performing violence for white masters while real violence happens constantly to Black people in public spaces. And ultimately, the NFL needs to change with it, or die. ♦



Hank K. Says:

I WANT
YOUR
BLOOD!

theranos

BEEP
BOOP

WORKING...

INSERT
BLOOD

ALL
AILMENTS
CURED!

BEHOLD!

THE
INCREDIBLE

"NANOTAINER"

JUST ONE DROP OF BLOOD

Selling The MIRACLE MACHINE

by SPARKY ABRAHAM and NATHAN J. ROBINSON

GETTING YOUR BLOOD TESTED IS NOT A FAST or pleasant experience. There are needles. A lot of common tests require a good deal of blood, meaning that you often have to give several vials. Because there are needles and lots of blood required, you generally have to go somewhere to let trained people draw your blood. And then they send it to a lab, where more trained professionals analyze it using sophisticated and expensive equipment. Sometime later you get your results, which can include important indicators of your health generally and can also tell you things like how you're responding to medications. This whole process—go to a place, needles, lab, weeks pass, results—has been mostly the same for decades. The tests themselves have gotten better but the process hasn't. Technology, though, has improved at such a rapid pace in the last 15 years. Wouldn't it be great if there was a way to simplify the process? What if there was a blood-testing machine that people could have in their homes? They could put a pinprick's worth of blood into it, it could analyze the blood and instantly share the results with their doctors. Think of how many lives real-time tracking could save...

Luckily we live in the age of disruption. And so, circa 2006, a prodigy Stanford student made it her mission to revolu-

tionize blood testing. She enlisted professors and engineers and top chemists. She got backing from high-ranking government officials, and she received hundreds of millions of dollars from Silicon Valley venture capitalists to develop an in-home blood testing machine and to revolutionize the way healthcare outcomes are tracked. Hundreds of top minds in many fields poured a decade into the machine's development. *Forbes* and the *Wall Street Journal* and grocery and healthcare conglomerates nationwide lined up to pay for and use this revolutionary new system.

And thanks to all this money and support and brilliance being thrown at an important problem, a decade on, we now have . . . nothing. No machine. No meaningful advances in the field. The company is shuttered. The founder-prodigy is under criminal investigation. And all of that time and those resources poured into a real problem where real improvements are possible and desperately needed yielded nothing at all.

In *Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup*, John Carreyrou has laid the stranger-than-fiction story of Theranos in painstaking detail. Here's the short version: Holmes got a bunch of people onboard with revolutionizing blood testing and got a bunch of venture capital money. She ran the place with an iron fist, firing people constantly and enforcing dra-

conian security procedures. She talked a big game about her technology but had little of it to speak of—most of the early demonstrations by Theranos used faked results, and later on they mostly used other companies' machines to do blood tests. They evaded regulators and lied to potential partners and clients and kept the charade going for more than a decade using non-disclosure agreements and fancy lawyers like David Boies to silence former employees and other detractors. Eventually someone tipped Carreyrou off to their shell game and he spent years unmasking the fraud through a lot of great investigative reporting and a lot of luck. Now Theranos is no more.

On the one hand, this is a story of a tyrannical boss with an apparent messiah complex torturing her employees and sacrificing any meaningful progress in the world at the altar of her personal ambitions. But it's also a story about how you gain legitimacy (and funding) for a project in the 21st century. The book reads as an indictment of our culture's current ideas about innovation. A democratically-controlled workplace with Theranos's employees and resources could have truly revolutionized blood testing and saved countless lives. But the pressure to innovate and disrupt, and the need for a single visionary leader (whose abuses could be explained away as signs of genius), were necessary to get the money to do this work and, simultaneously, all but guaranteed that the work wouldn't get done.

ELIZABETH HOLMES MESMERIZED MANY PEOPLE she met. With her passion for disruption, her memorably deep voice, her piercing eyes, and her boundless confidence, Holmes was able to sell a seemingly endless line of luminaries on her vision. Holmes was a preternaturally determined individual. When she was about 9, she stated, with the utmost seriousness, that she intended to become a billionaire. The high-level personalities who became involved with Theranos did not do so because they understood the science behind her idea—there was no science to understand—but because of the force of Elizabeth Holmes' personality.

Considering that the company was an almost total fraud, the number of highly-credentialed supporters Holmes attracted is almost stunning. Henry Kissinger was on the board, along with former Secretary of State George Schultz and former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry. Superstar lawyer David Boies was on the team, as was James Mattis, who concluded that Holmes herself "has probably one of the most mature and well-honed sense of ethics—personal ethics, managerial ethics, business ethics, medical ethics that I've ever heard articulated." Barack Obama appointed Holmes an ambassador for global entrepreneurship, she made multiple White House appearances, and Joe Biden did a photo op at the Theranos lab.

It should have been obvious that Theranos could not actually revolutionize the blood-testing industry. There were more red flags than a Soviet street parade. The company never made it clear exactly how it planned to surmount the considerable chemical and engineering problems involved, and potential investors who

pressed for proof that its new testing machines actually worked were given the runaround. When Holmes herself actually tried to explain the new method, Carreyrou points out that she sounded like a high school chemistry student. Here is how she explained the technology to *The New Yorker*: "A chemistry is performed so that a chemical reaction occurs and generates a signal from the chemical interaction with the sample, which is translated into a result, which is then reviewed by certified laboratory personnel." A chemistry, then a result! Voilà!

THERANOS BEGAN WITH PROMISE. HOLMES hired top chemical engineers, many of whom did believe that the company could make blood testing significantly more efficient, even if they were skeptical of the outlandish promises Holmes made to the media and investors. (She and her partner Sunny Balwani insisted that their analyzer could process over 1,000 different blood testing codes, even though it had never in fact processed more than 12.) The diligent and competent employees, however, soon found that their workplace ran on Orwellian principles: all communication was obsessively monitored, departments could not talk to one another without going through Holmes, and employees who crossed Holmes or Balwani—by, for example, disagreeing with them—were routinely fired on the spot and frog-marched out of the building.

Holmes began running the operation more like a cult than a business, even saying that she was "building a religion." Carreyrou reports that she was "dead serious" when she told assembled employees that the Theranos miniLab was "the most important thing humanity has ever built" and if "you don't believe this is the case, you should leave now." Advised to dress the part, Holmes started sporting the signature Steve Jobs black turtleneck. She began explicitly imitating Jobs, whom she referred to as "Steve" as if they were close friends. Employees could tell which chapter of Walter Isaacson's bestselling Jobs biography she was on by which phase of Jobs' career she was imitating.

As 700 million dollars flowed in, and Holmes was declared Silicon Valley's first female billionaire based on the estimated value of the company, she became progressively more paranoid and megalomaniacal. She installed bulletproof windows in her office and had a 20-person security team. She worked out of a space designed to look like the Oval Office. Employees were fired constantly over minor issues, and anyone who raised impertinent questions learned quickly that no dissent would be tolerated. Carreyrou writes that Indian workers on H1-B visas effectively became "indentured servants" because of the control the company exercised over their immigration status. One employee emailed Holmes: "You have created a work environment where people hide things from you out of fear. You cannot run a company through fear and intimidation... it will work only for a period of time before it collapses." Holmes did not change course.

The duplicity at Theranos boggles the mind. When Holmes publicly demonstrated the blood-testing machine, she had it spit

out completely fake results. People were told that their samples were tested by the machine when they were actually being tested on standard equipment. The Theranos lab itself contained a secret downstairs that inspectors were kept from viewing. Holmes said that the machines were being deployed by the United States military on the battlefield. They weren't.

There were tragic human consequences to Holmes' fraud. A chemist named Ian Gibbons, who prided himself on his integrity and the quality of his work, committed suicide after becoming entangled in Theranos' deceptions. A number of patients were given terrifying false test results from the Theranos machines, indicating that they had rare life-threatening illnesses. Holmes and Sunny Balwani were seemingly indifferent to the harm inflicted by their lies.

(Actually, as badly as Holmes comes across in Carreyrou's reporting, her partner Balwani appears far worse. Sunny was far more tyrannical and abusive, conducting most of the summary firings and issuing some of the most menacing threats. Sunny also knew so little about the underlying chemistry that employees had fun trying to sneak a fictitious scientific term into a presentation, which Sunny dutifully repeated to the quiet amusement of his subordinates.)

THE OBVIOUS, BUT INTERESTING, QUESTION RAISED BY the rise and fall of Theranos is: how could this happen? How could so many "brilliant" minds be duped? Holmes was the toast of Silicon Valley, profiled sympathetically in *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Rupert Murdoch invested. So did Carlos Slim. Top venture capitalist and Netscape founder Marc Andreessen was a prominent defender of Theranos, even as the whole enterprise began to unravel. A 20-year-old dropout with almost no scientific training in the relevant fields managed to convince dozens of Geniuses that she had solved chemical engineering problems that no expert in the field could surmount, without ever having to explain *how* she had solved them.

The first explanation is that this was simply a really good story. It fit perfectly with the Silicon Valley Narrative, which at this point is as much of an archetype as the Horatio Alger tale. A college dropout from a prestigious university proves all the experts wrong, disrupting and revolutionizing a field. Holmes' gender even provided a unique twist on the tale. These rich people wanted it to be true, because it would confirm their view of the world: innovation doesn't come from, say, well-funded public universities or the hard work of large teams of lowly employees. It comes from individual entrepreneurs who go their own way and single-handedly upend industries without help from anyone else. And nevermind the constant criticisms of male domination in tech (and the attendant misogyny and constant demeaning of women), Holmes proved that Silicon Valley rewarded merit and not maleness. Her success helped the Valley reassure itself about its goodness.

There was also an element of insecurity: once somebody is declared a Genius, those tempted to say that the Emperor has no clothes always wonder whether they're perhaps just missing something. Perhaps the Genius knows best. These things snowball. Once *Forbes* declares you the next big thing, *Fortune* will sign on too.

Holmes also knew that the aesthetic of success plays a big role in creating legitimacy. If you'll look the part, people will treat you accordingly. Fake it till you make it. Holmes' imitation of Apple extended beyond sweaters. She hired Chiat\Day, the advertising firm that had produced Apple's famous "1984" ad, to brand Theranos. While the inside of a Theranos machine was clunky and largely useless, Holmes paid obsessive attention to the exterior design. She "wanted a software touchscreen similar to the iPhone's and a sleek outer case for the machine. The case, she decreed, should have two colors separated by a diagonal cut, like the original iMac."

All of this worked. Safeway and Walgreens both tried to get Theranos testing machines for all of their stores, and even though neither had seen much evidence of the machines' viability, the potential upside was so big that they stifled their doubts. Carreyrou writes:

"Safeway was still hesitant to walk away from the partnership. What if Theranos technology did turn out to be game-changing? It might spend the next decade regretting passing up on it. The fear of missing out was a powerful deterrent."

The reluctance of people to admit they've been duped also worked to Holmes' advantage. George Schultz's grandson, Tyler, worked at Theranos and saw instantly that there was something deeply awry. He attempted to warn his grandfather, who preferred to destroy his relationship with his grandson rather than contemplate the possibility he had made a serious error in judgment. In one of the more bizarre incidents of Carreyrou's book, Schultz invited Tyler over to discuss the matter, and hid a team of attorneys in the house, who were waiting to spring out and cajole Tyler



into signing an agreement to keep his mouth shut.

Theranos deployed the full coercive power of the law in order to keep its crimes quiet. Employee non-disclosure clauses were enforced to the letter. Anyone who threatened to blow the whistle was immediately warned that they faced serious legal consequences. David Boies' law firm, Boies Schiller Flexner, pressured doctors who had doubts about Theranos into staying away from the press, and a team of lawyers confronted Carreyrou with (phony) intimations of potential impending libel suits. Getting ex-employees to talk on the record, even those alarmed by the company's actions, proved challenging for Carreyrou. (Carreyrou's attempts to track down the sources and piece together the story comprise a particularly gripping part of *Bad Blood*.)

THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY LESSONS HERE. *BAD BLOOD* sometimes reads like a how-to manual for running a fraudulent company, especially circa 2010. Want to ensure employee silence? Terrify them with constant monitoring and the ever-present risk of immediate termination. Make them sign all kinds of draconian agreements that, even if not actually legally binding, are as scary sounding as possible. Silo, silo, silo: anyone who can see the whole picture will know about the fraud, but you can keep going for a long time if the engineers think the chemists are doing the real operative work, and the chemists think the engineers are, etc. Better not let them talk to each other. Oh, and of course demand *absolute loyalty* at all times.

Misconduct can go unnoticed because the law is an effective instrument of maintaining employee silence, or because the truth would wound so many egos that nobody has an interest in confronting it. These factors demonstrate how completely irrational market pricing can be; personality can be just as important as the product in determining what investors make of a company. So don't worry so much about the science and technology—work on that personality. Get a schtick, steal someone else's, whatever you can do. Wear black turtlenecks, or maybe hoodies or crocs.

These negative lessons can also tell us something about what is important in running a *successful* organization. The machines never got built because the engineers didn't know anything about the fluid dynamics or chemistry problems, the designers didn't know about the engineering problems, etc. So if you wanted to run Theranos successfully, you would do everything possible to get your different sets of employees together. You want your engineers and chemists to have healthy working relationships. Hell, you want them to be *friends*. Undying loyalty to you is what you demand when you are a fraud. Curious, joyful, and cooperative engagement with a problem is what you need for solutions.

The same goes for how employers should treat their workers. When disagreement is punished, people stop disagreeing. And then when the boss is wrong, which they inevitably will be even when they *aren't* a non-expert in their early twenties, there will be no correction. Hierarchy is often counterproductive, and the stricter it is the worse the effects can be. There are even very simple

lessons one can draw about current and common policy proposals: the board members of Theranos would have been served very well by having employee representation on the board, as Elizabeth Warren has proposed requiring.

But *Bad Blood* also shows us a completely dysfunctional corporate culture. Silicon Valley is a place where anything that promises to “disrupt” and “change the world” can rake in hundreds of millions of dollars, even if the purveyor is no less a flim-flam artist than a 1900s seller of patent medicines. Those celebrated as brilliant are easily tricked, and are certainly no wiser than the rest of us.

THE MOST FORTUNATE AMONG US SOMETIMES find ourselves in a uniquely capitalist quandary: we are faced with the choice between doing a job that is good for the world but pays less, or a job that is terrible for the world but pays more. You can scratch by at a nonprofit trying to get babies out of ICE cages, or you can go be a management consultant and help Saudi Arabia figure out whom to imprison for speaking out. And, for most people, doing good doesn't last forever. Making relatively little money is exhausting in a world that demands much and judges harshly. Silicon Valley notoriously offers a solution. You can “make the world a better place” and get obscenely rich doing it. That promise is normally a bill of goods cynically sold to earnest souls, people who really *want* to believe that their lines of code adjusting the formatting on the ads served by some attention-harvesting social media company really are giving people meaning or connection or whatever.

Theranos, though, gives us a small glimpse into a possible alternative reality. Theranos really could have done significant good in the world. The people who came to work for Theranos thought that's what they would be doing. And Theranos did amass a small fortune to do that. The money was there to improve blood testing and people were willing to do the work—they could have saved lives and lived comfortably for their trouble. But the money wasn't *really* there to improve blood testing. The money was there to find a unicorn disrupter who could cement Silicon Valley's narrative of itself and relieve some of the burden on its conscience. If Theranos had been reasonably and productively managed it could have saved lives, but it never could have raised its money. Holmes *had* to be both pandering and toxic. She *had* to be a charismatic non-expert in a black turtleneck. Not because of some fact about the world, but because the only way to get money for this project was to appeal to people with exponentially more ego than expertise or sense.

The money exists. The expertise exists. Everyone would be thrilled to do the work. There is even money to be made, value created, by improving existing systems and possibly even being a little disruptive. But the people and systems for allocating those resources are compromised, maybe beyond repair. And those compromised people and systems demand that inspiring young people be Elizabeth Holmes. Without greed, power-hunger, and workplace tyranny, people can actually get things done. But a culture of hype, always searching for the next Genius, will only give us Elizabeth Holmes and her miracle machine. ❖

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- ✦ ART DEALERS
- ✦ CORRUPT COPS
- ✦ THE BOURGEOISIE



CIRCLES OF HELL

MINOR ANNOYANCES

MISOGYNISTS +
SEXUAL HARASSERS

LACK OF
COMPASSION

GREED

WRATH

HERESY +
HYPOCRISY

VIOLENCE

FRAUD

TREACHERY

NON-CURRENT
AFFAIRS
PUBLICATIONS

PEOPLE WHO
COMPLAIN ABOUT
BEING "PILLORED" BY
THE COURT OF
PUBLIC OPINION

CATCALLERS

MEN WHO SAY
WOMEN AREN'T
FUNNY

WELCOME TO THE
VILLAGE OF
UNFAMOUSNESS

THZ
REPORTERS

ANYONE WHO HAS
EVER SAID, "WELL
I'M A LAW-ABIDING
CITIZEN!"

KOCH
BROTHERS

JEFF
BEZOS

TRUMP

WE ♥ GREEN ENERGY

F*CK YOU,
DIBLASIO

CUOMO
X-ING

SUPER RICH
DOOMSDAY
PREPPERS

MENU
FREEZE
DRIED
GRUEL

POLICE
OFFICERS

SUBPRIME MORTGAGE
LENDERS AND THE
POLITICIANS WHO
BAILED THEM OUT

ICE AGENTS

CORRUPT
CLERGY



WHERE YOUR WORK GOES TO DIE

Limbo Times

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CENTRIST COMMENTATORS

PUBLISH CENTRISTS

NOBELS + PULITZERS

PHILLIP ROTH
NORMAN MAILER

HENRY MILLER

"GENIUS" MALE NOVELISTS

SMUG ACADEMICS

#METOO HARASSERS

AVITAL RONELL

CHARLIE ROSE

LOUIS C.K.

OBNOXIOUS YOUTUBE PERSONALITIES

PEOPLE WHO POINTEDLY IGNORE THE HOMELESS

ALEX JONES

THE TEXAS BOARD OF PRISONS OFFICIAL WHO REFUSED TO GRANT CURRENT AFFAIRS A PRESS PASS TO SEE A DEATH ROW INMATE BECAUSE WE WEREN'T ON A LIST OF APPROVED MAGAZINES THAT HAD BEEN MADE IN 1996

NFL TEAM OWNERS

PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY CEOs

INTERNET WHITE SUPREMACISTS

BOSSSES WHO SCREAM AT EMPLOYEES

PEOPLE WHO YELL AT CUSTOMER SERVICE REPS

WOMEN WHO DON'T SUPPORT OTHER WOMEN

JUDGES WHO PRETEND TO BE "CONSTITUTIONAL ORIGINALISTS" BUT REALLY JUST HATE WOMEN, PEOPLE OF COLOR, AND THE WORKING CLASS

HENRY KISSINGER

"LIBERAL" WRITERS WHO WANT MORE CONSERVATIVE VOICES ON CAMPUS BUT NOT SOCIALIST VOICES

RAPISTS

ROBOCALLER PROGRAMMERS

SCAMMERS WHO TARGET THE ELDERLY AND THE MENTALLY ILL

FBI/NSA

LIVE FEED OF INNER THOUGHTS

CIA

STUDENT LOAN SERVICERS

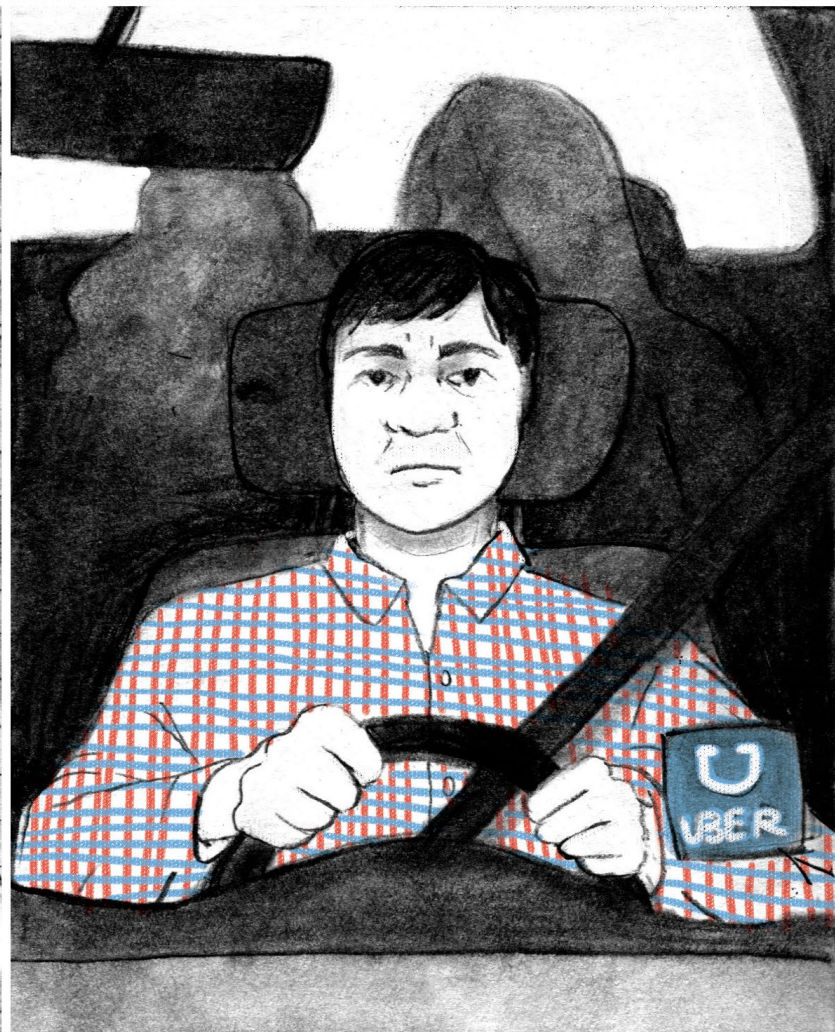
THE KKK

LATIN AMERICA

IRAN

DOWN WITH CAPITALISM

CENTRAL AFRICA



Can the Working Class SPEAK?

by MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ

I REGRET NEVER REALLY GETTING TO KNOW MY DAD until after the world broke him. And it's not like I didn't know him well before—I did. But not in the way I know him now. I wish I had known him better before everything went to hell, before the Recession hit, before we lost just about everything, so that he didn't have to go through it all feeling like I didn't, and *couldn't*, know what he was going through. To be perfectly honest, though, I don't think he really knew either.

Pops was never that much of a chatterbox. So, we all had to learn how to mine his brief words for hidden meaning. My siblings and I could decipher in a quick, throwaway suggestion that we watch a certain movie with him sometime a clear message that he *really* wanted to watch it with us *now*. We could discern many fine layers of disappointment in the way he said “Mmm ...” We could read his laughs like practiced fortune-tellers reading tea-leaves. And then there were his silences: the angry silence was obvious and terrifying; the smirking silence usually meant that he was still laughing inside at his own joke; the pensive silences when certain songs were playing usually corresponded to memories we had heard about enough times that we could practically see them playing out in his head.

But then, around Christmas, something changes. I see my dad sitting like a shadow. The familiar emotional cues I had once known how to read now seem lost in static, *shershing* and flashing

on a channel we don't get, faint, ghostly shapes swimming somewhere under the surface. Suddenly, my dad has become illegible.

It's clear that Christmas that my parents are hiding something from us. One of the perks of getting older is your parents gradually grant you access to more of those parts of themselves they had to keep behind curtains when you were little. They don't have to pretend to be saints anymore. They can laugh more. Ma giggles at the table—her eyes are even starting to water—as she gives us more ... unabridged versions of stories from her dumb, beautiful youth. She's kept them down for so long, it's like she's hearing them for the first time. At this point, she can let her guard down. She and Pops will finally concede that they *were* wrong about that one thing. They can admit now that there were times when they actually had no clue what they were doing, and they were terrified. They can just be themselves. But then there comes a day when you can tell, once again, that there's something they're not telling you. They've drawn the curtains again.

None of us can see the things loved ones hide from us in such moments, nor do we really want to. It's only in those terrifying, chest-pounding moments of unavoidable clarity—when the ambiguous haze we're all sailing through abruptly clears onto the jagged shore of the real, when an unpayable bill is due, or a notice is taped to the front door—that we are forced to acknowledge the truth we've been striving not to know.

Jesus Alvarez on losing everything, driving for Uber

Max: I'm curious to know, because we talked about it a lot over this conversation, and you've lived such an interesting life, and have come such a long way from that garage in Guadalajara, when your mom passed away, when you were six. And so, jumping closer to the present, you've said a number of times that the Great Recession that really kind of hit in 2008, and the after effects that we're still dealing with in significant ways, that this was kind of the real — this was the big meteor type of event, for you, for our family, and for a lot of working families around the country, and around the world. I guess, how did that translate on the real estate side that you were on?

JA: That's been, I think, to me, the most frustrating portion, that I worked all these years in real estate to provide, and have always been able to. When the real estate market crashed, unfortunately, I tell people that never in a million years would I think that I'd be one of the casualties, because I handled property owned by the banks, the bank owned properties and stuff like that. So never in a million years did I think that our family would be one of the casualties. But as it turned out, when the market crashed, we lost some rental property, we lost the office building that I was a partner in. The business crashed, Mom's business crashed, and as you know, we ended up losing our house. And that is super hard to get over, to think that we worked so hard to achieve whatever status we have. To have it all — it's like water going down your arms, dripping at your elbows [laughs]. The only way I can describe it is "it's all gone, it's disappeared." And it's been tough to get back, really tough mentally. Because no one wants to talk about what happens personally, ourselves included. It's depressing, it's embarrassment, all that kind of stuff. And I was surprised that when we went through all of this, everybody was too busy with their lives. Nobody really reached out to see where we were at, or throw us a lifeboat or whatever. But I realized, every family's got to survive. But having gone through all of this, having achieved what I thought was success, and then to have it all go away, and now kind of re-starting, I think it's a big thing, swallowing my pride, to go back out there and start all over. But we still have our health, we're still here. I always look at it as though I am a boxer — we're still in the ring. I'm old and I'm fat, but I'm like George Foreman. I still got a good overhand right... I'm hoping to land a good right on a good deal, and get us started back up. Which I think it will. I've got to call my mom again.

But it's interesting, now I'm driving a little bit for Uber. And when I went to apply or whatever, a lot of the people I saw were people my age, or older. And statistics show that a lot of people driving, or these kinds of things, are people who need secondary, or people who have lost a lot of stuff. I always thought it was just going to be the younger people, but no, it's a lot of people my age or older, and it's sad. As I talk to a lot of the passengers, interesting when I talk to a lot of them, because I'm pretty good at getting the conversation going now, and so I talked to several who have lost their house or whatever. And I'm thinking man, they've gone through the same thing, and I can relate to the emotions they went through, the depression. I think the main thing for me is that I realized is that we went through some depression. And so we're finally, I think, over that curve, and we're working our way back up. But I think unless you go through something like that, it's really hard. And maybe we didn't reach out for the help that we should have.

[...] Just two days ago, I picked up a lady at a restaurant. She was about my age, and we start talking. She's from Mexico. And we started talking about how when she got married, her husband left the family to come to the United States, so he could try to find a job to provide. I think she said it was 1984 and he was making \$3 an hour, sending the money back. And she was trying to raise I think three kids down there with the goal of eventually bringing them over. And then eventually, they were able to save enough and stuff for them to come over. But then one of the sons didn't want to come to the United States, he wanted to stay in Mexico or whatever. It's a little bit sad how our families get torn up. Torn up just trying for betterment, the Mexican culture or whatever. That's what people don't realize. We don't want to just come over to come over and take jobs. It's for survival. Any family would do the same thing just to provide for their family, which is hard. Nobody wants to leave their family behind. But if it was turned around to the other cultures, they would do the same thing. They would do whatever they have to do to provide for their family. And that's the part they don't talk about. We're not trying to do anything that nobody else would do. We're just trying to provide for your families, even at the tough part of ripping the families apart. Because there's unfortunately there's not enough economics in Mexico or other countries to provide. People don't want to split their families up just to do it. And it's sad when I talk to some of these people, and this lady. She's gone through a lot. Her family had been split. Her husband is over here, she's over there in Mexico trying to raise the kids and stuff like that, and it's like, man. We all got our stories, and a lot of those like that.

TALKING TO MA ON THE PHONE, YOU'D think someone had died. It's quite literally the last thing she wants to talk about, but they're out of time, and out of options. Pops won't (can't) talk about it. So, it's up to her. All of us are pooling our resources and trying to figure out how to get the money to them as soon as possible. As a graduate student, I don't really have any "resources" to speak of—I'm already living below the poverty line. I go to the University administration and see if there are any emergency funds I could get. No dice. They don't really know what to say. They look at me like I'm from another species. Apparently, "My folks are going to lose their home" isn't on their list of qualified emergencies. Eventually, I'll just end up taking out some more student loans. Robbing Peter to pay Paul, as Pops would say.

"Why didn't you call us sooner?" I ask Ma, trying not to sound like I'm scolding her.

"We don't want to bother you guys," she says. "It's our problem to deal with."

But it's everyone's problem now. I tell her that we're a family—it's always been *our* problem, and we're only going to get through it if we stick together. But we can't help if we don't know what's going on, if she and Pops keep hiding it from us. "I know," she says.

"OK."

"I love you."

"Love you too."

click

After I hang up, the ground seems to throb anxiously. Millions of dry leaves skitter in little circles. I recall that I've had this exact same phone conversation multiple times in the past year alone. I feel like I'm on a loop, like all of us are living in some uncanny state of suspension, like every day is waiting for a bus that's always delayed.

It dawns on me that Ma and Pops are hiding the truth from themselves just as much as they're hiding it from me and my siblings. They're living a shadow life. What else are they supposed to do? How else are they going to get by? Like so many others out there, their days are spent wading through a kind of quicksand, a mud-thick mirage of normalcy, trying to make it all the way back to bed without awakening the giant, sucking thing. They are trying to avoid having to remember that their lives are so painfully out of their control, that their existence is basically rented from a soulless landlord who could be banging on the door any minute.

TRY NOT TO FORGET: YOU DIDN'T WANT TO talk either.

I had moved back home to try to help out. It was supposed to be a short-term thing. Like my parents, like so many

others, I figured this would all pass soon enough. We just had to make it over the hump. Things would go back to normal eventually.

Four months and hundreds of job applications later, I'm sitting in the deathly waiting room of the temp agency, sandwiched between two leathery *viejos*. We sit in perfect stillness, like tired, miserable gargoyles, all six eyeballs fixed on the exposed fluorescents that are coughing and wheezing on the ceiling. It's 3:50 in the morning—the only time in Southern California when it's actually cold. We're penned up in a yellow, water-stained room, behind the one window in this strip mall, the one window on this street. It's like Hopper's *Nighthawks*, but much lonelier.

The jobs just aren't out there. And my fancy college degree doesn't mean shit. It doesn't make me better than anyone else. We're all here for the same reason. We've all got to eat. Truth be told, the only special thing about me is that I'm probably the only sad sack here who's also sitting on tens of thousands of dollars of student debt.

No one wants to talk, but everyone's got something to say. I can feel it, a shared heaviness sitting on all of us, invisibly filling the room like a gas leak. But no one really knows how to articulate it or what to do with it. We're all just wading through that mud-like thickness from one minute to the next, from the time we wake up till the time we go to bed. Occasionally, someone cracks a joke, but no one laughs that hard. We share some stories about good, bad, and horrible assignments. That's about it. We don't talk about our paychecks or our families. We don't ask if this is the only way it has to be.

I certainly don't want to talk about it with my friends or family either. I don't want to bother them. It's my problem to deal with. More than that, though, deep down, I don't want to talk about it with anyone, because talking about it means facing it, head-on; it means prying open the ominously-rattling manhole cover and staring into the pink, dripping teeth of the real. And that is, quite literally, the last thing I want to do.

What would I tell them, anyway? Where would I start? And how could I even begin to describe the *smell*?

I'm still waiting for an assignment when two 40-something guys stomp back into the temp agency to complain about the smell. It's light outside by this point. They won't go back, they say. They don't care about the pay. "*El olor de la sangre*"—it's unbearable, they say. The shrumpy employee behind the desk finally stops arguing with them, huffs, nods, looks down at the sign-in sheet. The shrimp calls out my name.

When we're all present and accounted for, the floor manager leads me and the other temps through the metallic, steaming bowels of the factory. I pass under some giant, whirring boiler, hard left, up a rickety aluminum staircase. Flashes of other goggled faces quickly appear and dissolve in the haze. I have no idea what the smell is, but at every turn I expect to see piles of dead somethings.

The smell is not just blood, turns out. It's all manner of human effluence. Mountains of it. In every kind of state: fresh,

crusted, bubbling, black. Standing in front of a screeching conveyor belt, in full hazmat gear, our job is to sift through and sort endless piles of soiled laundry from hospitals in the county. About half the guys I start my shift with run off the line to throw up at one point or another. None of them come back. The bosses don't care. They just call in more temps and keep us sifting and sorting at a breakneck pace. They know they can treat us like dogs. They know how many of us are waiting back at the agency. They know we wouldn't be here if we had better options.

I even find a syringe in one of the piles.

Why would I want to talk to anyone about this? Why would they want to listen? Even the other guys on the line don't want to talk about it. No one here wants to think of this as their life. It's just something you have to wade through. Best not to look at it too closely, or think about it for too long. All of you are just floating in deep space, suspended in the cold blackness like jellyfish.

I STARTED THE PODCAST *WORKING PEOPLE* FOR selfish reasons. I *needed* to talk to someone. And I quickly came to realize just how much other people need that, too.

I had bottled up so much for so long. I told myself that I didn't have to talk about it, that I'd eventually feel better if I just ignored and tried not to awaken the giant, sucking thing, if I put my head down and labored my way to absolution. If I *just kept working*, I'd get there, eventually. Then I could be my old self again. And my friends and family would be there waiting. And things would go back to normal. I'd dig myself out of this hole. I'd pay down my debts. I wouldn't be terrified to look at my mailbox or my bank account. I'd feel better. I'd be back on solid ground. This is what I told myself, as I waded through month after month, like a shadow that had lost its body. This is what I told myself, for five years. I am, it turns out, my father's son.

All that time I worked, waiting for myself to come back. But I never really did. Because no one ever comes back—there's never any safe, static "normal" to go back to. Encouraging and maintaining the cruel belief that there *is* still a "normal," just out of reach, is just one of the many ways the forces that command our world keep us compliant and hopeful, sucking us dry while we wait for the return of a past that is always delayed.

I needed to talk to someone. I needed to stop waiting for the world to return me to myself. But I had no idea how to do that. Like so many others out there, I had gotten extremely comfortable hanging in suspension, pickling in the brine of expectation, believing that things would go back to normal at some time that wasn't now, in some place that wasn't here. My self-in-waiting had taken the place of the self I was waiting for. And I knew I could stay like that forever, until the very end. And that terrified me. So, one day, I went to the person I imagined to be the "source" of my disposition, as if it was something that had been genetically passed down. I went to Pops.

Agreeing to be interviewed on *Working People* was a very brave thing. More than one of the interviewees I've had on the show since have confessed that they got the desire and mustered the courage to tell their story after listening to the interview Pops did to open the season. In the very first episode of this podcast, in a recorded conversation that people around the country would listen to, my dad became more legible to me than he had ever been. And I love him for that.

I didn't really have a clear idea of where I wanted the conversation to go, what I wanted it to be. I just wanted to listen. Perhaps I was hoping to hear something that would help me, to pinpoint in what he said or didn't say *something* that would show me how I had gotten stuck living this way, how I had become like him, a me-sized static who wouldn't (couldn't) face up to reality. As we kept talking, though, it was as if the antennae, at last, untangled themselves, a clear signal finally came through, and the crackling, impenetrable static of these last five, six, ten years gave way to an image of home, an image of the bruised, battered, but still bright, loving, funny, honest man who raised us.

We talked about growing up in Tijuana, and about the dead-beat dad who deserted him and his siblings two weeks after he was born. "Maybe he took a look at me and said, 'Man, I don't want this guy,'" Pops laughs. We talked about life at the bottom. "When you're poor," he says, "you don't realize you're poor." We talked about his mom dying in the middle of the night, and about not having a chance to say goodbye. And we talked about his mom's dying wish. "I remember my mom making my grandmother promise that she would bring us to the United States." We talked about him and his brother Chano being split up from their sisters when he was only eight years old. We talked about him and Chano living with a foster family that wouldn't ever verbally admit, but would communicate in many other, vicious ways, that they didn't really want them there. We talked about him meeting Ma when they were both working at a Sizzler—she was a waitress, he was a cook who loved to tease her. We talked and talked about his life, his different jobs, our family, about becoming a citizen, getting into real estate, and voting for Reagan. And then we talked about the Recession.

My dad came to this country in search of that proverbial thing: the American Dream. And I think there was a time in my childhood when he believed he had found it. Our family histories, on both sides, are colored with stories of poverty and hunger and need. But, for a brief time, with four kids in tow, Ma and Pops had clawed their way to the mythical middle class. And, in the flicker of a candle, it was all gone. Like so many others, we lost all the money we had. We lost our house. And for a good while, we lost each other.

"When the real estate market crashed ... never in a million years did I think that our family would be one of the casualties... And that is super hard to get over. To think that, as a broker, we work so hard to achieve whatever status we had. To have it all ... it's like water going down your arms, you know? Like, dripping at your elbows. The only way I can describe it is, 'It's all gone, it's all

disappeared.' And, it's been tough to get back, but I think it's been really tough mental ... mentally. Because nobody wants to talk about what happens personally, you know? Ourselves included. It's depressing, it's an embarrassment, all that kind of stuff. And I was surprised that, when we went through all of this, like, nobody really ... I don't know, maybe everybody's too busy with their lives ... nobody really reached out to see where we were at, you know?"

Pops and I had never talked about what happened like this before. The conversation flowed so naturally, it felt so familiar, but the whole time I was struggling to keep my breath. It was like a giant wound that had sliced across our whole family was finally being sewn up.

I think, for all these years, he had been punishing himself without mercy, boiling himself alive in the scum and froth of shame, paying his penance for what he saw as his ultimate failure to provide for us, regardless of how many times we told him otherwise. To this day, I still don't know if we will ever be able to convince him and Ma that the Recession, a worldwide catastrophic event, wasn't their fault. I don't know if we will ever be able to lift that cross from their shoulders. In that moment, though, in a recorded conversation that people around the country would listen to, I could feel my dad lifting the thing that had been crushing me, and our family, for so long.

In his own quiet way, he had always protected us, always put us first. And I think that's what he was doing now. He would carry us all the way to our beds when we were little. He would take the flashlight outside when we heard a scary noise. And now, black eye, broken ribs, and all, he strode calmly into the cackling, black wilds of the real. He faced it, head-on.

IT'S HARD TO OVERSTATE THE POLITICAL VALUE OF talking to each other. And *for* each other. And by *talking for* I don't mean *on behalf*, but *for the sake of*. More than anything, producing this podcast has revealed to me just how little of this needed honesty people get on a daily basis, and how much we all need it.

In the networked complexity of our atomized, hyper-mediated state of twenty-first-century being, it appears that we are communicating more than ever before, and yet we are ever more demonstrably bad at reaching one another. And please don't think I am taking the position of the old Luddite crank for whom technology is the culprit in the "death of dialogue." We have an overabundance of means for fostering genuine, open, soul-affirming dialogue in our world today—what we lack is the desire.

When we talk to each other, more often than not, we make each other secondary in the whole process. We serve as stand-ins, as proxies, for a conversation that isn't really about or meant for us. Whether real or imagined, there's always someone else in the room. *They're* the real interlocutors. This performativeness is by no means a problem that begins in the digital age with the dawn of social media, but the latter has certainly made the problem more visible. But only slightly, because it's become such a painfully obvious feature of our daily communicative interactions

that it has practically faded from view altogether. So much of what we say to each other on social media posts, for instance, is said *for* other people, known or unknown, who may see it. The person whom we are supposedly addressing, the one to whom we are ostensibly responding, becomes a vehicle for our own self-validation, which drips like sugar-sweet morphine in the form of “likes,” “loves,” “laughs,” shares, retweets, and so on.

And, again, this doesn’t just happen online—we do it everywhere. At our jobs, at the grocery store, on the subway, at the gym, on the street ... we use each other. And we grow accustomed to being used. On a daily basis, as the gross spectacle of capitalist life routinely encourages us to, we accept being each other’s instruments in our respective, harried races to become ourselves, forsaking our need to see and be seen for who we are, squandering our human capacities for being together, for connecting through genuine bonds of care and cooperation and dignity and equality and duty to each other. We get used to being—and to making out of each other—the tools for living alone.

That’s why I started this podcast. I wanted to feel less alone. I *needed* to see people, and to be seen by them, as more than faceless tools, as complex knots of humanity and time and experience with whom I was living *in common*. And I have talked to so many others who need that, too. And I think we have seen in one another—in our common need to be human to each other—the real, bleeding tissue of a possible, and necessary, socialism.

THE CONCEPT BEHIND *WORKING PEOPLE* IS INCREDIBLY simple: I talk to working-class folks from around the country, from all walks of life, and I record it. We talk about their life stories. We talk about where they grew up. We talk about family, friends, school, politics, and whatever else comes up. And we talk about their working lives ... their dreams, their victories, and their struggles.

I’d be lying if I said that the deep, scorching need for some kind of human connection that led me to start the podcast wasn’t also intertwined with the underlying political aim of building a sense of shared struggle and solidarity among workers. And the inspiration for this, once again, came from a familiar source.

As all of us in the family slogged onward in an endless, arduous struggle just to get by, Pops took to driving for Uber on nights and weekends. And it broke my heart. Knowing more than enough about Uber’s slimy, exploitative, low-paying model, it broke my heart to see him, like so many others, being taken advantage of. But something happened that I hadn’t expected. Pops found something he desperately needed, something that I think gave him the courage to share his story with me on the podcast, something that had been entirely absent in every other area of his life. While working as an Uber driver, he simply started talking to people: to the immigrant nurse he was driving to her second job, to the middle-aged husband who had lost everything in the Recession and had nothing for retirement. He discovered intimacy and honesty and solidarity with strangers, with fellow workers. And, in talking to them, he began to learn he wasn’t alone.

For the overwhelming majority of us, to live in the United States is to bask in a world that’s simply not ours, to be consumed by desires for what we don’t have, to strive to be what we’re not, to be told again and again that who we are is not good enough. We are inundated by an endless, kaleidoscopic barrage of elite lives and elite tastes, serving as a daily reminder to working

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard on survival

LBBA: I am the first in my family to ever attend college, and that was through the love and grace of my grandma. I am the first in my family to graduate college. My sister was second. And all that I learned going to school was “America needs to be educated.” We need to know the truth of what is really happening here. We need to start looking at our economics, because right now, my reality: I am a widow. I live on a widow’s benefit. It’s barely enough to make my monthly payments. I have to figure out how to, at 63 years old, how to make a little extra money to get all my bills paid. I plant my own garden. I gather roots and berries, and prepare for winter. I have a wood stove, so we gather wood. But at 63 years old, there are other people who are sitting back, in their retirement, having a very comfortable life. That is not our reality. It is not how we live. When we have people here on the reservation living without electricity, without running water — people are hauling their water — we live in a different world than the rest of America, our own home, our own homeland, where the roots grow out of our feet. Where we can tell the history of this land for thousands and thousands of years. To be pushed until America makes us invisible. And so I am pushing back. I am saying, “I am alive. We are still here.” We have our hands out saying, “let us teach you how to live on this land. Let us teach you how to respect the water. Let us teach you how to respect the land. We can do this for the betterment of the world, we do this so your grandchildren’s grandchildren can drink clear, clean water.” We are standing here offering our help.

We have never ever been an aggressor, we have only been defenders of this land. And we will continue to defend the land and the water. So growing up, that is how I grew up. I grew up a very difficult Indian childhood. Foster homes. Boarding schools. My two younger brothers were farmed out to a farm, and they were able to return home. Does America really know their own history, their own background?

Max: I really don’t think that many do. I’m so gripped by everything that you’re saying. Not only your work as a historian, but as you’re saying, the very kind of way of life, sustainable, communal way of life, these forms of knowledge that, you said, you have to teach the rest of America, even though the rest of America not only doesn’t know, but often doesn’t even see that these forms of living, that these communities are even there. So it seemed that for a moment, over the past few years, that with the No DAPL movement, that more Americans were starting to learn. Do you feel that — and you started by saying what a lot of people around the country who are protesting the separation of families at the border, is that this has been going on in Native communities for centuries.

LBBA: Since 1492.

Vickie Shannon Allen

on working at Amazon

VSA: It's a mind-fucking, because you literally have to be conscious of what you're doing. I'm talking about even if you need to refill your water bottle, or go get ice, or go to the bathroom. I mean, if your stomach is tore up one day when you go to work, you better hope to god that you can take a shit in the amount of time that they allow you to go to the bathroom, which they don't, it's — I'm not saying it's allowed. But what I'm trying to say is you can go to the bathroom whenever you feel like it, but you get timed from the time that you walk away from that station on that last scan that you did, to the time that you come back and do your next scan. Because as soon as there is a gap there, here comes the manager with their laptop saying, "okay, well where were you?" And I'm 49 years old, and I'm not in the habit of telling a 22-year-old kid when I go to the bathroom, and how long I was in there, and what I was doing.

Max: Yeah, Jesus Christ. Nor should you have to. Like what kind of dystopian bullshit is that?

VSA: That's exactly what it is. And the thing about it is, they don't really have a lot of managers my age. Actually, they don't have a lot of managers over the age of 30. All of the managers are under the age of 30.

M: And that's like, part of the mental game, right? You're just constantly making people feel inadequate, look over their shoulder. And I mean, like, and I know some of this has been like — this has kind of been leaking out in bits and pieces over the last year especially. But I know there were news headlines where like, warehouse workers pissing in bottles because they were terrified to go off the line for a minute.

VSA: Right. I can really see that happening. I'm not saying it didn't happen, and I'm not saying it did happen, but I can literally see that happening, because the only time the managers ever come to your station, is when they want to get onto you about something. They literally — you never see them. You never see them any other time, except for when they want to come say, "hey, I noticed that you had some TOT time, can you tell me where you were at?" Or, "hey, your rate's low." You never get an "atta boy," you never get a pat on the back. You never feel appreciated one time.

people that the blood and sinew of our rich, complex lives will always count for less. And it compounds that unshakeable, shameful feeling we carry with us—the feeling that we're the only ones going through this, that other people are getting by just fine, that our misery is our failure and ours alone.

But at a time when so few control so much, there's a world-changing potential in seeing ourselves and our neighbors as people engaged in a shared struggle, as so many strive to make do on so little. There's healing in knowing we're not alone in this. There's beauty and strength in sharing our stories and our scars with each other. And our stories *do* deserve to be told, our struggles deserve to be remembered, our lives deserve to be celebrated. From Sara, the undocumented telemarketer in Las Vegas, to Tom, the plumber in St. Louis; from Vickie, the Amazon warehouse worker in Texas, to John, the university lecturer in Michigan; from Glynndana, the Disney Resort worker in Anaheim, to LaDonna Brave Bull Allard of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota—this is what *Working People* is about.

FOR THE FIRST FEW EPISODES, I THINK I WAS WORRIED about whether or not our discussions would produce anything people out there would actually want to listen to. In that way, I was still perhaps thinking about the people I was talking to as tools. But quite quickly, that melted away. Because it turns out that, if you actually talk to people, if you really talk with and for each other, if you take the time and care and patience to see each other, you realize just how much we don't actually do that in our everyday lives, and how much we really need it.

In a world where working people are consistently reminded that we don't matter, where we become accustomed to being, at best, exploitable and, at worst, invisible to each other, seeing and affirming the trembling humanity we share with our neighbors is revolutionary. And this, I think, is the raw, beating core of the socialist project. It is not and will never be enough to talk at, about, or on behalf of the working class in the hopes of ultimately "swaying" them and "activating" them to the cause. We can only start by talking *to* and *for* each other in ways that open between us that which capitalism forecloses—in ways that allow us to see, share, and celebrate the common humanity of our rich, complex, and irreducibly different lives, and the common cause of living on this planet together.

Enough speaking for or about the working class. Just talk to one another. Without agenda, without judgment, just listen.

We must understand—and trust—that the open, vulnerable, attentive, and genuine process of communing with our fellow workers will, itself, enact the very truth of socialism. That it will—and must—bear out those humanity-affirming connections between us and those we talk to, which, once brought to the surface, will only confirm the dehumanizing unlivability of capitalist life. For what is socialism if not a vision for the material and social arrangement of a world in which we can finally practice the soul-affirming art of life in common? A world in which equality, dignity, freedom, peace, justice, and ecological sustainability are actualized in ways of living together and treating each other that enable the flourishing of a collective humanity, which capitalism has stunted and squandered in the endless search for profits.

The need for such a world is there, in so many of us, buried deep in the static of our lost connection to one another. From the lonesome vacuums of our daily wait to see and be seen, it calls out. In the brokenness of our brothers and sisters, it speaks. The question is: are we listening? ❖

SQUID LAWYER

I don't like it any more than you do, but we just don't have the resources to push this case further.

Agreed. We'll have to settle. Let's ink this deal.

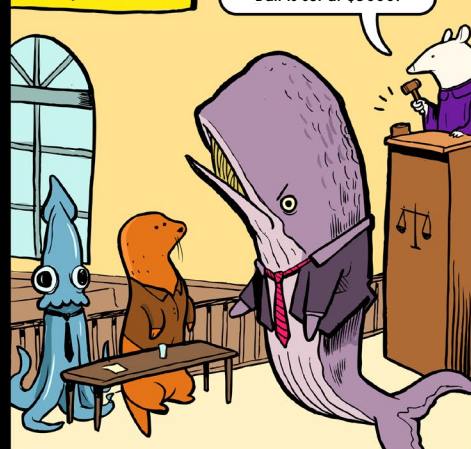


INK
SPLDOSH!!!

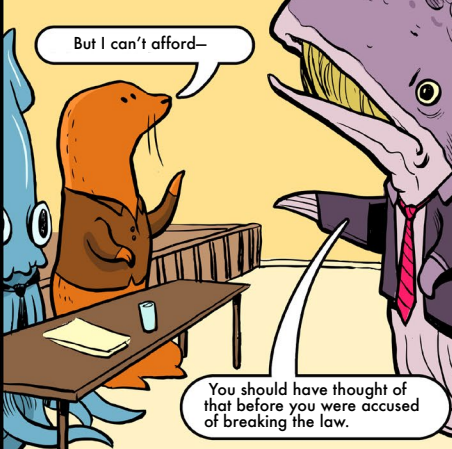


PART TWO

Bail is set at \$5000.



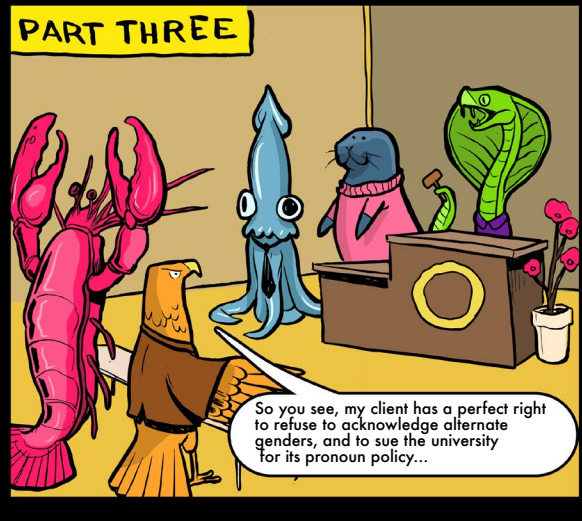
But I can't afford—



You should have thought of that before you were accused of breaking the law.

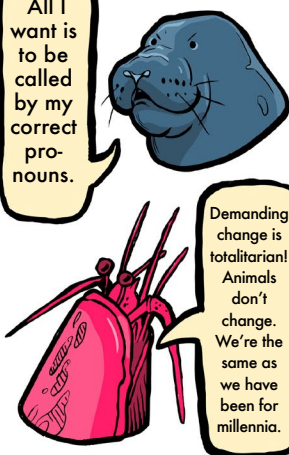


PART THREE



So you see, my client has a perfect right to refuse to acknowledge alternate genders, and to sue the university for its pronoun policy...

All I want is to be called by my correct pronouns.



Demanding change is totalitarian! Animals don't change. We're the same as we have been for millennia.



NICK SIROTICH

INJOINT

THE CURRENT AFFAIRS *Language*



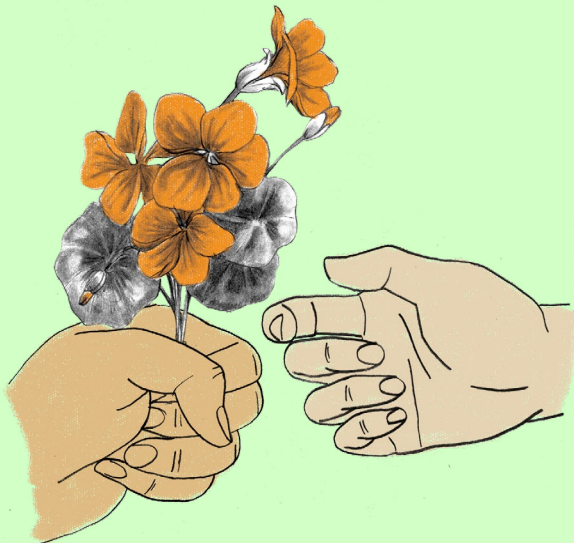
TINY CACTUS

"I understand you're prickly and sensitive. I respect your space, but I like you and I want to get to know you better."



KELP

"Just reminding you that the oceans are dying."



NASTURTIVM

"I like you, just not your politics."



RED ROSE

"I love you and together we can unmake capitalism."

of Flowers



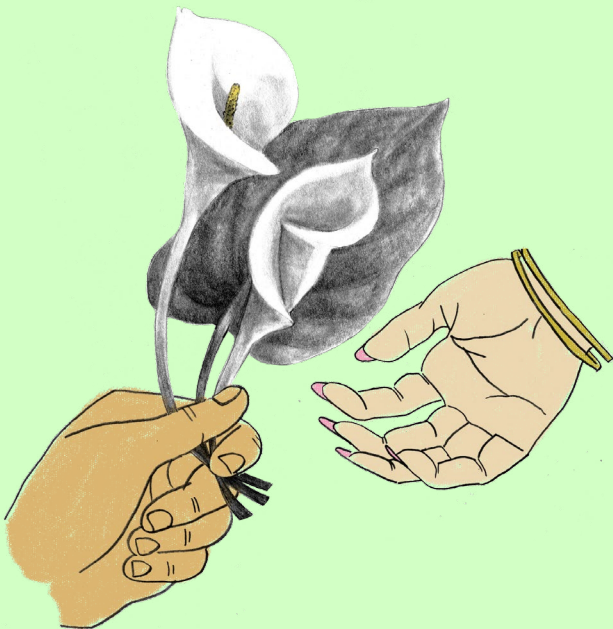
JOSHUA TREE BRANCH

"Let's end the concept of borders."



VENUS FLY TRAP

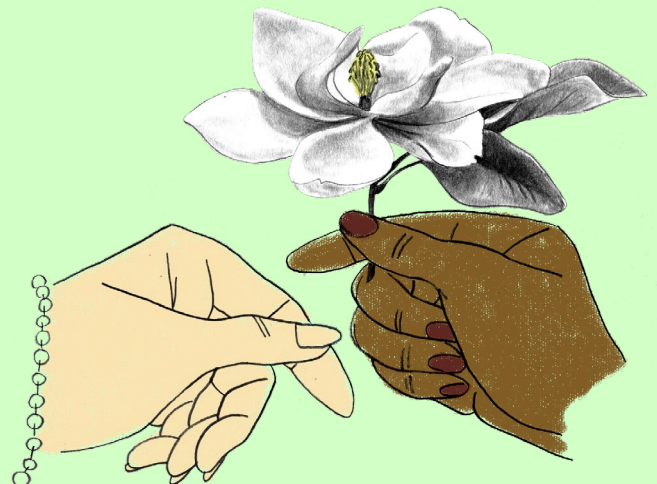
"Buddy, if you don't address that toxic masculinity we are going to have problems."



WHITE CALLA LILIES

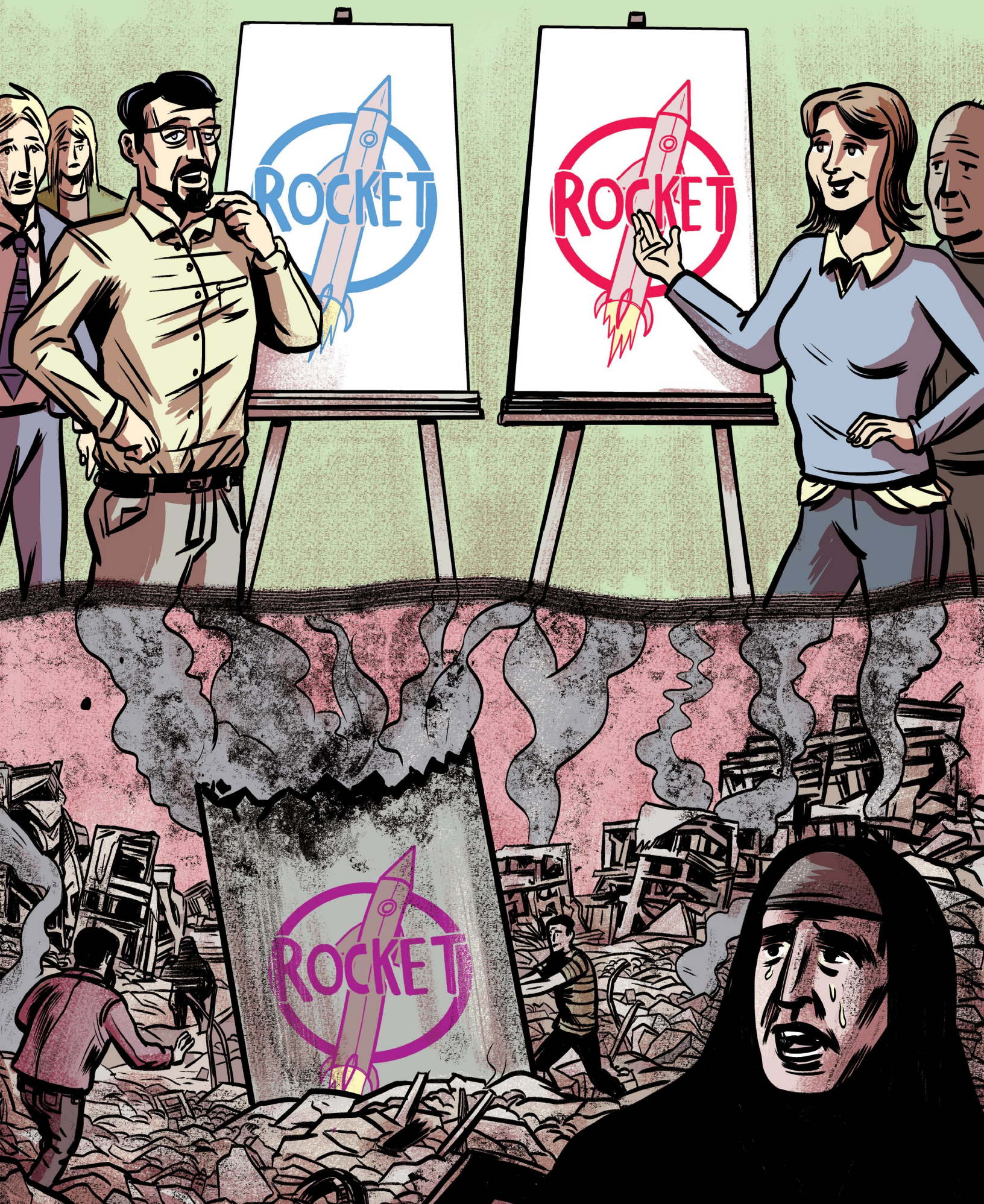
(can only be given to wealthy horrible people)

*"May you soon die or lose all your wealth,
I'm not particular as to which."*



MAGNOLIA

*"You're pretty and problematic,
just like the South."*



CREATIVE JOBS SOUND NICE, especially if you're currently stuck in a uncreative one that you don't particularly like. Instead of emptying portable toilets or placating Under Armor-clad suburban tyrants who holler for your manager whenever you run out of decaf, you could be living in a glamorous *Mad Men*-ian world of brilliant colleagues, gorgeous workspaces, and long boozy lunches. Creative jobs sound attainable, too. Maybe you couldn't be Steven Spielberg or Shonda Rhimes, but you could definitely be the person who writes their tweets. The pay would be good, and the work would be satisfying.

It sounds like a dream, but a very reasonable dream, because creative jobs are still jobs, and like any job they would have their downsides. The hours would probably be long. There would be lots of meetings, many of which would be boring, pointless, or both boring and pointless. Sometimes the clients would be lunatics. But even the bad parts about a creative job can be justified with ease, because they help soothe the suspicions of parents and peers when you say, "Yeah, I make memes for a living, but I'm doing it for *brands*. We don't have a 'real office', no. However, we do have a thriving and vibrant Slack." Creative jobs offer the best of both worlds: you get to feel like an artist, but get paid like someone whose work is actually valued.

This is the conventional view of creative jobs, and I would like to suggest that it's utter horseshit.

SOMEONE IS THINKING ABOUT YOU RIGHT NOW. They're trying to imagine what you're wearing, what you're eating, what you're texting your sister. They want to know if you believe in God and if you have any recently deceased pets. They're desperate to discover what makes you horny. Anxious. Mad. They study your tweets and Facebook posts like Jane Goodall studies chimps, trying to understand what's going on inside that mysterious head of yours. They know about the half-eaten Chinese takeout in your fridge and the vibrator in your sock drawer. They watch you when you go the beach, they follow you when you go to the zoo, they stroll with you down the aisles of the liquor store, keeping meticulous notes about every person you greet along the way. They know where you went to elementary school, they know how often you visit the doctor. They have spreadsheets full of your favorite websites, your least-favorite films, your most flattering selfies.

And yet no matter how much they learn about

HOW "CREATIVE" JOBS PERVERT YOUR SOUL

The marketing industry and its discontents

by Nick Slater

you, they're still hungry for more. They can't stop thinking about you. They spend their days dreaming what it's like *to be you*. You might call them creepy, obsessive, even criminal. Or you might just call them marketers, the single most grotesque embodiment of all that is contemptible about creative jobs.

They'll get quite upset if you say that, of course. Not the part about being a marketer (they're proud of that), but the part about having dubious intentions. "You're misunderstanding me!" complains the marketer. They mean you no harm, they just want to *educate* you. They're trying to make you happy. They only want to be loved by you.

"This is insane," you might say. "You don't give a single solitary shit about my well-being, you're just stalking me so you can manipulate my behavior for profit. What the hell is wrong with you? Go away! No, I wouldn't like to take a quick survey about my experience!"

The marketer will protest, claiming to have nothing but the greatest respect for you, the beloved consumer. "Marketing isn't stalking," they'll say with an indignant squeal. "Marketing is storytelling!" It's a creative endeavor, an art, and there's nothing wrong with pushing its boundaries. Plus, it's just their job.

They really believe this, too. Maybe marketers aren't always angels, but their hearts are in the right place. One of the most famous marketers alive, Seth Godin, once wrote:

"The truth is elusive. No one knows the whole truth about anything. We certainly don't know the truth about the things we buy and recommend and use. What we do know (and what we talk about) is our story. Our story about why use [sic], recommend or are loyal to you and your products. Our story about the origin and the impact and the utility of what we buy."

This paragraph is magnificent, stirring, inscrutable bollocks. Here's what it means in practice: imagine you're trying to sell herbal tea. Luiza herbal tea from Alon Moreh, to be exact. You're a creative person, a storyteller. So you invent a story. It's a calming and pleasant one—this herbal tea is special, it was made from the finest sun-kissed tea leaves, which were handpicked by family farmers who've worked the land for generations. Each cup is a moment of joy to be sipped in blissful tranquility as you curl up on the sofa with a soothing jazz record and the pitter-patter of raindrops against the window and a good thick book in your lap. Escape the hectic chaos of your daily life! Nurture your soul with a delicious cup of Luiza herbal tea from Alon Moreh!

NOW, IF YOU'D SEARCHED THE INTERNET FOR literally 10 seconds, you would've found some facts that complicate your story. You'd discover that Alon Moreh is an illegal Israeli settlement built on land that was stolen from Palestinian villagers, and that its "family farmers" are, in fact, M16-toting messianic zealots who set their neighbors' olive trees ablaze for fun and harass children who are trying to walk to school. You'd

realize that hundreds of Palestinian mothers and fathers have been beaten, starved, threatened, blackmailed, humiliated, imprisoned, tortured, raped, or killed so that you can enjoy your lovely cup of Luiza herbal tea from Alon Moreh. If you thought about this information for an additional 10 seconds, you'd realize that your "story" isn't just incomplete or misleading. It's maliciously deceptive, and you have poisoned your soul by spreading it. Maybe you were just doing your job, but any job that makes you do these kinds of things is an evil job.

SO THINK ABOUT GODIN'S WORDS FOR a moment. How did he type them without his brain bursting from his forehead like an explosively wet melon? What kind of imagination (or motivation) could cause a person to spout such slippery, meaning-free flubdub? Who would be shameless enough to share this malignant nonsense with the world? Like Godin says, the truth is elusive. Nobody can ever really know anything. To you, the layperson, these might sound like the words of a repugnant con artist. To the marketer, it sounds like Thomas fucking Pynchon.

Which is nonsense, because Godin is a much bigger star than Pynchon. They're both considered among the most creative minds in their respective fields, but Godin's the one who turned those compliments into something tangible (and endlessly monetizable). His audience is larger by several orders of magnitude. He's written 18 bestselling books and amassed a fortune of \$34 million. Pynchon isn't a starving artist by any means, but he can't boast that kind of net worth. He doesn't even have a TED Talk. Pynchon's creativity is the kind that gets you admiring mumbles from the stoned barista at the local coffee shop, but Godin's creativity is the kind that gets you a trip on a private jet to deliver the keynote speech at Davos.

Another mark in Godin's favor: his kind of success seems more achievable. If you're a creative young person who likes words, it's easier to imagine yourself becoming the next superstar marketer than the next postmodern literary hero. Your friends and family won't laugh at you for saying, "I want to write email newsletters that generate consistent sales," the way they'd laugh at you for saying, "I want to write thousand-page novels about a misanthropic postman who plays the ukulele." Americans have a fetish for practicality. A child who enjoys tinkering is likely to be told that the ideal outlet for her talents is a STEM career at Lockheed Martin, just as a child who enjoys drawing will be taught to dream of doing graphic design for Adobe. It's the Google doodle dream, a 21st-century version of the Renaissance patronage system with woke brands in place of benevolent royals, where expressing your creativity comes first and turning a tidy profit is just a pleasant side effect. There's no tension between doing

your job and doing what makes you fulfilled.

This system gave birth to what professor Richard Florida calls “the creative class.” Back in 2002, his theory of “creativity as a fundamental economic force” was celebrated by business executives and government administrators desperate to show that neoliberalism was compatible with human happiness. A vast new professional field, “spanning science and technology, arts, media, and culture, traditional knowledge workers, and the professions,” seemed to be living proof that society was benefitting from the policy decisions that had been “transforming our economy and culture over the past

are the products of a society conditioned to view creativity as an economic force. Godin and Florida embody what the French economist Thomas Piketty calls the “fundamentalist belief by capitalists that capital will save the world.” There’s no inherent conflict between artistic authenticity and corporate profitability! Sculptures and stock options go hand in hand! Be a bohemian, be a brand manager, it’s really all the same! Hustlers like Godin and Florida make lucrative careers out of reaffirming this desperate wish. Unfortunately, as Piketty says, “it just isn’t so.... capital is an end in itself and no more.” The type of creativity encouraged by capitalism

“Maybe you were just doing your job, but any job that makes you do these kinds of things is an evil job.”

several decades.” The best part? Our lives weren’t just better because we had more stuff, but because we earned that stuff by doing what we loved.

It’s easy to see the appeal of Florida’s argument. He was tapping into the same idea behind Rose Schneiderman’s famous line, “the worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too.” The only difference is that Schneiderman understood her demand to be incompatible with modern capitalism, whereas Florida was (and is) determined to squeeze this roundest of pegs into an immutably square hole.

Even today, after the ideas championed by Florida have led the planet to economic and environmental devastation, he remains unfazed. “I’m not sorry,” he says. “I will not apologize. I do not regret anything.” He claims that his critics “created a strawman.” Meanwhile, in New York, people are homeless at rates that rival the Great Depression, while a quarter-million homes sit vacant. Yet the man whose globally influential think tank invented the Bohemian Index insists, “I’m certainly not the architect of gentrification. I wish I had that kind of power.” He claims to be deeply concerned about “this divisiveness.” He says that today he realizes “we need to develop a new narrative, which isn’t just about creative and innovative growth and clusters, but about *inclusion* being a part of prosperity.” Like Godin, he has a gift for aphorisms as airy and toxic as a cloud of farts.

Sleazy marketers pretending to be storytellers, unscrupulous real estate developers masquerading as academics, these

is empty and meaningless, a low-calorie substitute designed to satiate our hunger to create (but just barely). The creative class only exists because our collective frustration would boil over into violent revolt if it didn’t.

In his landmark essay “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs,” anthropologist David Graeber described the “profound psychological violence” a person experiences when “one secretly feels one’s job shouldn’t exist.” Anyone who has ever run a corporate Twitter account or sketched out a comic about blockchain protocols will find Graeber’s insights uncomfortably relatable (he was so swamped by reader responses that he ended up writing an entire book about bullshit jobs). Perhaps you’re *technically* following your passion—writing words, drawing pictures—but there’s a gnawing sense of emptiness about the whole thing. Like most negative emotions, you’re taught to repress it, to justify it, to explain it away.

Former journalist Dan Lyons, who joined the tech startup HubSpot as a “marketing fellow” after losing his job at *Newsweek*, witnessed the power of this delusion firsthand. His coworkers—most of whom were the sort of hip, diverse millennials who form the barely solvent base of the creative class—were genuinely committed to doing “meaningful work.” This natural human urge was the mechanism by which they were controlled. As Lyons says:

“What I found striking was that you could tell people that it was [meaningful work], and they would just believe it. They

wanted to be doing something unique or valuable, and if you came at them with a straight face and said 'you are changing the world' they would go along with it."

Lyons's coworkers weren't stupid. They just wanted to believe their lives meant something, and having just lived through a global socioeconomic meltdown, they understood the precarity of their position. They weren't beggars (yet) but they didn't have the luxury of being choosers, either. As one depressed couple asked Lyons, "was there anything better?"

There wasn't, and there isn't (until we achieve socialism), and this explains why people will still aspire to join the creative class until we do. The young marketer who calls himself a storyteller isn't being disingenuous—he really does want to tell stories. If someone would pay him to tell stories about love and friendship, he would, but if they'll only pay him to tell stories about antimicrobial underwear, well, he'll do that, then, if it means his kids can have health insurance. In the meantime, he'll try to practice his craft as best he can: he'll study his audience, he'll learn their hopes and fears, he'll use every trick he can to convince them, to convert them, to make them *feel* something.

Does this mean he's a bad person? The truth is elusive, as a bestselling slimeball once said.

STILL, WE CAN SAY WITH REASONABLE CERTAINTY THAT there are some places where the truth will definitely *not* be found, and the soulless content factories of the cre-

ative class are a prime example. George Orwell once wrote that "if a writer is to have an alternative profession, it is much better that it should have nothing to do with writing." The same holds true for any creative pursuit. Taking a photo or composing a song or drawing a cartoon is a joyful thing for human beings to do, because it allows us to feel like we're sharing our true thoughts and feelings with the world. But as Orwell says, "no government, no big organization, will pay for the truth." It's doubtful that small organizations are any better. Rare is the case when telling someone the truth about a product or service is the most effective way to convince them to buy it. Creative jobs don't just discourage you from telling the truth—they demand that you tell lies, which taints the essence of what makes creativity so beautiful and satisfying in the first place.

Thus, the best professional advice for a creative person is to avoid the creative professions altogether. A talented writer should refuse to indenture herself to a consulting firm, and become a house painter instead. A gifted photographer should shun the advertising industry in favor of a career as a postman. Instead of seeking outlets for our creativity in jobs that bastardize our most human impulses, we should look beyond the world of work for ways to express ourselves. The urge to create can also be a destructive urge if we don't question what we are creating, or why we're creating it, or for whom. It's far better to write a poem that no one reads than a jingle that sells more missiles. ❖

HOW GOOD WOULD YOU BE AT A **CREATIVE JOB?** Try customizing your own pitch!

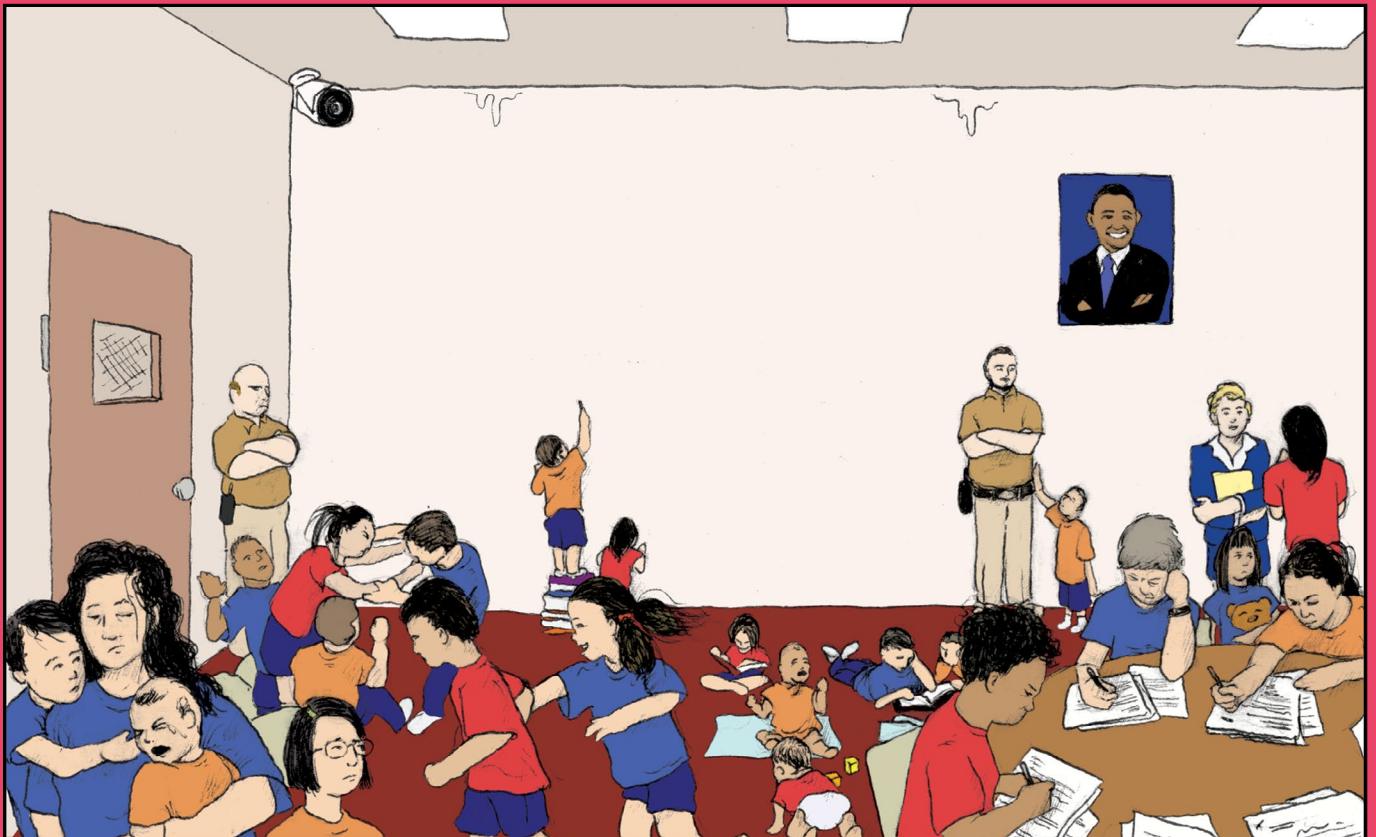
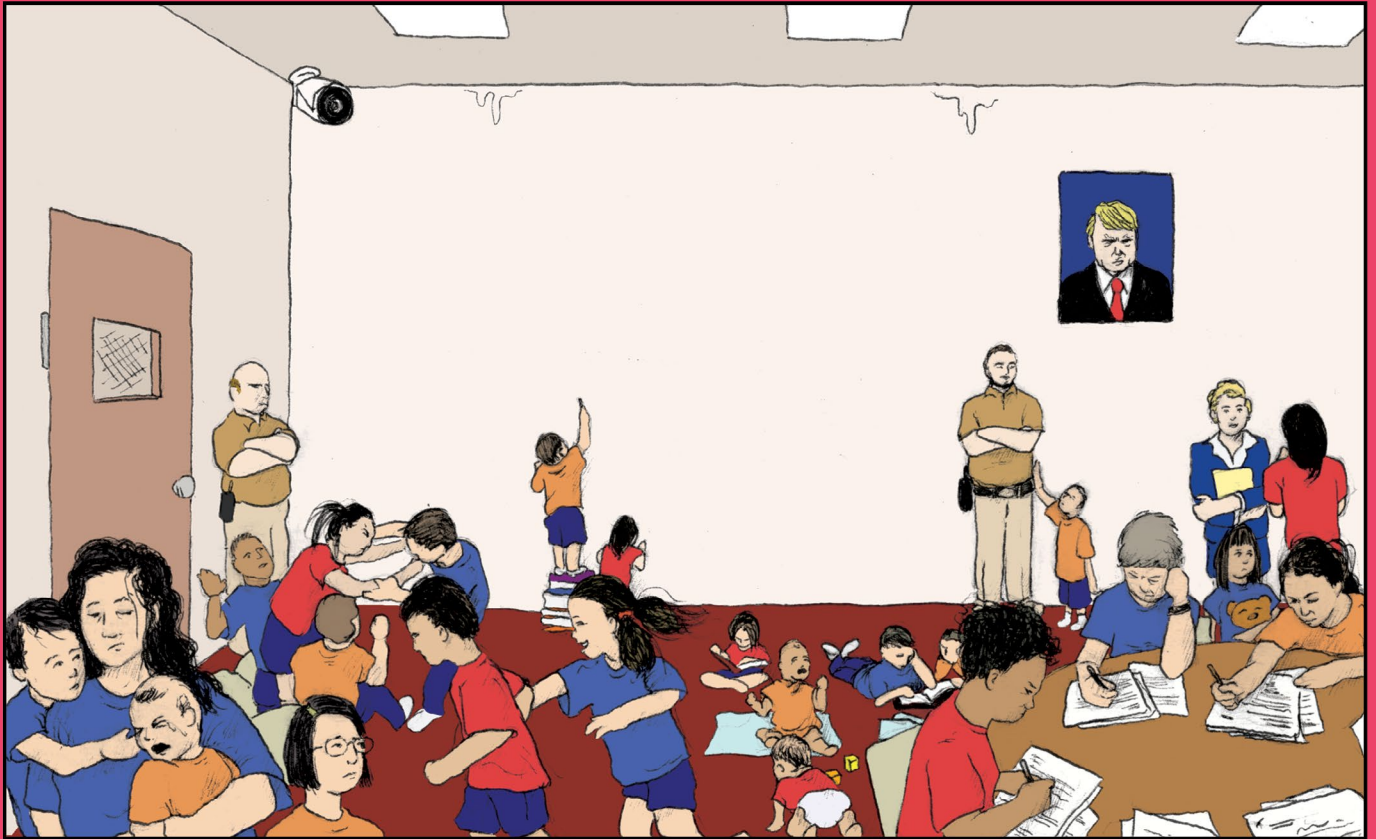
In our hectic modern lives, who has time to **[basic daily task]**? Fear not! A bold new brand called **[one letter word with no vowels]** is here to revolutionize* your **[noun that has awkwardly been turned into a verb]** experience! Discover **[happy adjective + nice feeling]** and elevate your **[obscure social media app you've heard all teenagers use now]** game with their must-own **[smart something]**!

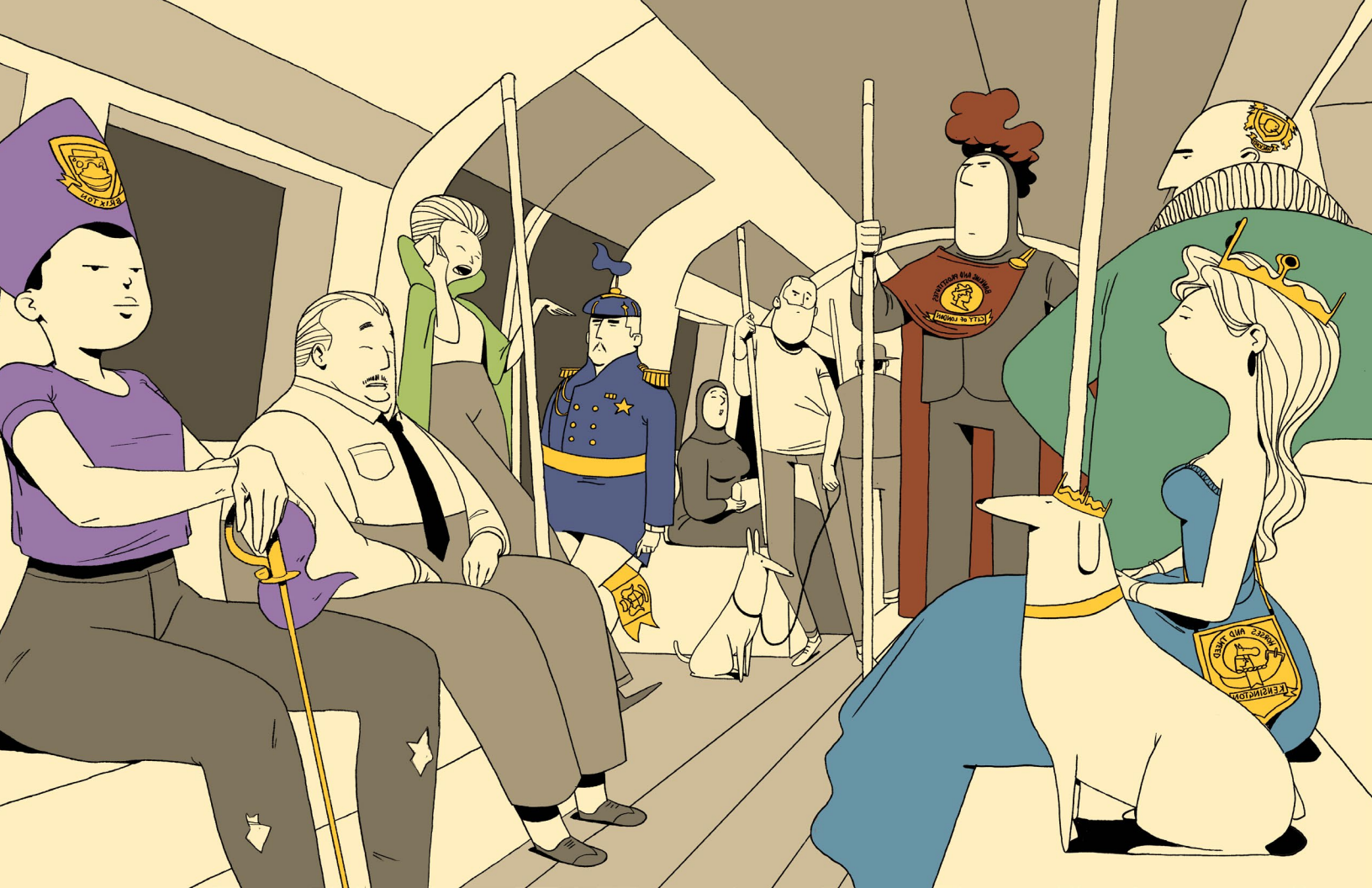
*Actual revolution not included.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCES

Two ICE family detention centers, separated in time by four years.

Can YOU spot every single difference between the 2014 baby jail and the 2018 baby jail?





What's with NATIONALISM

by Brianna Rennix & Nathan J. Robinson

"Nicaragua has been conquered like Athens. Nicaragua has been annexed like Jerusalem," cried the old man, with amazing fire. "The Yankee and the German and the brute powers of modernity have trampled it with the hoofs of oxen. But Nicaragua is not dead. Nicaragua is an idea." —G.K. Chesterton, *THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL*

WHEN G.K. CHESTERON WROTE HIS novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* in 1904, it was still just about possible to believe that nationalism was romantic. Nationalism was, in those pre-World War days, primarily characterized as the fight of democratic revolutionaries against tyranny, of subjugate nations against imperial-

ism: the United States, France, Ireland, Greece. It was the triumph of localism and authenticity against the pitiless forces of industry and the stale, performative rituals of cultural elites. The novel's opening imagines a 20th-century future when the global order has become dull and homogenized. Figurehead-leaders are selected by sortition, and civil life is administered by faceless bu-

reaucrats. This world isn't quite a dystopia, but it is a place of profound spiritual torpor. After decades of this predictable political routine, a jokester named Auberon is chosen by lottery to be the ceremonial monarch of England. Rather than following the expected procedures, Auberon instead proceeds to amuse himself by forcing the various boroughs of London to adopt faux-medieval heraldry, and adhere to parodically elaborate courtly forms. But this pageant quickly takes on a life of its own: the next generation of Londoners sincerely believes in the invented histories of their neighborhoods, and when a corporation attempts to demolish a block of shops in Notting Hill, the locals take up arms and go to war. This bloodshed is presented by Chesterton not as a tragedy, but as a joyous reawakening. The inhabitants of London—especially those whose lives were formerly bound up in the nation's business ventures and impersonal administrative structures—rediscover their humanity by acknowledging their natural love for the place they were born, and their willingness to die for its preservation.

The Napoleon of Notting Hill is, in its way, hard to place on the modern political spectrum. On the one hand, it feels like a novel for the era of *Standing Rock*: it tells the story of a small neighborhood that bands together against a cabal of businessmen to defend a small piece of the world they happen to hold in reverence. In the words of the leader of the rebellion: "That which is large enough for the rich to covet is large enough for the poor to defend." It's a book about the triumph of oddballs, hobbyists, and idealists over the well-monied forces of avarice and indifference. It celebrates the idea that there is poetry in ordinary life, and that ordinary people have a deep, instinctive hunger for poetry. On the other hand, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*—which is often read as an allegory of nationalism—also feels like a novel for the era of *Breitbart*, which is constantly inveighing against the evils of multiculturalism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism, and, in the same breath, suggesting that loyalty to one's country of birth is paramount, rendering all other moral obligations moot. War is a central feature of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, and is treated as an ordinary and even healthy human activity, without any significant long-term repercussions. Notably, all the characters in the book are men. We see them kill each other in an honorable spirit of good fun, but what their grieving wives and children think of the whole stupid business, we never discover. There are no wartime atrocities: the conflict has no civilians per se, and so we don't see any terrified civilians killed. Keeping things vague, of course, is the only way

you can possibly make a war narrative jolly, as if it were a sports match or a paintball fight. This kind of merry, Renaissance Faire LARPing might indeed be preferable to a colorless bureaucratic existence; but who wouldn't choose bureaucracy, however frustrating and inadequate, over the killing fields of Flanders?

THE DICHOTOMY SET UP BY *THE NAPOLEON of Notting Hill*, and modern proponents of nationalism, suggests that there's a binary choice between a dreary, monotonous global monoculture and the geographically-determined separation of human populations into personified groups. G.K. Chesterton envisions loyalty to place as something intensely local. The smaller the country, the purer the patriotism, so that loyalty to your street and your neighborhood is the purest loyalty of all. We can take issue with this assertion, of course: in the same way that plenty of people aren't blessed with loving families, many people aren't lucky enough to be born into a community that welcomes and nurtures them. An insistence on the primacy of the natal hearth, for such people, is a cruel form of emotional bondage. But even if we accept that some people, at least, are profoundly attached to the place they live, the extrapolation of the intimate emotions a person has about the scene of their childhood, or the place they've made their home, onto a political unit as large as a *nation* is a peculiar intellectual leap.

There's a notion that love for one's country is old human emotion, but if we understand "country" as "nation," it can't possibly be an old human emotion, because nations are a very new thing in human history. Scholars have struggled to even come up with a coherent description of what a "nation" actually is. Is it defined by ethnicity and language? Most nations aren't ethnically, culturally, or linguistically unitary (or were only made so by conscious social engineering), and that includes the small nation-states of Europe, as well as big imperial states like the U.S., Canada, and Russia. France, for example, often thought by outsiders of as a prime example of a culturally cohesive nation with deep historical roots, began its political existence a multiethnic, multilingual territory. The post-revolutionary state engaged in systematic suppression of minority languages like Occitan, Catalan, Basque, and Breton in order to force the populace to view themselves as members of a unified republic. Separatist movements in Catalonia and the Basque country of Spain, and the northern territories of Italy (whose flaghead separatist party, the

Northern League, has now emerged as a major anti-EU force in Italian politics) show the fragile identity of many of these European nations, which U.S. Americans tend to mistakenly perceive as ancient, undiluted cultural archetypes.

Another definition of nationhood tends to disregard the supposed historic or hereditary legacies of nation-states, and instead focus on nations as groups of people defined by their common assent to a set of laws or principles. (This is what is often derisively referred to by modern-day fascists as the “proposition nation.”) This definition, however, is somewhat difficult to pin down. No citizen of a state is actually ever given a meaningful opportunity to assent or dissent from the social contract of the geographic area into which they are born. Many people spend their whole lives in a state of passionate opposition to the laws of the state that is theoretically their legal protector. Many other people who would willingly assent to the laws of a particular country are arbitrarily denied the opportunity to become citizens, because they happen to have been born in the wrong geographic location.

In the end, most theorists have simply had to throw up their hands and admit that a nation (as coined by Benedict Anderson) is simply an “imagined community.” A nation exists if people believe that they are members of a nation. In other words, a nation is a kind of

collective delusion, which will vanish into thin air the minute enough people decide that they’re sick of playing pretend.

Much of what we call “nationalism” involves attempting to project the emotions that many people feel about their own families and immediate environs onto much larger groups of people and larger swathes of territory. In one sense, this isn’t *necessarily* a bad thing. A nation, in its best iteration, is a way for a heterogeneous group of people to envision themselves as members of a community, and to assume obligations toward one another as community members. It’s a way of ensuring that where more local structures like families and neighborhoods fall short—as they are inevitably bound to do, from time to time—there is always some larger group of individuals and some larger resource pool that can be safely relied upon. If we think of a nation in this way, as a kind of practical instrument of human solidarity and collective resource-sharing, then surely the bigger the nation, the better? If we can imagine ourselves to be in community with millions of U.S. Americans we’ll never actually meet, why can’t we imagine ourselves to be in a community with billions of other humans around the globe? Ideally, we would all be trying to move toward a massive political unit like *Star Trek*’s Federation of Planets, where autonomous individuals and smaller self-determined communities exist within a large umbrella alliance. A nation of this type would have no particular “identity” beyond its administrative structures and its shared moral commitment to universal, equitable resource-sharing.

The very essence of what we now understand as “nationalism,” however, is defined entirely by identity, by the notion that there is a core group of people who comprise the nation, that these people owe duties to each other and not to anyone else, and that outsiders must be kept at bay, through tight policing of borders, resource-hoarding, and preemptive military strikes. Because it is huge and impersonal, and not *truly* local in any meaningful sense, the modern nation is bereft even of the hazy charms of G.K. Chesterton’s medieval fantasy. It’s the job of propagandists to make people believe that the warm emotion they may feel about their own living-room or backyard is something they actually feel about the entire national territory—but *not* the entire territory of the planet at large. This psychological sleight-of-hand might be harmless enough, if the real-life essence of national self-preservation didn’t so often entail the enslavement or killing of people who don’t happen to enjoy any powerful nation’s protection.



"The World is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion" — Thomas Paine

IF NATIONS ARE ARTIFICIAL, WHAT OF IT? Even if conceptually they make little sense upon examination, perhaps these constructs are useful ways of ordering human society. In *The Virtue of Nationalism*, Yoram Hazony argues that there is a rational case for dividing humanity into nations, that in proper doses nationalism is not just benign, but a morally superior way of organizing ourselves.

Hazony's argument is that there are "two visions of world order": liberalism and nationalism. Liberals believe in a borderless world, where everyone shares common values and conceives of themselves as part of the human community. Nationalists believe that the world should be organized into nation-states, in which governments map onto that murky entity, the nation. Hazony believes that while liberalism is presented as morally superior, it is nothing of the kind. This, he says, is because universal values steamroll human differences. The advocates of universal values and a borderless world believe that a global government should impose those values regardless of the feelings of the subjects, and should force humans out of their natural groups. Hazony argues that liberalism, for all its rhetoric about human rights and world cooperation, is actually a form of imperialism.

The Virtue of Nationalism does not make its case particularly intelligently or fairly. Hazony posits a binary, arguing that the choice is between "an order of free and independent nations, each pursuing the political good in accordance with its own traditions and understanding" and "a single regime of law, promulgated and maintained by a single supranational authority." Nationalists believe in self-determination, whereas for the liberal imperialists "the desire and need for such collective self-determination tends to be regarded as primitive and dispensable." The liberals want to crush freedom and impose their will: "Under a universal political order... in which a single standard of right is held to be in force everywhere, tolerance for diverse political and religious standpoints must necessarily decline." The nationalists, on the other hand, simply want to be left alone. They believe that "good fences make good neighbors" and are reluctant to engage in wars of conquest. (Hazony even concludes that Hitler had more in common with liberal imperialism than nationalism, because Hitler thought everyone should be united under one world government—his own.)

Hazony is from Israel, and he concludes that international criticism of Israel is the product of liberals' hatred of the

nation-state. He says that "Israel is pilloried in international bodies, in the media, and on university campuses around the world for an alleged violation of human rights, whether real or imagined." But he does not consider it possible that the criticism arises from sincere concern about actual human rights abuses. Instead, it comes from "the hatred that a universal ideal bears against those nations or tribes that refuse to accept its claim of universality." Liberals resent Israel simply for existing, for daring to be a nation-state when nation-states are out of fashion. It is a "hatred for the particularists," and no matter how humane and reasonable Israel is, the "Jews will remain an object of special outrage." Hazony believes the international community disdains the United States for the same reason. Other countries "Deplore America for its willingness to solve pressing security problems on its own," and have "Consistently found it disturbing that the United States sees itself as having a right to act unilaterally... Their problem is, in other words, that the United States acts as an independent nation."

It should be obvious why Hazony's defense of nationalism is unconvincing. First, if you're going to conclude that critics of the United States and Israel must simply resent their pride in their identity, you first have to show that the substance of the critics' claims is false and must be a pretense. Hazony does not dwell on the actual charges against the two countries, namely that the United States believes its "right to act unilaterally" allows it to invade and depose any foreign leader whose existence it is uncomfortable with (Iran, Guatemala, Chile, Congo, Iraq, etc.), and has wrought havoc in dozens of countries around the world. Israel, for its part, has placed a million Gazans under siege and shoots any who try to escape. Since the world actually has many proud nation-states, it might be worth considering whether it really may be the *actions* of Israel and the U.S., rather than their hometown pride, that earns them so much scorn (and before you say "but why do the abuses of Islamic states go uncriticized by the left?" you should hear what we have to say about Saudi Arabia and the UAE!)

More importantly, though, *The Virtue of Nationalism's* binary is completely unnecessary. Is the choice really between closed-off nation-states and an all-powerful global government that despises self-determination? Many of the strongest critics of nationalism have also been critics of state power generally. The anarchist Rudolf Rocker's *Nationalism and Culture*, written in Berlin under the Third Reich, was both a plea for self-determination and a stinging attack on the concept of the nation. Rocker declared that "Man's liberation from the organized force of the state and the narrow bondage of the nation is the beginning of a new humanity, which feels its wings grow in freedom and finds its strength

in the community.” No nations, no states, no nation-states.

Rocker attempted to show that throughout history, governments and nations had stifled human beings and kept them from fully realizing their highest aspirations. “Culture” is often seen as an expression of national identity; in fact, Rocker says, it is not. There is a “community of culture” but it has nothing to do with nations. If you look at the history of art, he says, you’ll find that as art evolved, it had much more to do with the development of humanity as a whole than the particular characteristics of individual nations, and “changes in the artistic formative impulse were confined to one country or nation just as little as were the social changes from which they arose.” Rocker says that art reaches greatness not when it embodies national character, but when it speaks to universal human truths. He speaks admiringly of Leonardo da Vinci, whose work may have been influenced by a time and a place but is respected for its human qualities rather than its Italian qualities. We will find, Rocker suggests, that we are at our creative best when we transcend our provincial identities and produce work that speaks to all people.

That may offer the beginning of a hint of an answer to the difficult question: if we do oppose nationalism, how do we replace the “fulfillment” that nationalism brings people? Every country on earth has a flag. If you got rid of the flags, people would devise new ones. Collective identity appears to be a natural phenomenon, and while we might envision a world with “international” cooperation, it’s hard to envisage one with no nations at all, in part because anthems, customs, etc. seem to be such powerful “meaning-generators.”

But perhaps defenders of nationalism are too quick to conclude that “having pride in a collective identity” and “the contemporary nation-state” are necessarily the same thing. After all, people have pride in lots of different larger entities. Americans go fucking bananas over football, and your “team” can become a major part of your identity. The English are the same with soccer, though the associated history of rioting might seem to confirm the theory that exclusive collective identities inherently tend toward antagonism. There are plenty of relatively harmless forms of pride: New Yorkers are certainly annoying in how much they love New York, but they generally don’t kill anyone over it. Perhaps municipal pride should displace national pride, since it’s less likely to lead to war. You’re not French or American, you’re Parisian or Milwaukeean. Not only would this decrease the risk of bloody absurdities like World War One, but by increasing the diversity of possible identities it would make the world ever more rich and interesting.

Or perhaps we should stick with nations, but we can all get along. Look, for example, at the Olympics. Forget, for

a moment, the hideous injustices that occur every time a country hosts the games, squandering the treasury on a disposable stadium and displacing a bunch of poor people. Let’s just look at the spirit of the thing: friendly rivalry, competition among groups that are equal in status but different in identity. Or look at the World Cup: it brings everyone together, even as it is built on national difference. Perhaps the problem is states rather than nations: it would be fine to have these weird little imagined communities *if* they never used military force against minorities or one another. Perhaps nations “inherently” breed suspicion and hostility, leading to irreconcilable conflict and fear of “the other.” But that might not be the case! In a world of peace, without any weapons of war, it might be fun to all split into nations, play dress-up, invent languages, and sing songs.

THE UNIVERSALIST FACES ANOTHER FAR more serious challenge. If we reject the idea of self-determining nation-states, how do we approach national liberation movements? What do we think about Palestinian demands for a nation-state? For that matter, what do we think about the concept of Zionism? If an oppressed people identifies as a nation, and wishes to self-govern, who are we to say “nations make no sense as a basis for organizing governments”?

This is tricky. In practice, one might favor the “two-state solution” as a means of governing two nations that share one mass of land, while in principle one still dreams of a “no-state solution.” But one can be a pragmatic utopian, and treat certain kinds of nationalism as justified in response to particular conditions, even while ultimately hoping for and working toward a “post-national” future. In the case of Israel-Palestine, the two peoples should get to “collectively self-determine,” but we can still hope that eventually, there won’t be two “peoples” at all, just people, some of whom share certain traditions and affinities.

That said, to treat “self-determination” as an inherent good, independent of the particular reasons a certain group of people wishes to “self-determine,” seems naive. The Catalan region of Spain, for example, has its own language, history, and unique cultural traditions, which have been sidelined by the centralizing project of Spanish nation-building. This, we might think, is a good reason for Catalans to want to break off into a self-governing country: when a culture finds itself in danger of being subsumed by totalizing political forces, we might think that it is entitled to take steps to preserve itself. But Catalonia also happens to be the highest-income region in modern Spain,

and a not-infrequent talking point of Catalan separatists focuses on “unfairness” of the fact that Catalonia gives more to Madrid than it gets back. This, however, is exactly how wealth redistribution ought to work in a functional state. We can imagine that if a high-income region of the U.S., like the Bay Area or New York, suddenly became intensely interested in preserving its “heritage,” we would roll our eyes and assume that this regionalism was just a cover for tax-dodging. And of course, within a given population, there will always be mixed motives for any political step that has significant popular support.

Ultimately, as the left thinks about what nations ought and ought not be, it seems most sensible to consider them primarily as practical administrative devices for resource allocation. This is not a glamorous definition, of course: it is not the sort of thing it would be exciting to go to war for. But when we attempt to map political structures onto cultural identities, we get into very fishy territory. When a large nation attempts to create a distinctive “identity” for itself, this tends to mean the sublimation of many constituent cultures and identities. But, by the same token, there is a tyranny inherent in small, homogeneous, self-governing communities, where the only choice for individuals is to conform or get out. The great problem of nations is always what to do with the people who *don't belong*. What's to be done with people who have been rejected by their families, starved out of their cities, hounded to every corner of the nation where they were born? Where will they go? The fact is, they must go to other nations and other cities, and that will mean that the character of these places changes as they absorb new inhabitants. Similarly, new generations often fail to share the tastes and affinities of their forebears. Nationalist projects are often about trying to prevent these natural human developments, and trying to keep alive—or reconstruct—some vision of the past that a critical mass of living humans are no longer very attached to.

The sad reality is that, with the progression of time, many worthy feats of human ingenuity and many unique ways of life are lost. We often regret, after the fact, that we failed to appreciate and preserve the things we once had. And many people, who are scared to die, and who see the world they once knew changing before their eyes, are primarily animated by the desire to preserve the things that matter to them. This is understandable. But as humans, we must keep faith with the idea that each generation will have the ingenuity to produce things that seem good and beautiful to them, and that humans will choose to affiliate with other humans in ways that give their lives value and meaning. The mannerisms of newly-formed communities will, perhaps, look very different from what we are used to, and it

may confuse us to see the way things change in our lifetime. But it's worth remembering that most of the traditions and ways of life that seem pure and solid to us now are in fact the syncretic hybrids of many cultures, some of which have been entirely lost to time.

The separation of moral and aesthetic considerations seems key here. We need political structures for moral reasons, because otherwise, the resources of the world have no hope of being fairly distributed, and the environment we all depend upon would be destroyed. (Of course, we have yet to hit upon governmental structures that adequately ensure either of these things, but it's a worthwhile goal to keep working towards.) But it's not the business of political structures to tell individuals whom to associate with, and what to take pleasure in, and to the extent that a nation instead conceives its goal as keeping cultural forms static or homogeneous, it is not fulfilling any very useful purpose. The idea that people need a government to tell them what they ought to value is inherently patronizing. That said, a government can play a useful role in ensuring that no small, well-resourced minority (such as real estate developers, and other rich assholes) is able to impose its aesthetic preferences on others, and that no vulnerable minority is forced to give up its culture against its will. Our ideal future envisions communities of choice, not communities of birth-right, where every human being has the goods they need for a decent and fulfilling life. ♦





THE MOSQUES *that*

ARE EUROPE!

by Brianna Rennix

THE LAST ANTI-IMMIGRATION POLEMIC I reviewed for *Current Affairs* was Ann Coulter's vicious and deranged *Adios America!* Douglas Murray's *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*, a UK bestseller, has a similar thesis, but makes for an interesting contrast, tonally speaking. Ann Coulter is your cunning, slightly intoxicated aunt at the family cook-out, who purposely tries to rile you up into a screaming match.

Douglas Murray, by contrast, is the plummy Oxbridge academic who assures you that he *very much* cares about the plight of marginalized people, but *don't you think this has all gone too far?* How much migration can we possibly *take*? What about *liberal values*? What about *national identity*? What about *the future of Western civilization*?

Himself an atheist (albeit one with a vaguely-delineated cultural fondness for "Christianity"), Murray believes that mass

immigration to Europe, and in particular the large numbers of Muslim immigrants admitted to the EU after 2015, will destroy European civilization. For Murray, immigration seems to be *generally* bad, for reasons that are not clearly specified (he cites initial waves of immigration to Britain from the Caribbean and south Asia as the beginning of the problem), but as the subtitle suggests, most of his book focuses specifically on immigration from Muslim countries. Liberals' priorities, he argues, are all topsy-turvy: because they are myopically focused on suppressing right-wing fringe organizations, they've missed the reality that the *real* fascists in our midst are Muslim immigrants. Muslims are people who oppress women, hate Jews and gay people, believe in censorship by violence, and want to acquire territory through invasion and conquest. Europe is unhealthily ashamed of its own heritage, and this, together with its loss of religious faith, makes the European peoples anemic in the face of takeover by religious zealots with a proud consciousness of their own cultural roots. This tragic defeat, according to Murray, is inevitable, because Europe is afflicted with a profound ennui. Europeans, you see, *are sometimes sad and unsure of where their lives are going*. This uncertainty, apparently, is *not* merely what some of us would describe as "the fucking human condition," but is in fact a sixth sense that only Europeans possess, due to The Crushing Weight of History. It is "an exhaustion caused by a loss of meaning, an awareness that civilisation was no longer accumulating but living off a dwindling cultural capital." "If enough people in a society are suffering from a form of exhaustion," Murray tells us, with the air of someone who has just cornered you next to the wine bar at a graduate student party, as you nod politely and glance around frantically for an exit, "might it not be *that the society they are living in has become exhausted?*" Murray believes that no proper public conversation can be had about any of this, because anybody who even *tries* to bring it up is immediately branded a racist.

NOW, BEFORE I GO ABOUT ADDRESSING HIS arguments, I do just want to just take a few minutes to dispel the notion that Murray's more measured tone and occasional performative hand-wringing means that he is less bigoted than the likes of, say, Ann Coulter. He approvingly cites everyone from Viktor Orban (the opportunistic formerly-leftist-turned-fascist president of Hungary) who regularly refers to refugees as "Muslim invaders," to the far-right English Defence League, substantively endorsing their views while issuing vague disclaimers about their "tone" or "approach." He lavishes lengthy praise on the late journalist Oriana Fallaci, whom he calls "Europe's Cassandra," due to her supposedly prophetic fury about the presence of immigrants in Italy. Stressing that she was "the daughter of anti-fascists," he implies that her opposition to immigration was firmly-rooted in her intrinsic love

of liberty. He then goes on to tell us that Fallaci was so infuriated by the sight of Somali immigrants living in tents around the cathedral in Florence that "she had contacted every public official in Florence and then in Italy demanding to know why they could not clear away this site in the centre of the city, only to be greeted on each occasion with professions of incapability. She relates that eventually she phoned a local policeman and told him that if he didn't clear the tents away she would burn them down herself and he would then have to arrest her and incarcerate her in her own city." Murray then coyly acknowledges that Fallaci's "fiery style"—which included lengthy, obsessive complaints about the way Muslim men urinated, and the fact that Muslims "bred like rats"—occasionally veered into "something else," without saying explicitly what this "something else" was. Evidently, the "something else" did nothing to tarnish Murray's regard for Fallaci's opinions: he writes that although "a noisy wing of the Italian left" objected to her playful characterization of immigrants as piss-soaked vermin in need of extermination, "millions of others listened to her and revered her." In fact, Fallaci's writings were so nakedly racist that even Christopher Hitchens—who was not exactly known for his nuance or compassion when it came to writing about Muslims—described Fallaci's screed as "a sort of primer in how not to write about Islam," noting that "her horror is for the shabby, swarthy stranger who uses the street as a bathroom (she can't stay off this subject) and eyes passing girls in a lascivious manner. I've read it all before, in histories of migration."

Indeed, most of what Murray has to say about Muslim immigration is conventional anti-immigrant pabulum. Across time and space, there really is only *one* enduring anti-immigration narrative: immigrants are coming to take your jobs, soil your streets, assault your women and children, and out-breed your natives. The thesis of Murray's book is that Muslim immigrants are uniquely unsuited to assimilate into "Western" society, and pose an ideological threat to European identity. And yet—with the possible exception of his sections on terrorism—most of what he has to say about Muslim immigrants is interchangeable with the accusations that anti-immigration commentators in the U.S. are currently leveling against, say, Mexican and Central American immigrants: they're rapists, they bring crime, they make the neighborhoods where they settle dangerous and unlivable. Latino immigrants to the U.S., of course, largely hail from majority-Christian countries with legacies of European colonization, whose revolutionary traditions share the exact same philosophical underpinnings as our own. Isn't it interesting that non-Muslim immigrants in the Americas are apparently prone to exact same evils that Murray, in the European context, believes are fundamentally attributable to religious differences? It's almost enough to make you think that "something else" is underlying most of Murray's criticisms of Muslims. (All this clash-of-civilizations stuff, of course, is also deeply unoriginal: it's just warmed-over Samuel Huntington. Murray also, incidentally, shares Huntington's belief that


poor people shouldn't be educated beyond their station. We wouldn't need immigrants to do low-paying work if young people would just learn to hold their nose! "Where it is true [that native-born people won't do certain jobs], it is a consequence of welfare provisions that in some situations have made it better to avoid work than to take low-paid work," Murray writes. "But it is also the result of **young people being educated to a level** at which they look down at apparently mundane

teenage shooters if we get rid of the teenagers. They have no right to be here. Their parents were foolish to have had them in the first place." And of course, this is strictly correct; so what can I say?

This is approximately how it feels to argue about immigration. I can agree with Murray that somebody murdering a journalist over a Muhammad cartoon is bad, or that someone plowing a truck into a crowd in the name of Allah is bad, or

"THIS UNCERTAINTY, APPARENTLY, IS NOT MERELY WHAT SOME OF US WOULD DESCRIBE AS 'THE FUCKING HUMAN CONDITION,' BUT IS IN FACT A SIXTH SENSE THAT ONLY EUROPEANS POSSESS, DUE TO THE CRUSHING WEIGHT OF HISTORY."

or unglamorous labour." It's not labor conditions, you see, but *too much welfare and education*, that makes young people reluctant to take shit jobs!)

SO MUCH FOR MURRAY'S TONE: WHAT ABOUT his analysis of the social problems caused by immigration? Arguing about public policy with someone who's anti-immigration is always uniquely frustrating, because your opponent has a trump card they wouldn't otherwise be able to use in any normal debate; which is to say, "What if a whole gigantic population of people I don't like simply vanished, taking their problems with them?" Take, for example, the issue of mass school shootings in the U.S. This is a complicated problem, and I might posit a variety of contributing factors that need to be examined: easy availability of firearms, lack of access to mental health support, toxic masculinity, the stultifying atmosphere of U.S. schools and the attendant sense of powerlessness this creates in young people, etc. Now, imagine my opponent simply says to me, "This has gone too far. The problem is teenage boys. No more teenage boys. Get rid of them." I might reply that there are a *lot* of teenage boys in the U.S., and most of them are not shooting anybody! And maybe the ones who *are* disposed to shoot people could be prevented from doing so if we reached them early enough! "No," my opponent says, "that's an unacceptable risk. There will be no more

that the mass groping of women at a rock concert is bad. I can point out that these awful events have complex causes, and that attempting to prevent future incidents of the same kind will require a lot of thoughtful community work. Murray will simply say that all of the people who committed the above-cited crimes are immigrants or descendants of immigrants; therefore, the problem is immigration, and the solution is to restrict immigration. If there are no immigrants, there will be no murders or sexual assaults by immigrants. Problem solved.

If this line of thinking sounds reasonable to you, I am not sure I will get far persuading you otherwise. Extremist attacks, like school shootings, are an infrequent but terrifying phenomenon with a variety of social causes, and treating millions of Muslims (or immigrants generally) as somehow guilty of terrorism by proxy is not a proposition that any morally serious person could entertain. Extremism aside, I don't much like to get into fights about whether immigrants commit more or fewer crimes than native-born people: I've written previously about how difficult it is to collect reliable data on this topic, and how much I dislike the underlying assumption that it is ever wise to treat demography as a proxy for criminality. Murray does bring up some clearly bogus figures: for example, that Sweden's rape rate (thanks, he implies, to predatory migrants) is higher than Somalia's. As countless weary commentators have repeatedly explained, Sweden's *reported* rape rate is high because Sweden counts more forms of sexual assault as "rapes"

than most countries, and because every separate instance of assault by a single perpetrator is counted as an individual case; to say nothing of the fact that there are comparatively fewer cultural barriers to reporting sexual assault in Sweden, relative to other countries internationally. The fact that Murray cited this figure without caveat is clear evidence of his bad faith.



THAT SAID, I MYSELF MAKE NO ASSUMPTIONS about whether there are any crimes that immigrants or certain subsets of the immigrant population commit at higher rates than the native population. If it turned out to be true, or not true, I would be equally unsurprised. On the one hand, you might posit that immigrants are likely to commit fewer crimes because they don't want to risk deportation. On the other hand, you might posit that many immigrants come from conflict zones or areas of extreme deprivation, and are now living apart from their family units and familiar community structures, and that this makes it *more* likely that they would commit crimes. (Data out of Germany show that the crime rate is quite low by international standards, but that non-Germans are questioned as suspects at a rate higher than their representation in the population... which is an inherently difficult figure to unpack. It could mean that immigrants are more likely to be suspected of crimes, or it could mean that immigrants are committing more crimes, or both.) Murray, like most anti-immigration commentators, can sow a lot of uncertainty about the scale of immigrant-perpetrated sexual assault by recounting anecdotes about women who were reluctant to reveal that their attackers were migrants, or government officials who were initially reluctant to believe stories of sex trafficking rings run by immigrants, thus implying that there may be mountains of unreported assaults looming in the background. I do think that because sexual assault is routinely underreported (and, even when reported, often not taken seriously) it is extremely hard to develop a clear picture of what's actually going on in *any* country. I don't think our intuitions are very reliable guides here, and for me, differential crimes rates across immigrant populations, even if they existed, would not be a reason for an otherwise stable and prosperous country to refuse to admit immigrants, any more than I think the fact that men commit exponentially more rapes and murders than women is a reason to precautionarily exile all men to a Martian penal colony.

Murray also argues that Muslim immigrants are more likely to be bigoted towards certain other marginalized groups, and thus fail to "share Western values." The prospect of Muslim immigration jeopardizing civil rights for LGBT people, for example, has become a convenient talking-point for the right, which suddenly became much more willing to pretend condescending tolerance toward gay people once they realized it gave them a better stick to beat Muslims with. Although the

right has no doubt taken up this cause disingenuously, I still don't think this is an issue the left can afford to be hand-wavey about: one of the hardest parts of building fair and functional diverse societies is that minority groups are not homogeneous, and, inconveniently, do not always want the same things at the same time. We should obviously take seriously any possibility that immigration-driven changes in voting demographics could strip gay people of recently-acquired legal protections. At the same time, it's unhelpful to panic too early. Murray points to a frequently-cited study from 2016 showing that 52% of British Muslims believe that homosexuality should be illegal, as evidence that Muslims are virulently and uniquely homophobic. This number, out of context, does indeed sound rather shocking. But the reality is that it took a couple decades of prolonged exposure and positive media portrayals of gay people before the so-called "West" started to come around on gay rights. In 1989, for example, 80% of British Anglicans believed that homosexuality was wrong or almost always wrong; by 2013, that number was down to about 30%. (Securing legal protections for LGBT people certainly would have been a quicker process if there had been some mechanism for kicking all the Anglicans out of Britain in 1989--well, and all the Catholics and non-Christian Britons, too, who also opposed homosexuality in significant majorities at that time).

But just because 52% is perhaps roughly the number we would expect from immigrants hailing from countries with negative attitudes towards homosexuality, who are now settling and raising children in a country where gay people have far more social visibility, doesn't mean that it's a *great* number. We can perhaps take heart from the fact that, in the U.S., polling on Muslim attitudes toward gay people shows large gains in acceptance over the past few decades, such that Muslims now poll as about as tolerant of gay people as Protestants, and significantly more tolerant than evangelical Christians. That doesn't mean that this is a social issue we can ignore: in the same way that time and money has been spent trying to bring native-born populations round on LGBT issues, we must continue to develop strategies to communicate with newer immigrant populations. The same can be said for anti-Semitism: immigrants hailing from countries where open anti-Semitism is common may likewise import negative attitudes towards Jews. Figuring out how to safeguard the well-being of minority groups against forms of discrimination that may be more prevalent in countries from which significant numbers of immigrants hail is not easy. The pro-immigration left's response should always be to demonstrate through action that they are willing to put in the work necessary to confront these problems and arrive at solutions; the right, for all their opportunistic pandering, is certainly not going to take the project of protecting religious and sexual minorities seriously in the long term, and they mustn't get away with pretending to do so.

Lest you run away with the idea that Murray's *entire* book is just a prolonged inveighing against immigrants, Murray is anx-

ious to stress that he does feel *sympathy* for migrants. He spends a chapter profiling refugees at camps in Mytilene, Greece, interviewing them about the horrific dangers and crushing poverty they're fleeing. "Hearing such things, at such times, from people in such places, the instinct that Chancellor Merkel and her ministers displayed in 2015 [to admit refugees] can seem eminently justified," he writes. "She and her colleagues landed on a portion of the answer by recognising that our continent is probably doing the only thing that a civilised people can do in rescuing such people, welcoming them and trying to give them safety." Having made this admission, however, the rest of the book then seems to be a conscious effort to keep the refugee issue at arm's length. *Of course* we must take refugees under international law, Murray says – but surely there must be some *limit*? In its abundance of compassion, hasn't Europe *already* done too much? He expresses anger at the hypocrisy of Muslim-majority Gulf states for failing to take in refugees, and suggests that Europeans feel an obligation to help refugees due to a kind of perverse self-hatred. Europe, he thinks, is actually *addicted* to guilt, in a manner that's wildly out of proportion to its actual responsibility for the world's problems; and isn't it, in its way, a little *unfair* to the *refugees themselves* to incentivize them to make the dangerous journey to Europe by offering them refuge? By the end of the book, Murray suggests that Australia's preferred solution of throwing refugees into offshore island prisons while it decides what to do with them is the one that Europe ought to pursue, and that the West's approach generally should focus on pouring money into building camps for people, somewhere far away, until they can be resettled, preferably in some other country.

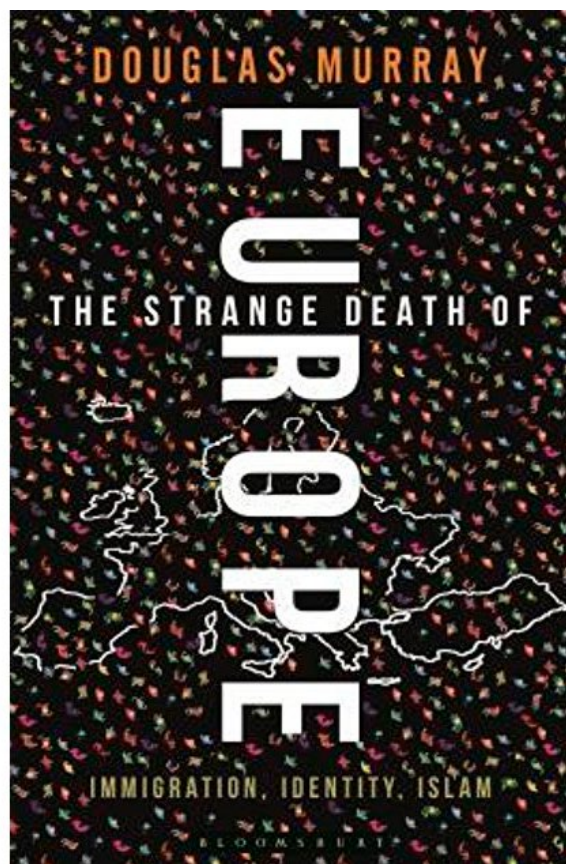
THERE'S A LOT GOING ON HERE. FIRST, MURRAY'S discussion of the West's irrational "guilt" is extremely facile. After all, he writes, weren't the Ottomans and the Mongols also imperial civilizations? Didn't African tribes participate in slave trade? Why is it only white people who believe that they are tainted by the sins of their ancestors? For one thing, this framing of the issue ignores the extent to which, for example, the UK's support of the Iraq invasion contributed to regional instability

and mass migration. This event was not some distant historical sin perpetrated by long-dead ancestors, but very recent military intervention. Even more importantly (for me at least), it's a state's present ability to help in a crisis, not any assignment of historic blame, that generates moral obligations. Studying history is valuable because it helps us understand how present-day inequalities came about, the often-subtle mechanisms by which injustices are perpetuated, and the intergenerational effects of past traumas. But even if Europe's superior wealth and stability *wasn't* attributable to colonialism, even if Europe had simply been blessed with an overabundance of resources that the rest of the world lacked, they would *still be obligated*

to take in refugees, simply because they have the ability to do so. Murray's ranting about the pathologies of national guilt is simply a distraction from the real moral underpinnings of the issue. (Additionally, when he takes a brief detour into the U.S. racial context, the shallowness of his analysis quickly becomes apparent: his argument is literally "the U.S. elected a black president, so why are people still complaining about racial injustice?")

Secondly, and perhaps even more damningly, Murray clearly has no understanding of where displaced people are actually living. He complains at length that the Ottoman Empire had a history of conquest and exploitation, just like the Europeans, so why isn't *Turkey* wracked by guilt? "If mass migration is an atonement for historical wrongs such as imperialism," he writes, "why do we not treat Turkey in such a way? ... Where should we encourage the waves of immigra-

tion to come from?" Reading this actually made me laugh out loud, because of course, Turkey *has* taken far more refugees than *any* European country. And Turkey's not the only one. In 2017, the UN reported: "Of all countries, Turkey sheltered the greatest number of refugees, hosting 2.8 million by mid-2016. It was followed by Pakistan (1.6 million), Lebanon (1 million), Iran (978,000), Ethiopia (742,700), Jordan (691,800), Kenya (523,500), Uganda (512,600), Germany (478,600) and Chad (386,100)." The reality is that, at the present moment, the overwhelming majority of refugees are being hosted in poor and middle-income countries in the Middle East and Africa, with a much smaller trickle reaching wealthy Western countries (and with Germany being the only Western country taking refugees in any truly significant numbers). Murray's idea,



I suppose, is to simply concentrate more refugees in countries that are already shouldering a disproportionate share of this global responsibility, maybe while finger-wagging for good measure at intransigent Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and the UAE (which, given their well-documented record of abuses against guest workers, are certainly not safe destinations for refugees). Murray's proposal is so obviously a non-solution that no one would bother proposing it if they actually cared about helping refugees.

So what's next for Europe, given this ticking time-bomb? As you might expect from someone who devotes literally *chapters* to tedious disquisitions on European existential angst, Murray's outlook is fairly fatalistic: he is skeptical that mass migration can be stopped, or that immigrant populations already in place can be removed. But for all the time he spent convincing the reader that Muslim immigrants are *fascists*, hell-bent on slaughtering apostates and outlawing gay sex, Murray finally gives us this description of what he imagines Europe's future will be like:

"By the middle of this century... Western Europe will at best resemble a large scale version of the United Nations. Many people will welcome this, and it will have its pleasures of course. Certainly not everything about it will be a catastrophe. Many people will enjoy living in such a Europe. They will continue to enjoy cheap services, at least for a time, as incomers compete with those already here to do more and more work for less and less money. There will be an endless influx of new neighbors and staff, and there will be many interesting conversations to be had. ... A pattern that is already underway will mean that there will be some rural areas where immigrant communities choose not to live and towards which non-immigrants retreat."

Having been primed to expect some doomsday dystopia of women forced into burqas and cartoonists driven into the sea, I was a little surprised that *this* vision, apparently, is the Death Of Europe Murray has spent so many pages trying to warn us against. Sure, I don't like the sound of cheap labor, because I hope that there will be better labor protections by the middle of this century. But cities filled with new neighbors and interesting conversations... is that supposed to be *bad*? Am I supposed to be devastated that those who don't like living around non-white people will relocate to the countryside? I suppose there's always something sad about familiar places altering their appearance, regardless of the reasons why; and with changing tastes, waves of relocation, and the passing of generations, such changes are always bound to occur. But I'll take the organic changes that spring from the formation of new friendships, families, and communities *any day* over the soulless changes that are currently being wrought by real estate developers. If Murray is truly worried about the future of English pubs and Gothic cathedrals, as he frequently professes to be, he ought to be praying they don't all get turned into luxury boutiques or private gyms, or bulldozed to make room for

a block of ghastly luxury flats. Capitalism is a much more efficient destroyer of familiar scenes than immigration, so if Murray is primarily worried about Europe's architectural heritage, he's picked the wrong enemy. After all, it's wealthy developers, not poor immigrants, who raze buildings and raise rents; profit-seeking has done far more to alter buildings and force involuntary displacement (as opposed to self-induced "white flight") of long-term residents of cities throughout Europe and the U.S. than immigration has. Beyond a simple dislike of the sight of brown faces, I can't figure out what precious "Europeanness" Murray anticipates will be lost in this world of immigrant-heavy cities. Surely people will enjoy their food, go for walks, read interesting books, pursue their favorite hobbies? Surely they'll share these pleasures with their families and friends, as they've always done?



PERHAPS, FOR MURRAY, A LIFE OF INTERESTING conversations simply isn't enough. In several sections of his book, he talks a great deal about the emptiness of European life, and its failed attempt to fill the void left behind by its loss of religious faith with the unsatisfying pleasures of consumerism. He writes about Europeans he has known who have converted to Islam, and at times seems to positively envy devout Muslims for their sense of spiritual purpose. He expresses nostalgia for Christianity and regrets that there is no system of thought that can take the Church's place at the core of European identity, and rescue Europeans from the "unbearable" feeling that they are "mere cogs in an economic wheel." For all that I mocked Murray earlier for the near-parodic extent of his European disaffection, reading these parts of his book made me think he might be a very sad person, who doesn't feel fulfilled by his life's work, and is maybe looking for some explanation for his despair. I can't know this for certain, of course; he might laugh to hear a stranger trying to diagnose his emotional state from afar. All I can say is that the central insight of Christianity--the religion Murray claims to believe is the wellspring of European culture--is that contact with the divine occurs only through direct communion with those who suffer. And so, to the extent that Europe gives succor to the suffering people of the world, and to the extent that individual Europeans participate in this work with their own hands, they are certainly living out the only part of Christianity that offers any spiritual benefit for humans: all the rest is window-dressing. Cathedrals are very beautiful, but they have little to do with Christianity; Christianity has more to do with the poor migrant squatting in a shantytown on the cathedral steps. If, instead, the avatar of Europe's chosen identity is the wealthy journalist screaming on the phone to the police, threatening to burn down a poor man's unsightly tent, then maybe the death of Europe would be no great loss to the world. ♦

a new line of SCENTS from the
TRUMP
offspring



by
IVANKA



by
BARRON



by
TIFFANY



by
DON JR.



by
ERIC





OUR
PERFECT
SCHOOL



SELF-CARE

Won't Save Us

by AISLING MCCREA

IT IS SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ONE AND TWO IN THE morning and, as per usual, I am flicking through internet tabs. Without really taking anything in, I am dividing my attention between a recipe for broccoli and peanut butter soup (one which has been in my favorites tab for maybe three years, still never attempted), some news story about a terrible event in which many people have needlessly died, and the usual social media sites. Scrolling down my Facebook feed, in between the enviable holiday snaps and the links to more sad news stories—people don't talk very much on Facebook any more, I've noticed; it's mostly a conduit for the exchanging of links—a picture catches my eye. It's a cartoon of a friendly-looking blob man, large-eyed and edgeless, wrapped up in blankets. The blob man is saying *"It's okay if all you want to do today is just stay in bed and watch Netflix."* I draw up my covers, nodding to no one in particular, and flick to a tab with my favorite old TV show.

The above story doesn't refer to any particular night that I can remember. But the general theme is one that I've played out again and again. I'm not sure I'm ever going to make that soup.

IF YOU'RE A MILLENNIAL WITH REGULAR ACCESS TO the internet, you've probably seen similar images to the cartoon I've described above. They're usually painted in comforting primary colors or pastels, featuring simple illustrations, accompanied by text in a non-threatening font. They invite you to practice 'self-care,' a term that has been prominent in healthcare theory for many decades but has recently increased in visibility online. The term generally refers to a variety of techniques and habits that are supposed to help with one's physical and mental

well-being, reduce stress, and lead to a more balanced lifestyle. "It's like if you were walking outside in a thunderstorm, umbrella-less, and you walked into a café filled with plush armchairs, wicker baskets full of flowers, and needlepoints on the walls that say things like 'Be kind to yourself' and 'You are enough,'" says *The Atlantic*. Though the term has a medical tinge to it, the language used in the world of self-care is more aligned with the world of self-help, and much of the advice commonly given in the guise of self-care will be familiar to anyone who has browsed the pop-psychology shelves of a bookstore or listened to the counsel of a kindly coworker—take breaks from work and step outside for fresh air, take walks in the countryside, call a friend for a chat, have a lavender bath, get a good night's sleep. Light a candle. Stop being so hard on yourself. Take time off if you're not feeling so well and snuggle under the comforter with a DVD set and a herbal tea. Few people would argue with these tips in isolation (with a few exceptions—I think herbal tea is foul). We should all be making sure we are well-fed, rested, and filling our lives with things that we enjoy. In a time where people—especially millennials, at whom this particular brand of self-care is aimed—are increasingly talking about their struggles with depression, anxiety and insecurities, it's no wonder that "practicing self-care" is an appealing prospect, even if it does sometimes seem like a fancy way to say "do things you like." What is concerning is the way that this advice appears to be perfectly designed to fit in with a society that appears to be the *cause* of so much of the depression, anxiety, and insecurities. By finding the solution to young people's mental ill-health (be it a diagnosed mental health problem or simply the day-to-day stresses of life) in do-it-yourself fixes, and putting

the burden on the target audience to find a way to cope, the framework of self-care avoids having to think about issues on a societal level. In the world of self-care, mental health is not political, it's individual. Self-care is mental health care for the neoliberal era.

As I write, the U.K. Prime Minister, Theresa May, is tweeting about World Mental Health Day and suicide prevention. She is not the only one; scrolling through the trending hashtags (there are several) one can find lots of comforting words about taking care of yourself, about opening up, confiding in a friend, keeping active, taking a breath. One such tweet is a picture of an arts-and-craftsy cut-out of a bright yellow circle behind dull green paper, designed to look like a cheerful sun. Printed on the sun are the words *"everything will be so good so soon just hang in there & don't worry about it too much."* All of us have probably seen some variation of these words at many points in our lives, and probably found at least a little bit of momentary relief in them. But looking through other tweets about World Mental Health Day reveals a different side of the issue. People talk about the times they *did* try to seek help, and were left to languish on waiting lists for therapy. They talk about the cuts to their local services (if they're from somewhere with universal healthcare) or the insurance policies that wouldn't cover them (if they're in the United States). They talk about the illnesses left cold and untouched by campaigns that claim to reduce stigma—personality disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia. They talk about homelessness and insecure housing and jobs that leave them exhausted. They talk about loneliness. And, in the case of Theresa May, they talk about how the suicide prevention minister she promises to hire will have to deal with the many people who consider suicide in response to her government's policies. These are deep material and societal issues that all of us are touched by, to at least some degree. We know it when we see people begging in the streets, when we read yet another report that tells us our planet is dying, when we try to figure out why we feel sad and afraid and put it down to an 'off day', trying not to think about just how many 'off days' we seem to have. We turn to our TVs, to our meditation apps, and hope we can paper over the cracks. We are in darkness, and when we cry out for light, we are handed a scented candle.

A COMMON SENTIMENT EXPRESSED IN THE world of self-care is that anyone can suffer from mental ill-health. This is true, but it's not the entire story. In fact, mental health problems are strongly correlated with poverty, vulnerability, and physical health conditions (with the causation going both ways). Furthermore, there is a big difference between those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to take time off work for doctor's appointments and mental health days, and those who can't; those of us who have children or other dependents to take care of, and those who don't; those of us who have the financial independence to take a break from our obligations when we need to, and those who don't. Not all people have the same access to help, or even access to their own free time—employers increasingly expect workers to be available whenever

they are needed, both in white-collar jobs and precarious shift work. Add in the (heavily gendered) responsibilities of being a parent, studying, a night-time Uber gig to cover the bills, or a long commute from the only affordable area in the city, and the stress of life will pile on even as it soaks up the time you're supposed to set aside to relieve that stress. Funding cuts are in fashion across a plethora of Western countries, both to health-care and to other services that indirectly affect our health, especially the health of people who need additional support to lead the lives they wish to live, or even just to survive. The rhetoric around self-care is flattering but flattening, treating its audience as though the solution to their problems is believing in themselves and investing in themselves. This picture glosses over the question of what happens when society does not believe or invest in us.

Even for those of us who are relatively lucky in life, self-care does not solve our problems. *"It's okay if all you did today was breathe,"* promises a widely-shared image macro of a gentle talking pair of lungs. Well, I hate to break it to you, talking lungs, but it's 2018. We're supposed to be walking powerhouses of productivity, using every minute of our time to its best effect. In an economic environment where careers are precarious and competitive, young people are increasingly pressured to give up their free time to take on extracurriculars and unpaid projects "for their resume," produce creative content "for exposure," learn skills such as coding, scout for jobs on LinkedIn, write self-promoting posts about their personal qualities, and perhaps worst of all, attend godawful networking events, some of which don't even have free canapés. Taking part in all this sounds unfair and exploitative, but you're in a world where solidarity is just the name of a song from the *Billy Elliot* musical; if you won't go along with it, there's a line of brilliant, hungry graduates from top-name schools right behind you who will. It doesn't stop with work either. This way of thinking about ourselves—constantly in need of self-improvement, constantly aware of our need to market ourselves as premium humans—seeps into our personal lives as much as our professional lives. On your way home from the office, perhaps you'll flick through the apps on your smartphone, doing all the tasks you've assigned to yourself so you can be stronger, smarter, more attractive. *Have you walked the 10,000 steps today mandated by your Fitbit? Have you done your Duolingo practice? You're falling behind with learning French. Learning French will make you more appealing to employers, and might also make you look sexy and mysterious on dates. Have you responded to that Tinder message? It wasn't very interesting, but you can't remember the last time you met a romantic prospect organically so you should really get around to responding. You need to think of a good joke first, though; if you come off as too generic they'll be on to the next candidate. Have you finished that book for your book club? You'll look like an idiot if you don't know how it ends. Did you play the guitar today? Creativity is important. Have you checked the news? What if someone asks you about the situation in Myanmar? How's your posture? Is it upright? Check your reflection in the window. Why are you slouching? Why are you so pale? Why are you so tired? Who is this person?*

It's harder, too, if you're a woman. (Copy and paste this sentence and stick it into any article you like, it'll work.) The standard pressures from the advertising industry have only ramped up as we've turned away from traditional media, insinuating their way into social media under the same guise of aspirational content, but this time smiling with the face of a friend. Youtube and Instagram stars draw you in with viral content and enviable abs, promising you that if you drink the juice, do the workout routine, learn how to use a hairdryer with perfect salon technique (*and if you're finding it difficult this new product makes it SO much easier, use my code for a 15% discount!*) you can be the best version of yourself you can be. This is a lie, of course—the goal is not to be *you*, it's to be them. You know this, and know it isn't what you should think, but you cannot help how you feel. The insecurities burrowing deep under your skin and planting the desire to be someone else don't even have to be internally consistent. Being a woman means you can stand in front of a mirror and simultaneously be upset that you're not as skinny as a sportswear model and as curvaceous as a 1950s pinup girl. Your phone is filled with updates from the lives of beautiful women you do not know. Flick to the next image in your feed, past the girl with the Photoshopped manicure (perhaps in reality, her nails, like yours, are bitten down). The next post is about self-care. There's a link to buy bath oils in the description.

On social media sites such as Instagram and Pinterest, pictures exhorting us to set aside an evening to relax sit alongside images of gorgeous people we will never look like (but will spend hundreds of dollars and hours trying to emulate), images of locations we will never travel to (but will keep for years on our bucket lists), images of top 10 tips from successful entrepreneurs (whose life advantages and luck cannot be guaranteed, but who we will continue to hold up as experts in how they attained their position in life). Ironically, in telling us to take the pressure off ourselves, self-care discourse can feel as though it's doing the exact opposite—adding “taking care of our mental health” as yet another task to put onto our plates, alongside finding a fulfilling, well-paid career, doing overtime to prove our worth, networking to maximize our chance of success, getting to the gym five times a week, finding the perfect skincare routine, practicing an interesting and resume-friendly hobby, seeing friends in a variety of glamorous locales, finding a partner, and creating an original yet classic décor theme for our homes. If it's too hard, and you need something easier for a little bit, you are invited to seek solace in consumption. Watch Netflix, watch Amazon Prime—put a little more change in the pocket of the world's richest man, in exchange for a couple of hours' distraction. Get delivery food from an app that uses poorly-paid “independent contractors,” the bulk of them time-poor, cash-poor millennials like you. Squash down the wave of guilt—guilt at spending too much money, at using services you don't support, at ordering the chicken when you swore you'd go vegan months ago. You're feeling constantly guilty about something or other anyway, so one more thing to feel guilty about barely registers. After eating, you curl up on the couch, hugging your knees with your arms, small. You are taking up the most minimal space; even in our darker moments, we feel a need to exist in the most efficient way possible.

WHY ARE THESE FEELINGS FAMILIAR TO SO many of us, yet we feel so alone? We are atomized, individualized, struggling under the same system but struggling inwardly and separately.

Self-care slots in neatly with capitalism, treating mental ill-health as an individual problem divorced from material and political context, to be solved by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and maybe spending a little money on the way. We are invited to draw inwards, shut our curtains; pull ourselves into movies and food and warm water and blankets as a means of escaping our problems without solving them. We are encouraged to ‘reach out’ to others, if we feel able to, but our relationships to others in the language of self-care appears to be as mutual conduits for pressure relief; “reaching out” always seems to mean drawing someone into the blanket with you rather than throwing the blanket off.

None of this is to say, by the way, that these tips are in and of themselves bad, or that they haven't brought solace to anyone. The problem arises when self-care becomes a sticking plaster on the wounds caused by capitalism. Sooner or later, the blood seeps out.

But what if there was an alternative? What if you didn't have to worry about your insurance covering a therapist, because everyone had universal coverage? What if you weren't exhausted from balancing your job and your family, because you had affordable day-care, decent parental leave, and six weeks' paid vacation? What if you didn't have to spend every waking moment optimizing yourself for the job market, because we had built an economy that did not put disproportionate power in the hands of employers? What if we stopped thinking of ourselves as being constantly in competition with each other, because we realized it was more a source of misery than success? What if we didn't feel a nagging sense of doom every time we looked at the news, because we were actually on the road to making things better? What if we built something different? What if we did it together?

All of us need to take pleasure in things we enjoy. It's important to take care of our needs and smell flowers and eat cheesecake. But if our deeper anxieties are at least in part caused by our conditions, then maybe our solution lies in fixing our conditions. Instead of commiserating with coworkers on a poor working environment, imagine organizing with them. Imagine connecting with other people in your community over things that matter to all of you; whether that's saving a treasured park or bringing attention to a local crisis. Going door-to-door, meeting people you've been living next to this whole time, hearing their voices, hearing your collective voice get a little louder every time someone joins you. Imagine what putting faith in solidarity could do at a local level, or a national level. How would it feel to take back power, to have agency? Developing bonds with people over something that matters can be electrifying, and of course if you win, that's a real change to the world you live in, for you and the people around you! Even if you don't win, all is not lost, because you created a possibility—the possibility that future victories might come, that other people might be inspired by what you did, that you could return to try again, that there's a better thing to be created. Most importantly of all, there's hope, perhaps the most powerful force in life. No bubble bath can give us that. Maybe that's a gift we give ourselves. ♦

Can you rearrange the **BLOCKS**

to spell the acronyms of the horrible
U.S. government agencies?

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



MONEY STUFF

An interview with **MATT LEVINE** of Bloomberg Opinion

Matt Levine runs the “Money Stuff” newsletter, one of the most irreverent and informative guides to the absurdities of the financial world. He is an experienced journalist covering Wall Street, and is also one of the few people in the press who can both understand and explain complicated economic issues! Our own SPARKY ABRAHAM and LYTA GOLD spoke to Levine in New York City about Ponzi schemes, sociopathy, insider trading, and Martin Shkreli...

SPARKY ABRAHAM: Sometimes you talk about the relationship of doing well or being profitable as a trader in finance versus being a good salesman, which is kind of like being a magician. One of the things you’ve said is that making money as a hedge fund manager is kind of secondary to the primary measure of success as a hedge fund manager, which is whether you can get people to invest in a hedge fund.

LYTA GOLD: To get them to believe that you’re good at this.

MATT LEVINE: Well, it’s a constellation of things. One thing is you need to go to people and say: “Give me money, I’m good at this.” Another thing you have to do is you have to be clever about how you keep their money, because there is a range of terms for hedge funds. One thing to do is say “Give me money, and if you ever want it back, you’ll have it back with 10 days notice.” Another thing is to say “Give me your money, and if you ever want it back, you have to give me a year’s notice, and I’ll give you a quarter of your money each year after that. Or I’ll raise a public vehicle in the Netherlands or whatever, and you can give me money, and then if you want to get your money back you can sell it to someone else.” If you do that, that’s partially a marketing thing, but mostly a legal obstruction. If you do that, and then you lose a lot of money, like half your money, you still have the other half. Whereas if you’re a regular hedge manager and you lose half the money, the people take out the other half. So it’s not just like having a nice smile and a firm handshake. There’s an intellectual endeavor to keeping their money, which is totally separate from investing well.



Lyta: There's almost a possible Robin Hood thing. Like taking rich people's money and saying, "Oh no, it's disappeared, it's gone to these secret places." You could benefit regular humans.

Matt: No one's done that. Oddly!

Lyta: Maybe someone should. I guess you'd probably get in trouble.

Matt: Well the attributes that make you good at this aspect of the hedge fund manager job, and the attributes that make you want to distribute the money...

Sparky: Another thing you write about a lot, which is a little bit related to this, are the scammers.

Matt: I love scammers! I want to distinguish here. There's a world of high finance that has the real intellectual content and has norms that are not necessarily intuitive to the average person or the average prosecutor. And so those norms will sometimes be surprising when they're exposed. But then separately there are just pure thieves, who're usually not at big banks—not never, but usually these are just thieves who run weird Ponzi schemes that are funny.

Lyta: Ponzi schemes are so great. Why do people keep doing them?

Matt: Because they keep working.

Lyta: It's amazing that they work. I just love it.

Sparky: Why do they keep working?

Matt: Because the stuff is hard, because the people are not financially literate, because people have a series of psychological biases. My favorite scheme is not the Ponzi scheme. I'm not going to name a particular thing; it's a concept that's called, it has different names—"the prime bank scam" is a pretty common name for it. Those words don't really mean anything. There's a phenomenal book by Guy Lawson called *Octopus*, which is the best scam book. So the prime bank scam, the pitch is so simple: there is a market that the big banks use to trade paper, commercial paper, prime loans, prime paper, or prime bonds.

Sparky: These are made-up names.

Matt: Just whatever. Sometimes it will coincide with the name of a real thing. It doesn't matter; it's all made-up shit. The banks trade this stuff secretly in trillion dollar increments. And I can give you access to that market and you can come in and trade these "prime bonds." The basic thing is just like the Nigerian Prince scam or anything else: I just need a little bit of money. But the pitch is that there is a secret world that is outside of your knowledge, and I'm inviting you into that secret world. It's like Hogwarts. It's such a primal human feeling of "I am not special, somewhere the special people are doing special things. Now I have been invited to be a special person, and I deserve it. And so I'm going to make a billion dollars trading prime bank loans." Why does that keep working? Why do people read *Harry Potter*? It's just such a basic archetype.

Lyta: People know that *Harry Potter* isn't real though. So you've got people being pulled into thinking that this is the real thing.

Matt: But it's like all of human—what is the Trump phenomenon, if not like, "I've taken the Red Pill"?

Lyta: It's a lot like YouTube conspiracy theories.

Sparky: Forbidden knowledge.

Matt: There's some secret knowledge out there that I have, and now I'm special. And the Prime Bank scam is like that, and what's amazing about *Octopus* is the first half of it is the story of Sam Israel, who starts as a hedge fund manager, and it becomes a Ponzi scheme. He's a hedge fund manager who loses some money and he says, "Well, I'll just make it back by lying to people," and then he just ends up running a Ponzi scheme. And it's a common story. The second half of the book is him saying, "I really need to make up this money" and some guy comes to him and says the banks treat these prime bank loans at night. And he's like, "I'll look into this." And they totally run this scam on him. They run the scam on the hedge fund manager who still has tens or hundreds of millions of dollars that he *hasn't* lost, which he then loses on the Prime Bank scam. No one knows who they are. These guys disappear. They take [Israel] to a bank at night. It's like *The Sting* where they rent an office and change the sign. They take him to a bank at night, and they say they only trade at night. The one guy who's in on [the scam] lets them in, and they turn on one computer so he can watch the terminal's lights blink. And then he goes "Sure, here's a billion dollars." And then it gets even crazier. It's amazing because it's not just the poor idiots. It's a whole range. I think everyone wants magic to exist. This guy's a hedge fund manager; he knows these things aren't real, or he should.

Sparky: I mean that's the crazy thing that took me a while to realize, that Ponzi schemes are not just like individual old rich ladies who are getting caught up in this stuff. Actually, that was sexist; not just old rich people.

Lyta: I'll allow it. You won't be fired into the sun today.

Matt: Ponzis are in some ways less interesting than the Prime Bank scams. If you look at Bernie Madoff, that trick is kind of straightforward. He's a pillar of the community, and he's promising low stable returns. And people were like, alright I'll take low stable returns. Every so often I'm like, what if Vanguard is a Ponzi scheme? Yeah, they're an index fund on the S&P and they keep accumulating assets. But what if they're just spending it? Just to be clear, I don't think it's a scam, but wouldn't that be cool? Because Bernie Madoff was a big respectable guy running a big market-maker, and he was just running a Ponzi scheme, and all these big respectable people gave him all their money. Most Ponzis are stupider than that; they say they'll give you high investment returns, and most people say, I like high investment returns.

Sparky: I don't mean to totally turn this sad, but the *Octopus* story is kind of sad too.

Matt: Of course it is! It's terrible.

Lyta: I like octopuses though.

Sparky: I do love octopuses; I have cephalopod paraphernalia—that's a squid. [pointing to a squid sticker on his laptop] But, so I didn't actually read *Octopus*, but I know there's a book called *Scarcity* that's sort of about the cognitive effects of being under stress about resources. Obviously the guy you're talking about, Sam Israel, he wasn't under stress about resources in the same way that the book talked about, which is people with very, very low incomes with high costs but you can kind of see the same thing. One of the things that happens is sort of like tunnel vision, and you kind of lose your ability to see under stress.

Matt: Sure, [Israel] was under a ton of stress because he was running a Ponzi scheme. One reason I'm interested in scammers is because they're funny, but it's also rare, not never, but it's rare that you really look at them and they're pure sociopaths. "I'm gonna rip people off." Not never; actually a fair number of them. But a lot of them, it's much more like you think you're good, you have one bad quarter; some combination of it doesn't fit with your self-conception, and you feel shame in front of your investors. So you're going to move a few things around, and then it just snowballs, and then you can't just admit the lie. "What am I gonna do?" And then it just snowballs into going to banks at night and doing the Prime Bank scam. But at each step along the way you can sort see how [the scammer] did that, and it ends up in a terrible place.

Sparky: Can you think of any examples of the more sociopathic kind?

Lyta: Fucking failsons.

Matt: And then he's like, I've redeemed you into these shares of this company that I started, and that company was a wild success, and they all made back all their money. It's really weird. Leaving aside the fact that his company was a wild success, which was really surprising, not how these things usually end, and he still goes to prison for it. Usually you go to prison when the third thing is also a failure. Leaving that aside, it's plausible that he wasn't actually stealing the money; he's actually investing it and losing it, and then just lying about it. The narrative of every step was sort of understandable. Filtered through his abrasive personality, it's still kind of there; he's still doing the same thing as every other Ponzi scheme. The more sociopathic—I hate to—

Sparky: You don't want to single out the sociopaths?

"Every time we move to create harsher punishments for some thing because we see rich white people who have done that thing and we want them to not get away with it, it leads to increased incarceration for poor people of color."

Matt: Martin Shkreli is a fascinating case because he's such a famously bad guy. He clearly has some sort of personality issues. But leaving aside the drug prices which is arguably sociopathic—there are people who defend it.

Lyta: Those people are sociopaths.

Matt: Leaving aside the threats on Twitter and all the crazy stuff—

Sparky: Wu-Tang album, which I feel was actually an unforgivable act.

Lyta: Oh yeah, war crime.

Matt: Yeah, well they were going to sell it. Most of the bad stuff they did. He was just the buyer.

Sparky: That's true. That was on the Wu-Tang Clan. I mean I'm not going to say he was just the buyer but yeah.

Lyta: He was shitty once he got it.

Matt: He's terrible in most ways, but just focusing on the stuff that he was charged and convicted of criminally, which was just a series of quite Ponzi-like activities... He ran a hedge fund, and he basically lost everyone's money. And then he lied to them about it. He was like, well I'm just putting your shares into this other hedge fund. And then he lost their money again.

Matt: There's an elephant in the room of a person who has recently been criminally charged with fraud, and who there's been a lot of discussion about that person being a sociopath. I just don't know; I just don't want to comment on that.

Sparky: That's fair. But I actually don't know who the elephant in the room is. So maybe I'll go back.

Lyta: Do we mean sociopath as someone who literally has no ability to make moral choices, someone with a mental illness, or do we mean somebody who is just acting in an extremely shitty way?

Sparky: I'm not really a fan of talking about people as sociopaths no matter what they might have done or what their motivations might have been.

Matt: I don't actually think Martin Shkreli is a sociopath; I think he's got a weird and abrasive personality, some of which is an act, some of which he thought would be helpful to him in some way.

Sparky: An act which arguably may have worked for him in some ways.

Lyta: Fun fact about Martin Shkreli: he went to high school with a friend of mine. Knew him, he was always a total douchebag apparently, but my friend ended up going to his 24th or 25th birthday party. Shkreli had just made his first big bunch of money, and they rented a penthouse for the party, and he swaggers into his party with his arms around two blonde babes. He was feeling good, 24-25, just made a

fuckton of money, got his bitches. He thought he was really hot shit.

Sparky: Did that ever stop being his attitude?

Lyta: I don't think so, but it's pretty remarkable to see was doing a job that was rewarded. He was only doing it poorly because he lost all those people's money.

Matt: Eventually he made it back.

Sparky: So the fact that Martin Shkreli ended up going to jail is kind of interesting because he didn't really lose all these people's money in the end. We've been having conversations between ourselves about how there's a kind of kneejerk reaction even among people who might tend more toward prison abolition-type views to be ok with punishing white collar criminals.

Matt: Absolutely. I find it discouraging... I'm not a big believer in putting people in prison if it can possibly be avoided. And I think that there are a lot of people who are like, we should not put nonviolent first-time offenders in prison, and then there are people who are like, "Actually we should go way beyond that and significantly reduce prison for repeat and violent offenders," and then there are people who are like, "every nonviolent first-time offender who insider-trades—the most ridiculous minor crime—should go to prison for 30 years." I really think the evidence is so overwhelming that every time we move to create harsher punishments for some thing because we see rich white people who have done that thing and we want them to not get away with it. Every time that happens it leads to increased incarceration for poor people of color. That's like a universal law. So when people are like, oh I'm a prison abolitionist but all white-collar criminals should go to prison, that means low-income mortgage brokers who are not the people making billions of dollars are going to prison for financial crimes. Always, always, always, always, always, means that. It's such a clear rule and disappointing tactically to say we should put more white-collar criminals in prison. Like Martin Shkreli should go to prison and only him. No, it doesn't work that way. Separately from the utilitarian effects, it's bad to cause harm to people. The value of causing harm to white-collar criminals is so purely expressive. It's not deterrence, because you don't need to be put in prison for eight years to deter insider trading. You can ban them from the securities industry. You don't need to do it to incapacitate them. There's no rationale for it except that we as a society like to express our anger at white collar criminals, and that is a terrible rationale.

Sparky: We talked about this on a bonus episode for the *Current Affairs* podcast, and personally this is part of the reason why I really loved working the CFPB, because it kind of felt like being a prosecutor, but we didn't put anybody in jail. The worst we could do to you is take the money that you made by doing the thing you did.

Matt: You should definitely take the money. I don't mean that white-collar crimes should run rampant. You should not put people in prison if you can avoid it.

Sparky: But one of the questions that we had that we didn't really have any way to know what the answer even could possibly be is something like—I think there's a lot of evidence out there that really long prison sentences don't work as a deterrent for particularly violent crime. But with a lot of white-collar crimes, sometimes it seems like something that's a little bit more cost-benefit weighed by people.

Matt: So two things: one is, yes sure, these are rational actors. Two, it seems to me, I could be wrong, but for me personally, the deterrent effect of a little bit of prison is quite high. I don't want to go to prison at all, not even a little bit. I would sacrifice a lot to not go to prison for a month. And I don't know if that's universal. People can say, "Oh two years and I'll come out rich?" People in finance, those people are not rationally educated.

Sparky: I don't believe those people at all.

Matt: No. You say that. They're wrong. They may genuinely believe that.

Sparky: Yes, I believe them that they believe it. I don't believe that if they knew what prison for two months was like...

Matt: So that's one thing. The other thing—this is going to be controversial—

Lyta: Say it.

Matt: If you look at the thing that is called white-collar crime, a lot of it is questions of interpretation. So there are people who are insider trading who are often harder to deter because they're not sophisticated people.

Sparky: I got a good tip; I'm going to go.

Matt: The big recent insider trading case that upended the law was this Newman case where this hedge fund manager employed analysts who called investor relations people at companies and talked to them. The investor relations people, their job was to talk to hedge fund analysts. And then the hedge fund managers asked around, what stocks should I invest in? The analysts said this stock. And then the managers buy the stock. And then the prosecutors said when those analysts talked to those investor relations people, that was a crime. But also, when the hedge fund managers heard from the analysts that the stock would go up, that was a crime too, because they must have known the information was too good. You look at that, and you're like, maybe. But this is not sociopath evil geniuses who are like, "Haha now I have the keys to the vault." This is a series of interpretations and cues that to some extent feels like after-the-fact criminalization. It's not all white-collar crimes that are like that. You know these cases: they were lying to customers. That's bad.

Sparky: I mean the guy was manipulating his chats.

Lyta: That's clever. Good work!

Matt: It's terrible, but you talk to those people and they're like, well I was 22, I came to this bank, the people who were successful powerful people at this big well-respected bank, and they said, here's what you do: tell them you paid 90 and then charge them. That's how they were trained, and they didn't know any better. And so they're deterable, but each headline is typically about prosecutors pushing the law a little bit, so how would they have been deterred if they didn't know it was illegal? I don't know; that's not always true but it's often true. That's especially true in insider trading.

Lyta: Because at a certain point nobody could ever talk to anybody else about this at all. If you're going to take it to the absolute extreme. ♦

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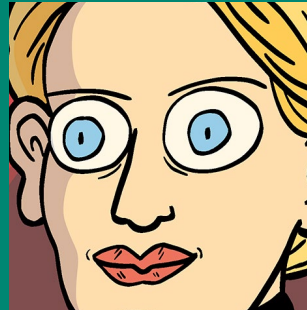
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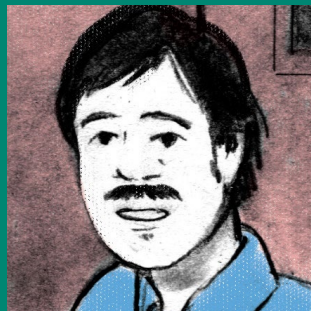
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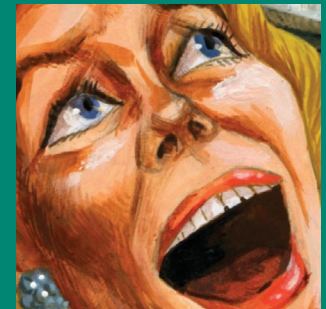
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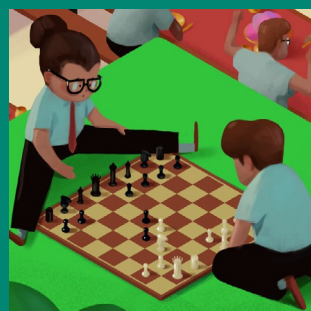


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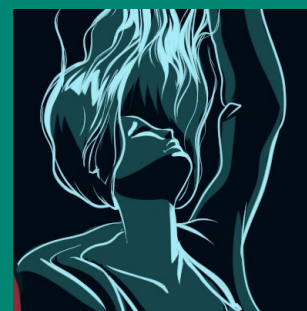


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